

Simpcw Indigenous Initial Attack crew



COOPERATIVE COMMUNITY WILDFIRE RESPONSE

Enhancing community
leadership and partnership
in wildfire response

RECONCILIATION

This work to advance reconciliation is guided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). One of the primary goals of this project is to highlight First Nations traditional knowledge and expertise in wildfire. Many First Nations have lived with and stewarded fire since time immemorial. Advancing reconciliation includes agencies respecting existing expertise and working towards more cooperative opportunities for wildfire management.

WORKING WITH RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

The BCWS has started engagement with rural and remote communities to explore opportunities to be more involved in wildfire preparedness and response. As wildfire suppression is a dangerous activity and is done by highly trained firefighters, conversations on how to involve communities who do not have structural/organized fire departments will take time to ensure proper protocols and agreements are in place.



The Cooperative Community Wildfire Response project is a collaborative effort between the BC Wildfire Service, the First Nations Emergency Services Society, Indigenous Services Canada, the University of British Columbia, Fraser Basin Council and the BC Cattlemen's Association to better understand and support wildfire preparedness and response capacities in Indigenous and rural communities and how to improve coordination between emergency management organizations and these communities.

Climate-related natural hazards are on the rise in B.C. Wildfires pose the greatest risk to rural and remote communities and the BCWS recognizes local community members know their own geographies best and what land owners value most. The Cooperative Community Wildfire Response project aims to leverage positive examples of cooperation with remote communities with established fire preparedness and response capacity and support improved coordination and consistency between the BCWS and community groups.

The BCWS is actively looking at viable opportunities to improve cooperation with communities and local governments to increase local response capacity. Solutions are being developed based on what the BCWS has learned from 2023 and previous wildfire seasons, and the BCWS will work with local governments and community organizations to figure out how best to offer them.



PROPOSED PATHWAYS TO COOPERATION

In Spring 2023, the team published a report, "Pathways to Cooperative Community Wildfire Response with First Nations." Several key themes emerged as pathways to a more cooperative approach to wildfire response between agencies and First Nations.

- First Nations hold diverse, often underutilized capacities for wildfire response, including leadership, local knowledge, training and experience, equipment, and important relationships and partnerships
- Enabling pathways for cooperation requires building from existing capacities to connect to a range of opportunities that reflect the diverse needs and priorities of First Nations
- Priority opportunities include:
 - Strengthening **First Nations Community Liaisons**
 - Full-time First Nations crews that could be **cross-trained** for wildfire response, wildfire prevention, prescribed and cultural burning, and structural protection
 - An in-community **Emergency Response coordinator**
 - Revitalizing **First Nations employment within BC Wildfire Service**
 - Additional **as-needed contracts and flexible proactive agreements and incident-based contracts**
- Key processes to enable these opportunities include:
 - **Prioritize relationship-building**
 - **Recognize First Nations Rights and Title**
 - **Streamline funding**
 - **Address racism to enable cultural safety**

PROJECT TIMELINE

This is a two-year project that will form the foundation for cooperative wildfire response in B.C., recognizing that many initiatives are already taking place. Our goal is to coordinate and streamline these efforts to improve access to information and opportunities, and support stronger relationships on and off the fireline.

