

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Agricultural Organizations Coordinate Wildfire Evacuation Support

For livestock, farm families and displaced residents across the Thunder Bay District

July 16, 2026 - Thunder Bay District, Ontario

Thunder Bay Community Pasture, the Oliver Agricultural Society at the Murillo Fairgrounds, and the Hymers Agricultural Society are working together to establish a coordinated regional response for livestock owners, agricultural families and other residents affected by the evolving wildfire emergency.

The organizations have joined forces to help evacuating families safely relocate animals, access emergency refuge facilities and connect with essential supplies and community support.

“Our priority is to protect people first, move animals as safely as possible and ensure evacuees know where to call before transporting livestock or arriving at a refuge location.”

COORDINATED EMERGENCY SUPPORT

The participating organizations and community volunteers are currently coordinating:

- Emergency transportation and relocation of livestock
- Livestock trailers, drivers and hauling assistance
- Temporary pasture, pens, shelter and boarding
- Feed, hay, bedding and clean water
- Veterinary assistance, medications and animal-care supplies
- Biosecurity procedures and livestock intake records
- Halters, panels, fencing, water containers and livestock-handling equipment
- Emergency planning information and livestock-hauling checklists
- Financial assistance for unexpected evacuation and animal-care expenses
- Temporary support for displaced families while longer-term accommodations are arranged

Wildfire-preparedness posters, public safety notices, emergency livestock-hauling checklists and social media updates have been developed and distributed to help livestock owners prepare before an evacuation becomes urgent.

A coordinated community fundraising effort, including GoFundMe organization, is underway to assist with transportation, feed, animal care and emergency supplies. Official fundraising information will be shared through the participating organizations' verified pages. Funds received through the Northwestern Ontario Wildfire Emergency Response Fund will be allocated at the joint discretion of the boards of Thunder Bay Community Pasture, the Oliver Agricultural Society and the Hymers Agricultural Society.

DESIGNATED ANIMAL REFUGE LOCATIONS

The current plan is to direct smaller numbers of livestock, poultry and companion farm animals to the Oliver Agricultural Society's Murillo Fairgrounds.

Larger groups of cattle, horses and other large livestock may be accommodated at the Thunder Bay Community Pasture, depending on available space, fencing, feed, water and handling requirements.

The Hymers Agricultural Society remains an active planning and response partner. However, due to its proximity to the Whitefish Lake/Palisades fire area, evacuees and animals are not currently being directed to the Hymers grounds.

Admission priority: Admission to designated animal refuge locations is prioritized for animals from communities in active evacuation status and is not intended as a precautionary measure. Exceptions may be approved only in extraordinary circumstances, when capacity and safety allow, by designated refuge personnel before transport. Availability may change quickly as animals arrive and conditions change.

CALL BEFORE TRANSPORTING ANIMALS

Livestock owners must contact the response team and receive confirmation before transporting animals to any refuge location.

Please do not arrive unannounced. Calling first allows volunteers to:

- Confirm that appropriate space is available

- Determine which location can safely accommodate the animals
- Prepare pens, pasture, feed and water
- Coordinate trailers and approved transportation routes
- Identify medical, handling or biosecurity requirements
- Prevent congestion and unsafe unloading conditions

All animals must be checked in before unloading. Owners should provide accurate identification, contact information, animal numbers, medical needs, medications and any special handling instructions.

Animal owners remain responsible for their animals whenever reasonably possible and should plan for ongoing feed, care and eventual return once authorities confirm that it is safe.

SAFETY MEASURES FOR LIVESTOCK OWNERS

Human safety must always come first. Residents should:

- Follow all official evacuation orders, alerts and road closures immediately
- Never enter an active fire area or restricted zone to retrieve animals
- Do not delay a mandatory evacuation while attempting to load livestock
- Keep trucks and trailers fuelled, inspected and ready
- Prepare halters, leads, portable panels and loading equipment in advance
- Pack animal identification, health records, medications and emergency contact information
- Carry water, feed and basic supplies when it is safe to do so
- Use approved transportation routes and follow instructions from emergency personnel
- Wait for authorization before returning animals to an evacuated property

Livestock owners who may require assistance are encouraged to make contact early. Advance planning provides the greatest opportunity to coordinate trailers, drivers, refuge space and animal-care resources safely.

SUPPORT FOR DISPLACED FAMILIES

The agricultural community has received significant offers of feed, transportation, livestock equipment and animal-care assistance. However, there is currently more limited capacity to support the personal needs of displaced residents.

Onsite camping at the Murillo Fairgrounds is reserved for evacuee families only, subject to confirmation by site personnel and available capacity. Priority will be given to families with livestock sheltered on the premises.

FAN-NWO has been invited to assist with coordinating support for the human needs of evacuees.

Anticipated needs may include:

- Drinking water
- Ready-to-eat food and snacks
- Basic hygiene supplies
- Blankets, sleeping bags and pillows
- Clothing and essential personal items
- Other family-specific supplies as needs are identified

Donation needs will change as the wildfire situation develops. Members of the public are asked not to deliver unsolicited items directly to refuge locations. Please contact one of the organizations first or watch their official pages for verified requests.

COMMUNITY COOPERATION

This emergency response is being made possible through the cooperation of agricultural organizations, livestock owners, haulers, farmers, veterinarians, businesses, donors and volunteers across Northwestern Ontario.

The participating organizations will continue sharing verified updates as refuge capacity, evacuation conditions and community needs change.

PRIMARY CONTACTS

Alexandra Chalifoux - Thunder Bay Community Pasture	807-629-5283
Mike Huber - Thunder Bay Community Pasture	519-572-0184
Carolyn Hughes - Oliver Agricultural Society (Murillo Fairgrounds)	807-629-8617

IMPORTANT: Call before transporting animals or delivering supplies. Refuge space and donation needs must be confirmed before arrival.

ONE-PAGE LIVESTOCK TRANSPORT EVACUATION CHECKLIST

Human safety comes first. Call before hauling. Do not enter restricted areas or delay a mandatory evacuation. Refuge admission is prioritized for communities in active evacuation status; precautionary placement requires extraordinary circumstances and advance approval from designated personnel.

OWNER / FARM: _____		CELL PHONE: _____	ANIMALS / COUNT: _____	DESTINATION: _____	DEPARTURE TIME: _____
1. AUTHORIZE & PLAN ☐ Call the response team before loading; confirm refuge space and destination. ☐ Follow official evacuation orders, road closures and approved routes. ☐ Do not enter an active fire area or restricted zone. ☐ Do not delay a mandatory evacuation to catch or load animals. ☐ Identify a backup route and a safe place to turn around. ☐ Tell a trusted person your route, destination and expected arrival. ☐ Record species, number, sex, identification and special handling needs. ☐ Separate sick, injured, aggressive, intact-male or unfamiliar animals.		3. LOAD ESSENTIAL SUPPLIES ☐ Halters, leads, sorting sticks, panels or portable fencing as appropriate. ☐ Animal identification list, photos, health records and owner contacts. ☐ Medications, dosing instructions and veterinary contact information. ☐ Feed and clean water for at least the initial 24-48 hours when practical. ☐ Buckets, tubs, hoses, bedding, manure tools and labelled equipment. ☐ Gloves, boots, masks, eye protection and weather-appropriate clothing. ☐ Phone charger, paper map, cash/card and emergency contact list.		6. DURING TRANSPORT ☐ Drive smoothly and reduce speed for smoke, wildlife, traffic and poor roads. ☐ Keep windows and ventilation appropriate for heat, smoke and animal type. ☐ Do not open trailer doors on the roadside unless the area is secure. ☐ Stop only in safe locations and check animals when conditions allow. ☐ Call ahead if delayed, rerouted, involved in a collision or animals are distressed.	
2. TRUCK & TRAILER SAFETY ☐ Tow vehicle has adequate capacity and is fully fuelled. ☐ Hitch, safety chains, breakaway cable and electrical plug are secure. ☐ Tires, spare tire, brakes, lights, bearings and wheel nuts are checked. ☐ Trailer floor, ramps, gates, latches, dividers and ventilation are safe. ☐ Fire extinguisher, first-aid kit, flashlight and basic tools are onboard.		4. BIOSECURITY ☐ Clean and disinfect the trailer before loading whenever time allows. ☐ Do not mix animals from different farms unless directed and unavoidable. ☐ Keep farm equipment labelled; avoid sharing buckets, halters and tools. ☐ Report coughing, diarrhea, fever, wounds or other illness before arrival. ☐ Use clean footwear and wash or disinfect hands between animal groups.		7. ARRIVAL & INTAKE ☐ Wait for instructions and check in before unloading. ☐ Confirm pen, pasture or unloading location with refuge staff. ☐ Provide owner contact, animal count, identification, medications and care needs. ☐ Inspect animals for injury, heat stress or respiratory distress after unloading. ☐ Confirm water, feed, fencing and emergency access before leaving. ☐ Record where each animal or group is housed and who is responsible for care. ☐ Do not return animals home until authorities confirm the area is safe.	
5. SAFE LOADING ☐ Use calm, experienced handlers and the minimum people required. ☐ Provide secure footing; remove sharp objects and loose equipment. ☐ Do not overcrowd. Balance weight and use suitable dividers. ☐ Close and physically check every gate, latch and escape opening.					

CALL BEFORE TRANSPORTING - PRIMARY COORDINATION CONTACTS

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Immediate danger: call 911. Do not self-deploy into an evacuation or fire zone.