

MEMORANDUM

TO: Emergency Preparedness Committee

AND TO: Murray Daly, Chief Administrative Officer

FROM: Stephanie Masun, Manager of Emergency Program Services

DATE: February 21, 2024

SUBJECT: Emergency Operations Centre Activities 2024, January to March

Wildfire Response 2023 (Task # 23-2482)

• ***After-Action Review Series to Capture Lessons Learned***

Emergency Program Services staff completed a series of after-action reviews to capture lessons learned for improving future EOC response, procedures and coordination with external partners, neighboring jurisdictions, internal staff, contractors and the First Nations/Indigenous Governing Bodies with whom the CRD EOC consulted and coordinated during the 2023 wildfire response. While not all relevant parties were able to participate in this after-action review series, the CRD EOC staff strive to continue to gather feedback and to improve and adapt procedures accordingly.

Flooding 2024 (Task # 24-0644)

- CRD EOC is activated at level one to monitor for flooding.

Long-term incidents

Incident Monitoring (DGIR 220747_No task #), Fuel Spill, EA A, March 2023, Monitoring Ongoing

- CRD EOC is monitoring a reported fuel spill in Electoral Area A, with updates from the responsible party and assisting agencies. Ongoing.

Spring Flood 2020 (Task # 210182), Landslide SOLE Maintenance, EA A, Monitoring Ongoing

- SOLE remains in place for Electoral Area A and requires weekly renewals.
- Evacuation Orders due to landslide for properties in Electoral Area A remain in effect.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stephanie Masun
Manager of Emergency Program Services

building communities together



2023 Wildfire Season After Action Review

Cariboo Regional District

Respectfully submitted to the Cariboo Regional District

Irene Israel - Emergency Program Coordinator

iisrael@cariboord.ca



CONTENTS

CONTENTS	1
Disclaimer	3
FIRST NATIONS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	4
Introduction and Context	5
SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT THEMES	6
A Successful Response Season	6
Enhancing Collaboration	7
Effective Communications	7
Preseason Preparedness	7
Approaching Emergency Management Through the Use of Multiple Partners	7
Understanding and Managing Limited Resourcing	8
Sector Based Approaches to Supporting Those Affected by Disaster	8
AAR PROCESS	9
Looking Back, and Looking Forward	9
OVERALL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	10
Roles and Responsibilities (Related to CRD EOC Operations)	10
Recommendations	10
EOC-Specific Findings	10
Recommendations	11
Communications and Collaboration	12
Recommendations	13
Interjurisdictional Aspects	13
Recommendations	14
Evacuation Planning and Implementation	14
Recommendations	16
Preparedness, Mitigation and Recovery	16



Recommendations	17
EDMA Legislation Adoption and Planning for the Future	17
General or Overarching Recommendations	18
Recommendations	18
SUMMARY	19
APPENDIX A: FACILITATED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	21



Disclaimer

This report is the property of the Cariboo Regional District (CRD) and is intended to be used by the CRD, its staff, and authorized parties for the purpose of emergency management program development.

Information and data used in the compilation of this report has been gathered from various sources and sessions made available and possible by the CRD and others and accessed for the purposes of research. These include the following:

- Various existing CRD plans, documents, maps, financial statements, and other sources of information.
- Various Government of British Columbia reports, websites, documents, legislation, and other sources.
- Consultation with CRD staff, volunteers, and other external agency representatives.
- Consultation with subject matter experts and a variety of external agencies.
- Various professional websites and reference documents.

The information contained in this document is the application of Clear Sky Consulting Ltd.'s professional expertise and opinion, subject to the accuracy and content of available information and the scope of work. Furthermore, it must be expected that the CRD Emergency Management Program will continue to evolve and be influenced positively and negatively by many factors. The use of this information indicates acceptance of full responsibility for any errors or omissions contained herein.



FIRST NATIONS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

"I acknowledge and respect that I live, work and am in relation with the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Ktunaxa, Syilx and Sinixt Nations. I was born on Nakoda Sioux traditional territory in what is now known as Northern Alberta, where I met my wife, Nicole. We relocated from Edmonton to our current home at the foot of the Selkirk Mountains in Warfield, drawn to the area's close connection to nature as avid hikers, mountain bikers and skiers. I appreciate the care the First Nations, who have called this land home since time immemorial, have shown the area, I acknowledge the harm that colonization has brought to Indigenous Nations on this land, and I seek to understand, reconcile, and build relationships with those who were here first. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to live and raise my daughter on these lands."



INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The Cariboo Regional District (CRD) geographically encompasses a large geographic region in central British Columbia (BC), within which includes urban communities, First Nations reserves and territory, and outlying rural areas (which typically fall under the jurisdiction of the CRD). At over 80,000 square kilometres, the CRD provides a variety of local government services to approximately 62,000 residents, not including First Nations reserves and incorporated municipalities. Approximately 40,000 residents live in rural areas and are governed by the CRD itself.

British Columbia in general experienced an extraordinary year for wildland and urban interface wildfire activity in 2023. 2023 was the most expensive and destructive year for wildland firefighting in BC history, with over 2 million hectares burned and over 2,072 fire starts recorded within BC this past year. The Cariboo Regional District did not experience an exceptional wildfire season – by 2023 standards - and avoided the catastrophic losses experienced in the northeast, Lillooet, Okanagan, and Shuswap areas of the province. However, what was notable in the CRD was the length and pervasiveness of the wildfire season in 2023.

The CRD experienced its longest Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) activation in history in 2023 – exceeding the significant Cariboo wildfire seasons in 2016, 2017, and 2021. The CRD activated its EOC to provide support to residents and partner agencies on April 29th, 2023, and was finally able to rescind its last evacuation alerts on September 28th, 2023. This equates to a total of 153 days of concurrent EOC operation for a regional district with limited resources. The CRD managed a notable 76 Evacuation Alert and Order implementations, changes and rescinds during the 2023 wildfire season.

Of note, this EOC activation included time spent in the EOC by 22 different CRD staff members, 5 contractors and 2 external partner liaisons. At the peak, the EOC hosted participants in 16 different EOC positions – a significant EOC activation. This does not include the staff and resources mobilized to support the wildfire response by external partners, incorporated municipalities and First Nations governments across the Cariboo region, though significant coordination and communication was undertaken by all of these organizations during the 2023 wildfire response season.

This document summarizes the results of an after-action review (AAR) session undertaken on November 14th, 2023, to examine the actions taken during the 2023 wildfire response season. The AAR session involved CRD internal personnel and external partners and was facilitated by Clear Sky Consulting (Clear Sky). It was held in person with the central focus of capturing successes, challenges, best practices, and opportunities for improvement. The format of the session allowed for a guided and facilitated conversation between all attendees. The preliminary portion of the session focused on the 2023 wildfire response season, whereas the latter portion focused on improvements going forward and anticipating changes that will be forthcoming with the enactment of the new Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA).



This document assumes that the readers are familiar with common concepts in the Incident Command System (ICS) and general EOC and emergency management concepts, activities, and responsibilities.

This document is intended for internal CRD use, and its distribution is at the sole discretion of the CRD Emergency Program and CRD leadership. It remains the exclusive property of the CRD.

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT THEMES

The November 8th external agency AAR session revealed several themes, which will be examined in greater detail later in this report. These themes were derived from both the review of the past wildfire season's response efforts as well as discussions about future legislative changes and associated requirements for emergency response partners.

A Successful Response Season

Throughout the session with the CRD staff and external agencies and partners, one thing was clear; all participants thought, overall, that it was a very successful wildfire response season. The CRD was complimented repeatedly by external partners, and internal staff complimented each other for successes and were supportive. The session facilitator heard repeated examples of CRD Emergency Program staff professionalism and of external partners wanting to ensure that it was known that they appreciated working with CRD staff. External partners noted excellent communications in a variety of instances with different CRD and EOC staff, and that the helpfulness, sensitivity, and supportive relationships were appreciated. EOC participants noted a high level of proficiency and experience shown by CRD and EOC staff, and a positive environment within the EOC, which will hopefully be conveyed to those who were not able to join the November 14th session. External partners spoke frequently about the well-evolved systems in the CRD regarding communications, management of evacuation alerts and orders, sharing of information, and that the CRD is a regional and provincial leader and supports many partner local governments and First Nations – which deserves to be recognized.

After action reviews often focus only on challenges and areas that need improvement. As much time was spent during this external agency review session on ensuring that successes and best practices were noted (by participants), as there was time spent on identifying areas for improvement.



Enhancing Collaboration

- AAR participants noted that there are only so many subject matter experts, or resources available in smaller communities (such as First Nations community members who support their communities, and others like the CRD and British Columbia Wildfire Service - BCWS).
 - Participants recommended that these human resources be identified in preseason planning and potentially be used by more than one agency as a liaison, which will ensure the continuity of information and maintenance of relationships during an emergency response.

Effective Communications

- AAR participants noted that there needs to be multiple ways of communicating during emergencies – this includes the effective use of coordination calls, smaller calls between two or more individuals, emails, text messages, and other means of sharing information. Common operating platforms were discussed, with the ability to access, view, provide and edit information by multiple agencies being important. Effective and coordinated information to those affected by disasters was noted as critical, especially by those supporting these people - such as the Emergency Support Services (ESS) representative who was present at the AAR session.

Preseason Preparedness

- AAR participants spoke more than once about the need for preseason meetings, opportunities to establish and enhance relationships, and the need to develop systems that simplify the sharing of critical information in a timely fashion.
- It was noted repeatedly that, if the wildfire season ends in September, October, or November, and starts again in March, then the preparedness and planning season is shorter than the response season itself, which creates challenges (there is very little “off-season”).

Approaching Emergency Management Through the Use of Multiple Partners

- 2023 saw excellent liaison partnerships with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, First Nations Emergency Services Society, and the Ministry of Forests (MOF) providing liaisons in-person to the EOC.



- Participants in the AAR noted that the use of traditional and non-traditional partners will be important moving forward due to the length, impact, and severity of events. Increased collaboration and communication between all partners were noted as critical. Improved relationships with First Nations was also noted as significant and worthy of additional development and effort.
- Some of the additional partners mentioned during the session included:
 - To continue the use of FNESS to help support interactions with, and support for First Nations partners, and to develop this relationship further.
 - More interaction with the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation (more so for ESS)
 - Improve and enhance relations with the Interior Health Authority (would support for the ESS team and EOC team)
 - Develop relationships with community-based support organizations (useful for both ESS and if there are any recovery activities).

Understanding and Managing Limited Resourcing

- Staff changes within the CRD, and partner organizations were recognized as a risk to continued relationships and knowledge retention in organizations.
- CRD staff observed that there was very good transfer of information between the BCWS Regional Wildfire Coordination Officer (RWCO) and the Incident Management Teams (IMTs) working from the Cariboo Fire Centre. This helped with relationships between the CRD and the IMTs as the same information and processes were being used between agencies. This can be challenging, and it was reported that 2023 was very successful in this regard.
 - In addition to this, the CRD noted that it was very helpful that the Cariboo Fire Centre has adopted and used the CRD-enhanced Re-entry Planning Templates and guidance to help inform the recommendations to rescind evacuation orders. This helps the CRD to manage the expectations of residents who are waiting for evacuation orders to be lifted so they can return home.

Sector Based Approaches to Supporting Those Affected by Disaster

- The use of First Nations and agricultural liaisons during the 2023 event were noted as both best practices and areas for development and improvement.
- Other regions of BC have had good success with economic liaisons as well.



AAR PROCESS

This AAR was developed and undertaken as a facilitated discussion among emergency response and support partners and was initiated and hosted by the Cariboo Regional District.

The CRD appreciates the support of the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, who provided funding support for this AAR through an Expense Authorization Form (EAF) request as part of their response funding support through the 2023 wildfire season.

A series of questions was developed to support the session in collaboration between CRD and Clear Sky staff. These questions were then shared with external partners, who were asked to either attend an in-person session (November 14th) or provide written feedback (or schedule a one-to-one discussion with CRD and Clear Sky staff). These questions are provided for reference in Appendix A.

Organizations who were represented during the AAR session included:

- BC Wildfire Service (BCWS)
- Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR)
- CRD Emergency Support Services Team
- Recreation Sites and Trails BC
- Ministry of Transportation (MOTI)
- Agricultural Liaison / EOC Contractor
- First Nations Emergency Services Society (FNESS)

Both Clear Sky and the Cariboo Regional District are grateful for the in-person support by these agencies and appreciate their commitment to improving outcomes for those affected by disasters.

Looking Back, and Looking Forward

On November 8th, 2023, the Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA) received Royal Assent and was brought into law by the Province of BC. This Act replaces the Emergency Management Act, which was in force in BC until November 1st, 2023, and was originally drafted in 1996.

The November 14th CRD AAR session was specifically designed with two objectives in mind; one, to review the activities, relationships, and actions from the 2023 Cariboo wildfire



season, and two, to consider the implications for all response partners moving forward in light of the new legislation. As such, the morning session (and associated questions) were developed to consider the past recent wildfire season, while the afternoon session was developed to frame a discussion about the new legislation, and activities and considerations that will be needed to move forward as a region effectively.

OVERALL FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The external partners debrief session was a facilitated and guided conversation, which included questions about roles and responsibilities, communications and information sharing, evacuation planning, recovery planning, interjurisdictional event management, successes, challenges, general best practices, and opportunities for improvement. The responses from participating organizations are captured below and are listed by each question (and observing agency, where relevant). Some sections include observations and recommendations made or derived by the facilitator.

Roles and Responsibilities (Related to CRD EOC Operations)

- Several participants, and in particular, the Regional Wildfire Coordination Officer from BCWS noted that the flow of information through several channels (phone calls, emails, and coordination calls, working through Information sections in different Emergency Operations Centres) works extremely well, particularly between the Cariboo Fire Centre and the CRD.
- BCWS noted that there would be advantages to having an embedded EOC / CRD representative in the BCWS response system – this may be particularly helpful in Chilcotin region responses.

Recommendations

- To preserve this highly effective working relationship during emergencies, efforts should be made to document, train and practice these effective interagency communications in the event of staff changes, or different participants within the EOC and BCWS Fire Centre.

EOC-Specific Findings

- Daily check-ins with remote EOC workers were noted as necessary and should be reflected in operational procedures – to ensure situational awareness and wellness for all of those involved in response. Those who were working remotely noted that these processes worked well, but as a best practice, these must be retained.



- Those external agencies who had a physical presence within the EOC noted the following:
 - There were some issues with being able to print documents that were persistent through the response.
 - There were some issues with CRD-specific emails that were resolved but it took some time to do so.
 - One AAR participant noted that certain forms in use by the CRD (specifically, an ICS214 form) does not work outside of CRD computers and IT systems.
 - One AAR participant noted that the mapping of current roads on GIS maps could be improved. This would support activities like livestock evacuation. Other participants noted that the best available data was being used.
 - Some EOC participants noted that the welcome orientation and situational briefing could have been improved.
- Some EOC participants noted that they felt that the EOC was, at times, too focused on their own internal processes and were not reaching out, to agencies outside of the EOC and maintaining overall regional situational awareness.
 - This is a common concern about EOCs – it can be very challenging to consider what is going on outside of the EOC when a lot of emphasis is placed upon internal EOC activities (such as action planning and the development of situational reports).
 - It should be noted that the Liaison position was utilized very effectively in 2023 in the CRD EOC, and many check-ins were completed with external agencies, and sharing of information and communications was greatly improved.
- Many AAR participants noted pleasant and professional interactions with CRD EOC participants during the wildfire response season – this was a theme repeated frequently when external agencies noted working with CRD Emergency Program staff. Some AAR participants noted, however, that at times, the conversation in the CRD EOC was too casual, and unprofessional comments were made, particularly by those who are not involved in emergency management full time.

Recommendations

- The atmosphere in an EOC should remain hopeful and light, where possible, but completely professional. Training is available for various sections within the EOC (such as specific training for EOC leadership and policy groups) and can be tailored to include sections on proper EOC conduct and mental wellness for EOC participants.



- Daily check ins with remote workers should be documented both in operational guidelines and in CRD policy (due to the WorkSafeBC and Employment Standards Act requirements) and should be practiced and trained.
- Prior to the 2024 response season, EOC contractors and EOC participants could be provided a pre-welcome package, and IT-related support should be made available (especially at the outset of an emergency) as IT-related issues are common and can impact response effectiveness. Some preseason preparation effort can be undertaken to address these issues as well.
- EOC participants should be canvassed for GIS or mapping requirements (wishes and wants) and the GIS / Planning section can determine if these requests are achievable prior to activation.

Communications and Collaboration

- Communications and collaboration were noted frequently as significant successes, both within the CRD EOC and in interactions with response partners. Many external partners noted that communication with the CRD during emergencies has improved greatly over the last few years of responses and noted that the CRD EOC has the best communication practices and is the most professional of the EOCs and agencies that they work with.
- An ESS representative noted that early notification and update calls from the CRD EOC in anticipation of evacuation alerts and orders was especially helpful and is a best practice that needs to be maintained.
- Further to the above, the ESS representative noted that directing evacuees to the most up-to-date information can be challenge.
- Broad EMCR coordination calls were noted as being less valuable at this time for a few reasons:
 - The calls are now considered public, with the public and elected officials finding access information for these calls. As such, participants will not share sensitive operational information (EMCR noted that this is being resolved through the use of a new coordination call link for each meeting).
 - As well, the scope of calls was noted as too broad. For example, the Donnie Creek wildfire (which was admittedly a significant major event) dominated the calls for the Northeast PREOC but was not valuable information for the CRD wildfire situation.
- Common regional terminology was noted as sometimes being challenging for organizations like the CRD and BCWS – for example, a common term within the



region is “parcels of land” whereas those not from the Cariboo expected street addresses or different descriptors.

Recommendations

- Best practices around early notification and frequent communication, especially with those tasked with assisting evacuated residents (ESS, health authorities, etc.) – which are documented processes in the CRD EOC – should continue to be a focus in training, orientation, and exercise opportunities.
- Develop a system whereby Reception Centres and ESS volunteers have access to the most up-to-date information possible and can direct evacuees to these resources quickly and easily.

Interjurisdictional Aspects

- Interjurisdictional relations between either the CRD EOC and provincial ministries, or other organizations, were noted as being highly effective by many parties in the AAR.
 - Some participants noted that communications and relationships with other organizations (outside of the normal relationships with local staff) were more challenging – this is expected as these relationships often do not exist. Given additional time and resources, more effort could be applied to develop these relationships and lines communication.
- Many organizations noted significant staff changes before, during and after the 2023 wildfire season, which will have an ongoing impact on interjurisdictional relationships, operational awareness, and organizational capacity. For example, the AAR representative from the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure noted that with the Cariboo, there are three new operations managers, who will need time, training, and support to develop relationships, and the understand the emergency response and management process, both internally and with partners.
- Several agencies noted that they would be interested to know, from the CRD, during non-response times what they could be doing differently to enhance the relationship and effect better outcomes for all involved during emergency response. Response seasons (flood and wildfire) are often busy for all involved and are not the ideal time to make changes to practice.
 - Some, such as the representative from Recreation Sites and Trails, were interested in further discussions to explore how each organization could better support each other.



- Development of a pre-season contact list to be shared between response organizations was recommended by AAR participants, as new staff, or those who are covering for others, may not be aware of who to contact – even at the organizational level, which numbers to call or emails to use (for example, for the Operations desk in the CRD EOC). This can also include staff schedules (such as vacation schedules for key personnel).
- AAR participants noted that it is sometimes difficult to know who the local liaison person is to discuss operational issues with.
 - For example, many First Nations governments will delegate a single point of contact (staff or community member) who will liaise with outside agencies during an emergency response.
 - It is important, therefore, for both BCWS and the CRD (and others) to know who to contact who might have current relationships and the best situational awareness, and decision-making authority.
- The FNESS representative noted that being requested early by the EOC assists in enhancing relations with local First Nations and in expediting response activities. This should be considered as a success in 2023 and retained as a best practice.

Recommendations

- Development of a pre-season contact list, and where possible, staff schedules or availability calendars that can be shared (confidentially) between response partners is recommended.
- Include, on preseason contact lists, or those lists established during the response, who local liaisons and other key personnel may be, so that all organizations are speaking with the most appropriate local people during the response.
 - This may also be important for agricultural liaisons, economic liaisons, and others.
- The CRD should request support from response partners (especially FNESS) when First Nations are involved in response activities and enhance these relationships and activities where possible. This promotes reconciliation and can help develop relationships and trust where it does not already exist. This was well executed in 2023 and should be continued in subsequent response seasons.

Evacuation Planning and Implementation

- AAR participants noted that work is needed to clarify and implement evacuation notices effectively – this includes clarifying jurisdiction, participating partners, who will deliver the notices and what “powers” they have, and how this information is



shared in a coordinated fashion – across multiple response partners and government jurisdictions (including First Nations who receive varying levels of support from response partners and the CRD).

- Early communications between agencies were noted as essential and are often more important than the more formal operational discussions later. These practices must be preserved, despite staff changes.
- Effectively coordinating the rescind of evacuation orders was noted as being critical.
- BCWS participants noted that evacuation recommendations are sometimes based on the availability of resources to tackle wildfires and noted that it's important for partners to understand these restraints when recommendations are received.
- AAR participants noted (particularly BCWS) that they were impressed with the speed that the CRD EOC was able to implement evacuation orders and alerts, and changes and rescinds to those conditions. This is a significant best practice.
- AAR participants noted that there were several interjurisdictional evacuation alerts and orders (between local governments and in some cases, First Nations governments) but overall, these situations were managed well. This is not always the case in other parts of the province.
- Concerns around evacuation orders and alerts being in place for too long was noted; this is often driven by limited resources and uncertain wildfire conditions.
- ESS noted that planning for evacuations is especially difficult now, as many commercial lodging options in Cariboo communities are now full of provincial wards who are receiving housing support from provincial ministries. This places a significant restriction on ESS volunteers who are looking to place evacuees in commercial lodging options.
- The EMCR representative noted that accuracy and precision is important in ESS data reporting, and evacuation status, and that the CRD ESS program does a good job of this.
- The Agricultural Liaison noted that there were significant issues with the BC Ministry of Agriculture Premises ID program and that additional follow-up work and review would be needed to ensure these systems were in place for the next response.
- AAR participants noted that:
 - The Cariboo has the largest road network in the province (highways, local, and resource roads) as noted by MOTI and MOF representatives in the AAR session.
 - Evacuation orders and alerts present a significant challenge in maintaining security for those evacuated. The RCMP does not have the resources to



both assist with evacuations, maintain order within evacuation areas and maintain a presence at roadblocks and limited points of entry into evacuated areas.

- There are limited security and flagging companies in the area – and many are already occupied by utility companies and in construction projects when wildfire season takes place.

Recommendations

- As part of a larger preseason preparedness initiative, discussions specific to how the security of large-scale evacuated areas can be maintained are recommended. At a minimum, representatives from the CRD emergency program, the RCMP, MOTI, EMCR and BCWS should discuss these issues to see if there are best practices possible, and at a minimum, awareness of these issues between all parties.
- For long duration evacuation alerts and orders, frequent, coordinated, and effective communication from all response partners is helpful, and ongoing discussions between response partners (with the intention of rescinding alerts and orders as soon as it is safe to do so) should be an ongoing priority and may require additional time and resources applied to manage effectively.
- Documenting and mapping the process for the flow of evacuation information between organizations (including early awareness calls the different communications channels available to staff in each organization) was noted as critical for development.
- It was suggested that it would be prudent to follow-up on BC Ministry of Agriculture Premises ID issues prior to 2024 responses.

Preparedness, Mitigation and Recovery

- The importance of preseason operational planning was brought up multiple times during the AAR session. This was noted in suggestions to:
 - Help prepare new staff to the EOC and those assuming new roles with partner organizations (provincial ministries, First Nations governments, and other support agencies).
 - Discuss and determine the flow, timing, and format of information both to and from the EOC, and to and from the receiving public.
 - Development, implementation, and improvement of processes related to emergency response, such as courtesy notifications of the pending issuance of evacuation alerts and orders.



- As this was mentioned often and in many contexts during the AAR session, it is included later in this report under “General and Overarching Recommendations.”
- Re-entry planning for evacuated areas was discussed during the AAR session. BCWS noted that it would be helpful to have re-entry documentation ready when recommendations were made around rescinding evacuation orders.

Recommendations

- To support re-entry planning for evacuations in general, the CRD can share existing re-entry planning information, and implement a process to share this with the BCWS RWCO when evacuations are rescinded so that wildfire officers and Incident Management Teams (IMTs) are aware of this information – and the potential barriers to re-entry for evacuated property owners.

EDMA Legislation Adoption and Planning for the Future

On November 8th, 2023, the Emergency and Disaster Management Act (EDMA) received Royal Assent in the BC Legislative Assembly – replacing the long-standing Emergency Program Act and its associated regulations. Regulation development under EDMA continues.

The adoption of EDMA has brought forth many questions about its implementation, how it will be interpreted, and concern from local governments, as it carries a much more authoritative tone, and may have wide ranging impacts on capacity and local government expectations. The next several years will require much dialog between the provincial government, local government, and BC-based First Nations to determine how best to implement and manage the many enhanced clauses within EDMA.

The AAR session participants noted two tenets which they perceive to be true about the current state of emergency management in BC.

1. The adoption of EDMA will enhance the requirements and expectations of all provincial ministries and agencies, local governments, and First Nations in BC – and there is significant concern as to whether capacity exists to meet these requirements in any of these organizations.
2. Response seasons are getting longer, and preparedness seasons are getting shorter; emergency events are increasing in frequency, severity, impact, and



magnitude. Examples include record setting wildfire seasons in 2017, 2018, 2021 and 2023.

As such, a final activity for the group was to discuss these aspects of emergency management and determine who they might enhance the region's resiliency going forward. Recommendations that the group suggested largely focused on enhancements of the previously suggested improvements. Some of these recommendations are noted below.

- Starting agency and interagency preparedness early in the new year. For example, BCWS starts their "pre-org" development in February – both agency and inter-agency preparedness needs to start early, as wildfire seasons are starting earlier.
- Identification, formalization, and enhancement of the community liaison concept – especially when working with First Nations (FNESS, community representatives) or sector-specific liaisons (for example, agriculture).
- Enhanced planning around establishing contact lists and notification procedures.
- Central or "duty" phone numbers and contacts for different organizations is critical.
- Regional preplanning sessions or coordination calls between response partners would be helpful.
- Enhancing relationships with non-typical partners – such as school districts, Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation, health authorities, and others.
- Additional work with First Nations is needed – such as determining the boundaries of First Nations traditional territory, and ensuring EOC staff are aware of this.
- Business continuity is a requirement of the new Act for many organizations; some development work with EMCR will be required to better understand this.
- Efforts to engage with organizations that are traditionally more difficult to bring to the table is worthwhile and necessary.

General or Overarching Recommendations

Several partners in the AAR noted that ongoing communication, interaction, and development of improvements between partners was required in the very short window between 2023 response and recovery operations, and the start of the 2024 response season. Some recommendations about this more general theme are found below.

Recommendations

- The use of emergency management committees or working groups is a well-established practice in emergency management in BC. However, it is important to note that there can be different committees, and different reasons for these committees to be struck. The CRD has an internal emergency management



committee and meets infrequently. The CRD could also participate in regional emergency management committees with partners external to the CRD. It is recommended that the CRD explore the development of a committee, or sub-committee that would exist solely to discuss preparations, improvements and planning specifically for the 2024 wildfire season. For this committee to be successful, it would need to meet, have terms and initiatives developed, and working to implement actions prior to the start of the 2024 wildfire season, which may be challenging.

- As per above – it is recommended that the CRD look to formalize and/or participate in:
 - An internal CRD Emergency Management working group that meets regularly.
 - An external regional emergency management committee that would include municipalities, First Nations and the regional district, and provincial ministries.
 - A 2024 pre-season multi-agency working group specifically tasked with preparations for 2024 response seasons.
- A pre-2024 wildfire season workshop would be an excellent opportunity to explore:
 - How to retain the successes documented from this AAR in late 2023
 - How to implement improvements and adjust practices prior to the next response season
 - Improve interjurisdictional relationships between response organizations, and
 - Be a training and orientation activity for new and existing staff in all participating organizations. CRD staff advise that there is a training calendar in development already.

Implementing either or both activities would help all participating organizations to be best prepared for potential activations in 2024. The sessions can be informal and can use the findings in this AAR as a guide if time is limited for planning.

SUMMARY

The wildfire season in 2023 was a major challenge for the Province of BC and while the Cariboo region was spared the most grievous impacts, the season was still a formidable challenge. An effective response to the 2023 wildfire season required coordinated efforts from various partner agencies, First Nations, and communities to mitigate its impact. This after-action report is intended as a comprehensive assessment of the response and



provides insights into the strengths, best practices, and areas for improvement in Cariboo emergency management strategies.

Throughout the season, and arguably, over the past decade of significant events, the dedication, innovation, and collaboration between first responders, emergency managers, and community volunteers has been evident. Their tireless efforts have undoubtedly saved lives, protected property, and mitigated the impacts of fires, floods, landslides, pandemics, and other emergency events. Despite the severity of the wildfire season, the collective response demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of our emergency management systems.

However, each activation of an emergency operations centre also reveals where improvements can be made. Communication and coordination among different agencies can always be improved to ensure more seamless and efficient support for those affected.

What was readily apparent through the guided discussion was great relationships among response partners in the Cariboo region. Partners noted excellent collaboration, communication, shared values, mutual respect, and support through the summer of 2023, which is a direct result of the hard work that these partners have put into these processes over the last several years.

In particular, and obvious during external review, is that the strategic emergency program review that was recently undertaken, and which led to additional staffing resources in the CRD emergency program, has had a very positive effect on CRD emergency planning, the ability to manage emergencies with less impact to business continuity for the CRD, and has had very positive outcomes for interagency and interjurisdictional relations for the CRD.

Moving forward, it is crucial to implement the lessons learned from this past wildfire season. Investing in training programs, relationship building, and fostering collaboration among agencies will strengthen the ability to respond to future wildfire seasons effectively and to adapt to changing legislation. Furthermore, collaboration and mutual support will be key to reducing the overall risk for residents and visitors to the Cariboo region.

This after-action report is not just a reflection of the challenges faced but a roadmap for continuous improvement. By addressing the identified areas for enhancement and building on the successes of this wildfire season, we can better prepare for and respond to the evolving threat of wildfires. Through ongoing collaboration, innovation, and a commitment to community safety, we can strive to create a more resilient and prepared society in the face of future wildfire challenges.



APPENDIX A: FACILITATED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The questions on the next page were shared with AAR participants prior to the facilitated session for feedback and were used as the basis for discussion during the November 14th session.





CRD EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

2023 Wildfire Season After Action Review

Guiding Questions for External Partner Agencies

This After-Action Review (AAR) is focused on the Cariboo Regional District (CRD) Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) activation and activities in support of the 2023 wildfire season. The general intent is to develop themes, identify any best practices and/or any opportunity for improvement. During an AAR, we are always looking to identify successes, challenges, lesson learned and best practices from each aspect of the events in question. Please keep this in mind as you consider these questions.

The following questions will be asked at the November 14th in-person session.

- What was your / your organization's role in the wildfire events and how did your organization engage with the CRD EOC?
- If your organization had a physical presence in the EOC, do you have any insights to share? Similarly, if there was no physical presence in the EOC (you were remote to the EOC), do you have any feedback?
- How were communications with the EOC? Were you getting the information you needed on a regular basis from the EOC? Were you sharing information regularly with the EOC? How could this be improved?
- Given that some of the fires crossed multiple local government boundaries, and/or threatened different jurisdictions, how do you feel that coordination went between those affected governments? How do you feel that this worked with First Nations?
- Was your organization involved in the evacuation planning for these wildfires, if at all? Do you have feedback to share about this aspect?
- Do you, or your organization have any feedback about preparedness, mitigation, or recovery planning, if at all? Were you included in pre-response planning, and can you offer insight for improvement?
- There are significant changes coming to provincial emergency management legislation and what it requires from local governments and provincial ministries, including more requests for collaboration and transparency. How, as a group, can we adapt to these changes, which help us work together better in the future? How can we come together to plan for future responses to emergency events?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with the CRD Emergency Program?

Thank you for being a part of the discussion, we appreciate any and all feedback that you can offer.