



**Chinook Emergency Response Society**  
37530 Eakin Settlement RD, Burns Lake, BC V0J1E4

January 23, 2024

Dear Honourable David Eby and Honourable Bowinn Ma,

The Board of Directors of the Chinook Emergency Response Society (CERS), having carefully reviewed the EDMA and having held public consultations, would like to formally express our concerns with the passing of the Emergency Disaster Management Act (EDMA).

Among our most serious concerns:

1. The ability of this government to impose enhanced fines and/or jail sentences on individuals who are committed to preserving their home and landscape.
2. The stripping of local decision-making authority and autonomy now granted by our Regional Districts. These government employees take the time to listen to their residents and work together to find solutions based on using joint knowledge.
3. Absolute overreach of this government towards individual and community rights, crippling communities that want to protect themselves, their families, their livelihoods and assist their neighbors in a time of emergency.

We feel the EDMA has been rushed through legislature without proper and comprehensive consultation with community members and organizations that are on the front line of this climate crisis. Community organizations like CERS are strategizing with their neighbours and building relationships with their local regional districts, BCWS staff and other agencies to more effectively prepare, protect and respond to these events. The creation of the Premier's 'Expert Task Force' has already outlined that volunteer groups with training, local knowledge and expertise are an important part of fighting wildfires.

Our local volunteer residents of the RDBN, Area E cooperatively and collaboratively action events from initial response through to the mop up stage. Without these responses, BCWS and this government would have been in a much bigger wildfire year than the one experienced in 2023. Far more than 2.84 million hectares would have been destroyed if it weren't for the preparedness, coordination, and response by locals with the knowledge and expertise to action the initial starts and be available and willing to work through effective initial response without cost to the government.

Since the 2018 fires in our region, most residents have acquired or increased their current inventory of firefighting equipment. Loggers and ranchers in the area have years of experience as well as the equipment to help assist with the extinguishing of most fires, particularly in the crucial early stages. In fact, they have far more equipment, ready and on call, than does our local

BCWS. These people are our first line of defense ...**your** first line of defense. BCWS simply does not have the capacity to act as quickly as local residents do to extinguish all the fire starts that come in a season. This act, as it stands, strips *this government* of the local knowledge, skill and experience that the Premier stated should be utilized when it comes to preventing and fighting wildfires. As the Premier state, "It was also clear to me that we could be doing a better job of leveraging local knowledge and expertise when it comes to preventing and fighting wildfires."

Cliff Chapman, BCWS Director of Provincial Operations, has been quoted, "We're hoping that the locals that are out every day on the line are not only feeling valuable because they're helping their community, which they were doing before, but now they're doing it side-by-side with us." He further states "What's happening in the Shuswap I think is a great collective effort from the Columbia Shuswap Regional District, the local residents of that area and BC Wildfire Service really working together to try and achieve a common objective, a common outcome of protecting people's homes and getting home sooner."

The formation of CERS after the catastrophic 2018 wildfire events created a model to assist residents when there are potential threats to our area. The society has developed strategies to assist with training and education including Firesmart and S100. Our society and its volunteers use communication tools such as social media, email, phones, and radios to communicate when there is an emergency. CERS will help coordinate volunteers who want to know how to help in these situations but do not instruct nor require residents to go to fires. CERS has brought an effective method of communication to a vast area and residents have had tremendous success with putting out fires before they become wildfires of note...in essence, saving this province millions of dollars in firefighting costs and natural resources.

**In 2023, our residents put out 12 of the 40+ fires in our area in less than 5 hours and actioned 27 fires in total. How can these statistics and this information possibly be ignored?**

The residents of Area E, Regional District of Bulkley Nechako, and their supporting group, Chinook Emergency Response Society, should be part of your planning model as you work through regulating this new Act that you have passed in what would seem is only beneficial in controlling your voting population as opposed to working with them in solving this crisis.

We urge you to extend the deadline for submissions and discussion on the EDMA and include the local knowledge and expertise that you speak so highly of in the final regulations surrounding this act. Remove the criminality and financial threats and leave the decision-making authority within the boundaries of the regional districts. You have rushed to the wrong decisions in this act...now pause and make the right ones. We look forward to a timely response.

Chinook Emergency Response Society board of directors