



# Developing a BC First Nations Disaster Response Network for Salmonids and Habitat

## Proposed Concept

Coordinated network of First Nations experts equipped to respond to natural and environmental disasters impacting salmonids, other fish species and habitat

## Description

Many environmental and natural disasters impact the health and sustainability of salmonids and other fish species, including the habitat critical to their lifecycles. The recent landslide at Big Bar highlighted the import and benefits of having a coordinated response to these disasters across all levels of government (federal, provincial and Indigenous) and involving local communities and personnel. This best practise has also been used to address the impacts to fish and habitat by events such as vessel sinkings, oil spill recovery, forest fires, and floods.

The National Indigenous Fisheries Institute, the First Nations Fisheries Council of British Columbia, several AAROM groups and First Nations political organizations were contacted by BC's Incident Command Post when the Big Bar landslide incident occurred to get contact information of local organizations and communities in order to hire personnel and equipment. Having an up-to-date and accessible list of First Nations contacts responsible for, and equipped to deal with, natural and environmental disasters and events that have the potential to significantly harm salmonids and other fish and fish habitat, would facilitate the formation of these inter-governmental management and personnel response teams in the future.

This proposed project may also be of interest to the First Nations' Emergency Services Society of British Columbia, which equips communities to be prepared for natural and environmental disasters. The Society developed the First Nations' Emergency Atlas in 2005<sup>1</sup> with financial support from (the formerly named) Public Works and Government Services Canada department to identify all BC First Nations community and reserve locations (using maps), general contact information, and the community transportation network. Developing and maintaining a First Nations disaster response network for salmonids and habitat could leverage this tool and/or be a companion piece.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fness.bc.ca/resources/library/emergency-management/first-nations-emergency-atlas> \*The Society notes that the atlas may not be up to date.



Phase two of this proposed project could include a training component to support more First Nations fisheries managers and/or AAROM staff getting the Incident Command System training that is offered by the Justice Institute of Canada. This curriculum is designed to help companies and agencies in BC manage major emergencies, such as an oil spill or railway accident, and it can be customized to suit specific training needs.

## Workshop

Following a discussion about the proposed concept and any required changes or input from AAROMs and First Nations without an AAROM, the workshop will focus on identifying the parameters and estimated cost of the project over three to four years.

For example, this project could include the following elements:

- Phase one: Establishing the parameters<sup>2</sup> of the network, such as:
  - Contact role(s), such as fisheries manager, fishery guardian, or other community personnel and information (telephone number, email address and/or other preferred contact method, e.g., text)
  - Training and/or certification(s)
  - Participating Nations and lead(s)<sup>3</sup>
- Phase two: Developing the network
  - Hiring one or two First Nations students (e.g., through an internship program)
  - Collecting contact information from participating Nations
  - Developing an online system to maintain up-to-date information (could be housed by the host/rotating lead Nation or AAROM (or other group, such as the First Nations' Emergency Services Society of BC)
- Phase three: Maintaining and building the network
  - Annual verification of contact information (and updating on the online system) by one or more First Nations students
  - Identifying and meeting incident command training needs
- Phase four: Ensuring response readiness
  - Pending partnerships, stage regular response practice drills

## Why is this Concept Being Considered?

Natural disasters, environmental disasters and industrial accidents can have devastating effects on salmonids, other species, and habitat across British Columbia. These include landslides, forest fires, and floods, as well as derailments and vessel sinkings. Natural and environmental disasters are also happening more frequently with the rising sea levels, heavier precipitation, longer periods of drought, and extreme storms brought on by climate change.

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<sup>2</sup> Training and certification(s), as well as equipment and vessels, could be added onto the network platform in later years

<sup>3</sup> An AAROM or another First Nations group could be lead the development of the network; and the host could be on a rotating basis thereafter.



To date, the impact of disasters and extreme weather events on salmonids and habitat have been dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Through BCSRIF, there is an opportunity to develop and maintain a BC First Nations' Natural and Environmental Disaster Response Network to be able to respond to these disasters, alongside the federal and provincial agencies responsible.

Beyond the BCSRIF program, there are also several agencies and organizations that could help maintain this contact network. This includes BC's Public Safety and Emergency Services, the Canadian Coast Guard, and the First Nations' Emergency Services Society of BC. There is also an annual opportunity to use internship funding programs to hire one or more First Nations students to annual verify and update the network information.

### **Alignment with BCSRIF Priorities**

This project encourages increased Indigenous involvement in innovation and infrastructure investments that would improve productivity, sustainability and safety across the sector. This includes network technologies to support the protection and restoration of wild BC stocks, including Pacific salmon. It is also focused on BCSRIF's priority for the protection and maintenance of healthy and diverse salmon populations and their habitats.

### **Alignment with Other Initiatives (Potential Partners)**

BCSRIF support may be used to augment the funding or activities of other programs.

- **Indigenous Community Response Training Project**

*This project was set up to develop emergency response partnerships between the Coast Guard and Indigenous communities as part of the Oceans Protection Plan. It enhances the search and rescue and environmental response capabilities within Indigenous communities through the delivery of community-tailored training curricula.*

- **Indigenous Community Boat Volunteer Pilot Program**

*This four-year program has funding to strengthen the capacity of coastal Indigenous communities to participate in maritime search and rescue response activities within their communities as members of the CCG Auxiliary, a national non-profit organization of 4,000 volunteer members which boosts the federal maritime search and rescue response capacity.*

- **First Nations' Emergency Services Society of British Columbia**

*The mission of this Society is to assist First Nations in developing and sustaining safer and healthier communities by providing fire services, forest fuel management, and emergency management.*

