



WEST HANTS REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY REPORT

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To: Committee of the Whole

Submitted By: Mark Phillips, Chief Administrative Officer

Date: June 13, 2023

Subject: 2023 May/June HRM and Shelburne Wildfires
– The WHRM Emergency Management Office Information Report

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Nova Scotia Emergency Management Act

RECOMMENDATION

N/A as this is an information report.

BACKGROUND

The following information report has been prepared to provide an overview of the activity and communications of WHRM EMO Committee surrounding the recent wildfires impacting parts of HRM and Shelburne Counties and the declaration of a state of emergency by the province. Wildfires in these areas were deemed out-of-control for approximately one (1) week in HRM and “being held” and still not under control up to June 11, 2023.

Events

- Saturday, May 27, 2023 – Wildfire broke out in Shelburne County (Barrington Lake area).
- Sunday, May 28, 2023 – Wildfire broke out in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), (Tantallon area).
- Thursday, June 1, 2023 – Declaration of a State of Emergency by Minister John Lohr.

The following “Executive Summary” has been copied and shared in this report from the “Emergency Management Plan for the West Hants Regional Municipality -2021” to summarize EMO responsibilities.

Introduction

This plan results from the recognition on the part of local government and provincial officials that a comprehensive plan is needed to enhance the Province's ability to manage emergency/disaster situations. It was prepared by Emergency Management officials working as a team in a planning process. This plan constitutes an integral part of a province wide emergency management program and contributes to its effectiveness. Authority to undertake this effort is provided by both the province’s Emergency Management Act and the West Hants Regional Municipality (WHRM) Emergency Management By-law. The development of this plan included an analysis of potential hazards that could affect our region and an assessment of our capabilities to deal with these potential hazards.

Comprehensive Approach

Dealing with disasters is an ongoing and complex undertaking. Through implementation of risk reduction measures before a disaster or emergency occurs, timely and effective response during an actual occurrence, and provision of both short- and long-term recovery assistance after the occurrence of a disaster, lives can be saved, and property damage minimized. This process is called comprehensive emergency management to emphasize the interrelationship of activities, functions, and expertise necessary to deal with emergencies. This plan contains five sections to deal separately with each part of this ongoing process.

Management Responsibilities

The emergency management responsibilities of departments and organizations are outlined in this plan. Assignments are made within the framework of the present WHRM capability and existing organizational responsibilities. The Municipal Emergency Management Organization (EMO) is designated to coordinate all emergency management activities within the region. In this process EMO intends to use the Incident Command System (ICS) to respond to emergencies. ICS is a management tool for the command, control, and coordination of resources and personnel in an emergency.

Provincial responsibilities are closely related to the responsibility of the local levels of government within the Province (cities, towns and municipalities) to manage all phases of an emergency. The Province has the responsibility to assist the local governments in the event that they have fully committed their resources and are still unable to cope with any disaster. Similarly, the Canadian Government is obligated to provide assistance to the Province after resources have been fully committed and the Province is unable to cope with the disaster.

This plan describes in detail the centralized direction of requests for assistance and the understanding that the governmental jurisdiction most affected by an emergency is required to fully involve itself in the emergency prior to requesting assistance. Specific emergency

management guidance for situations requiring special knowledge, technical expertise, and resources may be addressed in separate annexes attached to this plan. Examples of this type of situation are emergencies resulting from hazardous chemical releases, dam failures, or power outages.

Conclusion

This plan provides general all-hazards management guidance, using existing organizations, to allow the WHRM to meet the responsibilities before, during and after an emergency. Therefore, it is recommended that this Emergency Plan (EP) be reviewed and approved by the Municipal Council annually.

WHRM Planning Committee Meetings

With the close proximity of the HRM wildfire(s) to the West Hants Regional Municipality's, easterly boundary the CAO and Emergency Management Coordinator suggested meeting with select members of the EMO Planning Committee, primarily WHRM staff, RCMP and Fire services if available. WHRM was not experiencing any incident(s) nor a local emergency and the intent of the WHRM EMO meeting(s) was for situational awareness and resource assessment in the event the wildfires moved westerly. It became a non-event for the WHRM EMO Planning team.

A state of emergency was declared on June 1, 2023, for the area around and including Pisiquid Lake, Windsor, Hants County of Nova Scotia by The Honourable John Lohr Nova Scotia Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

Summary of Meetings

The meetings gave an opportunity to assess municipal staff members who may be directly impacted by the fires, members of their immediate family or staff who were members of WHRM Fire Departments. Fortunately, no employees reported having direct impacts on their immediate families and their homes as a result of the fires. A small number of municipal employees who are fire fighters did respond to the events through their respective departments when called upon.

Attendees at WHRM EMO Planning Committee meetings are as follows. Not all attendees attended all meetings and, in some cases, alternates may have been present vs. the appointments noted:

- Incident Commander – Mark Phillips , CAO
- EMO Coordinator – Shelleena Thornton
- Nova Scotia EMO – Not Present
- Fire – Not Present but the EMO Coordinator and Fire Chiefs were in communications
- Community Development – Kathy Kehoe and Vanessa Roberts
- Public Works – Todd Richard and Troy Burgess

- Planning and Development – Sara Poirier and Hartley Atwell
- Information Technology – Matt Povah
- Finance – Diana Gibson and Tammy Daurie
- Hants Exhibition Society / Grounds – Not Present
- Glooscap 1st Nation – Not Present
- Nova Scotia Public Works – Not Present
- RCMP – David Ferguson and Robert Frizzell
- Emergency Health Services – Not Present
- Department of Community Services – Jennifer McCulloch
- Hants Community Hospital – Not Present (Deanna Snair researching and providing updates)
- Safety – Deanna Snair
- Communications – Shelleena Thornton and VanEssa Roberts

Planning meetings are also referred to as “Sit Reps” or situational report meetings. The meetings mirror themselves with repeat agendas. Essentially each department or agency is asked “how are you and your department doing during this time and is any support required”? Most of the times during the meetings departments were not impacted and were operating at normal capacity.

WHRM EMO Planning Cycle Meetings included:

- Overview of existing wildfire conditions in HRM and Shelburne.
 - Awareness of proximity WHRM was to the fires. HRM evacuation area perimeter was 8 kms (linear) to the WHRM boundary east of Panuke Lake area.
 - Monitoring weather conditions.
 - Monitoring resources being dedicated to areas (primarily fire mutual aid).
 - Monitoring any potential transportation interruptions impacting WHRM (Highway 101 and 103).
- Established the potential command structure if required: Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources and Renewables would be the jurisdictional authority or Incident Command agency should a WHRM wildfire develop.
- Municipal department updates noting any impacts on municipal operations due to the events (resource availability, supply chain, staffing impacts, service delivery, etc...).
- WHRM fire services activity updates. Some departments assisted directly with the wildfires (HFD, WFD, and BFD). Awareness of regional readiness should there be a non-wildfire or a wildfire event in WHRM.
- Parks / Wooded areas and trail (s) closures.
 - Impacts to vulnerable people in our community such as those experiencing homelessness.
- GSAR support to Shelburne for volunteer support.

Meetings were held virtually and lasted approximately 30 minutes or less on the following dates:

1. 9:00 a.m., Monday, May 29, 2023
2. 9:00 a.m., Tuesday, May 30, 2023
3. 9:30 a.m., Wednesday, May 31, 2023 (not an EMO Planning Committee meeting, but rather, a meeting with Jennifer McCulloch, Community Services to discuss the impact on the vulnerable sector and homeless individuals as a result of the Provincial Restrictions/Bans. No meeting minutes were taken. (Attendees included: Mark Phillips, Shelleena Thornton, Kathy Kehoe, VanEssa Roberts, Deanna Snair, Kathy Johnston-Isenor, and Jennifer McCulloch). No meeting minutes taken.
4. 9:00 a.m., Thursday, June 1, 2023
5. 3:45 p.m. Friday, June 2, 2023
6. 9:00 a.m. Tuesday, June 6, 2023
7. 3:00 p.m. Tuesday, June 6, 2023

Fire representatives were not present at these meetings as we did not have an emergency; and fire resources (members and apparatus) were intermittently dispatched for mutual aid to the wildfires. Supervisor Thornton maintained constant communications with the fire departments throughout their mutual aid calls for service.

Communications Summary

EMC, Shelleena Thornton Communications – June 1, 2023

On the afternoon of June 1, 2023, the EMC was contacted by the MLA to share and exchange information regarding the lack of water in Lake Pisiquid and concerns she had been receiving through her office. She shared that it was the government's intent to communicate with the Federal Department of Fisheries (DFO) to request an amendment to the DFO Ministerial order to permit water into the former lake for safety reasons. This intent was shared with the CAO and onward to the Mayor for awareness.

In the evening the MLA advised the EMC that she has no further information regarding the amendment of the DFO Order. Additional contact was made later in the evening regarding actions coming from the Minister's Office which led to the declaration of State of Emergency. Throughout the day the EMC was unaware of any State of Emergency declaration by the Minister until late evening on June 1st. No request was made by the EMC for EMO related assistance nor a state of emergency request.

CAO Communications – June 1st, 2nd and 6th 2023

June 1st - Communication exchange with EMC as noted above. CAO unaware of State of Emergency declaration by Minister until late evening on June 1st. No request by CAO for EMO related assistance nor a state of emergency request.

June 2nd - CAO received call from Provincial Command Center Manager looking for any comments regarding safety concerns regarding Provincial declaration of state of emergency. After consultation with Municipal Departments, the CAO confirmed no known life or property related safety concerns to the general public as it relates to the declaration. A decision was made to close boat launches for unauthorized use.

June 2nd and 6th – Follow-up meetings with EMC and WFD Chief regarding communications and information requests from the province, EMO event procedures, ICS protocol and ongoing fire preparedness for West Hants and Pisiquid area.

Windsor Fire Chief Jamie Juteau Communications – June 1st and 2nd, 2023

Chief had an information exchange with the MLA mid day and follow-up email regarding dry hydrants in the Windsor waterfront area and Sangster bridge area. Chief was unaware of the State of Emergency declaration by the Minister until after the press release. No request by the Chief for EMO related assistance nor a state of emergency request.

Planning Cycle Conclusions

At the conclusion and throughout the planning cycles there were no immediate or significant threats identified as having impacts on municipal operations or services warranting further action by the WHRM EMO Planning Committee. There was certainly great concern for areas most impacted and a high sense of awareness of how the wildfires might approach the WHRM.

WHRM Fire Services and their members are to be commended for their dedication and responses to the calls for mutual aid support. These fires are unprecedented in our province at the size and scale experienced. Thankfully all members returned safely. At the conclusion of the event all fire equipment and apparatus have been reported as returned without any known damage and at full operational capacity.

Local State of Emergency or State of Emergency Declaration

Within the EMO community there is ongoing review and practice of when a declaration of a local state of emergency or state of emergency is declared. Each event can be unique. The EMO Planning Committee practices this when doing event planning, reviewing the EMO Plan, carrying out exercises and training and through real life events.

The EMO Plan and training would suggest it be an evidence-based assessment of the degree of risk to the community off-set by the level of resources available to address the emergency. For example, as the risk increases, and the level or degree of available resources decreases, deciding to declare a Local State of Emergency or State of Emergency might be more commonly agreed upon. The intensity of the event, its timing, the geographic area of impact and community response capabilities are heavily weighed in the decision-making process.

During this event WHRM EMO respects the decision of the Minister to declare a state of emergency independent from the municipality as is permitted within his authority. The declaration was quickly recognized by operations and the added water resource was and remains incorporated into the fire response plan if required.

ALTERNATIVES – N/A as this is an informational report.

ATTACHMENTS

- Sample Meeting Agenda – Wildfires Sit-Rep #1 May 29, 2023.
- HRM Wildfire proximity to WHRM map.
- Declaration of State of Emergency

DISCUSSION / NEXT STEPS

WHRM EMO and municipal operations are awaiting a decision from Minister Lohr regarding a possible extension of the state of emergency. A decision is expected before or on June 15, 2023, 14 days after the declaration was made. The WHRM EMO has stopped meeting surrounding the above noted events and will reconvene if required.

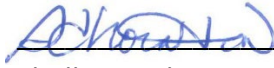
Evaluating fire protection readiness is ongoing and part of normal operations daily, season to season and year to year. Particularly during the recent higher state of alert when wildfires were more active and prior to the recent rains. Raw and treated water supplies are continually monitored for availability and supply. There can be potential impacts on treated water supplies each year including this year as capital construction work is being carried out on the Windsor water supply dam. Treated water reserves and the availability of alternative raw water sources (without the lake) are being reviewed by both utility staff and fire operations to ensure fire protection capabilities are maintained at all times based on all available sources.

It goes without saying that a secured freshwater supply is added support for fire protection. If the declaration is discontinued, then WFD will revert back to the operational plan that was in place for the past two years utilizing treated water and alternative raw water sources (fresh and salt water if needed). WFD is confident in operating under both scenarios.

The WHRM EMO Planning Committee respects the authority held by the Province in relation to the original declaration of SOE. Operationally, the committee and fire service awaits the province's future direction regarding this matter.

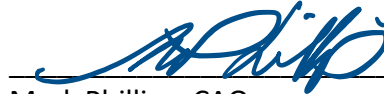
Staff further wait for any questions or concerns Council may have regarding this matter or direction Council may provide.

Report Prepared by:



Shelleena Thornton, Emergency Management Coordinator

Report Prepared by:



Mark Phillips, CAO



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WHRM EMO

Wild Fires Sit-Rep #1
May 29, 2023
Virtual / In-Person Meeting
Activation – Information Only

AGENDA

1. Roll Call/Introductions
2. Incident Update
 1. Shellburne Area
 - a. Geographic Areas Impacted
 - b. State of the Emergency
 - i. Emergency Classification
 - ii. Fire Status
 - iii. Evacuation
 - iv. Impacts on People / Animals
 - v. Homes and Business Impacted
 - vi. EMO and Municipal Capacity / Performance
 - vii. Other
 2. Bridgewater Area
 - a. State of the Emergency
 - i. Emergency Classification
 - ii. Fire Status
 - iii. Evacuation
 - iv. Impacts on People / Animals
 - v. Homes and Business Impacted
 - vi. EMO and Municipal Capacity / Performance
 - vii. Other
 3. HRM (Upper Tantallon and Lower Sackville)
 - a. State of the Emergency
 - i. Emergency Classification
 - ii. Fire Status
 - iii. Evacuation



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- iv. Impacts on People / Animals
- v. Homes and Business Impacted
- vi. EMO and Municipal Capacity / Performance
- vii. Other

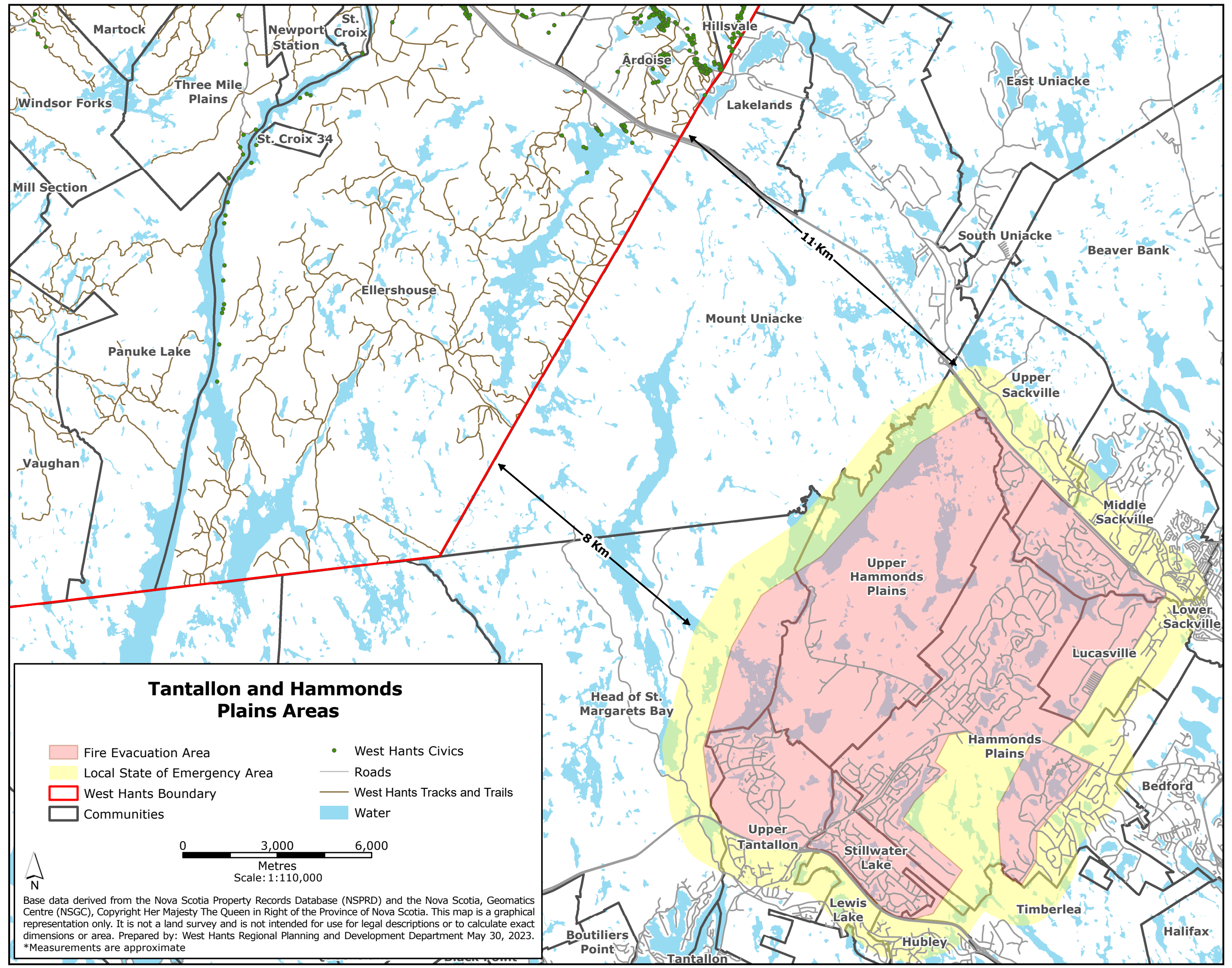
3. Representative Updates

- a. Incident Commander / Administration
- b. REMO Co-ordinator
- c. Nova Scotia EMO
- d. Fire
- e. Community Development
- f. Public Works
- g. Planning and Development
- h. Information Technology (IT)
- i. Finance
- j. Hants Exhibition Society / Grounds
- k. Glooscap First Nations
- l. NS Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal (NSTIR)
- m. Police
- n. Emergency Health Services (EHS)
- o. Department of Community Services (DCS)
- p. Hants Community Hospital (HCH)
- q. Safety
- r. Communications

4. Round Table Closing Remarks

5. New Action Items

6. Next meeting – May 30th 9:00am



Tantallon and Hammonds Plains Areas

- Fire Evacuation Area
- Local State of Emergency Area
- West Hants Boundary
- Communities
- West Hants Civics
- Roads
- West Hants Tracks and Trails
- Water

0 3,000 6,000
 Metres
 Scale: 1:110,000



Base data derived from the Nova Scotia Property Records Database (NSPRD) and the Nova Scotia, Geomatics Centre (NSGC), Copyright Her Majesty The Queen in Right of the Province of Nova Scotia. This map is a graphical representation only. It is not a land survey and is not intended for use for legal descriptions or to calculate exact dimensions or area. Prepared by: West Hants Regional Planning and Development Department May 30, 2023. *Measurements are approximate

Declaration of State of Emergency by Minister (subsection 12(1) of the Emergency Management Act)

Emergency area:

A State of Emergency is declared for the area around and including Pisiquid Lake, Windsor, Hants County of Nova Scotia.

Nature of the emergency:

Many wildfires have been burning in the several areas of the Province. Some continue to be out of control and to create extreme demands upon resources and personnel in the attempts to prevent further loss of property and to protect the health and safety of residents. This event requires prompt coordinated action or regulation for the protection of property and for the health and safety of persons in Nova Scotia.

After a consultation with a quorum of the Executive Council, I am satisfied that an emergency, as defined in clause 2(b) of Chapter 8 of the Acts of 1990, the *Emergency Management Act*, continues to exist or may exist in identified area of the Province.

While under a State of Emergency, I may require any or all of the actions specifically listed under clauses 14(a) to (m) of the *Emergency Management Act*, or anything else I determine is necessary for the protection of property and the health or safety of persons in the Province.

I hereby declare of a State of Emergency for all of the identified area of the Province on and after 8:00 pm on Thursday, June 1, 2023.

If this Declaration is not renewed or terminated earlier, the State of Emergency remains in effect until 14 days after the date and time it is declared, which is until 8:00 pm on Thursday, June 15, 2023.

Dated June 1, 2023, at Halifax, Nova Scotia,

Original signed by

Hon. John Lohr
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing