

**SUMMARY OF  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**THE PREMIER'S  
EXPERT TASK FORCE  
ON **EMERGENCIES****



**BRITISH  
COLUMBIA**

# Message from the Premier of British Columbia



**LAST SUMMER, BRITISH COLUMBIANS ENDURED THE WORST WILDFIRE SEASON OUR PROVINCE HAS EVER SEEN.**

Thousands of people were evacuated from their communities, hundreds of homes were destroyed and six brave firefighters tragically lost their lives.

After visiting several affected communities and meeting with local leaders, residents and first responders, I launched an expert task force on emergencies to help our government apply lessons learned to better prepare for what may be a tough season ahead as well as future climate emergencies.

The task force – comprised of experts from First Nations, local governments, wildfire and emergency management organizations, and the Province – focused on providing real-time, action-oriented advice that we could implement before and during the upcoming season.

I am now pleased to share a summary of their recommendations, including their advice to further develop our wildfire and emergency management workforce. One way we are doing this is through our flagship action to establish an innovative wildfire training and education centre. Located at Thompson Rivers University, this centre will be the first of its kind in

North America to offer credits for basic wildfire training courses that can be put toward diploma and degree programs. The centre will prepare our future wildfire professionals for the critical work of protecting our forests, our communities and our families in a rapidly changing climate.

Many of the task force's 31 recommendations are already underway, including actions to increase the use of new technology, better support evacuees, streamline volunteer training, enhance wildfire recruitment and boost our firefighting fleet and equipment.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the task force members who worked hard to provide recommendations that will have a direct impact on people and communities by strengthening the way we prepare for and respond to emergencies, particularly wildfires.

By continuing to work together, I am confident that we will be ready to respond to the challenges of climate change and better able to protect our province for future generations.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Eby". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**DAVID EBY**  
*Premier of British Columbia*

# Background

**THE PREMIER’S EXPERT TASK FORCE ON EMERGENCIES** was announced by Premier David Eby in September 2023. The Task Force was asked to provide recommendations to government on wildfire and emergency management, with a focus on improvements that could be implemented before and during the 2024 season. The Task Force began meeting in October 2023 and concluded its work at the end of February 2024.

**DIVERSE EXPERTISE:** The Task Force consisted of experts appointed by the Premier, and senior staff from the Premier’s Office, Ministry of Forests, and Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness:

- Kukpi7 Rosanne Casimir**, *Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc First Nation*
- Dan Derby**, *Fire Chiefs Association of BC*
- Scott Hildebrand**, *Thompson-Nicola Regional District*
- Chief Corrina Leween**, *Cheslatta Carrier Nation*
- Thom Porter**, *California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (retired)*
- Wayne Schnitzler**, *First Nations Emergency Services Society*
- Tanya Spooner**, *City of Prince George*
- Teresa Dobmeier** (*co-chair*), *Associate Deputy Minister, Emergency Management and Climate Readiness*
- Eamon O’Donoghue** (*co-chair*), *Associate Deputy Minister, Forests*
- Doug Caul**, *Deputy Minister, Premier’s Office*
- Madeline Maley**, *Assistant Deputy Minister, Emergency Management and Climate Readiness*
- Ian Meier**, *Assistant Deputy Minister, BC Wildfire Service*
- Shannon Salter**, *Deputy Minister to the Premier*



**SCOPE:** The Task Force was asked to identify improvements related to nine deliverables:

1. Enhance Wildfire Predictive Services current technology including the use of Artificial Intelligence and other technologies.
2. Planning for incorporation of local volunteer resources for wildfire response.
3. Improve integration of rural and municipal fire departments into BC Wildfire Service response in the wildland urban interface.
4. Review and update the Wildfire Emergency Response Strategy.
5. Strengthen community participation in all disciplines of FireSmart.
6. Identify effective expansion opportunities in wildfire prevention programs.
7. Enhance the Evacuation Registration Assistance (ERA) tool to provide fully digital support for evacuees.
8. Modernize and enhance community delivery of Emergency Support Services (ESS), including post-wildfire support.
9. Identify opportunities to assist First Nations and local authorities to improve evacuation order and alert awareness and compliance.

**THESE DELIVERABLES REFLECTED COMMON TOPICS** that emerged as provincial officials met with First Nations, local governments, emergency managers and community during the 2023 wildfire season.

Over the course of the Task Force process, mental health and resilience also emerged as a common theme in Task Force discussions and engagement with partners and stakeholders, and the Task Force provided recommendations for action on this topic.

“Emergency management partners” is used throughout this document. This term includes all agencies and organizations with responsibilities for emergency management functions or that can contribute to emergency management as part of an organized collaborative approach, including First Nations, provincial agencies, local authorities, fire departments, and non-governmental organizations.

A Real-Time, Action-Oriented Process: Recognizing a need to act on practical and achievable improvements during a limited window before the 2024 season, the Task Force was asked to provide real-time, action-oriented advice. Senior provincial agency staff participated on the Task Force to ensure a clear bridge from advice to action. Delivery teams from provincial agencies were established for each of the nine deliverables, and these teams met with the Task Force to receive advice and feedback that was translated into real-time planning and implementation.

The Task Force met thirteen times between October 2023 and February 2024. The Task Force also carried out targeted engagement with over sixty emergency management partners and stakeholders that were impacted by recent emergency events, and with other groups that offered to share their perspectives to the Task Force.

While it was not possible to meet with all First Nations, local authorities and other partners, provincial agencies continue to engage with many partners as they prepare for the 2024 season and implement Task Force recommendations.

This document summarizes the consensus advice and recommendations provided by the Task Force throughout this process.



# Summary of Recommendations

**BETTER INTELLIGENCE:** In recent years BC has witnessed how climate change is driving extreme conditions and unprecedented fire behaviour. These conditions are pushing the boundaries of the models used to predict how fire moves across the landscape. New modelling tools and platforms, augmented by artificial intelligence, offer an opportunity to improve the predictive intelligence emergency managers rely on to plan and make decisions before and during emergencies.

*The Task Force recommended expanding the use of, and access to, digital tools to improve predictive and real-time intelligence. Investments in new tools should build toward a longer-term goal of applying these tools in an all-hazard context to inform mitigation, preparedness, and advanced planning as well as response actions and decisions.*

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**ENHANCING A COMMON OPERATING PICTURE:** In addition to future-focused predictive information, shared access to real-time intelligence is critical to enable faster and better-informed decisions and coordination among emergency management partners. Real-time intelligence also helps emergency managers communicate clearly with the public.

*The Task Force recommended strengthening processes and tools for sharing real-time intelligence that provide a common operating picture among emergency management partners.*

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**SHARED TRAINING:** With more and more information being accessed through digital means, including social media, there is a significant public appetite for real-time information, especially in emergencies. Trust can be eroded when accurate and timely information is not provided by knowledgeable and credible sources. A common foundation of knowledge is needed for all emergency managers to be able to apply predictive and real-time intelligence in decision-making and communicate the risks posed by emergencies to the public.

*The Task Force recommended expanding training for emergency managers to interpret, understand, apply and communicate predictive and real-time intelligence, and understand its limitations.*

**CLEAR INNOVATION PRIORITIES:** With technological innovation and artificial intelligence unlocking the potential for digital solutions, it is important that these solutions are guided by the knowledge and experience of people working on the front lines of emergencies.

*The Task Force recommended setting clear research and innovation priorities for predictive and other technologies based on the needs identified by BC's first responders and emergency managers, and partner with other jurisdictions and technology innovators to shape, trial, assess and adopt new technologies.*

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**LOCAL AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE:** While digital solutions offer new opportunities to strengthen the intelligence used in emergency management planning and decision-making, they do not replace the local and Indigenous knowledge of people who live and work on the land. Model-based and people-based information are both essential, and complement each other.

*The Task Force recommended all emergency management partners recognize the value of and apply local and Indigenous knowledge, and develop clear and consistent guidance for incorporating it into operational wildfire and emergency management decision-making.*

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**COLLABORATIVE FIRST NATIONS FIRE STEWARDSHIP:** First Nations play a unique role in partnership-based emergency management and are demonstrating leadership in building community-based capacity for fire stewardship based on Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices, as well as protecting their communities through mitigation, preparedness and response

*The Task Force recommended defining clear pathways and strengthening supports for First Nations to build community-based capacity to lead wildfire preparedness, response and mitigation and fire stewardship activities in their territories.*

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**PATHWAYS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:** Local people with working knowledge of the land can play a role in partnership-based wildfire response. Safety is paramount and the work begins well before the season with organizing, training, and preparing, based on a foundation of communication, co-operation and trust.

Some of the most important roles local people can play to help protect their communities do not involve high-risk work on the fire line; local leadership is critical to promoting FireSmart, gathering local knowledge, supporting evacuation readiness, and making sure community members receive accurate and timely information.

*The Task Force recommended defining clear pathways for organized and trained local people to play a role in wildfire preparedness and response, based on consistent safety, pre-season training and readiness standards and plans, and integration into the BC Wildfire Service or local emergency management structure with appropriate coordination, accountability and oversight.*

*The Task Force recommended taking a laddered approach that matches opportunities with local capabilities and allows communities to build their capacity over time. Initial opportunities should focus on strengthening and empowering local expertise and leadership for preparedness, FireSmart, mitigation and recovery activities, such as prescribed burning and evacuation readiness.*

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**BUILD ON THE INTER-AGENCY AGREEMENT FOUNDATION:** Historically, structural and wildland firefighters operated under separate authorities and systems. Today, climate-driven wildfires in the wildland-urban interface are requiring them to work together continuously and seamlessly through an integrated approach. This requires strong relationships, but relationships alone are not enough. Structural and wildland firefighters require a common concept of operations and common processes, systems and tools.

*The Task Force recommended continuing to improve the Inter-Agency Agreement between the BC Wildfire Service and the Fire Chiefs' Association of BC, based on learnings identified through joint pre-season preparedness and post-season debrief processes.*

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**CROSS-TRAINING AND DEPLOYMENTS:** To continue to build an integrated approach to firefighting in the wildland-urban interface, firefighters must have opportunities to training and work together to gain a detailed working knowledge of wildland and structural firefighting systems, processes and procedures. These opportunities should span the full range of roles, from front-line crews to senior commanders.

*The Task Force recommended expanding crew-to-command cross-training and cross-deployment opportunities to enable structural and wildland firefighters to learn from each other, and test and refine integrated command models and operations.*

**CLEAR AND CONSISTENT ROLES AND PROCESSES:** A whole-of-society approach is already being implemented through relationships and arrangements among provincial agencies, First Nations, local governments and fire departments, the forest industry and forestry contractors, the ranching community and other partners. As BC continues to strengthen this partnership-based approach, everyone must have a common understanding of how to work together effectively.

*The Task Force recommended government develop guidance to improve the clarity, consistency and accessibility of the roles, processes and procedures for partnership-based wildfire response for all emergency management partners so that everyone has a clear understanding of how they can contribute effectively. These guidelines should evolve into joint annual operational planning among partners as a longer-term strategy.*

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**COLLABORATION BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER INCIDENTS AND SEASONS:** As emergency management becomes a year-round activity, success requires a strong commitment to shared learning and continuous improvement. Learning cannot occur in silos; partners must come together to rapidly identify successes and challenges and implement improvements as part of a continuous learning and planning cycle.

*The Task Force recommended establishing a consistent and inclusive practice of local and regional joint preparedness briefings and post-incident/season debriefs among emergency management partners as part of a planning cycle, to review and confirm coordination and collaboration practices and procedures and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.*

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**VERSATILITY:** As fire patterns shift across the landscape, firefighting agencies must adapt by expanding their capabilities to fight fire under different conditions, and configuring and deploying people and equipment flexibly to meet a diverse range of challenges.

*The Task Force recommended government maintain a proactive operational posture that is prepared for more frequent extreme seasons, and expand the types of firefighting tools – from fireline equipment to airborne resources and technology – to provide broader and more agile response capabilities in a wider range of conditions.*

**INITIAL RESPONSE:** Initial response to newly detected fires remains a critical element of effective wildfire management, especially when weather and fuel conditions pose an elevated risk of extreme fire behaviour and growth. There is an opportunity to leverage partnerships to strengthen initial response capabilities by enabling trained and qualified firefighters from provincial agencies, First Nations and local fire departments, and appropriately trained forestry contractors to contribute to initial response, based on clear and commonly understood roles and procedures.

*The Task Force recommended clarifying, streamlining and strengthening guidance, roles and responsibilities for initial response for newly detected fires based on a “nearest qualified crew” principle, supported by proactive communication and coordination.*

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**SIMPLIFY AND STREAMLINE FUNDING:** FireSmart has seen widespread adoption in BC in recent years among local communities and other partners. Sustaining this momentum will require ongoing investment and a more stable and accessible approach to funding longer-term community-based delivery.

*The Task Force recommended improving accessibility, streamlining administrative requirements, and providing more year-over-year certainty for communities applying for FireSmart funding.*

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**MEASURING AND COMMUNICATING PROGRESS:** Sustaining investments in FireSmart for the long-term will require a clear framework for measuring progress and evaluating outcomes. Clearly demonstrating and communicating how FireSmart activities at the household, neighbourhood and community level contribute to community resilience will also help drive public awareness and action.

*The Task Force recommended developing metrics to demonstrate the effectiveness of FireSmart practices in reducing risk to homes and communities and develop evidence-based communication strategies to strengthen public awareness and action.*

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**FOUNDATION FOR CONTINUED FIRESMART GROWTH:** FireSmart’s growth to date is a success story. Continued success will require a strong organizational model that continues to leverage a partnership-based approach while providing a stable platform and clear accountability for continued investments in communities.

*The Task Force recommended government review FireSmart governance to provide a strong foundation for continued growth.*

**BUILDING FIRESMART COMMUNITIES:** To proactively address wildfire risk at the community level planning and development in the wildland-urban interface must integrate FireSmart principles from the outset. The FireSmart disciplines focused on legislation and development require additional focus for proactive mitigation to be effective. The insurance industry is also a key partner in strengthening FireSmart adoption at the local level.

*The Task Force recommended a strengthened focus on integrating FireSmart principles into community development policies and building codes, and exploring opportunities to strengthen partnerships with the insurance industry to support broader adoption of FireSmart practices.*

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**LANDSCAPE RESILIENCE STRATEGY:** Whether managed for conservation, recreation, resource development or other values, every ecosystem across BC will be impacted by climate change and fire. Managing for resilience will require coordinated efforts across multiple initiatives and programs, based on a recognition that fire is a natural process that will continue to play a role in these ecosystems and, if managed appropriately, can have positive effects on ecosystem health and help mitigate the risks of catastrophic wildfires. It is also critical to create the enabling conditions for the forest industry, the ranching community, and other land users to apply their knowledge and capacity to contribute to landscape resilience, through an all-of-society approach.

*The Task Force recommended government initiate a landscape resilience strategy that brings together land management partners to align existing initiatives, define shared priorities for action, and establish collaborative pathways to strengthen landscape resilience. The strategy should address policy barriers to delivering resilience outcomes on the ground and encourage economically sustainable models for risk reduction and recovery that align with utilization goals. As part of the strategy, meaningful metrics should be defined to measure progress toward resilience outcomes.*

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**EXPAND AND EMPOWER LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS:** As FireSmart and wildfire risk reduction programs and projects have expanded over recent years, multiple planning committees and tables have been established to coordinate among various partners at a local and regional level. Improving the alignment of these initiatives will improve strategic outcomes across jurisdictional boundaries.

*The Task Force recommended rationalizing and better coordinating risk reduction and preparedness processes at a local and regional level to improve strategic outcomes.*

**LARGE-SCALE TREATMENTS:** First Nations, local communities, community forests, provincial agencies and other partners have all ramped up risk reduction initiatives in recent years, with a focus on the most urgent, high-risk priority areas. There is now an opportunity to build on the learning, capacity and relationships developed through these initiatives to scale up planning and implementation of treatments to a broader watershed level based on a longer-term, strategic planning focus on landscape resilience.

*The Task Force recommended developing landscape-level, partnership-based resilience investment projects to demonstrate how to deliver risk reduction in the natural and built environment at the watershed scale.*

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**ENABLING POLICIES:** The ability to deliver resilience outcomes at scale will require an efficient process for planning, reviewing and approving risk reduction projects, supported by enabling policies. Continued effort is needed to address barriers, remove disincentives, and create a more expedited process for project delivery.

*The Task Force recommended government continue to streamline administrative processes, remove policy obstacles and build capacity to expedite wildfire risk reduction projects, including prescribed burning, increased utilization, and other risk reduction and resilience practices.*

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**EXPAND PATHWAYS TO ACCESS SUPPORTS USING THE EVACUEE REGISTRATION AND ASSISTANCE (ERA) TOOL:** In rapid, large-scale evacuations, local authorities and Indigenous governing bodies can be challenged to provide timely access to appropriate supports and look to neighboring communities and the Province to help. Emergency Support Services (ESS) needs to be more accessible and responsive to surges in demand for support so that evacuees who need support, have their basic needs met in a timely manner.

*The Task Force recommended government further develop ERA-enabled pathways to improve timely access to supports for evacuees during large-scale evacuations, and reduce congestion at in-person reception centres, including virtual and digital options.*

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**STREAMLINE FOUNDATIONAL ESS RESPONDER TRAINING:** ESS rests on a foundation of trained, committed and compassionate staff and volunteers who have the knowledge and tools to provide support to evacuees in their time of need.

*The Task Force recommended government consolidate and improve accessibility to ESS training so that responders can be trained quickly and effectively to deliver supports in a culturally safe, trauma-informed manner.*

**CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO IMPROVED SUPPORTS AND EVACUEE-CENTERED CARE:**

Evacuations affect people across a spectrum of backgrounds, means and needs. Not all evacuees require the same level or kinds of support. Services should be evacuee-centered and provide flexibility to allow evacuees to make their own decisions about how to meet their needs.

*The Task Force recommended government review rates and make more supports available through e-Transfer so that evacuees can decide how to best meet their needs, based on the principle that evacuees are experts in their own needs.*

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**SEAMLESS INFORMATION-SHARING:** Decisions to issue evacuation alerts and orders draw on the analysis, expertise and advice of multiple partners spanning numerous jurisdictions. As information flows among these partners, technological issues, unclear processes and unnecessary steps can inadvertently cause delays.

*The Task Force recommended eliminating unnecessary communication lags between emergency management partners so critical evacuation decisions can be made and communicated quickly.*

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**ONE SOURCE, ONE VOICE:** People need quick and direct access to clear and reliable information from authoritative sources, to plan for and act during an evacuation. This information needs to be clear and consistent, regardless of where people go to find it.

*The Task Force recommended establishing and strengthening simple, intuitive ways to access trusted information people need to understand their role and make informed decisions before, during and after an evacuation. This includes creating shared platforms and processes that allow emergency management partners to share the same evacuation information through multiple communication channels.*

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**TEMPORARY AUTHORIZED ACCESS TO ORDER AREAS:** While evacuation orders are issued to protect peoples' lives and safety, there are circumstances where, with appropriate planning and communication, temporary access to order areas may be authorized. There are opportunities to develop clearer and more consistent guidance for managing this access.

*The Task Force recommended government collaborate with local authorities and First Nations to improve the consistency of guidance and strengthen coordination processes for residents who may require access to areas under evacuation order.*

**SHARING MENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE RESOURCES:** All emergency management partners face challenges supporting the mental health and resilience of their people as they confront more frequent, longer and more intensive climate-driven emergencies. These challenges are also faced by impacted communities. A proactive, compassionate and collaborative approach is needed.

*The Task Force recommended engaging mental health agencies and organizations to develop shared, proactive strategies and resources for supporting mental health and resilience across responders, emergency management partners and people in impacted communities. All emergency management partners should demonstrate leadership by normalizing mental health self-care and compassion.*

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**SURGE CAPACITY FOR RESPONSE:** Prolonged and extreme seasons can put significant strain on responders and emergency managers and pull staff away from other public service duties. The ability to bring in additional capacity to backstop local and regional response during intensive and extended activations is a vital feature of partnership-based emergency management.

*The Task Force recommended expanding and strengthening mechanisms to enable the rapid deployment of qualified staff to support emergency management partners where critical needs during intensive or extended activations exceed available local capacity.*

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**CAPACITY AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:** Emergency management will require a dedicated and trained workforce for the future. The time to begin building this workforce is now, with a focus on creating accessible and sustained training and career development opportunities for Indigenous and rural people from communities that are disproportionately affected by emergencies like wildfires.

*The Task Force recommended strengthening recruitment and career pathways for wildfire and emergency management that apply a progressive and modular qualifications model that recognizes on-the-job learning and experience. These pathways should be designed with a specific focus on strengthening accessibility to First Nations and rural people, particularly youth.*

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**SHARED LEARNING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT:** As emergency management becomes year-round, learning and continuous improvement must be built into the annual cycle of planning, responding and debriefing. The doers are the experts and most solutions will emerge from a regular practice of collaborative dialogue among emergency management partners.

*The Task Force recommended establishing consistent, inclusive, and collaborative processes for lesson-sharing and shared learning among emergency management partners, that help identify leading practices, recognizing successes, and considering opportunities for improvement. It is also important to identify opportunities to communicate the successes of emergency management to the public.*



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