

“Wabanaki Wildland Crew” prepared for AGFO Senate Briefing, December 5th, 2024

Introduction:

My name is Travis Joseph Sappier from Tobique First Nation, NB. I am employed with MAWIW Council Inc as a Capacity Development Coordinator and assistant to Emergency Management portfolio. As a MAWIW Council team member we work and advocate for the three largest communities in NB which are Elsipogtog First Nation, Esgeoopetitj First Nation, Neqotkuk First Nation on a Tribal Council level of governance and partnerships and initiatives with Provincial, Federal and Atlantic Canada agencies.

A brief history/overview of how the team came to be:

First of all, I'd like to take some time to acknowledge the other partnership agencies and officers who helped make this opportunity and initiative possible and who all helped make the Wabanaki Wildland Crew a success, agencies like Department of Natural Resources & Energy Development (DNRED) here in New Brunswick and their wildfire management team, Martha O'Sullivan, Troy Adams, Dan Michaud, Tony Cole and Chelsea Cullins; New Brunswick Wolastoqey Tribal Council and their EM team, Kirk Hannah, Don Stenger and Tim Plant; North Shore Tribal Council and their team Bianca Langille and Jared Bishop; Neqotkuk First Nation Fire Protection, Fire Chief Corey Nicholas, and Fire Captain Larry Sockabasin Jr; and Neqotkuk First Nation administration team, Chief Ross Perley, Marcy Crain and Serge Demers; and of course my family – I acknowledge their keen sense of resourcefulness, valuable experience, dedication, unconditional support, and commitment to the partnership and success of the Wabanaki Wildland Crew. Most of all, their friendship and their respectfulness to others. The Wabanaki Wildland Crew would not have been a success without the support of each and everyone involved and the commitment from the DNRED partnership and their initiative to help get the team established on every level.

How the team is coordinated and administered:

Although, still in its early development phases, as a team and partnership with these agencies and officers in NB, we were able to all work together thanks to the direction of DNRED and their officers as they assisted in the coordination an initiative for an all-Indigenous wildfire team; I personally seen the value, long-term vision, and opportunities this initiative could present for not only for the province of NB, but also the First Nations communities and the candidates on a capacity development perspective, along with opportunities that could be developed through employment and training for First Nations, as it presents real opportunities for those who wanted to help other communities across the country. I (Travis) took the opportunity to take advantage of this as I too valued what the team wanted to accomplish as they volunteered their time to selflessly help others in desperate need. I assisted with the coordination and administration with help from DNRED team and the Neqotkuk First Nation administration umbrella with hire forms, payroll administration, WorkSafe New Brunswick, Workers

Compensation Board Alberta & British Columbia insurance application processes, and communications within the provincial agencies and Wabanaki Wildland Crew members.

What the team's firefighting training requirements or regime are:

The Wabanaki Wildland Crew involves members with previous wildland firefighting experience (Tim Plant); Type II wildland firefighter training coordination through DNRED New Brunswick (Dan Michaud and his team) for all crew members in 2024; Level I and Level II firefighters from Neqotkuk (Tobique) First Nation Fire Department, Fire Chief Corey Nicholas, Fire Captain Larry Sockabasin Jr; and other entry-level Type II wildland firefighters now with experience who have demonstrated leadership potential in their mobilization in 2024 to Alberta; and partnership relations with DNRED Type I wildland firefighters, team leaders, and training specialists who have shared their knowledge, experience, and training leadership with the Wabanaki Wildland Crew members. We are to continue that valuable partnership and work together to continue recruiting FNs for the upcoming 2025 fire season, build capacity, continued education, training and leadership with the wildland initiative.

If and how the team is integrated into local firefighting departments, on and off reserve, in New Brunswick:

Partnerships and training with DNRED wildfire management team; FireSmart initiatives; Neqotkuk (Tobique) First Nation Fire Department; mutual aid agreement(s) with local fire departments; and joint-training exercises and initiatives with Wolastoqey Tribal Council Emergency Management team; training and discussions with New Brunswick Emergency Management Organization (NBEMO) with BEM, ICS 100-300 training, emergency management action/response planning; and coordination and support through Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) Atlantic officers.

The team's recent experiences fighting wildfires in New Brunswick, Alberta and other provinces and territories, if applicable:

Thanks to DNRED, Wolastoqey Tribal Council, MAWIW Council, and Tobique First Nation administrative support and leadership, the Wabanaki Wildland Crew were able to gain some valuable experience working and mobilizing to the SEMO camps in North Western Alberta 'Fox Lake' regions back in August – September of 2024 where they assisted as Type I and Type II wildland firefighters and other wildland teams in the region where they were able to successfully create and maintain new working relationships with other fire teams/officers in Alberta. Historically, the Wabanaki Wildland Crew were the first all-Indigenous team to be mobilized out-of-province to help fight and mitigate wildland fires in other Canadian province(s).

Any recommendations that the team might have for the federal government with respect to enhanced funding for the team's training, equipment, personnel, resources, etc.

DNRED, GNB, ISC, and Tribal Councils are collaborating (on-going) together about how/who/when to hire an Indigenous Liaison Officer (ILO) to assist with the coordination, organization, recruitment, training, and communications with other First Nations and wildfire agencies in New Brunswick on or before March 2025 and are seeking applicants / other potential funding.

As a team, we've had conversations and discussions about how the Wabanaki Wildland Crew should have (but not limited to) the following:

- Potential capital infrastructure projects in key locations in the province;
- acquisition and financial assistance for new pumps, hoses, chainsaws, pick-up trucks, and other critical equipment to mobilize within the province of NB and out-of-province;
- mobilization supplies, equipment and uniforms;
- communications & TMR radios for wildland crews;
- enclosed trailers to assist in mobilization, command centers & EOCs;
- continued safety training for equipment, fire risks and hazards;
- continued engagement in wildfire management training, tactics, and strategies used to mitigate and fight wildfires;
- potential/continued involvement in FireSmart initiatives and activities to keep the firefighters engaged, employed, and help to reduce downtime;
- leadership, equipment safety training, WorkSafe practices;
- Certified sawyers course(s), education, Type I wildfire training;
- Encourage information-sharing and conversations with other Federal/Provincial inter-agencies;
- Mutual aid agreements with Federal/Provincial agencies;
- Future Wabanaki Wildland Crew recognition on a Federal level and mutual aid agreements with Federal inter-agencies (ie. CIFFC);
- Why were other countries were called and not us? (Question I could not answer);
- Support for self-sufficient and recognized agency;
- Support for fire behavior, fuel types, studies and data collection for management and use for future generations; and
- Initiate and continue use of drone and software technology for fuel mapping, prescribed & traditional / cultural burns studies and data collection.

Finally, respectfully, I thank you for your time, efforts, and recognition of the Wabanaki Wildland Crew at your level of government. We look forward to working with continued partnerships within the Province of NB, other provinces across Canada, and other Federal Wildfire Agencies moving forward.