



2023 North Slave Complex Wildfires After Action Assessment:

Final Report

Yellowknife City Council

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July 8, 2024

Disclaimer

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Project Scope

Project Objectives

- 01** Assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the City's emergency management response and recovery processes, procedures, capabilities and framework in support of the 2023 North Slave Complex Wildfires.
- 02** Identify and document strengths, areas for improvement and gaps in existing preparedness and response capabilities.
- 03** Identify actions that need to be implemented immediately to ensure better preparation for the future, as well as medium to long term actions needed to strengthen and institutionalize the emergency response capabilities.
- 04** Consider, at minimum, the following four questions: 1) What was expected to happen? 2) What actually occurred? 3) What went well and why? 4) What can be improved and how?
- 05** Complete 4 key project deliverables.

Key Deliverables

- 01** **After Action Assessment Report**
Focused on the City's prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery activities as they relate specifically to the August 2023 North Slave Complex Wildfires. The recommendations from the AAA Report will seek to inform and develop future strategies developed in the City's emergency management and response program related to overall threats as well as to wildfire threats.
- 02** **After Action Work Plan**
Identifies and prioritizes recommended follow-up actions required.
- 03** **Interim Presentation to Yellowknife City Council**
Process and preliminary findings.
- 04** **Final Presentation to Yellowknife City Council**
Findings and recommendations.

Project Timeline

Phase 1: Project Initiation January 2024

Phase 3: Engagement March-April 2024

- Public Forum (March 27)
- Public Survey and email collection (March 25-April 12)
- Meetings with partners and stakeholders (ongoing)

Phase 5: Reporting June-July 2024

- Analysis of documentation and engagement findings
- Development of Final Report and Recommendations
- Final Presentation to City Council (July 8) ★

Phase 2: Documentation Review February- March 2024

- Review of internal and public documentation

Phase 4: Analysis March-May 2024

- Analysis of documentation and engagement findings (ongoing)
- Interim Presentation to City Council (May 13)

Approach

Approach



Data Collection/Analysis

- Internal/external documentation (plans, documents, emails, communications, etc.)
- Meeting with City EOC personnel
- Interviews with Mayor and Council
- Interviews with 9 key City staff
- 24 partner/stakeholder interviews
- Interview with local media
- Public engagement workshop
- Public survey (463 respondents)
- Email input from the public (43)



Key Findings

- 5 themes
 - Cross-Agency Coordination
 - Public Communications
 - Considerations for Vulnerable Populations
 - EOC and Continuity Management
 - Evacuation Planning, Response, and Recovery
- 19 key strengths
- 35 areas for future improvement

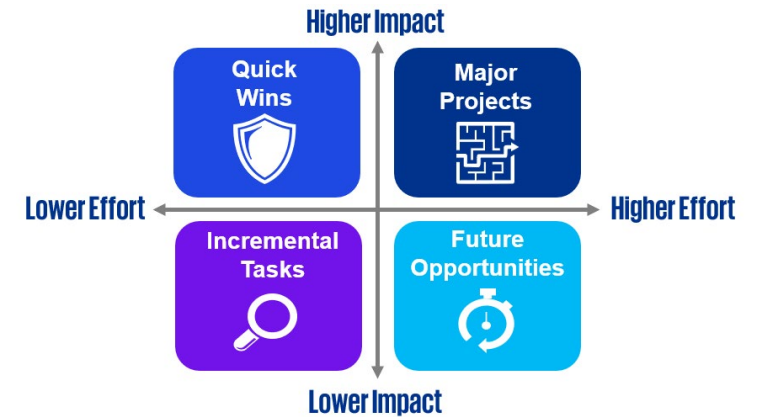


Recommendations

- Key findings analyzed in accordance with leading practices and standards (CSA, ISO, Sendai, WUI)
- 26 recommendations to address areas for future improvement



Prioritization



Approach

Key Findings






- Lack of clarity remains regarding roles and responsibilities between the City and other agencies.
- A full assessment and determination of roles and responsibilities is beyond the scope of this project.
- The Key Findings are based on the roles and responsibilities described in the NWT Emergency Plan publicly available during the 2023 North Slave Complex Wildfires, and the requests for assistance the City submitted to the GNWT.

Key Strengths

Key Strengths

CROSS-AGENCY COORDINATION

ENTITY INVOLVED

 <p>Considerable effort and resources were provided by contractors, and City staff for the installation of firebreaks and sprinklers, with support from volunteers for building firebreaks.</p>	The City
 <p>Interviews indicated that the coordination and communication between the City and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) Department of Environment and Climate Change (ECC) worked well throughout the wildfire season.</p>	The City & the GNWT
 <p>The City used the State of Local Emergency to re-allocate resources to mitigate risks of the 2023 North Slave Complex Wildfires.</p>	The City
 <p>Integration of representatives of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN) into the City Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) contributed to excellent coordination of response efforts and communications.</p>	The City & YKDFN
 <p>The City and YKDFN issued a joint Road to Re-Entry Plan and informed residents of the key dates for re-entry.</p>	The City & YKDFN

Key Strengths

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS




ENTITY INVOLVED

	The City provided some updates on measures being taken for community protection, including building firebreaks and installing sprinklers.	The City
	Regular updates were provided through press conferences livestreamed by the City on their website and by the City Mayor on Facebook.	The City & the GNWT
	Joint communications developed and released by the City and YKDFN.	The City & YKDFN
	Public communication was better coordinated for re-entry in comparison to the evacuation process.	The City & the GNWT
	The City provided residents with information about what to expect when returning to the city of Yellowknife, including specific actions they could take to ensure water and food safety.	The City





Key Strengths

CONSIDERATIONS FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

ENTITY INVOLVED

	Organizations supporting vulnerable populations are key sources of expertise for how to enhance preparedness to ensure all unique needs are met.	Vulnerable population organizations
	Organizations supporting vulnerable populations made substantial contributions in assisting their clients during the evacuation process.	Vulnerable population organizations
	Organizations supporting vulnerable populations contributed significant efforts to support their clients in the recovery and re-entry process.	Vulnerable population organizations



Key Strengths

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE AND CONTINUITY MANAGEMENT	ENTITY INVOLVED
 Despite gaps in the Incident Command System (ICS) or EOC training, City staff were able to activate a functional EOC and carry out the basic functions required.	The City
 City staff took initiative and contributed significant effort to supporting continuity of business operations during the emergency event.	The City
 The City identified the appropriate staff to fill key operational roles in the EOC throughout the evacuation.	The City
 Volunteers contributed significant time, effort, and resources to support the implementation of community protection measures.	Volunteers

Key Strengths

EVACUATION PLANNING, RESPONSE & RECOVERY

ENTITY INVOLVED

	The City identified internal capacity issues and made the appropriate requests for assistance from partner agencies.	The City
	The City responded to requests from the public for pet support by working with local animal welfare organizations and developing a clear process for owners to submit requests for pet retrieval and care.	The City & the GNWT

Prioritized Recommendations for Improvement

Recommendations

The following recommendations assume that the responsibility for their implementation rests with the City. This is based on the NWT Emergency Plan which was recently updated in 2024 and includes notable shifts in roles and responsibilities between the GNWT and Local Authorities. It is important to note that the updated NWT Emergency Plan does not include any considerations unique to the City as a Local Authority associated with emergency events. The experiences from the 2023 North Slave Complex wildfires suggests it may be appropriate to consider whether the City is unique from other Local Authorities in the Northwest Territories as it relates to emergency events, particularly as it relates to roles and responsibilities between the City and the GNWT.

The City may make an agreement with the GNWT, or pro-actively submit formal requests for assistance to the GNWT associated with emergency management responsibilities, including any responsibilities associated with the following recommendations, if the City does not have the capacity to fulfill that responsibility. However, for the purposes of this report it is assumed no such agreement is in place, nor any pro-active request for assistance submitted.

Recommendations

CROSS-AGENCY COORDINATION

#	Recommendation
1	Involve partners and stakeholders in emergency planning efforts to ensure a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities and improve future coordination.
2	Coordinate with the GNWT to establish a formal decision-making process for shared responsibilities associated with declarations of states of emergency, Evacuation Notices, Alerts, and Orders, and other response and recovery related activities.
3	Coordinate with the GNWT to ensure a shared understanding and interpretation of the <i>Emergency Management Act</i> , particularly with respect to roles and responsibilities following the declaration of a Territorial State of Emergency by the GNWT.
4	Work with the GNWT to establish a common understanding of roles and responsibilities, including communication and coordination channels, to formalize information sharing and institutionalize the relationship between different government levels.



Recommendations

CROSS-AGENCY COORDINATION

#	Recommendation
5	Coordinate with the GNWT on the designation and management of critical service workers during evacuation scenarios comparable to the 2023 North Slave Complex Wildfires.
6	Continue to partner with YKDFN by inviting one or more representatives to the City EOC during major activations to enhance the coordination of response actions and development and delivery of joint communications.
7	Regularly review and update the City of Yellowknife Community Wildfire Protection Plan (and comparable wildfire risk management documentation) and consider opportunities to coordinate with the GNWT and neighbouring communities on wildfire mitigation and risk reduction measures in advance of wildfire seasons.



Recommendations

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

#	Recommendation
8	Collaborate and coordinate with the GWNT on public communications related to a city-wide evacuation to identify opportunities to align approach, timing, content, and audience prior to the release of information.
9	Develop a strategy for managing public information before, during and after evacuations to ensure that communications to the public are clear, accessible, informative, and timely. This strategy should include templates, draft messaging, guidelines, contact information, and channels for communication with partners and the public. The strategy should also include procedures for the timely issuance of Evacuation Notices, Alerts, and Orders through various communication channels.
10	Prepare and communicate materials to enhance public awareness of the City's wildfire mitigation and preparedness efforts that have been taken, are planned for, or are underway.



Recommendations

CONSIDERATIONS FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

#	Recommendation
11	Consider opportunities to increase the accessibility and reach of information and guidance to support personal preparedness efforts.
12	Consider the needs of vulnerable populations in all evacuation planning, response and recovery activities and implement a system to register these individuals to ensure their safety during evacuation and re-entry. Involve local organizations that support vulnerable populations in the planning efforts.
13	Establish a position within the City EOC that can be activated to coordinate with local organizations supporting vulnerable populations to enhance coordination and communication.
14	Provide advance and direct communications to organizations supporting vulnerable populations when the City is considering issuing an Evacuation Order. This will allow time for preparations to support these populations.



Recommendations

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE AND CONTINUITY MANAGEMENT

#	Recommendation
15	<p>Develop an emergency management training plan for City staff that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the frequency and scope of training; ICS training for all City staff that may serve in roles within and/or in support of the City's EOC; enhanced ICS Training (e.g., ICS 300 and ICS 400) for City staff that may serve in leadership roles within the City's Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) (E.g., Incident Command / EOC Director, Liaison Officer, Information Officer, Section Leads, etc.); and, an ongoing record of training completed.
16	<p>Establish clear documentation processes to manage information, including templates, tracking documents, clear internal communication channels for the sharing of information, and documentation filing approaches.</p>
17	<p>Review and consider revisions to City EOC documentation based on lessons observed during the 2023 activation, including documentation guiding the activation of the EOC and position-specific procedures.</p>



Recommendations

EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE AND CONTINUITY MANAGEMENT

#	Recommendation
18	Ensure the safety and wellbeing of staff activated to the City's EOC.
19	Conduct a risk assessment to identify risks to critical City services and potential impacts of disruptions on critical services and resources, to inform continuity planning efforts.
20	Establish and maintain a continuity management program for the City.
21	Develop continuity plans for the City across all departments, which include the identification of critical City services and the staff required to ensure the continuity of these services.
22	Plan for the involvement of spontaneous volunteers during emergency response and recovery. The planning effort should consider whether, how, and when spontaneous volunteers can support response and recovery efforts.



Recommendations

EVACUATION PLANNING AND RESPONSE

#	Recommendation
23	<p>Develop a detailed wildfire evacuation plan that incorporates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• roles and responsibilities for the City and partner organizations;• evacuation decision procedures;• public communications procedures;• response procedures for partial or total evacuation of the community;• response procedures for supporting evacuees including consideration for the unique needs of vulnerable populations;• logistics processes and considerations relevant to evacuations; and• recovery and re-entry processes and considerations.



Recommendations

EVACUATION PLANNING AND RESPONSE

#	Recommendation
24	In collaboration with the GNWT, and as appropriate given interjurisdictional protocols, identify potential host locations for evacuees to support planning efforts. Where possible, pre-establish relationships, communication channels, and agreements.
25	Develop a clear understanding of what resources are anticipated to be required during future evacuations, and the capacity of the City to meet those requirements. For anticipated requirements beyond the City's capacity, consider preparing and delivering anticipated requests for assistance to the GNWT in advance of emergencies.
26	In collaboration with the GNWT and relevant local organizations, incorporate considerations and procedures for pets and animals in the City's evacuation plan.





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