

Who is responsible for structure protection on Reserve Lands during wildfire incidents?

BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) is responsible for responding to wildfires on Crown land and lands under cost-sharing agreements. BCWS also supports wildfire response on other public and private lands through service and mutual aid agreements. This includes providing wildfire response, including structure protection, on Reserve Lands.

The First Nations' Emergency Services Society (FNESS) is a supporting agency to First Nation communities. They do not have the authority to make decisions on behalf of First Nations. BCWS cannot expect to utilize FNESS resources in their operational planning or rely on FNESS for operational input on behalf of affected First Nations.

If a First Nation community would like a structure protection trailer deployed, what is the process?

If a BCWS incident commander determines a First Nation community is at risk based on wildfire activity, then BCWS will assess the need for structure protection resources and, if available and appropriate, deploy FNESS resources. If FNESS is unavailable, or other resources are more readily available or appropriate, then BCWS will deploy structure protection from available contractor and fire department resources. Depending on the threat, a combination of resources may also be used.

If a BCWS incident commander finds the community is not at risk, but the community still feels that there is a desire for structure protection resources, the community can request structure protection support directly from FNESS.

When FNESS deploys at the request of the community and is in command of structure protection resources, who pays?

In the above scenario where FNESS deploys to a First Nation community outside the structure of a BCWS incident, then the costs are borne by FNESS.

A First Nation community would like protection of a cultural site or community asset outside of Reserve Lands, can FNESS deploy structure protection?

If the cultural site or community asset falls within an incident being managed by BCWS, the community can share this information with the Incident Commander and BCWS will coordinate structure protection resources where operationally feasible.

If this request occurs outside of an incident being managed by BCWS, the community should make their request directly to FNESS.

In the above scenario, are there differences between a BCWS worksite and non-worksite (e.g. fire has potential to move toward a cultural site or community asset but is a few kilometres away)?

In either situation, this scenario provides an opportunity for community leadership to engage directly with BCWS incident command, to share their concerns and the values at risk. A collaborative approach to protecting cultural sites can be incorporated within the incident priorities as operationally feasible.

If FNESS resources are deployed to non-Reserve Lands, will they get pulled to support the First Nation community?

BCWS does not request FNESS resource deployments outside of Reserve Lands. When deployed by BCWS, the use of FNESS resources is specifically directed towards structure protection on Reserve Lands.

Can First Nations can be a part of the Inter-Agency Agreement (IAA)?

If a First Nation community has a recognized fire department, registered with the Office of the Fire Commissioner and a declared service level, then they can fall under the Inter-Agency Agreement (IAA).

There are First Nation Fire Departments that look to deploy resources through the IAA. All Fire Departments that are recognized by the Office of the Fire Commissioner are eligible to register under the IAA. All training qualifications for personnel and apparatus requirements listed in the IAA apply. As with any community, it is worth having a conversation around intent to register under the IAA. Currently, of the 400 fire departments in B.C., only about 120 departments register annually for deployments under the IAA. There are a range of reasons that most community fire departments in B.C. do not register (e.g. service level, staffing, training, required equipment, prioritizing protection of local community, etc.).

Who should a community contact for structure protection support and information?

At the BCWS Incident level: Reach out to the Incident Commander or Incident Management Team assigned to the fire or complex.

For general BCWS Fire Services questions: Email spco@gov.bc.ca

For general BCWS questions: Email bcws.fnir@gov.bc.ca

At FNESS: dutymanager@fness.bc.ca