

November 25, 2024

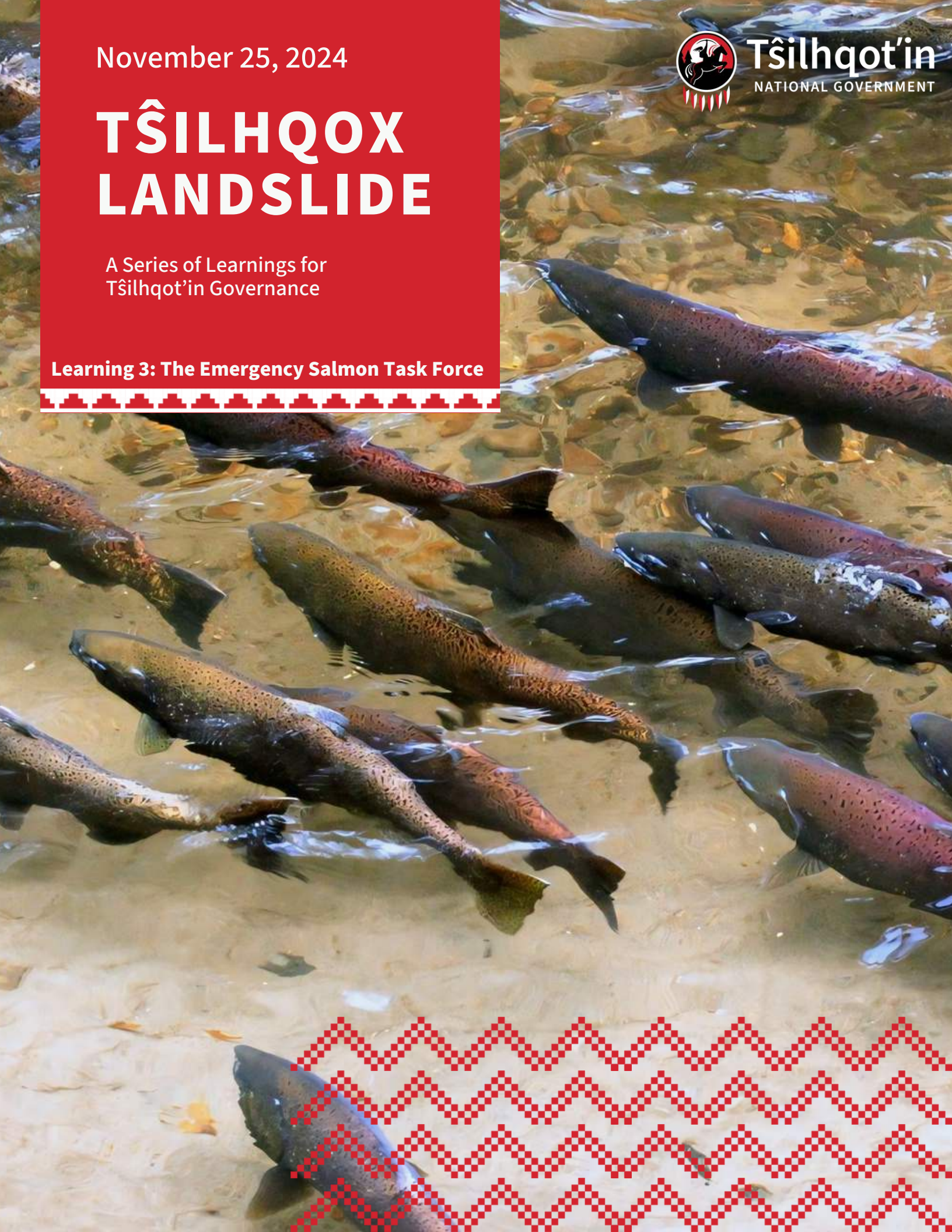


**Tsilhqot'in**  
NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

# Tsilhqox Landslide

A Series of Learnings for  
Tsilhqot'in Governance

Learning 3: The Emergency Salmon Task Force





## Background

On July 30, 2024 a landslide occurred at Nagwentled (Farwell Canyon), blocking the T̄silhqox (Chilcotin River). The T̄silhqot'in National Government (TNG) declared a state of local emergency, issued emergency orders to ensure people's safety and called on all parties to halt all fishing activities to conserve T̄silhqot'in territory-bound salmon.[1] The T̄silhqot'in Fisheries Team began to monitor ts'eman and jaš (sockeye and Chinook salmon) migrating to their spawning grounds at Chilko Lake in the heart of the T̄silhqot'in Title land. T̄silhqot'in leadership asked Crystal Verhaeghe (Emoda Consulting), Dr. Jocelyn Stacey (University of British Columbia), and Dr. Emma Feltes (York University) to document the event, building on prior work in *Nagwedizk'an gwaneš gangu ch'inidžed ganexwilagh* (The Fires Awakened Us) and *Dada Nentsen Gha Yatastig: T̄silhqot'in in the Time of COVID*.

This document captures insights from T̄silhqot'in leadership and staff interviewed in the immediate aftermath of the landslide. This is the third in a series to show that the T̄silhqox landslide meant much more to the Nation than a temporary waterway obstruction. It is a call to realign responsibilities and relationships to the nen (land), tu (waters) and ts'eman.

[1] The T̄silhqot'in language has many different names for salmon, underscoring the close relationship between these species and the people. For ease of reading, we use the English word "salmon" throughout when referring collectively to all species of salmon.

August 4, 2024 - Water pooling behind the slide





## Key Learning

The T̓silhqot̓in Nation is in the best position to lead a collaborative approach to salmon governance. Deep place-based knowledge, technical sophistication and a values-based approach to fisheries flowing from T̓silhqot̓in law and jurisdiction allowed the Nation to quickly mobilize technical experts and government partners to prioritize the survival and recovery of the salmon.



TNG Fisheries Team at T̓silhqox Biny Spawning Grounds



## Emergency Salmon Task Force

With the impacts to the salmon at the forefront of 2024 T̓silhqox landslide discussions, the Nits'il̓in-Qi (Chiefs) sought creative solutions to prioritize salmon survival and recovery. The T̓silhqot'in National Government (TNG) made an immediate request to all First Nations and all fishers along the ̓Elhdaqox (Fraser River) to forgo fishing T̓silhqot'in territory-bound salmon. This request received remarkable support from First Nations, who were willing to sacrifice their own cultural practices and sustenance to help protect the salmon. In addition, TNG was able to harness its incredible technical fisheries expertise and capacity, implement best practices from the 2019 Big Bar landslide, and build on existing relationships to form the Emergency Salmon Task Force.

The Emergency Salmon Task Force brings together technical experts from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, British Columbia, and the Upper Fraser Fisheries Conservation Alliance (UFFCA) to monitor the impacts on T̓silhqot'in territory-bound ts'eman and ja̓s̓ (sockeye and Chinook salmon) populations and to work collaboratively to determine appropriate landslide response measures. Under T̓silhqot'in leadership, the fisheries team was able to move quickly from heartbreak to coordinated governance and effective emergency response.



T̓silhqot'in Conservation Hatchery

### People of the River

The T̓silhqot'in, known as the “people of the river,” are comprised of six communities - Tl'etinqox, ̓Esdilagh, Yunešit'in, T̓sideldel, Tl'esqox and Xeni Gwet'in - connected by the rivers that run through T̓silhqot'in territory. Historically, and to this day, the T̓silhqot'in Nation exercises inherent jurisdiction to steward the nen (land), tu (waters) and sustain T̓silhqot'in culture and way of life for the deni (people). The T̓silhqot'in Nation won the first declaration of Aboriginal title in Canadian law, recognizing T̓silhqot'in ownership of a portion of the nen. The Nation continues to exercise rights and jurisdiction to protect the whole of the nen. The Nation works to restore and strengthen collective and individual well-being through language, culture, and education guided by the ̓Esggidam (ancestors) and dechen ts'edilhtan (laws).

T̕ilhqot̕in stewardship of salmon is supported by a sophisticated TNG fisheries program. The program conducts close annual monitoring of several fish populations including the individual populations of ja̕ (Chinook), ts̕eman (sockeye), dandzex (coho) and ja̕ lant̕eh (pink), and tislagh (steelhead), which provides detailed technical data but also underscores the close, familial relationships between the deni (people) and lhuy (fish). Since the Big Bar slide, TNG's fisheries program has implemented conservation and enhancement measures to rehabilitate threatened fish populations, while also challenging management regimes imposed from outside the territory, which threaten the sustainability of the Chilcotin watershed salmon populations and the T̕ilhqot̕in fishery. This work to monitor, understand and rehabilitate ts̕eman enabled a rapid and effective response to the 2024 landslide by TNG. As TNG's fisheries biologist, Pete Nicklin, explains, "rather than starting from a place of trying to understand the impacts [of the landslide], we could just add to

what we already knew...[and] add to the network [of monitoring and protections] that we already have in place." No other government had such detailed knowledge of the ts̕eman and ja̕ runs that could enable an adaptive response to the landslide.

TNG's fisheries program implements T̕ilhqot̕in laws and jurisdiction. Fisheries decisions are guided by a principled framework that prioritizes the interdependent survival and thriving of deni, lhuy, and nen. This principles-based approach meant that, in the aftermath of the landslide, TNG could make fine-grained, valued-based decisions about the appropriateness of specific response measures that BC and Canada could not. BC and Canada officials rallied around TNG's leadership and their technical experts eagerly came together and committed to making thoughtful, rigorous, and timely decisions together. TNG established the Emergency Salmon Task Force on August 6th and its first emergency response measures were in place on August 8th.



**TNG Fisheries Team at T̕ilhqot̕ Biny Spawning Grounds**

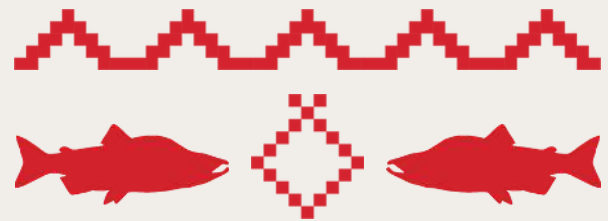


Michelle Tung, TNG’s Fisheries Strategy Lead, explains, “we had our relationships all in the right place already.” These relationships have proven vital to the work of the Task Force. Its members began their collaborative work with significant goodwill amongst one another, which has allowed them to focus on producing the most robust information about ts’eman and jaš impacts to generate recommendations that were trusted by all parties. The Emergency Salmon Task Force provided a vehicle for swiftly pulling all the right people into a coordinated decision-making structure. It ensured that the response to the 2024 Tšilhqox landslide was able to implement the relevant lessons from responding to the Big Bar landslide.

The Emergency Salmon Task Force is an example of collaborative consent-based decision-making. Under Tšilhqot’in leadership, the Task Force facilitates unanimously supported technical decisions, by putting the best data and

expertise in service of protecting and rehabilitating resilient salmon populations. As Nits’il?in (Chief) Lennon Solomon explains, “we need to focus on the salmon, not politics. The salmon do not know what a politician is.” The Salmon Task Force focuses on the salmon and related factors above politics.

In mid-fall 2024, Tung cautions, “we’re not remotely out of it.” The Task Force is still focused on emergency response. The success of its emergency work has demonstrated why the Tšilhqot’in must continue to lead collaborative fisheries governance throughout this emergency and beyond it. The Nation – not BC or Canada – is who holds the long-term vision for salmon survival and resilience.



**Left to right; Winston Bambrick, Michelle Tung & Peter Nicklin, at Tšilhqox Biny Spawning Grounds**