

**COMMITTEE RECORD OF PROCEEDING**  
**MEETING 058-20-24 OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ACCOUNTABILITY AND**  
**OVERSIGHT**

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2024 AT 9:00 A.M.**

**DET'ANCHOGH KÚÉ - EAGLE ROOM**

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Chair Rodgers called the meeting to order at 9:01 A.M.

Committee Members in attendance:, Hawkins, Morgan, Morse, Nerysoo, Reid, Testart, Weyallon Armstrong, McNeely, Edjericon, and Yakeleya

Regrets: None

1. Prayer was conducted by MLA McNeely
2. MLA Reid moved the adoption of the agenda as presented. Carried.
3. There were no declarations of conflicts of interest.
4. Public Matters:
  - a. No Public Matters

MLA Morse moved that Committee move in-camera for the following items. Carried.  
Committee moved in camera at 8:01 A.M.

5. In Camera Matters
  - a. House Planning/Sessional Workplan
    - i. Meetings and Events
    - ii. Previous Day's Business
    - iii. Ministers' and Members' Absences
    - iv. Members' Statements
    - v. Oral Questions
    - vi. Replies to the Commissioner's Address
    - vii. Replies to Budget Address
    - viii. Tabled Documents
    - ix. Reports of Standing and Special Committees
    - x. Committee of the Whole
    - xi. Motions/Members' Initiatives

6. Confidential Correspondence
  - a. 16-10-24 – Minister of Finance – Supplementary Appropriations
  - b. 17-10-24 – Minister of Finance – Fiscal Update and GNWT Borrowing
  - c. 15-10-24 – Government House Leader – Legislative Proposal
  - d. 18-10-24 – Minister of Finance – Capital Estimates Follow-Up
7. Deferred Business
  - a. 16-10-24 – Minister of Finance – Supplementary Appropriations
  - b. 17-10-24 – Minister of Finance – Fiscal Update and GNWT Borrowing
  - c. 18-10-24 – Minister of Finance – Capital Estimates Follow-Up
8. New Business:
  - a. None

MLA Edjericon moved that Committee conclude in-camera matters. Carried. Committee concluded in-camera matters at 10:25 A.M.

9. Public Matters:
  - a. Public Briefing on the 2023 Wildfire Response Review
    - i. Presentation

10. Date and Time of Next Meeting: October 21, 2024 at 6:00 P.M.

11. MLA Weyallon-Armstrong moved to adjourn the meeting. Carried. The meeting was adjourned at 12:34 P.M.



Denny Rodgers, Chair



Harjot Sidhu, Committee Clerk



# 2023 Wildfire Response Review

Government of Northwest Territories

October 21, 2024



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## 2023 Wildfire Season Key Statistics

| Canada                |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Number of Wildfires   | 7,131               |
| Area Burned           | 17,203,625 hectares |
| Community Evacuations | 200                 |
| Lives Lost            | 8                   |

| Northwest Territories |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Number of Wildfires   | 306                |
| Area Burned           | 3,400,000 hectares |
| Community Evacuations | 19                 |
| Lives Lost            | 1                  |



# Project Overview

## Project Purpose

To review and assess the GNWT, Department of Environment and Climate Change's preparedness and response to the 2023 wildfire season in the NWT to identify lessons learned, including recommendations, opportunities for improvement and areas where current activities should be sustained.

## Review Approach



### Facilitated Sessions

- 4 in-person regional sessions
- 1 virtual regional session
- 1 in-person FMD session
- 1 virtual FMD session
- 1 stakeholder session



### Interviews

- 57 one-on-one virtual and in-person interviews



### Research & Document Analysis

- Legislation, Policies and SOPs
- After Action Reviews
- Incident Action Plans
- Strategies
- Budgets
- Weather Report, Fire Behaviour Modelling

## Project Timeline

- Engagement Letter Signed  
November 23, 2023
- Project Kick-Off & Session  
December 2023
- Initial Data Collection  
January-March 2024
- Regional Engagement  
February - April 2024
- Analysis and Drafting  
February-April 2024
- What We Heard Report Draft  
April 5, 2024
- Additional Information and Validation Requests  
April-June 2024
- Main Report and Case Study Drafts and Edits  
April-June 2024
- Final Report  
July 2024

# Final Report Contents



Final Report

## Main Report

- 11 Key Themes
- 25 Recommendations
- 17 Opportunities for Improvement

## What We Heard Report

- 5 Key Themes (Human Resourcing & Supports; Machinery and Equipment Resourcing, Policies; Process and Procedures; Fire Prevention; Communication)

## SS052-23 Case Study (Enterprise/Hay River Wildfire)

- 7 Recommendations

## ZF015-23 Case Study (Behchokò/Yellowknife Wildfire)

- 6 Recommendations

## ECC Response to Recommendations and Opportunities for Improvement

# Main Report Key Themes



- Theme 1: Fire Behaviour Modelling



- Theme 2: Human Resources - Capacity



- Theme 3: Human Resources – Training and Skills Management



- Theme 4: Aviation Resources



- Theme 5: Equipment Management and Infrastructure



- Theme 6: Incident Command System Discipline



- Theme 7: Policy, Strategy, and Procedures



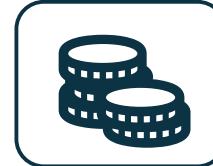
- Theme 8: Wildfire and Wildfire Response Information Sharing



- Theme 9: Coordination with Municipal and Indigenous Governments



- Theme 10: Prevention and Community Protection



- Theme 11: Budgeting and Reporting Structure

# Highlight: Situational Awareness

“We don’t have the right tools for the job.”

## Contributing Factors

- Software limitations and uncertainty
- Outdated input data
- Limited trained/experienced employees

## Consequence

- Inaccurate fire behaviour predictions
- Data deficiencies
- Reliance on external services

## Recommendations

- Enhance wildfire behaviour prediction capabilities (software and internal expertise) and the ability to establish a common understanding of a situation.





# Highlight: Resourcing

“We did not have the crews for the type of work needed to conduct necessary fire suppression activities.”

## Contributing Factors

- Lack of redundancy in positions
- Competition for resources from other regions/jurisdictions

## Consequence

- Unqualified/inexperienced individuals filling key positions
- Insufficient resources for required activities

## Recommendations

- Increase the ability to cope with frequent extreme wildfire situations by adding additional resources.



# Highlight: Mental Health Supports

“We haven’t had a chance to celebrate the season, we also haven’t had a chance to cry.”

## Contributing Factors

- Insufficient resources
- Long hours
- Lack of accessibility and appropriateness

## Consequence

- Physical and mental consequences
- Burnout
- Recruitment and retention challenges

## Recommendations

- Enhance firefighter well-being, morale, and operational capacity through appropriate supports and services.



# Highlight: Incident Command System Departure **MNP**

“During critical times, the team is breaking down.”

## Contributing Factors

- Inadequate training and experience
- Lack of awareness of protocols
- Rapidly changing situation

## Consequence

- Delayed decision-making
- Internal conflicts
- Near-misses

## Recommendations

- Broaden ICS training and recommit to ICS principles to improve emergency response effectiveness.



# Highlight: Information Sharing

“The use of personal social media accounts is an easy way for misinformation to spread.”

## Contributing Factors

- Improper communication channels and protocols
- Lack of awareness of roles/responsibilities

## Consequence

- Increased public safety risk
- Spread of inaccurate information

## Recommendations

- Enhance understanding of government roles, communication channels, and resource deployment.



# Highlight: Program Structure

“People are wearing multiple hats and trying to juggle multiple duties.”

## Contributing Factors

- Split authority
- Varying service delivery
- Limited personnel

## Consequence

- Inconsistent decision-making and service levels
- Constrained resource sharing
- Regions easily overwhelmed
- Reporting and accountability difficulties

## Recommendations

- Consolidate regional and territorial aspect of the program for efficient resource allocation, management and reporting.



# Highlight: SS052-23

## Key Findings:

- Inconsistent regular reporting and documentation
- Frequent disrupted team dynamics
- Insufficient information sharing
- Weather and fire behaviour modelling gaps
- Lack of formal linkages between wildland and structural fire fighters
- Strength with imported teams
- Poor situational awareness and communications with EMOs

## Recommendations

- Improve communication discipline, invest in forecasting and analysis resources, training internal resources, desktop exercises, leveraging external resources, and standardizing reporting.



# Highlight: ZF015-23

## Key Findings:

- IMT and ICS did not always operate according to protocols
- Inconsistent and delayed planning and forecasting
- Ineffective Behchokò indirect attack strategy and execution
- Unclear communication responsibilities between communities, Indigenous Governments, and GNWT

## Recommendations

- Improve planning and authorization processes for indirect attacks, invest in forecasting, reinforce ICS principles, ensure qualified people in key roles, and consolidate the fire program under unified leadership.



# Implications for GNWT



- Creation of Additional Positions



- Investment in Software



- Commitment to Training



- Dedication to Mental Health Supports



- Time/Resources to Review and Modernize Policies and SOPs



- Creation of a Culture of Discipline Regarding Documentation and Reporting



- Commitment to Increased Collaboration (interdepartmental and local authorities)



# Questions?



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# Standing Committee on Accountability and Oversight

2023 Wildfire Season After Action Review

October 21, 2024



Government of  
Northwest Territories

# Lessons Learned after 2023 Wildfire Season

- After-actions reviews are a regular part of ECC business.
- Lessons learned used to make adjustments on a regular basis to enhance our program.
- ECC put a number of changes in place before the 2024 season began (before the external review):
  - Additional training that started earlier
  - Added additional staff and brought on earlier
  - Brought on additional aircraft and started earlier
  - Early season scanning for holdover fires
  - Enhanced communication protocols with communities and Indigenous governments



# Recommendations and Opportunities

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Fire Behaviour Modelling</b>              | <b>Human Resources Capacity</b>              | <b>Human Resources Training &amp; Skills</b>                    |
| <b>Aviation Resources</b>                    | <b>Equipment &amp; Infrastructure</b>        | <b>Incident Command System</b>                                  |
| <b>Policy Strategy &amp; Procedures</b>      | <b>Wildfire Response Information Sharing</b> | <b>Coordination with Municipal &amp; Indigenous Governments</b> |
| <b>Prevention &amp; Community Protection</b> | <b>Budgeting &amp; Reporting Structure</b>   |   |



# 1. Fire Behaviour Modelling

## Modelling:

- ECC uses two nationally accepted fire modelling programs: FireStarr and WISE (Wildfire Intelligence and Simulation Engine).
- These tools are used by fire managers across Canada.

## Improved Data:

- The GNWT weather network has been expanded with more weather stations set up across the NWT, ensuring continuous data collection throughout the year.
- ECC collaborates with federal agencies, and other forestry and wildfire management experts to enhance available data on fuels in the NWT.

## Training:

- 4 staff are currently at a national training course on Advanced Fire Behaviour, with a few more staff scheduled to attend a similar course in the new year.



## 2. Human Resources Capacity

### Culturally Appropriate Counselling:

- Contracted Indigenous-led counselling to support the well-being of individuals involved in wildfire management and response.
- A Standing Offer Agreement for culturally appropriate counselling is being pursued.

### Sustained Action Crews:

- Adding two 20-person crews in one location may prove challenging; the department is looking to add 5-person crews in several communities across all regions.
- These resources can be brought together as needed to form 20 person sustained actions crews.



# 3. Human Resources Training & Skills

## Centralized Training:

- The department plans to host two centralized training sessions each year, one for the northern and another for the southern NWT, to support consistent and efficient training.

## Certification Manual:

- A contractor is actively working with ECC to finalize the Wildfire Management Certification and Qualification Manual by the end of the 2024-25 fiscal year.

## Expand Capacity:

- MACA, in collaboration with the Department of Finance, has established a redeployment process within the GNWT to enhance departments' capacity during emergency events.
- MACA aims to train GNWT staff in the Incident Command System (ICS) through a comprehensive four-year training plan starting in fall 2024.



## 4. Aviation Resources

### Forest Act Regulation Development:

- ECC staff will work with the Intergovernmental Council Secretariat, Indigenous governments, Indigenous organizations, boards, stakeholders and the public on the development of regulations for the *Forest Act*.
- This collaborative process will consider many factors and needs. It will also be informed by lessons learned during the 2023 wildfire season.

### Update SOPs:

- ECC maintains and periodically updates a wide range of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to guide wildfire management programs and activities.





# 5. Equipment Management & Infrastructure

## Back-up Communications:

- Starlink systems have been installed in most fire bases, providing reliable satellite internet connectivity.
- To support this infrastructure, ECC is developing localized training programs to ensure that personnel can operate and maintain these systems as needed.
- MACA has complemented these efforts by equipping Regional Emergency Management Organizations (REMOs) with Starlink systems, satellite phones, and Emergency Communication Protocols.



## 6. Incident Command System Discipline

- ECC and MACA have proactively sought to broaden the pool of GNWT staff trained in the Incident Command System (ICS).
- ICS has been adopted as the response model for the purpose of the NWT Emergency Plan, which was updated in April 2024 and communicated to all GNWT departments, agencies, local authorities, and the public.
- MACA, in collaboration with FIN, has implemented a strategic redeployment process within the GNWT.



# 7. Policy Strategy and Procedures

## Physical Binders:

- The department will make physical SOP binders available in each regional office and other locations as needed.

## Review AAR process:

- The department is:
  - Reviewing existing AAR processes, and processes to identify areas for improvement.
  - Ensuring AAR's are completed for each fire.
  - Supporting a process and culture of lessons learned and continuous improvement.



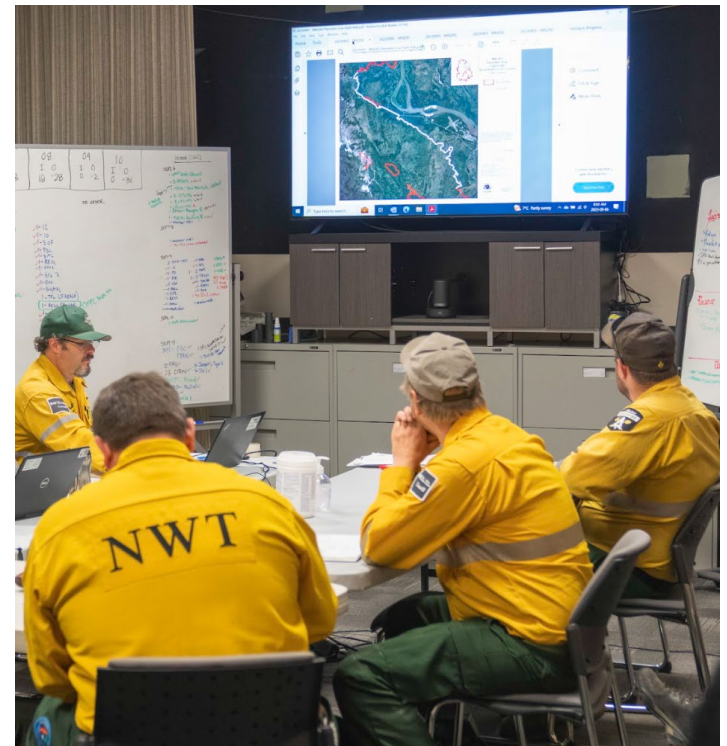
# 8. Wildfire Response Information Sharing

Reaffirm government departments roles:

- A Joint Information Committee is in place to enhance coordination of public information dissemination.
- MACA updated the NWT Emergency Plan. This comprehensive plan provides a framework for coordination and planning during emergencies that may impact all or part of the Northwest Territories.

Community Engagement:

- Each winter, ECC engages with all forested communities across the NWT to look back at the last wildfire season and discuss local planning for the upcoming season.



# 9. Coordination with Municipal and Indigenous Governments

## Wildfire & Structural engagement:

- ECC enhanced collaboration with local fire departments on information sharing, communications and cross-training.
- MACA supporting these efforts through new Territorial and Regional FireSmart Committees, which are led by ECC.
- ECC and MACA updated protocol for Wildfire Event Notifications.
- EIA established new protocol for sharing information with Indigenous governments on nearby fires.
- GNWT Departments held meetings to clarify roles, identify challenges and enhance processes for working together during a wildfire emergency.
- ECC working with communities, Indigenous governments and NWTAC on wildfire prevention & mitigation initiatives.



# 10. Prevention and Community Protection

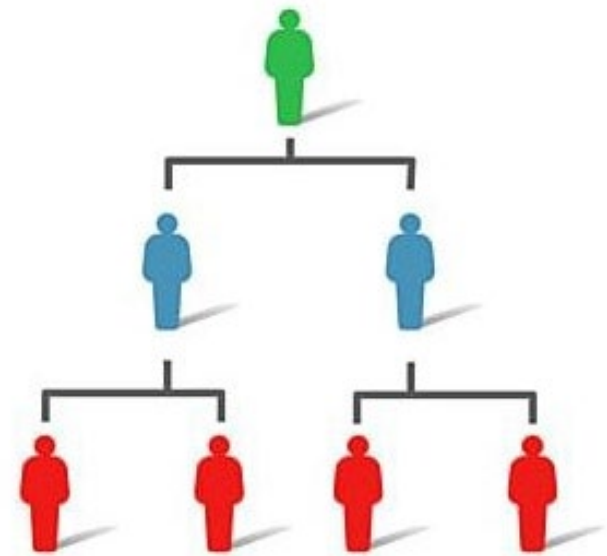
## Define Roles & Responsibilities:

- ECC and MACA support comprehensive planning and preparedness efforts at the community level.
- ECC is the lead for Territorial and Regional FireSmart Committees, which will also include participation of MACA, communities, Indigenous governments and others.
- In addition to providing strategic guidance, ECC and MACA assist community governments in identifying and accessing financial resources necessary to undertake FireSmart community protection projects.



# 11. Budgeting and Reporting Structure

- ECC is reviewing options to streamline human resource, budgeting and reporting structures and processes.
- This will include an assessment of:
  - Current program structure/function
  - Approaches in other jurisdictions
  - Analysis of best practices
  - NWT Forest Fire Management Policy



# Conclusion

ECC is committed to implementing the 25 recommendations and 15 Opportunities for Improvement.

- Some recommendations can be implemented quickly and will be in place for the 2025 fire season.
- ECC has begun planning and implementation of all of the recommendations, and some are already in place.
- Some recommendations require financial investments that will require further assessment and decision-making.
- Some recommendations are longer-term in nature, but ECC is committed to progressing to ensure each of the recommendations are implemented as promptly as possible.

