
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate
Readiness
Government of Canada
Tsilhqot'in National Government

Province, Canada contribute to disaster resilience for Tsilhqot'in peoples

WILLIAMS LAKE – A series of investments by the governments of British Columbia and Canada will help the Tsilhqot'in National Government strengthen climate resilience and emergency management for its people and communities.

The Province is providing \$5 million to the Tsilhqot'in National Government for an extensive feasibility study to determine the suite of emergency infrastructure required in the territory, which is located in the Chilcotin region of west-central British Columbia. Infrastructure, such as an emergency centre and evacuation and training centres, will be considered.

“The Tsilhqot'in peoples were severely impacted by the Cariboo and Chilcotin wildfires of summer 2017,” said Bowinn Ma, B.C.’s Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness. “This funding and partnership is in keeping with our government’s commitment to advance reconciliation and improve emergency management for Indigenous Peoples and is another step in solidifying our long-term and growing partnership with the Tsilhqot'in National Government.”

Last year, the Province, the federal government and the Tsilhqot'in National Government renewed the Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement (CEMA), which was established in 2018. The Province is providing \$1 million to the Tsilhqot'in National Government for governance and operations to support the next four years of CEMA.

CEMA commits the three governments to collaboratively develop and implement strategies to enhance the role and capacity of Tsilhqot'in peoples in emergency management, including a review of infrastructure, operational requirements and other capacity needs.

The development of a proposal for an Indigenous-led regional emergency centre, a training facility and evacuation centres were part of the original CEMA agreement, which was renewed for a five-year term and financed by contributions from B.C.’s Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, B.C.’s Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, and Indigenous Services Canada.

The BC Wildfire Service is engaged in ongoing agreements with the Tsilhqot'in National Government related to facility and operational co-operation.

Through Indigenous Services Canada, the federal government has committed approximately \$2 million for CEMA, including support for co-ordination and planning of the emergency centre, community fire-safety assessments and fire-services equipment.

Additionally, Natural Resources Canada is investing more than \$1 million toward the T̓silhqot̓'in National Government Emergency Management – Wildfire Capacity Building project, which will recruit and train 20 community members to build capacity and help establish crews in each of its six communities. This project is part of the Fighting and Managing Wildfires in a Changing Climate Program Training Fund to train 1,000 additional firefighters and incorporate Indigenous traditional knowledge in fire management.

These funding initiatives are a response to the 2019 T̓silhqot̓'in-led report: Nagwedižk'an gwaneš gangu ch'inidžed ganexwilagh (The Fires Awakened Us) Calls to Action.

“The history of wildfire management in the province has shown us that First Nations are often at the front lines and need to be empowered to manage emergencies on their land. We know what is best for our people,” said Nits'il?in (Chief) Joe Alphonse of the T̓silhqot̓'in National Government. “We have seen wildfires, flooding and a pandemic that have put our relationships with B.C. and Canada to the test. Groundbreaking agreements like CEMA are needed to ensure First Nations have an active and leading role in emergencies. We have to change the way we approach wildfire and how we fight it. The climate crisis is taking all hands on deck. We are proud to say that we are making progress in the infrastructure needed to be resilient during this crisis.”

These investments also advance reconciliation under the Gwets'en Nilt'i Pathway Agreement of 2019, which brought the T̓silhqot̓'in National Government, the Province and the federal government together to continue their work toward supporting the self-determination of the T̓silhqot̓'in peoples. The Gwets'en Nilt'i Pathway Agreement is the first tripartite reconciliation agreement of its kind in B.C.

The work done with the T̓silhqot̓'in National Government and T̓silhqot̓'in communities is intended to inform work with other Indigenous governments and communities, and the broader commitment to improve overall emergency management in B.C. and throughout the country.

Quotes:

Patty Hajdu, federal Minister of Indigenous Services –

“Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately impacted by wildfires and other emergencies. The experience of severe weather emergencies has increased as the reality of climate change means more frequent and more intense events. Today, the federal government announced with the Province of British Columbia new funding for the Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement. This agreement provides the financial resources to help with climate resilience and empowers a new approach to policy making for the T̓silhqot̓'in Nation to provide emergency management services for their people. I thank the T̓silhqot̓'in Nation for your expertise and leadership and know this investment will benefit all of Canada as we learn to manage the risk and reality of climate-related emergencies together.”

Jonathan Wilkinson, federal Minister of Natural Resources –

“This wildfire season has been among the worst on record and projections indicate that it will continue to be challenging throughout the summer. Since 2015, the federal government has taken measures to adapt to and mitigate the effects of intense wildfires. That is why we have

committed to training more firefighters in more communities across this country, especially in Indigenous communities that are frequently at highest risk. This partnership with the T̓silhqot̓in people will mean more firefighters where they are needed most.”

Murray Rankin, B.C.’s Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation –

“The extreme nature of the 2017 wildfires throughout the vast T̓silhqot̓in territory revealed the need for the T̓silhqot̓in to have a leadership role in managing emergencies within their lands. The \$6-million provincial investment announced today will support the creation of a new model of excellence in emergency management, one that builds on the expertise of the T̓silhqot̓in Nation and reflects their values, needs and jurisdiction. I’m proud to be working with T̓silhqot̓in Nation and Canada as true government partners.”

Quick Facts:

- The T̓silhqot̓in territory covers 6.65 million hectares (approximately 16 million acres) of land between the Fraser River and the coast mountains in west-central B.C.
- The T̓silhqot̓in National Government consists of the T̓silhqot̓in communities of Tl'etinqox (Anaham), ʔEsdilagh (Alexandria), Yunesit'in (Stone), Tsi Deldel (Alexis Creek/Redstone), Tl'esqox (Toosey) and Xenigwet'in (Nemiah).
- The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness is co-developing modernized emergency management legislation with First Nations to ensure a new act supports more effective emergency management and aligns with the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Learn More:

Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement:

https://www.tsilhqotin.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/2022_Collaborative_Emergency_Management_Agreement.pdf

T̓silhqot̓in National Government: <https://www.tsilhqotin.ca/>

For information about the BC Wildfire Service’s Cultural and Prescribed Fire Program:

<https://prescribedfire.ca/>

To learn how B.C. is rising to the challenge of disaster and climate risk, visit:

<https://climatereadybc.gov.bc.ca/>

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