

Summary Report: 2023/2024
First Nations Emergency Management
Partnership Tables



June 2024

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Message from Monica Cox, Assistant Deputy Minister, Partnerships, Engagement and Legislation



As communities throughout British Columbia continue to face ongoing and overlapping impacts related to flooding, wildfires, and drought, the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) recognizes the need for strengthened relationships to better understand and meet the needs of First Nations communities impacted by these events.

The 2023-24 Partnership Tables (PTs) provided a forum for discussion and a significant topic was British Columbia's new emergency management legislation, the *Emergency and Disaster Management Act* (EDMA), which received Royal Assent on November 8th, 2023. EDMA upholds the inherent rights of Indigenous Peoples to make laws in relation to emergency management, provide policy improvements that reflect the lived experience of First Nations during emergency events, and enhance emergency management outcomes for the safety of all British Columbians.

EDMA includes new Indigenous engagement requirements for local governments, the Province and critical infrastructure operators. The legislation also enables *Declaration Act* agreements and collaboration agreements in the context of emergency management. EMCR is currently working on the development of modernized regulations to support the implementation of EDMA. The new regulations will be introduced in a phased approach, enabling comprehensive engagement on draft regulations with Indigenous Peoples.

As we all become more familiar with the new legislation and the ongoing development and implementation of regulations, I anticipate that continued discussions about EDMA will remain a central feature of future gatherings.

In closing, I would like to extend my gratitude to everyone who participated in the 2023-24 Partnership Tables. Sharing your knowledge, experience, and time is what makes the PTs a success. And I would like to extend a special thank you to the Elders and host communities who provided opening prayers, shared songs and dances, and who graciously invited participants into their communities to witness cultural events.

On behalf of myself, the Partnerships, Engagement and Legislation Team, and all members of EMCR we look forward to continuing to support your communities in preparing, responding, and recovering from hazard events.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Monica Cox".

Monica Cox
Assistant Deputy Minister
Partnership, Engagement & Legislation

Executive Summary

The Partnership Tables (PTs) began in 2018 to offer a regional forum for First Nations emergency managers to build relationships, share knowledge, and guide service delivery efforts supported by EMCR, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), and Indigenous service providers.

The purpose of the PTs is to bring together emergency practitioners, First Nations communities' Emergency Program Coordinators (EPCs) and emergency management partners to discuss the previous hazard season, what worked well, what could be improved upon for the next hazard season, and possible opportunities for collaboration.

The PTs operate under principles and values which were co-developed with First Nations. These values are based on a spirit of collaboration that honours Indigenous self-determination and upholds the spirit of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*. They include:

- Inclusiveness,
- Consensus-building,
- Respect,
- Equity and fairness,
- Accountability.

The 2023 wildfire season was particularly demanding, and many First Nations experienced a prolonged response season. Due to this expanded season, many Nations decided to host their PTs in spring 2024 instead of the usual fall schedule. From October 2023 to March 2024, First Nations community representatives were invited to attend a regional session at one of the following locations: Williams Lake, Fort Nelson, Burns Lake, Leq'á:mel, Kelowna, and Port Hardy.

The 2023/24 PTs focused on opportunities for meaningful engagement and open dialogue, where First Nations EPCs identified challenges and successes in their communities. While discussions centred on region-specific priorities, the over-arching themes across all the PTs are highlighted below:

Capacity & Funding:

- Strengthen capacity through dedicated EPC funding for First Nations communities.

Mental Health Support:

- A greater emphasis on mental health supports and trauma treatment, including training for partners who provide support to First Nations people.

Preparedness and Emergency Management Plans:

- Revise, modernize and streamline community Emergency Management Plans (EMPs).
- Develop community evacuation and Emergency Support Services (ESS) plans that address the unique needs of vulnerable populations, longer-term events, and provide a framework for improved inter-agency coordination.

Engagement and Collaboration:

- The importance of meaningful and transparent collaboration with First Nations, including follow-up with how information collected through engagement will be used.

This report includes several recommendations and EMCR will work in collaboration with communities and Indigenous partner organizations to support continuous improvements efforts.

Territorial Acknowledgement

EMCR headquarters and regional offices are located within the territories of the WSÁNEĆ, Lekwungen, Tk'emlups te Secwepemc, Coast Salish, Ktunaxa, Sinixt, Syilx, Lheidlei T'enneh, and Tsimshian peoples.

PTs are often hosted within First Nations communities to provide an opportunity to share culture and history. EMCR gratefully and humbly acknowledges that we are visitors to these territories, where First Nations peoples have maintained close ties to the land since time immemorial, developing their own ways of knowing and being to keep their communities safe.

Introduction

The content in this report includes:

- An overview of the engagement approach undertaken with First Nations communities in each of the regions to co-develop agendas and PT content.
- The over-arching themes observed during the PTs.
- Regional summaries and key topics.
- Challenges, recommendations, and strategies learned at the PTs.
- Next steps, including sharing this report with EMCR, agency partners, and with First Nations to address recommendations collaboratively.



The next section reviews the engagement undertaken prior to the PTs to inform the agendas and approach.

Prior Engagement

In alignment with the values of the PTs, agendas were co-developed with First Nations communities through the engagement strategy recommendations from the 2022 PTs. These strategies included a combination of direct outreach through emails and phone calls, online surveys, and virtual meetings.

Due to the sustained duration of the response activities, many communities opted to host their PTs in spring 2024. Although participation in the online surveys was low, the virtual meetings to discuss agenda content, requested presentations and preferred invitees for the PTs, were well attended. Prior engagement approaches also included direct phone calls and the sending out of information and work packages in advance to provide more context and time for reflection.

The next section outlines the agenda topics that were developed through the engagement.

Summary of 2023/2024 Meeting Topics

Following the 2023 wildfire season, First Nations communities identified several priorities for discussion at the PT’s. These priorities were used to shape each and although topics varied by region, there were some agenda items that were universally requested. These included the need to better understand the *Emergency and Disaster Management Act* (EDMA), training and exercise opportunities, an overview of the roles and responsibilities of partner agencies, as well as time for EPCs to share their experiences through nation-to-nation discussions. Other topics included funding opportunities, roundtable/panel discussions with agency partners, food security in emergency management planning, mental health and wellness and cultural burning. Agenda topics for each region are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 – Summary of PT Agenda Topics 2023/2024

Agenda Topics	Northeast Region	Northeast Region	Northwest Region	Southwest Region	Central & Southeast Regions	Vancouver Island & Central Coast Regions
Meeting Location	Williams Lake	Fort Nelson First Nation	Ts’il Kaz Koh First Nation	Leq’á:mel First Nation	Kelowna	Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw, Kwakiutl First Nation
EDMA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Funding Opportunities	✓			✓		✓
Training Discussion/Exercise	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Roundtable / Panel	✓		✓	✓		
Food Security in EM Planning				✓		
Roles and Responsibilities	✓		✓		✓	✓
Nation-Nation Discussion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mental Health and Wellness				✓	✓	
Cultural Burning					✓	

During the six PTs, recurring themes emerged, including:

- the need for dedicated capacity and greater funding opportunities,
- preparedness and planning strategies are urgent priorities for First Nations communities to consider for the future state of their communities due to climate change,
- how to improve collaboration and engagement among partners on emergency management to avoid engagement fatigue, and
- the long-term mental health effects on communities and workers, and the need for mental health supports and trauma informed service from partner agencies.

These key themes are highlighted below, and are expanded on in the “Challenges, Recommendations, and Strategies” section of this report on page 18.

Summary of Themes



CAPACITY AND FUNDING

The need for dedicated emergency management capacity in communities continues to be an issue for BC First Nations. Communities also raised concerns about the application processes for various funding programs and the need for clear guidelines and transparent eligibility requirements.



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

The 2023 hazard season had prolonged mental health effects on first responders, EPCs, and communities at large. Emergency events such as COVID-19, wildfires, and the ongoing toxic drug crisis have disproportionate impacts to First Nations communities. These emergency events have a compounding affect on the economy, and increase trauma response for the whole community, exasperating existing inter-generational impacts of colonialism, issues of poverty, and mental health issues.



PREPAREDNESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANS

During the PTs communities shared their strategies and challenges when preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies. Many EPCs expressed concerns about being able to support vulnerable community members during evacuations. Also highlighted was the importance of protecting areas of cultural significance or biodiversity, preserving traditional food, and executing culturally safe Emergency Support Services (ESS). EPCs discussed challenges with lengthy or out-of-date EMPs that require time and resources to update to be relevant to their community. don't address these evacuation concerns and are not specific to individual communities.



ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

Conversations at the PTs focused on how governments and partner agencies can improve collaboration and engagement efforts with First Nations communities. Capacity issues challenge the effectiveness of various initiatives and can lead to engagement fatigue. Communities recommended EPCs and partner agencies meet more frequently to build stronger relationships, share experiences, and work toward a common vision.

Regional Summaries

BC encompasses a diverse landscape, population distribution, and rich cultural diversity which was represented in each regional PT. The unique events and conversations from each PT are summarized in the next section.

Northeast Region First Nations PT

The Northeast (NEA) regional office works with 26 First Nations, as well as the T̓silhqot̓'in Nation Government, and the Southern Dakelh Nation Alliance. Due to the large geographic area covered by the region and as a follow up action to a recommendation from the 2022 PTs, two meetings were held in the NEA, one in Williams Lake, and another in Fort Nelson hosted by Fort Nelson First Nation.

Williams Lake PT

The Williams Lake PT was held February 28-29, 2024. The agenda dedicated a significant amount of time on EDMA to clarify roles in emergency management. There was also time to share experiences of the First Nations during the evacuations from 2017 and 2023, and on developing training needs assessments. Participation included a mix of EPCs and federal, provincial, and local government representatives (see Table 2).

Table 2 – NEA Williams Lake First Nations PT Attendance

First Nations and Indigenous Organizations	Esk'etemc First Nation, Lhoosk'uz Dene Nation, Lhtako First Nation, Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation, Toosey First Nation, T̓silhqot̓'in National Government, Tsq'escen First Nation, Ulkatcho First Nation, Williams Lake First Nation, Xenigwetin First Nation, ?Esdilagh First Nation, Nazko First Nation, Secwepemc Health Caucus
Federal Agencies	ISC, Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)
Provincial Agencies	EMCR, First Nations Health Authority (FNHA), First Nations Emergency Services Society (FNESS), Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR), BC Wildfire Service (BCWS)
Local Authorities and Regional Districts	City of Williams Lake, Cariboo Regional District

Conversations at the PT emphasized a need for stable, continuous funding for emergency management for each First Nation that provides for training and retention of emergency management professionals in communities. Discussions also highlighted that focusing on all four pillars of emergency management is essential to long-term success. As climate change is an ongoing and progressing issue, participants raised a need for approaches that prepare for the future by including youth and succession planning. Other key topics from the meeting are summarized below.

Key Topics

- Evacuation Challenges
 - Utilizing people with local knowledge is critical to determining evacuation routes.
 - The Evacuation Registration and Assistance (ERA) tool is not a viable option in many First Nations due to poor connectivity, lack of trust for the virtual platform.
 - Retaining the physical voucher system, or funding communities directly, is preferred.
 - Planning for response through ESS planning needs to include vaccinating animals so they can be evacuated, and strategies for the protection of sacred sites.
- Future Meetings
 - More frequent engagement throughout the year, as well as in-person visits to band offices is needed.
 - A provincial workshop with EPCs and EMCR about how regulations will be implemented so that everyone can have the same vision. A cross-province strategy to get everyone together is needed.
- Opportunism
 - First Nations get approached from a variety of contractors when new funding is announced and there's difficulty determining which contractors are qualified.
 - Past experiences with being taken advantage of makes trust difficult.
 - Suggestions that a certification of some kind would make it easier to know who to trust and who to work with.
 - Lodging prices soar when evacuees arrive at hotels.
- Training
 - Traditional emergency management training does not work for all people, there is a need for Indigenized programs.
 - A Hazard, Risk, and Vulnerability Assessment (HRVA) should be the first step for every community.
 - Youth need to be involved in emergency management training.
 - A template and training needs for each position in the Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) and ESS would be helpful.
 - Benefits of an After-Action Review (AAR). AARs can be a challenge for communities who do not have the capacity to dedicate to these reviews.



Fort Nelson PT

The NEA PT in Fort Nelson was held on March 13 and 14, 2024 and was hosted by Fort Nelson First Nation. The meeting was held without partner agencies at the request of First Nations. The purpose was to create an opportunity for First Nations and regional district representatives to connect and plan for the coming year (see Table 3). The discussion over the two days focused on the key topics below and the need for equitable and transparent access to funding and resources, and meaningful community engagement in policy development and decision making.

Table 3 – NEA Fort Nelson First Nations PT Attendance

First Nations	Doig River First Nation, McLeod Lake Indian Band, Saulteau First Nation, Blueberry River First Nation, Halfway River First Nation
Provincial Agencies	EMCR
Local Authorities	Peace River Regional District, Northern Rockies Regional Municipality

Due to the remote nature of many of these communities, the conversations at the table focused on collaborative strategies and challenges to access resources. Infrastructure loss in these northern communities has a greater impact on food security, recovery efforts, and mobility than other areas of the province.

Key Topics

- Recovery
 - Housing, infrastructure, and cultural assets are being lost during wildfires which affects the livelihoods and cultural practices of communities.
- Evacuation challenges
 - The north is particularly precarious when under evacuation order as access roads and highways are limited.
- Planning for the future
 - A major goal of the First Nations in the northeast is self-reliance, and it hopes to develop the infrastructure for these initiatives, while protecting their investments during wildfires.
 - Food security is an area that requires ongoing attention.
- Funding
 - Difficult to obtain reimbursements for costs of emergencies.
 - All four pillars of emergency management require funding.
 - Direct funding to communities is more effective than different streams.
- Collaboration and Agreements
 - Discussed the need for agreements and mutual aid agreements, including a proposed Treaty 8 Emergency Management Society.



Northwest Region First Nations PT

The Northwest (NWE) Regional office supports 36 First Nations including coastal, remote, and northern communities, and Nations with territories spanning across provincial and international borders. Based on suggestions from the 2022 PT, the region has been hosting regular virtual meetings with the region’s communities. In addition to the planned agenda, this table was an opportunity for communities to share what they have been working on and discover points for collaboration.

The NWE PT was hosted on March 6 & 7, 2024 at the Ts’il Kaz Koh First Nation office. It was attended by EPCs, local governments, and provincial agencies (see Table 4). On the first day there was a knowledge sharing roundtable, and updates from the regional office and the EDMA. There were also opportunities to connect with partner agencies through a panel discussion and networking tables. The day ended with a social dinner and drumming provided by members of the Ts’il Kaz Koh First Nation.

The second day of the PT was dedicated to a discussion workshop on evacuation planning. Although shortened due to some weather and travel safety concerns, participants exchanged strategies and challenges for when a community evacuates.

Table 4 – Northwest Region First Nations PT Attendance

First Nations	Nee Tahi Buhn First Nation, Taku River First Nation, Tlingit First Nation, Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Saik’uz First Nation, Stellat’en First Nation, Skin Tye First Nation, Gitsegukla First Nation, Nak’azdli Whut’en First Nation, Takla First Nation, Witset First Nation, Kitsumkalum First Nation, Haisla First Nation, Wet’suwet’en First Nation, Ts’il Kaz Koh First Nation, Kitselas First Nation
Federal Agencies	ISC
Provincial/ Agencies	EMCR, Health Emergency Management BC (HEMBC), BCWS, Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development, and Innovation, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI), Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS), Telus, FNHA
Local Authorities	Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, Regional District of Kitimat Stikine, Regional District of Fraser Fort George

Participants at the PT shared strategies and adaptable solutions to the challenges of remote communities, as well as where issues remain. Groups spoke to the advantages of having agreements and relationships with neighbours to assist with response and ESS. Other main topics and knowledge sharing are summarized in the Key Topics section below.

Key Topics

- Alert/order requirements.
 - The ability to sign Band Council Resolutions virtually or verbally is useful.
 - Inaccurate maps on orders can lead to miscommunication and the need for repeated editing.
- Community and leadership involvement:
 - Recent events have made emergency management visible to the public and leadership.
 - Public engagement tactics including:
 - Spreading information at potlatches and gatherings,
 - Video tools to help spread education when not in person,
 - Ensuring homeowners take responsibility of clearing ground fuels.
 - Struggling to find volunteers for fire teams and EOCs, some populations are nearing retirement, and few are available to take their place.
- Recovery
 - Declaring a recovery period assists with the gap between response and recovery.

- The recovery process needs to be better communicated.
- Documenting areas of interest helps when going into recovery.
- Evacuation Logistics
 - Arranging security during an order to prevent looting.
 - Limited evacuation routes hinder evacuation efforts.
 - Elders/Vulnerable Peoples
 - Impact of smoke means that elders are evacuated more often,
 - Elders are not used to eating out and not having access to traditional food,
 - People who do not want to leave who have pets or kids,
 - People with substance use issues need additional supports,
 - Difficulties getting fuel and food to those unable to evacuate or who are sheltering in place.
 - Communication strategies:
 - Creative strategies to communicate during evacuations including messages sent through a siren or loudspeaker, printed posters, and billboards, sharing a pre-recorded video, and alerting systems.
 - Translations of English messages for those more comfortable in other languages.



Southwest Region First Nations PT

The Southwest (SWE) Regional office supports 41 First Nations. Leq’á:mel First Nation volunteered to host this year’s event on October 25-26, 2023. Priority agenda topics included food security, EPC mental health, ESS, Hazard Risk Preparedness, and EDMA. Based on First Nations input at the table, the agenda was adjusted to include additional time for communities to share their experiences of emergency management and ask questions to partner agencies. The event was attended by First Nation representatives, Emergency Planning Secretariat (EPS), and provincial and federal agencies (see Table 5).

Table 5 – Southwest Region First Nations PT Attendance

First Nations	Boothroyd Indian Band, Chawathil First Nation, Cheam First Nation, Soowahlie First Nation, Skwxwu7mesh First Nation, Semá:th First Nation (Sumas First Nation), Seabird Island Band, Matsqui First Nation, Sq’éwlets First Nation, Leq’á:mel First Nation, Sqwá First Nation
Federal Agencies	ISC
Provincial Agencies	EMCR, FNHA, FNESS, WLRS
Local Authorities, other Emergency Management Organizations	Fraser Valley Regional District, City of Mission, EPS, Red Cross, Urban Systems, District of Kent

A highlight of the table was joint ESS presentation by Leq'á:mel First Nation, City of Mission, and EMCR. Representatives discussed their experiences, challenges, and collaboration on ESS. The group discussed the importance of having options outside of group lodging during an evacuation, as well as a need for diverse, accessible, and empowering training for EOC basics, EPC skills, “train the trainer,” and ERA tool access. During the PT, EPS expressed significant concerns that EMCR did not conduct adequate engagement with the 31 Coast Salish communities in the SWE to inform the agenda. To address this shortcoming, EMCR offered to organize a follow up gathering guided by EPS who offered to develop a Terms of Reference.

Engagement strategies and feedback are outlined in the “Prior Engagement” section of this report. Additional key topics raised at the event are summarized in the section below.

Key Topics

- Training
 - Training is not “one size fits all” and requires Indigenized options.
 - It was discussed that capacity affects training, as it takes time to build up expertise and there is no guarantee of long-term EPC positions.
- Future Meetings
 - Inclusion of decision makers at the meeting.
 - Continued inclusion of EPCs so their voices are heard.
 - BCWS to attend.
 - Provide more context and clarity of the purpose of PTs in advance.
- Drought, Extreme Heat and Food Security
 - Streams and rivers have low water levels and are at a higher temperature, affecting fish stocks.
 - The heat and drought have impacted other food sources as well, such as berry production.
 - Heat events affecting many, especially elders and those who are low-income.
 - Far reaching impacts of drought, effects are still developing, and consequences are unknown.
- Compounding effects of multiple emergencies
 - Economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the 2021 Atmospheric River.
 - Debris and silt from the Atmospheric River still impacting streams.
 - Major fire events, such as the 2021 Lytton Creek wildfire, have increased concerns around access routes and available resources to fight fires.
 - Inflation and economic stressors have meant that many community members cannot prepare for emergencies.

Central and Southeast Region First Nations PT

The Central (CTL) and Southeast (SEA) Regions are two distinct regions that often collaborate on emergency management initiatives, including the PTs. The regional offices work with and support 40 First Nations, as well as Tribal Councils including Ktunaxa Nation Council, Lillooet Tribal Council, Okanagan Nation Alliance, Scw'emxmx Tribal Council, Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, and the Nlaka'pamux Nation Tribal Council.

The CTL and SEA regions met March 13 to 14, 2024 in Kelowna. The event was attended by EPCs, Indigenous organizations, provincial agencies, and local government representatives (see Table 6). The agenda included presentations from agency representatives to outline their mandates and service delivery objectives. This was followed by a “world café,” where participants could network with agencies and create connections for future meetings. The second day included an EDMA presentation, and a discussion exercise that yielded important conversations about wildfire response and planning. There was also a panel on funding pathways and eligibility, and an ESS presentation.

Table 6 – Central/Southeast Region First Nations PT Attendance

First Nations, Tribal Councils, and Indigenous-led Agencies	ʔakisq̓nuk First Nation, ʔaq'am First Nation, Adams Lake Indian Band, Bonaparte First Nation, Coldwater Indian Band, Cooks Ferry Indian Band, Lillooet Tribal Council, Lower Nicola Indian Band, Lower Similkameen Band, Lytton First Nation, Neskonlith Indian Band, N'lakapmux Nation, Okanagan Indian Band, Osoyoos Indian Band, Secwepemc Health Caucus, Simpcw First Nation, Skeetchestn Indian Band, Skwlax te Secwepemculecw, Splatsin First Nation, Okanagan Nation Alliance, Upper Similkameen Band, Xaxli'p First Nation, Yaqan Nukiy
Federal Agencies	ISC, Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Provincial Agencies	Ministry of Forests, BCWS, BC Emergency Health Services, FNHA, HEMBC, FNESS, Ministry of Agriculture and Food
Local Authorities	Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen, Regional District of East Kootenay, Regional District of Central Okanagan, Columbia Shuswap Regional District, Thomson Nicola Regional District, Regional District of Central Kootenay, Regional District of Kootenay Boundary

Highlights of the event included presentations from representatives of Osoyoos Indian Band and Lillooet Tribal Council that outlined their emergency management programs and recent experiences. After a devastating 2023 fire season, communities spoke to the impacts on their communities and emergency programs. It was stressed that a call for “resiliency” should be replaced with acknowledgement of the “adaptability” of staff and communities. This allows time to heal and adapt to changing circumstances in a less harmful way. Other key topics discussed at the meeting are summarized below.

Key Topics

- Knowledge Sharing
 - It takes time for the land to regrow and for deer and moose to return after a fire.
 - Sharing resources is key to battle multi-faced fires and to run ESS.
 - AARs are essential to grow and improve emergency management programs.
 - Need to reassess debris removal and assess ways to use trees and water left over after a disaster.
 - Cultural burning is a type of prescribed fire, and there needs to be room for nations to define that for themselves.



- Future Meetings
 - Request that representatives from non-profits, MOTI, Transport Canada, railway companies, and provincial dam representatives attend future meetings.
 - Conversations on how to respond to waterway issues.
 - A forum is needed for everyone to share, provincially or federally.
 - Monthly meetings would be useful to connect more regularly.

Vancouver Island Coastal Region First Nations PT

The Vancouver Island Coastal (VIC) Regional office supports 57 First Nations and six Tribal Councils and Treaty Nations including Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, Naut’sa mawt Tribal Council, Heiltsuk Tribal Council, Wuikinuxv-Kitasoo-Nuxalk Tribal Council (WKNTC), Maa-nulth Treaty, and Tla’amin Nation Treaty. There are three distinct tribal regions in the VICC including Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth, and Kwakwaka’wakw nations.

The PT meeting was co-hosted by the Gwa’sala-Nakwaxda’xw and Kwakiutl nations on October 11-12, 2023. The event was attended by EPCs, other community representatives, and provincial and federal agencies (see Table 7). The agenda consisted of an update from the previous PT, an agency panel, and a nation-to-nation discussion. On the second day the agenda was adjusted after consultation with participants, and a training exercise was removed to allow for additional time to share experiences in emergency management.

Table 7 – Vancouver Island Coastal Region First Nations PT Attendance

First Nations and Tribal Councils	Snuneymuxw First Nation, Ditidaht First Nation, Malahat Nation, Cowichan Tribes, Heiltsuk Nation, Nuxalk Nation, We Wai Kai First Nation, Penelakut First Nation, Stz’uminus First Nation, Gwa’sala-Nakwaxda’xw First Nations, Pacheedaht First Nation, Mamalilikulla First Nation, Tla’amin First Nation, Dzawaka’enuxw First Nation, Tseshaht First Nation, Kwakiutl First Nation, Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council
Federal Agencies	ISC
Provincial Agencies	EMCR, FNHA, FNESS, HEMBC, BCWS, BC Hydro, MOTI

A highlight of the meeting included a circle share where First Nation representatives identified the unique emergency management landscapes of their community, their challenges, as well as the tools that they implement to tackle different issues. The major emergency management topics discussed are summarized below in the Key Topics section.

Key Topics

- Existing and Emerging Threats
 - Coastal concerns, including oil spills add a lot of unique challenges to the EPC role.
 - Preparation and education of earthquake and tsunami threats are needed within the community.
 - Wildfires are an emerging threat for coastal communities.
 - Access/egress concerns, there are limited evacuation routes and over reliance on BC ferries.

- Some communities have strained relationships with their neighbouring governments and are seeking pathways to further partnerships with local governments.
- Water and Drought
 - Undrinkable water or precarious access to water during emergencies, as well as aging infrastructure.
- Training
 - More in-person training, including assistance with Disaster Risk Management plans, and Incident Command System (ICS) training.
 - There is a need for Indigenized training for emergency management, including cultural humility training offerings for local governments and partner agencies.
 - ICS's application is limited within the indigenous world view, exploring ways to decolonize approaches within EOCs.
- Next Meeting
 - Meeting Topics and Agenda Topics
 - Truth and reconciliation through transparency of where progress has been made toward solving issues, and where gaps still exist.
 - Less time on EMCR initiatives and a greater focus on First Nation experiences.
 - Add risk management to the agenda.
 - More time for networking with partner agencies.
 - Invitees
 - Decision makers at the table, including EDMA, Disaster Financial Assistance (DFA), as well as those who can answer the systemic level questions.
 - BCWS, Coast Guard, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy, Search and Rescue, BC Hydro, BC Ferries, BC Ambulance, Canada Food Inspection Agency
 - Materials
 - Infographic 1-pagers of information
 - Phone and email contact list and a list of partner agencies contacts.



Challenges, Recommendations, and Strategies

Four over-arching topics emerged throughout the PTs and are detailed below, along with suggested strategies to address challenges.

Capacity and Funding Strengthen capacity through dedicated EPC funding in First Nations communities.	
EPC Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable, long-term funding for EPCs is needed for every First Nation community. Finding dedicated individuals to fill the role is difficult, especially when the job is part-time and does not have long-term funding. • It is challenging for communities to staff both the EOCs and ESS program at the same time. • The nature of the role is expanding as new initiatives begin. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Can't participate fully in working groups and engagement initiatives with various levels of government due to lack of capacity. ○ There are many hazards and few resources, and this is exasperated by climate change. • Collaboration between EPCs is needed to stretch existing resources and there needs to be a space for new EPCs to knowledge share with those experienced in the role.
Funding and Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A central funding branch in government with common application forms and lists of funding opportunities. This would provide a more equitable approach to funding opportunities. First Nations are often competing for limited funding opportunities, and only those with capacity can seek out and secure the bulk of funding. • Support is needed for new infrastructure initiatives, as well as mitigation efforts to protect those investments. • Resource challenges include out of date computers in the EOC and aging firefighting equipment. • Time consuming grant processes mean that staff do not have time to focus on their work. • Requirements, application processes, and eligibility for funding should be clear. There should be a complete list of funding available for reference. • Floating expenses while awaiting reimbursements cause cash flow problems for communities. • More emergencies need to be covered through one funding stream instead of through many ministries or agencies.
Mental Health Supports A greater emphasis on mental health supports and trauma treatment, including training for staff.	
Mental Health Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of mental health support, both for front-line staff and communities. • Trauma-informed service is needed from supporting agencies. • Workshops for psychological first aid and cultural safety are needed. • Periods with thick wild-fire smoke cause a lot of anxiety, highlighting that preparedness needs to be a community-wide endeavour.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EOC burnout after long activations is a challenge.
Compounding Emergencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPCs suffer with uncertainty and anxiety around the future, and what unknown emergencies will develop with climate change. • Intersecting emergencies challenge the mental wellness of staff who are responding, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing opioid crisis. • Trauma from these repeated activations, as well as inter-generational traumas, are a contributing factor to capacity challenges. • Emergencies compound and amplify the existing effects of poverty, addiction, and mental health.
<p>Preparedness and Emergency Management Plans Emergency Management Plans in communities need to be revised, modernized, and streamlined. Plans need to consider vulnerable populations, longer-term evacuations, and inter-agency coordination.</p>	
Evacuation Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's a need for community-based ESS and ESS volunteers that are trained in cultural safety. • It's important to keep families together and get supplies to those sheltering in place. • ERA Tool challenges, including trust and connectivity challenges, make paper forms essential. • Plans and funding for traditional food during evacuations, including generators to preserve food, is important. This is especially true during longer evacuations. Community sourced food is better for those away from home. • Extra supports are needed for elders and more vulnerable community members. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Moving those with mobility limitations requires training. ○ Supports for those struggling with substance use disorders. ○ Culturally safe places for elders. • Trapped pets are a significant challenge, many are unwilling to evacuate and leave pets behind.
Four pillars focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporating the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is essential to prepare for the future. • Emergency management is a year-round endeavour and mitigation requires more attention.
Early planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A plan to vaccinate animals ahead of time so that they can be evacuated. • Planning for ESS supports and lodging options while incorporating an Indigenous world view and flexibility for those who do not want to go to larger cities. • A desire to move beyond traditional ESS certification, communities want to support and welcome each other during emergencies. • Planning for the protection of culturally significant sites and areas of high biodiversity. • Food security and preparedness, helping people prepare households and have stores of food for sheltering place.

Emergency Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing emergency plans are too long, often outdated, and not specified to the community or population. Simplified plans are needed. Have workshops and training that start with an HRVA and create a guidance structure based off identified risks. A “one-stop shop” with contacts for partners would be helpful.
<p>Engagement and Collaboration Meaningful and transparent collaboration with First Nations, including follow-up with how information will be used.</p>	
Response Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During emergencies, invite communities into the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre (PREOC), and a variety of organizations into EOCs to help share expertise and knowledge.
Government Initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to participate in many government projects due to capacity concerns and contributes to engagement fatigue. A lack of follow-up after engagement can lead to feeling tokenized and deteriorates trust. Succinct follow up and clarity of how information collected will be used. Appreciated when senior leadership and decision makers attend communities, this contributes to building relationships. Change messaging from “resilient” to “adaptable.” Long-term resilience is damaging to the health of EOC workers who need to allow time to acknowledge feelings and impacts from disasters and adapt to changing circumstances. There is a lot of broken trust because of colonialism. Promises must be fulfilled by government to build trust. Responsibilities and communication pathways with local governments need to be clear.
Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training and involving youth in emergency management is essential for decolonization and succession planning.
EDMA and DFA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further information and engagement as regulations are developed. Follow-up with how much Indigenous Engagement Requirement (IER) funding was dispersed would make collaborating or pooling the funding easier.
Future Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More frequent engagement beyond the PTs. A forum is needed for everyone to collaborate, provincially or federally and move forward with a shared vision.
Service Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People in call centres and PREOCs should have front-line experience and knowledge of First Nations communities. When contacting communities during an emergency, have a list of priorities and available resources. Avoid asking “How can we help?” and ensure communities know available options. Recognition that when areas are allowed to burn, livelihoods and food sources are lost. There needs to be more consideration beyond physical structures. Trauma-informed service.

Next Steps

The challenges, recommendations, and strategies summarized in this report will be utilized to track and support continuous improvement efforts. First Nations communities, EMCR, ISC, and other partner organizations each have responsibilities in supporting these improvements through shared leadership and partnership.

As the lead provincial coordinating agency for emergency management in BC, EMCR's regional office staff continue to be available to First Nations community representatives to provide emergency management supports and services.

Acknowledging the value of forums like the Partnership Table to discuss priorities and opportunities, it is also important to recognize that the lines of communication are *always* open. Please connect with EMCR's regional offices if you have any questions or concerns related to emergency management, or for further updates regarding progress on the recommendations in this report.

Provincial Emergency Operations Centres (PREOCs)

South West PREOC Phone: 778-572-3962 Email: preoc2.ops1@gov.bc.ca	Central PREOC Phone: 250-312-6623 Email: preoc3.ops1@gov.bc.ca	South East PREOC Phone: 778-671-9032 Email: preoc4.ops1@gov.bc.ca
North East PREOC Phone: 250-614-6322 Email: preoc5.ops1@gov.bc.ca	North West PREOC Phone: 250-615-4800 Email: preoc6.ops1@gov.bc.ca	Vancouver Island/Central Coast Phone: 236-478-2830 Email: preoc1.ops1@gov.bc.ca

APPENDIX A: List of Abbreviations

AAR	After-Action Review
BCWS	British Columbia Wildfire Service
CAF	Canadian Armed Forces
CN	Canadian National Railway
DFA	Disaster Financial Assistance
EDMA	Emergency Disaster Management Act
EMCR	Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness
EMP	Emergency Management Plan
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
EPC	Emergency Program Coordinator
ERA Tool	Evacuee Registration Assistance Tool
ESS	Emergency Support Services
FNESS	First Nations Emergency Services Society
FNHA	First Nations Health Authority
HEMBC	Health Emergency Management BC
HRVA	Hazard, Risk and Vulnerability Analysis
ICS	Incident Command System
IER	Indigenous Engagement Requirements
ISC	Indigenous Services Canada
MIRR	Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
MOF	Ministry of Forests
MOTI	Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure
PREOC	Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
WLRS	Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship