

Attachment 1: Questions & Answers from All Chiefs' Provincial Technical Briefing/Situational Update Calls July 17 -21

1. Food Security

The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) understands the critical importance of preserving salmon habitat, harvesting, and fishing areas for cultural practices, community consumption, and traditional medicinal purposes. EMCR is taking the following steps to action food security and sovereignty concerns, including the following:

- Working alongside the Interagency Drought Working Group to collaboratively address food security and sovereignty issues raised by communities.
 - Several provincial ministries are a part of this group, including EMCR, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Ministry of Forests, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation.
 - Federal working group members include Agriculture Canada, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Indigenous Services Canada, and Public Safety Canada. The First Nations Health Authority and the First Nations' Emergency Services Society are also members of the Interagency Drought Working Group.
 - The provincial and federal governments and agencies will continue to work with First Nation communities to address impacts related to food security and food sovereignty and to identify both short- and long-term solutions.
- EMCR staff are working with federal partners and communities on their community disaster recovery plans which include several complex, longer-term food security and sovereignty issues, such as the following:
 - reduced access to traditional food sources due to the impacts of climate change,
 - disrupted or impacted food supply and infrastructure in remote communities, and
 - impacts to salmon populations and habitat such as low water levels and landslides blocking the ability of salmon to spawn in streams and rivers.
- EMCR is supporting communities through regional and provincial emergency operations centres and the Integrated Disaster Council of BC (IDCBC). The IDCBC is comprised of nongovernment service organizations including the Salvation Army, Food Banks BC, the Canadian Red Cross, Metis Nations BC, and BC Association of Aboriginal Friendships Centers.

- In recent years collaboration by all levels of government and First Nations communities have been key to protecting traditional food sources. We will continue this work in collaboration with partners to support recovery efforts. Previous examples of collaboration include, in 2021, actions taken following the Big Bar landslide:
 - Fisheries and Oceans Canada, in partnership with local First Nations, released over 213,400 Chinook & sockeye fry into the Upper Fraser watershed, of which 101,000 Chinook fry came from 2020 Big Bar brood stock
 - Advancing work on the permanent “nature-like” fishway in prior to the 2021 Fraser salmon migration, including upgrading the concrete fish ladder.

2. Federal Government Funding

- EMCR has heard First Nations’ request for direct funding from Canada to enhance emergency management capacity in community. The Province continues to seek opportunities to streamline funding reimbursement processes related to emergency events.
- Through the Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centres (PREOCs), EMCR is working with First Nations communities and partners such as Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), the First Nations Emergency Services Society (FNESS), and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) to address funding gaps and unmet needs related to emergency response and recovery efforts.
- EMCR currently provides emergency management services and supports to First Nations communities on behalf of the federal government through a bilateral service agreement, which was signed in 2017. EMCR is supportive of the renegotiation of this service agreement and looking forward to joining ISC and the FNLC at the negotiations table.
- EMCR is committed to improving our partnerships with First Nations to better support capacity, while honouring that First Nations are best positioned to make decisions that affect their communities.

3. Why did it take a few days before BC Wildfire Service (BCWS) responded to a fire? What has been done about fuel management?

- EMCR and BCWS both value proactive measures to reduce the impact and severity of wildfire events. Many of the new starts over the week of July 7-11th were from significant lightning storms. With the heavy smoke and concurrent lightning strikes in many areas, it took more time for BCWS to safely perform air patrols to identify new fire starts and confirm fire starts where the public may have called in reports of smoke.

- BCWS would like to thank everyone who reported fires and continues to encourage the public to call in fire information to help identify new fire starts as quickly as possible.
- Many communities across the province have been active in fuel management in the spring of this year to prepare for wildfire season. This includes initiatives such as the Community Resilience Investment Program. Fuel management projects, such as FireSmart, help to remove fuel to protect homes and surrounding properties. FNESS is also a key partner in reducing wildfire risk at the landscape and community levels
- FNESS has a program dedicated to fuel management and more information can be found on their website.

4. Request for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the First Nations Health Authority (re air quality) to join the calls

- EMCR welcomes the participation of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) on these calls which will now be led by FNESS. The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) has been invited to these calls (see question 6) and has been instrumental in providing culturally safe support as well as the provision of air purifiers and mental health and wellness supports.

5. Some are concerned that they have had no notification or alerts regarding the fires near them. This causes frustration, as they don't have funding as First Nations people to protect their people and animals. All stock is at risk.

- The EMCR PREOCs are positioned to directly support First Nation communities with questions related to funding reimbursement and livestock / animal reimbursement or relocation. There are several items eligible for funding during response, including animal evacuation and rescue (see pages 10-13 of the Financial Guidelines).
- EMCR and the BCWS strive to notify all impacted or potentially impacted communities as soon as possible when there is a known or imminent risk to a community. EMCR and BCWS have staff on-call 24/7 to support community notifications, and EMCR maintains a list of 24/7 contacts for each community to reach out to if/when an emergency event takes place. Where communities are close to or affected by wildfire, BCWS teams are actively seeking community liaisons to work with to improve communication and information flow.
- The most up-to-date wildfire information can be found on the BC Wildfire App and BC Wildfire website. Once a fire is discovered, the information is put into the app and all updates including size, planning, and resources deployed.
- Bulletins from fire centres are sent out by the communication teams through a listserv. If communities are not receiving these emails, please let BCWS know, and they will update your community information or add additional contact information to our list. You can contact BCWS.FNIR@gov.bc.ca with your name, community name, email, and phone number, and they will ensure you're added to the list.

- Please visit the EmergencyInfoBC website or twitter feed, to see a list and receive updates on all evacuation alerts and orders in BC.
- Also, please see the attached EMCR Response Pathway document attached with this letter, outlining roles, responsibilities, and key contacts for FNESS, FNHA, ISC and EMCR.

6. The neighborhood is heavy with smoke and the neighboring community is doing headcounts, as the smoke is that bad. At what point do we call a Provincial State of Emergency (PSOE)?

- The Province and FNHA are aware of smoke concerns and the following resources are available:
 - The Ministry of Health has several resources on how to help stay safe when experiencing wildfire smoke: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-info/prevention-public-health/wildfire-smoke>.
 - FNHA's provincial and regional Environmental Public Health Services (EPHS) team are monitoring the air quality situation and providing air purifiers to impacted areas as needed. FNHA provides air purifiers to support those most at risk of low air quality related harms.
- FNHA has also been sharing messages on how to set up clear air shelters, how to stay safe in poor air quality situations, and providing general wildfire preparedness information.
- First Nations can also submit an expense authorization request to their local EMCR PREOC for the rental of air cleaner or air scrubber units. These units are not for use in individual homes, but community gathering spaces. EMCR will cover incremental costs for the operation of these facilities.
- On the topic of the Provincial State of Emergency, the federal government and the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre have been engaged and are providing firefighting personnel, aircraft support, and other assets. A provincial declaration of a state of emergency has not been necessary to help people, to access funding, or to coordinate or obtain additional resources — including federal assets.
- Declaring a Provincial State of Emergency is a decision, informed by the advice of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness and BC Wildfire Service officials. A Provincial State of Emergency will be enacted if, or when, it is required. In the meantime, I can assure you it is something we are reviewing daily.

7. Evacuee supports

- Evacuee support is driven by First Nation communities to determine pathways for evacuee well-being and care for those impacted by emergency events. Many agencies (e.g. EMCR, FNHA, ISC, and FNESS) are positioned in the PREOCs to work together to support evacuees with various services. If your community is seeking additional evacuee supports, we suggest contacting the local PREOC, or they call EMCR at 1-800-663-3456.

Emergency Support Services:

- ESS provides short-term basic support to people impacted by disasters. The program is financed by the provincial government and administered by Indigenous communities and local governments. This program often depends on volunteers to coordinate services for people forced from their homes because of an emergency.
- Supports provided to those eligible are determined on an individual or family bases using a low barrier criteria. Services may be available for an extended period depending on the emergency and the circumstances of an evacuation.
- Primary services include temporary lodging, food, clothing, and incidentals (such as toiletries)
- Specialized services include emotional support, health services (such as first aid), pet care, and transportation
- Evacuees register for ESS by following the instructions provided on their evacuation alert or order. This process can be different for each community. It is the discretion of the local emergency program to determine if online or paper registration is available at the time of the emergency event. The online option uses the Evacuee Registration & Assistance (ERA) tool with a self-registration option. The paper option includes in-person registration with paper forms. Both options require a trained ESS responder to connect with an evacuee to complete registration and provide emergency supports on a case-by-case basis.
- For the 2023 wildfire season, EMCR is also working with FNESS, FNHA, and ISC to taking steps to coordinate mass evacuation planning in a manner that is community-led and culturally safe:
- EMCR is working with Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc to establish additional sites for self-sustaining evacuees with trailers and tents, and they are exploring services provided by Indigenous vendors.
- EMCR has also hired an Indigenous consultant in the PECC Advanced Planning Unit to oversee mass evacuation planning Indigenous communities. The intent is to co-develop a provincial Indigenous Evacuee Lodging Plan that is culturally safe, community-driven, Nation-based, and provincially supported. Part of this plan will be to develop an enhanced understanding of First Nations capacity to host other Nations, and Indigenous support organization's capacity to support mass evacuation efforts.