

After Action Review Northwest Territories 2023 Wildfire Season

*Bilan des interventions dans les Territoires
du Nord-Ouest
Saison des feux de forêt 2023*



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*Rapport final
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Territoires du Nord-Ouest*

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FOREWORD

The 2023 wildfire season was catastrophic across Canada, including in the Northwest Territories (NWT). It posed unprecedented challenges that tested the resilience and resourcefulness of even the most experienced organizations. The scale and intensity of these events were overwhelming, necessitating extraordinary efforts from all involved.

IN SUCH A FORMIDABLE CONTEXT, MANY INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS TASKED WITH RESPONDING TO THESE WILDFIRES DISPLAYED COMMENDABLE DEDICATION AND PROFESSIONALISM. THEY ENDEAVOURED TO PROTECT LIVES, PROPERTY, AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT WITH THE RESOURCES AT THEIR DISPOSAL.

This After-Action Review (AAR) seeks to reflect on the legislation, operations, experiences and lessons identified during the 2023 wildfire season. It acknowledges the remarkable efforts made and provides a platform to identify areas for improvement. The objective is to enhance preparedness and response strategies for future incidents, ensuring that the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) can better navigate the complexities of large-scale emergencies in the future. After-action reviews are constructive evaluations focused on successes, learning and improvement; as a global best practice, they do not find fault or assign blame.

The report is structured to offer a comprehensive analysis of the 2023 wildfire season. Its layout is designed to facilitate a clear understanding of the events, responses, and lessons through a variety of public engagement techniques, including in-person sessions, interviews, and an open format survey. The survey tool was available in French and English, online and in paper copy. The survey opportunities were open for all to respond, a non-probability convenience sample. The surveys were not a random and representative probability sample and therefore are not considered statistically valid. Therefore, when interpreting results caution should be taken in generalizing the results to the entire population of the Northwest Territories.

The *Key Findings* section presents overarching observations and insights drawn from the wildfire season. The *Recommendations Summary* provides a high-level overview of each recommendation designed to address identified challenges and leverage opportunities effectively. These recommendations are aligned with national and international standards, as well as best practices in emergency management.

For a more in-depth understanding, the detailed sections (Chapters I-VIII) offer comprehensive explanations, supporting data, and a deeper understanding of the rationale behind each key finding and recommendation.

Improvement opportunities are offered throughout the report, where appropriate that supplement or complement the key recommendations. By carefully reviewing these sections, readers can fully appreciate the considerations and strategies proposed to enhance future emergency management preparedness, response and recovery.

Readers are encouraged to thoroughly review all sections to fully understand the considerations informing the strategic recommendations.

AVANT-PROPOS

La saison des feux de forêt de 2023 a été catastrophique partout au Canada, notamment aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest (TNO). Elle a posé des défis sans précédent qui ont mis à l'épreuve la détermination et l'ingéniosité des organismes, même les plus expérimentés. L'ampleur et l'intensité de ces feux ont nécessité des efforts extraordinaires de la part de toutes les personnes concernées.

DANS UN CONTEXTE AUSSI DIFFICILE, DE NOMBREUX INDIVIDUS ET ORGANISMES CHARGÉS DE LUTTER CONTRE CES FEUX DE FORÊT ONT FAIT PREUVE D'UN DÉVOUEMENT ET D'UN PROFESSIONNALISME REMARQUABLES. ILS SE SONT EFFORCÉS DE PROTÉGER LES VIES, LES BIENS ET L'ENVIRONNEMENT NATUREL AVEC LES RESSOURCES DONT ILS DISPOSAIENT.

Cette analyse après incident vise à réfléchir à la législation, aux interventions, aux expériences vécues et aux leçons identifiées pendant la saison des feux de forêt de 2023. Elle reconnaît les efforts remarquables déployés par les parties prenantes et offre une plateforme pour cerner les points à améliorer. L'objectif est d'améliorer les stratégies de préparation et d'intervention en cas d'incidents, afin que le gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (GTNO) puisse mieux gérer les situations d'urgence à grande échelle à l'avenir. Les analyses après incident sont des évaluations constructives axées sur les réussites, les enseignements et les améliorations; il s'agit d'une pratique exemplaire qui ne cherche pas à attribuer des blâmes ou des responsabilités.

Le rapport est structuré de manière à offrir une analyse exhaustive de la saison des feux de forêt de 2023. Sa présentation est conçue pour faciliter la compréhension des événements, des interventions et des leçons à tirer par l'entremise de diverses techniques d'échanges avec le public, notamment des séances en personne, des entretiens et un sondage en format ouvert. Le sondage était disponible en français et en anglais, en ligne et en format papier. N'importe qui pouvait répondre au sondage; il s'agit donc d'un échantillon de commodité non probabiliste. Les sondages ne constituaient pas un échantillon aléatoire et représentatif et ne sont donc pas considérés comme étant valables sur le plan statistique. Par conséquent, il convient de faire preuve de prudence lorsqu'on interprète les résultats en généralisant les résultats à l'ensemble de la population des Territoires du Nord-Ouest.

La section *Principales conclusions* présente des observations et des réflexions générales tirées de la saison des feux de forêt. Le résumé des recommandations propose une vue d'ensemble de chaque recommandation visant à relever les défis recensés et à tirer parti des occasions. Ces recommandations sont alignées sur les normes nationales et internationales, ainsi que sur les meilleures pratiques en matière de gestion des situations d'urgence.

Les sections détaillées (chapitres I à VIII) offrent des explications exhaustives et des données à l'appui qui permettent de bien comprendre le raisonnement qui sous-tend chaque principale conclusion et chaque recommandation.

Des suggestions d'amélioration sont proposées tout au long du rapport, le cas échéant, pour étoffer les principales recommandations. En examinant attentivement ces sections, le lecteur pourra se faire une idée précise des stratégies proposées pour améliorer la préparation à la gestion des urgences et la réponse aux situations d'urgence, ainsi que les mesures de rétablissement.

Le lecteur est invité à lire attentivement toutes les sections afin de bien comprendre les considérations derrière les recommandations stratégiques.

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Land Recognition

During the late summer and fall of 2024, Transitional Solutions Inc. (TSI) team members were invited to engage with those impacted by the 2023 Northwest Territories (NWT) wildfires. TSI is thankful for the safe passage from our home fires in Treaty 6, 7 and 8 to the traditional territories and homeland of the Dene, Métis and Cree of the NWT. TSI is grateful to communities, Indigenous peoples, Inuit and First Nations for allowing the opportunity to visit, listen, and stay on their traditional lands. TSI is also profoundly grateful for the generous sharing of knowledge, wisdom and ways of knowing, being, doing and believing in TSI's purpose: the 2023 NWT Wildfires After-Action Review.

“Our people host - we host - in good times and in crisis. Our duty and our culture are to host and to take care of others.” - Elected Indigenous Leader, Treaty 11

TSI acknowledges that its team is on the traditional Territory of Treaty 8 and Treaty 11, which encompasses the ancestral lands of the Nehiyaw, Denesúhné, Dene Tha', and Dane-zaa, Dene, and also the modern and traditional lands of the Gwich'in, Th̓chq̓, Sahtu Dene as well as the Métis Nation. This Territory has been a gathering place and home for these communities for generations. TSI expresses its gratitude for the enduring connection to this land and recognize the impact of colonialism on Indigenous cultures and traditions. TSI commits to fostering respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples and working towards reconciliation.

TSI honours and respects what was shared with its team. TSI visited many communities during harvesting season and appreciated those who took time off the land and water to be together. TSI asked permission to take notes as its team listened to community members and citizens. Privacy and confidentiality have and will continue to be respectful of individuals and groups who shared their experiences from the 2023 wildfires with TSI. Direct quotes throughout this report acknowledge the community or its member(s) without identities for their privacy.

TSI commits to respecting Indigenous rights and working towards reconciliation with all Indigenous peoples whose histories are intertwined with this land.

“The landscape has changed. We have changed. You can see things that we could not see from afar. It was very scary.” - Elder, Treaty 11, Fort Simpson



Image 1 Mackenzie River, Fort Simpson (TSI, 2024)

Recognition of Loss

TSI recognizes the profound losses felt throughout the NWT directly or indirectly due to the 2023 wildfire season. This AAR acknowledges the practical aspects of emergency management and the significant emotional and cultural impacts on all those affected. TSI appreciates that there was and continues to be profound loss and grief for individuals, families, and entire communities, underscoring the human, environmental, and cultural devastation that has occurred.¹

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“I am deeply saddened at the level of loss - there are medicines that I will never again see growing on these lands in my lifetime. I am mourning the loss of life - the birds, the fur animals, the fish. I am still very hurt today. Lives were lost - families lost relatives while separated; the fires separated us. There is a lot of loss and grief among us.” - Elder, Fort Smith, Treaty 8

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Loss of Human Life: The lives lost during the wildfire season are deeply mourned, including a firefighter from Fort Liard who tragically died while directly responding to the wildfires, as well as those who passed away during evacuations and while separated from their communities. The loss of elders, whose wisdom and presence were invaluable, is heartbreaking and leaves a significant void.

Loss of Animal and Wildlife: The fire has left a lasting mark on local ecosystems and traditional lands, directly affecting and altering the current balance of the natural world that sustains communities and culture. While wildfires are a natural occurrence, the size and scope of the 2023 wildfire season was anything but natural.

Significant Property and Infrastructure Loss: Enterprise faced staggering losses with up to 90% of the town reduced to ashes according to the Government of Canada and local government. Entire neighborhoods were burned out and businesses destroyed. Cherished landmarks vanished, leaving streets lined with broken structures and scattered belongings. For many residents, the once-familiar landscape is nearly unrecognizable, a haunting reminder of the devastation. The emotional toll is immense as families grapple with the loss of their homes and community. Rebuilding will be long and difficult; however, the town’s resilience remains a beacon of hope amid the wreckage. Many other communities experienced property loss as well, permanently altering what once was.

Separation and Displacement: During evacuations, families were separated, and individuals remained unaccounted for an extended time, compounding the trauma and uncertainty for some loved ones. This was exacerbated for those who experienced separation and displacement from their communities and families due to residential schools. The fear and helplessness felt during these displacements have left a lasting emotional impact.

Human Injuries and Near Misses: Numerous people sustained injuries, and there were close calls during firefights and evacuations. Cars were melting as residents evacuated through fire along

¹ <https://cabinradio.ca/150809/news/environment/wildfires/how-elders-see-the-changes-the-nwts-landscape-and-peoples-must-bear/>

highways. These incidents are stark reminders of the bravery, sacrifices and the toll taken on responders and community members.

Cultural and Traditional Losses: Communities have experienced the loss of traditional lands, including traplines, medicinal areas, foods, and landmarks that hold cultural, ceremonial, and traditional livelihood significance. Additionally, irreplaceable ceremonial artifacts and historic sites have been destroyed, impacting cultural continuity and identity. The inability to hold ceremonies or gather has left an unfillable void.

Economic Impact: The economic fallout is felt at all levels - personal, business, traditional, community, and territorial-wide. The financial stability of families, communities, and the Territory has been challenged, impacting livelihoods and long-term financial security.

Loss of Trust in Safety and Security: The events have shaken the fundamental sense of security, leaving many uncertain about their safety in their own lands. This loss of faith is a painful burden for a territory that has long found solace and strength in its connection to the land and each other.

Movement of Team Members and Community Residents: Many valued community members and skilled team members have had to or have chosen to leave, either relocating or stepping away from their roles. This departure has led to a significant "brain drain," referring to the loss of skilled individuals from a region. This has weakened the Territory's collective resilience and ability to recover and rebuild effectively.

Vulnerability and Homelessness: The 2023 wildfire events have highlighted the gaps in care for those who are vulnerable in emergency events, such as aging adults and those precariously housed.² The fires and loss of homes, coupled with displacement, heightened the vulnerability of many and led to challenges to support those who are unhoused, creating a growing need for increased support, improved shelter options, and stability as communities rebuild.³

“People are continuously worried about low levels of water and high levels of fuel surrounding our community. People remember the dark sky, the smoke, the high stress, the lack of timely information, the stress of leaving quickly and being separated from our homes- from each other. There is a loss of trust. There is a loss of belief that we will be safe in the future.” - Th̓chq citizen, Behchok̓, Th̓chq Traditional Territory

TSI approached this review with deep respect for these losses and the resilience of all affected. This document aims to understand what happened, honour the gravity of these losses, build resiliency, and strengthen future preparedness through capacity building and adaptation. TSI is committed to

² <https://cabinradio.ca/156440/news/yellowknife/what-can-we-learn-from-yks-evacuation-about-helping-vulnerable-people/>

³ https://www.ntlegislativeassembly.ca/sites/default/files/legacy/cr_47-192_scosd_report_-_homelessness_prevention_-_supporting_pathways_to_housing_nwt_residents.pdf

remembering each life, space, and tradition of culture and community that was touched by these events as the AAR moves forward with purpose and respect.



Image 2 Hay River (TSI, 2024)

Executive Summary

Introduction & Purpose

The 2023 wildfire season was unprecedented in the Northwest Territories (NWT), with nearly 70% of the entire territorial population displaced during multiple and concurrent community evacuations between May and September. Roughly four million hectares burned. This After-Action Review (AAR), prepared by Transitional Solutions Inc. (TSI), examines the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) emergency management response to the 2023 wildfire season.

The purpose of this AAR is twofold. First, it reflects commendable efforts, recognizing strengths that can serve as a foundation for future success. These effective practices offer proven approaches that can be repeated and scaled during future emergencies. Second, it identifies systemic challenges—recurring issues that, if left unaddressed, could hinder future response efforts. The GNWT can avoid isolated fixes and implement meaningful, lasting improvements by bringing these to light. The report concludes with actionable recommendations to enhance resilience, clarify governance, and strengthen overall readiness for future large-scale emergencies.

Scope of the Review

This review examined GNWT's performance and preparedness across the full emergency management continuum, assessing eight interconnected domains:

1. Legislation Wise Practices
2. Organizational Preparedness
3. Community & Household Preparedness
4. Roles & Responsibilities
5. Risk Assessment & Monitoring
6. Response Operations
7. Recovery & Re-Entry
8. Communications & Public Information

It focused on GNWT's capacity, coordination, processes and leadership while recognizing local authorities, Indigenous government roles, and intergovernmental dynamics in a complex crisis response season. The findings reflect system-wide observations rather than isolated incidents, with recommendations designed to enhance GNWT's resilience, equity, and accountability.

Methodology

This AAR was developed through a multi-method engagement process as per the Request for Proposal, including:

- **Document Review:** Over 200 background documents, including the 2018 and 2024 NWT Emergency Plans, policies, previous AARs, GNWT situation reports, and Incident Action Plans.
- **Community and Staff Engagement:** More than 250 individuals were engaged through interviews, surveys, and workshops. Thirteen (13) in-person community consultations occurred from September to November 2024.
- **Jurisdictional Comparisons:** Evaluated legislative and operational frameworks in other Canadian jurisdictions, as well as national and international standards, including the Canadian Standards Association, Public Safety Canada, and the United Nations Sendai Framework.
- **Cross-Sectoral Analysis:** Engagement spanned GNWT departments, municipalities, Indigenous governments, non-government organizations (NGOs), businesses and emergency support organizations.

Engagement was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained. Lived experiences, though subjective, provided critical insight into systemic issues, especially regarding coordination, communication, activation of resources, decision-making and cultural safety.

Participants represented diverse roles—from frontline responders and senior GNWT leaders to Indigenous governments, municipal officials, NGO partners, businesses and community leaders. Community members shared deeply personal accounts of fear, trauma, and strength. These voices form the moral imperative and lived context underpinning this report. In addition to their accounts of the events, participants shared observations of the emergency management response. Where themes and critiques emerged consistently across interviews, focus groups, and survey results, they were treated as validated insights, forming the basis for key findings and recommendations throughout this report.

Key Strengths Identified

Despite overwhelming conditions, many aspects of the emergency management response reflected profound strength and resilience. Key successes included:

- **Dedication and Heroism:** Individuals across the Territory, from first responders, municipal and territorial leaders, and Indigenous communities to NGOs, businesses, and community volunteers, demonstrated extraordinary courage and resolve to support each other.
- **Adaptation Under Pressure:** GNWT staff, community members and NGOs assumed roles beyond their mandates to ensure continued service and evacuation support; many were directly affected by the fires and subsequent evacuations and yet continued to serve others.
- **GNWT Action on Improvements:** Initial updates to the Emergency Plan (2024) and operational shifts demonstrate a willingness and eagerness to learn and adapt.
- **Public Communication Improvements:** Mid-response improvements in alerting systems and information sharing reduced confusion over time.

Key Challenges Identified

The 2023 wildfire season revealed systemic limitations across GNWT's emergency management framework:

- **Fragmented Emergency Management Structure:** The LEMO/REMO/TEMO model caused confusion and lacked a coordinated command, resulting in duplication, delays, and blurred responsibilities.
- **Legislative Gaps:** Legislation can better recognize Indigenous governments as orders of government, better reflect modern hazards and provide enforceable preparedness standards.
- **Training and ICS Competency:** A lack of mandated training for elected officials and government staff led to operational inefficiencies, inconsistent decision-making and insufficient organizational depth.
- **Unclear Roles and Responsibilities:** Multiple agencies conducted overlapping tasks, such as evacuee registration, without clear authority.
- **Coordination with Non-Government Organizations:** Essential services for vulnerable groups were inconsistently delivered, and NGO partnerships were underutilized.
- **Limited Governance Continuity:** Key GNWT departments did not have tested plans for operational continuity during displacements.
- **Public Trust Erosion:** Many citizens expressed feelings of abandonment, confusion, and long-term trauma from the events. Engagement revealed this was partly due to a lack of clarity in communication, limited transparency in decision-making and response times that exceeded operational expectations in some regions.

Overarching Themes

The review identified overarching themes that cut across all sectors and communities:

- **Resilience without Structure and Resources is Unsustainable:** Communities were resilient but lacked the systemic support from the GNWT to maintain it.
- **Need for a Dedicated Emergency Management Agency:** A dedicated territorial emergency management agency is essential to reduce fragmentation and provide comprehensive, wraparound support. With budgetary and organizational autonomy and strategic clarity, emergency management can evolve into a core, all-hazards, year-round function—supported by specialized staff, standardized tools and processes, and routinely exercised plans.
- **Inclusion:** Indigenous governments must be formally integrated as equal partners in emergency management.
- **Trust and Transparency:** Citizens must be able to trust their institutions. Rebuilding trust requires clarity, consistency, and cultural competency.
- **Preparedness is a Daily Discipline:** Plans must be exercised, understood, and integrated into day-to-day governance, including collaborating with NGO partners.
- **System Integration:** From alerts to evacuations to recovery, the GNWT emergency management system must function as a cohesive whole with clear roles, data sharing, and wraparound support.

Summary of Recommendations

The AAR outlines over 30 actionable recommendations. Highlights include:

Timeline	Key Recommendations
Immediate (0–12 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a Territorial Emergency Management Agency with operational independence and accountability• Centralize GNWT ICS certification tracking• Update emergency preparedness messaging• Engage Indigenous governments as full partners
Short-Term (1–2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Amend legislation to clarify authority between overlapping states of emergency• Mandate and maintain ICS training for elected officials and emergency managers• Create a territorial Emergency Social Services Plan inclusive of vulnerable groups
Intermediate (3–4 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update Emergency Management Act to require compliance by way of regulations• Continue strengthening communication through pre-developed message maps and public trust strategies• Embed trauma-informed mental health models into GNWT emergency management processes
Long-Term (5+ years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mandate minimum exercise frequency• Institutionalize ICS in all GNWT operations• Improve insurance literacy and disaster recovery options

Conclusion

The 2023 wildfire season profoundly impacted the NWT socially, economically, and environmentally. It will likely remain a defining moment for the NWT. While it illustrated serious vulnerabilities, it also showcased the remarkable courage and resilience of Northerners. This After-Action Review honours that impact while offering a constructive and forward-looking roadmap.

Implementation of these recommendations requires leadership, sustained investment, and a commitment to reconciliation and shared responsibility. Through this shared commitment, implementation will position the NWT as a northern leader in emergency management rooted in resilience, reconciliation, and readiness.

The Government of the Northwest Territories is presented with a generational opportunity to lead in redefining emergency readiness for the North.



Key Findings

Key findings highlight the most significant observations, including successes and challenges, identified during the preparation, response, and recovery efforts. These findings are drawn from input from interested and affected parties, documentation reviews, and community feedback. By understanding these key themes and findings, the GNWT can build on strengths while addressing challenges to ensure more effective outcomes in the future. Key findings are supported with recommendations as noted below.

Legislative Best Practices	Observation(s)	Recommendation
GNWT emergency management legislation is lenient and lacks oversight and enforceability.	There is currently minimal oversight of local Emergency Management Plans to ensure legislative requirements are achieved.	Refer to Chapter I, pages 61-62 Recommendation 1 & 2
Mutual Aid Agreements with other provinces and territories are ambiguous or nonexistent specific to NWT emergency management.	Agreements have undefined roles, responsibilities and partnerships. Community members hosted within NWT and outside the Territory found Emergency Social Services support inconsistent.	Refer to Chapter II, pages 72-74 Recommendation 8
Minimum training requirements are not mandated at all government levels nor is a legally enforceable incident management system.	There is inconsistent levels of training preparedness among territorial and municipal personnel, creating gaps in continuity of approach.	Refer to Chapter I, pages 61-62 Recommendation 5
There is an absence of a clear response and business continuity human resources (HR) policy for GNWT staff during an emergency or evacuation.	Across departments and ministries, approaches to crisis human resources practices were inconsistent. Many GNWT staff did not understand whether their role was essential and whether they were to work remotely or not, resulting in some people continuing regular or emergency duties, and others not working. This led to what people referred to as “evac-cations” during engagement.	Refer to Chapter IV, page 91-92 Recommendation 3
The NWT Emergency Management Organization (EMO) structure is not agile enough for large scale, multiple concurrent, or long-duration emergencies.	There was no effective workforce plan for the EMO structure and its leadership. It is unclear when an event transitions between the local, regional and territorial EMOs.	Refer to Chapter I, pages 61-62 Recommendation 4
The GNWT's lack of a dedicated territorial emergency management department or agency created challenges.	Without full-time emergency management with its own governance structure, territorial departments, regional EMO and community LEMOs could not be appropriately prepared and resilient.	Refer to Chapter I, pages 61-62 Recommendation 4
The GNWT legislation doesn't reflect Indigenous leadership representation in Emergency Management.	The Emergency Management Act does not reflect all government orders within the Territory. Indigenous governments have voiced that they need to be included in the Act.	Refer to Chapter I, pages 61-62 Recommendation 1
GNWT legislation does not capture the need for continuity of territorial government in an emergency.	Ministries and departments operated in silos, viewing business continuity as an individual department effort rather than a holistic government-wide approach to leveraging capacities and skills. With Yellowknife offline, the GNWT's operations were significantly impacted.	Refer to Chapter VI, pages 110-111 Recommendation 2

Key Findings

Organizational Preparedness	Observation(s)	Recommendation
GNWT was tracking the submission of community EMPs on file (in draft or final).	32 of 33 NWT communities had Emergency Management Plans.	Refer to Chapter III, pages 85-86 Recommendation 1
There are limited established vendor or resource lists at the territorial level.	A lack of preplanning impedes rapid procurement and deployment of critical resources during emergencies. Preplanning addresses questionable procurement arrangements and costs.	Refer to Chapter II, pages 72-74 Recommendation 4
Enhancing the involvement of Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) helping in planning efforts and increase the inclusivity and effectiveness of the NWT Emergency Plan.	Collaboration and mutual aid partnerships are needed formally with experienced NGOs to engage their skills sets and knowledge.	Refer to Chapter III, pages 85-86 Recommendation 3
Critical infrastructure, such as fibre optic networks and highways, lacks redundancy.	Redundancy makes the system less vulnerable to disruptions and supports safety for first responders and evacuees.	Refer to Chapter III, pages 85-86 Recommendation 3

Community & Personal Preparedness	Observation(s)	Recommendation
Many community Emergency Management Plans (EMPs) need updates and modernization.	There is no indication of consistency in content. EMPs show in-force date ranges from 2011 to 2024. The GNWT does not have legislation in place to enforce local compliance through penalties or incentives.	Refer to Chapter II, pages 72-74 Recommendation 7
Ongoing testing and implementation of local EMPs will greatly impact the success of communities handling local emergencies.	Learning from past emergency experiences benefitted some communities, including Hay River and Kakisa.	Refer to Chapter I, pages 61-62 Recommendation 6
Households were not prepared for prolonged evacuations.	72-hours preparedness is not enough and needs to be revisited to manage safety, mental health and long-duration evacuation expectations. Most evacuations are in weeks, not days or hours, in length.	Refer to Chapter III, pages 85-86 Recommendation 4
Few dedicated humanitarian efforts were directed towards supporting vulnerable populations during the crisis.	People fell through the cracks. This resulted in unsafe situations for vulnerable community members and very high stress for those trying to assist them.	Refer to Chapter III, pages 85-86 Recommendation 5
The mental health impacts on the population are profound, with many individuals experiencing severe emotional and psychological strain.	The lack of coordinated and effective mental health support in communities has delayed recovery and readiness to face future emergencies.	Refer to Chapter VII, pages 119-120 Recommendation 2

Key Findings

Roles & Responsibilities	Observation(s)	Recommendation
The roles and responsibilities in the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) were ambiguous, resulting in hesitation and indecisiveness among decision-makers.	It was unclear if the GNWT was taking primary response roles, or a coordination role to support local and Indigenous governments, paralyzing decision making. Compounding this, an effective command structure was missing, leading to disorganization during emergency response efforts.	Refer to Chapter IV, pages 91-92 Recommendation 1
There was a lack of understanding regarding who held the authority to issue evacuation orders and authorize re-entry.	The delegation of authority process was not clear on how authorities and responsibilities are transferred or escalated to another jurisdiction.	Refer to Chapter I, pages 61-62 Recommendation 3
There was no consensus on what constituted an essential service.	GNWT essential services identification was guided by political considerations and personal connections.	Refer to Chapter II, pages 72-74 Recommendation 4
The identification and designation of essential workers for basic needs and support was unclear.	Professionals who wanted to assist did not know how to access essential services/workers lists to benefit community members.	Refer to Chapter IV, pages 91-92 Recommendation 3

Risk Monitoring	Observation(s)	Recommendation
There was a lack of comprehensive assessment or preparation for long-duration or multiple emergencies.	Many scenarios were never considered in risk assessments, including the evacuation of Yellowknife and the majority of the NWT population.	Refer to Chapter V, pages 99-100 Recommendation 3
Current emergency management practices do not align to an all-hazards framework in the territory, contradicting the NWT Emergency Plan.	The all-hazards approach to risk monitoring aims to identify, assess, and manage a wide spectrum of potential risks—whether natural, technological, or human-caused. Instead of focusing on specific threats in isolation, this approach considers the full range of potential hazards that could disrupt operations, harm individuals, or impact infrastructure.	Refer to Chapter V, pages 99-100 Recommendation 1
Coordination between different levels of Government was fragmented at times.	There is a general lack of understanding between ministries on capacity and division of labour resulting in a lack of coordination, duplication, and gaps.	Refer to Chapter IV, pages 91-92 Recommendation 1
Modern fire watch practices would benefit from incorporating traditional knowledge and local context.	There is a major reliance on technology to monitor for fires.	Refer to Chapter V, pages 99-100 Recommendation 2

Key Findings

Response Activities	Observation(s)	Recommendation
The evacuation process revealed disparities, resulting in instances where the perception of privilege and access to confidential information dictated evacuation priorities.	Those without personal vehicles, financial resources or connections were the primary groups waiting hours outside in long lines waiting to be evacuated by air.	Refer to Chapter VI, pages 110-111 Recommendation 3
There was no formal ESS plan in place to guide response efforts.	Hosting supports were inconsistent across the Territory and within other jurisdictions outside of the Territory. This led to confusion, mistrust, anger and high stress among those evacuated.	Refer to Chapter III, pages 85-86 Recommendation 6
ESS was not integrated into the Incident Command structure, leading to inefficiencies.	Due to privacy legislation, registration data collected under Health and Social Services could not be shared with the ICS structure for operational use.	Refer to Chapter II, pages 72-74 Recommendation 6
A lack of continuity of services for emergency operations team members remaining in the Territory impacted operational effectiveness.	When health services became unavailable, workers could no longer remain to support the response. Health and safety protocols are still required in emergencies for response staff.	Refer to Chapter VI, pages 110-111 Recommendation 3
Registration records weren't interconnected or utilized for communications, causing discrepancies and inefficiencies.	Community members had to register multiple times using different methods. Significant differences existed between the registration lists, evacuation lists, and records kept at reception centers, resulting in confusion.	Refer to Chapter VI, pages 110-111 Recommendation 1
Recovery	Observation(s)	Recommendation
Political interference in the emergency phase of the fires led to deep distrust in the territorial Government, hindering the effectiveness of recovery efforts.	Typically a dedicated recovery group (by way of task force or other model) supports immediate, short and long term recovery, which the GNWT does not currently have.	Refer to Chapter II, pages 72-74 Recommendation 3
Structured re-entry pre-plans were lacking, complicating evacuees' safe and orderly return.	The same teams supporting the emergency were deeply embedded in re-entry planning, creating high stress and fatigue.	Refer to Chapter VII, pages 119-120 Recommendation 1
Recovery funding has been challenging to navigate at the personal, business, community and territorial level.	Lack of documentation creates additional work to apply for and receive disaster assistance funding.	Refer to Chapter VII, pages 119-120 Recommendation 3
There continues to be significant trauma in all levels of government and community.	The lack of mental health support during recovery remains a significant issue, with ongoing trauma, staff resignations, and eroding trust within and towards the GNWT.	Refer to Chapter VII, pages 110-111 Recommendation 2

Key Findings

Communications	Observation(s)	Recommendation
Internal government communication channels were either poor or contradictory, leading to confusion and inefficiency.	ICS forms were used inconsistently. Communications were referred to as the “worst kept secrets” when confidential information was frequently shared inappropriately, undermining trust and control over critical messaging.	Refer to Chapter II, pages 72-74 Recommendation 1
There was no comprehensive, whole of government crisis communications plan to guide messaging during the emergency.	Emergency communications were siloed, sometimes contradictory, delayed, and often not trusted by community members. Environment Climate Change (ECC) had the most noted positive reception to their updates on the fires.	Refer to Chapter VIII, pages 130-131 Recommendation 2
Territorial representation in reception centres was not considered in coordinating interprovincial ESS, reducing the relevance and effectiveness of communications.	Helping agencies noted that it was challenging to connect with their GNWT leaders to clarify information, support, and operational methods. Community members noted that they wanted to see their GNWT leadership in the communities they were evacuated to.	Refer to Chapter III, pages 85-86 Recommendation 1
Communications need to be multilingual beyond English and French.	Using Indigenous languages could better help a majority of the population understand GNWT communications.	Refer to Chapter VIII, pages 130-131 Recommendation 3
Public communications were perceived as too late, not validated and would benefit from being in plain language.	Trusted sources included Cabin Radio, community social media accounts, and updates from family and friends.	Refer to Chapter VIII, pages 130-131 Recommendation 1



Source: TSI (2024)

Recommendations Summary

Recommendations from this AAR are prioritized based on anticipated positive impact. Although priorities serve as guidelines, timelines may vary due to resource availability. Recommendations can be implemented concurrently or more quickly. Each recommendation includes a detailed rationale in the full report. Readers can refer to the corresponding section and recommendation number for further details. The GNWT is responsible for accepting and implementing the recommendations they wish to act on. Suggested partners are identified where appropriate to support implementation. Best practices from other jurisdictions and industries are included to aid the GNWT's strategy.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE: IMMEDIATE (WITHIN THE NEXT 12 MONTHS)

Recommendation	Refer to Section & Rationale	Responsibility	Best Practice Alignment
Create one dedicated Emergency Management Agency for the NWT, providing coordination support to local authorities leading the emergency response(s). It must have its own defined governance to ensure operational independence while still maintaining accountability.	Legislative Wise Practices	GNWT	Alberta Emergency Management Agency; New Brunswick Emergency Measures Plan; Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency
Develop a centralized system to track ICS certifications across all government departments ensuring a comprehensive repository of trained personnel.	Organizational Preparedness	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments, Federal Agencies</i>	NFPA 1660 Standard on Continuity, Emergency & Crisis Management
Engage Indigenous Governments in emergency management programs.	Organizational Preparedness	GNWT <i>Partners: Indigenous Governments, NGOs</i>	BC Indigenous Engagement Requirements Interim Guidance
Update emergency preparedness messaging. Emphasize longer-term preparedness for evacuations (e.g. one week vs 72 hours).	Community & Personal Preparedness	GNWT <i>Partners: Local & Indigenous Governments</i>	Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA) Municipal Resilience Toolkit
Establish and clarify pre-defined roles and responsibilities for all levels of governments and agencies.	Roles & Responsibilities	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments, Federal Agencies, NGOs</i>	Alberta Incident Management System (AIMS) 2024
Improve the GNWT registration system. Use a tested and proven system for registration and updates.	Response Activities	GNWT	MyAlberta Emergency Registration System; BC Emergency Support Services
Review, revise and train on the NWT Alert processes and ensure one alert process for the territory	Communications	GNWT	National Public Alerting System (Canada); Alert Ready

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE: SHORT TERM (WITHIN THE FIRST TWO YEARS)

Recommendation	Refer to Section & Rationale	Responsibility	Best Practice Alignment
Amend existing territorial legislation to describe how a territorial State of Emergency interacts with / interfaces with a State of Local Emergency.	Legislative Wise Practices	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments</i>	British Columbia Emergency and Disaster Management Act; Ontario Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act Standards Regulation
Legislate minimum ICS training. Include elected officials and specialized roles.	Legislative Wise Practices	GNWT	Alberta Local Authority Emergency Management Regulations
Establish a comprehensive list of essential services personnel and partners before an emergency occurs to ensure uninterrupted critical operations during crises.	Organizational Preparedness	GNWT	CSA-Z1600 Emergency Management & Business Continuity
Train Emergency Social Services personnel on ICS integration.	Organizational Preparedness	GNWT	BC Emergency Support Services Program Guide (2023)
Apply lessons observed and integrate findings from past NWT AARs to avoid repeated mistakes. Establish a structured process to review, prioritize, and act on AAR findings.	Organizational Preparedness	GNWT	CSA-Z1600 Emergency Management & Business Continuity
Inventory essential personnel, businesses, and critical infrastructure in the territory and in communities.	Community & Personal Preparedness	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments, NGOs</i>	Government of Alberta Community Planning Guide for Re-Entry after an Evacuation
Create an ESS Plan to include vulnerable populations.	Community & Personal Preparedness	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments, NGOs</i>	ISO 22395:2018 – Community Resilience Guidelines For Supporting Vulnerable Persons In An Emergency
Continue implementing a comprehensive all-hazards risk matrix or tool.	Understanding Risk	GNWT	Emergency Management Framework for Canada
Identify opportunities for technology and innovation to overcome communication barriers and gaps.	Communications	GNWT <i>Partners: NGOs</i>	OECD Report on Public Communication; Centre for Expertise for Standards and Research on Accessibility

**IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE: INTERMEDIATE-TERM
(WITHIN THE NEXT FOUR YEARS)**

Recommendation	Refer to Section & Rationale	Responsibility	Best Practice Alignment
Update the NWT Emergency Management Act to mandate preparedness standards for municipalities and Indigenous Governments, supported by regular audits.	Legislative Wise Practices	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments</i>	Nova Scotia Emergency Management Act; British Columbia Indigenous Engagement Requirements Interim Guidance
Develop prescriptive emergency management regulations to ensure adherence to best practices and accountability that will support the NWT Emergency Management Act. Make it enforceable. Use an all-hazards approach.	Legislative Wise Practices	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments</i>	Alberta Local Authority Emergency Management Regulations; Ontario Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act Standards Regulation
Continue to develop recurring, scenario-based training for IMTs and elected officials, emphasizing their unique roles within ICS.	Organizational Preparedness	GNWT	Justice Institute of British Columbia
Recognize Indigenous sovereignty and integrate Indigenous governments as equal partners in emergency management specific to roles and responsibilities.	Roles & Responsibilities	GNWT <i>Partners: Indigenous Governments</i>	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
Access and include local fire and Indigenous knowledge to support risk assessment, monitoring and decision-making.	Understanding Risk	GNWT <i>Partners: Indigenous Governments</i>	Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action
Plan alternative operational hubs for the GNWT (outside of the territorial capital city).	Response Activities	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities and NGOs</i>	ISO 22395:2018, Security and resilience -- Community resilience
Develop and communicate pre-planned evacuation routes and pre-planned reception centers.	Response Activities	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments</i>	ISO 22315:2014 –Mass Evacuation Guidelines for Planning
Develop and implement a message mapping approach that considers consistent messaging across traditional and social media platforms.	Communications	GNWT	Everbridge: Message Mapping; Centre for Risk Communication; Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council; ISO 22322:2022 Emergency Management Guidelines for Public Warning

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE: LONG-TERM (WITHIN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS)

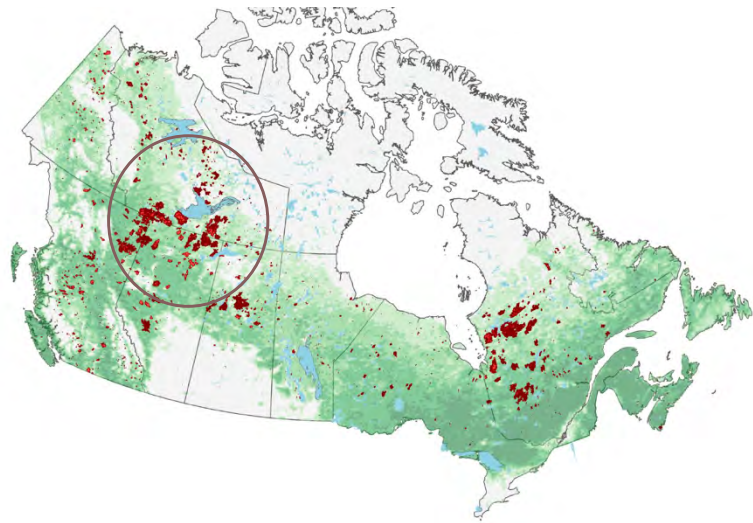
Recommendation	Refer to Section & Rationale	Responsibility	Best Practice Alignment
Legislate minimum exercises for the GNWT and communities, including type and frequency.	Legislative Wise Practices	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments</i>	Manitoba Local Authorities Emergency Planning and Preparedness Regulation; Public Safety Canada Emergency Management Exercises
Incorporate ICS into day-to-day operations for GNWT staff (e.g., major public events).	Legislative Wise Practices	GNWT	ICS Canada
Foster formal partnerships and advanced collaboration with Alberta, BC and other jurisdictions.	Organizational Preparedness	GNWT <i>Partners: Provinces and Territories</i>	ISO 22396:2020 Community Resilience Guidelines For Information Exchange Between Organizations.
Strengthen the support and resources to communities for improved emergency plans that are exercised and reviewed consistently.	Community & Personal Preparedness	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments</i>	Manitoba Local Authorities Emergency Planning and Preparedness Regulations.
Commit to the seven disciplines of the FireSmart™ program, ensuring adequate and appropriate funding and education to align with mitigation, preparedness and recovery phases.	Community & Personal Preparedness	GNWT <i>Partners: FireSmart™ Canada, Municipalities, Indigenous Governments, Households</i>	FireSmart™ Canada; Facet Journal - The Right To Burn: Barriers And Opportunities For Indigenous-Led Fire Stewardship In Canada
Establish workforce management policies for essential and non-essential staff.	Roles & Responsibilities	GNWT	BC Emergency Support Services Program Guide (2023)
Purchase mitigation equipment and train personnel on its use. Locate it in areas where the identified risks significantly impact people.	Understanding Risk	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments</i>	Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety
Create a baseline for re-entry planning by leveraging expertise from other jurisdictions and partners.	Recovery	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments</i>	Government of British Columbia: Community Re-Entry Considerations for First Nations & Local Authorities
Include trauma-informed mental health and community-based healing in recovery planning for evacuees and GNWT response teams.	Recovery	GNWT <i>Partners: Municipalities, Indigenous Governments, NGOs</i>	International Critical Incident Stress Foundation of Canada; Government of Canada Emergency Management Strategy for Canada
Explore improved options for insurance and disaster financial assistance, including insurance literacy.	Recovery	GNWT <i>Partners: Federal Agencies & Insurance Sector</i>	Insurance Bureau of Canada; Indigenous Services Canada; Saskatchewan Disaster Assistance Policy Regulations
Create a framework for risk communications.	Communications	GNWT	FEMA: Community Engagement Toolkit

Introduction

The Northwest Territories experienced their worst wildfire season on record in the spring and summer of 2023.⁴ It was an unprecedented and dynamic fire season, with nearly 70 percent of the population evacuated at some point during the spring, summer, and fall. Some communities evacuated more than once - many with less than 24 hours' notice. Community members were away from their homes and off the land and water for weeks. Many community members shared they had never evacuated their homes outside the Territory or off their traditional lands. The newness of this experience brought with it complexity and complications.

The 2023 wildfire season was not only a test of physical systems but a challenge to the emotional resilience of responders, leaders, and citizens alike. A trauma-informed lens is essential to understanding how events unfolded, why certain decisions were difficult, and what supports were lacking.

The 2023 wildfire season began in May with human-caused fires that prompted evacuations of two communities. Throughout the summer and fall, the fires intensified, impacting regions including the North Slave, South Slave, Treaty 8, Treaty 11, Th̓ch̓q̓ regions, and the Dehcho areas. By the end of the season, nine communities had been evacuated; three communities reported structural losses during different phases of the season.



Source 3 Large fires in 2023 - Drivers and Impact of the Record-Breaking 2023 Fire Season (Natural Resources Canada, 2024)

The extreme conditions, which included record temperatures and high winds, severely challenged response efforts. All levels of government - municipal, territorial, federal, and Indigenous - collaborated to support firefighting and emergency management operations across affected areas. The situation was further complicated by overlapping and sequential emergency events, which strained response capacity and communication systems. To address the scale of the crisis, the NWT imported resources from the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC), including crews, air tankers, and equipment.

The NWT Environment and Climate Change (ECC) department coordinated multiple full-scale wildland fire operations across a significant geographic portion of the Territory, noting the devastation: 4.16 million hectares burned across 304 fires, making it the driest, most destructive wildfire season on record for the region. This represents a significant portion of the Territory's forested area. Tragically, the season also saw the loss of a firefighter in the line of duty. The after-

⁴ <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/shane-thompson-historic-2023-wildfire-season>

action review highlights the immense challenges and impacts of this historic fire season, which affected a significant portion of the Territory's forested area.

The 2023 wildfire season had far-reaching impacts on the communities, infrastructure, the economy and the environment. Recovery efforts will take years, and the event has highlighted the growing need for climate adaptation strategies in the face of increasingly extreme weather patterns.

This report is presented as a learning opportunity; it must be acknowledged that this is not the only after-action report conducted from the 2023 wildfire experience in the Territory. The following AARs have also been released by orders of government:

- Government of Northwest Territories, Environment and Climate Change AAR (focuses on the wildland fire fighting capacity⁵).
- The City of Yellowknife⁶
- Pontoon Lake North Neighbourhood (within Ingraham Trail)
- The Town of Hay River
- The Town of Fort Smith

Some agencies and non-government organizations also completed organizational, operational and/or reflections that were provided during engagement for awareness.

TSI is thankful to those who engaged, and in some cases, also participated in these previously conducted AAR reports. Sharing personal and professional experiences many times can be challenging for mental health and overall community healing and spirit. TSI encourages the lessons observed to be actioned in communities across the Territory, the Government of the Northwest Territories and across orders of Government for the safety, trust and benefit of community members.

A trauma-informed emergency management system recognizes the cumulative impact of stress, displacement, and fear, particularly in a territory shaped by colonial trauma, geographic isolation, and climate threat. It seeks not only to respond better but to lead differently: with empathy, cultural respect, and deliberate care for the psychological well-being of communities and responders alike. This AAR embraces those values and recommends their formal integration into the design of emergency policy, leadership structures and response operations.

Building trust will be the most challenging outcome of this report. Since the devastating wildfires of 2023, the GNWT has implemented several improvements to enhance emergency management, as noted in the 2023 AAR for the GNWT ECC. This is a noted demonstration of the commitment to continuous improvement.

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https://www.gov.nt.ca/sites/flagship/files/documents/1._nwt_wildfire_response_review_report_and_appendices_final_compressed-9k.pdf

⁶ https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/resources/Reports/Public_Safety/CITY-OF-YELLOWKNIFE-AFTER-ACTION-ASSESSMENT-2023-NORTH-SLAVE-COMPLEX-WILDFIRES-FINAL-REPORT-JUNE-2024.pdf

After-Action Review Scope

An analysis comparing feedback collected to the existing emergency management system and processes in the NWT:



Emergency Preparedness Activities

- Territorial, regional, municipal and NGO preparedness
- Preparedness for evacuation of the public
- Understanding of roles and responsibilities during activation of community emergency plans including existing plans and procedures.



Risk Monitoring & Assessment

- Understanding risk
- GNWT risk communications (before, during and after)



Response Activities

- Jurisdictional scan to determine best practices to gain an accurate perspective of best practices, and comparative models of practice as it relates to wildfire response.
- Evacuations, transportation and hosting



Operational & Public Communications

- Role of communications to the public



Transition to Recovery

- Re-entry planning
- Repatriation
- Damage assessments

This review is focused on emergency management only; wildfire fighting activities are outside of the scope.

Communities In Scope

- Publicly available survey
- Written submissions & workshops
- Public engagement sessions in evacuated communities:
 - Hay River
 - Kátł'odeeche First Nation
 - Sambaa K'e
 - Wekweètì
 - Behchokò
 - Fort Smith
 - Salt River First Nation
 - Jean Marie River
 - Enterprise
 - Kakisa
 - Yellowknife
 - Dettah and
 - N'dilo

Engagement Groups

- Local Emergency Management Organizations (EMOs),
- Regional EMOs,
- Territorial EMO (including federal partners)
- GNWT departmental employees and senior management.
- Members of the 19th Legislative Assembly in office during the 2023 wildfire events,
- Indigenous governments,
- Non-Government Organizations (NGOs),
- Business stakeholders and
- the Public.



Assumptions and Limitations

In preparing this AAR, it is important to acknowledge certain assumptions and limitations that may impact the findings' scope, depth, and generalizability. These considerations are inherent to retrospective analyses and should be considered when interpreting the results. The following are key assumptions and limitations associated with this report:

- The document is focused on the GNWT's response to the 2023 wildfire season, intending to extract insights and propose improvements for its EMP. The primary source of information was gathered through Incident Action Plans (IAPs) and incident documentation provided by the GNWT, workshops, interviews, public surveys, media reviews, and engagement activities.
- Appendix E (Engagement Summary) provides a breakdown of the methodology, engagement participation and representation used to develop the findings and recommendations. Logistical limitations and scope of this review made it unfeasible to collect feedback from every responder and all impacted parties.
- Although interview requests were extended to key organizations and partner agencies, challenges such as staff turnover, availability, and willingness to participate resulted in some inconsistency and limits to information.
- An AAR is a participatory process designed to gather input from those who wish to contribute. Participation is entirely voluntary and there is no legal authority to require participation.
- It is important to recognize that interviewees share their lived experiences, and these perspectives may not necessarily align with the objective reality or perceptions of events, processes, and practices. Variances in viewpoints may arise from diverse roles, responsibilities, activation timing, training backgrounds, and individual perceptions. Despite efforts to identify common themes and address any outlier information, it is crucial to acknowledge that personal experiences should not be dismissed. These perspectives, in aggregate, contribute valuable insights even if they differ, and play a significant role in understanding the multifaceted nature of events and processes under review.
- Results are presented in aggregate to protect respondent identities. Engagement survey participants were also asked subset questions based on any key roles they identified as having in their communities. An aggregate approach was applied to limit the potential of personal bias and participation levels in the development of this After-Action Review. A cross-sectoral methodology was also used. For all the survey results discussed, the complete and detailed data for each question can be located in Appendix G.
- Engagement participants may offer distinct information to third parties compared to what they communicate within their own circles, influenced by various factors. These reasons may include the real or perceived need to manage perceptions, protect sensitive information, or out of fear of repercussions. Participants might also tailor their communication based on the audience's level of understanding or their role in the broader context. Recognizing these

dynamics is crucial for understanding the complexity of information sharing as participants navigate the delicate balance between transparency, confidentiality, and the strategic interests of different groups.

- Many participants in this AAR process were personally impacted by the wildfire events, all while contributing to emergency management activities to support others. Their resilience is acknowledged as they reflect on 2023 from both professional and personal perspectives. It must be recognized and appreciated how the lines between personal and professional experiences often blur in such situations, adding an extra layer of complexity and emotional weight to the review.



Image 3 Jean Marie River, NT (TSI, 2024)



IMPACT SUMMARY

Evacuation

70% of NWT population evacuated



Chartered Flights

Min. 22 charter flights arranged to evacuate fire-impacted residents.

Commercial Flights

10 planes evacuated around 1,500 residents to southern provinces (mainly Alberta).

Military Aircraft

Canadian Armed Forces deployed four Hercules aircraft, one C-17 aircraft, and one Polaris aircraft to assist with evacuations.⁹



Use of Boats

Boats and ferries were used to transport evacuees to safer areas, if traditional routes were inaccessible.

Environment

Wildfires devastated forests & habitats



Habitat Loss

Mature boreal forest loss has impacted several animals, including numerous bird species.^{14,15}

Fires deep underground have impacted peatlands, impacting wildlife and carbon storage.¹⁶

Biodiversity

Increased frequency and intensity of wildfires have impacted biodiversity.¹⁷

Damage

Homes, businesses, infrastructure destroyed



Property Damage

>70 homes and businesses sustained damage or destruction beyond repair.¹⁰

4.1M hectares were fire-impacted.¹¹



Infrastructure Damage

Roads, bridges, power lines, water supply systems, and communications networks were all fire-impacted throughout the Territory.

Finance

Significant financial burdens highlighted



Millions in Expenses

Wildfire fighting costs reached around \$100M (5x budget).^{18,19}

Evacuations & cost of supporting evacuees estimated around \$50M.

Insured Damage

Yellowknife and Hay River wildfires caused >\$60M in insured losses.²²

Budget Impacts

Wildfire costs have reduced the projected Territorial surplus by \$173M, to around \$5M.^{20,21}

Federal government provided advance payment of \$84.3M through DFAA program to assist with recovery costs.^{23,24}

Air Quality

Smoke created extended air quality issues



Smoke Hours

Record-breaking smoke hours more than doubled 2014 levels, including >800 hours of smoke in Yellowknife.¹²

>High-risk air quality persisted for extended periods.¹³



Health Impacts

Poor air quality resulted in hospital visits for respiratory issues.

NWT Chief Public Health Officer noted it will be “years” to understand long-term impacts.

Contributing Factors



Climate Change

2023 wildfires were exacerbated by hotter and drier conditions than usual.²⁵

Record Temperatures

Record-high temperatures contributed to high winds and rapid fire spread.²⁶



Fire Management

Scale of the wildfires overwhelmed firefighting resources, eliminating possibility of containment



KEY CONTRIBUTORS & ESS SUPPORTS

The GNWT, community governments, and other groups provided several supports to local responses, and to evacuees, during the 2023 wildfire season, while various agencies and organizations assisted communities. This list is not fully exhaustive of all supports offered and provided to NWT evacuees; however, it acts as a good representation of the some of the key supports made available.

GNWT Supports



Collaboration

GNWT coordinated local responses.

Contracted fire weather services, from True North Weather Consulting.

Worked with federal partners for logistical support.

Federal Support



Canadian Armed Forces

CAF deployed 350 personnel and equipment to assist with fire suppression.

Public Safety Canada

Coordinated federal response and provided logistical support.
Authorized assistance in response to GNWT request.

Indigenous Services Canada

Offered funding for response and recovery activities for eligible First Nations through EMAP.

Coast Guard

Provided trained personnel and portable equipment, including water pumps and mobile incident command post trailer.

Financial Aid



GNWT Evacuee Travel Support

ETSP provided financial assistance to residents who had to evacuate, covering travel expenses.

GNWT Income Support

EIDS provided one-time payment of \$750 to residents whose employment income was disrupted due to extended evacuation.

GNWT Evacuation Relief Program

EERP provided one-time financial support (\$800 for those 18+; \$400 for underage dependents) to mitigate evacuation costs.

GNWT Lodging & Per Diem

ESS provided accommodations and \$128 per diem to evacuees in other communities.



Canadian Northern

Economic Development

Contributed \$1M to support small businesses impacted by the wildfires through GNWT SEED Policy.

Non-profits

Numerous NPOs contributed to evacuation efforts & supported residents



United Way NWT

Launched fundraising campaign to support fire-impacted residents, and mobilized community resources for relief efforts.

⁷ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/nwt-press-conference-wildfire-report-1.7306308>

⁸ <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/shane-thompson-historic-2023-wildfire-season>

⁹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/nwt-wildfire-impact-1.6975633>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/nwt-emergency-response-update-nwt-wildfires-may-15-2023-1730pm>

¹¹ <https://www.canadianunderwriter.ca/insurance/price-tag-for-the-insured-wildfire-losses-in-northwest-territories-1004240287/>

¹² https://www.cbc.ca/sites/default/files/2024-03/03/07_24_CIFFC_2023CanadaReport%20%281%29.pdf

¹³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/2023-record-wildfire-smoke-year-nwt-1.6983106>

¹⁴ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/wildfire-smoke-air-quality-nwt-1.7274552>

¹⁵ <https://www.rcin.ca/eye-on-the-arctic/2023/09/25/severe-wildfires-will-have-long-lasting-impact-on-n-w-t-s-boreal-forest/>

¹⁶ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/nwt-wildfire-impact-1.6975633>

¹⁷ https://www.srrb.nt.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=422&catid=85&Itemid=554

¹⁸ https://www.wrrb.ca/sites/default/files/Bank%20Suallo%20Canadian%20Genoscape_Proposal%20NWT_Final.pdf

¹⁹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2023/12/minister-sajjan-announces-disaster-recovery-funding-to-northwest-territories-for-2023-wildfires.html>

²⁰ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/nwt-2023-firefighting-costs-1.6953018>

²¹ <https://www.nns.com/news/nwt-wildfires-gnwt-maintains-budget-surplus-of-5-million-7274740>

²² MP McLeod announces \$15 million to Indigenous governments and organizations affected by 2023 wildfires - Canada.ca.

²³ <https://www.abc.ca/news-insights/news/Behchokep-yellowknife-and-hay-river-wildfires-cause-over-60-million-in-insured-damage>

²⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2023/12/minister-sajjan-announces-disaster-recovery-funding-to-northwest-territories-for-2023-wildfires.html>

²⁵ https://www.cif-ife.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/FireSeason2023_CIF_led_wre.pdf

²⁶ <https://climatelibrary.ec.gc.ca/dataset/drivers-and-impacts-of-the-record-breaking-2023-wildfire-season-in-canada>

²⁷ <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/have-your-say-financial-assistance-programs-evacuees>

²⁸ <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/important-information-about-evacuee-income-disruption-support-program-eids>

²⁹ <https://www.fin.gov.nt.ca/en/services/emergency-evacuation-relief-program>

Reconnaissance du territoire

À la fin de l'été et à l'automne 2024, les membres de l'équipe de Transitional Solutions Inc. (TSI) ont été invités à s'entretenir avec les personnes touchées par les feux de forêt de 2023 aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest (TNO). TSI est reconnaissante d'avoir pu séjourner en toute sécurité sur les terres visées par les traités 6, 7 et 8, ainsi que sur les territoires traditionnels et la patrie des Dénés, des Métis et des Cris des TNO pour effectuer cette analyse. TSI remercie les Premières Nations, les Inuits et les Métis de lui avoir permis de les écouter et de séjourner sur leurs terres traditionnelles. TSI est également profondément reconnaissante pour le généreux partage de connaissances, de sagesse et de façons de savoir, d'être, de faire et de croire pour l'aider dans son analyse après incident des feux de forêt de 2023 aux TNO.

« Notre peuple est accueillant, nous sommes accueillants, dans les bons comme dans les mauvais moments. Notre devoir et notre culture sont d'accueillir les autres et d'en prendre soin. » – Chef autochtone élu, Traité 11

TSI reconnaît que son équipe se trouve sur le territoire traditionnel des traités 8 et 11, qui englobe les terres ancestrales des peuples nehiyaw, denesų́́né, dene tha', dane-zaa et dénés, mais également les terres contemporaines et traditionnelles des peuples gwich'in, th̓chq̓ et dénés du Sahtu, ainsi que de la Nation des Métis. Ce territoire est un lieu de rassemblement et de vie pour ces communautés depuis des générations. TSI exprime sa gratitude pour le lien durable avec ce territoire et reconnaît les effets du colonialisme sur les cultures et traditions autochtones. L'entreprise s'engage à favoriser des relations respectueuses avec les peuples autochtones et à œuvrer en faveur de la réconciliation.

TSI honore et respecte ce qui a été partagé avec son équipe. Les membres de l'équipe de TSI se sont rendus dans de nombreuses collectivités pendant la saison de la récolte et remercient ceux qui ont pris le temps de se réunir au lieu de passer du temps sur le territoire et les cours d'eau. TSI a demandé l'autorisation de prendre des notes pendant que son équipe écoutait les résidents des collectivités. La vie privée et la confidentialité des personnes et des groupes qui ont partagé leurs expériences liées aux feux de forêt de 2023 avec TSI ont été et continueront d'être respectées. Les citations directes figurant dans ce rapport sont attribuées à la collectivité ou à ses membres sans les identifier, pour des raisons de confidentialité.

TSI s'engage à respecter les droits des peuples autochtones et à œuvrer à la réconciliation avec tous les peuples autochtones dont l'histoire est intimement liée à ce territoire.

« Le paysage a changé. Nous avons changé. On peut voir des choses qu'on ne pouvait pas voir de loin. C'était très effrayant. » - Aîné, Traité 11, Fort Simpson



Reconnaissance des pertes

TSI reconnaît les lourdes pertes subies aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest, qu'elles soient directement ou indirectement liées à la saison des feux de forêt de 2023. Cette analyse après incident tient compte des aspects pratiques de la gestion des situations d'urgence et des répercussions émotionnelles et culturelles importantes sur toutes les personnes concernées. TSI est consciente que les personnes, les familles et des collectivités entières ont souffert et continuent de souffrir profondément, en raison de la situation qui a eu des conséquences dévastatrices sur les plans humain, environnemental et culturel.¹

.....

« Je suis profondément attristé par l'ampleur des pertes – il y a des plantes médicinales que je ne reverrai plus jamais pousser sur ces terres de mon vivant. Je pleure la perte de vies – les oiseaux, les animaux à fourrure, les poissons. Je suis encore très blessé aujourd'hui. Des vies ont été perdues. Des familles ont perdu des proches alors qu'elles étaient séparées; les feux nous ont séparés. Il y a beaucoup de souffrances et de chagrin parmi nous. » - Aîné, Fort Smith, Traité 8

.....

Pertes de vies humaines : Nous pleurons sincèrement les vies perdues lors de la saison des feux de forêt, notamment celle d'un pompier de Fort Liard qui a tragiquement perdu la vie dans l'exercice de ses fonctions, ainsi que celles des personnes décédées lors des évacuations alors qu'elles étaient séparées de leurs proches. La perte de certains aînés, dont la sagesse et la présence étaient inestimables, est déchirante et laisse un vide important.

Perte d'animaux et d'espèces sauvages : Les feux ont laissé des traces indélébiles sur les écosystèmes locaux et les terres traditionnelles, affectant et modifiant directement l'équilibre actuel du monde naturel sur lequel reposent les collectivités et la culture. Bien que les feux de forêt soient des phénomènes naturels, on ne peut pas en dire autant de l'ampleur et de la portée de la saison des feux de forêt de 2023.

Destruction de biens et d'infrastructures : Entreprise a subi des pertes considérables alors qu'environ 90 % de la collectivité a été réduite en cendres, selon le gouvernement du Canada et l'administration locale. Des quartiers entiers ont été brûlés et des entreprises détruites. Des lieux emblématiques ont disparu, laissant des rues bordées de structures brisées et d'effets personnels éparpillés. Pour de nombreux résidents, le paysage autrefois familier est désormais méconnaissable, ce qui constitue un rappel puissant de la dévastation. Le bilan émotionnel est immense pour les familles qui doivent faire face à la perte de leur foyer et de leur collectivité. La reconstruction sera longue et difficile, mais la ténacité des résidents constitue une lueur d'espoir au milieu des décombres. De nombreuses autres collectivités ont également subi des pertes matérielles, ce qui a modifié à jamais la vie d'autrefois.

¹ <https://cabinradio.ca/150809/news/environment/wildfires/how-elders-see-the-changes-the-nwts-landscape-and-peoples-must-bear/>

Séparation et déplacement : Pendant les évacuations, les familles ont été séparées, et certaines personnes sont restées introuvables pendant une longue période, ce qui a aggravé le traumatisme et le stress ressentis par certains de leurs proches. Cette situation a été exacerbée pour ceux qui ont été séparés de leur collectivité et de leur famille et déplacés en raison des pensionnats. La peur et le sentiment d'impuissance ressentis lors de ces déplacements ont laissé un effet durable sur le plan affectif.

Blessures corporelles et quasi-accidents : De nombreuses personnes ont été blessées, et il y a eu des incidents lors des efforts de lutte contre les feux et lors des évacuations. Les voitures fondaient alors que les résidents évacuaient les secteurs touchés à travers les flammes le long des routes. Ces incidents rappellent brutalement le courage et les sacrifices des intervenants et des résidents des collectivités, ainsi que les conséquences négatives subies.

Pertes d'ordre culturel et traditionnel : Les collectivités ont perdu des terres traditionnelles, notamment des territoires de chasse, des sites de cueillette de plantes médicinales, des sources de nourriture et des lieux d'importance culturelle, cérémonielle et traditionnelle. Par ailleurs, des objets cérémoniels et des sites historiques irremplaçables ont été détruits, ce qui a eu un effet sur la continuité et l'identité culturelles. L'incapacité à organiser des cérémonies ou à se réunir a laissé un vide impossible à combler.

Répercussions économiques : Les répercussions économiques se font sentir à tous les niveaux, tant personnel et professionnel que traditionnel, communautaire et territorial. La stabilité financière des familles, des collectivités et du territoire est menacée, ce qui a une incidence sur les moyens de subsistance et la sécurité financière à long terme.

Perte de confiance et du sentiment de sécurité : Ces événements ont ébranlé le sentiment fondamental de sécurité, ce qui a rendu de nombreuses personnes incertaines quant à leur sécurité sur leur propre territoire. Cette perte de confiance est un poids douloureux pour un territoire qui a longtemps trouvé réconfort et force dans son lien à la terre et aux gens.

Départ de membres de l'équipe et de résidents : De nombreux résidents estimés et des membres qualifiés de l'équipe ont dû partir ou ont choisi de le faire, soit en déménageant, soit en quittant leurs fonctions. Ces départs ont entraîné un important « exode des cerveaux », soit le départ de personnes compétentes des différentes régions. Ce phénomène a affaibli la résilience du territoire et sa capacité à se rétablir et à se reconstruire efficacement.

Vulnérabilité et itinérance : Les feux de forêt de 2023 ont mis en évidence les lacunes dans la prise en charge des personnes vulnérables en cas d'urgence, comme les personnes âgées et celles qui sont mal logées. Les feux et les pertes de logements, conjugués aux déplacements forcés, ont accru la vulnérabilité de nombreuses personnes et ont rendu difficile l'aide aux personnes sans domicile fixe. Ainsi, il apparaît clairement qu'il faut davantage de soutien, de logements et de stabilité pour aider les collectivités à se reconstruire.²³

² <https://cabinradio.ca/156440/news/yellowknife/what-can-we-learn-from-yks-evacuation-about-helping-vulnerable-people/>

³ https://www.ntlegislativeassembly.ca/sites/default/files/legacy/cr_47-192_scosd_report_-_homelessness_prevention_-_supporting_pathways_to_housing_nwt_residents.pdf

« Les résidents sont très inquiets des faibles niveaux d'eau et de l'abondance de combustible autour de notre collectivité. Ils se souviennent du ciel sombre, de la fumée, du stress intense, du manque d'informations, du départ précipité et de la séparation de nos foyers et de nos proches. On constate une perte de confiance. On ne croit plus que nous serons en sécurité à l'avenir. » - Citoyen th̃ch̃q, Behchok̃q, territoire traditionnel th̃ch̃q

TSI a abordé cette analyse avec un profond respect pour ces pertes et la capacité d'adaptation de toutes les personnes touchées. Ce document vise à comprendre ce qui s'est passé, à reconnaître la gravité des pertes, à favoriser la résilience et à renforcer la préparation aux situations d'urgence grâce au développement des capacités et à l'adaptation. TSI s'engage à honorer chaque vie, lieu et pratique culturelle et communautaire touchés par les feux en poursuivant l'analyse après incident avec détermination et respect.



Introduction et objectif

La saison des feux de forêt de 2023 a été une saison sans précédent aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest (TNO), où près de 70 % de la population totale du territoire a été déplacée lors d'évacuations multiples et simultanées de collectivités entre mai et septembre. Environ quatre millions d'hectares ont brûlé. La présente analyse après incident, préparée par Transitional Solutions Inc. (TSI), examine la gestion des urgences par le gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (GTNO) pendant la saison des feux de forêt de 2023.

L'objectif de cette analyse après incident est double. Tout d'abord, il témoigne d'efforts louables et reconnaît les points forts qui pourront servir de base à l'avenir. Ces pratiques efficaces constituent des approches éprouvées qui pourront être reproduites et adaptées à grande échelle lors de futures situations d'urgence. Deuxièmement, il recense les défis systémiques, c'est-à-dire les problèmes récurrents qui, s'ils ne sont pas résolus, pourraient entraver les interventions futures. En mettant ces problèmes en lumière, le GTNO peut éviter des solutions isolées et mettre en œuvre des améliorations significatives et durables. Le rapport se termine par des recommandations concrètes visant à accroître la capacité d'adaptation, à clarifier la gouvernance et à renforcer la préparation globale en vue de futures situations d'urgence à grande échelle.

Portée de l'analyse

Cette analyse a porté sur le rendement et l'état de préparation du GTNO dans l'ensemble du continuum de la gestion des urgences, en évaluant huit domaines interdépendants :

1. Pratiques législatives judicieuses
2. Préparation organisationnelle
3. Préparation des collectivités et des ménages
4. Rôles et responsabilités
5. Évaluation et surveillance des risques
6. Opérations d'intervention
7. Rétablissement et retour dans les collectivités
8. Communications et information publique

L'analyse est axée sur la capacité, la coordination, les processus et la direction du GTNO, tout en reconnaissant les autorités locales, le rôle des gouvernements autochtones et la dynamique intergouvernementale dans une saison complexe d'intervention en cas de crise. Les conclusions découlent d'observations à l'échelle du système plutôt que d'incidents isolés, et les recommandations visent à renforcer la capacité d'adaptation, l'équité et la responsabilité du GTNO.

Méthodologie

Cette analyse après incident a été réalisée à l'aide d'un processus d'échanges ayant recours à plusieurs méthodes, conformément à la demande de propositions, comprenant les éléments suivants :

- **Examen de la documentation** : Étude de plus de 200 documents de référence, y compris les plans d'urgence des TNO de 2018 et de 2024, les politiques, les rapports annuels précédents, les analyses après incident du GTNO et les plans d'intervention en cas d'incident.
- **Échanges avec les collectivités et le personnel** : Plus de 250 personnes ont été sollicitées dans le cadre d'entretiens, d'enquêtes et d'ateliers. Treize consultations communautaires en personne ont eu lieu entre septembre et novembre 2024.
- **Comparaisons entre les administrations** : Évaluation des cadres législatifs et opérationnels d'autres administrations canadiennes, ainsi que des normes nationales et internationales, notamment celles de l'Association canadienne de normalisation, de Sécurité publique Canada et du Cadre de Sendai des Nations Unies.
- **Analyse intersectorielle** : Les échanges ont été menés avec les ministères du GTNO, les municipalités, les gouvernements autochtones, les organisations non gouvernementales (ONG), les entreprises et les organismes de soutien d'urgence.

La participation aux échanges était volontaire, et la confidentialité a été respectée. Les expériences vécues, bien que subjectives, ont fourni des informations cruciales sur les problèmes systémiques, notamment en ce qui concerne la coordination, la communication, la mobilisation des ressources, la prise de décisions et la sécurité culturelle.

Les participants représentaient divers rôles : intervenants de première ligne et hauts dirigeants du GTNO, gouvernements autochtones, fonctionnaires municipaux, ONG partenaires, entreprises et dirigeants communautaires. Les membres des collectivités ont fait part de témoignages très personnels sur leurs craintes, leurs traumatismes et leur force. Ces voix constituent l'impératif moral et le contexte vécu qui sous-tendent le présent rapport. Outre leurs récits des événements, les participants ont fait part de leurs observations sur la gestion de la situation d'urgence. Lorsque des thèmes et des critiques sont ressortis de manière cohérente dans les entretiens, les groupes de discussion et les résultats du sondage, ils ont été considérés comme des informations validées et ont servi de base aux principales conclusions et recommandations présentées dans ce rapport.

Principales forces cernées

Malgré des conditions extrêmement difficiles, de nombreux aspects de la gestion de la situation d'urgence ont démontré une force et une capacité d'adaptation remarquables. Parmi les principales réussites, on peut citer :

- **Dévouement et héroïsme** : Des Ténos de l'ensemble du territoire, des premiers intervenants aux dirigeants municipaux et territoriaux, en passant par des membres des collectivités autochtones, des ONG et des entreprises, et des bénévoles communautaires, ont fait preuve d'un courage et d'une détermination extraordinaires.

- **Adaptation sous pression :** Le personnel du GTNO et les membres des collectivités et des ONG ont assumé des rôles qui dépassaient leur mandat afin d'assurer la continuité des services et le soutien à l'évacuation; bon nombre d'entre eux ont été directement touchés par les feux et les évacuations qui ont suivi, mais ont continué à aider les autres.
- **Mesures prises par le GTNO pour apporter des améliorations :** Les premières mises à jour du plan d'urgence (2024) et les changements opérationnels témoignent d'une volonté d'apprendre et de s'adapter.
- **Amélioration des communications destinées au public :** Les améliorations apportées en cours d'intervention aux systèmes d'alerte et au partage d'informations ont permis de dissiper progressivement la confusion.

Principaux défis cernés

La saison des feux de forêt de 2023 a révélé des limites systémiques dans le cadre de gestion des urgences du GTNO :

- **Structure fragmentée de gestion des urgences :** Le modèle formé des organisations de gestion des urgences locales (OGUL), des organisations de gestion des urgences régionales (OGUR) et de l'Organisation de gestion des urgences territoriale (OGUT) a semé la confusion et manquait d'un commandement coordonné, ce qui a entraîné des chevauchements, des retards et un flou dans les responsabilités.
- **Lacunes législatives :** La législation devrait mieux reconnaître les gouvernements autochtones comme des ordres de gouvernement, mieux refléter les risques modernes et prévoir des normes de préparation exécutoires.
- **Formation et maîtrise du Système de commandement des interventions (SCI) :** L'absence de formation obligatoire pour les élus et le personnel gouvernemental a entraîné des inefficacités opérationnelles, des prises de décisions incohérentes et un manque de profondeur organisationnelle.
- **Rôles et responsabilités peu clairs :** Plusieurs organismes ont accompli des tâches qui se chevauchaient, comme l'enregistrement des personnes évacuées, sans autorité claire.
- **Coordination avec les organisations non gouvernementales :** Les services essentiels destinés aux groupes vulnérables n'ont pas été fournis de manière cohérente, et les partenariats avec les ONG ont été sous-utilisés.
- **Continuité limitée de la gouvernance :** Les principaux ministères du GTNO n'avaient pas de plans éprouvés pour assurer la continuité des opérations pendant les déplacements.
- **Érosion de la confiance du public :** De nombreux citoyens ont exprimé un sentiment d'abandon, de confusion et un traumatisme durable à la suite de ces événements. Les échanges ont révélé que cela était en partie dû à un manque de clarté dans la communication, à une transparence limitée dans la prise de décisions et à des délais d'intervention qui dépassaient les attentes opérationnelles dans certaines régions.

Thèmes généraux

L'analyse a permis de dégager des thèmes généraux communs à tous les secteurs et à toutes les collectivités :

- **La résilience sans structure ni ressources n'est pas viable** : Les collectivités ont fait preuve de capacité d'adaptation, mais elles n'ont pas bénéficié du soutien systémique du GTNO pour la maintenir.
- **Nécessité d'un organisme dédié à la gestion des urgences** : Un organisme territorial dédié à la gestion des urgences est essentiel pour limiter la fragmentation et fournir un soutien exhaustif. Grâce à l'autonomie budgétaire et organisationnelle et à une stratégie claire, la gestion des urgences peut évoluer vers une fonction centrale, couvrant tous les risques, tout au long de l'année, et soutenue par un personnel spécialisé, des outils et des processus normalisés, ainsi que des plans régulièrement mis en pratique.
- **Inclusion** : Les gouvernements autochtones doivent être officiellement intégrés en tant que partenaires à part entière dans la gestion des situations d'urgence.
- **Confiance et transparence** : Les citoyens doivent pouvoir faire confiance à leurs institutions. Pour rétablir la confiance, il faut faire preuve de clarté, de cohérence et de compétence culturelle.
- **La préparation requiert une discipline quotidienne** : Les plans doivent être mis en œuvre, compris et intégrés dans la gouvernance au quotidien, notamment dans le cadre de la collaboration avec les ONG partenaires.
- **Intégration du système** : De l'alerte aux évacuations en passant par le rétablissement, le système de gestion des urgences du GTNO doit fonctionner comme un tout cohérent, avec des rôles clairs, un partage des données et un soutien global.

Résumé des recommandations

L'analyse après incident présente plus de 30 recommandations réalisables. Voici quelques faits saillants :

Échéancier	Principales recommandations
Immédiatement (0 à 12 mois)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Créer un organisme territorial de gestion des urgences doté d'une indépendance opérationnelle et d'une obligation de rendre compte• Centraliser le suivi de la certification concernant le Système de commandement des interventions (SCI) du GTNO• Mettre à jour les messages relatifs à la préparation aux situations d'urgence• Mobiliser les gouvernements autochtones à titre de partenaires à part entière

Échéancier	Principales recommandations
Court terme (1 à 2 ans)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modifier la législation afin de clarifier l'autorité entre les états d'urgence qui se chevauchent • Rendre obligatoire et maintenir la formation au Système de commandement des interventions pour les élus et les responsables des services d'urgence • Élaborer un plan territorial de services sociaux d'urgence incluant les groupes vulnérables
Moyen terme (3 à 4 ans)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mettre à jour la <i>Loi sur la gestion des urgences</i> afin d'exiger son respect par voie réglementaire • Continuer à renforcer la communication grâce à des messages préétablis et à des stratégies visant à gagner la confiance du public • Intégrer des modèles de santé mentale tenant compte des traumatismes dans les processus de gestion des urgences du GTNO
Long terme (5 ans et plus)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Définir une fréquence minimale des exercices • Intégrer le Système de commandement des interventions dans toutes les opérations du GTNO • Améliorer les connaissances en matière d'assurance et les options de rétablissement après sinistre

Conclusion

La saison des feux de forêt de 2023 a eu de profondes répercussions sociales, économiques et environnementales aux TNO. Cette saison restera probablement un moment déterminant pour les TNO. Si elle a mis en évidence de graves vulnérabilités, elle a également démontré le courage et la capacité d'adaptation remarquables des Ténos. La présente analyse après incident reconnaît ces répercussions tout en proposant une feuille de route constructive et orientée vers l'avenir.

La mise en œuvre des recommandations exigera du leadership, des investissements soutenus et un engagement envers la réconciliation et le partage des responsabilités. Grâce à cet engagement commun, la mise en œuvre positionnera les TNO comme un chef de file du Nord dans la gestion des situations d'urgence ancrée dans la capacité d'adaptation, la réconciliation et la préparation.

Le gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest a une occasion unique de jouer un rôle de premier plan dans la redéfinition de la préparation aux situations d'urgence dans le Nord.

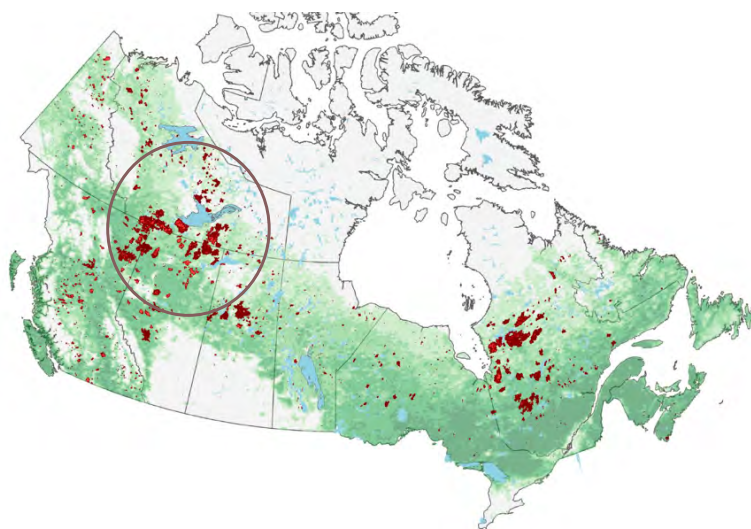


Introduction

Les Territoires du Nord-Ouest (TNO) ont connu leur pire saison de feux de forêt jamais enregistrée au printemps et à l'été 2023.¹ Près de 70 % de la population a été évacuée au printemps, en été et en automne pendant une année où les feux ont été d'une rare intensité. Certaines collectivités ont été évacuées plus d'une fois, souvent avec un préavis de moins de 24 heures. Les résidents se sont retrouvés loin de chez eux pendant des semaines. De nombreux résidents ont déclaré n'être jamais sortis des TNO ou n'avoir jamais quitté les terres ancestrales. Cette nouvelle expérience a été complexe et semée d'embûches.

La saison des feux de forêt de 2023 a non seulement mis les systèmes en place à l'épreuve, mais elle a aussi exigé des premiers intervenants, des leaders et des résidents qu'ils fassent preuve d'une force émotionnelle hors du commun. Il est essentiel de tenir compte des traumatismes pour comprendre comment les événements se sont déroulés, pourquoi certaines décisions ont été difficiles à prendre et quelles ont été les lacunes en matière de soutien.

La saison des feux de forêt de 2023 a commencé en mai avec des feux d'origine humaine qui ont entraîné l'évacuation de deux collectivités. Tout au long de l'été et de l'automne, les feux ont gagné en intensité, touchant notamment les régions du Slave Nord, du Slave Sud, des Tłı̨chǫ et du Dehcho, ainsi que les terres visées par les traités 8 et 11. À la fin de la saison, neuf collectivités avaient fait l'objet d'une évacuation. Trois collectivités ont signalé des dommages structurels au cours de différentes périodes de la saison.



Source 1 : Les grands feux de 2023 – Facteurs déterminants et répercussions de la saison des feux de 2023, qui a battu tous les records (Ressources naturelles Canada, 2024)

Les conditions extrêmes, notamment les températures record et les forts vents, ont grandement compliqué les efforts d'intervention. Tous les paliers de gouvernement (municipal, territorial, fédéral et autochtone) ont collaboré pour appuyer les opérations de lutte contre les feux de forêt et de gestion des urgences dans les secteurs touchés. La situation a été en outre compliquée par des situations d'urgence qui se sont chevauchées et se sont succédé, ce qui a mis à rude épreuve la capacité d'intervention et les systèmes de communication. Pour faire face à l'ampleur de la crise, les TNO ont importé des ressources du Centre interservices des feux de forêt du Canada (CIIFFC), notamment des équipes, des avions-citernes et de l'équipement.

¹ <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/shane-thompson-historic-2023-wildfire-season>

Le ministère de l'Environnement et du Changement climatique (MECC) des TNO a coordonné de nombreuses interventions de lutte contre les feux de forêt à grande échelle sur une partie importante du territoire, ce qui a permis de constater les ravages : 4,16 millions d'hectares brûlés par 304 feux, soit la saison des feux de forêt la plus sèche et la plus destructrice jamais enregistrée dans la région. Cette superficie représente une part importante de la zone boisée du territoire. Par ailleurs, un pompier forestier a tragiquement perdu la vie dans l'exercice de ses fonctions au cours de cette saison. Cette analyse après incident met en évidence les immenses difficultés rencontrées et les conséquences de cette saison des feux historique qui a touché une partie importante de la zone boisée des TNO.

La saison des feux de forêt de 2023 a eu des effets considérables sur les collectivités, les infrastructures, l'économie et l'environnement. Les efforts de rétablissement prendront des années, et les feux ont fait ressortir le besoin croissant de stratégies d'adaptation au climat dans un contexte de conditions météorologiques de plus en plus extrêmes.

Le présent rapport est créé en tant qu'outil d'apprentissage; il faut reconnaître qu'il ne s'agit pas du seul rapport d'analyse après incident réalisé au sujet des feux de forêt de 2023 aux TNO. Les rapports d'analyse après incident suivants ont également été publiés par les ordres de gouvernement :

- Analyse après incident du ministère de l'Environnement et du Changement climatique du gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (axée sur la capacité de lutte contre les feux de forêt)²
- Ville de Yellowknife³
- Quartier nord du lac Pontoon (sur la route Ingraham Trail)
- Ville de Hay River
- Ville de Fort Smith

Certaines agences et certains organismes non gouvernementaux ont également complété les informations organisationnelles et opérationnelles ou les réflexions qui ont été données lors des échanges, à des fins de sensibilisation.

TSI remercie toutes les personnes qui ont contribué et, dans certains cas, participé à ces rapports d'analyse après incident. Le partage d'expériences personnelles et professionnelles peut parfois être difficile pour la santé mentale des résidents et la guérison de la communauté dans son ensemble. TSI encourage la mise en pratique des leçons tirées dans l'ensemble des collectivités et des gouvernements des TNO afin de favoriser la sécurité, la confiance et le mieux-être de tous les résidents.

² https://www.gov.nt.ca/sites/flagship/files/documents/1_nwt_wildfire_response_review_report_and_appendices_final_compressed-9k.pdf

³ https://www.yellowknife.ca/en/city-government/resources/Reports/Public_Safety/CITY-OF-YELLOWKNIFE-AFTER-ACTION-ASSESSMENT-2023-NORTH-SLAVE-COMPLEX-WILDFIRES-FINAL-REPORT-JUNE-2024.pdf

Un système de gestion des urgences qui tient compte des traumatismes reconnaît les effets cumulatifs du stress, des déplacements et de la peur, particulièrement dans un territoire façonné par les traumatismes coloniaux, l'isolement géographique et la menace climatique. Il cherche non seulement à mettre en œuvre de meilleures interventions, mais aussi à diriger différemment, soit avec empathie, en respectant les cultures et en se souciant expressément du bien-être psychologique des membres des collectivités et des intervenants. Cette analyse après incident adhère à ces valeurs et en recommande la pleine intégration à la conception des politiques sur les situations d'urgence, des structures de leadership et des interventions.

L'aspect le plus difficile de ce rapport sera d'instaurer la confiance. Depuis les feux de forêt dévastateurs de 2023, le GTNO a mis en œuvre plusieurs initiatives pour améliorer la gestion des urgences, comme l'indique l'analyse après incident de 2023 du MECC du GTNO. Il s'agit d'une démonstration remarquable de l'engagement en faveur de l'amélioration continue.

Portée de l'analyse après incident

Une analyse comparant les commentaires recueillis au système et aux processus de gestion des urgences déjà en place aux TNO:



Activités de préparation aux urgences

- Préparation au niveau territorial, régional et municipal et préparation des ONG
- Préparation à l'évacuation du public
- Compréhension des rôles et responsabilités lors de l'activation des plans d'urgence communautaires, notamment les plans et procédures en place



Suivi et évaluation des risques

- Compréhension des risques
- Communications du GTNO sur les risques (avant, pendant et après)



Activités d'intervention

- Analyse des administrations pour déterminer les moyens d'obtenir des informations précises sur les meilleures pratiques et les modèles de pratiques comparatifs en matière de lutte contre les feux de forêt.
- Évacuations, transports et hébergement



Communications opérationnelles et publiques

- Rôle des communications au public



Transition vers le rétablissement

- Planification du retour
- Rapatriement
- Évaluation des dommages

Cette analyse se concentre uniquement sur la gestion des urgences; les activités de lutte contre les feux de forêt ne sont pas prises en compte.

Collectivités concernées

- Sondage public
- Commentaires écrits et ateliers
- Séances d'échanges avec le public dans les collectivités touchées :
 - Hay River
 - Kátl'odeeche First Nation
 - Sambaa K'e
 - Wekweètì
 - Behchokò
 - Fort Smith
 - Salt River First Nation
 - Jean Marie River
 - Enterprise
 - Kakisa
 - Yellowknife
 - Dettah and
 - N'dilo

Groupes concernés

- Organisations de gestion des urgences locales (OGUL)
- Organisations de gestion des urgences régionales
- Organisation de gestion des urgences territoriale (dont les partenaires fédéraux)
- Employés et cadres supérieurs des ministères du GTNO
- Députés de la 19e Assemblée législative en fonction lors des feux de forêt de 2023
- Gouvernements autochtones
- Organismes non gouvernementaux (ONG)
- Intervenants du monde des affaires
- Public général



Hypothèses et limites

Pour élaborer cette analyse après incident, il a fallu tenir compte de certaines hypothèses et limites susceptibles d'avoir une incidence sur la portée, la profondeur et la généralisation des conclusions. Ces facteurs sont indissociables des analyses rétrospectives et doivent être pris en compte lors de l'interprétation des résultats. Les principales hypothèses et limites associées à ce rapport sont les suivantes :

- Le document se concentre sur l'intervention du GTNO lors de la saison des feux de forêt de 2023, dans le but d'en tirer des enseignements et de proposer des améliorations pour son programme de gestion des urgences. Les principales sources d'information ont été les plans d'action et la documentation sur les incidents fournis par le GTNO, les ateliers, les entretiens, les questionnaires publics, les revues de presse et les échanges.
- L'annexe E (résumé des échanges) présente une synthèse de la méthodologie, de la participation aux échanges et de la représentation utilisées pour élaborer les conclusions et les recommandations. Les limites logistiques et la portée de cette analyse ont empêché de recueillir les commentaires de tous les répondants et de toutes les parties concernées.
- Bien que les demandes d'entretien aient été étendues aux principaux organismes et agences partenaires, des difficultés comme la rotation, la disponibilité et la volonté de participer du personnel ont entraîné des incohérences dans les informations et ont entravé leur collecte. L'analyse après incident est un processus participatif conçu pour recueillir les commentaires des personnes qui souhaitent y contribuer. La participation est entièrement volontaire et ne peut être imposée de quelque façon que ce soit.
- Il est important de reconnaître que les personnes interrogées partagent leurs expériences vécues, et que celles-ci ne correspondent pas nécessairement à la réalité objective ou à la perception des événements, des processus et des pratiques. Des divergences de points de vue peuvent résulter de la diversité des rôles, des responsabilités, des délais de mobilisation, des formations et des perceptions individuelles. Malgré les efforts déployés pour dégager des thèmes communs et traiter les informations aberrantes, il est essentiel de reconnaître que les expériences personnelles ne doivent pas être écartées. Même si, dans l'ensemble, ces points de vue peuvent diverger, ils apportent un éclairage précieux et contribuent grandement à la compréhension de la nature complexe des événements et des processus examinés.
- Les résultats sont présentés sous forme agrégée afin de protéger l'identité des participants. Les participants au sondage ont également été invités à répondre à un sous-ensemble de questions basées sur les rôles clés qu'ils ont identifiés au sein de leurs collectivités. On a eu recours à une approche globale pour l'élaboration de cette analyse après incident afin de limiter les risques liés aux préjugés personnels et aux différents niveaux de participation parmi les groupes. On a également eu recours à une méthodologie intersectorielle. Pour ce qui est de tous les résultats du sondage examinés, vous trouverez les données complètes et détaillées pour chaque question à l'annexe G.
- Les participants aux échanges peuvent offrir des informations différentes à des tiers de celles qu'ils communiquent dans leur propre cercle, pour diverses raisons. Il peut s'agir de la

nécessité réelle ou perçue de gérer les perceptions ou de protéger des informations sensibles, ou alors d'une crainte des conséquences. Les participants peuvent également adapter leur communication en fonction du niveau de compréhension de leur public ou de leur rôle dans un contexte plus large. Il est essentiel de tenir compte de cette dynamique pour comprendre la complexité du partage de l'information, car les participants doivent trouver un équilibre délicat entre la transparence, la confidentialité et les intérêts stratégiques des différents groupes.

- De nombreux participants à ce processus d'analyse après incident ont été personnellement touchés par les feux de forêt, tout en contribuant aux activités de gestion des urgences pour aider leurs concitoyens. Leur détermination est reconnue lorsqu'ils évoquent 2023 d'un point de vue à la fois professionnel et personnel. Il faut être conscient que les limites entre les expériences personnelles et professionnelles sont souvent floues dans de telles situations, ce qui ajoute une couche de complexité et un poids émotionnel à l'analyse.



Image 4 Jean Marie River, NT (TSI, 2024)



Résumé des Répercussions

Évacuation

70 % de la population des TNO a été évacuée



Vols Nolisés

Au moins 22 vols nolisés ont été organisés pour évacuer les résidents touchés par les feux de forêt.

Vols Commerciaux

Dix avions ont permis d'évacuer environ 1 500 résidents vers les provinces du sud (principalement l'Alberta).

Avions Militaires

Les Forces armées canadiennes ont déployé quatre avions Hercules, un avion C-17 et un avion Polaris pour faciliter les évacuations.



Bateaux

Des bateaux et des traversiers ont été utilisés pour transporter les personnes évacuées dans des endroits plus sûrs lorsque les voies traditionnelles étaient inaccessibles.

Environnement

Les feux de forêt ont détruit des forêts et des habitats.



Destruction D'habitats

La perte de parties de la forêt boréale mature a eu des répercussions sur plusieurs animaux, dont de nombreuses espèces d'oiseaux.

Les feux souterrains brûlant en profondeur ont touché les tourbières, ce qui a eu des répercussions sur la faune et le stockage du carbone..

Biodiversité

L'augmentation de la fréquence et de l'intensité des feux de forêt a eu un effet sur la biodiversité.

Dommages

Des maisons, des entreprises et des infrastructures ont été détruites.



Dommages aux infrastructures

Des routes, des ponts, des lignes électriques, des systèmes d'approvisionnement en eau et des réseaux de communication ont tous été touchés par les feux dans tout le territoire.



Dommages à la propriété

Plus de 70 maisons et entreprises ont subi des dommages ou ont été détruites. Une superficie de 4,1 millions d'hectares a été touchée par les feux de forêt.

Finances

De lourdes charges financières sont évoquées.



Millions de dollars en dépenses

Les coûts de la lutte contre les feux de forêt ont atteint environ 100 millions de dollars (cinq fois le budget). Les évacuations et le coût de l'aide aux personnes évacuées sont estimés à environ 50 millions de dollars.

Dommages assurés

Les feux de forêt de Yellowknife et de Hay River ont causé plus de 60 millions de dollars de pertes assurées.

Répercussions budgétaires

Les coûts liés aux feux de forêt ont réduit l'excédent territorial prévu de 173 millions de dollars, à environ cinq millions de dollars.

Le gouvernement fédéral a versé une avance de 84,3 millions de dollars par l'intermédiaire du programme des Accords d'aide financière en cas de catastrophe (AAFCC) pour aider à couvrir les coûts de rétablissement.

Qualité de l'air

La fumée a créé des problèmes de qualité de l'air à grande échelle.



Heures de présence de fumée dans l'air

On a constaté un nombre record d'heures où la fumée était présente, soit plus du double des niveaux de 2014, avec notamment plus de 800 heures de présence de fumée dans l'air à Yellowknife.

> La qualité de l'air a été très mauvaise pendant de longues périodes.



Health Impacts Répercussions sur la santé

La mauvaise qualité de l'air a entraîné des consultations à l'hôpital pour des problèmes respiratoires.

L'administratrice en chef de la santé publique des TNO a indiqué qu'il faudrait « des années » pour connaître les effets à long terme

Facteurs contributifs



Changement climatique

Les feux de forêt de 2023 ont été exacerbés par un temps plus chaud et plus sec que d'habitude.

Températures Record

Des températures record ont contribué à des vents violents et à une propagation rapide des feux.



Gestion des Feux

L'ampleur des feux de forêt a dépassé les capacités de lutte contre les feux, ce qui a rendu leur confinement impossible.



Principaux contributeurs et services de soutien d'urgence (SSU)

Le GTNO a fourni plusieurs SSU aux personnes évacuées pendant les incendies de forêts de 2023, tandis que divers organisations ont aidé les collectivités.

Mesures de soutien du GTNO



Collaboration

Le GTNO a coordonné les interventions à l'échelle locale. On a conclu un contrat avec True North Weather Consulting pour des services météorologiques liés aux feux de forêt. On a collaboré avec des partenaires fédéraux pour le soutien logistique.

Soutien du gouvernement fédéral



Forces Armées Canadiennes (FAC)

Les FAC ont déployé 350 personnes et du matériel pour aider à lutter contre les feux de forêt.

Sécurité publique Canada

Coordination de l'intervention du gouvernement fédéral et du soutien logistique. Autorisation de l'aide en réponse à la demande du GTNO.

Services aux Autochtones Canada

Financement offert pour les activités d'intervention et de rétablissement des Premières Nations admissibles par l'intermédiaire du PAGU.

Garde côtière

Fourniture de personnel formé et d'équipements portatifs, notamment des pompes à eau et une remorque mobile servant de poste de commandement.

Aide financière



Programme d'aide aux déplacements en cas d'évacuation du GTNO

Le Programme d'aide aux déplacements en cas d'évacuation a fourni une aide financière aux résidents qui ont dû être évacués en couvrant une partie de leurs frais de déplacement.

Aide financière du GTNO

Le Programme d'aide en cas de perte de revenus pour les personnes évacuées a versé un paiement unique de 750 \$ aux résidents dont le revenu d'emploi a été compromis en raison d'une évacuation prolongée.

Programme d'aide d'urgence en cas d'évacuation (PAUE) du GTNO

Le PAUE a fourni une aide financière unique (800 \$ pour les personnes âgées de 18 ans et plus; 400 \$ pour les personnes à charge mineures) afin d'atténuer les coûts de l'évacuation.

Aide au logement et indemnités journalières du GTNO

Les SSE ont fourni un logement et des indemnités journalières de 128 \$ aux personnes évacuées d'autres collectivités.



Agence canadienne de développement économique du Nord

Contribution de 1 million \$ pour aider les petites entreprises touchées par les feux de forêt par l'intermédiaire du Programme d'aide aux entrepreneurs et au développement économique du GTNO.

Organisations à but non lucratif

Plusieurs organisations sans but non lucratif ont contribué aux efforts d'évacuation et ont aidé les résidents.



Centraide TNO

Centraide TNO a lancé une campagne de collecte de fonds pour soutenir les résidents touchés par les incendies, et a mobilisé les ressources communautaires pour les opérations de secours.

Le GTNO

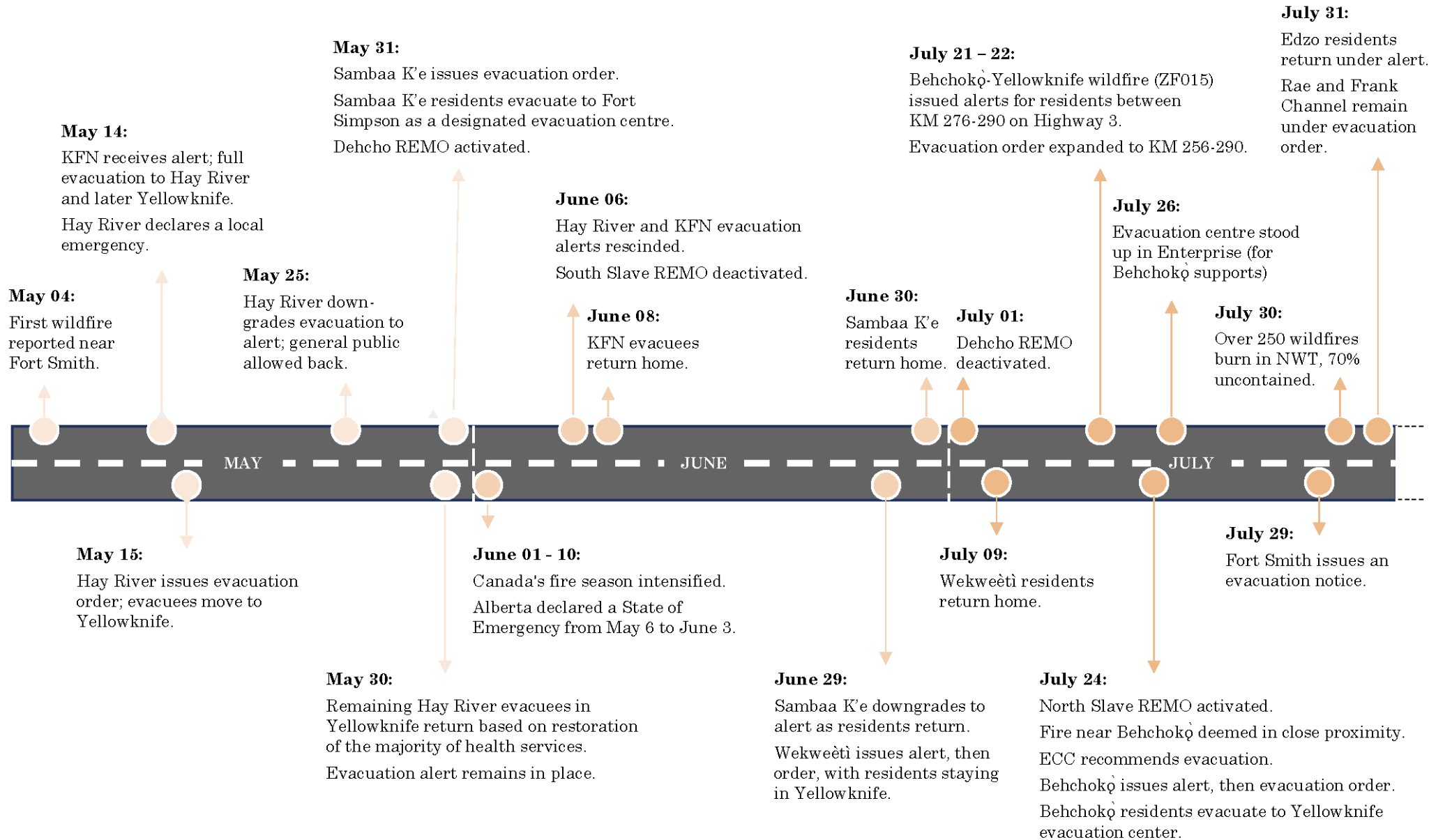
Le GTNO, les administrations communautaires et d'autres groupes ont, à plusieurs reprises, appuyé les interventions locales et les personnes évacuées pendant la saison des feux de forêt de 2023, alors que divers agences et organisations ont aidé les collectivités. Cette liste de toutes les mesures de soutien offertes et fournies aux personnes évacuées des TNO n'est pas exhaustive; cependant, elle représente bien certains des principaux services de soutien offerts.

2023 Wildfire Season Timeline

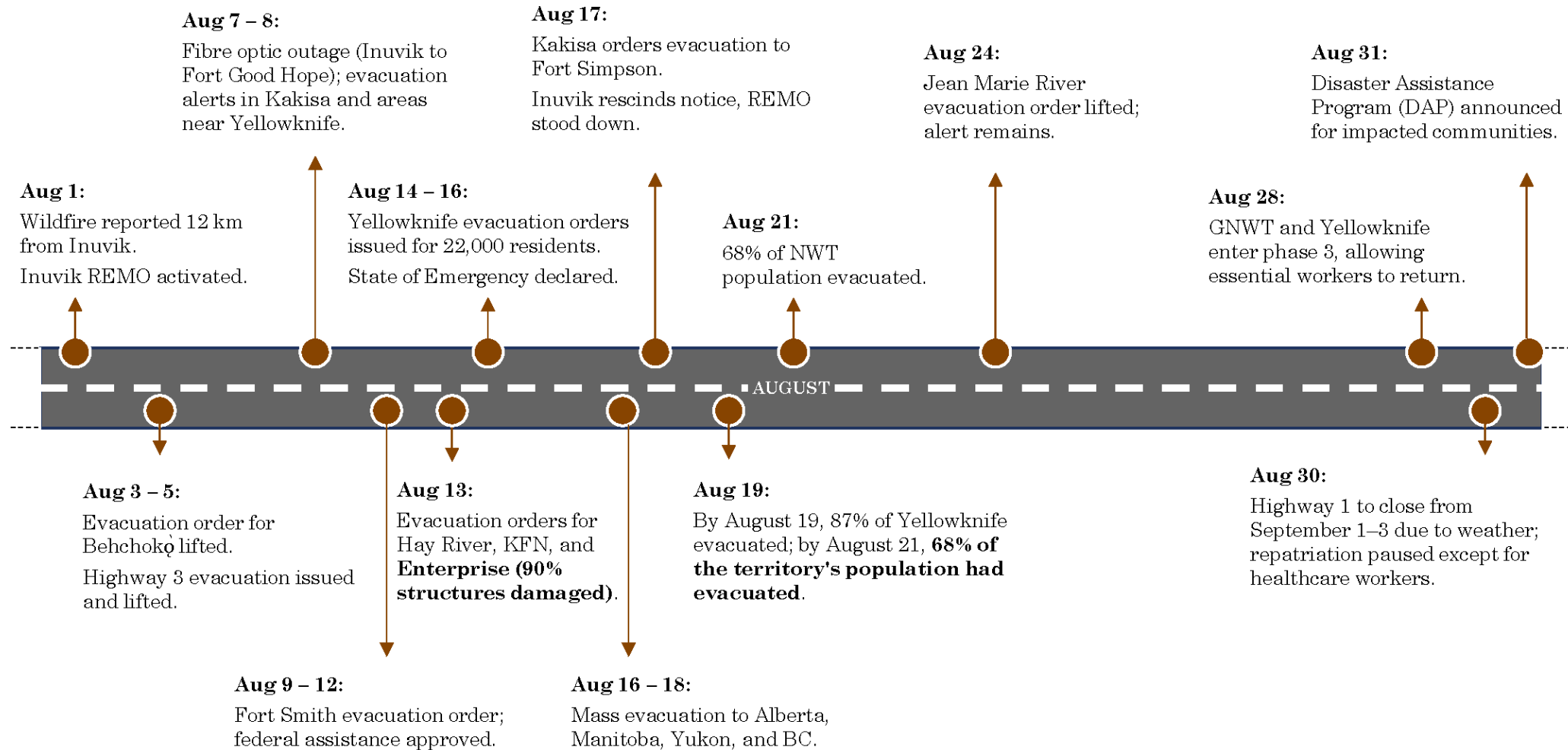
MILESTONE	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
Hay River (First Evacuation)	May 14 - 25				
Kátł'odeeche First Nation (KFN) (First Evacuation)	May 14 - June 8				
Sambaa K'e		May 31 - Jun 29			
Wekweètì			Jun 29 - July 9		
Behchokò			Jul 25 - Aug 4		
Fort Smith				Aug 12 - Sept 18	
Salt River First Nation				Aug 12 - Sept 18	
Jean Marie River				Aug 13 - Aug 24	
Hay River (Second Evacuation)				Aug 13 - Sept 16	
Enterprise				Aug 13 - Sept 22	
Kátł'odeeche First Nation (Second Evacuation)				Aug 13 - Sept 27	
Kakisa				Aug 17 - Sept 9	
Yellowknife				Aug 16 - Sept 6	
Dettah				Aug 16 - Sept 6	
N'dilo				Aug 16 - Sept 6	

MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
<p>04th: First wildfire reported near Fort Smith.</p> <p>14th: KFN receives alert; full evacuation to Hay River and later Yellowknife. Hay River declares a local emergency.</p> <p>15th: Hay River issues evacuation order; evacuees move to Yellowknife.</p> <p>25th: Hay River downgrades evacuation to alert; general public allowed back.</p>	<p>08th: KFN evacuees return home.</p> <p>29th: Wekweètì issues evacuation order.</p>	<p>24th: Behchokò issues evacuation order; residents relocate to Yellowknife.</p> <p>30th: Over 250 active wildfires across NWT; 70% uncontained.</p>	<p>12th: Fort Smith issues evacuation order due to Wood Buffalo Complex Fires.</p> <p>13th: Mass evacuations from Hay River, Enterprise, and KFN. Catastrophic fire damage to Enterprise (90% structures affected).</p> <p>16th: GNWT issues evacuation order for Yellowknife, impacting 22,000 residents.</p> <p>19th: 87% of Yellowknife's population evacuated.</p>	<p>06th: Yellowknife evacuation order downgraded; residents begin returning.</p> <p>15th: Significant return of Yellowknife residents despite fire risks and infrastructure challenges.</p>

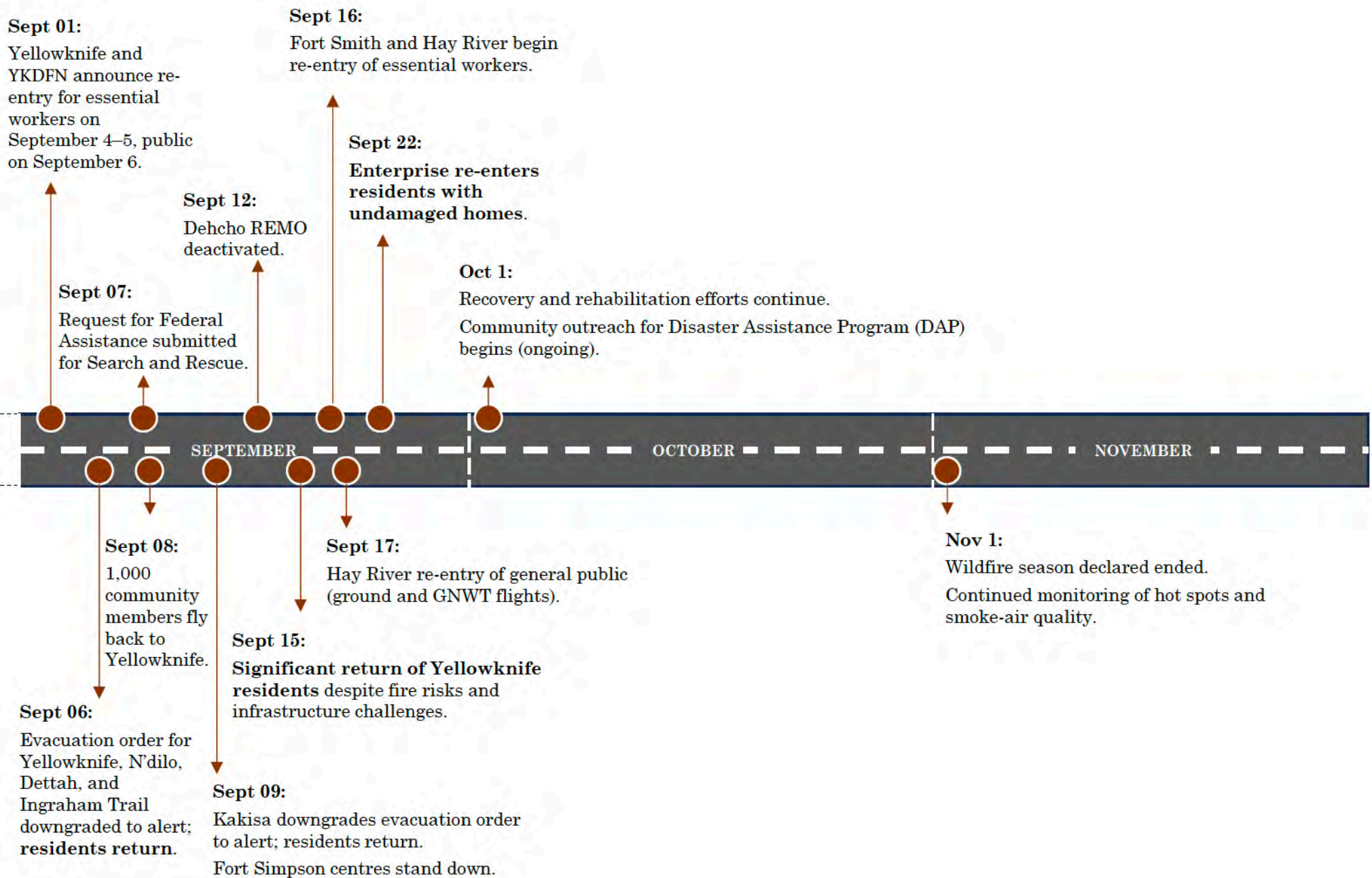
2023 Wildfire Season: Detailed Timeline (May – July)



2023 Wildfire Season: Detailed Timeline (August)



2023 Wildfire Season: Detailed Timeline (September – November)



CHAPTER I

Legislative Wise Practices



Introduction

This section of the report focuses on observations in four key areas of legislative best practices:

- Emergency Management Acts and Regulations;
- 2018 & 2024 NWT Emergency Plans; and
- Jurisdictional comparisons of legislation and plans
- Emergency Management Organizations

Understanding the leading legislative practices in Canada is crucial in creating resilience from an individual level up to a territorial level. Emergency management legislation must reflect a comprehensive and collaborative approach to build resilient communities and organizations. The following are recommended leading practices to establish comprehensive emergency management legislation:

1. **Collaboration and Coordination:** Emphasizing the importance of working together across different levels of Government (municipal/regional, territorial, federal) and Indigenous communities, and self-governing nations, and with various stakeholders (public and private industry) to ensure a unified approach to emergency management
2. **Comprehensive:** Cover all phases of emergency management (mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery) to ensure a holistic strategy.
3. **Proactive Risk Management:** focus on reducing risks before disasters occur, aligning with international frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.³⁰
4. **Financial Support:** Programs like the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangement (DFAA) provide the financial resources to help communities recover from disasters. This highlights the importance of economic resilience.³¹
5. **Standards and Systems:** Establish standards and systems to ensure consistency and effectiveness in emergency response across the Territory.³²

The Acts in emergency management can provide a broad perspective through all pillars (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery). The Acts provides the vision and legal power.

Regulations associated with the Acts will give all relevant participants and the public the necessary tools to accomplish the intent of the Acts. Regulations bring it to a concrete, actionable level, adding the clarity needed for partners to do their jobs.

Regulations in emergency management are valuable for establishing clear guidelines and procedures that ensure a coordinated, efficient, and effective response during disasters. They provide a framework for governments, agencies, and communities to follow, ensuring that resources are appropriately allocated, emergency services are prepared, and the safety of individuals is prioritized.

³⁰ United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction (2019)

³¹ Public Safety Canada (2024)

³² Public Safety Canada (2011)

By setting standards for mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery, regulations help minimize the impact of emergencies, protect public health, and foster resilience in the face of unforeseen events.

The NWT Emergency Management Act

In the current NWT Emergency Management (EM) Act, there are provisions that lead to challenges when put into practice. The most glaring is Provision 18(10) that allows a territorial State of Emergency to nullify a SOLE. This creates jurisdictional confusion on roles and responsibilities as the emergency plays out through all its phases.

The 2018 Emergency Management Act does not clearly identify Indigenous Governments as orders of government.

Indigenous governments in the Territory strongly desire recognition in the NWT Emergency Management Act. They emphasized the importance of aligning the legislation with the principles of Truth and Reconciliation.³³ Specifically, they suggested that the EM Act should acknowledge local authority, promote the inclusion of Indigenous governments in decision-making processes, and support the needs of their communities.³⁴

The Territory would benefit from creating a strong regulatory framework to clearly outline the duties and responsibilities of all rights-holders and stakeholders throughout the Territory. In addition, the Territory ought to ensure thorough consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples and governments when developing the regulations. The GNWT can continue to strive for consistency with the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. These uphold a whole-of-society approach to emergency management and set a foundation for collaborative relationships with Indigenous Peoples and governments in the Territory.

The regulatory framework should include performance measures and metrics. This will assess the effectiveness of emergency management practices and create a culture of continuous improvement.

SUCCESS

Bill 98 is undergoing the legislative process for amendments to include Indigenous Governments, as per the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Legislation Comparison

Based on Table 1 in Appendix C, the NWT Emergency Management Act appears insufficient compared to other jurisdictions in the following areas:

1. Regulatory Support and Standards:

- NWT lacks additional regulations or guidelines supporting its Emergency Management Act. For example:

³³ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-management/emergency-management/emergency-activation/em-taskforce>

³⁴ <https://www.willowspringss.com/case-studies/rebuilding-resilient-indigenous-communities>

- Alberta has regulations like the Disaster Recovery Regulation and the Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation, providing clear direction for municipalities and disaster recovery.
- British Columbia has multiple regulations for compensation, disaster financial assistance, and agreements with Indigenous governing bodies.
- Manitoba and Ontario also have comprehensive regulations guiding financial assistance, disaster recovery, and local authority responsibilities.

2. Local Authority Oversight and Requirements:

- Provinces like Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia, as well as the Yukon, require local authorities to develop prescriptive emergency management plans, assess risks, and conduct training. NWT also delegates these emergency management responsibilities to community governments but lacks prescribed oversight or mandatory standards for these local plans through regulation.

3. Indigenous Agreements:

- British Columbia explicitly integrates Indigenous nations into its emergency management framework through agreements and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. NWT does not highlight the legislation's provisions or coordination agreements with Indigenous governments.
- Considering this need for integration with Indigenous Governments, it is worth evaluating whether the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) is the most appropriate entity to manage emergency management or whether another department, such as Executive and Indigenous Affairs, would be better suited.

4. Risk Assessments and Vulnerable Populations:

- Some provinces, such as the Yukon and British Columbia, emphasize risk assessments considering hazards, vulnerable groups, and cultural safety. However, these aspects are not mentioned in the NWT.
- While risk assessments are mentioned in the Act, they have not been enforced for completion. Identifying and continually updating hazards, risks, and vulnerabilities throughout the Territory is an important step in the journey towards resilience for both the Territory and local authorities.

5. Business Continuity and Recovery Planning:

- The Yukon, Nunavut, British Columbia and other provinces include provisions for business continuity plans and recovery measures to ensure critical services are maintained during emergencies. NWT does not explicitly address these aspects in its legislation.

2018 NWT Emergency Plan

During the 2023 wildfires, the GNWT operated based on the 2018 NWT Emergency Plan. On paper, the Plan should have worked. However, engagement with interested and affected parties indicated that very few people within the GNWT and throughout local governments knew about the Plan; it

had not been broadly trained on or exercised regularly. None of the individuals engaged during this AAR process indicated that the plan had been exercised, and no supporting documentation was provided to suggest that such exercises had taken place. Engagement revealed that some communities had a vague idea that there was a Territorial plan. They understood that the LEMO connected to the REMO which then connected to the TEMO, but only in a linear and rudimentary way. The breakdowns happened when the details of the complexities were not understood by all parties. Knowing this, the GNWT can adjust its training and exercise planning, as well as its education methodologies to those that utilize the Territorial Plan so they better understand how to use the Plan in a complex environment.

"I knew the territorial emergency plan and the legislation. The gaps that I felt and saw were that we did not know how to activate them and work within them- in real time- in an event. We had gaps in application."

- GNWT leader, activated for the Emergency Management Operations for 2023.

The training section of the 2018 Plan lacks depth and thoroughness. This brevity indicates that the Plan may be insufficiently detailed and overly optimistic in its expectations.

The development of an emergency plan is a significant undertaking that demands a collaborative effort between multiple parties. Once the Plan is created, it must be thoroughly communicated to all affected parties, and there must be a comprehensive training and exercise process. In the event of an emergency, everyone must be not only aware of the Plan but also understand their specific role.

"Our department had a business continuity plan and scenario-based emergency plans. We are often responding to events and emergencies [in our department] around the clock and in all seasons. We did not have a tested operational mechanism to intersect with other government departments in a complex, protracted emergency that impacted numerous regions simultaneously or in a sequence." - GNWT leader with an emergency management background.

The 2018 Territorial Plan was found to be too high-level and lacked sufficient detail and practical application. It was neither adequately tested for complex scenarios nor updated to address the evolving risks and hazards of climate change. It was a common theme from consulted parties that they either did not know the plan existed, how to access the plan, or it was not easily accessible when needed due to a lack of paper copies and limited internet connectivity.

"Emergency Management is on the side of everyone's desk" - GNWT Leader

The GNWT must strengthen its emergency business continuity policies by creating more comprehensive public policies. Greater clarity regarding essential and non-essential workers is

needed. Some staff were deemed to be "essential workers" while their colleagues in similar roles were not. An inclusion in people's job descriptions on who would or would not be essential is beneficial to ensure everyone understands their roles in an emergency.

Key departments' roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined, including MACA, Health and Social Services (HSS), ECC, Executive and Indigenous Affairs (EIA), Finance and Infrastructure. While the plan outlined general responsibilities, the lack of training or awareness meant there was confusion on who was responsible for what. For example, two different groups began registering evacuees and it was not clear to the parties involved who had the actual authority to do registrations or the process to follow. As a result, there was either duplication of efforts or responsibilities were missed. Additionally, human resource capacity for emergency mobilization should be enhanced, and the roles and contributions of partners should be clarified.

The transfer of authority in emergencies remains unclear in both legislation and practice. For example, the GNWT had legislative authority to take control during the Yellowknife evacuation response. However, after the evacuation, there was no formal transfer of authority back to the City of Yellowknife, even though the legislation specifies that the local community has jurisdiction for re-entry. Yellowknife eventually resumed command, which created confusion among the public and the GNWT.

2024 Updates to the NWT Emergency Plan

The 2024 updates to the NWT Emergency Plan include changes to the document format, the location of where information can be found in the document, and text that has been added to provide clarity and more fully articulate roles and responsibilities.³⁵

The updated Plan also:

- Revises language to better reflect the purpose of the Plan, which is to establish a coordination and planning framework for emergencies and outline how emergency management partners work together;
- Clarifies roles and responsibilities for Local Authorities as lead for emergency management and response coordination, as well as how Indigenous governments, non-government organizations, and the GNWT can support;
- Clarifies GNWT department and agency-specific roles and responsibilities in supporting community governments when their capacity has been exceeded;
- The Evacuation and Hosting Guidelines annex was revised to clearly state what response and hosting costs community governments can seek GNWT reimbursement for if the

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The GNWT began implementing lessons learned into the NWT Plan immediately following the 2023 wildfires.

³⁵ https://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/sites/maca/files/resources/nwt_emergency_plan_-_april_2024.pdf

Disaster Assistance Policy (DAP) is applied to a disaster event.³⁶ This is in response to requests from community governments for greater clarity and more information.

- The Emergency Communications Protocol annex was revised to better articulate the GNWT's approach to emergency-related communications and outline the tactics that will be used to communicate emergency-related information to the public.
- Unincorporated areas such as the Ingraham Trail, are largely omitted from the 2024 Plan. These areas do not have local government and therefore fall under the legal responsibility of the Territory specific to emergency management. The Plan, however, does not make provisions for its emergency management organization to support unincorporated areas in any phase. Previously, the 2018 Plan provided support by way of the Regional Emergency Management Organization (REMO).

Comparing the NWT Plans Across Canadian Jurisdictions

When comparing the 2018 and 2024 NWT Emergency Plans with other jurisdictions, one key aspect is that other Canadian jurisdictions have a regulatory framework to support their Act and resulting emergency plan(s). Provinces and territories with regulations have better compliance in enforcement of their Act and demonstrated more effective emergency management plan(s). The regulations appear to be helping Canadian communities be more resilient. In addition, regulations require community emergency management plans to be routinely tested, validated, and updated.

Based on Table 2 provided in Appendix D, the areas where the Northwest Territories emergency management framework is insufficient compared to other jurisdictions include:

1. State of Emergency:

- The 2018 NWT Emergency Plan provides a basic outline of declaring a State of Emergency (SOE) but does not go into as much detail as the Yukon Territory, which includes a clear flow chart and outlines the powers granted under an SOE.
- The 2024 NWT Plan does not mention the process for declaring an SOE, leaving a potential gap in procedural clarity. There may be a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) intended to complement the Plan; however, it was not referenced during the engagement process, and no related documentation was provided for review. Its existence or status may become clearer through future discussion or internal review.

2. Emergency Social Services (ESS):

- Both NWT plans (2018 and 2024) rely on the Department of Health and Social Services and the Health and Social Services (HSS) to provide (ESS) upon request but lack detailed descriptions of ESS services or proactive support. In contrast, Alberta

³⁶ <https://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/en/services/community-emergency-planning>

defines ESS comprehensively and outlines how provincial support can assist local authorities.

3. Mutual Aid Agreements:

- While the NWT relies on the federal Emergency Management Mutual Aid (EMMA) agreement³⁷, it does not encourage or define local or regional mutual aid agreements, unlike Alberta and the Yukon, which emphasize the development and maintenance of mutual aid agreements and provide detailed descriptions of their purpose and application.

4. Training and Exercises:

- The NWT 2024 Plan mentions a territorial emergency management training program but does not detail mandatory training or specific requirements for staff. Alberta specifies training and exercise requirements, which ensures preparedness at multiple levels.

5. Provincial/Territorial Support to Communities:

- The NWT plans to describe how LEMO, REMO, and Territorial Emergency Management Organization (TEMO) work together but lack a robust outline of specific support services (e.g., IMT, situational awareness) that many other provinces provide.

6. Scope and Framework:

- Alberta and the Yukon take a more comprehensive approach to defining their emergency management systems, emphasizing resilience-building, modernization, and high-level guidance. The NWT plans focus more narrowly on coordination and response.



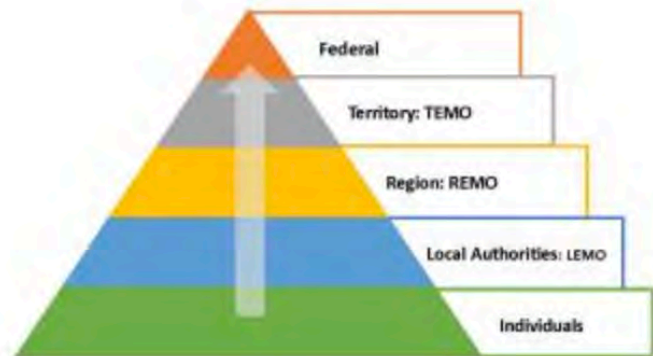
Image 5 Mackenzie Highway (TSI, 2024)

³⁷ https://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/sites/maca/files/resources/nwt_emergency_plan.pdf

Emergency Management Organization(s)

Within the GNWT, multiple emergency management organizations operate across different sectors or geographic areas, each with its own leadership, protocols, and objectives. Initially, as per the NWT Emergency Management Act (2018), a Local Emergency Management Organization (LEMO) will activate. They coordinate with a Regional EMO; if activated, the REMO coordinates with the Territorial EMO (TEMO). While maintaining coordination between each other, the REMO and TEMO serve as a conduit for GNWT

Departments involved in the emergency. This structure may initially seem practical for managing the diversity of tasks required during a crisis. Unfortunately, as demonstrated in 2023, it often leads to confusion, blurred lines of authority, and fragmented communication. The lack of a cohesive and coordinated system appeared to hamper the effectiveness of emergency management during the 2023 wildfires. While the standard approach for emergency management involves multiple layers of coordination, this linear structure in the NWT did not support the intent of its design. Communities throughout the territory lacked competency on this incident organizational model. Throughout the research of this report, themes across communities indicated duplication of efforts, gaps, and a general lack of awareness of the reporting structure. This could be remedied by having a standardized system of response that is trained on through seminars, workshops, lessons, and exercises. These insights may support the GNWT in tailoring its education initiatives, strengthening available tools, and refining its approach to better align with the needs and expectations of EMO participants at all levels identified through this process.



Source MACA Emergency Management in the NWT (2024)

Structural weaknesses within the governance framework became apparent as wildfire events began compounding. The LEMO/REMO/TEMO system, while designed to provide accountability and oversight, proved ineffective during a large-scale disaster. Competing layers of authority created delays in decision-making and confusion about jurisdictional boundaries and roles throughout the 2023 wildfire season. There was confusion from communities and GNWT staff understanding how TEMO operates internally and its interoperability with LEMOs. This fragmentation highlighted the need for a more unified command structure and an emergency governance model that prioritizes speed, clarity, and collaboration during crises. A lack of cohesion in preparedness planning left smaller, remote municipalities particularly vulnerable.

Establishing a dedicated wrap-around emergency management model such as an agency, rather than relying on the current as-needed linear EMO approach, is essential for enhancing resilience and preparedness in the Northwest Territories. Agency models effectively oversee all phases of emergency management. This fosters a culture of preparedness and ensures a nimble and coordinated response to emergencies and disasters.

This agency organization would be responsible for:

- Facilitating collaboration between federal, territorial, and local governments, along with public and private organizations, to ensure a unified approach to emergency management while ensuring the local authority maintain ownership and authority for the emergency;
- Implement strategies to reduce the risk of disasters through proactive planning;
- Develop and maintain comprehensive territorial emergency plans and provided clear guidelines to communities for their local plans;
- Conduct regular training and exercises to ensure all relevant parties are aware of these plans and how they complement one another rather than replace or hand off to one another;
- Provide emergency management in unincorporated and special areas; and
- Support communities to recover from disaster by providing resources, guidance, and assistance as a wraparound service.

Challenges of Multiple Emergency Management Organizations

Authority Confusion: Without a clearly defined chain of command, emergency management becomes fragmented, leading to inefficiencies. One of the most significant challenges of having multiple emergency management organizations (LEMO, REMO, TEMO) is the confusion surrounding authority and a lack of understanding the reporting structure. When multiple organizations are responsible for managing a crisis, the roles and responsibilities of each entity may overlap or conflict. This can lead to decision-making delays, conflicting orders, and uncertainty among responders and the public. Staff highlighted that delays led to many team members making decisions they knew were out of their scope, but they were required to support.

"My team were caught in the cross-hairs regarding decision-making. Our team was supporting firefighting operations and we were sharing information with other ministries. It was very stressful to maintain cadence of information sharing for decision-making within two operations: firefighting and emergency management. Of course, there is tension during an emergency but there was heightened tension in 2023 between ill-defined incident command structures." - Senior leader, GNWT

Fragmented Communication: Effective communication is critical during any emergency response, but when several organizations operate independently, communication channels become disjointed. This was especially prevalent in the 2023 wildfires, where communication channels were disrupted due to geographical and physical challenges as communication lines were destroyed. This fragmentation can result in critical information not being disseminated swiftly, hindering the overall effectiveness of the response. This was prominent in evacuation decisions, fire behaviour analysis, movement communications and resource availability.

Inefficient Resource Allocation: In a system with multiple emergency management organizations, resources may be duplicated, misallocated, or unavailable when needed most. There may be competing demands for the same resources, further exacerbating delays in response. Resources were stretched within the region during the emergency. With the central hub of

Yellowknife facing its own evacuation, this strained resource allocation even more. Additionally, several remote communities, unaffected by the wildfires, were affected by resource availability critical to preparing for the upcoming winter season.

“Remote communities like ours that rely on Yellowknife for supplies which include food and medical supplies were left stranded and our resources were nearly depleted when without notice Yellowknife was evacuated.” - Community Member, Thicho Traditional Territory

Inconsistent Training and Standards: Although EMOs within the GNWT stated they used ICS Canada standards, a lack of coordinated training between the various organizations was noted. Some members of the groups were unaware of any formal training initiatives to have the EMOs work together. Additional engagement identified a lack of awareness and training to utilize plans or learnings from recent exercises.

Overburdened Incident Command Systems: When multiple organizations are involved in an emergency, ICS – an internationally recognized standard to coordinate emergency response and recovery - can become overburdened. Although it appears there were many members within the ICS command structures (where identified), the general feedback indicated that few were trained or comfortable in their roles. Many people were thrust into positions with little background knowledge and adapted on the fly during the incident.

“We had very shallow bench strength to respond. Teams worked beyond a healthy capacity. Government capacity to staff the emergency response structure was very limited and there were human resource gaps in how people within the government could be activated. Emergency social supports capacity was very low [with high demands for this team] and there was a huge hesitancy to ask for assistance from subject-matter experts.” - Senior leader, GNWT

The challenges multiple emergency management organizations pose within a single jurisdiction are significant but not insurmountable. By dismantling fragmented systems and transitioning to a unified emergency management organization through a territorial agency, jurisdictions can eliminate confusion, improve coordination, and enhance the overall effectiveness of response efforts. With clear lines of authority, streamlined communication, and efficient resource allocation, a unified system supports swift emergency responses that are targeted, and well-coordinated - ultimately saving lives and minimizing the impact of disasters.

Recommendations: A Path Forward

1. **Update the GNWT Emergency Management Act to mandate preparedness standards for municipalities and Indigenous Governments, supported by regular audits.**
 - **Rationale:** Aligning the NWT Emergency Plan with municipal and community emergency plans supports a more seamless integration and avoids jurisdictional conflicts. This approach respects Indigenous self-governance by empowering Indigenous Governments to participate in emergency preparedness efforts as they deem appropriate including receiving the necessary support from the GNWT. This approach needs to recognize not all Indigenous Government structures and capacities are similar. This aligns with the principles of reconciliation and collaboration.
2. **Develop prescriptive emergency management regulations:** Develop prescriptive regulations to ensure adherence to best practices and accountability that will support the NWT Emergency Management Act. Make it enforceable. Use an all-hazards approach.
 - **Rationale:** Clear regulations will provide structure, ensure adherence to best practices, and help with accountability and sustainability. Regulations provide a more detailed interpretation of the framework, tools and mechanisms necessary to operationalize the Act.
3. **Amend existing territorial legislation to describe how a territorial State of Emergency (SOE) interacts with / interfaces with a State of Local Emergency (SOLE).**
 - **Rationale:** Amending the legislation explicitly defines the roles, responsibilities, and authority of municipal, territorial and Indigenous governments during overlapping emergencies, reducing confusion and ensuring effective governance and resource allocation. It minimizes conflicting directives, streamlines response and recovery, and prevents public confusion. Clear protocols for how SOLEs and Territorial States of Emergency interact build public trust in a unified and prepared government.
4. **Create one dedicated territorial Emergency Management Agency for the NWT, providing coordination support to local authorities leading the emergency response(s).** It must have its own defined governance to ensure operational independence while still maintaining accountability.
 - **Rationale:** Adopting a single-agency approach will streamline emergency management by reducing layers of EMOs and prioritizing population needs and risks. The agency will lead, coordinate, and, when necessary, direct territorial emergency functions.
5. **Legislate minimum ICS training:** Ensure that ICS training is mandated and completed across all relevant personnel. Include minimum training for Elected Officials (e.g. ICS 402) and specialized roles.

- **Rationale:** Standardizing ICS adoption across the Territory at all EMO levels will streamline operations, clarify roles, and improve decision-making during emergencies. This will also bolster the capacity across the Territory to draw from in future long-duration emergencies.
6. **Legislate minimum exercises for the GNWT and communities, including type and frequency.** Support and hold accountable the completion of training and exercises in person.
- **Rationale:** Regular exercises will ensure that personnel and communities are better prepared and can effectively respond to emergencies. The training will provide a baseline on which communities progressively challenge their skills and abilities from memorization to application through tabletop exercises, drills, and functional and full-scale exercises.

Improvement Opportunities

- i. While considering legislation changes, the NWT 2024 Plan can still be updated to reflect the above recommendations.
- ii. Incorporate the Canadian Standards Association “Plan Do Check Act” model into the NWT Plan as a best practice.



Image 6 Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, (TSI, 2024)

CHAPTER II

Organizational Preparedness



Introduction

This section will explore the territorial systemic challenges revealed during the 2023 wildfires, highlighting lessons observed and pathways to building a more robust, scalable, and responsive emergency management system for the GNWT in the future. It focuses on:

- GNWT Preparedness (The System);
- Mutual Aid;
- Workforce Sustainability; and
- ICS and Training


The preparedness phase of emergency management involves a series of proactive measures aimed at ensuring readiness for potential emergencies. This phase includes activities like developing and updating emergency plans, conducting training and exercises, and mitigating risks.

The 2023 wildfire season in the Northwest Territories (NWT) was unlike any other in recent memory. It was defined not only by the sheer scale and intensity of the wildfires but also by the unprecedented convergence of concurrent emergencies. Multiple communities faced simultaneous crises, straining every aspect of the GNWT's EM system.

"We didn't just face wildfires. We faced an endurance test that our system was not built to pass." – Community Leader.

The GNWT and communities endured what many described as "compound crises," characterized by simultaneous wildfires, supply chain disruptions, and communication breakdowns. The urgency of mass evacuations introduced further layers of complexity, with each new challenge triggering vulnerabilities in other critical systems.

This extraordinary complexity underscores the need for an EM framework built on redundancy, adaptability, and foresight. While the GNWT's existing preparedness framework has effectively managed smaller-scale emergencies in the past, the 2023 wildfires highlight the necessity of scaling up to meet the demands of concurrent and compounding disasters.



SUCCESS
Amid all the
compounding
emergencies, the
resilience and dedication
of individuals,
businesses, municipal
leaders and territorial
agencies shone through.

"We faced wildfires before, but never on this scale. It felt like every system we relied on was breaking down, one after another." – Municipal Leader

The System

The 2023 wildfire season illuminated critical vulnerabilities in the GNWT's EM system and systemic gaps across municipalities, NGOs, and Indigenous communities. This disaster tested how prepared the Northwest Territories are for all-hazard, large-scale emergencies. From the onset, it became evident that the system was not equipped to handle the events' scale, duration, or complexity. The prolonged nature of the wildfires and overlapping emergencies tested the endurance of emergency teams, governance structures, and the affected communities.

"It felt like no one was steering the ship. We were left to figure things out on our own." - Municipal Leader

Pre-Planning

The 2023 wildfire season demonstrated that while certain emergency preparedness elements existed across GNWT and community governments, the absence of coordinated and well-rehearsed planning significantly weakened the territory's capacity to manage the scale, duration, and complexity of the events. Emergency plans were present at both territorial and community levels; however, they were often out of date, under-exercised, or not well understood by those expected to activate or implement them.

In several communities, emergency plans did exist but had not been tested through live or scenario-based exercises. As noted in community reflections, many community leaders were unaware of their plans' contents, or found they lacked practical details such as clear evacuation decision-making points, defined command roles, or updated contact lists. This lack of operational clarity delayed decisions and reduced confidence in local response structures.

This challenge was magnified by the absence of pre-established activation decision models for evacuations, which became a critical point of failure in multiple regions. In Hay River, Fort Smith, Behchokq and Enterprise, the lack of defined evacuation thresholds resulted in delayed departures, with some evacuees fleeing "through flames," as cited in evacuee testimony. Trigger points, where defined, were not widely understood, not operationalized, or lacked alignment with fire behavior modeling.

Additionally, GNWT's business continuity plans were inconsistent across departments and did not hold up under the prolonged and complex activation of territorial resources. As discussed, many departments were unable to sustain operations after relocating, and senior leadership roles experienced notable attrition without clear backfill protocols.

"We were flying blind. Many of us were doing jobs we'd never been trained for, simply because there was no one else." - REMO Representative

There were bright spots in early-stage readiness, however. Some communities, notably Kakisa and Kát'odeeche First Nation, Jean Marie River, and Wekweeti demonstrated initiative and foresight by evacuating Elders and vulnerable individuals ahead of formal orders—showcasing how community-level relationships and informal planning compensated for gaps in formal systems. These examples highlight the potential of empowering local governments, including indigenous governments, and incorporating community knowledge more deliberately into GNWT-wide preparedness frameworks.

Overall, while elements of pre-planning were present, they were not scaled, practiced, or sufficiently integrated across jurisdictions. The 2023 wildfire season showed that without coordinated and regularly validated plans—including clear evacuation criteria, mutual aid staging processes, and departmental continuity strategies—the system defaulted to improvisation at critical moments. Moving forward, the GNWT will need to ensure that emergency plans and standard operating procedures are not only created, but shared, exercised, and embedded into the organizational culture across all levels of government.

Planning with NGOs

The 2023 wildfires highlighted critical gaps in how non-governmental organizations (NGOs), not-for-profits, and Indigenous-serving agencies are integrated into the GNWT's emergency planning framework. While many of these organizations were prepared and willing to provide frontline assistance, there were few pre-existing protocols or formal partnerships to activate and coordinate their participation effectively.

In multiple communities, NGOs with longstanding relationships, logistical capacity, and cultural competency were either underutilized or engaged late in the response. Several organizations shared that they were not part of pre-disaster planning or table-top exercises, despite offering services that could have filled critical gaps in supporting evacuees, particularly those from vulnerable populations. This lack of integration resulted in avoidable delays and inequities in service delivery.

A not-for-profit leader noted, *"We were not partners to the government to help people impacted by these events. We could have done more if they had just asked."* The absence of role clarity created missed opportunities to support Indigenous evacuees, those with medical and mobility issues, and those facing language or trust barriers when accessing government services.

Furthermore, there was no shared communication strategy or registration data-sharing mechanism between GNWT and community-based organizations. This limited the ability of NGOs to mobilize volunteers, locate vulnerable clients, or deliver wraparound services in host communities. These disconnects were particularly pronounced in the initial 48–72 hours of Yellowknife's evacuation and resettlement efforts.

"When Yellowknife shut down, it felt like the entire system collapsed. Communities like ours didn't know where to turn." - Evacuee Reflection

Where informal partnerships did emerge, they were largely based on existing personal or organizational relationships—not formal emergency management protocols. This further emphasizes the need to shift from ad hoc coordination to structured, pre-planned integration of NGOs into territorial and community-level emergency management plans.

Going forward, GNWT should identify and pre-engage key service partners (e.g., the Canadian Red Cross, local housing support agencies, Indigenous wellness organizations, aging adults supports) as part of its whole-of-society planning approach, including ESS, evacuation supports and hosting out of community supports. These relationships should be reinforced through memoranda of understanding (MOUs), joint training, and inclusion in the GNWT Emergency Plan. Doing so will not only expand surge capacity but ensure that culturally relevant, trauma-informed supports are available from the outset of future responses.

Mutual Aid

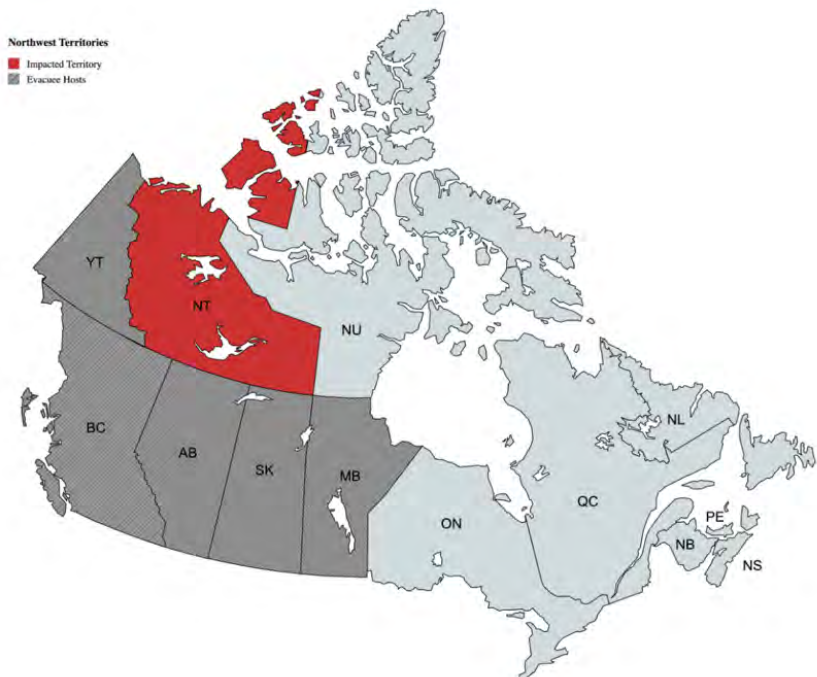
The 2023 wildfire season demonstrated the essential role that mutual aid partnerships played in sustaining emergency operations once the GNWT's internal capacity was exceeded. The Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre (CIFFC) facilitated resource-sharing agreements, allowing provinces and territories to support each other during emergencies. For instance, the Government of Yukon sent additional wildfire personnel to Alberta and the NWT to help manage the ongoing wildfire incidents.³⁸ Indigenous Services Canada has emergency management service agreements to support First Nations in the NWT, Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba.³⁹ Additionally, the NWT is part of the Emergency Management Mutual Aid Agreement (EMMA), a joint agreement with all provinces and territories for inter-jurisdictional emergency management assistance.⁴⁰ This interprovincial support significantly expanded GNWT's capacity to respond to concurrent fire fronts.

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Asking for help from other provinces and territories was an excellent decision and greatly supported the GNWT's ability to provide emergency management services.

Alberta facilitated the support and accommodation of NWT evacuees, ensuring that those displaced by the wildfires had access to necessary resources and shelter. **This proved to be another significant success.** Mutual aid agreements with British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and other bordering jurisdictions were either limited in scope or not in place, which delayed resource mobilization in the event that Alberta's capacity became constrained. This was a real risk given Alberta's own wildfire challenges during the same period.

These pre-planned mutual aid agreements were crucial for providing timely assistance and sharing resources during large-scale emergencies. **It's a great example of collaboration and solidarity among regions facing similar challenges.**⁴¹



³⁸ <https://open.yukon.ca/sites/default/files/02-cs-yukon-sends-additional-wildfire-personnel-alberta-nwt-may-31-2023.pdf>

³⁹ <https://www.isc-sac.gc.ca/eng/1669207681911/1669207720136>

⁴⁰ https://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/sites/maca/files/resources/nwt_emergency_plan.pdf

⁴¹ <https://www.firefightingincanada.com/wildfires-disasters-underscore-need-for-mutual-aid-agreements-between-indigenous-nations-in-alberta/>

Workforce Sustainability

The GNWT's emergency management workforce faced significant challenges during the wildfire response, highlighting critical gaps in capacity, expertise, and support systems that can be addressed through preparedness planning. There was no pre-existing plan for managing long-duration or compounding disasters, leading to exhausted resources and insufficient strategic foresight. Moving forward, it is essential to safeguard the GNWT workforce to support continuity of operations by proactively addressing these gaps.

Many key positions remained unfilled or were staffed by individuals without sufficient training or experience, leaving responders to prepare for and operate under immense pressure for prolonged periods. The reliance on informal personal networks rather than formalized processes further strained operations, creating inconsistencies and inefficiencies in critical decision-making. Jurisdictional tensions, particularly between territorial and municipal authorities, compounded these challenges, emphasizing the need for more explicit pre-defined roles and collaborative frameworks.

"People were asked to be in (emergency) roles because they knew people or had shown an interest in helping in the past. There didn't appear to be a framework or a process. It was very confusing and very stressful. If I was asked again, I would not proceed. I need distance and time away from emergency management." - GNWT public servant.

The scale and protracted timelines of the wildfires exposed a lack of sustainability within the emergency management workforce. Fatigue set in quickly. Inadequate system bench strength and a lack of experienced personnel to lead complex emergencies further compounded the challenges.

"By the midpoint of the season, we were running on fumes. We lacked both the numbers and expertise to handle the evolving crisis." - REMO Representative

Responders described the overwhelming toll of working long hours under crisis conditions without adequate resources to sustain their efforts. One responder reflected, *"We were so focused on putting out fires, literally and figuratively, that we forgot to take care of ourselves and each other."* This sentiment underscores the need for a trauma-informed approach to preparedness. Prolonged exposure to high-stress environments, coupled with insufficient access to mental health services, left

What does "trauma-informed" mean in Emergency Management?

A system that:

- Acknowledges the emotional and psychological toll of crisis
- Ensures leadership and staff are trained in stress-informed communication
- Design systems to avoid re-traumatization
- Supports frontline staff through embedded mental health services
- Prioritizes psychological safety and dignity in evacuations, housing, and service delivery
- Includes Indigenous healing and culturally relevant supports

many responders vulnerable. The planning framework lacked integrated mental health support for both responders and the public.

Gaps in business continuity planning led to leadership attrition at pivotal moments, further weakening the workforce's ability to sustain operations over time. Training and development efforts, while resource heavy and costly, must be expanded to build confidence and resilience among responders, ensuring they are better equipped to handle the complexities of future events.

GNWT must prioritize capacity-building efforts, address mental health as a core component of preparedness planning, and adopt scalable models tailored to the region's unique challenges to sustain its emergency management workforce. By addressing workforce sustainability through improved training, formalized processes, and the integration of trauma-informed practices, GNWT can strengthen its emergency management system and support both responders and affected communities in future crises.

Feedback highlighted the emotional toll on responders (and community members) during the wildfire response. The absence of trauma-informed practices contributed to burnout, decision fatigue, and diminished trust. Integrating trauma-informed principles—such as recognizing the signs of trauma, fostering safe environments, and promoting collaboration—can strengthen emergency management systems and support recovery.

ICS & Training

The absence of a consistent Incident Command System (ICS) application across the Territory (geographically and jurisdictionally) significantly hindered coordination and decision-making during the response. Roles and responsibilities were unclear without a standardized approach, and overall incident management suffered. This lack of structure contributed to confusion, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities to address evolving challenges effectively. Training gaps were apparent, with little mandate for regular ICS training or comprehensive exercises. Many personnel had only theoretical knowledge of emergency management, lacking the hands-on experience needed for such a crisis. It was not evident if ESS was using the ICS system or had been trained on it as opposed to personal networks, work experience within the GNWT's departments and relationships with municipal and Indigenous leaders.

It is estimated that fewer than 50% of individuals assigned to ICS roles during the 2023 wildfire season had completed ICS 100-level training or higher. Formal training records were decentralized, making it difficult to identify qualified personnel during activation.

There was little evidence that ESS personnel had been trained on ICS, resulting in parallel but disconnected operations at reception and evacuation centres. Post-event feedback indicated a strong desire among ESS leaders to be formally trained and integrated.

SUCCESS

The GNWT has begun widespread training on the Incident Command System to build capacity. This includes staff and elected officials which will help with role clarity in emergencies.

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“...[we] created surge capacity by calling in anyone with problem solving skills or ICS...[we] just used them out of need.” - GNWT Public Servant
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A critical gap was the lack of adequately trained Incident Management Teams (IMTs). Responders were not equipped to coordinate or manage complex emergencies effectively, underscoring the need for comprehensive training programs tailored to developing IMTs. Experienced teams are essential to improving decision-making, operational efficiency, and outcomes during high-stakes, dynamic situations.

Key ICS tools such as Situation Reports (ICS 209), Resource Status Tracking (ICS 219), and Incident Action Plans (ICS 202–206) were either inconsistently used or not initiated until late in the season. This hampered both operational coordination and responder accountability.

Elected officials would have benefited from knowledge of emergency management protocols and their roles within the ICS framework. This gap frequently led to misaligned expectations and decisions that slowed response efforts and hindered operational efficiencies. Training for elected officials is critical, as their understanding - or lack thereof - profoundly impacts incident management success. Since the 2023 wildfires, ICS 402 training has been implemented among some elected officials.

.....
"Political interference was more cumbersome than operations, yet no one wanted to make decisions." – Senior Leader, GNWT
.....

The current system also revealed deficiencies in strategic and tactical planning expertise. Responses were fragmented and less effective without sufficient training and experience in these areas. Jurisdictional silos further compounded these issues, as decisions were sometimes made without coordination or consultation. These silos, coupled with insufficient inter-jurisdictional training, led to misaligned priorities and reduced overall effectiveness. The lack of a Unified Command between GNWT, municipalities, and Indigenous governments led to overlapping operational priorities, decision-making delays, and public confusion. Establishing Unified Command structures early could have resolved jurisdictional tension and improved clarity.

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“Jurisdictional silos were a real problem. Decisions were being made without coordination, and sometimes without consultation....non-operational people were making decisions.” – TEMO Representative
.....

ICS principles offer a proven framework for managing emergencies, and their mandated adoption across all levels of the GNWT - from elected officials to first responders - would streamline operations, clarify responsibilities, and enhance decision-making under pressure. Training on ICS principles also helps build surge capacity by preparing a pool of trained personnel capable of filling critical gaps and sustaining operations during prolonged events. This approach reduces responder burnout and enhances the continuity of operations.

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“We want and will support ICS training in our community. It is essential for us for the future- so that we can structure ourselves to manage our citizens, and support them, during future emergencies. We know we will have more emergencies in climate change.” - Th̓chq̓ leader, Behchok̓.

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Moreover, ICS principles directly support safety and accountability by promoting structured communication and a transparent chain of command. These principles ensure that responders understand their roles and responsibilities, which mitigates risks, improves situational awareness, and protects both staff and responders. Adopting ICS "truths," such as "The organization adapts to the incident" and "Management by objectives is key to success," reinforces how training on core ICS concepts directly improves outcomes.

.....

“We are willing and able to be trained in ICS. We want it. It will empower us. It will allow us to lead and help our community members in times of crisis. It will permit us to work in a system that our people are often left behind in.” - Indigenous leader and Elder, Deh Cho, Treaty 11

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The unique challenges of the Northwest Territories' vast geography and relatively small population create inherent difficulties in sustaining a robust and resilient emergency management workforce. Traditional emergency management models, while valuable, may not fully align with the region's realities. To address this, GNWT should investigate alternatives that leverage ICS principles of scalability and adaptability, ensuring that future responses are more efficient and outcome-focused.

.....

"We have people with emergency management experience in the Territory. We need to know where they are and to what level they are trained. We need to have this capacity documented and accessed in crisis. We did not have a mechanism to see our emergency management workforce in the communities and across the territorial government." - Senior leader, the GNWT.

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The lack of organizational depth exposed responders to burnout and operational delays, while gaps in business continuity planning resulted in leadership attrition at critical moments. Communities affected by wildfires emphasized the need for culturally sensitive mental health services, particularly for Indigenous populations. Integrating these into the GNWT emergency framework is essential for a trauma-informed approach that benefits both responders and community members. Confidence stems from robust training and practice and can help responders better manage the stresses of emergency environments.

Recommendations: A Path Forward

1. **Incorporate ICS into day-to-day operations for GNWT staff (e.g., public works or community events).**
 - Rationale: Regular exposure to ICS outside emergency contexts builds familiarity and improves operational efficiency during crises.
2. **Develop a centralized system that tracks ICS certifications across all government departments ensuring a comprehensive repository of trained personnel.**
 - Rationale: Centralized tracking ensures consistency in training standards, creates a database from which to support surge capacity in times of need, and identifies gaps in qualified personnel.
3. **Continue to develop recurring, scenario-based training for IMTs and elected officials, emphasizing their unique roles within ICS.**
 - Rationale 1: IMTs need tailored training to confidently manage dynamic incidents and coordinate effectively.
 - Rationale 2: Elected officials often hinder response efforts when their roles are misunderstood; training empowers them to contribute constructively.
4. **Establish a comprehensive list of essential services personnel and partners before an emergency occurs to ensure uninterrupted critical operations during crises.**

This effort should be integrated into the whole-of-government approach to mobilization, leveraging human resources capacities to support and streamline the process.

 - Rationale: Identifying essential services beforehand will enable a swift and seamless response, maintaining critical operations during emergencies.
5. **Engage Indigenous governments in emergency management programs.**
 - Rationale: Building culturally inclusive emergency response plans enhances local resilience and leverages unique knowledge.
6. **Train ESS personnel on ICS integration.**
 - Rationale: Embedding ESS within the ICS structure ensures seamless support and resource alignment for evacuees.
7. **Apply lessons observed and integrate findings from past NWT AARs.** Establish a structured process to review, prioritize, and act on AAR findings.
 - Rationale: Integrating findings from past reviews will help avoid repeated mistakes and strengthen response capabilities. Past AARs (e.g., Hay River flooding, COVID-19) identified recurring gaps that must be addressed to prevent repeated failures. Sustained improvement requires clear timelines and accountability, especially during personnel or government transitions.

8. **Foster formal partnerships and advanced collaboration:** Formalize detailed emergency management mutual aid agreements with Alberta, BC, and other jurisdictions, Integrate NGOs and not-for-profits into GNWT emergency management frameworks as subject matter experts. Identify, pre-plan for and leverage volunteers, as they will be invaluable during response and recovery.
 - Rationale: Partnerships enhance resource sharing and reduce dependency on internal capacity. Relationships built pre-crisis ensure smoother operations during emergencies. Partnerships create surge capacity and capability. Volunteers provide essential support and can help communities recover more quickly.

Improvement Opportunities

- i. Establish a Territorial All Hazards Incident Management Team (AHIMT). Address jurisdictional silos by centralizing emergency coordination under a unified command structure. A single point of command ensures that decisions are made collaboratively and effectively.
- ii. Practice unified incident command with the City of Yellowknife and the other urban municipalities in the GNWT. Include partners and external agencies.
- iii. Collaborate with partner agencies to create accessible evacuation plans for vulnerable populations. This will include the need for information-sharing protocols amongst all partners during planning and response. Equitable planning ensures that all community members, including those with mobility or transportation challenges, are safely evacuated.
- iv. Collaborate with partner agencies to build a long-term housing and food security strategy for post-disaster recovery. Addressing basic needs reduces community displacement and accelerates recovery.⁴²
- v. Invest in infrastructure resilience, including flood barriers, fire breaks, and climate adaptation measures. Protecting critical infrastructure reduces cascading failures, and proactive adaptation strategies mitigate long-term vulnerabilities.
- vi. Through partnerships, develop redundancy in supply chains to minimize disruptions when Yellowknife is affected. Diversifying supply sources ensures continued access to critical resources during crises.
- vii. Update resource databases with vendor contracts, equipment inventories, and mutual aid agreements. A centralized repository enables rapid deployment, reduces response delays, and contributes to fiscally responsible choices.
- viii. Create a long-term strategy for GNWT workforce resilience, including training pipelines and mentorship programs. Building a surge workforce ensures continuity during prolonged

⁴² <https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>

emergencies. Reducing reliance on a small pool of experienced individuals prevents burnout and system collapse.

- ix. Create fatigue management plans for the GNWT workforce that include shift length maximums, activation duration, and position redundancy. This includes not only those within the Emergency Management Organizations, but also essential workers in other departments supporting critical functions and business continuity.
- x. Ensure critical incident stress management mental health and wellness support for GNWT IMTs. Consider support from organizations like the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation of Canada.
- xi. Review existing business continuity plans for all departments within the GNWT and ensure regular training occurs so that theory can become practice.

Trauma-Informed Emergency Management Toolkit

Toolkit for Implementing Trauma-Informed Practices:

To support the integration of trauma-informed principles, the following resources and strategies are recommended:

- **Training Modules:** Develop sessions on recognizing trauma, building resilience, and fostering supportive environments.
- **Policy Development:** Review and revise policies to incorporate trauma-informed language and practices.
- **Community Engagement:** Collaborate with Indigenous communities and other stakeholders to ensure culturally appropriate approaches.
- **Evaluation Metrics:** Establish indicators to assess the effectiveness of trauma-informed initiatives. These tools align with national guidelines and can be tailored to the unique needs of GNWT.

Trauma-Informed Operational Checklist

- **Physical & Emotional Safety:** Clearly defined safe spaces, rest areas, and emotional support access points are identified during operations.
- **Trust & Transparency:** Regular, transparent updates are provided during emergencies; clear rationale is shared for all decisions.
- **Cultural Relevance:** Indigenous and community advisors consulted regularly; trauma-informed language guidelines provided to communications teams.
- **Empowerment & Choice:** Emergency responders and evacuees provided choices whenever feasible; feedback actively sought and integrated.
- **Collaboration:** Regular meetings held with NGOs, Indigenous organizations, and mental health agencies to coordinate trauma-informed care and support.

CHAPTER III

Community & Personal Preparedness



Introduction

This section will explore the preparedness at the local and individual level. It focuses on:

- Household preparedness;
- Community preparedness; and
- FireSmart™

Data for this section includes community visits, a public survey, one-on-one interviews with families, community members, leaders and elected officials. Questions were asked relating to household preparedness for emergency evacuations, being away from home, the safety of their property and belongings, how to access supports, and their perceptions of being supported during the wildfires.

Although legislative responsibility for community emergency management lies elsewhere, the GNWT's ability to successfully manage emergencies at the territorial level is closely interrelated with community and personal preparedness. An informed understanding of these perspectives is essential for shaping a whole-of-government, whole-of-society emergency management program that is resilient, scalable, and capable of protecting the people and communities of the Northwest Territories.

Community readiness directly influences the scale of support the territorial government must provide during emergencies, with gaps at the local level often escalating into territorial challenges. Strong community and individual preparedness reduce demand on territorial systems, while weaknesses can significantly increase resource needs, operational complexity, and public risk.

Emergency management is inherently interconnected across jurisdictions. Community vulnerabilities, capacity, and perceptions of risk directly impact territorial outcomes, particularly in high-risk events such as wildfires and evacuations. By understanding local realities, the GNWT can better align its programs, prioritize risk reduction efforts, allocate resources strategically, and design public education initiatives that resonate with community needs. This insight strengthens not just operational response, but also prevention and recovery efforts, helping to build long-term resilience across the territory.



Image 7 Northern Lights in Fort Simpson (TSI, 2024)

Integrating community and personal preparedness perspectives strengthens public trust, improves system-wide coordination and supports territorial emergency management programs to be responsive, scalable and effective.

Community members and Elders referred to the past as having experienced low water/drought conditions and fires, but none were to the ferocity of 2023. Community members recalled fires in the 1930s that threatened communities, and then in 1998, fires impacted Hay River-K'atlodeeche First Nation-Fort Providence-Yellowknife.⁴³ The last significant fire year noted during was 2014, when Kakisa-Hay River-Whati-Gamati-Jean Marie River-Fort Providence-Fort Smith-Wekweètì-Behchokò were impacted.⁴⁴ Across the North Slave, the South Slave, the Deh Cho regions and Treaty 8- community members noted that the spring and summer of 2023 were unlike anything recognized in oral traditions.

“(It was) an experience that we do not have in our oral traditions- it was like nothing we have ever experienced or imagined.” - Elder, Salt River First Nation, Treaty 8.

Household Preparedness

Across all of the communities engaged, very few households were prepared for the wildfires and resulting evacuations. Survey results found that:

- 77% of respondents felt they and their communities were not at all prepared or low preparedness for dealing with the wildfire before the events of 2023 (n=286, scores of 1 or 2 out 5, where 1 is not at all prepared),
- 5% of respondents felt they and their communities were well prepared or prepared for dealing with the wildfire before the events of 2023 (n=286, scores of 4 or 5 out 5, where 5 is well prepared).

In addition

- 53% of respondents felt they were not at all prepared for an evacuation from their home in 2023 (n=286, scores of 1 or 2 out 5, where 1 is not at all prepared).
- 20% of respondents felt were well prepared or prepared for an evacuation from their home in 2023 (n=286, scores of 4 or 5 out 5, where 5 is well prepared).

Community members shared that they did not have a family plan to be away from home for so long or to prepare to leave so quickly; 48% of respondents indicated they were evacuated from home between three and four weeks. Many community members shared angst, anger, and stress regarding pets and animals being left behind and not taking them due to the lack of pet support in NWT reception centres. Community perception from engagement was that pets were better supported outside of the NWT in host communities. Common themes heard were that families were separated

⁴³ <https://www.nnsi.com/opinion/yellowknife-history-the-bush-fires-of-the-1930s-7274969>

⁴⁴ <https://cdd.publicsafety.gc.ca/dtpg-eng.aspx?cultureCode=en-Ca&eventTypes=%27WF%27&normalizedCostYear=1&dynamic=false&eventId=1066>

and had little time to pack and plan together. Households lost traditional meats and medicines due to service disruptions. Gardens were left behind, and families did not know when they would be home - or if those gardens would survive.

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“Our household was not prepared. We never thought that we would have to leave our home and pets under such short notice. We never thought that we would be away from home and our community for weeks and weeks. We have a new appreciation for household preparedness. We have a new appreciation of helping each other.”

- Community member, Fort Smith.

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Across numerous communities, residents shared that they packed frantically and brought things with them that had no use to them in an emergency. Households packed legal documents and as many family mementos and ceremonial items as possible. There was noted awareness of packing a 72-Hour Go Kit; however, the lessons observed were that packing needed to be done for a longer and protracted timeline. The top key steps respondents felt individuals could take to better personally prepare for and respond to wildfires were:

- Ensuring they have emergency evacuation supplies (23%), and
- Fireproofing/fire smarting homes/protecting personal property from fire damage (16%).
- The need to take more personal responsibility/make own wildfire response, evacuation plans and decisions (11%)

With this knowledge, the GNWT can update and adjust its preparedness messaging and education campaigns to help close these knowledge gaps now, in collaboration with local authorities.

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“We take care of our family. We stay together. We look after each other. We were separated. It was like I was floating- I did not know where anyone was or where I was. The evacuation was the most stressful thing I have experienced in a long time. I did not have the right things with me. I did not know where I was going. I did not know when I would return home.” - Open House Participant, Yellowknife.

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Image 8 Jean Marie River, NT (TSL, 2024)

From a logistics perspective, households emphasized the need for improved communication plans with family members and a more reliable fuel strategy for their vehicles to empower them in a crisis. Additionally, during community visits, concerns about prescriptions and medications frequently emerged as a gap in emergency planning. Addressing this issue is essential for both household preparedness and broader health care system planning in future emergencies.

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“Lessons learned- we need households to have medications and prescriptions planned and on hand- and then we have to insert accessing medications and prescriptions into the regional and territorial emergency plans. We also need to establish processes for licensure and accreditation in other jurisdictions to access medications and health files.” - Pharmacist, NWT.

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Community Preparedness

This section of the AAR is an opportunity for the GNWT to have an environmental scan of the feedback from communities impacted in 2023 to better understand the spectrum of emergency management knowledge, preparedness, skills and the tools both present and utilized in 2023, as well as the gaps. The gaps identified offer the opportunity for collaboration and coordination between the GNWT and communities to better prepare, train, practice, invest in and build capacity based upon risks, local readiness and desires to be active in future responses.

Community readiness and preparedness are the foundation for building emergency management capacity. Residents did their best in fast-moving and complex wildfire situations in 2023. It was heard across all communities that they wish to support each other, protect their communities, and participate in their own readiness. There is a willingness to be better prepared in the future and to coordinate with agencies, orders of governments, and each other; however, there is a need for investment in emergency capacity-building, transparent communications, defined roles and responsibilities, and accountability to lessons learned. From a public policy lens, local communities have the jurisdictional responsibility to be ready and prepared for emergencies. Communities wish to have agency in decision-making and support from other sources to build their capacity. They cannot do it alone. This is an opportunity for the GNWT and other agencies to participate in building local emergency capacity.

The NWT combines remote, rural, suburban, and urban living. One risk is the low number of people in any one area; this increases the risk due to the lack of personnel trained to provide regional emergency management oversight. The current oversight of emergency management and forest fire mitigation cannot provide the required support to smaller communities and restricts a community's ability to be independent and support mitigation efforts.

Communities are sparsely located across the Territory with some only accessible by plane and boat. Many of these rely on Yellowknife to supply their daily needs, such as medicines; others rely heavily on the land to provide food. When their land cannot sustain wildlife, the long-term survival of the entire community is at risk of collapse. They need to be better informed and prepared for larger, more impactful disasters such as those recently experienced. Communities require and desire more training in basic emergency management and inter-municipal disaster communications (including

hardware to communicate with), trigger points to evacuate, or even who and when to call for additional support. A common theme heard across engagement with community was confusion over the role of the REMO, its function and interoperability with the LEMO or community leadership. The awareness of what is available, by whom, and in what capacity when communities are in need could make all the difference toward better future outcomes.

Many communities lack the capacity to develop, maintain and train on their emergency management plan. It was consistent throughout the engagement process that MACA support is limited, inconsistent, and lacking direction, in part due to legislation and its ability to be enforced, as well as its small workforce with emergency management expertise. There are also no legislative repercussions or incentives specific to having a community emergency management plan and adequate training.

Very few local governments, Indigenous governments, organizations, or businesses were prepared for:



Some communities had more experience responding to events such as winter storms, overland flooding, air quality alerts, the COVID-19 pandemic, hosting evacuees from other communities, search and rescue situations and previous wildland fire operations. Feedback on how their learning pathways led them to build capacity in their communities that supported them in 2023 was appreciated. Most noted that ICS training, learning from previous emergency responses and a good working relationship with MACA were key to this capacity-building success.

Another theme that emerged throughout engagement was that communities wish to share, learn from each other, and build on emergency management capacity. Included in capacity building was the need to increase ICS training and to better engage with non-governmental agencies and the not-for-profit sector to assist members with emergency support in a crisis. There was a high level of receptivity to ICS training and being able to volunteer during a crisis to assist fellow community members. Partner agencies (NGOs and not-for-profits) are recommended to build their own response capacity to support their clients and work with communities in crisis if they have a defined role.

Overall and resounding feedback was that community members help each other: a willingness to do this and a deep desire not to lose this sentiment. Survey results revealed that the top 5 organizational groups that assisted respondents during the 2023 wildfires were (multiple selections allowed):

- Family and friends (71%),
- A government outside of the Northwest Territories (40%),
- The territorial government of the Northwest Territories (36%),
- A local business (21%), and
- A Non-Governmental Organization or agency (18%)

SUCCESS

Some communities had extensive pre-plans in place to evacuate their most vulnerable well ahead of evacuation notifications. For example, Kakisa and Kátł'odeeche First Nation took Elders to other communities.



Image 9 Yellowknife, NT (TSI, 2024)

Community Plans

Community emergency management plans and response reside legislatively with municipalities and local community governments as per the Emergency Management Act, by which the Act assigns significant responsibility to local authorities, requiring them to create and update community emergency plans and establish Local Emergency Management Organizations (LEMOs). The Act also places statutory duties on local authorities to lead emergency management at the community level, with the GNWT coordinating and supporting as required.

The documentation review indicated that community emergency plans existed in 32 of 33 communities tracked by the GNWT; however, they were not well known, outdated and not practiced in many cases. In addition, overall plans were not shared effectively with community members, leading to high distress, confusion, and mistrust in processes, decision-making, and crisis priorities.

Communication was a common theme of criticism - it was not timely, not accurate, did not contain the level of details needed, and sometimes direction contradicted other messaging from sources. It was noted that language is essential- clear and non-jargon, and lack of translations into indigenous languages were also given as critical feedback. In addition, who and what services are deemed necessary in a crisis was not clear nor communicated effectively. Community members also expressed that there were few opportunities to volunteer and contribute their crisis experience, skills and local knowledge of the land.

“Thank goodness for the sirens/horns. I do not rely on my phone. We will pack and plan better now. We never imagined being gone for months.” - Community Elder, Behchokq.

In the communities, essential health services in an emergency were a primary area of concern and discussion. In public engagement sessions, members shared that health services and practitioners were often the first services to close/leave their community. Essential health services were not clearly defined and operationalized until after the evacuation requiring practitioners, or other partners, to return as essential services. According to the territorial emergency plan, Health and Social Services were supposed to support registration and emergency social services when requested. However, there was considerable feedback from many residents pointing out that this was not the case in their experience. Community members were often left to handle this critical task while health services teams left the area for response activities such as registration. There were significant gaps in the performance of this vital emergency management function by HSS across different areas.

There were noted inconsistencies in programming and social services in community; the timing, levels, and how to access these emergency services differed at each host community. Deep disappointment and anger were expressed in engagement due to the lack of support for pets and animals within the Territory. However, when community members were hosted in other jurisdictions, pets and animals were very welcomed. This caused some of the highest levels of emotional distress and anger experienced during engagement. In addition, healthy, culturally

appropriate food was noted as inconsistent and sometimes a challenge for families to access during their evacuation experience.

“Leaving with our animals was the highest level of stress for us as a family. Our pets were not welcomed in the evacuation/reception centres in NWT but they were supported in Alberta. We need to have a much more comprehensive plan for pets and animals in emergencies in NWT.” South Slave community member.

Communities were not fully prepared to support those who are vulnerable or who may find themselves marginalized and vulnerable in a crisis. This is in part because community emergency plans were light on emergency social support planning, or there was a reliance on the GNWT providing ESS. Across most of the communities visited, there was deep concern for the overall ability of all government orders to support vulnerable populations in an emergency. Many community members shared stories of humanity - checking in on and helping aging adults evacuate, assisting agencies working with vulnerable people, assisting with door-knocking outreach, and helping on flights during air evacuations. Some of the most poignant and emotional discussions were regarding the distress and fear of "missing" community members - and there were individuals with unique needs (mental health, addictions, medical, mobility, language) that were not located for days and even weeks.

“It scares me that people will not evacuate next time an Order is called. People could not find family members. We could not locate Elders. It was very distressing and made me very angry. We also left people behind- those that needed our help. This was an evacuation of privilege.” Community Member, Deh Cho, Treaty 11.



Image 10 Enterprise, NT Before (Left) and After (Right) 2023 Wildfires (Photos courtesy Cliff Kimble, 2024)

In addition to these situations, there were complex medical needs, mental health issues, and addiction realities that required clinical support both within the Territory and outside of the NWT region during the emergency. However, practitioners are not typically licensed to practice outside of their province or Territory. Overall, these situations were challenging for community members to bear witness to and deeply challenging for registered practitioners to support and uphold a duty of care. Communities noted that they need better emergency plans for their own organization. Indigenous communities shared that they hope to be more engaged in evacuations to support their members. Knowledge of families, health, capacities and unique needs were cited often as a community strength.

SUCCESS
Indigenous communities successfully activated outreach teams to locate their citizens and members outside of the NWT across Western Canada.

“People helped us. Alberta helped us. Our agency wasn’t prepared but we had many people help us. I am forever thankful to those who hosted us in their home community. We will be much better prepared next time and we will also host others after the help we received.” - Executive Director, NGO based in Yellowknife.

Participants also highlighted several areas for enhancing community mitigation efforts, including:

- Implementing robust drought monitoring systems.
- Managing fuel loads to reduce fire risk.
- Expanding FireSmart™ initiatives to protect communities.
- Testing emergency systems and plans for effectiveness.
- Improving local warning systems, such as sirens, to reduce reliance on complex technology.
- Enhancing weather monitoring systems to provide timely and accurate data.
- Communications with other orders of government



FireSmart™

FireSmart™ was also a common theme discussed across all communities and in many households regarding preparedness. Many community members felt that FireSmart™ principles were not implemented at all or completed too late in higher-risk zones. Coupled with this, community members voiced concern about the lack of household fuel mitigation efforts. **FireSmart™ implementation requires the coordination of numerous government orders and resources, as well as personal and household commitments and responsibilities.** This includes vegetation and fuel management around structures, homes, cabins, and the community. The overall sentiment regarding FireSmart™ was a willingness to adopt it with the right resources, investment, and workforce. Communities and individuals see the value of FireSmart™ and wish to pursue it is a vital mitigation step.

“We need to get out on the land and manage fuel with our partners- Wood Buffalo National Park, the municipality, sister Nations, all relations in the region including Metis. We also have to be responsible with the fuel near our homes and cabins.” - Indigenous Knowledge-Keeper Elder, Treaty 8.



Source 5 FireSmart™ Canada

Current FireSmart™ grant deadlines and payout timelines inadvertently place FireSmart™ activities in a reactive rather than proactive timeline. Despite this, communities are actively developing and maintaining fire breaks and collaborating to reduce risks around their homes.

“Listen to us - we walk the land. We are on the water. We listen to the wind. Listen to us- we need to be better prepared and listen to the Elders- listen to the community. We know the dangers. Our traditional peoples know the land. Listen to us. Act sooner and do not wait [on the fires].” Elected leader, Jean Marie River First Nation.

Recommendations: A Path Forward

1. **Strengthen the support and resources to communities for improved emergency plans that are exercised and reviewed consistently**, Including partnerships, seasonal evacuation and re-entry planning. Pre-arrange community-to-community hosting agreements. Collaborate with Indigenous governments. Incorporate the lens of the most vulnerable into plans.
 - o **Rationale:** More substantial planning will empower communities to be better organized and collaborative in emergencies. Local governments and NGOs often have greater flexibility and responsiveness in emergency situations, enabling them to adapt and act swiftly. Communities can activate these plans immediately, reducing delays and confusion for evacuees. Tailored approaches reduce inequities and enhance overall resilience.

2. **Commit to the seven disciplines of the FireSmart™ program, ensuring adequate and appropriate funding and education to align with mitigation, preparedness and recovery phases.** Implement as many of the seven disciplines of FireSmart™ into personal and community preparedness as a long-term goal.
 - **Rationale:** By implementing measures such as vegetation management, fuel management, and public education, these initiatives reduce the likelihood of wildfires escalating into severe emergencies. This proactive approach strengthens community resilience, minimizes damage to properties and infrastructure, and ensures a safer environment for residents and first responders.
3. **Inventory essential personnel, businesses, and critical infrastructure in the Territory and communities:** Mapping community assets, critical infrastructure, and strengths will empower the community in emergencies and upon recovery.
 - **Rationale:** Identifying and mapping these resources will streamline response and recovery efforts, ensuring the continuity of critical services. As an outcome of inventorying, further plans can then be developed (e.g., Critical Infrastructure Protection Plans, Evacuation Plans, and Hosting Plans).
4. **Update emergency preparedness messaging:** Given the complexities of events and the distance between communities, prepare community members to be self-sufficient and for extended evacuations. Include support and planning for pets and animals.
 - **Rationale:** Emphasizing longer-term preparedness (e.g. one or more weeks rather than the current messaging of 72 hours) will better reflect the realities of modern crises and equip communities for more prolonged disruptions.
5. **Create an ESS plan to include vulnerable populations:** Develop the Plan in collaboration with NGOs, municipalities, Indigenous governments and GNWT departments.
 - **Rationale:** Supporting vulnerable populations will ensure their needs are met during emergencies. Collaborating ensures the plan aligns with local knowledge and resources, enabling culturally sensitive and practical support for vulnerable populations such as Elders, individuals with unique needs, and those living in more remote communities. Sharing the plan widely fosters awareness builds trust and ensures clarity in roles and responsibilities during crises.



CHAPTER IV

Roles & Responsibilities



Introduction

The 2023 wildfires in the Northwest Territories highlighted significant challenges in coordinating and clarifying roles and responsibilities across government and emergency response personnel levels. As the crisis unfolded, it became evident that many individuals involved in the response did not fully understand their roles or those of others. This lack of clarity created confusion, undermined effectiveness, and hindered the overall response effort.

“Our teams were very tired. The timelines and events were protracted and blended together. We did not have bench strength for relief. Leaders were working long hours and weeks on end. We transitioned roles from the government structure into an emergency - into multiple emergencies. We did not have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Some teams were working in an IMT structure. Some teams were not. It was challenging- everyone was trying to do their best.” - GNWT team member

One of the most critical issues during the wildfire response was that many individuals—whether municipal staff, territorial government employees, or support agencies—did not understand their roles. This lack of understanding led to uncertainty about who was essential to remain on the ground and who could be evacuated. As a result, many individuals who were needed to manage on-the-ground operations left, leaving significant gaps in the response effort. Essential personnel were absent, while some non-essential personnel stayed longer than needed, further adding to the confusion.

Personal Versus Professional Roles

High tensions arose due to unclear boundaries between personal and professional responsibilities. Many emergency personnel were left questioning their roles and duties, asking, “What am I – an evacuee? An essential worker? An evacuee who continues working but is not deemed essential?” This confusion contributed to stress and inefficiencies within the EM system.

A critical gap in the response was the lack of consistent and sufficient communication to staff regarding evacuation protocols and their roles during the evacuations. The swift and large-scale evacuations ordered due to advancing wildfires created a sense of urgency and disorder. However, many government and emergency response personnel were uncertain whether they should remain or leave.

Regular Duty Roles vs Emergency Management Roles

The distinction between the regular duty roles and emergency management roles was significantly blurred. Regular operational responsibilities overlapped with emergency management roles, generating uncertainty and inefficiency in decision-making and task execution. The integration of GNWT titles and nomenclature into the ICS framework proved ineffective. The roles, responsibilities, and terminology did not translate well, further complicating coordination and response efforts.

It was shared that “the Department of Finance does not play a significant role in emergency management as compared to some other GNWT departments and agencies.” Finance is a critical function of ICS and has a significant role in the response and recovery phase of emergency management. Operationally, Finance should be involved in all aspects of emergency management.

From our engagement with GNWT staff, it was our understanding that there was little direct communication with staff to inform them of their roles during this critical time. For those who stayed, there was no clear information on what was expected of them, where to report, or how to coordinate with other departments. Of those who left, many did so out of fear and uncertainty with unclear direction as to whether they would work remotely or would be off work completely.

Interjurisdictional Clarity

Significant obstacles hindered inter-jurisdictional collaboration. Indigenous governments were not adequately integrated as sovereign entities, while coordination between the local, regional and territorial EMOs was often fragmented creating inefficiencies. It was shared during engagement that ten of the 33 communities in the NWT are under Indigenous Governments, where they would be the lead agency in an emergency. How Indigenous Government roles and responsibilities fit into the 2018 NWT Emergency Plan was unclear. Indigenous governments are calling for more responsibility.

Compounding these challenges was the unintended dysfunction between the different levels of government—municipal, territorial, and federal. In emergency management, effective collaboration between these levels of government is essential for a coordinated response. However, when individuals do not understand their own roles, it becomes nearly impossible to work effectively with other entities that are also unclear on their responsibilities.

This imbalance became particularly apparent in the wildfire response. Municipal governments struggled to communicate with regional and territorial authorities, and territorial authorities shared in engagement that they were unclear about the federal government's capacity to support them. Interdepartmental collaboration also suffered, as various groups within the same level of government operated with a siloed approach, not understanding how their responsibilities fit into the broader effort. Misunderstanding exacerbated existing communication barriers and hindered the ability to mount a cohesive response.

The consequences of unclear roles and responsibilities during the 2023 wildfires were severe. Response efforts were delayed, resources were underutilized, and critical tasks were left unattended. This was most evident when roles within the REMO were either unavailable or vacant; communication between the LEMO and TEMO were effectively severed.

The lack of role clarity hampered the ability to make informed decisions about resource allocation. In many cases, decision-makers were unaware of what support was already being provided or which entities were responsible for specific tasks. This led to redundant efforts in some areas and critical shortfalls in others.

Emergency Social Services Outside of the EOC

The role of ESS outside of the EMO and ICS structure created a lack of cohesion because roles and responsibilities were not transparent to all parties. Engagement participants noted an ESS plan was not available throughout the 2023 wildfire season. Through this AAR process, a territorial ESS Plan was not made available for review or comment; no one knew if or where it existed in the GNWT repository. It was noted in engagement multiple times from various GNWT departments that a physical ESS Plan did not exist.

Out of the lack of roles rose some incredible individuals who took it upon themselves to fill some ESS gaps. There were individuals who drove around the community to help the vulnerable evacuate. Those who stayed when they did not have an official role to do so assisted in areas that were far outside their mandate.

Role Clarity at the Territorial Level

Decision-making processes at the TEMO level were unclear. Inadequate transparency in decisions undermined trust and constrained functional success. The GNWT is designed to be a coordination role but was highly operationalized due to the EMO structures.

Misconceptions surrounding the qualifications and duties of 'essential' personnel, along with the support provided to them, significantly impacted the effectiveness of activities. Questions about human resource support for deployments and ongoing operational needs remain unresolved. Additionally, there was a gap in emergency management plans for critical staff should they have to evacuate while working in evacuation zones. Political interference negatively impacted the TEMO's ICS and IMT structures. Requests for updates, information, and involvement in decision-making processes outside ICS best practices disrupted operational focus and efficiency. Just as administration does, so too do elected officials have different roles in an emergency.

A critical gap in leadership was observed across the GNWT response. Many decision-makers were not visible, present, or available to their teams or the affected communities. This absence leadership contributed to poor morale and operational challenges. Well defined roles are needed so that leadership understands and can execute their role in an emergency.

The Role of the GNWT and the City of Yellowknife: Scrambling to Support the Evacuation

During the 2023 wildfires, a key challenge was the confusion over roles and responsibilities between the GNWT and the municipalities. Role clarity was a concern identified throughout the 2023 wildfire season in multiple communities; due to the size and complexity, this pattern became very visible when the City of Yellowknife became impacted. The lack of coordination and communication between the territorial and local governments created significant gaps in evacuation processes and the effectiveness of communications with residents.

The evacuation order for Yellowknife came swiftly and decisively from the GNWT. Consultation with the City of Yellowknife and staff from the GNWT, it was TSI's understanding that there was limited consultation and collaboration with the City. While the GNWT had the authority to make the call,

the City was suddenly burdened with executing on-the-ground logistics without clear guidance or adequate preparation.

City officials described the situation as being put in a reactive position, trying to organize transportation, evacuation centers, and essential services with minimal collaboration with the territorial government. The last-minute scramble left the City overwhelmed and without a clear understanding of its role in the overall evacuation strategy, particularly since their community emergency plan suggested a shelter-in-place tactic. This uncertainty further compounded the confusion for Yellowknife residents, who were unsure where to go, how to get there, and what services would be available.

This misalignment of responsibilities and communication channels delayed critical information and contributed to the already challenging conditions for those attempting to evacuate. Vulnerable populations—who needed the most straightforward and timely instructions—suffered the most from these gaps.

Strengthening the coordination and communication between the municipal, GNWT, and Indigenous governments is vital to prevent similar issues in future evacuations.

Recommendations: A Path Forward

1. **Establish and clarify pre-defined roles and responsibilities for all levels of government and agencies:** This should also align with those identified as essential services and personnel to remain during evacuations and who can be redeployed. Proper communication with all staff members regarding their role in an emergency should be ensured, with roles identified as dependent on the level and type of emergency. Some redundancy should also be built in for essential roles to ensure the role is fulfilled regardless of any vacancies.
 - Rationale: Clear role definitions will reduce confusion and ensure everyone understands their responsibilities during emergencies. The interaction between roles requires clarity, including reporting structures and a clear delineation of the transfer of duties and roles as emergencies expand and contract.
2. **Recognize Indigenous sovereignty and integrate Indigenous governments as equal partners in emergency management specific to roles and responsibilities.**
 - Rationale: A formal framework will ensure effective collaboration and coordination between different governments. Collaborative planning leverages local expertise and builds trust. Inclusive models promote equitable outcomes and community resilience.
3. **Establish workforce management policies for essential and non-essential staff:** Define essential services across all government orders—municipal, Indigenous, territorial—and incorporate this into GNWT job descriptions. Develop a compensation model that addresses remuneration for essential staff during activations. Ensure their extraction plan, and that people identified as essential workers are aware of the extraction plan.
 - Rationale: Clearly defined expectations support operational readiness and continuity. Staff members who remain to support emergency response efforts often face a

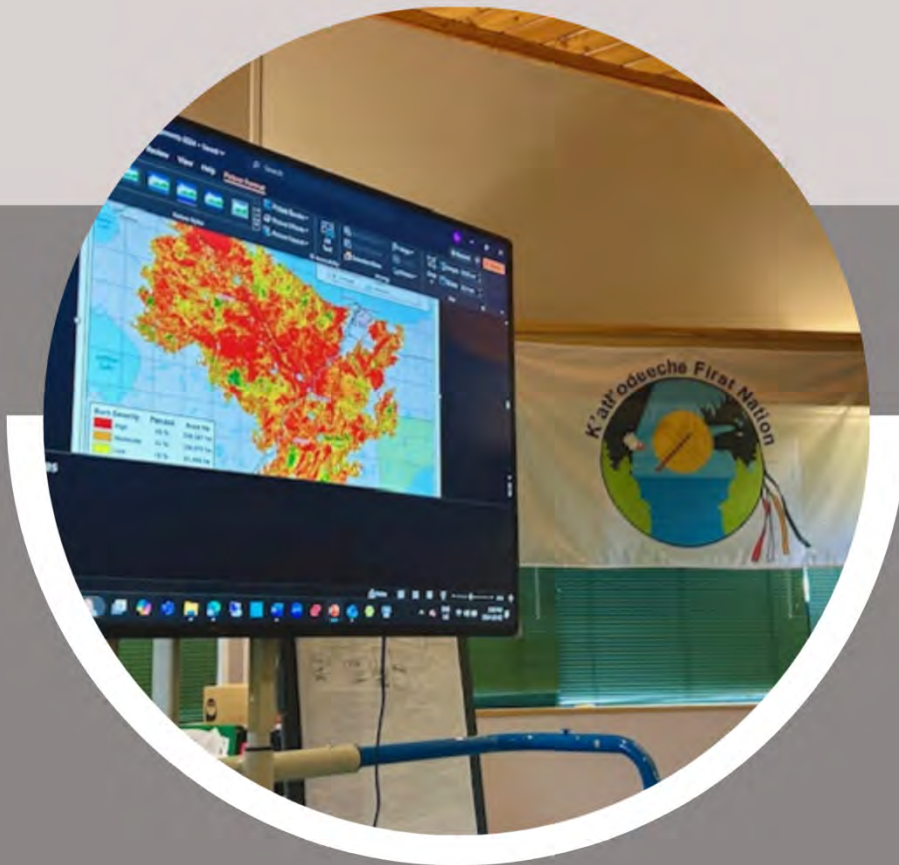
significant personal challenge: balancing their professional responsibilities with the safety and well-being of their families. By implementing a clear and effective extraction plan, organizations can help alleviate this burden and ensure that employees feel confident and supported in their roles. Incorporating these definitions into job descriptions helps set employee expectations, enhancing transparency and preparedness.



Image 12 Yellowknife Airport, NT (TSI, 2024)

CHAPTER V

Understanding Risk



Introduction

Various concerns and observations related to risk monitoring, wildfire risk management, and community preparedness were shared throughout the consultation process. Risk was not defined within the scope of work; therefore, the following definition was applied for this review: *the continuous tracking, assessment, and management of wildfire-related risks to ensure public safety and minimize property damage by gathering and analyzing real-time data, evaluating mitigation efforts, and adapting response strategies as conditions evolve.* In this context, this section looks at:

- Fire monitoring
- Disseminating risk data and understanding triggers
- All-hazards risk assessment and planning
- Communicating Risk

“Indigenous knowledge can assist with understanding local risks. We know the land. We know the water. We know the animals. We know the medicines. We know the air. We can assist with understanding how to better prepare for emergencies.” - Indigenous Elder, Treaty 11, Deh Cho.

Fire Monitoring

While fire monitoring was out of scope in undertaking this AAR process, public engagement participants provided insights on their experience related specifically to wildfire monitoring. This provides the GNWT with important context on public experiences related to risk communications, in which fire monitoring plays a role.

Feedback consistently indicated that the fire monitoring process was perceived as challenging, which created mistrust within departments of the GNWT and in community. While processes such as cameras and students hired by the GNWT were deployed to observe and track fire activity, there did not appear to be any consistent definition of what monitoring entailed. There is opportunity for the GNWT to raise awareness about fire monitoring and how it acts as a risk communication tool to support community preparedness. It was a common theme heard that monitoring efforts were challenging, as critical data was not acted upon in a timely or coordinated



Image 13 Fire Monitoring Tower, NT (TSI, 2024)

manner. The speed and intensity of the wildfires also overwhelmed monitoring capacity and capability.

Local communities and Indigenous governments voiced frustration, believing their communities were placed at unnecessary risk due to perceived gaps in fire monitoring practices and felt a lack of inclusion where they could share local Indigenous knowledge on fire risk and behaviour. Many Indigenous communities are investing in Guardians to support risk management in the future.⁴⁵

Communities also expressed they would appreciate sharing local knowledge in risk monitoring, particularly regarding key factors such as wind patterns, fire behaviour, fuel availability, weather conditions, fire guards, water shortages or droughts.

"We waited too long. We waited on government. We waited on technology. We waited to act. We should not wait. We should fight fires as soon as we can to keep our community safe. Why do we keep waiting?" Community member, South Slave.

Disseminating Risk Data & Utilizing Triggers

The GNWT ECC found it challenging to disseminate situational awareness during critical incidents given the speed, intensity and unpredictability of the wildfires amongst other factors as stated in the ECC AAR. Through community outreach, it was noted that their capacity to gather, analyze, and share relevant information was weak, leading to confusion and delayed decision-making. This undermined the effectiveness of emergency responses and highlighted the need for stronger protocols and training to ensure situational awareness could be established and communicated efficiently in the future.

Warnings during the crisis went unheard at times, either due to ineffective distribution or audiences ignoring them. Predictive measuring, which could have provided valuable insights into the progression of risks, was almost entirely absent. Even the limited predictive systems that were in place were, for the most part, disregarded. The difficulty in prioritizing and acting on warnings and predictive data further compounded the obstacles that response teams and communities faced.

For example, Kátł'odeeche First Nation relied on data and direction from the GNWT ECC to return to their Nation when they experienced their first fire and subsequent evacuation; overnight, the fire turned, and Kátł'odeeche First Nation had to evacuate again.

The hamlet of Enterprise did not receive risk communications from the GNWT ECC or REMO until it was too late. The community was not initially invited to a fire risk update presentation from the ECC held in Hay River on August 13 until the Chief of Kátł'odeeche First Nation noticed Enterprise was not on the virtual call with Hay River, the ECC and the REMO; so, the Chief reached out directly to Enterprise's elected officials. Once Enterprise was aware of the risk to the community, it declared an evacuation. The hamlet was evacuated between 2:30 pm and 8:30 pm that day. By 9:30 pm, the fire had reached the hamlet and decimated it. Adding to this, it was evident that situational

⁴⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/environmental-funding/indigenous-guardians/map.html#year> 5 Government of Canada

awareness based on risk was not available or disseminated appropriately to MACA, who, according to multiple engagement participants, noted in the same ECC meeting that "MACA would declare an evacuation alert for the Town [sic] of Enterprise at 4:00 pm or 5:00 pm and then do an evacuation order later if needed."

Many parties underestimated the severity of risks or assumed that existing systems and procedures were adequate to assess risk. This delayed proactive measures and hindered the ability to adapt and respond effectively to evolving crises.

Trigger Points

A trigger point is a predefined threshold or condition that, when met, prompts a specific action or response. Trigger points are essential to ensure timely decision-making by identifying key indicators that signal the need for escalation, resource deployment, or protective measures.

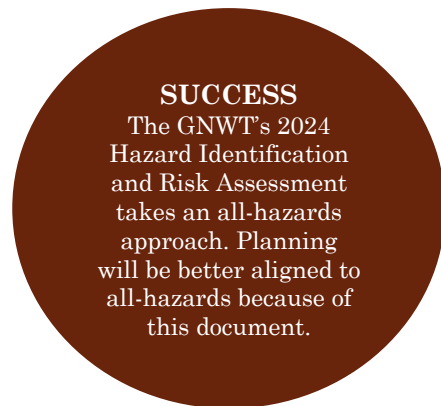
Trigger points were undefined during the 2023 wildfire season. For example, there was only one highway egress available to come into Alberta for many residents fleeing wildfires, and a large portion of the NWT relied on a single fibre optic cable for communication, with no redundancy in place. Having these two risks prioritized as triggers for evacuation would support more effective decision-making in times of response. Evacuees may not have had to flee through flames if single-egress points were flagged as pre-determined triggers. This lack of pre-defined thresholds for action increased vulnerability, as there were no backup systems or alternative plans to mitigate risks in the event of infrastructure failure or loss of evacuation routes.

With training and awareness, trigger points will be easier to identify and activate going forward..

All-Hazards Risk Assessment & Planning

One of the significant shortcomings identified was the absence of all-hazards planning through all phases of emergency management. All-hazards planning addresses natural, human-induced, technological and public health hazards, ensuring there is a flexible and coordinated approach rather than individual strategies for every possible scenario. This type of planning was not implemented, leaving the response teams unprepared for the situation's complexities. The lack of an effective all-hazards approach meant that critical gaps in preparedness went unaddressed, leading to inefficient and fragmented responses when emergencies occurred. Most emergency planning in the NWT is focused on responding to flood and wildfire events. While these are highly probable and impactful events, the NWT faces numerous other risks that require mitigation in some form.

Once all risks have been identified, all-hazard plans must be developed to minimize their potential impact. This process requires assessing the capacity to respond to identified threats, including determining who is responsible for managing and mitigating them. Risks should be classified within a risk matrix with impact and frequency evaluated to inform the planning process.



After overlaying the risk matrix onto the available capacity, decisions must be made to guide response efforts. These decisions should include developing detailed mitigation plans, identifying equipment needs, assessing staffing requirements, and designing training programs to ensure all personnel are prepared to handle the identified risks effectively using an all-hazards approach.

As climate change intensifies, disaster frequency and severity increase, putting communities at greater risk. A thorough assessment allows governments to identify vulnerable areas, correlate risks with community demographics, and prioritize resources for prevention and response efforts. It provides the starting point for all planning and mitigation efforts. By understanding the unique characteristics of each region—such as vegetation types, topography, and local infrastructure—governments can implement targeted mitigation strategies and better allocate firefighting resources.

Communicating Risk

Risk communication was identified as an area needing improvement. Feedback indicated that risk communication was too slow and often limited to small groups, eroding trust and leaving many uninformed.

Effective communication of wildfire risks is essential for preparing residents and minimizing harm. Governments must disseminate clear, timely information regarding the status of fire threats and safety protocols. This includes public education campaigns on understanding fire danger levels, how to prepare homes, and when to act. Establishing pre-planned evacuation routes is crucial; these routes must be well-marked and regularly updated to accommodate changing conditions. Residents should also be made aware of designated muster locations—safe spots where they can gather if evacuation becomes necessary—and reception centers that provide shelter and resources for those displaced by an event.

A consistent message was the importance of involving residents in the decision-making process, particularly those living in areas directly affected by risks. Engaged participants emphasized that leveraging local knowledge and fostering collaboration would lead to more effective and trusted outcomes. Engaging residents fosters trust and ensures that their unique knowledge, needs, and perspectives are incorporated into the planning and implementation of risk, mitigation and response measures.

Increased awareness of local risks and hazards as a result of the 2023 wildfires has heightened stress and anxiety. The GNWT is encouraged to use a trauma-informed approach for future risk communications.



Evacuations

Communication that occurs pre-crisis or before the need for significant key actions to be taken, such as community evacuation, are essential for the successful execution of evacuations, particularly if conditions worsen. Such efforts are designed to provide timely, accurate, clear, and consistent information that helps residents understand the current situation, potential risks, and associated safety measures. Effective risk communications ensure community members are aware of their role in the emergent event being experienced, are prepared to fill that role and understand the next steps as the situation evolves. Such preparation would have facilitated a smoother evacuation than was experienced in many parts of the NWT.

Adding another layer of importance, transparent emergency messaging can help to foster trust between residents and government authorities, reinforcing community resilience and government success. By engaging the public through diverse channels, the GNWT – and its local government partners – can counter misinformation, address concerns, and build a sense of shared responsibility in facing wildfire threats, ultimately contributing to a safer, more informed response.

One example in the City of Yellowknife is particularly jarring, released on August 13, 2023. In an expanded statement associated with this piece of communication, it was stated:



“The City of Yellowknife would like to assure residents that despite the increasingly smoky conditions, our community is not currently at risk due to the ongoing wildfires.”

This preceded the City's evacuation two days later (August 15, 2023). While the statement did urge residents to remain vigilant and prepared, the main element of the notice, stating that the evolving wildfire situation did not threaten the City, created a false sense of security, contributing to challenges during evacuation. While the City issued this messaging, it is understood that the GNWT

provided direction and that the City communicated with the GNWT continuously throughout the span of those communications mentioned above. In the future, a consistent approach to risk communications must be implemented across community governments, as much as possible, and supported by the GNWT.

In many areas throughout the NWT, it was heard that evacuation orders came with 30-minutes notice or less and that there had been no preceding evacuation notice or alert. In conducting engagements tied to the execution of this AAR, a common theme arose of residents feeling the chaos of these moments.

“We went from low risk to leave immediately - NOW. This was very distressing and very scary. There was very little lead up. There was very little preparation and background to the escalation. This made my entire family very stressed and in the future we demand more information about the local risks so that we can be better prepared.” - Hay River resident, South Slave Region.

Recommendations: A Path Forward

- 1. Continue implementing a comprehensive all-hazards risk matrix or tool :** Identify and assess all potential NWT risks using an all-hazards approach coupled with local knowledge. Understand how the risks differ due to population, topography, weather, and capacity. Assess the risks and their potential impact, including the impact of any evacuation (routes, timing, volume, and effect on mitigation efforts) and develop a list of hazards in order of severity or impact, which may require a response.
 - Rationale:** Understanding areas of greater risk will help create response plans, stage equipment, educate affected populations, and determine mitigation strategies. Most current emergency management activities focus very heavily on flooding and wildfires to the detriment of other risks and hazards in the NWT.
- 2. Purchase mitigation equipment and train personnel on its use. Locate it in areas where the identified risks significantly impact people.** Ensure equipment is available, maintained and tested. Verify that personnel are trained and competent.
 - Rationale:** Proper equipment and training will enhance the ability to respond effectively to emergencies. Proper wildfire and other required apparatus located appropriately and with enough volumes to afford real impact will support an adequate response. During on-site reviews, it was noted that proper wildfire and other required gear were not located with enough volumes to afford any real impact on the mitigation in some places.
- 3. Access and include local fire and Indigenous knowledge to support risk assessment, monitoring and decision-making.** Consider advice from Community Elders. Integrate traditional knowledge and warnings.

- **Rationale:** Better engaged local fire knowledge will provide valuable insights and improve response decision-making. Local community fire services are a valuable source of information and assistance. Traditional knowledge of the land will enhance understanding of risks and improve preparedness.

Improvement Opportunities:

- i. Continue developing emergency management mitigation strategies considering the top risks identified in the NWT Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment . These strategies also need to consider capacity, as some of them will not be able to be managed with currently available or nearby resources.
- ii. Continue utilizing geographic information systems (GIS) to create detailed maps highlighting vulnerable zones, enabling targeted resource allocation. By understanding areas of greater risk, GNWT departments can use this information to develop response plans and stage equipment, educate affected populations and communities, and work with affected areas to determine the best mitigation strategies.
- iii. Continue collaboration on risk monitoring protocols to foster trust and coordination among all interested and affected parties.
- iv. Launch ongoing educational initiatives to inform residents about risks and prevention measures. This includes distributing materials on creating defensible spaces around homes, understanding fire danger ratings, and the importance of emergency preparedness kits.



CHAPTER VI

Response Activities



Introduction

In emergency management, effective coordination and communication are essential to mitigate the impact of disasters, ensure a timely, well-organized response and saves lives. Utilizing ICS principles from the onset of the 2023 Wildfire season and subsequent use of IAPs would not only ensure continuous tracking of resources, actions, and outcomes throughout the response phase, but would also provide clear and comprehensive documentation for AARs. The ICS Canada Framework Overview is available in Appendix F.

This section will review:

- Rapid fire spread and unpredictability;
- Evacuations and logistics;
- Hosting communities; and
- Emergency Support Services (ESS)

Rapid Fire Spread and Unpredictability

One of the primary challenges faced by emergency managers was the rapid spread and unpredictability of the wildfires. Due to the combination of high temperatures, dry conditions, and strong winds, the fires expanded quickly, making it difficult for responders to control and contain them. Fires escalated out of control quickly, creating complex and dynamic situations for both emergency responders and evacuees.

The fires' speed and ability to jump firebreaks or spread erratically meant that emergency plans had to be adjusted on the fly. Responders had limited time to develop detailed IAPs, and strategic decisions had to be made in real time, sometimes with incomplete information.

The sudden expansion of fires meant that many communities had to be evacuated in haste, often with little time for individuals to gather personal belongings or prepare.

Engagement emphasized the need for enhanced municipal and wildland interface firefighting capacity.

Coordination Between Agencies and Jurisdictions

The wildfires in the NWT affected local communities and larger regional and territorial structures, requiring coordination across multiple levels of government and numerous agencies, including federal, provincial/territorial, and municipal authorities. Effective communication and collaboration are critical to ensure a unified response.

Coordination between emergency management agencies, fire services, and governmental bodies proved difficult due to resource differences, jurisdictional boundaries, managing decision-making timelines and organizational structures. Additionally, the involvement, or lack thereof, of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Indigenous Governments added further layers of

complexity. Multiple and concurrent coordination requirements did not appear to have been extensively considered in pre-planning .

Document review found that IAPs were not created from the onset of the deployment of emergency management organizations. The first IAP was noted in August 2023, primarily during the final month of

response and into the recovery phase of the wildfire response; however, multiple EMOs at all levels had been activated since the beginning of the fire season in May. Keeping a consistent process of IAP creation from the onset of any incident is essential during the incident with communication and work assignments, following the incident in post-incident review, and during recovery phases. IAPs also support resource tracking and personnel accountability, strategy, objectives for key decision makers.



Source GNWT (August 27, 2023)

“Team members were missing for hours and in some very challenging situations for days. This was very distressing and very concerning. The context of communications fibre optic lines going down contributed to this reality, however, we need to implement improved incident tracking and awareness within operations that go to scale.” Senior leader, GNWT.

Limited Resources and Infrastructure

The vast geographical area of the NWT, combined with limited resources and infrastructure, posed significant challenges in managing the wildfires. Despite having Canada's highest per capita emergency management funding⁴⁶, the region faced limitations in firefighting resources and support systems.

The NWT is sparsely populated, and firefighting resources, such as personnel, aircraft, and equipment, were stretched thin. While resources were mobilized from neighbouring provinces and the federal government, the Territory's vastness made it challenging to deploy them where they were most needed, especially in remote areas.

The lack of infrastructure, such as roads and communication networks, impeded response efforts and maintain communication with affected communities.⁴⁷ In some cases, firefighting operations were limited by terrain, weather, or the availability of specialized equipment like air tankers, leading to gaps in the response.

⁴⁶ <https://ifsd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ifsd-report-2020-05-emergency-funding-for-covid-19-responses-and-support-to-indigenous-peoples.pdf>

⁴⁷ The Northwest Territories 2023 Wildfire Response Review (MNP)

Environmental and Health Risks

The wildfires in the NWT threatened property, infrastructure, and public health. They produced significant smoke, affecting air quality across the Territory and extending into neighbouring regions. High temperatures, smoke, and evacuation-related stress posed considerable health risks.

Smoke severely impacted the air quality, leading to health concerns such as respiratory issues, particularly for vulnerable populations like the elderly, children, and those with pre-existing health conditions. Additionally, there were concerns about the long-term environmental impacts of the fires, including water contamination and the destruction of wildlife habitats.



Source GNWT (September 3, 2023)

Emergency management had to balance immediate firefighting efforts with long-term health and environmental protection. This included establishing air quality monitoring systems, evacuating individuals with respiratory conditions, and preparing health facilities to handle an influx of patients with fire-related illnesses. These complexities continued to expose the minimal capacity available in the GNWT.

Psychosocial and Mental Health Impact

Another significant challenge was the psychological and emotional toll of the wildfires on residents, responders, and emergency management personnel. The stress of evacuation, displacement, loss of homes, and the trauma of living through a disaster affected many individuals.

Addressing mental health needs, including providing trauma-informed support to affected residents, responders, and evacuees, was a major concern. While basic needs like shelter, food, and water were prioritized, addressing the mental health of individuals impacted by the wildfires required additional resources and support systems.

The mental health consequences of the wildfires, including anxiety, grief, and post-traumatic stress, led to an increased demand for psychological support services. Emergency managers would have benefited from mental health resources much earlier in the response phase to mitigate the long-term emotional toll of the disaster.

“The mental health supports offered to us were too late, too limited and not helpful. I did not want to access them in the office. I did not want to access them in the context of my role and job. I required mental health supports in the context of leading in a government role, being a parent, being separated from my family and working in high stress for months at a time. We also need much improved incident debriefings and overall operational debriefings. These would have helped me with my mental health.” – GNWT leadership, Yellowknife.

Evacuations and Logistics

Mass evacuations during the wildfires were a vital emergency response but presented significant logistical challenges. More than 20,000 people were forced to evacuate their homes, some evacuating multiple times during the wildfire season. These large-scale evacuations required careful coordination to ensure the safety of residents, many of whom lived in remote or isolated areas.

Evacuating people from rural and northern communities, particularly those in remote or hard-to-reach areas, added complexity to logistics. Limited infrastructure, a lack of transportation options, and long distances between communities made moving people quickly and safely difficult.

Establishing clear evacuation routes was critical for ensuring residents' safe and efficient movement during an emergency. Going forward, the Territory can work with local authorities to map out these routes, ensuring they are well-marked and accessible. Creating pre-planned responses, such as identifying established evacuation centers or shelters, also helps streamline the evacuation process. Residents can then be educated on these routes and procedures.

Many evacuees faced delays and uncertainty as they were transported to temporary shelters. Managing shelter capacity, providing food, water, and healthcare to evacuees, and addressing mental and emotional well-being were crucial but challenging tasks for emergency managers.

The evacuation of Yellowknife during the 2023 wildfires was one of the most complex and challenging operations undertaken during the crisis. Yet, reviewing stakeholder interviews and workshop findings, it became clear that the community's most vulnerable members were not adequately prioritized. Despite efforts to ensure public safety, the evacuation process was less complex to navigate for those with greater access to resources.

“The Yellowknife evacuation wasn't just about one city; it destabilized the entire system.” - Engagement Participant

Evacuation Notifications

One of the primary issues cited by engagement participants was the abrupt nature of evacuation orders. The lack of clarity in communication left many vulnerable residents unprepared. They had little time to arrange transportation, gather essential belongings, or coordinate care for family members with special needs. The sudden shift in messaging created confusion, panic, and uncertainty, especially for those without access to the necessary means to evacuate quickly. Evacuation notifications were often not utilized, which would have given residents time to prepare for the potential of an evacuation order.

For example, Hay River faced a perilous situation during the wildfire crisis. The GNWT ECC communicated critical information about the wildfire's approach to Hay River as the fire began to threaten the area. However, the GNWT ECC's notification to Hay River came too late in part

because of the speed and intensity of the fire's movement, putting many residents at significant risk and necessitating an immediate evacuation order.

Fort Smith, Jean Marie River, Wekweètì and Behchokò experienced varying obstacles and successes in evacuation, however generally all communities described evacuation notification as a challenge.

Another significant issue was the breakdown of communication systems during the evacuations. Many residents reported registering for evacuation communications but received no updates. Some even registered multiple times, hoping to be included in critical messaging, but still never received important information about evacuation details, updates on the wildfire, or instructions on what to do next. This void in communication left many vulnerable residents in a state of confusion and fear.

Challenges for Vulnerable Populations

The evacuation process was complicated for those with mobility challenges, health concerns and the unhoused population. Participants recounted instances where elderly and disabled individuals waited for hours, sometimes all day, to board evacuation planes. In many cases, these individuals were sent home after waiting all day, only to be told to return the next day to repeat the process. The lack of prioritization for these vulnerable residents highlights significant inequities in managing evacuation.

*“Evacuations were seen as “evacuations of privilege” – Engagement Participants,
North Slave Region*

For those requiring medical assistance, the situation was even more dire. The evacuation of Yellowknife's hospital was a major challenge, as there was an absence of a well-coordinated plan to evacuate the facility. Essential medical staff needed to remain in Yellowknife to support first responders and care for those unable to leave. However, many of these staff members were evacuated by mistake and had to be brought back to ensure that essential medical services could continue. This lack of planning left healthcare infrastructure vulnerable at a time when it was critically needed.



Image 15 City of Yellowknife, NT (TSI, 2024)

Airlift Evacuations

Discussions of airlift evacuations revealed common themes. Many recalled that queue management and ground transportation for airlifts were disorganized and very stressful. Based on engagement, smaller communities fared better than the capital in this regard. In addition, flights were not barrier-free, families were separated, and numerous agencies noted that vulnerable people in communities were awaiting flights while exposed to extremely poor air quality, often with significant delays, and exposed to added vulnerability in host communities.

“The air evacuation queues were heartbreaking. There wasn’t support for aging adults, individuals with mobility issues, for indigenous community members with large families, and New Canadians were very confused. People had to stand for hours without updates on the airlift process. There were limited snacks and water. Local community members were coming to hand out food and water. The queue management was honestly disgraceful. People were doing the best they could but this was totally unacceptable as an operation in emergency management.” Yellowknife MLA, Member of the 19th Assembly.

Engagement participants revealed that they located members airlifted in hosting urban centres that were very dangerous and not safe, with a focus on women of all ages. Participant interviews revealed that numerous residents were evacuated without knowing where they were going. Vulnerable individuals were placed on planes with no clear destination communicated to them beforehand. Upon boarding, evacuees were told little about their landing locations, which further exacerbated anxiety, especially for those who were aging adults, individuals requiring mobility assistance, individuals with unique needs, didn’t speak English as a first language, or had health conditions requiring special attention.

It must be acknowledged that many priorities converged within the airlifts, and the spectrum of support from commercial airlines, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), smaller regional carriers, and those who provided medical support on flights was complex. Non-governmental organizations and agencies noted that they had to proceed with their own evacuation plans and air evacuation plans for their clients. This resulted in high stress and added to the complexity and costs of their evacuation experience.

Consolidated feedback on evacuation by air experience includes the need for:

- A national harmonized approach, with a northern lens, to mass evacuation airlifts, especially relating to the health human resources required to support evacuees;
- A clear and transparent process to secure and access airlines for a territorial evacuation;
- Safer and better ground and queue management for airlifts;
- Mapping destinations and host community landings and return-to-home planning linked to a registration process and flight manifest;

- Mental health and addiction support on flights when available – ideally working with established partners;
- Territorial government teams on flights when available;
- Community agencies and Indigenous support leaders on flights with members;
- Barrier-free access and improved clinical support for vulnerable persons during an airlift process- pre-departure, in-flight, arrival and during ground transportation.

“We had community members, located by our indigenous government, in Vancouver. These members did not speak English as their first language and they did not know where they were flown to. It was very scary for them. They also had compounding health issues with their medications missing which led to another crisis within the fire crisis. The air evacuation was very stressful for these members including their families.” - Tlicho community leader with emergency/crisis experience, Behchokò.

Ground Transportation

For those who evacuated their communities by ground transportation, that experience fell within a broad spectrum of feedback. Across all regions of the Territory, improved highway management during a crisis came up as a point of constructive feedback. To contextualize, the communities visited acknowledged that the Territory is a large geographical area, and many people are very comfortable travelling via roads in all seasons.

The feedback received was two-pronged: it was acknowledging the dangerous work done by highway teams in emergency situations AND the need for improved methods of alerting the general public to the imminent dangers on the roads during an evacuation. Some communities experienced road closures and piloting teams during their evacuation, which were greatly appreciated and acknowledged. Numerous community members experienced harrowing escapes as the fires licked and jumped the roads. Discussions included topics of concern: the role of RCMP in road closure management, assessing dangers and communicating these to the general public, and the authority to close roads and enforcement.

"Our drive out of the Territory was absolutely harrowing. At numerous times, we thought that we were not going to make it - the flames were licking at our car. It was the worst experience of my life. We could not see ahead of us or behind us. We did not have any sense of the road or ditches. We acknowledge that piloting was a challenge but we should never have to experience this again - ever. No one in the community should be permitted to leave a community [by evacuation order] without improved highway management [during an emergency]. We need to be safe.” - Community member, Fort Smith, Treaty 8.

This lack of information during evacuation processes also extended to families. Many families were separated during evacuations, leading to distress and confusion. Individuals were put on separate buses without knowing when or where they might be reunited. For vulnerable individuals—especially children, older adults, and people with disabilities—this lack of coordination created an immense burden during an already intense situation.

Individuals noted that advance notice would have allowed for a more orderly evacuation, with more time to prepare and prioritize vulnerable residents. Instead, the delayed communication forced many to evacuate under high-stress conditions, some stating they drove through flames. The late notice endangered vulnerable populations, such as those without access to private transportation or those with mobility challenges. The lack of proactive communication and timely warnings undermined the ability to execute an effective evacuation in many communities throughout the wildfire season, exacerbating the dangers of the encroaching wildfire.

Hosting Communities

Multiple communities hosted evacuees throughout the 2023 wildfire season. Unfortunately, many people were relocated when their host community also received evacuation orders.

At the peak of the wildfire season, multiple jurisdictions were all evacuating to or were already being hosted in Yellowknife when suddenly Yellowknife was identified as being under threat. This is when the cascading events caused catastrophic failure of the emergency management structures and processes. The hub community, Yellowknife, was no longer available. The loss of this critical community caused a ripple effect on many people, organizations, and communities. Even communities not under wildfire risk suddenly saw supply chain disruptions, medical disruptions, and transportation disruptions.

Alberta was generous and very well organized. Host communities included locations from north to south: High Level, Zama City, Grande Prairie, Peace River, Cold Lake, Edmonton, Leduc, Red Deer, St Albert, Strathcona County, Lloydminster, Calgary and many others. Many evacuees needing medical support were sent to Vancouver. Other evacuees were welcomed in Whitehorse and Winnipeg. This mass scattering of evacuees, including GNWT staff and elected officials, contributed to the significant breakdown of emergency support services and business continuity.

Adding to the confusion was a lack of GNWT staff on-site in host communities to assist with messaging, support, and logistics. Engagement noted that evacuees were looking for a familiar northern representative who would be their conduit to information and comfort.

Emergency Social Services

There were significant gaps identified in ESS⁴⁸ provided during response efforts. These gaps highlighted the need for better coordination and preparedness in delivering people-centric services:

- **Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** were notably absent from emergency management operations within the Territory, apart from the direct support of their existing

⁴⁸ Note: British Columbia has changed culturally appropriate terminology to "Emergency Social Support." In Alberta, ESS is called "Emergency Social Services".

clients and participants. This lack of engagement with NGOs limited the overall capacity to address diverse community needs. An urgent need is enhanced engagement with NGOs and agencies supporting vulnerable populations. This includes incorporating them into ESS planning and exercises to strengthen overall emergency management operations and ensure the needs of all community members are met effectively.

- **Registration processes** for evacuees and affected individuals were found to be weak. Systems were not thoroughly tested, leading to disorganized efforts, and the data collected during registration was not effectively utilized for operational roll-out stages. This inefficiency underscored the importance of robust, pre-tested registration systems.
- Critical gaps in pet support also existed. Many residents within the Territory struggled to find adequate resources for their animals, while more support was available in other jurisdictions outside of the NWT. This disparity highlighted the necessity for comprehensive pet care planning within ESS frameworks.
- Planning for vulnerable populations was another area where significant shortcomings were identified. Congregate shelters were noted as not appropriate for aging adults, Elders and vulnerable people. Substance abuse increased unintentionally due to proximity and availability.

Recommendations: A Path Forward

1. **Improve the GNWT system for registration:** Use a tested and proven system for registration and updates. The registration system needs to identify where community members are. Registration data must be sharable for operational use and shared among responding organizations where necessary to ensure adequate evacuee support. Other considerations for a modern registration include:
 - Digital portal and data entry from communities.
 - A system that allows Indigenous governments to upload their citizens' and members information
 - Geo-mapping modality
 - Push communications can be sent from it
 - It can dovetail into re-entry and financial assistance processes
 - **Rationale:** A reliable registration system will ensure evacuees receive timely updates and support. It will enhance accountability and tracking, enabling family reunification sooner. It can provide real-time data, improve agency coordination, build public confidence, and support cost projections.
2. **Plan alternative operational hub for the GNWT (outside of the territorial capital city).** Have alternate locations for both municipal and territorial governments to relocate to maintain government business continuity.
 - **Rationale:** The current model, with Yellowknife as the hub for many essential services, profoundly impacts communities that rely on supply chains, government offices, and transportation via the capital. Yellowknife's central role makes redundancy necessary to prevent widespread service disruption during localized

crises. The GNWT also needs to be able to continue operations even if Yellowknife facilities are no longer available.

3. **Develop and communicate pre-planned evacuation routes and pre-planned reception centers.** As part of evacuation planning, identify key resources required along evacuation routes and create messaging for affected communities about the availability of these resources.

- **Rationale:** During the 2023 Wildfire evacuations, some resources were available along evacuation routes, but not clearly communicated out. Clear evacuation routes and pre-planned reception centers are vital for ensuring community safety and reducing confusion during emergencies. By identifying vital resources needed along evacuation routes and communicating their availability, people are better equipped to evacuate efficiently and confidently. This proactive approach enhances equitable access to critical support during crises.



Image 16 City of Yellowknife Multiplex and Reception Centre (TSI, 2024)

CHAPTER VII

Transition to Recovery



Introduction

Transitioning to the recovery phase is a crucial step that begins during the response phase, as effective re-entry planning needs to be initiated well before the actual process occurs. This section will look at:

- Re-entry
- Damage assessments
- Finances
- Loss, grief and trauma

Re-Entry

A healthy and well-managed re-entry plan sets a community up for healing and future resilience in recovery. Many communities noted this as an area for improvement for future emergencies.

“We returned home and that was it. Home. We did not see any of our territorial leaders. We did not have any community events. It was very strange. It was like the evacuation didn’t happen but it clearly did. We did not thank community helpers or volunteers in a meaningful way. It felt hollow and empty. It still does. It makes me very sad.” - Community member, South Slave Region.

Common themes emerged about re-entry to the territory by air including missed flights, empty seats and unwanted guests, leaving many confused about the priorities and efficiency of repatriation. EMO teams and support departments could not reference pre-existing re-entry plans or procedures. One re-entry plan, which was created on-the-fly for one of the largest communities, ended up being disregarded when the timeline for re-entry was moved up.

Pre-planning for community re-entry would clarify roles, provide a framework that could be adjusted during the event if needed, clarify the internal and external communications plan, and ensure that community re-entry and recovery needs are identified and met, in alignment with coordination support requests of the GNWT.

The return-to-home experience was a topic that came up consistently in engagement as an area for improvement. The GNWT was keenly aware that residents across the fire-impacted regions wanted to get home as soon as possible. Most people never conceived of being away from their homes for the length of time they were evacuated in 2023, or to be evacuated multiple times.

On the positive, **re-entry became one of the successful areas of communication in 2023.** Survey respondents identified their top five areas of satisfaction with wildfire communications:

SUCCESS
Re-entry was more effective in communities who had recently “rehearsed” re-entry through previous evacuations.

- Informing you about the fires and firefighting efforts near your community (35%),
- Informing you about when you can return home (26%),
- Informing you about the process of returning home (21%),
- Informing you about how to return home (21%) and
- Effectiveness while you were outside of your community (if applicable) (21%).

Feedback from engagement also revealed:

- Many people noted that they had very little notice to be at airports for their return flights. People were hours away from the airport where they were to depart from.
- Many re-entry flights did not require identification, and many noted that there are now new members in their communities who came north on re-entry flights, placing stress on local services. Where identification was required, some people did not have it for various reasons (left behind or did not have ID originally).
- The EMOs across most communities found it challenging to meet timelines and dependencies for re-entry well.
- Residents were not prepared for the level of fire impact, burn areas and the mental health impacts of returning home. Feedback included improved access to mental health support for re-entry, especially for grief and loss.
- Non-governmental agencies had to rush to prepare for re-entry. There was limited advanced communication, planning, and preparation in coordination with the TEMO.
- The territorial government did not fully understand the ramp-up time for re-entry for critical services such as airports, hospitals, and health centres; given this was a first experience for most, this is not unexpected. Inexperience can be mitigated by partnering with experienced IMTs.
- Vulnerable people were not a specific consideration for planning re-entry, which should happen in the future to prepare for unique and emergent needs.
- There were significant gaps in re-entry healing, mental health support and critical incident management upon re-entry for those who worked during the emergency and for those who supported in the community.
- Some residents and GNWT staff have decided to not return to NWT, and others have chosen to live in other communities now.

SUCCESS

Residents were very thankful for those who looked after their property, gardens, garbage, animals and fire protection systems while evacuated.

Damage Assessments

It was unclear through engagement or documentation reviews if a dedicated recovery group within MACA was formed to support overall recovery activities across the Territory.

Structure Damage

Throughout the 2023 wildfire season, homes, cabins, and businesses in multiple communities were lost to wildfires, and over 4.1 million hectares of forest were affected by the 303 wildfires.⁴⁹

Enterprise lost 90% of the entire building stock of the community; it is estimated that less than 5% has been rebuilt. Some residents are temporarily living near Hay River at Castaway Cabins in recreational vehicles and cabins.

Hay River lost between eight and 10 structures in the area.

Behchokò and area lost 19 structures. Behchokò and the Tlicho noted that they are doing their own damage assessments and working with the Government of Canada and GNWT on this. They are documenting their properties to have an updated inventory of cabins and traplines for future events.

Kát'odeeche First Nation Reserve lost 17 structures; all residential structures have been replaced.

Sambaa K'e lost one structure.

Fort Smith, Salt River First Nation, Wekweètì, Dettah, Jean Marie River, Kakisa, Ndilo, and the City of Yellowknife did not experience structure losses directly within their communities; however, some structures and damage were noted in areas surrounding these communities. Cabins in other areas throughout the NWT were also lost. This number is not yet available.



Source: TSI (2024)

⁴⁹ https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/independent-reviews-wildfire-and-emergency-response-2023-wildfire-season-underway-0?utm_source=chatgpt.com

The fire destroyed dozens of vehicles along the highway outside of Hay River, Enterprise and other evacuation routes.

*The fight with the GNWT (for recovery) after was worse than the burn....
overshadowing the disaster and loss.”—Engagement Participant, Enterprise*

The GNWT has recovery information specific to damage assessments, debris cleanup and environmental reviews available on its website.⁵⁰

Environmental Impact and Wildlife

A critical concern was the impact of repeated drought seasons on the environment. Linked to drought conditions, there is concern that there is more fuel and vegetation that can burn, thus increasing risks. In addition, erosion and water pathways have changed, leading to other risks. Engagement participants noted that caribou migratory paths have shifted further north due to changing environmental conditions, while wildlife typically found near communities has moved away due to a lack of food in burned forest areas. The sensitive nature of the NWT's ecosystems suggests that the recovery of forests and the return of wildlife will require many years of concerted effort.



Image 17 Black bear along Fort Smith Highway (TSI, 2024)

⁵⁰ <https://www.maca.gov.nt.ca/en/services/disaster-recovery/2023-wildfires-recovery>

Finance Recovery

The GNWT announced funding to support recovery for residents who self-evacuated by road and for small businesses affected by evacuation orders in the Territory.

The Evacuation Travel Support Program was available to NWT residents who, by order, evacuated their home community because of the 2023 wildfires.⁵¹ Eligible individuals who evacuated by vehicle were eligible for a one-time direct deposit as follows:

- \$750 per vehicle evacuated to a southern jurisdiction or
- \$400 per vehicle evacuated within the NWT

Evacuees who left by road but needed to return by air could register for organized re-entry flights paid for by the GNWT.

The Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development (SEED) Policy was expanded to allow for contributions of up to \$5,000 to offset operational costs incurred by wildfire-affected businesses. Applications for expenses incurred from May 2023 onward will be accepted and must be supported by receipts or equivalent proof.

Businesses that have already received funding for wildfire relief under the SEED Policy could receive up to the \$5,000 funding limit if they can continue to meet the program criteria required. These supports were temporary additions to SEED and were accessible until March 31, 2024.⁵²

Insurance

The primary role of the GNWT concerning insurance revolves around sharing insurance education in their risk communications. Understanding, accessing and funding insurance coverage posed a significant challenge for many residents, particularly in rural and Indigenous communities. Factors such as geographic location, the availability of municipal fire hydrants and municipal fire services, and subsequent insurance availability created barriers to obtaining adequate insurance.

NWT residents and businesses had and continue to have significant concerns about accessing insurance. It is:

- Too expensive;
- Too complex;
- They lack access to insurance as parts of the NWT are a higher-risk region – few insurance agencies will cover them;
- They cannot get insurance due to their primary home heating source being wood-burning stoves (which, for some, is a result of a lack of access to propane and natural gas); and
- They did not access their insurance due to premiums increasing

⁵¹ <https://www.gov.nt.ca/en/newsroom/nwt-emergency-response-update-august-25-2023-630-pm#:~:text=The%20GNWT%20has%20announced%20funding%20for%20residents%20who,their%20home%20community%20be cause%20of%20the%202023%20wildfires.>

⁵² GNWT Finance

Many residents who lived in government-provided housing did not understand the need for additional protections, such as content insurance. This left many households, businesses and communities financially vulnerable in the aftermath of the wildfires.

Small businesses did not have the cash flow to purchase insurance beyond minimum levels, leaving a substantial gap in revenue and loss to cover. The loss of income and disruption to livelihoods were significant.

During engagement sessions, impacted parties expressed that they were unable to recover financially from the costs associated with evacuations and lost wages resulting from their inability to work during this period. Engagement revealed that there are people currently unhoused due to the financial strain put on them during and following the evacuations.

“I have been in business for 15 years. The past 5 years have been very challenging-coming out of Covid-19 pandemic and then the fires. We are still trying to financially recover from the evacuation of 2023. I did not activate my insurance policy- the complexity of the insurance was too overwhelming for me and it did not cover loss of income which is the support that I needed. I am now trying to balance my business finances with my household finances and it is very difficult. I did receive some support from my Band- I am very thankful for that support.” - Indigenous business owner, Yellowknife.

Local Authorities Reimbursements

The GNWT has a disaster assistance policy to support municipalities with the burden of emergency response and recovery costs. The Disaster Assistance Funding Policy also allows the GNWT to provide financial assistance to help individuals, small businesses, and non-profit organizations with recovery costs for essential basic needs.

Documentation is critical for reimbursement, which is another reason to fully integrate ICS into municipal emergency operations. Its processes and forms can provide significant proof of financial costing. Not all expenses are eligible, including costs associated with commercial accommodations, facilities, and equipment damages.⁵³

Loss, Grief and Trauma

Engagement revealed significant loss, grief and trauma within local, Indigenous and territorial levels of government and communities. The absence of mental health support during recovery and return to the new normal is evident in the majority of interactions, stories, and recollections. There was limited capacity for community-based healing and little to no collaboration for mental health support for impacted residents, first responders and emergency management organizations at all

⁵³ NWT Emergency Plan (2024)

levels. Responders continued to support the event but lacked outlets to provide feedback. Mental health support was not readily available (either by availability, eligibility or appropriateness) immediately following the event, and critical incident stress management support was absent. Significant psychosocial and mental health impacts from 2023 are still very present with limited supports in place. There is still a great need for mental health support in the NWT.

"We were and continue to be collateral damage." – Engagement Participant, Yellowknife

Volunteers played a crucial role in the community's physical and psychological recovery. During the wildfire season, neighbours and strangers became unofficial volunteers, supporting those in need. These volunteers assisted with tasks such as maintaining gardens, ensuring security, caring for pets, and sharing vital information. Their efforts breathed life into their communities, helping residents find a sense of normalcy and begin their recovery journeys.



Recommendations: A Path Forward

- 1. Create a baseline for re-entry planning by leveraging expertise from other jurisdictions and partners:**
 - Rationale:** Leveraging expertise from other jurisdictions and partners to create a baseline for re-entry planning better supports the GNWT to effectively manage the complex process of returning displaced residents to their communities after an emergency.
- 2. Include trauma-informed mental health and community-based healing in recovery planning for evacuees and GNWT response teams.** Provide improved support for evacuees, response teams, and others.
 - Rationale:** Those who experience profound loss must be provided with opportunities to rebuild and heal. Mental health support must be readily available for evacuees as they repatriate. Mental health support must be available for months after an event and should be provided in various mediums to ensure maximum reach. Responders must also be well supported with mental health resources and mechanisms to foster resiliency and reduce absenteeism and attrition.
- 3. Explore improved options for insurance and disaster financial assistance, including insurance literacy.** Create an insurance literacy communication before a disaster.

Rationale: Improved insurance and financial assistance will help residents and businesses recover more effectively. Reviewing any territorial component of the disaster financial assistance program might identify additional improvements.

Improvement Opportunities

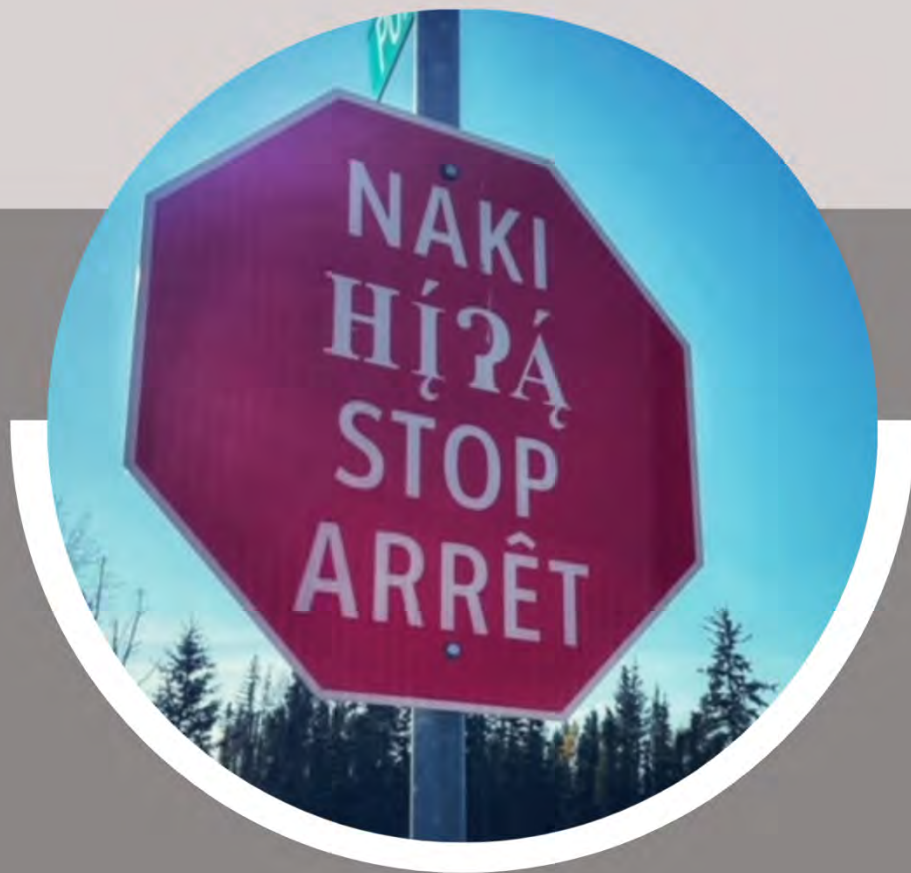
- Mandate (through policy) that EM planning at both the community level and for the GNWT include re-entry and recovery planning through a whole-of-community approach. During an event, policies should direct collaboration and consultation between the local and territorial governments prior to re-entry. This collaboration should occur at least three operational periods before re-entry is planned. Ideally, this requirement to collaborate and consult should be legislated (refer to the Emergency and Disaster Management Act, BC, 2023). This would ensure adequate coordination between both governments and ensure services are established and aligned prior to repatriation.
- Identify priority services for re-entry as part of re-entry planning and/or essential service identification. Identifying the interdependencies between functions (when one service is critical for another) and the specific order in which these services must be restored (e.g. power must be restored to the grocery store so that the grocery store can stock essential items for returning evacuees whose fridges will have spoiled).



Image 18 Castaway Cabins, NWT (TSI, 2024)

CHAPTER VIII

Communications



Introduction

When faced with a significant emergent event, communications are a cornerstone to effective emergency management and developing relationships with event-impacted individuals and communities. When executing a wildfire response to the scale seen during the 2023 wildfires, creating trust between community members and government is foundational to ensuring the short-term success of response efforts and the long-term stability and sustainability of the Territory and its communities as it navigates recovery.

This AAR focused on four core components of communications tied to the GNWT's wildfire response, including:

- Emergency Alerts
- Public Communications
- Public Trust and Misinformation
- Internal Communications

The vast majority of areas explored bridge all four focus areas, while some may be more aligned with one or two areas. However, moving forward, it is important that the GNWT consider crisis communications through a lens applicable to these areas, with consideration given to pre-, in-, and post-crisis event phases. This will help determine the appropriateness of communications efforts executed, through proper evaluation of the need for issues management, risk communications, and crisis communications.

Across all areas of public communications reviewed in completing this AAR, there emerged a series of key themes that bridged different focuses:

- Lack of coordination in public communications and in internal communications between the GNWT and its staff.
- Lack of risk communications leading up to and during evacuation.
- Lack of trust in GNWT as a 'source of truth.'
- Significant levels of misinformation went unaddressed by official sources, including the GNWT.
- Lack of trauma-informed engagement throughout emergent events and post-crisis.

Emergency Alerts

Territorial Emergency Alerts, or the use of lower-tier Public Notification Systems sometimes executed at the community government level, are a crucial element of successful emergency management. They provide appropriate situational awareness and insights to the public while clearly and concisely articulating public expectations and actions to be taken. In reviewing these elements executed by the GNWT and through communities, meticulous evaluation was undertaken

of the timeliness, reach, clarity, and overall efficacy of alerts issued. Manual notifications, such as sirens and horns, were also included.

This review component seeks to enhance the precision and effectiveness of emergency alerts, ensuring swift and clear communication to maximize public safety and awareness during disasters.

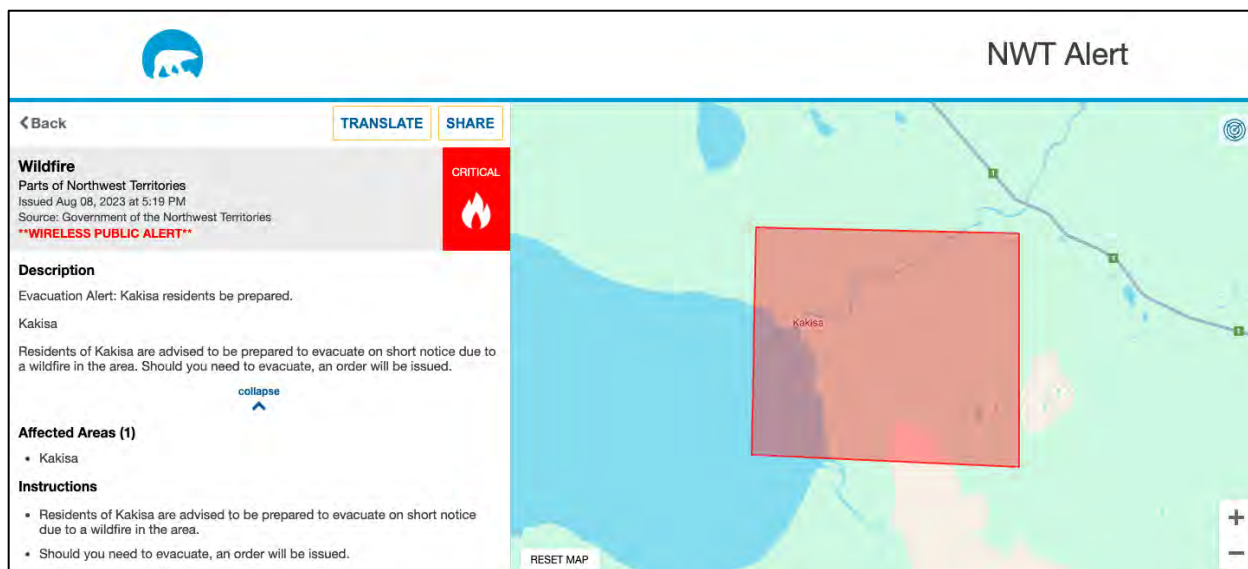
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“I am deeply thankful for the sirens from the local First Nation (KFN). They alerted us of the high-risk fire danger and to evacuate. We cannot resort to only digital communications- our fiber optic cable went down! We need the sirens and then door-knocking so that all community members are empowered to leave safely.” - Hay River community member.

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For the purpose of this review, notifications issued through NWT Alert from August 8, 2023, to September 25, 2023, were analyzed. This marks both the first and the last instance of critical wildfire-specific alerts being issued in the two-month span of August and September 2023.

The first Alert issued (August 8, 2023) indicates some issues observed throughout wildfire alerts, including a lack of clarity, detail, and appropriate public instructions.



The Description in this Alert reads:

“Evacuation Alert: Kakisa residents, be prepared. Residents of Kakisa are advised to be prepared to evacuate on short notice due to a wildfire in the area. Should you need to evacuate, an order will be issued.”

The Instructions in this Alert read:

“Residents of Kakisa are advised to be prepared to evacuate on short notice due to a wildfire in the area. Should you need to evacuate, an order will be issued.”

Analyzing this alert, specifically, raises concerns surrounding the efficacy and impact of the NWT Alert system at the time during which the 2023 Wildfires occurred, including the following considerations:

1. **Lack of Clarity:** This alert has too little information for residents to respond in what would be considered an appropriate or expected manner. While it is important for messaging to be concise, additional information should be provided through Alerts of this nature, including:
 - a. Where the wildfire is located at the time at which the alert is issued;
 - b. The entire area, marked by routes/geographic locations, to which the =evacuation alert applies; and,
 - c. How quickly residents should be prepared to evacuate: a 2-hour evacuation alert carries different implications than a 30-minute Evacuation Alert.
2. **Lack of Direction:** The instructions provided to residents do not add any information beyond what is in the core Alert description and do not support residents in what's being asked of them in preparing for potential evacuation. Additional direction should be provided through Alerts of this nature, including:
 - a. What residents should do to prepare themselves for potential evacuation (i.e. what to pack);
 - b. Where additional information on evacuation preparedness can be found;
 - c. Areas to avoid while crews work to get the wildfire under control.

"The alerts were very confusing- some were late and were lacking in information and direction. We were getting more accurate and timely updates from other parts of the Territory- and not from our own community. If there was an evacuation order this week, I would question even leaving and the value of the information." - Community member, South Slave, Treaty 11.

Similar issues arose across wildfire-related NWT Alerts issued throughout August 2024. While it has not been possible to identify figures associated with the true reach of NWT Alerts, it was anecdotally heard in conducting engagement that residents often did not receive the NWT Alerts issued by the GNWT.

Generally speaking, the following best practices should be considered and followed when developing future NWT Alerts of this nature:

1. Be Clear and Specific

- Use straightforward language and clearly state the level of urgency, ensuring appropriate context is provided for those who may not understand the language used (e.g., Evacuation Alert vs. Evacuation Order).

- Use geographic markers, such as street names or specific boundaries, to identify areas of pertinence to the Alert recipient.

“As an Indigenous leader, my role is to support the messaging of the emergency- to help our members. It was very difficult for me to do this when the messaging was not clear, delayed and often in the wrong sequencing. It was very challenging. We need to do better in the future.” - Elected Indigenous leader, Deh Cho, Treaty 11

2. Provide Actionable Instructions

- Outline clear steps for residents to take immediately (e.g., for an Evacuation Alert, this could include what essentials to pack, how to secure pets, etc.).
- Specify what not to do, such as outlining areas which residents should avoid.

3. Provide Regular Updates

- Clearly state when further Alerts will be issued or information available and how residents can access that information (if it is not through the NWT Alert system). Stick to the provided timeline at all costs.
- Provide regular updates on an emerging or rapidly evolving situation to keep residents informed and feeling as though they have control over the situation, which will help alleviate confusion or panic.
- In the absence of new information, confirm the most recent information presented and that updates are still in progress, showing that the situation is being actively managed.

4. Leverage Partners to Promote Alerts

- Coordinate and collaborate with local officials and the media to ensure that information shared in NWT Alerts is echoed through as many avenues as possible, ensuring messaging consistency across communications.

“The not-for-profit sector could not assist with messaging because it was not clear and it was not given to us in a timely way. [We] were hearing updates and evacuation messaging at the same time as community members. We were not partners to the government to help people impacted by these events. We could have done more to support people in these distressing times.” Senior leader, not-for-profit sector, NWT.

5. Include Contact Information

- While the NWT Alert example provided states that people are not to phone 9-1-1 with questions or for information, no direction is given for where they should seek those answers. Provide a dedicated phone line or other contact information for those seeking answers.
- Provide a dedicated phone line or other contact information for vulnerable persons who may require additional assistance if an evacuation order is issued or if they are preparing for potential evacuation in response to the evacuation alert.

6. Ensure Accuracy

- All Alerts must be completely accurate and current when they are issued. An established process should allow for streamlined and rapid Alert content review before it is publicly released.

While there were issues in the execution of NWT Alert usage, it is important to note that the GNWT excelled in numerous areas:

- Alerts were issued with reasonable and appropriate frequency so as not to overwhelm or create complacency;
- While there were issues in the execution of NWT Alerts, it is encouraging to see the various tools within the system used.

SUCCESS

An audio option worked effectively to reflect Alert content, reducing barriers to access.

Public Communications

As the wildfire situation evolved, and risk communications shifted to crisis communications, the GNWT and community governments were tasked with communicating effectively with residents throughout significant impact events, including evacuations. In reviewing GNWT public communications issued throughout August 2023 and September 2023 – including through sources like the GNWT website, social media, and traditional media – and in engaging residents from evacuated communities, it has been concluded that public communications experienced challenges.

Social media was the public communications method most frequently used by the GNWT. While some effort was put into developing media releases and partnering with traditional media, it was determined that these methods were not enough to reach all wildfire-impacted residents and/or communities.

"I was following Cabin Radio. I was reading posts from my MLA on social media. I was reading messaging from various GNWT ministries and departments such as roads, highways, [and] parks. It took a lot of time and work for me to synthesize and understand ALL of the messaging. It was not clear, concise and aligned. The timeline varied for each source of information. We have to do a better job of crisis communications in the future. Communications is everything!" - Community member, Enterprise.

Public communications from the GNWT were often inconsistent, and there were times when publicly shared information conflicted with other instances of public communications. The importance of consistency is unparalleled when looking at communications surrounding such major occurrences as community evacuation. It was heard through engagement that evacuated residents relied on sources other than the GNWT for information, partly due to this lack of consistency.

*“Communications was definitely struggling for the overall response for the first few days. I began to post information as an MLA for more fulsome information and I continued to do so during the evacuation. For community members, I felt strongly that information needed to be more timely, more detailed and more consistent.” -
19th Assembly, MLA, Yellowknife.*

It was also heard that there was a perceived lack of transparency in GNWT public communications. In what is deemed a valid number of interviews conducted, respondents spoke anecdotally about instances in which information shared by GNWT officials did not match information shared by other sources, or that communications were combative when responding to specific inquiries or requests for information. In each of these instances, the perception placed upon the GNWT was a lack of transparency in messaging.

In many of the above-stated instances, it was common that engagement participants instead turned to friends and family as a key source of information, with many noting that they had a direct tie to a first responder who could provide them with accurate and timely information.

The NWT is unique in its limitations on communications. While rural and remote locations across Canada can experience poor cell phone coverage and internet connectivity, this problem is exacerbated in the NWT.

In the NWT, 85% of households have internet access^{54, 55}, to varying degrees of reliability compared to the Canadian average of 94%⁵⁶; while 86% of households own a cell phone, compared to the Canadian average of 94%⁵⁷. Many households share one cell phone. This proved to be a significant barrier to those engaged through this AAR process, with many citing that their connectivity is unreliable or limited despite having internet access.

Additionally, in conducting engagement for this AAR, it was frequently heard that residents were not receiving those public communications executed by the GNWT. This included critical communications, such as NWT Alerts. This is of significant concern and must be explored further by the GNWT. It also further impresses the need for the GNWT to utilize all forms of public communications, including proactively strengthening and leveraging relationships with traditional

54 Research on Telecommunications Services in Northern Canada: Final Report, Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, November 4, 2020: https://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/pwgsc-tpsgc/por-ef/crtc/2021/023-20-e/POR023-20_report.pdf

55 Connectivity in Rural and Remote Areas, Reports of the Auditor General of Canada, accessed: September 30, 2023: https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/att__e_44225.html

56 Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2022, Statistics Canada, July 20, 2023: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230720/dq230720b-eng.htm>

57 So long landline, hello smartphone, Statistics Canada, May 11, 2023: <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/3582-so-long-landline-hello-smartphone>

media, community and Indigenous governments, and other forms of media/communication to ensure messages are shared widely during major emergent events.

Engagement uncovered a perceived trend that it was known amongst GNWT representatives that communications were inadequate in many cases, primarily due to a lack of internal capacity to be able to handle the demands of this scale of emergent event.

In interviews, participants pointed out that the communication breakdown between the GNWT and communities created a disjointed and inconsistent flow of information. Many residents were left in the dark about evacuation plans, leading to unnecessary delays, confusion, and frustration. For example, while some residents were told to evacuate immediately, others believed they had more time due to earlier communications that an evacuation might not be necessary.

Public Trust & Misinformation

One specific area of concern in reviewing public communications administered by the GNWT was the lack of public trust in the information being provided. This is primarily related to the perceived lack of transparency and the perception that GNWT messaging was inconsistent and unclear. This is not unique to the NWT and is a common theme in many large-scale emergencies.

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"Frankly, I received better information from family and friends than I did from the government. [The] local government did the best they could. Once I was safely out of the Territory, I tried not to follow social media- it was too confusing and upsetting. I needed to see leaders in Alberta updating us on the fires. We did not see that. I have a very low level of trust in our government; they did not come forward in a timely and transparent way." - Fort Smith community member, Treaty 8.

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Engagement participants repeatedly stated that the GNWT was not considered a 'source of truth' throughout the wildfire events; instead, more weight was placed on the information shared by non-governmental organizations, with particular emphasis placed on the value of Cabin Radio's broadcast to keep residents informed.

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"My team was assisting community members in Alberta, and it was very challenging to support families in a good way with such limited support and messaging from the territorial government. Fortunately, personal networks were activated to support the agencies in better-serving community members from NWT. We did not have messaging or a process of decision-making from the territorial government." - Senior leader, NGO supporting the evacuation.

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In reviewing the coverage provided by Cabin Radio, it has been determined that the media outlet was significant in ensuring accurate information was released in a timely manner; those involved with Cabin Radio should be applauded for their efforts and commitment to NWT communities.

Still, it is concerning that a third party carried the torch of information sharing, as a stop-gap to a lack of public information available through other means, including government.

Misinformation

Many engagement participants noted that friends and family were considered a more reliable source of information than the GNWT. Numerous studies point to such entrenched trust in non-official sources, resulting in heightened levels of misinformation, which was also seen in the NWT throughout this time. This included misinformation about the wildfires, evacuations, and wildfire response, each contributing to heightened confusion. Public safety risks were worsened by such misinformation.

There are very few instances in which the GNWT directly tackled misinformation. Such misinformation, however, did draw on the EOC and other GNWT resources and resulted in frustration amongst those serving in official GNWT roles.

Cabin Radio succeeded in its attempt to inform the public because of its dedication to sharing accurate and timely information and because the public viewed Cabin Radio as a source of truth over the GNWT.

In conducting public engagement for this AAR, participants often lacked trust in the AAR process until it was explained that the firm leading the AAR was acting at arm's length from the GNWT. Participants voiced concerns that:

- a. They felt they could not necessarily speak freely about their experiences related to the 2023 wildfires for fear of repercussions, with some citing that during previous reviews of this nature, GNWT officials called out members of the public for their opinions.
- b. The results of the AAR would not be actioned by the GNWT to the extent required.

These are concerning and show low trust between the public and its Territorial government.

Internal Communications & Structures

In addition to the state of public communications reviewed in undertaking this AAR, concerns emerged surrounding how the GNWT communicated internally throughout this event, and the structures by which the GNWT communicated internally and externally. However, teams on the ground were adept at finding solutions to many of the evolving issues being experienced.

While out of the GNWT's control, some of the challenges, such as those associated with technology, are important lessons for the future.

- **Process Alignment:** The GNWT did not use IMT Information Officers for communications in the ICS structure.
- **Technology:** Due largely to extreme smoke, Emergency Response personnel could not access lines of communication, including through typical means such as satellite phones. Starlink proved to be an effective tool for overcoming these challenges.

- **Reception Centres:** Reception centre staff felt they were operating without an appropriate level of information or communication from the GNWT. Some noted that decisions were made on the ground, outside of appropriate decision-making structures.

Recommendations: A Path Forward

1. **Review, revise and train on the NWT Alert processes with collaboration in mind. Ensure the NWT Alert system is used effectively at the local and territorial levels through training and exercises. Ensure one process for the territory.**
 - Rationale: Reviewing and revising processes will improve the effectiveness of the NWT Alert system. As NWT Alerts are used for in-crisis public notifications, the GNWT should look at a consistent option for community governments to use public notification systems appropriate for risk communications and local updates in the event of an emergency.
2. **Develop and implement a message mapping approach.** Ensure alert content is adequate and properly informs recipients. Before deployment, mapping also considers consistent messaging across multiple traditional and social media platforms.
 - Rationale: A message mapping approach will ensure that alerts provide clear and actionable information to as wide an audience as possible.
3. **Create a framework for risk communications.** The GNWT must develop a Community Crisis Communications Support Framework to provide communications support to local government organizations throughout a major emergent event, whether staffed internally or through a qualified third party.
 - Rationale: A framework for risk communications will ensure that residents are informed and prepared for potential risks. Effective risk communications ensure that community members know their role in the emergency, are prepared to fill it out and understand the next steps as the situation evolves.
4. **Identify where communication barriers exist across the Territory and use technology and innovation to overcome them.** Use all forms of communication to reach residents, including traditional sirens, text alerts, and social media updates. This can range from ensuring language barriers are addressed in crisis communications planning to investing in redundant satellite internet solutions.
 - Rationale: The NWT is unique in its limitations regarding receiving communications, which many residents throughout the Territory experience. While it is valid across Canada that rural and remote locations can experience poor cell phone coverage and internet connectivity, this problem is exacerbated in the NWT. There are also multiple languages that need to be considered.

Improvement Opportunities

- i. Review and revise processes associated with NWT Alerts to ensure the system is used effectively.
- ii. As NWT Alerts are used for in-crisis public notifications, the GNWT should look at a consistent option for community governments to use public notification systems appropriate for risk communications, local updates, and more in the event of a disaster or emergency.
- iii. Tools such as Starlink should be made available to first responders and emergency management organizations across the NWT, either through the GNWT or community governments, in direct response to some of the accessibility challenges specific to the north.
- iv. Mandate through legislation or policy that all community governments across the Territory must have a dedicated Crisis Communications Plan aligned with best practice and with the local Emergency Management Plan (or equivalent).
- v. Upon creation, the Territory must have a process for verifying that each community government's Crisis Communications Plan is aligned with best practices.
- vi. The GNWT is encouraged to develop a Community Crisis Communications Support Framework to provide communications support to local government organizations throughout a major emergent event, whether staffed internally or through a qualified third party.
- vii. Release the AAR publicly, in full, showing a commitment to transparency and continuous improvement of best practices.
- viii. Create an implementation plan by which recommendations included within this report will be addressed and a public portal through which Territorial residents can track the progress made in executing those recommendations.



Source TSI (2024)

APPENDICES



Appendix A: Acronyms

AAR	After Action Report
AB	Alberta
AEMA	Alberta Emergency Management Agency
BC	British Columbia
BEM	Basic Emergency Management
CAF	Canadian Armed Forces
CanNor	Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency
CIFFC	Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre
CWPP	Community Wildfire Protection Plan
DAP	Disaster Assistance Policy
DFAA	Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
ECC	Environment and Climate Change (GNWT Department)
ECCC	Environment and Climate Change Canada
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
EERP	Emergency Evacuation Relief Program
EIA	Executive and Indigenous Affairs
EMMA	Emergency Management Mutual Aid
EMO	Emergency Management Organization
EMP	Emergency Management Plan
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
ESS	Emergency Social Services
ETSP	Evacuee Travel Support Program
FOIP	Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GNWT	Government of Northwest Territory
GoA	Government of Alberta
HR	Human Resources
HSAA	Health and Social Services Authority
HSS	Health and Social Services
IAP	Incident Action Plan
ICP	Incident Command Post
ICS	Incident Command System
IMT	Incident Management Team
ISC	Indigenous Services Canada
LEMO	Local Emergency Management Organization
MACA	Municipal and Community Affairs
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
NFPA	National Fire Protection Association
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NT / NWT	Northwest Territories
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
REMO	Regional Emergency Management Organization
SEED	Support for Entrepreneurs and Economic Development
SOE	State of Emergency
SOLE	State of Local Emergency
TEMO	Territorial Emergency Management Organization
TSI	Transitional Solutions Inc
UNDRR	United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction

Appendix B: References

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Appendix C: Comparing Emergency Management Legislation Across Canada

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Key Features	Additional Regulation
Northwest Territories	Emergency Management Act	Ministerial Authority: The Minister may enter into agreements respecting emergency management with other governments. Local Authority: Community governments are responsible for local emergency management. State of Emergency: The Minister can declare a state of emergency for up to 14 days, extendable as needed.	No
Alberta	Emergency Management Act	Ministerial Authority: The Minister can declare a provincial state of emergency and direct resources. Local Authority: Municipalities must have emergency plans and agencies. State of Emergency: The Minister can declare a provincial state of emergency; Mayor (or Reeve) can declare local states of emergency	Yes (2): Disaster Recovery Regulation: Governs the assessment of damage or loss caused by a disaster and the payment of financial assistance for the damage or loss (Disaster Recovery Regulation - Open Government. https://open.alberta.ca/publications/1994_051) Local Authority Emergency Management Regulation: provides increased direction to local authorities (municipalities) on their emergency management roles and responsibilities
British Columbia	Emergency and Disaster Management Act	Ministerial Authority: The Minister can issue an order to ensure the objectives of the Act are met if a person has not properly exercised their powers or duties or if the order is necessary to achieve the Act's goals. The order may require the person to perform duties, comply with directions, or coordinate with others, and deadlines may be set for compliance. Additionally, the Minister has the authority to declare a state of provincial emergency, which can be amended or extended, but it expires after 28 days unless extended and can be cancelled if the emergency no longer exists. Local Authorities: Local authorities, including municipalities, regional districts, and Indigenous nations, have jurisdiction to	Emergency and Disaster Management Regulation: This regulation provides specific definitions and procedures under the Emergency and Disaster Management Act, such as clarifying what constitutes a "critical incident" and "specialized measure," the conditions under which a "volunteer" is not compensated, and the requirements for employees to notify their employers about deployment for emergency actions. It also details the process for granting temporary authorizations and handling requests for volunteer deployment. Compensation and Disaster Financial Assistance Regulation: This regulation outlines the procedures and criteria for providing financial assistance to individuals, businesses, and municipalities affected by disasters, including the types of eligible damages and the application process for compensation. It also sets

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Key Features	Additional Regulation
		<p>exercise powers and perform duties within their designated areas. These authorities can establish or join emergency management organizations independently or as part of a multijurisdictional effort to oversee and coordinate emergency activities. Additionally, local authorities may enter agreements with other jurisdictions or organizations for emergency cooperation, while being required to report to the Minister and follow specific regulations concerning emergency declarations and actions.</p> <p>State of Emergency: If an emergency is present, the Lieutenant Governor in Council or the Minister can declare a state of provincial emergency, specifying the nature of the emergency and the affected area. This Declaration can be amended, extended, or cancelled, with extensions lasting no more than 28 days. The Declaration expires after 28 or 14 days, depending on who issued it.</p> <p>Agreements with Indigenous Governing Bodies: This part defines key agreements related to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. A "coordination agreement" is an agreement with an Indigenous governing body for coordinating powers or duties under specific response and recovery phases, excluding decision-making or statutory power agreements. A "decision-making agreement" involves negotiating powers of decision, while a "statutory power agreement" concerns the joint exercise or consent for statutory powers with Indigenous governing bodies. The part also outlines</p>	<p>out the responsibilities of government officials in administering disaster relief funding.</p>

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Key Features	Additional Regulation
		<p>procedures for resolving disputes and the effect of these agreements when applied to powers or duties under the Act.</p> <p>Plans, Programs and Other Measures: Risk assessments must identify foreseeable hazards, assess risks to individuals or property, and consider vulnerable groups, including those who may experience intersectional disadvantage. Emergency management plans must detail measures for each phase, roles, emergency resources, and procedures while promoting cultural safety and mitigating effects on vulnerable groups. Business continuity plans ensure critical functions continue during emergencies, with specific plans for infrastructure owners to maintain essential services.</p>	
Manitoba	Emergency Measures Act	<p>Local Emergency Plans: Municipalities are required to develop emergency plans.</p> <p>Provincial Support: The province helps when local capacities are exceeded.</p>	<p>Local Authorities Emergency Planning and Preparedness Regulation: requires local authorities to develop and maintain emergency plans, ensuring preparedness for potential disasters and emergencies. It also outlines the roles and responsibilities of local officials in coordinating emergency response efforts and provides guidelines for public safety and resource management during such events.</p> <p>Disaster Financial Assistance Policy and Guidelines (Private Sector) Regulation: Establish the criteria and procedures for providing financial assistance to private sector entities, such as businesses and non-profits, that suffer damage or loss due to declared disasters. The regulations outline eligibility, the application process, and the types of expenses covered under the assistance program.</p> <p>Disaster Financial Assistance Policy and Guidelines (Public Sector) Regulations: These</p>

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Key Features	Additional Regulation
			regulations set out the criteria and procedures for providing financial assistance to public sector entities, such as municipalities and government agencies, to repair or replace damaged infrastructure and property following a declared disaster. They outline eligibility, covered expenses, and the application process for public sector entities seeking assistance.
New Brunswick	Emergency Measures Act	Comprehensive Planning: Emphasizes an all-hazards approach. Coordination: Establishes the New Brunswick Emergency Measures Organization.	<p>Disaster Assistance to Municipalities: This section outlines the process and criteria for providing financial aid to municipalities affected by disasters, covering repairing or replacing public infrastructure and assets. It specifies eligibility requirements, types of eligible expenses, and application procedures for municipalities seeking assistance.</p> <p>Emergency Planning for the Continuity of the Government of New Brunswick: This law mandates the development of comprehensive emergency plans to ensure the continued functioning of government operations during and after a disaster or emergency. It outlines the responsibilities of government officials in maintaining essential services and ensuring the resilience of government structures in crisis situations.</p>
Newfoundland and Labrador	Emergency Services Act	Provincial Agency: Creates Fire and Emergency Services – Newfoundland and Labrador. Municipal Responsibilities: Municipalities must develop emergency management plans.	None
Nova Scotia	Emergency Management Act	Municipal Requirements: Municipalities must establish emergency management organizations. Provincial Authority: The Minister can declare a state of emergency and coordinate responses.	None
Nunavut	Emergency Measures Act	Community Focus: Emphasizes community-level emergency planning. Territorial Support: The territory provides guidance and resources to communities.	None

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Key Features	Additional Regulation
Ontario	Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act	<p>Municipal Obligations: Every municipality must develop and implement an emergency management program, which includes an emergency plan, training programs, public education on emergency preparedness, and other elements required by emergency management standards. Municipalities are also required to assess hazards, risks, and vulnerable infrastructure. Confidentiality provisions protect sensitive information related to these assessments, particularly in defence or security matters, and meetings to approve such plans may be closed to the public. Municipalities must regularly review and update their emergency plans and conduct training to ensure readiness.</p> <p>Provincial Oversight: The Solicitor General is responsible for creating and maintaining a provincial emergency management plan, conducting training, preparing an annual progress report, and reviewing the Plan every five years. Additionally, they must develop an accountability and governance framework detailing the roles and responsibilities of key officials during emergencies, ensuring compliance with the framework, and making it publicly available.</p>	<p>Termination of Emergency Regulation: Outlines the procedures for formally ending a declared state of emergency, including the conditions under which the emergency declaration may be revoked by the Premier or designated authority. It ensures that all necessary actions and responses have been completed before the emergency is officially terminated.</p> <p>Extensions of Orders: Allows for the continuation or extension of emergency orders beyond their initial period, provided certain conditions are met. This ensures that necessary measures remain effective to manage ongoing emergencies until they are no longer needed.</p> <p>Standards: Establishes the criteria and guidelines for emergency management programs, ensuring that municipalities and other entities meet specific requirements for preparedness, response, and recovery during emergencies. It outlines the necessary components, such as planning, training, and risk assessments, that must be incorporated into these programs.</p>
Prince Edward Island	Emergency Measures Act	<p>Coordination: Establishes the Prince Edward Island Emergency Measures Organization. Municipal Involvement: Municipalities are encouraged to develop emergency plans.</p>	None
Quebec	Civil Protection Act	<p>Shared Responsibility: This policy defines the roles of municipalities, regional authorities, and the province. Public Safety Plans: This policy requires the development of civil protection plans.</p>	<p>Decree Concerning the Establishment of Three General Financial Assistance Programs: This decree sets out the guidelines for establishing three financial assistance programs in Quebec. These programs provide support for individuals, businesses,</p>

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Key Features	Additional Regulation
			<p>and communities affected by disasters or emergencies. The decree details eligibility criteria, application procedures, and the scope of assistance under each program.</p> <p>Regulation respecting standards, specifications, and quality criteria applicable to 9-1-1 emergency centres and specific secondary emergency call centres: Establishes the technical and operational standards that 9-1-1 emergency centers and secondary emergency call centers must meet to ensure effective and efficient emergency response services. It covers infrastructure, equipment, personnel training, and service quality criteria to maintain a high public safety standard.</p> <p>Regulation respecting warning and mobilization procedures and minimum rescue services required to protect persons and property in the event of a disaster: Outlines the procedures for issuing warnings, mobilizing emergency services, and ensuring the provision of minimum rescue services during a disaster. It aims to protect public safety by establishing clear disaster response guidelines, including the authorities' roles and responsibilities in coordinating rescue efforts.</p>
Saskatchewan	Emergency Planning Act	<p>Municipal Planning: Municipalities must prepare emergency plans. Provincial Assistance: The province supports municipalities during emergencies.</p>	<p>Provincial Disaster Assistance Policy Regulations: Outline the eligibility criteria, application process, and guidelines for providing financial assistance to individuals, municipalities, and non-profit organizations affected by disasters. The regulations define the types of damages covered and the procedures for applying for aid to help with recovery and repair efforts.</p>
Yukon	Civil Measures Act	<p>Territorial Authority: The Commissioner in the Executive Council can declare a state of emergency. Community Plans: Communities are responsible for local emergency planning.</p>	None

Appendix D: Comparing Emergency Management Plans Across Provinces & Territories

	Northwest Territories Emergency Plan (2018)	Northwest Territories Emergency Plan (2024)	Alberta Emergency Plan (2022)	Yukon Emergency Coordination Plan (2011)
Purpose	"To facilitate a prompt and coordinated response by the GNWT and its partners to emergencies affecting all or part of the NWT."	"establishes a coordination and planning framework for emergencies that may affect all or part of the NWT. The Plan outlines how emergency management partners (all levels of government, critical infrastructure providers, non-government organizations, the private sector, and Indigenous governments) work together to respond to widespread, large scale and complex emergencies, which allows all emergency management partners to effectively engage, plan and prepare for such emergencies in advance." (Northwest Territories, 2024)	"The AEP aims to ensure effective emergency management within Alberta through the establishment of an emergency management system that is dedicated to preparing for, responding to, recovering from, and building resilience to emergencies and disasters." (Alberta, 2022)	"to provide a comprehensive framework of strategies including the roles and responsibilities across government and to help guide the preparedness of departments, corporations and personnel so that the Yukon Government is well prepared to respond to all emergencies. It is an educational tool, a planning framework, and a guide to high-level emergency management" (Yukon, 2011)
Objective/Aim /Scope	Describes the emergency management framework in the NW and the roles and responsibilities of departments and partners.	"a description of the NWT emergency management system, • a framework for relationships with other departments, governments, and non-government agencies in preparing for and responding to emergencies, and • procedures for the coordination of responses to territorial emergencies and in supporting Local	describe Alberta's emergency management system and the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders therein; • outline the principles of disaster management in Alberta, including arrangements for prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery; •	

	Northwest Territories Emergency Plan (2018)	Northwest Territories Emergency Plan (2024)	Alberta Emergency Plan (2022)	Yukon Emergency Coordination Plan (2011)
		Authorities during emergencies where their capacity has been exceeded, and assistance has been requested. “ (NWT, 2024)	clarify how the GoA will work with all emergency management partners in an all-hazards framework; and • bolster commitment to continuous improvement across Alberta’s emergency management system through a blueprint for system modernization.” (Alberta, 2022)	
Roles and Responsibilities	Lists roles and responsibilities per territorial department	Lists individual, Indigenous, and departmental responsibilities	Lists roles and responsibilities per provincial department	Lists all roles and responsibilities from the Premier, Cabinet, departmental, self-governing Indigenous communities, hospitals, etc.
State of Emergency	Lists how to declare a SOE	Not mentioned	Lists how to declare a SOE and the interaction with a SOLE	States the process of declaring an SOE with a flow chart and the powers it can provide
Emergency Social Services	States that the Department of Health and Social Services and Authorities will provide ESS services when requested by the local authority	States that the Department of Health and Social Services Authorities will provide ESS services when requested by the local authority	States what ESS is and how the province can provide support to the Local Authority	States that the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Social Services will provide ESS
Provincial/Territorial Support to Communities	Lists how LEMO, REMO, and TEMO work together	Lists how LEMO, REMO, and TEMO work together	Lists how the province can provide support during an emergency (Situational Awareness, Field Officers, IMTs, etc.)	Lists how the different levels of government work together and provide support

	Northwest Territories Emergency Plan (2018)	Northwest Territories Emergency Plan (2024)	Alberta Emergency Plan (2022)	Yukon Emergency Coordination Plan (2011)
Response Structure	ICS	ICS	ICS	ICS
Mutual Aid	“In July 2009, the Minister Responsible for Emergency Management signed a Memorandum of Understanding with all provinces and territories on the provision of inter-jurisdictional emergency management assistance. The purpose of the Emergency Management Mutual Aid (EMMA) agreement is to promote and facilitate emergency management assistance between provinces and territories, before, during and after a major event.”	“In July 2009, the federal Minister Responsible for Emergency Management signed a Memorandum of Understanding with all provinces and territories on the provision of inter-jurisdictional emergency management assistance. The purpose of the Emergency Management Mutual Aid (EMMA) agreement is to promote and facilitate emergency management assistance between provinces and territories before, during, and after a major event.” (Northwest Territories, 2024) This Plan also lists the steps necessary to request mutual aid assistance	Mutual Aid agreements are defined and encouraged throughout the document. No specific mutual aid agreement is mentioned.	“Mutual aid agreements allow for the provision or distribution of disaster response resources between jurisdictions. These agreements include details of resources and how they are provided. Yukon Emergency Measures Organization is generally responsible for coordinating emergency management related mutual aid agreements with other governments and jurisdictions both internal and external to Yukon” (Yukon, 2011)
Training		“MACA’s Emergency Management Division will coordinate the delivery of a territorial emergency management training program sufficient to support the NWT emergency management system.” (Northwest Territories, 2024)	Requirements for staff of exercises and courses are outlined	Training and exercises are mentioned by departments, communities, and mutual aid agreements, understanding that it is each department's responsibility.

Appendix E. Engagement Summary

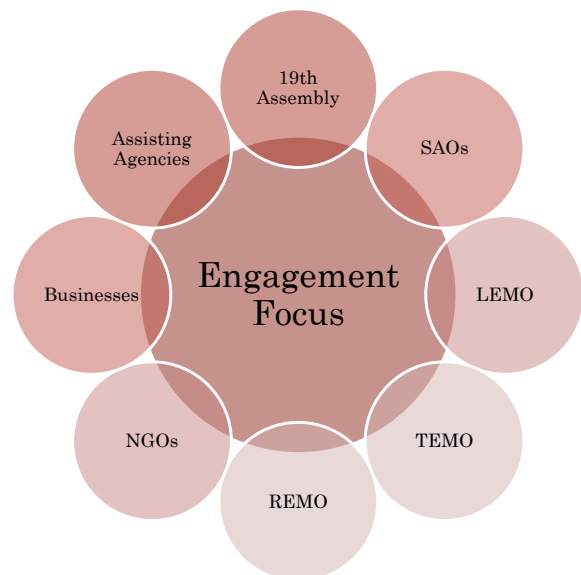
This summary provides a breakdown of the methodology, engagement participation and representation used to develop the findings and recommendations. Logistical limitations and scope of this review made it unfeasible to collect feedback from every responder and all impacted parties.

The After-Action Report (AAR) is produced based on post-event debriefs, post-incident surveys, interviews, workshops, community visits and a review of incident documents. It intends to identify and celebrate successes and determine key recommendations that address crucial capability gaps in response to the above incident.

Engagement was designed with trauma-informed considerations, accessibility and cultural sensitivities. The TSI team consisted of members with critical incident stress management certifications. The survey was crafted with guidance from a Credentialed Evaluator and a team of professionals holding certifications from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2). This ensured adherence to best practices in evaluation and public engagement.

TSI designed an engagement strategy that was vetted and approved by an Oversight Committee appointed to this review. As part of this engagement strategy, an engagement website was utilized to direct community members to information and updates on the engagement process (www.engagenwt.ca) A toll free number (1-867-877-3921) and email address (engagenwt@tsi-inc.ca) were made available. Radio and newspaper advertisement shared these communications throughout the summer and fall of 2024. Leadership groups within the GNWT and local communities were also provided with these contacts to broadcast through their communication channels. Additionally, TSI provided updates to Cabin Radio to post onto their website for further and ongoing reach and used community social media pages where possible and accepted. TSI was sensitive to the fact that many communities and homes have limited access to high-speed internet and technology and designed its engagement strategies and tools with this in mind.

TSI met with municipal and territorial governments, Indigenous governments and leaders, not-for-profit/non-governmental organizations, community leaders, families and community members, professionals, small business owners, elected officials, team members of federal partners, Elders, knowledge-keepers and Northerners who very openly care for their communities. We sat in their anger, their sadness, their silence, their loss, their fears, and their frustrations. We also heard about successes and what was done to the best of everyone's abilities in very challenging situations. TSI also heard their lived experiences and recommendations to be stronger, better prepared and more coordinated in emergencies for their communities in the future. This 2023



wildfire after-action report captures the voices of community members for the Government of Northwest Territories' 2023 Wildfires Emergency Response After-action Review. It is the voices heard. It is the recommendations listened to and documented.

TSI utilized best practices from Alberta, British Columbia, and the United States Department of Homeland Security in developing this After-Action Report. Key activities, processes and documents used by the GNWT teams were reviewed and analyzed. Interviews and survey feedback, including elected official commentary, provided valuable insight into the incident and emergency management processes. TSI relied heavily on the input provided by those directly and indirectly involved in the response; interested and affected parties shared candidly.



Engagement in communities was an enriching opportunity to listen to the lived experiences of 2023 and to be invited into the community spaces of sharing. Each community had unique viewpoints and experiences that they shared. Across communities, there were consistent and common themes that have been captured throughout this report. Below is a map highlighting communities that were engaged through this process.



Appendix F: ICS Canada Framework Overview

ICS is part of a broader set of principles designed to provide structure and accountability in emergency response operations. It standardizes command, communication, and coordination across different levels of government and emergency response organizations. ICS is designed to be flexible and scalable, meaning it can be used in a variety of emergency situations, from localized incidents to large-scale, multi-agency responses.

Some of the key principles of ICS include:

- **Unified Command:** A structure where multiple agencies, organizations, or jurisdictions can work together to achieve a coordinated response. This is typically found at the local response between local EMO and municipal services, but creating a Territorial Unified Command Structure would help solidify the implementation of these principles.
- **Chain of Command:** Establishing a clear hierarchical structure that defines roles and responsibilities to minimize confusion and enhance decision-making. This was an area that appeared to have confusion within the 2023 responses. A general misunderstanding of who were the decision makers was prevalent across multiple engagements.
- **Modular Organization:** The ability to expand or contract the structure depending on the scale and complexity of the incident.
- **Standardized Communication:** The use of common terminology and procedures across all involved agencies. However, in 2023, this was challenged by physical constraints in the communication system. Ensuring redundancy is critical.
- **Resource Management:** Ensuring resources are identified, allocated, and tracked efficiently.

Incident Action Plans

Incident Action Plans are a crucial component of ICS. An IAP is a comprehensive document that outlines the strategy for responding to an incident, including the objectives, resources, and tactics required. The process of creating an IAP is not only critical for ensuring an effective response but also for ensuring clarity, accountability, and safety for all involved. Utilizing ICS principles to create an IAP from the onset of an emergency brings several benefits:

Clear Objectives and Goals

An IAP provides a structured way to articulate the incident's objectives. These goals are developed based on the current situation, potential hazards, available resources, and the overall desired outcomes. Establishing these objectives early on ensures that all team members are working toward a unified purpose, reducing the likelihood of miscommunication and inefficiency.

Identification of Resources

ICS emphasizes resource management as a key component. The IAP helps ensure that all necessary resources (personnel, equipment, supplies, etc.) are identified and accounted for. By utilizing ICS

principles, response teams can quickly determine what is needed, allocate resources effectively, and track them throughout the response.

Tactical Coordination

The IAP outlines the strategies and tactics to achieve the identified objectives. By specifying these tactics in advance, responders can focus on execution, knowing that there is a clear plan for action. This reduces confusion and helps to ensure that operations are carried out safely and efficiently.

Contingency Planning

ICS Canada encourages the creation of contingencies within the IAP, preparing for unexpected developments. From the onset of an incident, the IAP should consider potential changes in the situation, and alternative courses of action should be in place. This foresight helps responders remain adaptable and proactive when unexpected challenges arise.

Continuous Updates

The IAP is a living document. It should be updated regularly to reflect the evolving situation on the ground. ICS Canada principles emphasize the need for continuous reassessment and adjustment of the IAP to accommodate new information, shifting priorities, or changes in resources.

Tracking in Emergency Management

One of the core principles of ICS is effective tracking of resources, personnel, and actions. This tracking process is integral to the coordination of efforts and to maintaining oversight during an emergency response. It ensures accountability, transparency, and efficiency in all aspects of the response. Below are the key tracking elements essential to ICS Canada:

Resource Tracking

Accurate tracking of resources (personnel, vehicles, equipment, etc.) is essential for managing an incident. ICS provides methods to track and document resource allocations, usage, and replenishments. By tracking resources from the onset, emergency managers can ensure that resources are being used effectively and that there are no shortages or surpluses. This helps to avoid waste and ensures critical needs are addressed promptly.

Personnel Accountability

ICS emphasizes the need to account for all personnel deployed during an emergency response. This is vital not only for ensuring the safety of responders but also for ensuring that teams are being effectively utilized. Tracking personnel in real time allows for quick adjustments to staffing levels or reassignment of duties as the situation changes.

Situation Status and Reporting

Timely and accurate tracking of incident status is vital for decision-making and ensuring that all stakeholders remain informed. ICS promotes the use of standardized reporting methods, which help convey the current situation, the progress of operations, and any challenges encountered. Regular status updates from the field allow decision-makers to adjust strategy as needed and ensure the incident is managed appropriately.

Incident Progress Monitoring

Tracking also involves monitoring the overall progress of incident response activities. ICS recommends using performance metrics and key indicators to track the achievement of operational goals outlined in the IAP. This helps determine whether the strategies are working, where adjustments may be needed, and when the response has been successful.

The Importance of Early Implementation

Utilizing ICS Canada principles from the onset of an emergency is crucial for the following reasons:

- **Enhanced Coordination and Communication:** Early implementation of ICS Canada principles establishes a common framework, ensuring that all involved parties are aligned in their understanding and approach. This facilitates smoother communication and better coordination between different teams and agencies.
- **Efficient Resource Use:** By identifying needs, tracking resources, and planning in advance, ICS Canada helps minimize waste and ensures that resources are used optimally. This efficiency is especially important in large-scale emergencies where resources may be limited.
- **Increased Situational Awareness:** ICS Canada promotes the development of structured, real-time reports, allowing for continuous situational awareness. With accurate and up-to-date tracking, decisions can be made based on reliable data, ensuring that the response is agile and responsive to evolving conditions.
- **Continuous Improvement:** By establishing an ongoing cycle of planning, implementation, and review (through the IAP and tracking), ICS Canada supports a continuous learning process. Each response builds on the lessons learned, ensuring that future emergencies are managed better.

Appendix G: Survey Report Summary, Methods, Overall Experiences and Demographics

Overall Experiences Summary

- All survey respondents completed this section of the survey, a total of 328 respondents.
- The top three main sources of information about the 2023 wildfires were:
 - Social media (65%),
 - Government website (36%), and
 - Friends (34%).
- The top five areas of satisfaction with wildfire communications were:
 - Informing you about the fires and firefighting efforts near your community (35%),
 - Informing you about when you can return home (26%),
 - Informing you about the process of returning home (21%),
 - Informing you about how to return home (21%), and
 - Effectiveness while you were outside of your community (if applicable) (21%).
- 25% of respondents were satisfied (4-5) with the level of supports provided to them during the 2023 wildfires.
- 19% of respondents indicated that their community needs were adequately met (4-5) during the 2023 wildfire season.
- 27% of respondents felt the response of local community emergency services and authorities was very good or excellent (4 or 5 out of 5).
- 58% of respondents indicated they felt their community was not at all prepared for dealing with the wildfires before the events of 2023.
- 30% of respondents indicated that they were not at all prepared for an evacuation from their home in 2023.

General Public Survey Summary

- A total of 286 respondents completed this section of the survey.
- The top 5 personal ways respondents were affected by the wildfires in the NWT in 2023 (multiple sections allowed) were:
 - Evacuated (76%),
 - Personal health (61%),
 - Other financial loss (32%),
 - Family separation (30%), and
 - Separation from animals (11%)..
- 20% of respondents had supported wildfire monitoring, fighting, or monitoring in the past.
 - 21% of those with wildfire support experience indicated their knowledge was sought and shared during the 2023 wildfires (n=58).
 - 15% of those with wildfire support experience indicated they had an opportunity to volunteer during the wildfires.
- 85% of respondents indicated they were evacuated due to the wildfires(n=243).
 - Of those respondents evacuated, 92% were evacuated to a location outside of the NWT.
 - 80% of evacuated respondents were evacuated only once.
 - 82% of evacuated respondents were evacuated by vehicle.
 - 75% of evacuated respondents waited for the evacuation notice before evacuating.
 - 52% of evacuated respondents received less than 24 hours' notice before having to leave their home community.
 - 48% of evacuated respondents were away from home between 3 weeks to less than 4 weeks.

- 54% of evacuated respondents were very dissatisfied (rating of 1 out of 5) with the evacuation process.
- 52% of respondents knew how to access supports during the 2023 wildfires. 34% of respondents did not know how to access supports during the 2023 wildfires and 13% of respondents selected don't know.
- The top 3 organizations that assisted respondents during the 2023 wildfires were:
 - Family and friends (71%),
 - A government outside of the Northwest Territories (40%), and
 - The territorial government of the Northwest Territories (36%).
- 56% of respondents felt they and their communities were not at all prepared (rating of 1 out of 5) for dealing with the wildfires before the events of 2023.
- 26% of respondents felt not at all prepared (rating of 1 out of 5) for an evacuation from their home in 2023.
- The top key steps respondents felt individuals can take to better prepare for and respond to wildfires were:
 - Emergency evacuation preparedness/being ready to evacuate on short notice/ensuring they have emergency evacuation supplies (23%), and
 - Fireproofing/fire smarting homes/protecting personal property from fire damage (16%).
- The top two suggestions for improving wildfire preparedness and response in the future were:
 - Improve/increase level of communication with residents/be more open and forthcoming with information (21%), and
 - Improve disaster and emergency preparedness and planning (general) (13%).

Chamber of Commerce Survey Summary

- In total, 42 respondents completed this section of the survey.
- The top three sectors participants indicated they operated within were:
 - Construction (17%),
 - Retail trade (12%), and
 - Professional, scientific and technical services (10%).
- 43% of respondents were not at all prepared (rating of 1 out of 5) for an evacuation of their business in 2023.
- 64% of respondents described the overall health of their business or organization prior to the wildfires of 2023 as stable.
- 41% of respondents estimated the financial losses or costs incurred by their business as a result of the wildfire as significant (50% or greater loss).
- Only 5% of respondents felt very informed (rating of 5 out of 5) of any government or community support programs available to assist businesses affected by the wildfires.
- 12% of respondents indicated that their business had a wildfire-specific emergency preparedness of business continuity plan in place before the events of 2023.
- 67% of respondents indicated they had risk mitigation strategies including insurance prior to the wildfires and of those respondents 11% indicated their insurance coverage was very adequate (rating of 5 out of 5) (n=28).
- 64% of respondents indicated their business received information about wildfire conditions and evacuation orders from media.
- The most frequently mentioned critical factor by respondents for facilitating long-term recovery and resilience for businesses impacted by the wildfires is providing businesses with more recovery support/resources/financial assistance (general).
- The top two recommendations respondents had for local authorities to better support businesses during future wildfire events were:

- Improve/increase level of communication/be more forthcoming with information (general), and
- Improve emergency evacuation planning/procedures (general).

Indigenous Leadership Survey Summary

- In total 14 respondents completed this section of the survey.
- 3 out of 14 respondents indicated from their perspective the overall management and coordination of wildfire response efforts was not at all effective (rating of 1 out of 5).
- 7 out of 14 respondents indicated there were engaged in decision-making at the local level.
- The top three most significant challenges respondents or their communities encountered leading during the wildfire in 2023 were:
 - Resource constraints (n=10),
 - Lack of information (n=9), and
 - Communication issues (n=9).
- The top three ways respondents communicated critical information and updates about the wildfires to their community members were:
 - Word of mouth (n=9),
 - Social media (n=8), and
 - Telephone (n=7).
- 6 out of 14 respondents provided a neutral rating (rating of 3 out of 5) for the effectiveness of collaboration between different agencies, jurisdictions, and organizations involved in wildfire response efforts.
- Respondents indicated they frequently (4 or 5) coordinated with community groups (8) and local authorities (8) throughout the 2023 wildfire.
- 4 out of 14 respondents indicated they were very dissatisfied (rating of 1 out of 5) with the support provided in their community during the wildfire response of 2023.
- The top two recommendations for improving wildfire management and response effort in NWT as it related to providing supports were:
 - Improve wildfire response planning and strategies, and
 - Improve/provide more wildfire response training.

MLA and Elected Leadership Survey Summary

- In total, 6 respondents completed this section of the survey.
- 3 out of 6 respondents gave a neutral rating (3 out of 5) for how effective the GNWT's legislative and policy response to the wildfires in 2023.
- 4 out of 6 respondents indicated they felt there are gaps or areas of improvement in the existing wildfire management policies.
- 1 of the 6 respondents felt they were fully engaged (rating of 5 out of 5) in the decision of the emergency.
- 1 of the 6 of respondents rated the GNWT's preparedness for responding to wildfires before the events of 2023 as prepared (selected 4 out of 5).
- 2 out of 6 respondents provided a neutral rating (3 out of 5) for how effective the coordination between GNWT Departments, Indigenous governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders was during the wildfire response.
- 1 out 6 of respondents indicated that, in their opinion, community needs were met during the wildfire response (selected 4 out of 5).

Non-Governmental Organizations and Other Helpers Survey Summary

- In total, 10 respondents completed this section of the survey.
- 4 out of 10 respondents indicated they were not engaged in the wildfire response.
- 5 out of 10 of respondents indicated their organization supported impacted communities and 4 out of 10 indicated supporting host communities.
- 3 out 10 respondents indicated their organization was prepared to provide support to community members for specific or unique needs.
- 3 out of 10 respondents provided supports in their organization's area of expertise.
- 3 out of 10 respondents indicated they worked with local leaders.
- 1 out 10 of respondents indicated that in their opinion their organization's support was effective in meeting the needs of community members impacted by wildfires (4 out of 5).
- 2 out of 10 respondents indicated their organization was not at all prepared (rating of 1 out of 5) for responding to wildfires before the events of 2023.
- 3 out of 10 respondents agree (ratings of 4 or 5 out of 5) with the statement my organization or agency is resilient after the 2023 wildfires.
- 5 out of 10 respondents indicated their organization's ability to provide services was directly impacted by the wildfires of 2023.

Methods

The survey and the survey sub sections were designed in close consultation with the project team. The overall experiences section was designed to capture high-level feedback from all participants while the sub-sections were designed to capture more nuanced feedback based on respondent identity attributes or roles during the 2023 wildfires. Respondents were only asked to complete the sections that were relevant to them.

The survey was available online from August 6, 2024, to November 22, 2024, concurrent with in-person public engagement activities, collecting 328 responses. In September a French version of the survey was made available, 2 survey submissions were completed in French.

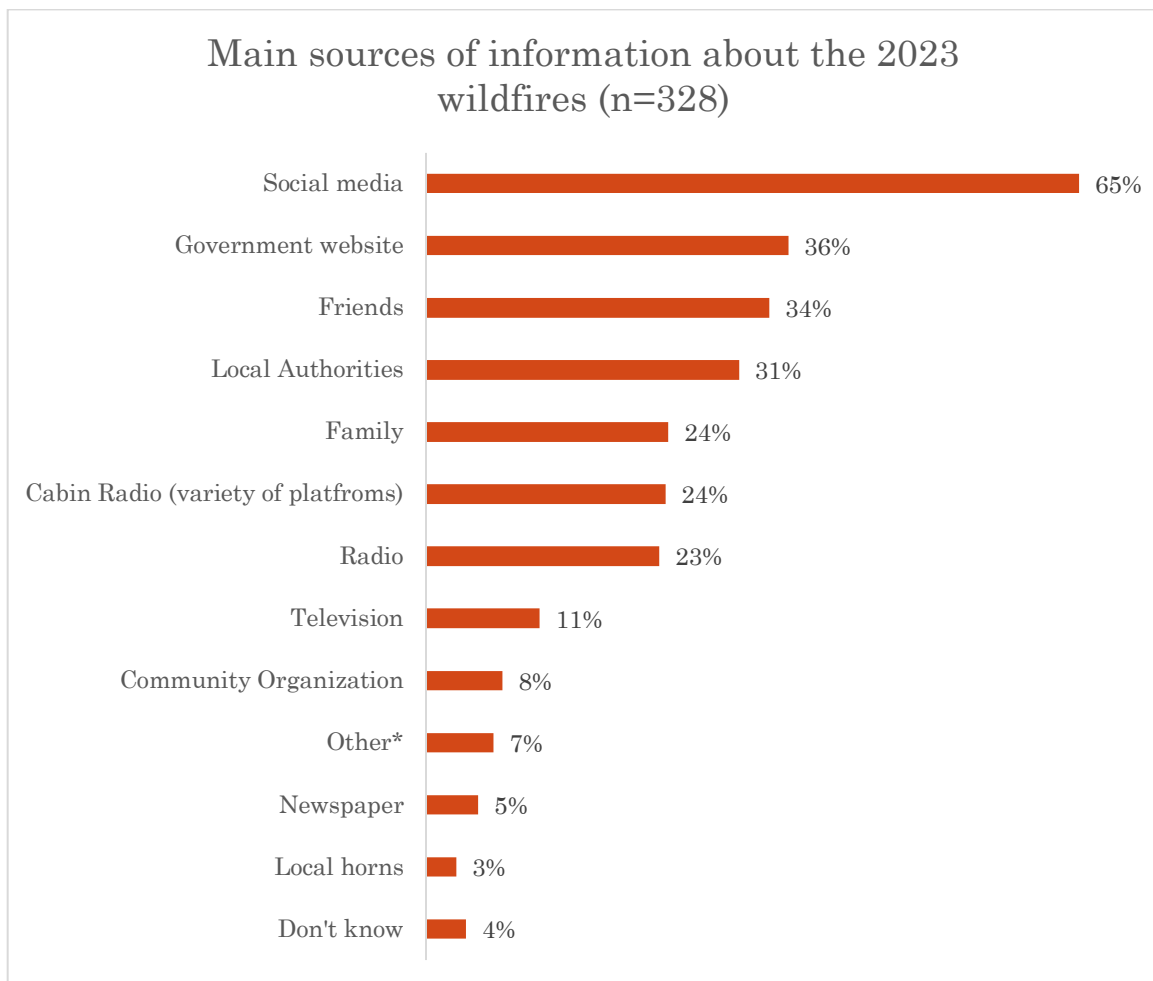
All open-ended responses were coded by Y Station's coding team and codes were validated by the survey data analyst and project manager. Sub-group analysis was completed on the Overall Experiences and General Population sections to determine if there were any significant differences based on key demographic variables. Where differences were found they are noted in the overall results below.

The three sub-sections designed for Indigenous leaders, elected officials, and non-government organizations, agencies, or helper organizations resulted in low sample sizes. As a result, results in those sections should be interpreted with caution.

Where respondents are over n=30, data is presented in percentages. Some graphs may total more 100% due to rounding or multiple responses being accepted.

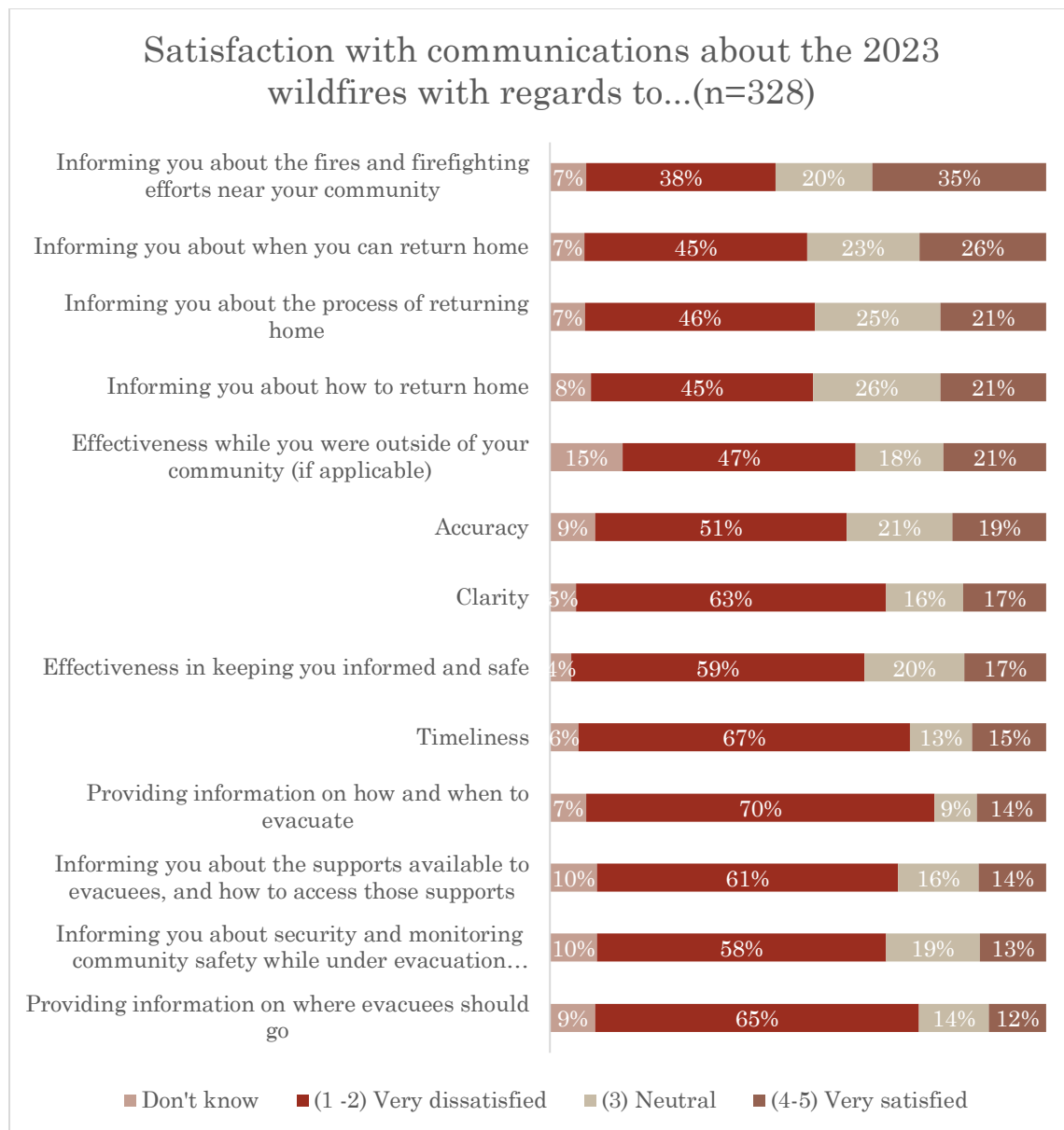
Overall Experiences

All survey respondents completed this section of the survey, resulting in 328 section completes.



Other includes: GNWT employees, Band Council/chief, NWT Fire (various), CBC North (various), Place of work (co-workers/employer), TCSA (Tlicho Community Services Agency), Online news media (unspecified), and NASA/LANCE/FIRMS.

Those aged 55 to 64 were more likely to indicate their main source of information about the 2023 wildfires was Government websites (51%).

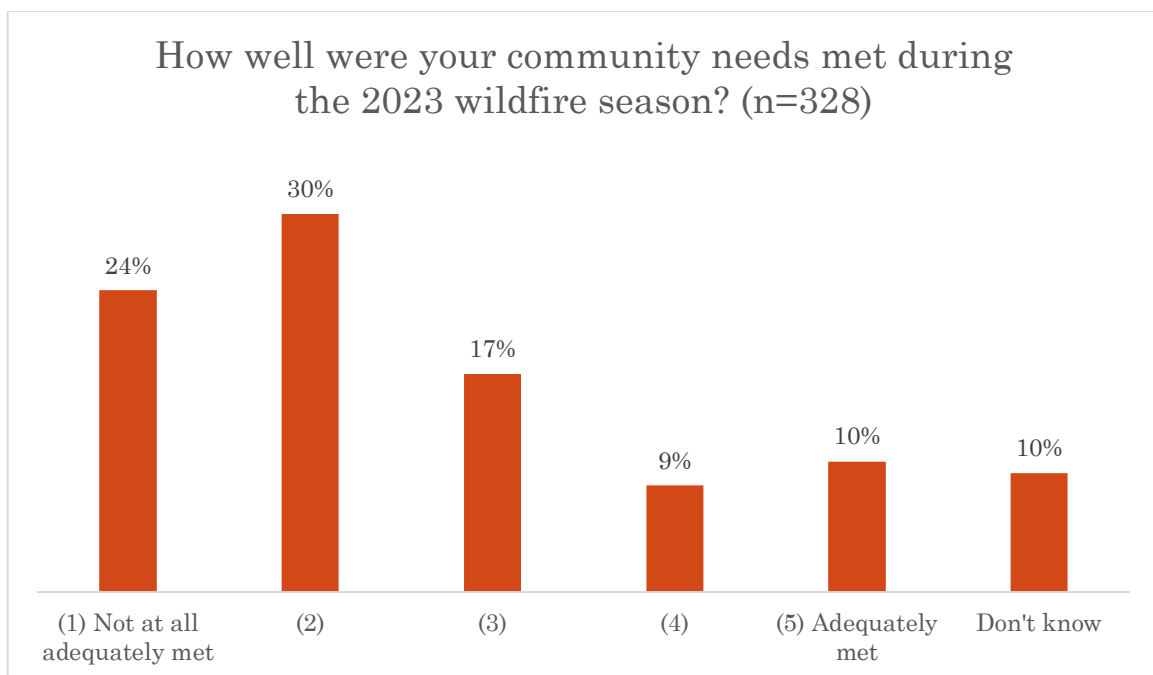
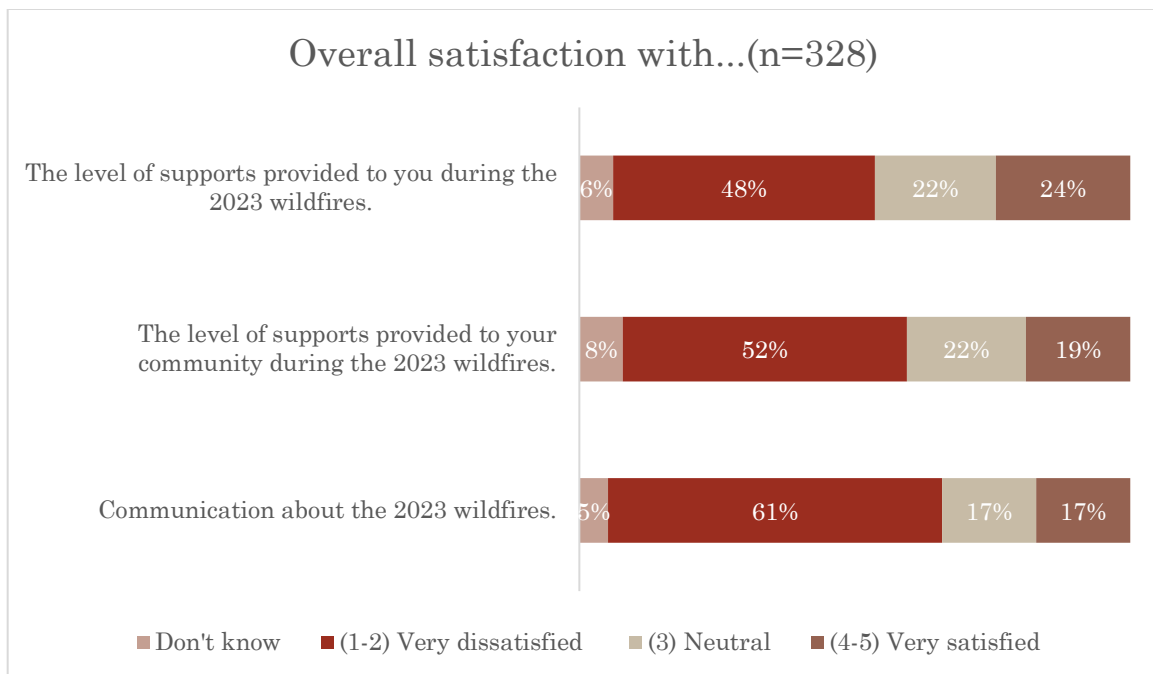


Respondents that identified as men were more likely to be satisfied (4-5) with the clarity of communication, (29%) compared to those who identified as women (12%).

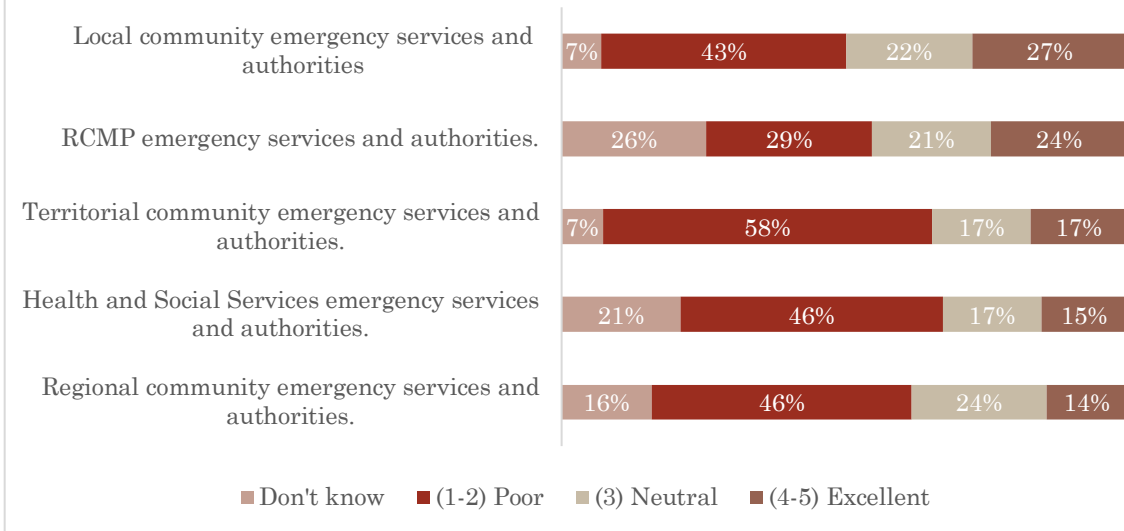
Respondents that identified as men were more likely to be satisfied (4-5) with information about security and monitoring community safety while under evacuation orders, (24%) compared to those who identified as women (9%).

Respondents that identified as women were more likely to be dissatisfied (1-2) with regards to timeliness of communication, (76%) compared to those who identified as men (55%).

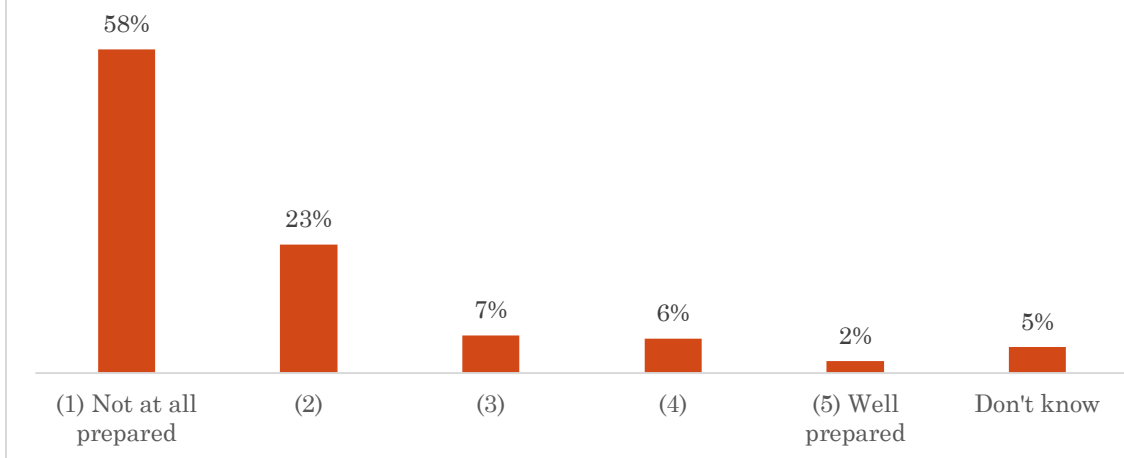
Respondents that identified as women were more likely to be dissatisfied (1-2) with regards to providing information on how and when to evacuate, (80%) compared to those who identified as men (55%).



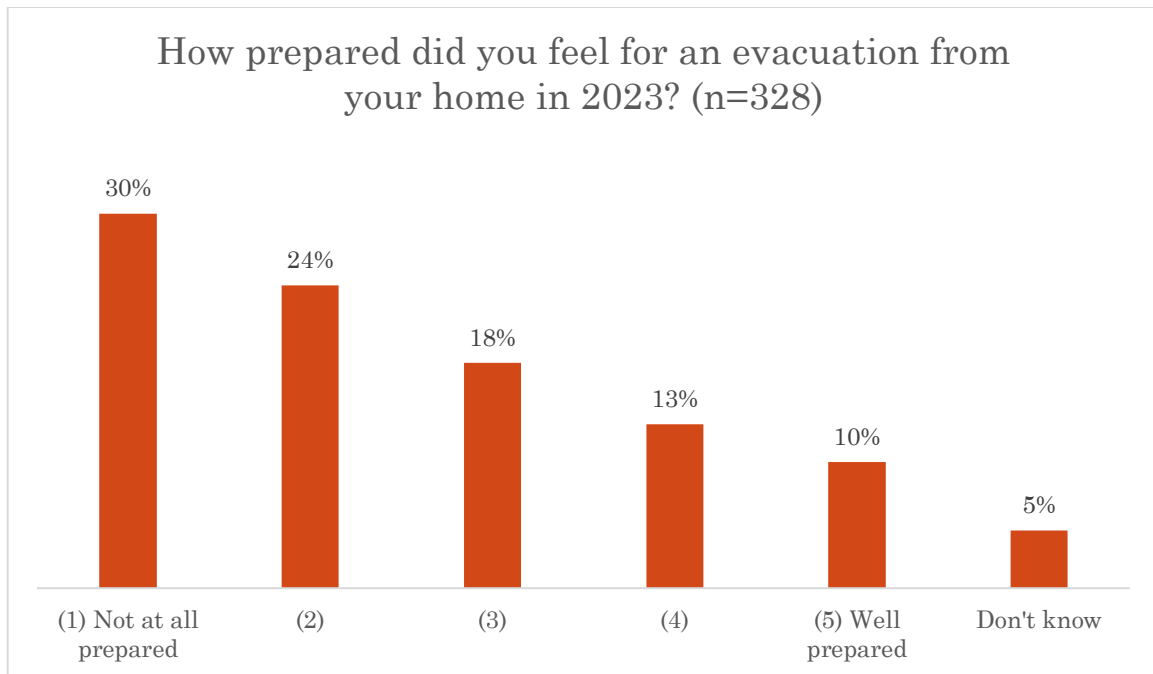
How would you rate the response of each of the following during the 2023 wildfires...(n=328)



How prepared did you feel your community was for dealing with the wildfires before the events of 2023? (n=328)



Respondents that identified as men were more likely to indicate they felt their community was prepared (4-5), (18%) compared to those who identified as women (4%).



Respondents that identified as men were more likely to indicate feeling prepared for an evacuation from their homes (4-5), (36%) compared to those who identified as women (17%).

Demographics

Identity	Percent of respondents n=328
Indigenous	22%
A member of the LGBTQ2S+ community	8%
A person with a disability	7%
An immigrant in Canada	5%
A member of a visible minority	5%
A refugee in Canada	0%
None of the above	51%
I prefer not to answer	10%

Indigenous leader, base: respondents that identify as Indigenous	Percent of respondents n=71
Yes	20%
No	80%

Roles (multiple responses)	Percent of respondents n=328
I am a GNWT employee	46%
I own or manage a business or organization in the NWT	13%
I was a caregiver to a family member during the 2023 wildfires	10%
NWT Resident	4%
Indigenous leader	3%
I am a community leader	3%
I work for or represent a non-governmental organization, partnering agency or other type of helper or support organization in the NWT	3%
Employed (general)	3%
Retired	2%
I am an elected official	2%
Other*	2%
I am Member of Legislative Assembly	<1%
None of the above	15%
I prefer not to answer	7%

*Other includes: WSCC employee, federal government employee, board member, emergency service responder, and union officer, and Indigenous Government and GNWT resident.

Do you currently reside in the Northwest Territories?	Percent of respondents n=328
Yes	96%
No	3%
I prefer not to answer	1%

Gender	Percent of respondents n=328
Man	30%
Woman	60%
Two-Spirited	1%
Non-binary	2%
I prefer not to answer	8%

Age	Percent of respondents n=328
18 to 34	13%
35 to 54	38%
55 to 64	17%
65+	10%
Not stated	22%

Residence at the time of the 2023 wildfires	Percent of respondents n=328
Behchokò	9%
Dettah	<1%
Enterprise	1%
Fort Simpson	1%
Fort Smith	5%
Hay River	16%
Inuvik	<1%
Norman Wells	1%
Yellowknife	61%
Other*	5%
I prefer not to answer	2%

*Other includes Ingraham Trail, Prelude Lake Main/Prelude East, Fort Providence, Fort Good Hope, Fitzgerald (AB), Edmonton (AB), Border Town (Tthebacha Née 169A), and Bay de Verde (NL).

Appendix H: Definitions

Essential services ^{58 59}	Essential services in emergency management are those services and functions that are critical to preserving life, health, public safety, and the basic functioning of society during emergencies or disasters. Best practice definitions consistently emphasize that these services must remain operational to ensure the safety and security of the public or a segment of the public.
Essential workers ⁶⁰	Essential workers in Canadian emergency management are defined as individuals whose roles are critical to maintaining the health, safety, security, and basic functioning of society, especially during emergencies or disruptions. Best practice emphasizes that these workers must continue their duties to ensure the continuity of essential services that protect the public and support societal infrastructure.
Operational period ⁶¹	As standardized in the Incident Command System (ICS) used across Canada, an operational period is the time scheduled for executing a given set of operational actions as specified in the Incident Action Plan. Operational Periods can be of various lengths, although usually they last 12 to 24 hours. Events and non-emergency incidents may have operational periods of a week or longer.
Trauma-informed ⁶²	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Policies and practices that recognize the connections between violence, trauma, negative health outcomes, and behaviours. These approaches aim to increase safety, control, and resilience. In emergency management, applying a trauma-informed approach means designing systems and services that are sensitive to the potential trauma histories of individuals, thereby minimizing the risk of re-traumatization and promoting healing and resilience. This approach is grounded in four key principles: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understanding trauma and violence: Recognizing their impacts on people's lives and behaviours. 2. Creating emotionally and physically safe environments: Ensuring that spaces are safe for all individuals. 3. Fostering opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection: Empowering individuals by involving them in decision-making processes. <p>Providing a strengths-based and capacity-building approach: Supporting client coping and resilience by focusing on their strengths.</p>

⁵⁸ <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/ntnl-scrtr/crtcl-nfrstrctr/esf-sfe-en.aspx>

⁵⁹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/news/2023/04/essential-services.html>

⁶⁰ <https://www.betterteam.com/ca/what-is-an-essential-worker>

⁶¹ <https://icscanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ICS-Canada-Glossary-May-2023.pdf>

⁶² https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/health-risks-safety/trauma-violence-informed-approaches-policy-practice.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com

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