



## First Nations: Crucial to Big Bar Landslide response



From the onset of the incident at the Big Bar Landslide, a government-to-government-to-government response was envisioned and implemented. An innovative collaboration between First Nations, Federal, and Provincial governments has been formed in the spirit of reconciliation and recognition of First Nation’s place at the table.

Within a week of the slide being reported, First Nations representatives from the Fraser River Aboriginal Fisheries Secretariat participated in early strategic planning that included First Nations engagement. The Unified Command then reached out to First Nations to invite participation on the Big Bar Landslide First Nations Leadership Panel. The Panel includes 47 participants from 30 communities and Tribal Councils from the Fraser River and Marine approach First Nation groups that have an interest in Fraser salmon stocks. The Panel, which makes decisions by consensus, provides guidance and decision-making on strategies to address the landslide. The panel provides input, reviews response options and endorses options, all while considering cultural sensitivities and incorporating First Nations’ traditional ecological knowledge and perspectives.

First Nations are involved in the incident response at all levels: from the Joint Executive Steering Committee, Incident Command, project management, fish health, and environmental unit, to crews working on the river. First Nations’ traditional ecological knowledge underpins fish capture methods including: fish wheels, beach seining and dip netting. Local First Nations Cultural Heritage experts are on site seven days a week, conducting assessments of ongoing works to ensure cultural values are preserved.

The landslide has impacted numerous First Nations communities and organizations in British Columbia. Salmon are critical to Indigenous communities for food, social, and ceremonial needs. Leadership and delegates from communities across BC have taken helicopter overview flights. These flights are vital to understanding the scope and scale of the incident. Participants can subsequently share response updates with their communities from a firsthand perspective.

As such, the Big Bar Landslide response has set a precedent for future cooperation and to ensuring that information flows as efficiently as possible throughout communities and organizations across the province.

“A Unified Command Incident Management Team is like an arrow. The people in the field are the arrowhead, the office personnel are the shaft, and the Joint Executive Steering Committee are the feathers that guide the direction of the arrow.”

- Greg Witzky, Incident Commander

“We’re really proud to be here. We have to be here working together in a united group because that’s the only way we will save the fish. We must make sure we have fish for our future generations, my children, and others throughout the world!”

-Chantel Alec, Gitxsan Seining Crew



*Millie and Chantel, mother-daughter duo, who hail from the Lake Babine Nation, work with the Gitxsan seine crew on-site. [Watch a short video about Millie and Chantel here!](#)*



*Two fish wheels sourced from the Kitsumkalum First Nation. Photo by Gina Anderson @gina-gerl imaging. [Watch a short fish wheel video here!](#)*