



NAGWEDIŹK'AN
GWANEŠ GAN GU
CH'INIDŹED
GANEXWILAGH

The Fires Awakened Us

TSILHQOT'IN REPORT- 2017 WILDFIRES

Verhaeghe | Feltes | Stacey



Photograph by Grand Chief Ed John

The catastrophic wildfires devastated British Columbia in 2017. The Tsilhqot'in communities, their territory and wildlife will take years to recover. Planning for the future of impending emergencies needed to happen yesterday.

The wildfires swept through the Tsilhqot'in territory in the summer of 2017 and illuminated the issues that plague the inclusion of First Nation value systems in government-to-government relationships.

In many ways the fires awakened the Tsilhqot'in people.



(On the cover) Photograph by Riske Creek Resident

**TSILHQOT'IN NATIONAL
GOVERNMENT**

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WILDFIRE TEAM

Wildfire Team

Jody Nishima, Wildfire Project Lead
Negotiations & External Affairs – TNG

Jay Nelson, Executive Lead
Negotiations & External Affairs – TNG

Connie Jasper
Health Hub Coordinator – TNG

Luke Doxtator
Stewardship Manager – TNG

Sean Wiebe
Lands & Resources Sub-Table Manager –
Negotiations & External Affairs – TNG

JP Laplante
Mining, Oil and Gas Manager – TNG

Jeremy Boyd
Registered Professional Forester – TNG

Dan Heaton
Emergency Management Coordinator/Emergency
Operations Lead – Westbank First Nation

Robert W. Gray
Fire Ecologist – R.W. Gray Consulting Ltd.

Authors

Crystal Verhaeghe
Consultant – Emoda Design

Emma Feltes
PhD Candidate, Anthropology –
University of British Columbia

Dr. Jocelyn Stacey
Assistant Professor – Peter A.
Allard School of Law - University
of British Columbia

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Tsilhqot'in Citizens
?Esdilagh First Nation Government
Tl'esqox First Nation
Tl'etinqox Government
Tsi DelDel First Nation
Xeni Gwet'in First Nation Government
Yunesit'in Government
Tsilhqot'in National Government
Becky Row, Canadian Red Cross
Cariboo Chilcotin Residents

Catherine Lappe, Government of Canada
Chuck Puchmayr, City of New
Westminster
Elder William Myers - Translation
Grand Chief Ed John, First Nations Summit
Industry Representatives
Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction
Support Team - Report Compilation
Vancouver Sun
Williams Lake Tribune

THE FIRES AWAKENED US

A Message From Tsilhqot'in National Government Tribal Chairman, Nitsil'in Joe Alphonse

The way that us as First Nations people move through the world and experience the world is vastly different from non-First Nations. We have come from a history of being viewed as a burden - as something that needs to be changed and assimilated. The wildfires of 2017 demonstrated that this outdated historical perspective is still active in the way governments and organizations view and treat First Nations people.

Our traditional, ecological and territorial knowledge of the Tsilhqot'in territory weaves an unbreakable thread through our generations for century upon century. Protecting our lands, food sources and homes from wildfire is nothing new to us. We always knew the time would come for a massive wildfire event – it was never a matter of if, but always a matter of when. When the 2017 wildfires hit, we knew we had a long battle ahead of us. We knew that this battle was not going to be on the land with wildfire – it was going to be in the administration office with the financial reports, in the homes with the families and in the boardrooms with outside organizations.

In 2010, my community of Tl'etinqox was evacuated to a centre in Williams Lake where our people slept on cots, were provided non-traditional foods and were at times viewed with major distrust by local staff. Traumas from residential school resurfaced as our elders felt the effects of being forced from their homes. Tsilhqot'in leadership did not want to put their people through this again, nor were we going to allow our houses to burn as wildfire resources went to other areas. We knew we had the strength and knowledge to stay and fight the wildfires – so we stayed.

Many of our members were trained and had years of experience working the front lines of wildfires for the provincial government. They protected our homes and our families from what would have been sure devastation.

The report that we have produced is a mechanism to allow for a true reflection of the experience that we as Tsilhqot'in people endured. We hope this report can be used to improve emergency management in other First Nation communities while also maintaining their rightful jurisdiction to their lands, people and practices.

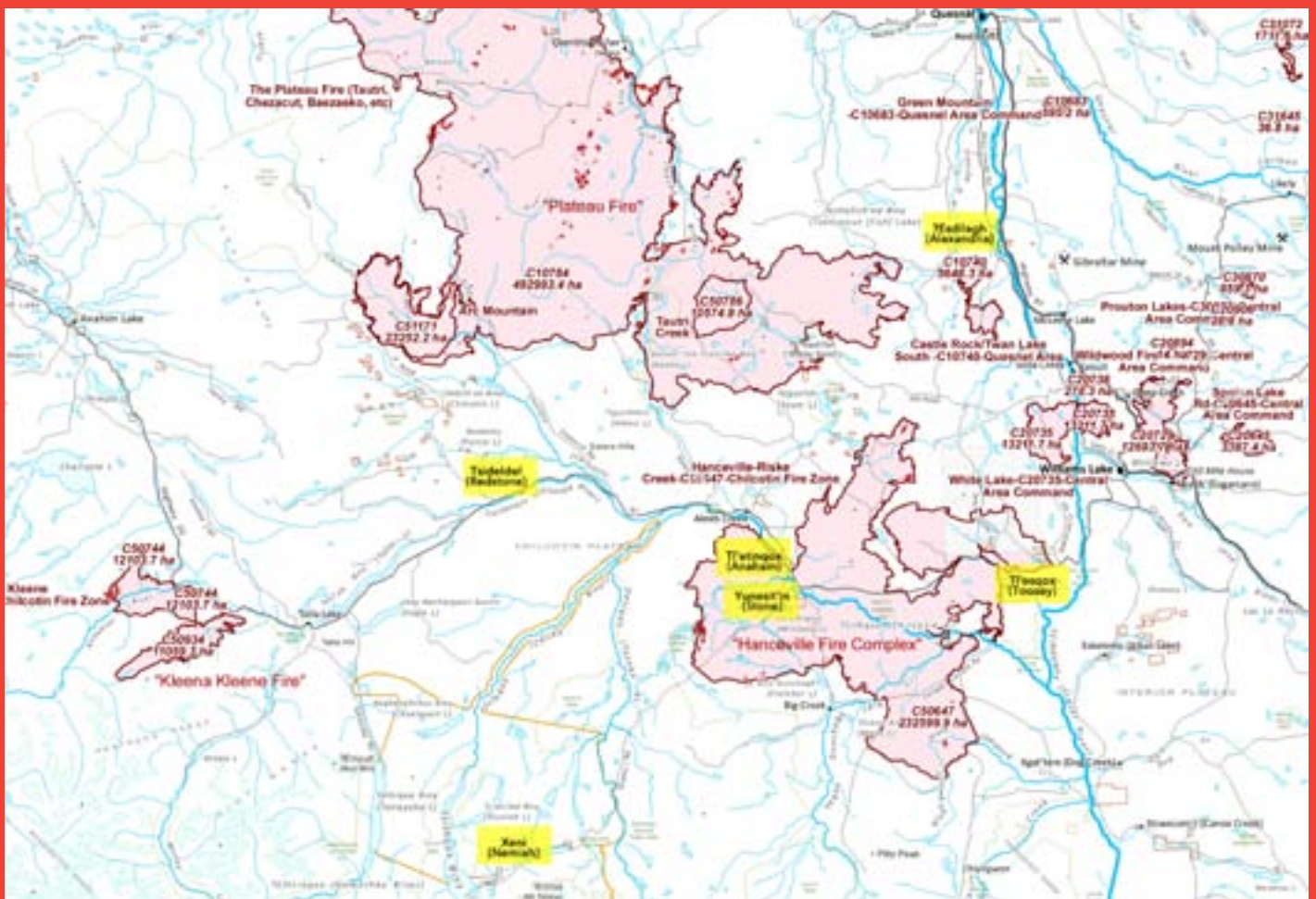
INTRODUCTION

The 2017 wildfires broke all records in British Columbia as they burnt over 1.2 million hectares of land, reached suppression costs of \$568 million dollars and forced a remarkable 65,000 people to evacuate. Todd Stone, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure announced a Provincial State of Emergency that lasted 70 days. In just the first 48 hours, 176 new wildfires started.¹ However, the Chilcotin region is isolated and remote. As a result, it saw delayed and unequal wildfire protection, in part because of the Province's prioritization of higher-value urban areas.

In the Interior of British Columbia, the Tsilhqot'in communities were significantly impacted by two of the largest wildfires: the Hanceville Fire and the Plateau Fire. These two fires encompassed approximately 761,000 hectares of land, which was 63% of the total area impacted in British Columbia.

¹ *Wildfire Season Summary (2017 BC Wildfires)*
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/wildfire-status/about-bcws/wildfire-history/wildfire-season-summary>

Regional Cariboo Chilcotin Wildfire Activity Map (August 29, 2017) Compiled by: Tsilhqot'in National Government GIS Department *Tsilhqot'in Communities Highlighted*



The Contention Over Inherent and Colonial Authority

The Tsilhqot'in leadership asserts jurisdiction over the territory, yet continues to face challenges reconciling its authority with the Governments of British Columbia and Canada.

Jurisdiction in Tsilhqot'in territory is an intricate web of overlapping regional, provincial, federal, and Tsilhqot'in authorities. The Tsilhqot'in Nation exercises its inherent jurisdiction to care for its land and people. This jurisdiction has been exercised since time immemorial. However, with colonialism came the assertion of exclusive jurisdiction by the British Crown, and its subsequent division between federal and provincial powers in sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act, 1867 (and later the Constitution Act, 1982). These colonial laws mean that Tsilhqot'in jurisdiction was not only disregarded, it was further obscured by a confounding delineation of territorial authority between federal and provincial governments. The federal government's legislative authority, under section 91(24) includes "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians" managed under the Indian Act. Subordinate and selective bylaw-making authority is then 'delegated' by the federal government to individual Indian Band governments. Meanwhile, provincial legislative authority under sections 92 and 92A includes powers over lands and natural resources (excluding federal Crown land).

In 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada recognized Aboriginal title in Tsilhqot'in territory. The decision, while recognizing Tsilhqot'in title over a portion of Tsilhqot'in lands, left questions of jurisdiction untouched, and to be determined through future litigation or negotiation. As a result of this decision, the resolution of issues of jurisdiction in Tsilhqot'in territory is now guided by the Nenqay Deni Accord (BC and Tsilhqot'in Nation) (NDA)² and the Letter of Understanding (LOU)³ between the Tsilhqot'in Nation and Canada: January 27, 2017.

² "Nenqay Deni Accord" February 2016, http://www.tsilhqotin.ca/Portals/o/PDFs/Nenqay_Deni_Accord.pdf

³ "Letter of Understanding" January 27, 2017, http://www.tsilhqotin.ca/Portals/o/PDFs/Press%20Releases/2017_01_27_Tsilhqotin_Canada_LOU.pdf



**Tsilhqot'in National Government & Provincial Government
Signing - Nenqay Deni Accord (February 12, 2016)**

Source: Province of BC [flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/14814477@N02/)



**Tsilhqot'in National Government & Federal Government
Signing - Letter of Understanding (Jan. 30, 2017)
Photograph By: Monica Lamb - Yorski, Williams Lake Tribune**

Emergency management in Canada is also an inter-jurisdictional endeavour. Local, regional, provincial, and federal authorities must cooperate to address major emergencies. From a constitutional perspective, emergency management falls principally to provincial governments and their delegates, the municipalities. However, the federal government plays a vital coordinating and supportive role, exercising its powers under the Emergency Management Act, SC 2007, c 15.

Since First Nation's reserve lands fall within federal jurisdiction, they are not subject to provincial emergency response regimes. Here again, the federal government plays a supporting role, leaving authority over emergency management on reserves in the hands of First Nations' leadership. At the same time, the federal government has entered into arrangements with the provinces and third-party organizations to provide resources when emergencies exceed the capacity of the local community. As a result, emergency management on reserves is known to be a complex arrangement between communities, the provincial and federal governments, and third-party organizations.⁴ This jurisdictional complexity creates unnecessary vulnerability and confusion in the face of disasters.

The discord over authority made a lasting impression on the leadership for BC, Canada and the Tsilhqot'in Nation and exposed the expansive work still necessary to attain a

⁴ Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2013 Fall Report of the Auditor General of Canada (Ottawa: Auditor General of Canada, 2013) ch 6, online: www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201311_06_e_38800.html

genuine government-to-government relationship as set out in the Accord and Letter of Understanding.

During the 2017 wildfires, a flashpoint for these jurisdictional issues was the decision of the Tl'etinqox Government, one of the six Tsilhqot'in communities, to not issue an evacuation order. Instead, Tl'etinqox followed its own emergency protocols, developed to reflect its traditional governance structures, and community members stayed to fight the impending wildfires. Among provincial and federal authorities, there was a widespread assumption that Tsilhqot'in leadership should simply follow their lead. The Tl'etinqox leadership's decision not to issue an evacuation order caused a negative reaction from government. Attempts were made to impose an evacuation of citizens by intimidation and persuasion by governmental authorities, and threats of child apprehension. No one seemed to contemplate the fact that Tsilhqot'in leadership was in the best position to make decisions in the best interests of its communities.

The emergency operations strategies that the Tsilhqot'in communities employed were on par with, and exceeded in many ways, the work of the Emergency Operation Centres (EOC) subsidized by the government.

Having faced multiple evacuations in previous years, the communities began prioritizing wildfire response training across the various levels of wildfire suppression. The Tl'etinqox were ready with a comprehensive and effective emergency plan reflective of their traditional governance structures, modelled on Provincial operations. Tl'etinqox's wildfire response was directed by knowledgeable and strong leadership.

Hazard Protection Measures in the Tsilhqot'in

Still, due to the fact that the Tsilhqot'in Nation was not sufficiently funded for emergency preparedness, they were disadvantaged by the lack of dedicated resources for continual planning, training and testing. The magnitude of the situation forced the communities to respond to the emergency even without adequate resources. The conflict over jurisdiction caused numerous stumbles, which left communities, land and resources vulnerable to the impending wildfires within the territories of the Tsilhqot'in.

Wildfires in the Tsilhqot'in are inevitable and may be intensifying as climate change boosts the probability of wildfire.⁵ The BC Government predicted that climate change will increase droughts, leaving forests more susceptible to wildfire.⁶

A ground-based survey of forest fuel conditions surrounding the Tsilhqot'in communities was conducted in September 2018 to determine that forest fuel conditions are likely to deteriorate in the future due to continued forest health issues. This means the forests surrounding Tsilhqot'in communities are becoming increasingly more combustible and dangerous. The diverse forested areas in the territory face increased mortality and are highly vulnerable to attack from the epidemic population levels of spruce budworm, mountain pine beetle and Douglas-fir beetle.⁷ The poor health of the forest, in addition to deficiencies in forest fuel management and modern forestry practices, are among many of the cumulative effects that increase the wildfire risk in the Tsilhqot'in.

5 *Summary for Policymakers of IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5° Celsius Approved by Governments.* (2018). [online] Available at: <https://www.ipcc.ch/2018/10/08/summary-for-policymakers-of-ipcc-special-report-on-global-warming-of-1-5c-approved-by-governments>.

6 Abbott, George and Chapman, Maureen. "A Report for Government and British Columbians. Addressing the New Normal: 21st Century Disaster Management in British Columbia." April 30 2018.

7 Gray, Robert. "Wildfire Fuel Assessment for Tsilhqot'in Communities in the Cariboo Forest Region." September 2018.

On February 19, 2018, the Tsilhqot'in Nation, the Federal Government and the Province of British Columbia entered into the first-of-its-kind Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement⁸ to build upon a ground breaking platform for effective partnerships in emergency management in a cross jurisdictional landscape.

Following this, the Tsilhqot'in Nation compiled a team of experts and collected advice from the knowledge keepers in the territory to develop strategic recommendations that support Indigenous peoples as true partners, experts and government authorities in emergency management. This report reflects the culmination of that work.

⁸ Collaborative Management Agreement" February 19 2018, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/agreements/tng_collaborative_emergency_management_agreement_signed.pdf



Tsilhqot'in National Government, Federal & Provincial Governments Signing - Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement

Jan. 30, 2017

Photograph By: Monica Lamb - Yorski, Williams Lake Tribune



Throughout this report, you will see the Tsilhqot'in flag. This flag indicates that the report is addressing an issue of jurisdiction. Jurisdiction answers the question: who has the authority to govern or decide? Jurisdiction is thus fundamental to Tsilhqot'in authority over Tsilhqot'in people and territory. The report documents numerous significant moments during or after the 2017 wildfires in which the answer to the question of jurisdiction was unclear or contested. Because of the fundamental nature of these jurisdictional issues and the significance of addressing these issues moving forward, additional discussion of jurisdiction can be found in Recognizing Tsilhqot'in Jurisdiction in Emergency Management (Appendix B).

CALLS TO ACTION

Infrastructure Requirements

CORE CHALLENGES

Substandard building and water infrastructure is a common problem on First Nation reserves. The inadequacy of the infrastructure does not meet the current basic needs of the citizens. Even worse, the infrastructure does not adequately support emergency situations.

During the 2017 wildfires, the residents west of Williams Lake, BC were compelled to fight the fires for many days without external assistance since all wildfire personnel were already deployed to other major wildfires. The aggressive wildfires in the isolated rural Tsilhqot'in exposed the vulnerability of the communities: community water systems lacked the volume to adequately suspend the fires that encroached upon the community; the facilities used by the community for services or to gather together lacked commercial-grade air filtration systems leaving emergency personnel susceptible to prolonged smoke exposure; the volunteers did not possess caches of wildfire equipment to efficiently support fire operations; and communication was severely restrained.



1. Develop a centralized Indigenous-led Emergency Centre in Tsilhqot'in territory with satellite sites to connect isolated or remote communities with advanced safety and emergency equipment
 - Upgrade all essential infrastructure in the community with stand-by generators
 - Expand and improve water treatment facilities and reserves for future emergencies with back-up systems
2. Construct or update fire halls in each reserve equipped with:
 - Fire trucks
 - Training space
 - Storage for supplies (i.e. hoses, pumps, firefighting equipment)
3. Build gathering halls/safe muster areas with:
 - Commercial kitchen
 - Training area
 - Sleeping quarters
 - Storage space for emergency & evacuation supplies (i.e. cots, non-perishable foods)
4. Create an immediate on-reserve housing and infrastructure strategy fund to:
 - Assemble a team to assess the wildfire impacts to all homes in Tsilhqot'in territory
 - Build houses that are more structurally sound and energy efficient with air purification systems
5. Develop lodging in and around each community to accommodate seasonal workers that assist communities with the four phases of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery
6. Invest in public services along Highway 20 and Taseko Lake Road corridor including:
 - Installing cell phone towers
 - Connecting Fiber Optics in some areas
 - Commencing a major powerline upgrade on Highway 20
7. Establish highway signage to clearly identify community locations to ensure rapid emergency response where necessary
8. Widen and maintain roads to communities and egress routes

Pre-Disaster Agreements

CORE CHALLENGES

The Tsilhqot'in faced a multitude of set-backs while trying to govern their communities and work with the governmental wildfire protocols. Respect for the decisions that Chief and Council make for the benefit of their citizens is paramount. The Tsilhqot'in people who are knowledgeable about the land should be recognized for their skillsets and the Nation should be supported as government.

The Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement (2018) is a crucial first step in recognizing Tsilhqot'in leadership in emergency management. However, further detailed agreements are necessary to ensure all parties understand the roles and responsibilities of all orders of legitimate government in a way that allows for a fully-coordinated, multiple-agency, real-time emergency response.

9.  Establish an advanced protocol agreement that establishes an active and collaborative leadership role for the Tsilhqot'in Nation with:
 - Recognition of Tsilhqot'in adaptable emergency measures, orders and culturally-appropriate relocation protocols that differ in form and substance from regional, provincial and federal actions
 - Re-entry protocols for a staged approach to returning to the community providing continual service throughout
 - Protocols for child protection during emergencies
 - Tsilhqot'in access pass lists authorized by leadership and recognized by the Cariboo Fire Centre
 - Procedures on geographic coordination of wildfire response that reflect Tsilhqot'in fire crew knowledge of the land
 - Revision of protocols to ensure that land, resource and wildlife recovery and mitigation decisions are based on Tsilhqot'in cumulative impact assessments and value-based approaches are incorporated into a territorial management plan
10. Ratify Nation-to-Nation evacuation location agreements with First Nation partners to ensure that there is adequate capacity, resources and protocols in place prior to relocating citizens to these venues
11.  Enter into a Service Agency/Tsilhqot'in agreement built upon respect and recognition of Tsilhqot'in jurisdiction that:
 - Fosters consistent, ongoing relationship and communication networks with government service bodies beyond the fire season
 - Outlines community protocols for entering into the community or working within the community
 - Mandates cultural awareness and sensitivity training for all Emergency Agencies providing services to the community
12. Develop inter-agency Tsilhqot'in Nation service provider agreements in the event of an emergency with Denisiqi Services Society, Nenqayni Wellness Centre Society, Cariboo Friendship Society and Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society to provide services to citizens during and after an emergency event

Prominent Tsilhqot'in Role & Capacity Development

CORE CHALLENGES

Long-term hazard mitigation measures reduce and eliminate risk, and are proven to protect communities and create cost-efficiencies for government. Enhancing the Nation's capability to respond to and recover from disasters, coupled with the abundance of knowledge that the Tsilhqot'in have about the lands in which they reside, will improve emergency management. First Nation citizens merit a prominent role in training, employment and contracting opportunities locally.

First Nation mental and physical health were disproportionately impacted in the 2017 wildfires. Due to the rurality and uniqueness of the Tsilhqot'in, health needs cannot be adequately addressed through conventional services.

13. Develop a contract with British Columbia establishing a progressive framework for on-the-ground emergency response within Tsilhqot'in territory that ensures:
 - Tsilhqot'in crews are properly trained and resourced to become level 1 contract crews
 - Tsilhqot'in and First Nation crews are prioritized in deployment before other jurisdictions
 - Local Tsilhqot'in citizens receive priority for work within the territory in the event of an emergency including formal Community Liaison positions in each Tsilhqot'in community
 - A requirement for yearly Tsilhqot'in wildfire service agreements committing to economic opportunities for citizens, community and privately held businesses to ensure they are placed as stand-by primary contractors
 - Investment in training and employment of First Nation first responders and wildfire emergency management positions to ensure local First Nation knowledge is retained.
 - A process for experienced community crew members embedded within the broader fire centre structure, i.e. as incident commanders
 - A provision for sufficient staff, supplies, and transportation to feed and support crews on the reserve
14. Establish government-subsidized, direct, ongoing, and dependable funding for training and certification that promotes Tsilhqot'in expertise (train-the-trainer) including:
 - Emergency responder training in various roles adapted to the Tsilhqot'in mandated role in emergency response (i.e. first aid, critical incident trauma training)
 - Essentials of operating and maintaining emergency equipment (i.e. fire truck, structural infrastructure unit)
 - Development of Tsilhqot'in Wildfire Teams with year round conditioning and fire suppression training at all levels (i.e. S100, S185)
 - Evacuation centre personnel processes
 - Forest fuel mitigation management
15. Establish government-subsidized, direct, continual funding for planning, including:
 - The development of and improvements to comprehensive community and Nation emergency management operational plans that are suitable to the unique requirements of each community while at the same time, sync with the entire Nation. The plans may include:
 - Adding mechanisms for periodic review, practice scenarios, and clear protocols for community members
 - Immediate emergency operation action plans
 - Citizen information packages (i.e. personal emergency kit checklist, relocation "go-bag" essentials, contact information for service agencies, muster/relocation areas,

- relocation steps, emergency preparedness information)
 - A 72-hour plan
 - Emergency contacts
 - Crisis communication speaking notes
 - Relocation procedures,
 - Community roles and responsibilities
 - Community-based risk assessments, and
 - Evacuation routes
16. Establish government-subsidized direct funding for personnel, including:
- Full-time Community & Nation Emergency Managers (yearly)
 - Full-time Recovery Managers and Implementation Managers to complete recovery funding applications & manage the recovery projects (until complete)
 - A part/full-time Fire Chief for each community fire station with a budget to recruit and train stand-by Fire Fighters
17. Establish a subsidized Tsilhqot'in Association of Emergency Responders with the responsibility to:
- Coordinate and inventory individual community resources for improved Nation-level response and develop a labor force survey
 - Deliver fire safety programs and workshops to communities
 - Advance the mapping and identification of dwellings and streets
 - Develop policies that support Fire-Smart community principles (i.e. debris management)
 - Establish an advanced communication structure and process that:
 - Performs a mass call service for Tsilhqot'in members
 - Connects via alternate modes of communication (i.e. cellular, WIFI, radio, satellite networks)
 - Provides GPS coordinates and check-in options for on-the-ground emergency personnel
 - Standardizes mandatory contact record keeping
 - Establishes an alert siren and speaker system to connect with citizens without access to phones
 - Establishes regular
- communication protocols for the entire community and Nation during emergencies with Tsilhqot'in language speakers for general information and updates
 - Create door-to-door policies and procedures for on reserve check-ins
 - Generate Tsilhqot'in culturally focused plans and procedures for relocation, launching and managing evacuation centre camps
 - Develop a transportation system for each community including securing the appropriate means to transport citizens
 - Launch alcohol and drug support program with integrated policies in all aspects of Emergency Management
18. Provide direct funding for Tsilhqot'in-led targeted skills and employment training and reduction of barriers to employment initiatives (i.e. driving lessons, programs to get driver's license back, upgrading)
19. Establish a holistic health support system that includes:
- Short to Mid-term*
- Integrating mental health supports in daycares, schools, band offices and health departments for staff and citizens
 - Hosting traditional healing ceremonies
 - Conducting addictions counselling and programs
 - Offering Tsilhqot'in focused individualized men, women and youth empowerment groups
- Long-term*
- Emergency Medical Service Team contracts for each community that include, but are not limited to remote nurses, mental health counselors and/or psychologists, addictions counselors, etc.
 - Medical supply lists & emergency medicine supplies
 - Ongoing year round expanded mental health supports at the community level
 - The compilation of an emergency management planning group, which hosts quarterly planning meetings & reports on discussions to community staff and citizens



Land-Based and Economic Stabilization Measures

CORE CHALLENGES

Long-term mitigation measures and rehabilitation efforts will occur over several years and will require specialists in the various facets of forest ecology and planning. Tsilhqot'in involvement with resolving the balance to the delicate ecosystems in which they rely upon and live within is imperative.

The Tsilhqot'in have been disproportionately impacted by the wildfires and the impacts to their traditional way of life is intensifying. Compensation measures should be jointly developed to satisfactorily address the actual impact. The wildfires burnt hectares of Tsilhqot'in forest resources therefore investments focused on diversification strategies for First Nation communities are required.

20. Perform test area forest fuel reduction practices with training through Indigenous-led fuel mitigation measures (i.e. prescribed burns)
21. Conduct a Tsilhqot'in-managed comprehensive study on the Cariboo Chilcotin forest ecosystem affected by the wildfires including conservation recommendations
22. Separate the Tsilhqot'in territory from the Williams Lake Timber Supply Area and apply joint management methods
23. Engage in rehabilitation planning at the territorial level with Tsilhqot'in communities playing an active leadership role
24. Create a mechanism for tracking and compensating ongoing cultural and cumulative impacts
25. Perform geotechnical work to stabilize banks and roads, as well as install culverts where wildfires threatened the vegetation of the steep slopes that surround and are within the communities
26. Conduct a damage assessment to archeological sites and create/ implement mitigation and protection measure for sensitive sites
27. Develop a Tsilhqot'in Economic Diversification report in anticipation of the decrease of forestry-related economics
28. Strengthen and expand collaborative enforcement efforts on Tsilhqot'in territory to promote cultural, economic and ecological values as the land recovers from wildfire



After the Fires
 Photograph By: Monica Lamb-Yorski
 Williams Lake Tribune

Dedicated Financial Resources Throughout All Stages of Emergency Management

CORE CHALLENGES

Core funding for emergency management and preparedness has been dedicated to government operated emergency operation centres. First Nation communities lack access to financial reserves and face barriers to obtaining credit extensions when they require them for emergency situations. The lack of funding is an impediment to preparedness and in the event that the community has suffered an emergency, the financial recovery processes are significantly demanding on operations rather than building up First Nations' capacity.

The Tsilhqot'in Nation provides autonomous governance for their citizens and communities. The most vital duty of the Nation is to protect the Tsilhqot'in citizens, property, and territory. With dedicated financial resources Tsilhqot'in emergency management could be enhanced with community-level planning, coordination and training based upon Tsilhqot'in values and needs.

29. Start a pilot project that implements a one-stop reimbursement process for First Nations governments



30. Reimburse communities in accordance with the principle of building back better to mitigate future disaster risk



31. Advance Tsilhqot'in recovery requests for financial assistance towards community rebuilding as soon as possible

32. Establish clear financial arrangements and compensation measures developed together between Tsilhqot'in, regional, provincial, and federal authorities in



advance of an emergency through:

- A reserve fund for Tsilhqot'in emergency response and a commitment to the timely advance of Federal reserve funds for emergency situations
- Proportionate compensation and restitution processes' that accurately reflects the community's reliance on land-based sustenance

33. Apply Jordan's Principle to emergency management on reserve to require a single government partner to provide immediate payment responsibility for response and recovery costs



COMMUNITY SPECIFIC NEEDS

Tl'etinqox Government Office Specific Needs

Fast Track Expenses Incurred During 2017 Wildfires

- Replace freezers ruined in 2017 power outages
- Replace fencing and cattle guards damaged by installing fuel breaks
- Hay for livestock & to replace losses
- Repair Anaham Creek to its natural state
- Remove debris from other creeks, roads and trails caused by wildfires
- Repair damages to homes and public buildings

Emergency Infrastructure

- Emergency Operations Centre
- Traditional Community Long-House Gathering Centre with kitchen and lodging
- Training facility with storage
- Traditional Arbor & Camping Area for evacuees

- Expansion to Health Centre & Services

Health & Wellbeing

- Conduct an immediate community mental health wellness assessment to determine appropriate service needs
- Facilitated healing circle for staff
- Holistic health team with comprehensive health services
- Land-based equine recovery, healing and leadership program
- Safe House
- End of Life, Palliative Care/Hospice Society – to support amplified stress from 2017 wildfires on Elders

Emergency Equipment Needs

- Heavy-duty equipment emergency needs assessment and procurement

Yunesit'in Government Office Specific Needs

Fast Track Expenses Incurred During 2017 Wildfires

- Replace fencing and cattle guards damaged by fires and fuel breaks
- Hay for livestock & to replace losses
- Remove debris from other creeks, roads and trails caused by wildfires
- Repair damages to homes and public buildings

Emergency Infrastructure

- Satellite Operations Centre (preferably an updated fire hall) with response equipment, medical equipment, a training room, and kitchen
- Structural protection installed on essential infrastructure
- Gas Station
- Upgrade water reservoir, treatment plant and hydrants
- Back-up systems including generators for community essential infrastructure
- Community Hall (for safe gathering site)
- Radio Tower or Mobile Satellite
- Helicopter Pad
- Renovate and replace derelict housing
- Access to water for the dual process of fire suppression and irrigation

Health & Wellbeing

- Immediate community mental health wellness assessment to determine appropriate and

ongoing service needs

- Ongoing cultural programming on the land as part of community healing

Emergency Equipment Needs

- Needs assessment and procurement of heavy-duty equipment emergency
- Two Skidders (Damaged in wildfires)
- Fleet truck
- Fire truck

Community Capacity Needs

- Assess emergency staffing needs and existing capacity
- Ongoing training for fire crews
- Simplified emergency management plan for community members, including Elders
- Access to reserve funds or expanded credit limit
- Indigenous Fire Management methods, such as prescribed burning

Research

- Needs assessment of medical equipment and supplies
- Assess impacts on rights, wildlife, hunting, fishing, plant and medicine areas
- Map remaining hunting, fishing, and culturally-significant locations for future protection
- Develop holistic, territorial, and long-term rehabilitation and land-use plan

Tl'esqox First Nation Specific Needs

Fast Track Expenses Incurred During 2017 Wildfires

- Remove debris from other creeks, roads and trails caused by wildfires
- Repair damages to homes and public buildings

Emergency Infrastructure

- Toosey Old School Expansion
- Upgraded water reservoir to handle additional capacity
- Back-up systems for community essential infrastructure
- Structural protection installed on essential infrastructure
- Create pump hose caches with adequate line to reach homes
- Rebuild hose cleaning station (burnt in 2017)
- Community gathering/muster centre with kitchen, lodging and storage
- Camping area for evacuees
- Food & Provision storage

Health & Wellbeing

- Conduct an immediate community mental health wellness assessment to determine appropriate service needs
- Host cultural events to ensure appropriate

transfer of knowledge to youth (i.e. sweat lodge, Tsilhqot'in language and traditions, equine healing)

Emergency Equipment Needs

- Heavy-duty equipment emergency needs assessment and procurement
- Water vehicles
- First Aid vehicles

Self-reliance Community Projects

- Establish gardens & greenhouses
- Raise livestock
- Host community canning and drying workshops to foster food preservation techniques within community

Community Capacity Needs

- Industry trades
- Commercial licenses & transportation certificates

Internal Policies

- Relocation Order travel policies – to prevent people from attempting re-entry after a signed evacuation order
- Emergency Response communication measures

Tsi Deldel First Nation Specific Needs

Fast Track Expenses Incurred During 2017 Wildfires

- Refund expenses towards food, general and emergency supplies
- Wildfire crew expenses (i.e. wages, fuel)

Emergency Infrastructure

- Band office (new)
- Health Clinic (new)
- Satellite Operations Centre with response equipment, medical equipment, a training room, and kitchen
- Structural protection installed on essential infrastructure
- Back-up systems for community essential infrastructure
- Community hall and lodging capacity for evacuees with kitchen, showers and storage
- Camping area for evacuees

Health & Wellbeing

- Immediate health supports for community (i.e. traditional healing ceremonies, men's and women's support groups, addictions counselling programs, individual and group counselling)
- Conduct a community mental health wellness assessment to determine appropriate service needs

Emergency Equipment Needs

- Heavy-duty equipment emergency needs assessment and procurement
- Trailers
- Community vehicles
- Water trucks
- Ambulance & medical transfer vehicle
- Mapping plotter

Community Capacity Needs

- Medical training (i.e. nurse, first aid responders, search & rescue)

Research

- Needs assessment on medical equipment demands
- Conduct a damage assessment to archeological sites
- Develop mitigation & protection measures to protect the sites

Internal Policies

- Access through road blocks designated by Chief & Council

Emergency Preparation

- Develop fire guards around community & Punky Lake Wilderness Camp Society

?Esdilagh First Nation Government Specific Needs

Fast Track Expenses Incurred During 2017 Wildfires

- Refund expenses towards food, general and emergency supplies
- Emergency response staff expenses (i.e. wages, fuel)
- Community living-out expenses (i.e. lodging, essential needs)

Emergency Infrastructure

- Band office (new)
- Satellite Operations Centre with response equipment, medical equipment, a training room, and kitchen
- Structural protection installed on essential infrastructure
- Back-up systems for community essential infrastructure
- Multi-use community centre with gymnasium, additional separated rooms, kitchen, storage
- Camping area for evacuees
- Gas station
- Upgraded water reservoir to handle additional capacity with potable water
- Accessibility:
 - Create an Egress route – safety bridge to connect to Highway 20

- Upgrade the West Fraser Road washout
- Signage to mark ?Esdilagh territory

Health & Wellbeing

- Immediate health supports for community (i.e. traditional healing ceremonies, men's and women's support groups, addictions counselling and programs, individual and group counselling)
- Conduct a community mental health wellness assessment to determine appropriate service needs
- Host cultural healing events and provide Tsilhqot'in courses
- Emphasis on youth programs & events (i.e. additional resources for mountain bike trial & riding gear, movies in the community, support for recreational activities)

Emergency Equipment Needs

- Heavy-duty equipment emergency needs assessment and procurement
- Trailers
- Emergency response vehicles
- Hoses to reach each home
- Install fire hydrants throughout the community

Xeni Gwet'in First Nation Government Specific Needs

Fast Track Expenses Incurred During 2017 Wildfires

- Refund expenses towards food, general and emergency supplies
- Emergency response staff expenses (i.e. wages, fuel)
- Community living out expenses (i.e. lodging, essential needs)

Emergency Infrastructure

- Satellite Operations Centre with response equipment, medical equipment, a training room, and kitchen
- Structural protection installed on essential infrastructure
- Upgraded water reservoir, treatment plant & hydrants
- Back-up systems for community essential infrastructure
- Band office with community gathering space
- Multi-media building for training and employment
- Community Hall
- Accessibility:
 - Create an Egress route – Secondary passage to leave Nemiah Valley
 - Complete air strip
 - Upgrade Nemiah Valley Road

Health & Wellbeing

- Conduct an immediate community mental health wellness assessment to determine appropriate service needs
- Support for additional essential health staff

Emergency Equipment Needs

- Heavy-duty equipment emergency needs assessment and procurement
- Water transportation vehicles
- Water vehicles

Community Capacity Needs

- Remote and isolated community emergency response capacity

Internal Policies

- Development of roles, duties and hours of emergency staff

Emergency Preparation

- Expansive forest fuel management plan and mitigation measures
- Forest prescription project
- Debris clearing along the road and powerline corridors
- Identify and develop safety zones

THE NATION EXPERIENCE

Preparedness

As a consequence of the 2003 wildfires in the Cariboo Chilcotin, later that winter the Tsilhqot'in leadership were invited to meet the Firestorm 2003 Provincial Review Team⁹ to discuss their overall experience. The largest issue was and still is that the wealth of Tsilhqot'in skills and expertise is dismissed by government. The Tsilhqot'in recommended true involvement of their people who possess extensive knowledge of the territories and that they should be included in the fuel mitigation, fire suppression, and recovery efforts.

In both 2009 and 2010, some of the Tsilhqot'in communities were evacuated due to wildfires and the knowledge of how to better prepare the Nation grew stronger. Nevertheless, emergency planning financial resources were scarce. Each community created an Emergency Preparedness Plan, but many of these plans were shelved for years because the communities could not afford to employ an emergency manager position to maintain and manage emergency practices.

The Nation consistently sought financial resources for the day that a wildfire would undoubtedly threaten the communities again, but they were unable to secure sufficient funds to prepare adequately. The expansive and distinct composition of the Tsilhqot'in territory requires planning at a Nation level, while still recognizing and addressing the strengths and challenges of each community.

The 2017 wildfires finally publicly exposed the inadequacy of provincial emergency readiness within the Tsilhqot'in territory. In the heat of the emergency response, the failure to properly integrate Tsilhqot'in knowledge and expertise into emergency preparedness was on full display. Sometimes inadequate knowledge was as simple as basic local geography, as in the mistaken attempt by the RCMP to evacuate the Tsilhqot'in community of Tsi Deldel (also known as Redstone or the Alexis Creek First Nation) because of confusion with the nearby municipalities of Redstone and Alexis Creek. This lack of geographic knowledge is clearly problematic from a logistical emergency management perspective.

More fundamentally, provincial and federal roles in emergency preparedness did not adequately support the Tsilhqot'in Nation in playing a leadership role in emergency management within their territory. Planning and preparation to support the Tsilhqot'in and nearby residents' safety and security are paramount. The Tsilhqot'in are inherently responsible for the livelihood of their citizens, and are responsible to protect their land, resources, and traditional wellbeing, which is combined into an intricate value-based

⁹ Firestorm 2003 Provincial Review . Province of British Columbia, 15 Feb. 2004, https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/farming-natural-resources-and-industry/forestry/wildfire-management/governance/bcws_firestormreport_2003.pdf.

KEY POINTS

- Previous experience with wildfires enabled the Tsilhqot'in to provide recommendations to government grounded in expertise, however they were unheeded.
- The 2017 wildfires revealed inadequate recognition and support of Tsilhqot'in leadership in wildfire management.
- Sufficient financial support towards emergency preparation was not available to First Nation communities.

decision-making process. The provincial and federal government have not reconciled their governance orders with the inherent responsibilities and value systems that drive First Nations governance, leading inevitably to conflict.

Response

When the wildfires of 2017 swept through Tsilhqot'in territory, the communities were left to their own devices for many days since wildfires were burning out of control across the Province of British Columbia. Resources were allocated to the numerous interface fires. The highways to the communities were desolate because of the roadblocks, and residents throughout the territory felt they were abandoned and had no choice but to stay and fight the fires themselves.



Tl'etinqox leadership made the choice to not sign and authorize an evacuation order for their citizens, which aggravated interactions with RCMP. There was a general perception that the Tsilhqot'in were disobeying the evacuation order, when in fact the provincial evacuation order was not applicable to the Reserve lands. In the days to follow, hordes of RCMP and Canadian Armed Forces personnel flooded the territory. The Nation remained determined to operate independently and make the best decisions for its citizens and local neighbours. Where possible, they sought external supports to ease the burdens while combating wildfires.

The lack of understanding of Tsilhqot'in jurisdiction was on display most prominently in the conflict at Tl'etinqox, when the RCMP attempted to enforce a provincial evacuation order. Chief Alphonse informed the RCMP that the order was not enforceable unless the Chief and Council consented to it, which they had not. The fact that a Band Council Resolution or bylaw is legally required for an evacuation on reserve is easily accessible information contained in the province's Evacuation Operational Guidelines (2009).

A similar lack of understanding was experienced in Yunesit'in, which was subject to a community evacuation order. Chief Myers Ross and Council members issued a Band Council Resolution declaring a local state of emergency and ordering that Yunesit'in Government and employees work in collaboration with the primary response agency to perform all acts and implement all procedures that are considered necessary.... However, RCMP



SUMMARY OF LEGAL AUTHORITY TO DECLARE STATES OF EMERGENCY AND TO ISSUE EVACUATION ORDERS

Emergency response measures on reserves are governed by Band Council Resolutions or bylaws. Provincial and regional authorities cannot impose emergency measures on reserve lands.

In British Columbia, emergencies are governed by the Emergency Program Act, RSBC 1996, c 111. This legislation empowers the Lieutenant Governor in Council (LGIC) to declare a provincial state of emergency (s 9) and it empowers the Minister to implement emergency measures (e.g. evacuation orders, roadblocks) (s 10). During a state of emergency, the LGIC or Attorney General can assume jurisdiction over the police forces and firefighting services (Emergency Program Management Regulation, s 9). The Emergency Program Act also empowers local authorities to declare local states of emergency (s 12) and to take emergency measures (s 13). However, if a provincial state of emergency is declared, local emergency powers cease to have any effect (s 14(3)).

The Emergency Program Act does not apply to reserve lands. Reserve lands are federal jurisdiction under s 91 of the Constitution Act, 1867. Federal Parliament has not legislated specifically on emergency management on reserve lands. Emergency management is therefore governed by the Indian Act.

Emergency measures on reserve lands are governed by s 81(1)(a) of the Indian Act, which authorizes the council of a band to make by-laws "to provide for the health of residents on the reserve...". Validly enacted by-laws have the force of law; they are binding on individuals. During the 2017 wildfires, Tsilhqot'in leadership exercised their inherent jurisdiction to protect their communities. They also implemented emergency responses in their communities through Band Council Resolutions, issued under the authority of s 81(1)(a) of the Indian Act.

did not follow this requirement for collaboration to ensure a "soft" evacuation in the community.

Nation-wide, Tsilhqot'in communities also experienced financial uncertainty resulting from a lack of coordination between provincial and local authorities. With the wildfire bearing down on Tl'etinqox, and no assurance that provincial wildfire response authorization was forthcoming for many days, Chief and Council in Tl'etinqox directed crews to begin fighting fire. This decision meant that the community had to assume liability and the financial risk of deploying these crews.

Throughout the territory fire-fighting efforts began without authorization since buildings, homes and full communities were at risk. In each community there were many recollections of immediate wildfire response activities. Notably, these early firefighting efforts are credited with protecting the communities from fire.

Leadership requires adequate consultation and dialogue with both the provincial and federal governments well in advance of declaring an evacuation. Merging the local First Nations knowledge, local resident knowledge and government processes together would create an enhanced emergency response process that would better attend to the particular

challenges and needs of First Nations communities. Access to basic resources that are common for many Canadians, such as vehicles and relatives who live in evacuation cities to lodge with, is often lacking for Tsilhqot'in citizens. Due to financial constraints, Tsilhqot'in citizens may not own vehicles, and even if they do, they may not have insurance or even fuel. Vehicles may not be road worthy or reliable, thus elevating their risk. Emergency management must account for these additional and significant barriers to safe emergency response within First Nations communities.

Each community has varying risk thresholds for agreeing to evacuations, but at the very least, all had a safety plan, a support team for the citizens to rely on, and a trained fire fighting presence. The media heavily publicized the wildfires and portrayed the Nation as acting recklessly for exercising its own emergency response systems instead of heeding the evacuations. Tl'etinqox Chief Joe Alphonse was interviewed in the subsequent days and described the extensive preparation and planning by his community for wildfire response and the importance of First Nations' autonomy in the case of evacuation procedures.

KEY POINTS

- Emergency response authorities lacked a basic understanding of Tsilhqot'in jurisdiction and governance, which caused unnecessary confusion and conflict.
- Proper coordination between the governments of BC, Canada and Tsilhqot'in Nation that integrates the knowledge and expertise of all three governments will create enhanced emergency management that makes communities safer.
- The Tsilhqot'in communities established emergency management systems to instinctively protect their lands and resources.
- Early firefighting efforts decreased the wildfire footprint.

Fires Burning Across Roads in the Chilcotin Photograph By: Riske Creek Resident



Support Through First-Hand Observations

Dignitaries from across British Columbia began to seek travel to the Chilcotin to personally assess the damage and to provide support. Chuck Puchmayr, a New Westminster City Council Member, had maintained a long-standing relationship with the Tsilhqot'in starting in his previous role as MLA for New Westminster, and was one of the first to connect with Tl'etinqox during the wildfires. Hearing about the refusal by Tl'etinqox to evacuate, and in his role as Chair of the Emergency Advisory Committee in New Westminster, Puchmayr worked with his riding's fire department to gift a fire truck to the community of Tl'etinqox, which was delivered on July 13, 2017, after his visit to the community.

Puchmayr observed that Tl'etinqox activated a well-functioning Emergency Operations Centre. They were supported by knowledgeable and trained First Nation firefighters, local heavy-duty equipment and operators, and the leadership's assessment of the fires and safety plan was accurate and sound.

*City of New Westminster Donation of Fire Truck to Tl'etinqox
Chief Joe Alphonse and New Westminster City Councillor Chuck Puchmayr
Photograph By: Monica Lamb - Yorski - Williams Lake Tribune*



Visit to Tl'etinqox

(Left to Right) Chief Robert Chamberlain, Chief Joe Alphonse and Grand Chief Ed John
Photograph Provided By: Grand Chief Ed John



Grand Chief Ed John, Political Executive of the First Nation Summit (FNS) worked with the Ministry of Forests Deputy Minister to arrange a helicopter to fly to the remote and difficult-to-access areas of the Tsilhqot'in. Once it was safe and the skies were clear enough to fly, Grand Chief Ed John travelled with Chief Bob Chamberlain, Vice-President of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), and Catherine Lappe, the Regional Director General for Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) to Tsilhqot'in territory. On the day of the visit, the fire was blazing across the river from Tl'etinqox, in Yunesit'in's caretaker area and they were present to witness the local fire crews managing the fire.

Grand Chief Ed John highlighted in their meeting with government officials that in order to make appropriate decisions, First Nation leadership require real time information that can be provided by the Regional Districts who are equipped with emergency operation centres. In addition, the expansive geographic area of a Regional District requires local resident representation to advise them on the state of the land.

In a letter dated July 28, 2017, Grand Chief Ed John wrote to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and attached "A Proposal for a BC First Nations Emergency Management

Fund to prepare for, prevent, respond to and recover from emergencies.” The proposal called for a \$200 million First Nation emergency preparedness and response fund. The seven recommendations include:

1. Review and revise First Nation’s emergency response plans.
2. Support to develop an integrated multi-agency government and First Nation’s emergency response action plans.
3. Support for emergency response asset acquisitions for First Nations.
4. Support for capacity development in the form of training and accreditation for First Nations.
5. Dedicated support to the health and wellbeing of evacuees and their recovery, financial support for restoration of the community and additional recovery of resources expended to First Nation communities that provided safe relocation centres.
6. Establish an Emergency Operation Centre centrally located along Highway 20 within the Tl’etinqox village.
7. Assistance for the restoration of traditional food security, relief for the impacts to First Nation farmers’ and ranchers’ livelihoods and support for First Nation people to develop mitigation measures to avoid further cultural and traditional loss.

During the wildfires of 2018, the BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nation Summit and Union of BC Indian Chiefs resubmitted the seven recommendations to Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier John Horgan.¹⁰

¹⁰ “BC First Nations Being Devastated by Wildfire Season of 2018, Immediate Resources Needed.” UBCIC Website, 22 Aug. 2018, https://www.ubcic.bc.ca/bc_first_nations_being_devastated_by_wildfire_2018.

Fire Across Chilcotin River near Yunesit'in Community

Image Facing South From Tl'etinqox Community

Photograph By: Grand Chief Ed John



Lappe had received many calls of concern from other governmental organizations, and traveled to the Tsilhqot'in communities with FNS and UBCIC to meet with Tsilhqot'in leadership. Lappe affirmed that the role of Federal Government is to work with communities to understand from their leadership what types of supports they require, rather than to assume what is best for the community. In Tl'etinqox, she affirmed that Chief and Council were clearly within their own authority to issue evacuations and alerts on their Federal Indian Reserves.

Becky Row, Canadian Red Cross Senior Manager for Northern and Indigenous Engagement BC & Yukon, saw many lightning strikes from her Prince George, BC office on July 7, 2017, and knew that assistance from the Society would be required shortly because a substantial

fast-moving incident was underway. Row connected with the First Nation Health Authority to provide her contact information and described that the role of the Red Cross was to provide financial assistance to those working towards recovery.

The Canadian Red Cross faced the barrier of not having up-to-date contact information for each First Nation community, which prevented immediate service delivery. Once contact was made, the Canadian Red Cross proceeded with meeting the leadership to seek culturally-respectful guidance on working within the community. Quickly learning that the First Nations communities have unique needs, the Red Cross team communicated daily with their internal team to discuss the various experiences and themes, and to seek methods to address them quickly.

FAST TRACKING RECOVERY EXPENSES

In the weeks following the wildfires' abatement, Lappe organized community tours with additional service agencies to learn about the communities' experiences and needs. Lappe discovered that integrating the work of varied agencies in emergency situations requires much more effective coordination. As such, a different approach was employed to commit to fast track recovery funding from the Federal government to help First Nations build back quicker after impacts from natural disasters.

In the case of the 2018 Alkali Lake wildfire that destroyed many structures in the Telegraph Creek area of the Tahltan Nation and displaced several community members, the Federal government was able to accelerate funding so the First Nation could cover initial expenditures. The process still requires further refinements to reducing the extensive paperwork requirements.

KEY POINTS

- At the outset of the wildfires, there was widespread apprehension regarding the competence of the Tsilhqot'in.
- The Tsilhqot'in accommodate BC and Canada's jurisdiction in safety and emergency management, but expect a similar recognition.
- In principle, support for Tsilhqot'in leadership in wildfire emergency management is existing and widespread. Building on this foundation of support will allow the Tsilhqot'in Nation to be true leaders in First Nation led emergency response.

Common Wildfire Experiences

The six Tsilhqot'in Nation communities shared similar experiences and challenges. At the forefront was the difficulty in communicating and coordinating with governmental organizations. In general, an inordinate amount of time was spent educating external organizations about the jurisdiction of the Tsilhqot'in. Both Tsilhqot'in citizens and non-First Nation residents expressed the concern that if they made the decision to stay and protect their homes, infrastructure and livestock, they would be punished by having services cut off to them.



Concerns about child apprehension loomed large in Tsilhqot'in communities. RCMP had threatened to remove children from the Tl'etinqox community in a meeting with Chief Alphonse to try to force them into evacuation. A verbal battle between Chief Alphonse and the RCMP ensued with each threatening duelling roadblocks. The Chief then informed them that they needed to seek legal advice about evacuations on First Nation

SUMMARY OF PROVINCIAL AUTHORITY TO APPREHEND CHILDREN ON RESERVE

Under provincial law, police officers and MCFD officials have the authority to remove a child if they reasonably believe the child's health or safety is in immediate danger, or if an official reasonably believes that the child needs protection and no less disruptive measures are available (Child, Family and Community Service Act, RSBC 1996, c 46 ss 27, 30). Section 88 of the Indian Act makes these powers applicable on reserve lands.

When making a decision about removing a Tsilhqot'in child, officials are to be guided by the best interests of the child, which is elaborated in the Child, Family and Community Services Act to include consideration of: "the child's cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage" and "[i]f the child is an aboriginal child, the importance of preserving the child's cultural identity must be considered in determining the child's best interests" (s 4). In the Nenqay Deni Accord, the province committed to working with the Tsilhqot'in Nation to provide: "adequate support for Tsilhqot'in children and families, delivered and managed by Tsilhqot'in Communities, in accordance with Tsilhqot'in laws and values..." (s 8).

Denisiqi Services Society (DSS) is a Delegated Aboriginal Agency affiliated with the Tsilhqot'in National Government that works with MCFD when there is a child protection concern. DSS does not have decision-making authority over child removal. This leaves the decision to remove a Tsilhqot'in child in the hands of police and MCFD officials who exercise provincial authority.

The exercise of provincial jurisdiction over child removal is part of a long colonial legacy that includes Indian Residential Schools and the 60s scoop. Against this backdrop and the recent class action proceedings on behalf of 60s scoop survivors, threats of child apprehension are always grave and traumatic for Indigenous communities. The threats of child apprehension during the 2017 wildfires perpetuate this colonial legacy. These actions failed to reflect the spirit and intention of the guiding principles in the Nenqay Deni Accord. They fail to reflect the goal of family preservation – achieved through prevention services and adequate family support – that ultimately breaks the intergenerational cycles of trauma.

reserve since the Chief was acting within his authority and that he felt strongly that the children were safest where they were.

These threats were, in part, acted upon in Tl'esqox where RCMP misled a Councillor in order to "mark" houses with children in case child apprehension was deemed necessary. For families that did evacuate to evacuation centres in the cities, they faced increased surveillance by the Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD). Displaced from their communities and ordinary support systems and in a high-stress setting, parents were scrutinized — not supported — by the province.

In various accounts from community citizens, revolving enforcement personnel at roadblock crossings were uncooperative and inconsistent in enabling access to designated staff — even those with sanctioned passes — to deliver essential food and supplies. Delivering goods to and from the communities was a dangerous job because the fire had crossed the highway several times and continued to burn close to the road. However, safety protocols were in place to ensure that those drivers had knowledge of the territory and some had wildfire interface experience, which helped to assess and mediate the risk.

The issues with roadblocks started from a lack of communication and clarity around permits. Even some of the Tsilhqot'in leadership were not provided with permits at the start. Dealing with RCMP who had come in from elsewhere was entirely inconsistent. For this reason, it was later suggested that it would have been helpful to have a community member or liaison stationed at each roadblock.

The enforcement of roadblocks during the provincial state of emergency was arbitrary and often confrontational. At times, enforcement officials — largely RCMP — recognized the need for Tsilhqot'in government employees to pass through roadblocks to provide essential supplies. Other times, roadblocks were strictly

and aggressively enforced. There was no consultation with the Tsilhqot'in Nation about the placement and enforcement of roadblocks in Tsilhqot'in territory during the wildfire.

Enforcement of roadblocks depended on the particular officials on duty. On some days, officials would let Tsilhqot'in citizens and employees pass through. Other days officials would strictly enforce the same roadblock in an aggressive, confrontational and disrespectful manner. The result of this arbitrariness was that Tsilhqot'in government employees were constantly uncertain about whether they would be permitted to carry out their jobs in supporting Tsilhqot'in communities. Tsilhqot'in authorized representatives were not uniformed. While they held positions of authority delegated by their respective leadership or Emergency Operations Centres, they were not equally recognized for their role within the Nation. Many of these positions were essential services for the welfare of the community emergency response teams. Enforcement officials either lacked a basic understanding of Tsilhqot'in authority or understood, but refused to respect the vital role they played in emergency response in their communities.

Information about the location of roadblocks was poorly communicated to Tsilhqot'in communities. Moreover, decisions about the placement of roadblocks were made without input from Tsilhqot'in communities and resulted in alternate routes left accessible and unpatrolled. This was a missed opportunity to incorporate Tsilhqot'in knowledge of the territory to ensure the safety of those travelling through the fire zone.

Access passes issued by the Fire Centre were a partial solution to the challenge of managing roadblocks. Passes allowed authorized individuals (such as Tsilhqot'in National Government employees) to pass through roadblocks. These passes were a welcome, if belated, development. However, for Tsilhqot'in community

members, leadership and employees, the permitting process was time consuming and difficult to access.

Local territorial knowledge was disregarded and as a result, government-to-government relationships were further strained. The governmental by-the-book procedures were frustrating to experienced and senior Tsilhqot'in wildfire staff who possessed practical experience and land-based knowledge, which could have been greatly beneficial to wildfire suppression efforts. Without adequate consultation and dialogue, a significant amount of the territory was decimated. Wildfire response activities, such as back burns, resulted in excessive damage to cattle guards and fences, timber, wildlife, medicinal plants, culturally significant sites, and even led to unearthing human remains from important spiritual burial grounds.



A central theme that emerged in documenting the Tsilhqot'in experience for this report is the significant knowledge that Tsilhqot'in people have of their territory and how little of this knowledge was accessed or respected by emergency responders and fire crews. Daily briefings occurred in the communities, but only conveyed information on what had already been decided by the provincial response authorities. Crucial decisions about firefighting strategy, such as the location and extent of back burns were made without meaningful consultation with the communities who have knowledge of the territory and who are most impacted by the consequences.

Chiefs noted that it would take 10 days or more to develop a working relationship with an Incident Commander, and then the 14-day shift would come to an end. There was a very strong impression that every Incident Commander who came through approached their work with the First Nations differently. In a few notable and laudable instances in some communities, leadership recall that they were asked about sites to be mindful of that held cultural significance. But after the 14-day shift, the Incident Commander was not seen by the community again and there was no indication that this important information had been transferred to the next Incident Commander.

Burnt power lines created communication challenges for those actively working in communities. Within five minutes of leaving the Williams Lake city centre, travelling west on Highway 20, cell phones do not have network coverage. The lack of communication posed many safety concerns.

KEY POINTS

- Provincial authorities attempted to undermine Tsilhqot'in leadership during the response through threats of child apprehension and increased surveillance.
- Roadblocks were sites of confrontation, discrimination and active impediments to effective Tsilhqot'in wildfire response.
- Communication was strained, particularly in the rural setting of the Tsilhqot'in, and Tsilhqot'in knowledge and expertise was not incorporated into provincial wildfire response strategy.



Fires Burning in the Tsilhqot'in
 Photograph By: Jason Payne/PNG - Vancouver Sun

Evacuations and the Tsilhqot'in

For the communities that were evacuated, their citizens were scattered into evacuation centres in different cities. The setting added to citizen stress and in many cases triggered residential school trauma: memories of being forcibly removed by authorities, staying in unfamiliar group lodging and many separated from family and friends. It was the first time for many of the Tsilhqot'in to travel to a larger urban centre. The effects on the health of the Tsilhqot'in from evacuations is still being understood today.

Many found being separated from family to be extremely stressful, without the emotional, social, and economic supports they might be used to. Normally, within the confines of the community, leadership and their employees provide basic services to their people. Band offices, daycares, and health clinics offer a range of support services from providing access to health care professionals to administering income assistance. Counselling for mental health instabilities and addictions are essential community services. The health

departments even provide basic toiletries to those in need. The staff recognise if families may require a food hamper or assistance in some form.

Displacement eliminated access to these types of services, and at the greatest cost to the Nation, led to the loss of a Tsilhqot'in Elder's life. During the evacuations a Tsilhqot'in Elder, identified as a vulnerable person, was reported missing when he did not return back to Tsi Deldel after being evacuated to Kamloops, BC RCMP, family and friends searched extensively, but sadly in the spring the Elder was found and had passed. The Canadian Red Cross assisted the community and family to transport the Elder back home to have a peaceful burial.

Within the Nation there are Elders who speak only the Tsilhqot'in language. Intake at evacuation centres was a discouraging process for those with language barriers and literacy challenges, which resulted with many not receiving financial support. In addition, the evacuation generated new

expenses, adding financial difficulty to impoverished citizens. Many people rely solely on preserving fish and wildlife in the summer to provide sustenance throughout the year. At the same time, evacuees were forced to spend funds on costs that they would not have encountered at home – i.e. laundry mat expenses, commercial transportation, groceries, shelter for themselves and their livestock/pets, and fuel and insurance for vehicles.

Within communities, where possible, facilities remained open as a central point of contact providing services to citizens and workers that stayed behind. Often times, leadership and staff were required to advocate on behalf of those in need and were stationed at these locations. These were gathering sites for citizens and staff.

An emergency operation site for the Nation and a separate one for Yunesit'in were hosted in Williams Lake in the Tsilhqot'in National Government (TNG) offices. When the City of Williams Lake was evacuated, staff that remained in Williams Lake were scattered to different cities and had to assist to the best of their ability remotely.

The TNG staff and volunteers assisted citizens and communities with various

needs to ensure that the operations went as smoothly as possible; however, the logistics were undeniably complex. Staff worked from revolving task and responsibility lists that were created newly each day. The many duties they assigned included assisting citizens with registration at the evacuation centres, and shopping for and delivery of large orders of food and prescriptions. Community delegates were helped with shopping for inventory. Deliveries of supplies to the community were frequent, often several times a day. Limited supplies in BC forced staff to procure supplies from other provinces. TNG Geographical Information Systems Technicians developed daily maps specific to the territories. These maps were widely praised for their usefulness. Neighbours would check the TNG social media pages for up-to-date information they could not easily receive elsewhere.

The Nation hired a community contractor to host Basic Fire Suppression and Safety (S-100) training courses on the fly. When communities required assistance, the staff were there to help. Daily conference calls helped communities to be connected, receive updates, and determine outstanding needs.

KEY POINTS

- Evacuation procedures were not culturally appropriate and left Tsilhqot'in without adequate support.
- Tsilhqot'in leadership and staff effectively managed a complex emergency response effort, providing support to all six communities and evacuated citizens as needed.
- Basic services refined in communities were not available to Tsilhqot'in citizens when they were evacuated.
- Due to a lack of culturally appropriate programming some citizens did not receive support during evacuation.
- The six communities maintained a central emergency operations centre.
- The six communities continued to maintain their duties and obligations to citizens and were available to support them.
- The Tsilhqot'in National Government provided centralized services (i.e. training, mapping and logistical support) to each community in a regionalized manner.

Recovery

The Cumbersome Road to Recovery

Beginning as early as August 2017, communities performed damage assessments and began recovery planning. By the beginning of September, each community needed to focus on daily operational programs and provide regular services to citizens. However, recovery has been plagued by an intensive recovery-reimbursement process. Over a year since costs were expended, some reimbursements are still being reviewed.



The current funding approach to emergency response in Canada is structured through a reimbursement process. Communities are expected to cover up-front response costs and then use a reimbursement process facilitated through Emergency Management BC. First Nations in British Columbia must also follow this provincial process, even though emergency funding is ultimately sourced from the federal government.

Unlike municipalities, Tsilhqot'in communities do not have the capacity to maintain emergency reserve funds to cover emergency expenditures. Multiple Tsilhqot'in communities had to establish a line of credit with private financial institutions to cover emergency response expenditures. Tsilhqot'in communities were required to make a financial leap of faith to respond to the wildfires, hoping that costs would eventually be recouped, placing significant financial strain and uncertainty on the communities in the interim. In the absence of loans from financial institutions, Tsilhqot'in leadership would have been in the untenable position of having to lay-off essential front-line staff in their communities.

This leap of faith has not fully borne out. Communities are still waiting, well over one year after the 2017 wildfires, for full reimbursement for their emergency expenses. Tsilhqot'in communities already face a significant financial strain in the day-to-day operations of their organizations. This forces the communities to provide services to their citizens without the appropriate financial support until they can recover from the financial impact.

Each community varies in size, but most needs are common amongst them all. Documenting losses is an extensive process resulting in databases of information, but to actually perform the recovery requires financial resources and human capacity.

Although funding has been available through various sources, the communities have had difficulty handling the extra administrative burden of applying for, and reporting on funding. Funding should flow directly to each community to ease financial risks. Navigating a disjointed and non-transparent web of financial and reporting requirements spread across multiple agencies including FNESS, EMBC, Red Cross, and DISC has put significant strain on staff.



The Tsilhqot'in National Government held a meeting for community finance managers to provide information on the reimbursement process and to learn from one another's experiences. Finance managers learnt then that there are many different bodies that provide reimbursement however it would be scrutinized by one group at a time. This process was unsatisfactory. As a start, through the Tripartite Collaborative Emergency Agreement senior staff representing the many bodies established a table to field the recovery requests together. The table has not addressed all questions and reimbursements are still outstanding.



International standards for emergency management point to the recovery stage as a crucial moment for rebuilding in a way that prepares communities for the next emergency (known as 'build back better').¹¹ Building back better means repairs that go beyond simply restoring infrastructure to its previous state and improving that infrastructure so that it is sufficiently resistant to future threats. Despite the standard emergency management practice of building back better, Tsilhqot'in communities need significant additional support from provincial and federal authorities for recovery that reduces vulnerability to future wildfire.

¹¹ United Nations Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), Priority 4.

KEY POINTS

- Emergency financing is premised on assumptions of financial capacity that do not match reality.
- Reimbursement for emergency expenditures is slow, involves multiple departments and places an excessive administrative burden on Tsilhqot'in communities.
- Recovery needs in Tsilhqot'in communities are significant and urgent. Tsilhqot'in communities remain vulnerable to the next wildfire.



Fires Burning in the Chilcotin
Photograph By: Jason Payne/PNG - Vancouver Sun



Helicopter with Water Bucket near ?Esdilagh, BC
Photograph By: Richard Lam/PNG - Vancouver Sun

Impacts to the Tsilhqot'in Peoples

Individually, people are deeply and emotionally impacted by the scarcity of their traditional sustenance and medicinal plants and berries. Compensation for the loss of them has also been elusive. The citizens put high significance on their traditional practice, considering them invaluable. In addition to determining the impact to the community, there is always confusion about whether to approach the federal or provincial government for support. In the short term, these impacts have been supported financially through the Red Cross “cultural livelihood” funding, a catch-all form through which individuals can claim lost opportunities in hunting, fishing, and the like, and income lost from traditional arts industries and cultural work. While these applications are pouring in, there is concern that this may not be the appropriate restitution for longer-term losses in game, fish, medicine, and berries. Further, this process is inadequate to capture the collective impacts, beyond economic impacts, on Tsilhqot'in peoples' ability to practice their rights. With so much burned up, people are having to go further and further out into the territory to find game and berries, beyond the areas that have been traditionally and continuously used. This has deep social, cultural, and political implications for the exercise of Tsilhqot'in title and rights.

Sadness and mental health concerns has plagued many families after the experience of working on such a tumultuous fire without proper provisions. Witnessing large tracks of traditional land, wildlife, and livestock die in the fire added an even greater emotional burden to many.

At the onset of the 2018 fire season and throughout the summer, anxiety increased, and panic was triggered by helicopters, sirens, and smoke. Many of the people who worked on or throughout the fires have had little time off as the burdens of the community are unending.

Citizens who are personally recovering from the exhausting experience identified many health and wellbeing issues, in addition to the effects to their livelihoods as ranchers, trappers, farmers, and woodlot owners. The emotional, mental, and physical health of the citizens has been negatively compounded. Asthma and depression are among the many common physical and emotional symptoms.

Unfortunately, there is concern that the residual mental health impacts, as well as increased disposable income, particularly among the young men on the fire crews, had increased alcoholism and impacted family and community safety. Heavy drug and alcohol use started or increased during people's evacuation to urban areas, and drugs are now coming back to the community from those cities. Incidents of drunk driving, violence, domestic violence and familial conflict have increased from previous rates. The evidence is plain: there is an urgent need for counselling as well as community healing, including debriefs, community gatherings, cultural and land-based activities and traditional ceremony.

Impacts to the Tsilhqot'in Land

As part of the effort to suppress fire mobility, firefighters destroyed fences, cattle guards, and even historical and current trails or roads. In some areas, the machinery-built fire guards had diverted water courses, which led to flooding. In other areas, wildfires left hillsides barren of vegetation causing mudslides during heavy precipitation.

The wildfires not only devastated traditional sustenance, but also continue to impact the daily life for the animals that did survive. The Tsilhqot'in Nation is a steward of the land and prioritizes conservation for future generations, yet the Nation is consistently at odds with political decisions that conflict with these values.



The jurisdictional division between provincial and federal crown lands divides the territory and the rehabilitation work being done on it. While rehabilitation work has begun on Crown land in Tsilhqot'in territory, the lack of a comprehensive land use plan at the territorial level means that rehabilitation work is somewhat piecemeal and lacks overarching Tsilhqot'in authority or vision on how the work will unfold. On the one hand, there has been a positive move towards direct awarding rehabilitation contracts to community entities. A group of five communities including Yunesit'in, Tl'esqox, Tsi Deldel, Tl'etingox, and Esk'etemc have established zones in the Hanceville fire complex and have been contracted to each of these zones. So, while it is a positive development that the government is receptive to First Nations managing the rehabilitation program, major decision-making has still come from the Province, undermining the community leadership's inherent right to plan, set priorities and make decisions on their lands. Further, the process has been too slow, as prescriptions have been made, but much of the work hasn't started.

Impacts to the Homes, Properties and Livelihoods

Homes and infrastructure within the Tsilhqot'in communities are subpar to those in non-First Nation communities. Housing on reserves is in need of major repairs, often is infested with bats or mold and is severely overcrowded. The shortage of housing has been a longstanding issue and forces multiple families to live within one house. Infrastructure

needs are significant. Many of the communities have remained on boil water advisories for years without any indication of when or how their community water systems will be improved. The common buildings, often not properly constructed, are insufficient to handle the needs of the communities.

During the wildfires existing gaps in community infrastructure became acute. Lack of emergency structures such as firehalls, emergency operation centres, large community gathering spaces, kitchen facilities, and storage left the communities vulnerable. Further, each community was faced with issues of disrepair and limited capacity of their water reservoirs and treatment plants.

After the wildfires, these inequalities worsened. Rodents had moved into hundreds of evacuated homes, seeking refuge from the fires. Resulting from group lodging and clothing donations, bedbugs infiltrated homes. What is a small issue to some becomes a large issue in First Nation communities. For instance, seeking

housing inspectors to assess the state of each household has become a significant challenge. Cleaning homes and clothing to prevent the spread of bedbugs is an arduous activity without individual washing and drying machines. Existing dilapidated houses became further impacted. The Tsilhqot'in is in an even greater state of crisis facing housing shortages.

Patterns of animal behaviour has changed due to the landscape disturbances at times causing a safety concern for the people. The displaced animals pose a threat to daily activities like walking to and from school.

"I remember going to the Cariboo Regional District (CRD) Office, probably around seven at night and then realizing they have a pretty big room, and they have all their communications, have a huge tv-screen projecting all of the events taking place, people sitting around a big table with all their computers, laptops and phones, everyone dialed into communicating on different things and already, by that time, there had been about 36 different fires that started up, all within an hour's time. Going in there I realized that we weren't going to be a priority. That is the biggest thing I got out of that night."

CHIEF RUSSELL MYERS-ROSS

Ranching is a source of income for many citizens in the Tsilhqot'in. The wildfires either injured livestock or burned them to the point of non-recovery. Communities have noted negative impacts on the production of hay, and the procurement of hay for livestock because hay fields were either burnt or left unmanaged. The fires decimated integral outbuildings and further continue to impact the economical bottom line of these small businesses.

KEY POINTS

- The 2017 wildfire has had a deep and far-reaching impact on Tsilhqot'in citizens, affecting land-based practices, mental health and livelihood.
- Significant rehabilitation activities are ongoing in Tsilhqot'in territory.
- Economic opportunities have flowed to Tsilhqot'in-based companies in a modest and piecemeal way, but planning and major decision-making in the region has been led by the province in the absence of Tsilhqot'in collaboration.
- Infrastructure on reserve is inadequate to suitably support the basic needs of the citizens and even less suitable to support their needs in an emergency situation.
- The Tsilhqot'in communities lack sophisticated emergency operations equipment and a facility, although they are well situated to manage these operations themselves.
- Tsilhqot'in communities face greater struggles to recover from disasters than non-Indigenous communities and face disproportionate impacts.

Advancing and Strengthening Relationships - A First Step

It is clear that government representatives across a number of ministries need training in the jurisdictional authority of First Nation governments, as well as cultural competency training in working with Indigenous communities. Given the high turnover of personnel, this training must be frequent and ongoing. In particular, the RCMP should be prepared to take direction from Chief and Council. Beyond simply hiring liaisons, community members should be embedded within the larger emergency response and management system, taking up leadership roles such as division supervisors and managers.

Training for the Tsilhqot'in communities needs to continue to ensure that more people within the territory have tickets and certifications for wildfire suppression. In the summer of 2018, the Province of BC contributed a mobile Community Structural Protection Unit (SPU) to the Tsilhqot'in National Government. The SPU contains approximately 350 sprinklers and can protect between 30-35 homes. Tsilhqot'in citizens were trained to operate this highly-valuable unit. Although this was a significant contribution the nation requires an ongoing and comprehensive training regime along with a cache of equipment and inventory.

KEY POINTS

- Cultural competency training for service agencies that support First Nations in emergencies is a first step.
- First Nation communities require continual and government-subsidized training.

Taking Back Inherent Jurisdiction



In May 2018, the Tsilhqot'in Nation issued permits for mushroom harvest and declared "No Harvest Zones" within the territory.¹² This exercise of jurisdiction led to a coordinated approach with other governments and agencies and allowed the harvest of lucrative, post-fire mushroom crops, while also protecting culturally-sensitive areas destroyed by the 2017 wildfires.

Many non-Tsilhqot'in people—including visitors and those who live in the territory—were exposed to, interacted with, and abided by Tsilhqot'in law and jurisdiction. In the beginning, there was resistance from some mushroom buyers and mushroom pickers, however this had subsided quickly once the Tsilhqot'in had explained that the measure was taken for conservation purposes and to keep the area clean. A small fee was charged for the pickers and buyers. The fee allowed Tsilhqot'in land rangers to monitor areas for safety purposes, maintain outdoor bathroom facilities and empty Tsilhqot'in-provided garbage bins.

This form of governance should be expanded to other areas of land management. This includes seeking ways to put assessment, monitoring, and prevention roles directly into the hands of the community, including leading in prescribed burning.

¹² Tsilhqot'in National Government. "Tsilhqot'in Issue Permits for Mushroom Harvest in Territory." 2018. http://www.tsilhqotin.ca/Portals/o/PDFs/Press%20Releases/2018_05_18_MurshroomPermitPR.pdf

The Tsilhqot'in mushroom harvesting permitting regime is a tremendous success story of collaborative, inter-jurisdictional stewardship in Tsilhqot'in territory. In anticipation of a significant influx of people onto Tsilhqot'in territory to harvest and purchase mushrooms, the Tsilhqot'in Nation exercised its inherent jurisdiction to establish a permitting system on Tsilhqot'in territory. Early and ongoing conversations led to an effective enforcement collaboration between the Tsilhqot'in Nation and the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development, Conservation Officers, Natural Resource Officers and the RCMP.

British Columbia has not established a regulatory regime for mushroom harvest on Crown lands. As a result, there is, at present, no possibility for a jurisdictional conflict between provincial law and the exercise of Tsilhqot'in law over mushroom harvesting on Tsilhqot'in territory. Rather, the Tsilhqot'in Nation has effectively filled an existing jurisdictional gap.

The objectives of the 2018 Tsilhqot'in mushroom harvesting regulation were to manage the influx of mushroom harvesters and purchasers, ensure their safety, protect culturally- and-biologically sensitive areas within Tsilhqot'in territory and generate economic benefits for Tsilhqot'in communities. The regulation required mushroom pickers and buyers to purchase permits from the Tsilhqot'in National Government. The harvesting permit allowed harvesting only in designated areas, which excluded the Title lands and sensitive areas within Tsilhqot'in territory.

The Tsilhqot'in permitting regime was supported by the Government of British Columbia through a Land Act closure applicable to sensitive cultural and biological areas within the fire perimeter. Tsilhqot'in Land Rangers led the implementation and enforcement of the permitting system, with ongoing support from provincial and federal enforcement agencies. In August 2018, Tsilhqot'in leadership heralded the management of the mushroom season as success defined by a "spirit of collaboration" (Media Release Aug 8, 2018).

Riske Creek Fire

Photograph By: Riske Creek Resident





The Tsilhqot'in Nation has also exercised inherent jurisdiction over the harvest of moose in its territory, in response to a severely-declining moose population and the unknown effects of the 2017 wildfires. Prior to the hunting season in September 2018, the Tsilhqot'in and Southern Dākelh Nation Alliance, comprised of 10 First Nation communities, declared a joint prohibition on Limited Entry Hunt (LEH) for moose in response to the Province's plan to allow a LEH with a few limited restrictions. The fire guards built in 2017 dramatically increased hunting access routes into the territory and increased access to wetlands considered to be high value due the abundance of moose found in the area. The burnt natural moose canopy cover had opened up sight lines for hunters and predators, making wildlife especially vulnerable.

Management of the moose population in Tsilhqot'in territory is an example of both jurisdictional cooperation and conflict. In 2017, both the Tsilhqot'in Nation and British Columbia imposed moratoriums on the moose hunt, post-fire in portions of the territory. Yet moose management is an ongoing source of conflict, with the Tsilhqot'in Nation and Province unable to reach a consensus. The Tsilhqot'in Nation opposes the current provincial approach to still issuing LEH authorizations and feels this approach is incautious in light of the cumulative threats faced by the moose population, the lack of study post-wildfire, and the failure to close all the access roads built in 2017.



**TŚILHQOT'IN & SOUTHERN DAKELH
MOOSE LEH CLOSURE**



DISCLAIMER:

VISUAL AID ONLY

For details of the LEH closures see the Tsilhqot'in Interim Moose Protection Law or contact the Southern Dākelh Nation Alliance





Riske Creek Fire

Photograph By: Riske Creek Resident

Conflict in the 2018 hunting season culminated in a Moose Co-Management Agreement between the Tsilhqot'in Nation and the Province, directed at developing and implementing a framework before the 2019 season. Stewardship decisions about the moose population in Tsilhqot'in Territory are guided by both the Nenqay Deni Accord and Moose Co-Management Plan. This plan will work towards moose recovery by dealing with habitat loss, and human and predator caused mortality.

Moose are an important traditional food source for the Tsilhqot'in and are thus, of significant cultural value. The Tsilhqot'in Nation exercises its inherent jurisdiction over the land, guided by its stewardship obligations with respect to the land and wildlife. The right of Tsilhqot'in citizens to hunt moose in their territory is protected in Canadian law under s.35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

Provincial decisions impacting the moose in Tsilhqot'in territory are subject to the Crown's constitutional obligation to consult and accommodate the Tsilhqot'in communities. In addition, the Nenqay Deni Accord constitutes a bilateral Fish and Wildlife Panel, which provides "the framework for collaborative management of Fish and Wildlife in Tsilhqot'in Territory" (12.26). A key role of the Panel is to provide recommendations to provincial decision-makers regarding stewardship decisions within Tsilhqot'in territory (12.28 and

the Tsilhqot'in Stewardship Agreement). Over the course of several months, the Fish and Wildlife Panel deliberated on a joint recommendation on the 2018 moose hunt, however, it was unable to reach a consensus and no joint recommendation was made.

As a result of BC's decision to move ahead with the LEH for 2018 and the Tsilhqot'in interim moose protection law which prohibits moose hunting in Tsilhqot'in Territory, there remains an unresolved jurisdictional conflict. It remains to be seen whether or to what extent the work envisioned by the Moose Co-Management Agreement will address this ongoing jurisdictional conflict.

Moose management has proven to be highly political involving numerous parties. Nonetheless, as the stewards of their lands, the Tsilhqot'in need to be at the forefront of making decisions, and planning for the conservation of the moose and moose habitat.

The communities have not allowed the 2017 jurisdictional battle to affect how they continue to manage their lands. Still, they are faced with daily opposition to overcome the barriers to self-determination.

The Tsilhqot'in, in March of 2018, also enforced conservation measures when they announced the closure to fishing Steelhead trout on the Chilcotin River.¹³ The Tsilhqot'in forwent their Aboriginal right to fish the newly acclaimed endangered species under the Species at Risk Act. In a press release, the community called upon the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to also eliminate the bycatch from the commercial Pacific salmon fisheries.

The many conservation measures that the Tsilhqot'in have executed were examined closely. The wildfire impacts have played a role in both, the reduction of fish and wildlife, and the creation of an in activity on the land. Many of the Tsilhqot'in communities have made the decision to not hunt or fish due to these concerns. However, at the same time, putting restrictions on hunting and gathering impacts the food sources that the community citizens heavily rely upon. While these decisions can be difficult for the communities to make, Tsilhqot'in leadership upholds the traditional teachings to care for the lands on which the people rely.

Ongoing issues with unilateral decision-making by government, even in reporting, rehabilitation, and strategic planning, demonstrate that the jurisdictional and operational conflicts have yet to be addressed. While some communication and relationships have improved between Tsilhqot'in leadership and certain government partners, for others, it's back to the status quo.

¹³ Tsilhqot'in National Government. "Tsilhqot'in Nation Announces Full Closure of Steelhead Fisheries." 2018. http://www.tsilhqotin.ca/Portals/o/PDFs/2018_03_20_SteelheadClosure.pdf

KEY POINTS

- The Tsilhqot'in receive wide-spread support by local non-First Nation residents in their efforts towards applying conservation measures to circumvent wildfire effects within their territory.
- Decisions affecting wildlife, lands and resources within Tsilhqot'in territory need to be reconciled with Tsilhqot'in rights, culture, values and goals to achieve jurisdictional cooperation.
- Wildfire fuel breaks created heightened access to vulnerable wildlife.
- Provincial authorizations affecting Tsilhqot'in within the Cariboo Chilcotin continue regardless of the recommendations towards wildlife management made by the Tsilhqot'in.



TL'ETINQOX GOVERNMENT

Anaham First Nation



Tl'etinqox Aerial View
Photograph By: Grand Chief Ed John

The Tl'etinqox (Anaham) Government is located just over 100 kilometres west of Williams Lake, BC on Highway 20 on the Chilcotin Plateau. The main reserve is located northeast of the Chilcotin River and the community of Alexis Creek. Tl'etinqox have over 1600 citizens registered and are the largest of the Tsilhqot'in communities with less than half of their population residing on the reserve.

Tl'etinqox infrastructure on the reserve includes a band office, health centre, elders centre, elementary school, church, and gas station. The health building and the elementary school were the latest to be constructed. The newer buildings provide a safe, clean and healthy environment for health care services and schooling. Tl'etinqox seeks opportunities to upgrade and replace the facilities for the benefit of their people.

Tl'etinqox Government operates numerous subsidiaries, which include Dech'en Ventures Ltd., a successful forestry company, and Tl'etinqox Trading, a convenience store and gas station.

Cultural camps are held in summers to nurture the transmission of traditional teachings on the lands within the territory. Additionally, an annual ride on horse or bike embarks from Tl'etinqox and journeys to the Williams Lake Stampede. The journey is five days, and the participants stop to camp along the way. The event is multigenerational and is another way to foster the teachings.

Often Tl'etinqox is in the media because the leadership places an emphasis on publicizing the disparities of treatment toward their people and First Nations in general. They have assumed the responsibility to advocate for better services. Knowledge of such disparity is otherwise hidden from public.

This type of publicity is exactly what Tl'etinqox leadership welcomed during the 2017 wildfire experience.

WILDFIRE FUEL ASSESSMENT

The Tl'etinqox main reserve is located on both sides of Highway 20 located northeast of the Chilcotin River. Between the river and the highway lies mostly hayfields that have been irrigated in the past but have not been active for several years. These fields could have high surface fuel loads once the grasses have cured in late summer however the highway lies between the fields and most structures which would act as a fire guard.

Surrounding the community the terrain slopes steeply and has scattered Douglas Fir with moderate-to-low surface fuel loads. These steep slopes have discontinuous forest cover and intermittent cliff bands that act as partial fuel breaks.

Robert Gray, Fire Ecologist
R.W. Gray Consulting Ltd.
Tsilhqot'in Wildfire Fuels Assessment

The Tl'etinqox Experience

July 7, 2017 marked the first day that wildfire threatened Tl'etinqox. Tl'etinqox Chief and Council immediately recognized that the only way to save their residences and buildings from the intense rampant wildfire was to launch an Emergency Operations Centre, mobilize their wildfire interface personnel, and prepare to fend off the fires themselves.

Building on previous wildfire experiences, the Chief and Council knew that an evacuation order could not be issued without a signed resolution by the community leadership. Chief Joe Alphonse assessed the risk for the community, knowing that if the community evacuated, they would have no authority to defend their homes and territory. Throughout the years, hundreds of their citizens were trained in various levels of wildfire response, from managing an Emergency Operations Centre to front-line wildfire response, and they were confident in handling the situation.

Leadership's choice to not evacuate, knowing the decision was within their full jurisdiction, was not understood or accepted by the RCMP. The RCMP had continued to try to force an evacuation of the community and alerted citizens that if they did not leave they would be forcibly moved or arrested. Further, the RCMP threatened the apprehension of children. At odds with enforcement personnel, Tl'etinqox had many abrasive encounters, which forced the leadership to act independently to safeguard the community.

These threats and preparations were excessive and disrespectful. Moreover, if acted upon, they would have undermined with the exercise of Tsilhqot'in law. Tl'etinqox had in place a relocation order for vulnerable citizens; emergency preparedness actions had been taken in the community to protect children during the wildfire.

The Tl'etinqox Government 2017 Wildfire Report – A Compilation of Tl'etinqox Residents' Encounters with the Wildfire,¹⁴ released in September 2017, documented the comprehensive accounts of the community's experiences. The fire originating south of

“Why is it that at just the slightest provocation, they will take our kids away? I would have been willing to go to jail for that. We're making a stand. We want to look after ourselves and we don't want to depend on anybody.”

CHIEF ALPHONSE
*The Wildfire Warriors of
Tl'etinqox - The National Observer*

¹⁴

Verhaeghe, Crystal. “Tl'etinqox Government 2017 Wildfire Report – A Compilation of Tl'etinqox Residents' Encounters with the Wildfire.” Tsilhqot'in Territory. 2017.

TI'etinqox, across the Tsilhqox (Chilcotin River) travelled north east to Tsibas (a mountain east of the community). The historic Lee's Corner, a restaurant and gas station, had burnt down and the fire was travelling closer to the community. At the same time a fire flanked southwest of the community.

The highway was closed soon after and citizens of TI'etinqox prepared to safeguard their homes and relocate, if necessary to the neighbouring communities of Tsi DelDel (Alexis Creek First Nation) or the community hall in the township of Alexis Creek, BC.

The TI'etinqox health building, band office, gas station and nearby fields became the gathering site for hundreds of people to take refuge. Neighbouring residents, community citizens, wildfire crews and equipment operators gathered to await instruction to fight the fires. Citizens were travelling along the highway to extinguish spot fires that could reignite and saturate burning hydro poles. The fires had compromised the hydro and telephone lines, leaving the communities without communication and electricity. The health building was the only building that had a backup generator, but within hours a secondary power supply was installed for the gas station.

Working from the TI'etinqox health building, the community assigned staff and volunteers to cook for the mass of people. Days into the wildfires, there was no sign of wildfire support. The community established firefighting crews and instructed un-dispatched equipment operators to

begin working on the fires. Chief Alphonse assumed the liability and financial burden to start protecting their community.

An emergency operation centre was established, governed by the TI'etinqox Emergency Operations Plan (TEOP). People were assigned to managerial positions of Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance and the Incident Commander and Emergency Operation Centre Director were established. They assumed their roles and duties as set out in the TEOP. The plan was modelled after provincial processes; however it included information

specific to the community and their traditional governance and processes.

The TEOP became the governing document, the TI'etinqox Emergency Operation Centre (TEOC) became the governing body and the Indian Act Chief and Council system dissolved to ensure the emergency management process would be the sole authority.

“A few weeks after I left Tsilhqot'in territory, I witnessed the fire at the Joe Rich community in Kelowna, BC I refer to this as the Joe Rich fire versus the Joe Alphonse fire. Firefighting response was abundant with water bombers flown every 20 minutes. When I was in TI'etinqox I did not see any.

In Kelowna, they protected the high-valued land but it was not the same in the Tsilhqot'in. The land & territory was not perceived as a high-value area however in wealthy communities, infrastructure could be replaced quicker whereas in a First Nation community it may take several years.”

CHUCK PUCHMAYR
New Westminster City Council

Early into the wildfires, several dignitaries traveled to the community to get a first-hand impression on the state of the situation and to understand the community needs. Representatives from the Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, First Nations Summit and Ministry of Indigenous Relations travelled to meet with TI'etinqox leadership, volunteers and youth. Commitments were made to expedite funds in the event of losses. The dignitaries left with firsthand knowledge of the state of the community and territory and furthered their advocacy for the Nation from a far.

City of New Westminster representative Chuck Puchmayr, City Councillor travelled to Tl'etinqox when the roads were clear, to meet with Chief Alphonse and learn about emergency protection mechanisms that were in place. After the initial meeting, it was deemed safe to transport a fire truck donated from the City of New Westminster to Tl'etinqox. Puchmayr traveled back and forth to the community delivering supplies often.



The wildfires of 2017 strained the relationship between the First Nation Health Authority (FNHA) and the Tl'etinqox Government office. FNHA personnel were instructed by their superiors to stop work out of concern for their personal safety, even though there was no local evacuation order in force in Tl'etinqox. While FNHA staff did what they could to arrange for prescription medicine orders, supplies and deliveries, Tl'etinqox was stripped of essential health care services without notice. Tl'etinqox sought emergency staff to fill the gaps in health services immediately and found health care staff with specialized training in remote medicine willing to travel to them. The exit of FNHA staff left the Tl'etinqox Health Clinic in an impossible position, as it had been operating as the main assembly point of the community.

Several fires in the Tsilhqot'in territory and surrounding Tl'etinqox merged to become the Hanceville Complex Fire and the Plateau Fire. These fires were not contained until mid-September 2017. Tl'etinqox, united as a team, stood their ground to fight the wildfires that continuously threatened to decimate their residences, coming within feet of the village buildings.

Recovery, Over A Year Later

Early on the community recorded damages, and worked diligently to refine their records to accommodate the reporting method requested by government. Tl'etinqox was the first Tsilhqot'in community to seek recovery reimbursement and submitted their first draft of a recovery plan in September 2017. They became an experimental subject in this difficult and time-consuming process. This funding, over a year later, has still not been fully reimbursed adding additional pressures to the community.

Many issues resulting from wildfires affect the basic human needs of Tl'etinqox citizens. Many of these issues could not wait for the recovery process, and the community relied on own-source funding to address them. Additional impacts from the fire, similar amongst all of the communities, include smoke and water damage, melted siding and roofing, rodent, bat and bed bug infestation, demolished fence systems, and broken cattle guards.

Tl'etinqox submitted damage reports to the government for the hay fields, houses, public buildings, and land-based impacts from heavy duty equipment (i.e. fire guards, creek impacts), supported by specialized maps, photos to reflect the damage, and GPS coordinates to identify the exact location. These documents later required further details.

Tl'etinqox submitted documentation to support response costs and any identified recovery needs. Specific to community healing, many proposals were submitted to restore the community in a holistic manner. Activities such as equestrian healing were proposed as the Tsilhqot'in people have a strong relationship with horses. This may be unconventional and challenging to fund under existing government silos, but it is important to the people and their culture.

In addition, therapists for the community developed a mental health impact assessment that documented an increase of negative coping strategies, interpersonal violence, and negative physical body symptoms compounded from stress (Appendix C). Heightened

“First Nation leadership reach out to me when wildfires jeopardize their communities and territories. We give them support and advice, but we all are impaired by government processes and narrow-minded approaches when it comes to including us in emergency management.”

My hope is that the Tripartite Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement will foster practical incorporations of First Nation jurisdiction in emergency management based on the recommendations that we provided living it first hand.

When we are faced with an emergency, we need the resources and infrastructure in place to protect people, wildlife, homes and buildings within the territory.”


CHIEF JOE ALPHONSE

anxiety was expressed in anticipation of the next wildfire season or with the presence of smoke.¹⁵ The demand for both conventional and cultural healing supports far outweighs the current capacity.

Over a year after the wildfires had ended, a team provided immediate and emergency health services to the community. Getting through a year without wildfires in the community forced the workers to settle in and reflect on their current state of wellbeing. Many of them had worked straight through, and without breaks because of not only an overwhelming backlog of regular work, but also the vast needs of the recovery efforts. It is clear that emergency health support is not a one-month endeavor, there is a need for continual support.

In the spring of 2018, as a result of the wildfires, Tl'etinqox had numerous floods. The community pursued Disaster Financial Assistance (DFA) for the secondary losses of hay field production and water source debris management due to flooding. These issues have been flagged in the community recovery plans for rehabilitation.

¹⁵ Hartwick, Lisa. “Tl'etinqox Community Holistic Health Review of Effects Summer Wildfires, 2017.” Tl'etinqox Government Caretaker Lands. 2017



Darell Petal and Robert Elkins fighting fires threatening the Riparian Ranch and IR #18. Left to fight the fires themselves, they worked for 24 hours and saved the Riparian Ranch.

Photograph By: Rebecca Rosette

Reconciliation and Preparation

In April 2018, Tl'etinqox and the RCMP participated in a relationship-building healing circle to begin reconciliation from the 2017 wildfires. The RCMP also attended Indigenous Awareness Training specific to the Tsilhqot'in.

In August of 2018, the New Westminster City Council and the Tl'etinqox Government began the processes to connect the municipality of New Westminster with the First Nation community as a sister city. This relationship is the first of its kind in Canada.

The relationship between New Westminster and Tl'etinqox has been a strong one. The Tsilhqot'in Nation received a donation of two police department vehicles in the summer of 2018. One was used for the Tsilhqot'in Ranger program and the other for Tl'etinqox security program.

The community was immersed in every aspect from response to recovery, and therefore are confident that they are equipped to handle a similar emergency. The Tl'etinqox is prepared to deploy equipment, personnel, and set up a fire camp.

Over the year, staff have undertaken professional development training in all aspects of operating an emergency operations centre and attended wildfire and structural interface training. Furthermore, the knowledge they gained from seeking out the appropriate paperwork in a haste, is now documented for ease of process in the future.

Tl'etinqox Best Practices

- Focused training in firefighting and the functions of an Emergency Operation Centre since 2003.
- Asserted decision to not evacuate the community even when threatened by enforcement personnel because of the understanding of the jurisdictional authority regarding evacuation protocols on First Nation reserves.
- Assessed the community's ability to respond to wildfires and initiated culturally-appropriate emergency processes and safety procedures.
- Adopted community direction about how to handle the emergency situation.
- Accompanied Elders to annual Elders Gathering and situated them in a safe location throughout the wildfire.
- Documented a chronological report on the Wildfire experience.
- Established a process to ensure that spot fires were attended to, hydro poles were consistently saturated along the highway and an overnight crew monitored the wildfires' proximity to the community.
- Assumed governance and financial implications of responding to wildfires immediately when there was no other support available.
- Developed a single decision-making body in Emergency Operations and dissolving Indian Act Chief and Council system to prevent duelling internal authorities.
- Applied knowledge of the traditional territory in decision making.
- Fostered a sister-city support system with a city that had expertise in Emergency Operations and a long-standing relationship with leadership.
- Employed remote medical support staff to assist with health care needs of the community.
- Commenced recovery plan and damage assessment during the end of the wildfires.
- Commissioned a mental health and wellbeing report written by the community therapist.
- Initiated a healing circle jointly with the RCMP to reconcile the damage to the relationship during the wildfires of 2017.



YUNESIT'IN GOVERNMENT

Stone First Nation



Yunesit'in Community View
Photograph By: James Smith

Yunesit'in (Stone) is located approximately 105 kilometres west of Williams Lake, BC, and 8 km south of Hanceville, off of Highway 20 in the Chilcotin Plateau. Its original place-name, 'Gex Nats'inilht'ih,' refers to where rabbits were hunted. The main reserve overlooks the Chilcotin River on the south side. Yunesit'in has 450 registered citizens, 250 of whom reside on the reserve.

Infrastructure on the reserve includes a band office and health centre, elementary school and gym, church, saw mill, youth centre, water reservoir and treatment plant, and three greenhouses. While the band office, school, and greenhouses are new, some of the other infrastructure need upgrades, including the water reservoir, and an old firehall that is no longer properly equipped.

Yunesit'in Government operates a subsidiary forestry company, Yunesit'in Development Enterprises (YDE).

A majority of Yunesit'in's population speaks the original language, Nenqayni Chi. Yunesit'in embraces Tsilhqot'in values and identity in the land, expressed through central activities including cultural camps, horseback riding, and fishing.

Together with Xenigwet'in, and with support from TNG, the Yunesit'in Government launched the Dasiqox Tribal Park Initiative in 2017. In an area known as Nexwagwez'an—"it is there for us"—the tribal park is a proposed land, water and wildlife management area in traditional Tsilhqot'in territory. The communities exercise Indigenous governance over about 300,000 hectares of wilderness and wildlife habitat, bordering a number of existing parks and protected areas.

WILDFIRE FUEL ASSESSMENT

The Hanceville Complex fire burnt within a few hundred metres of Yunesit'in. The fuel loads have been reduced on the south side of the community due to the fire and subsequent salvage logging.

Between the burnt area and the southern side of the community is a band of deciduous trees. Several large hayfields are to the north and west of the community. Lightly burnt Douglas fir stands are located east of the community with an estimated mortality of these stands are less than 30%. The forests lie outside of the immediate Yunesit'in dwelling and community infrastructure.

Robert Gray, Fire Ecologist
R.W. Gray Consulting Ltd.
Tsilhqot'in Wildfire Fuels Assessment

Friday July 7th, an Indication of What Was to Come

In the late afternoon of Friday July 7th, citizens of the Yunesit'in community remember seeing a big plume of smoke directly adjacent to the reserve. Those who were travelling between the reserve and Williams Lake at this time, report seeing at least ten or eleven lightning strikes. As one citizen remembers, "we were at home and first I... heard the thunder coming and the lightning and I was excited because in our tradition when there's lightning it means the salmon is coming up the river." However, within a matter of 30 minutes, the magnitude of what was about to unfold started to become clear.

When the fires began, Yunesit'in staff and leadership were scattered throughout the province—a challenge in coordination, governance, and communication that would persist throughout the wildfires. Most staff were travelling from north of Prince George, BC, where they had been on a work retreat. The Band Manager, with the few staff and summer students who remained at the band office, took immediate action. Very quickly, the band office became its own "little ops centre," which oversaw the provision of essential resources and services that were neglected by the Cariboo Regional District Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) in Williams Lake.

Meanwhile, two of four band councillors were in Vancouver, where they had just

completed a training with the First Nations Education Steering Committee. The Chief and another councillor were in Williams Lake. Nevertheless, by about 5:30 p.m., Chief and Council came to a consensus to issue a Band Council Resolution (BCR) to evacuate the reserve. However, it was intentionally decided that it should be implemented in a moderate and culturally-appropriate way, rather than forcing people to leave—an approach that both the Province and the RCMP would fail to grasp.

Almost right away, existing gaps in community infrastructure became acute. The fire truck, which had fallen into disrepair, had been sold the previous year. Since then, the fire hall had been used primarily for storage. The first night, Lee's Corner, an historic store and gas station burnt down. As the power went down, in an area already without cell phone service, communication was cut off. A dearth of backup generators and no community freezer meant that each household's deep-freeze—containing the yearly supply of hunted game, fish, and other essential foods—began to thaw. Further, the limited capacity of the reserve's water reservoir and treatment plant, already in need of upgrades, became an urgent source of stress. However, when the Chief walked in to the EOC that night, it was clear that his community and their infrastructure needs were not going to rise the top of their list. It

was clear that the majority of response operations would have to be taken on by the band itself.

At the same time, community fire crews were quickly assembled. Under the Yunesit'in Development Enterprise, forestry crews became wildfire crews. However, YDE's Forestry Manager was out of town and the community's most experienced fire fighter was stuck in Williams Lake. With approximately 20 personnel on standby, they were guided by the Forest Manager from a distance. By the time they were sent to their first post that night, the fire was already out of control, and they were told by the Fire Centre to stand down. Meanwhile, others from the community were ready to join crews, but they required fire training and certification first.

If the chaos of that first few hours revealed anything, it was that inconsistent coordination and inter-jurisdictional ambiguity with provincial and federal authorities would continue to pose operational and governance challenges which needed constant troubleshooting, generated instances of undermining the community leadership, created financial uncertainty, and delayed wildfire response and access to necessary resources on the reserve. Nevertheless, community strengths were also revealed: unity among band council, staff, and membership; a willingness to share responsibilities; and a strong commitment to advancing and acting on community authority. Despite many complex challenges, showing great resilience, Yunesit'in was able to respond to and recover from the 2017 wildfires in a way that prioritized community wellbeing.

Wildfire Response

Firefighting By Yunesit'in Crews

Although the community started with inadequate infrastructure, patchy certification, and dispersed leadership, by the time the last of the community fire crews were taken off the line in the first week of November, much had been accomplished.

Starting with about 20 crew members from Yunesit'in, by the end of fires, the Response Coordinator (normally the YDE Forestry Manager) was managing about 50 personnel,

Yunesit'in Wildfire Crews and Canadian Armed Forces Photograph By: Rebecca Rosette



including Yunesit'in crews, those sent from Tl'etinqox, and Emergency Fire Fighter (EFF) crews employed by the Province. While EFF are meant to be a separate entity—provincial employees outside of the Ministry—the Response Coordinator would meet them every morning at 6 a.m. to determine who was going where. While coordination was more efficient this way, it was difficult to manage these extra crews and their food and transportation needs when band resources were already stretched to their limit.

The need to put experienced and inexperienced crew on the line together put a strain on the only two veteran crew leads. Without knowing where the funding was going to come from, one of the band councillors set up certification for emergency crew members within the first couple of weeks.

Many reported that Yunesit'in's infrastructure, food, and equipment needs were not taken seriously at the EOC or the Fire Centre in Alexis Creek. The band office stepped in. As one staff reported, "we were kind of like an EOC here." Due to an issue with the generators, they did this without power for the first few days. Band staff and Council members—and sometimes their family members—were enlisted to buy essential equipment on their own credit cards, or float expenses through YDE. This included two trucks, thousands of feet of hose, cat loops, radios, sprinklers, shovels, etc. When Williams Lake ran out of supplies, equipment was "coming from all over the place," including Kamloops, Quesnel, Prince George, and Alberta. Sometimes, when they had no pumps, they had to rely on the existing reservoir and hydrants, running the water supply low, and at one point letting out a dam in place for irrigation. As the Response Coordinator, Ryan Grady, recalled, "The community received no support from the provincial government probably for the first month. The big struggle was getting fuel for work trucks, fuel for the skidders, fuel for the community and food."

Indeed, food would become a major source of tension. "The fire station in Alexis Creek

was being very prejudice against our firefighters from this reserve here," refusing to provide them food or other supports, despite their being contractually entitled to those things after the first 24 hours of an emergency. In any case, it didn't make sense for Yunesit'in crews to drive to Alexis Creek for each meal at the end of a long work day, and risk getting stopped at a roadblock. Ultimately, the band had to purchase, transport, prepare, and supply food to crews and other community members, all out of the Yunesit'in band office. Food was either donated from Red Cross, donated from individuals' deep freezes, taken from storage at the school, or bought by leadership, staff, and family members from other cities. Before the generator was up and running, 10 cooks utilized just six two-burner Coleman stoves to prepare food for 100 people.

Despite these impediments, in the end it was important for people to come together to eat at the band office. It gave them the opportunity share knowledge of the land and wildfire.

"You know in First Nations communities, food is a way of gathering, food is a way of getting knowledge from each other and helping each other and just sharing stuff or planning and just being together."

**COUNCILLOR JESSICA
SETAH-ALPHONSE**

There were challenging—though sometimes positive—dynamics with the wildfire personnel brought in from outside the community. A blatant disregard of Yunesit'in stewardship and knowledge of the land became a theme with Ministry personnel. Sadly, this meant that the location of cabins used as hunting, fishing, and berry-picking outposts were not protected and many were lost in the fires. Meanwhile, the Yunesit'in crews often had to advocate for themselves so that they were not first to be relieved of

work. One of the Ministry's machine managers recognized this, going so far as to acknowledge they're "the sovereign people" and should be in charge, not pushed out of the way. Unfortunately, this manager was an exception to the rule.

There grew to be a deep mistrust and suspicion of outsider crews' seeming disregard for the territory, fuelled by their delayed or insufficient tree falling, and especially their excessive prescribed burning. It seemed they had no respect for the land.

"They are going to go home somewhere else and they won't have to look at what's left over... the feeling of the land, the appreciation for what was here... they don't have any feeling what so ever."

DUANE HINK

There was one crew member from a ministry unit who bragged openly about burning a thousand hectares, since there weren't enough resources to patrol that area. As incidents like this continued, Yunesit'in crews suspected they weren't abiding the proper burn-off protocol, which the Yunesit'in community knew from long-standing experience with prescribed burning. Worse, some people became suspicious that they were stoking the fires around the reserve intentionally, or letting them burn while they prioritized elsewhere. Proper forest management practices should include burning pine beetle trees in the winter to not let forest fuels build up. As one community member said, "our people have always told Forestry and Ministry people that."

Nevertheless, outsider crews came to rely on Yunesit'in's strong coordination and land-based knowledge. In addition to coordinating with EFF and CRD crews, the Response Coordinator would meet regularly with the Incident Commander, who would change every 14 days. The crews were

invited to Alexis Creek for daily briefings if necessary, and were invited to CRD Incident Command before it was evacuated.

One area where there seemed to be a universal lack of clarity was the role of the military. Both crews, staff, and citizens perceived that the reinforcements were a waste of resources, capacity and specialized equipment. While they were purportedly trained, they tended to leave hot spots behind, requiring community crews to follow after them. Communication was a challenge because only the main officers seemed to have any authority to speak, while the others, those on the ground, "wouldn't listen." In fact, some citizens reported feeling as though they were under additional scrutiny by the military, particularly in the midst of the conflict over the Taseko Mines Ltd. proposal, to which the community is vehemently opposed.

Yunesit'in's experience of the 2017 wildfires cannot be understood without mention of July 17th, the night that the Yunesit'in crews saved the community. They had some warning the day before, as all indications showed that the fire would make a push towards their main reserve. Predicting that the winds would shift around noon, the crew lead advocated that the crews stay on the line all day. As the fire neared the reserve, all of the crews were brought to a field down below the community burial grounds, and told to stand down and get ready to evacuate. At this point, the community crews broke rank and resolved to defend the community. Starting with 25 crew members from Yunesit'in, they were joined by an additional 10 from Tl'etinqox, as well as some local ranchers who came to help. By the time they set up safety guards, wet down houses, and made sure everyone had left, the fire pushed towards a subdivision on the other reserve, having to turn their attention there. They cut a path to lay hose towards the creek above the reserve, set up a pump, and laid hoses wherever needed. By the end of the night no houses were lost.

The worst injury of the wildfire season occurred the next evening. The firefighting



Hanceville Fire View From Yunesit'in Residence

Photograph By: James Smith

crew members had faced overwhelming physical and mental demands. Some of the citizens were unequipped to manage their stress in a healthy and supported manner. An impaired driving accident left one member paralysed. Without truck insurance, and off work hours, this has been an emotionally harrowing experience for family and community, and it has also been financially stressful and onerous to sort out. This proved true for the two, much more minor, incidents that also occurred, both of which were made more complicated by the bureaucratic and communication challenges plaguing the wildfire season. In the first, a crew member got his arm caught in a skidder fan and had to be transported to Kamloops, BC to get treatment, and was off work for 10 months. In another, the crew lead flipped a truck while driving along roads that were soft from the fires and broken up by the heavy machinery constantly driving over them. While his injuries were minor, the decision to fly him to Prince George left him stranded there until extended family could pick him up.

While the crews were kept mostly on the reserve for the first couple of weeks, without sufficient equipment they couldn't accomplish much. After that, they were

often deployed elsewhere, even if another crew—often the EFF—was sent to Yunesit'in, or close by on the Hanceville fire. Being deployed to lower-priority areas gave the impression that their knowledge and skills were undervalued, causing frustration and low morale. Holdups at the provincial level only exacerbated this. For example, quite a few of the crew have tree falling skills, so the YDE submitted a standing offer for danger tree falling. However, when the one person in the Province who could approve contracts went away for 10 days, contracting came to a standstill.

A relationship that may have strengthened as a result of the wildfires is that of Yunesit'in and its surrounding, non-Indigenous neighbours. Yunesit'in crews and citizens helped to protect neighbouring ranches and have helped to rebuild those that were lost. In turn, the crews borrowed or repaired machinery at those ranches, some of whom never had a relationship with the community before. When the community organized a clean-up of all the debris in order to get the irrigation flowing—which is shared among Tsilhqot'in and non-Tsilhqot'in neighbours—quite a few ranchers showed up.

“That’s the first time I’ve seen everyone coming together... I think that’s the start of building a relationship... Hopefully it’s a continuous thing.”

COUNCILLOR JESSICA
SETAH-ALPHONSE

Evacuation

Evacuation became a messy affair for Yunesit'in. The ethic and objective behind the BCR to evacuate was deliberate: it should be implemented in a moderate way, by preparing most people to evacuate, while allowing flexibility so that citizens had agency in deciding if and when to leave. This seemed like a solution that was sensitive to different cultural and community needs. However, as would be revealed, neither the Province nor the RCMP would come to grasp the modest evacuation procedure the band had laid out, nor the authority of the band to issue it in the first place. Without the proper resources, understanding, or support from government, its implementation proved complicated.

Leadership evacuated the community to set an example but also to look after the needs of citizens scattered elsewhere. There was some animosity towards this decision; however the leadership made this choice in hopes of putting themselves in the best position to support the many different needs of the community. Much of the work they were doing to advocate for the community and get supplies was not visible to those who stayed. Some felt that evacuations should have been more strongly enforced, while others disagreed.

However, the RCMP interpreted the BCR like a standard evacuation order, taking a hard line and attempting to force people to leave the reserve. There were multiple accounts of RCMP officers showing extreme disrespect for Elders, swearing at them and yelling at them from outside their homes. It was also reported that the RCMP stated that

the Chief had ordered everyone to evacuate thus invoking the Chief's authority without his consultation. As one Elder reported, RCMP officers didn't seem to care if people had no way of leaving. After these reports, one Councillor ended up taking this up with a Constable. The Councillor suggested that, at the very least, RCMP officers should have a community member who speaks Tsilhqot'in accompany them door-to-door.

Incentives for people not to evacuate included: employment opportunities on reserve such as cooking; apprehension about evacuating to large, non-Tsilhqot'in urban centres, where their usual support networks fell away; the desire to protect livestock and other animals; and the desire to protect their homes, belongings, and land. One staff noted that many of these are already derelict homes that are long overdue for renovation or replacement by INAC. In fact, the band put in a renovation request two years ago for \$2 million, of which they were only provided \$250,000. Given this lack of support for housing on reserve, it can hardly be a surprise that people were skeptical that their homes would be protected.

Starting from the first day, a large group of Yunesit'in citizens camped away from the community fires at nearby Fletcher Lake—a traditional site for healing, sweats, and trout fishing. This posed a challenge for Yunesit'in as it was difficult to connect with the group to ensure their safety. They were sent food, supplies, a satellite phone, and a fire crew member would regularly report to them warning them as to when they should leave. Since there was movement to and from the camp, mostly via backroads, eventually, a helicopter from the CRD Fire Centre and a group of RCMP evacuated them. While the camp did evacuate for a time, some returned, and others joined those staying on the reserve.

Initially, about 60 people stayed on the reserve, including Elders, families, and other members, many of whom were not properly prepared for the emergency situation, aware of tracking protocols or informed of the risk and responsibilities.

Without sufficient support from provincial and federal service agencies, there were not enough community resources and services to support them, and this caused a strain on staff and essential resources needed for the crews. Staff faced significant difficulty transporting food, prescriptions, diapers, medical and other supplies to the community. While there were two people administering first aid at the band office, there was no regular health staff. Gas was restricted and staff, fire crews, and citizens were sometimes stuck on the reserve, or had to transport gas, sometimes dangerously, from elsewhere.

Many who remained in the community evacuated on the day the fire encompassed the reserve, and the total number dropped to 35. By this time, much of the resources and services in the evacuation centres had been exhausted. As the Band Manager reflected, "the system was there to provide supports but it was only there for people who followed the program." This meant that people who arrived late had a more difficult time accessing those supports, with the band "basically running our own emergency social services" and providing food vouchers. For those who had evacuated on the first day of the fires, the band arranged for them to spend the night at Elks Hall in Williams Lake, and after that the high school. But after Williams Lake evacuated, people were strewn between Kamloops and Prince George.

People relayed both positive and negative experiences at the evacuation centres. On the negative side, some felt displaced and uncomfortable in such public and crowded spaces, particularly those with health issues. Some felt that the centres were not culturally sensitive, and recall feeling scrutinized by volunteers and government authorities. This proved true when the band office received three or four phone calls from the Ministry of Children and Family Development, who had flagged a couple of Yunesit'in families in evacuation centres. In each case, the family had never had an issue in the community; as the Band Manager explained, they were under exceptional strain, and without their regular child care and support systems. One family

who needed special needs support for their autistic child found the centre was not appropriate, and could not provide them with the proper care.

On the positive side, people felt safe and taken care of, particularly in Prince George, where most of the evacuated citizens stayed together and were accompanied by one of the band councillors. As Elder Charleen Brigham-Hink reflected, "it was okay because we stuck together, we found other people to have our beds beside, other people from Stone, [when] we were kind of scattered at first." Some remember being handed supplies as soon as they walked in: towels, shampoo, snacks, gas vouchers, etc. Further, there were representatives from banks, the Red Cross, and Employment Insurance (EI) there to help people get set up on EI, or apply for other types of funding and compensation.

Ultimately, what seemed to be the key difference was the ability to stick together as a community, and get consistent advocacy from the band. In the end, the Chief hired a coordinator to phone every individual and offer to get them help, fill out paperwork, arrange lodgings, etc. Another success came when some Elders encountered a volunteer in Williams Lake who spoke Tsilhqot'in. However, it was not part of the regular program; rather, it was lucky that the individual was there at the right time.

Yunesit'in leadership felt the Williams Lake evacuation order was lifted prematurely, while it was still dangerously smoky, and before key services were re-established. The community took a different approach and sought to lift its own evacuation order incrementally until it was safe for more vulnerable citizens to return. To varying success, they worked with evacuation centres to accommodate certain people longer, including Elders and pregnant women. However, the shift from evacuation to alert meant that certain services and resources, including Red Cross funds, were suddenly cut off.

Roadblocks

Yunesit'in met numerous challenges with roadblocks, due to a rotating cast of RCMP

personnel who had different attitudes towards the crews, staff, and other citizens trying to get through. Whenever the fire crews were held up at roadblocks, multiple people had to be called upon to intervene. Often, the crew members' families would call band staff to let them know of the situation, who would then have to track down the right authority to have it dealt with. The Chief, Band Manager, the Response Coordinator had to provide constant "double-verification" to vouch for people to get through. At one point, the fire crews were even turned away, preventing them from getting to the fire line. Once, a nearby rancher arrived and reprimanded the RCMP for delaying the crews. And for a time, the RCMP brought in their former community liaison, which made things go more smoothly. However, incidents like these encouraged the use of back roads, the safety of which were often unknown.

Decision-Making, Coordination and Communication

With so much upheaval, coordination, communication, and decision-making within the community itself, among Tsilhqot'in

communities, and with many different governmental authorities—including EMBC, CRD, INAC, FNESS, Red Cross, RCMP, FNHA, and the Military—posed significant challenges, exacerbating operational gaps and jurisdictional conflicts, and delaying information.

While the governments were making decisions according to a certain hierarchical order of operations, Yunesit'in uses a participatory, consensus-based decision-making process. This meant that Yunesit'in would be left out of critical decisions, or left in the dark on decisions of which it needed to be involved in. On the one hand, the non-Indigenous Response Coordinator reported mainly positive interactions with the Ministry, whether it was the contract fire crews, EFF, fire centres, or the permitting process. However, the Chief reported having to constantly educate new personnel who arrived, and repeatedly remind PREOC where Yunesit'in is situated. Playing go-between between the community and government, there were countless examples of coordination breakdown.

Many of these challenges seemed to arise as a result of the fact that government agencies



Overlooking Chilcotin River
Photograph By: James Smith

weren't receptive to talking to staff or citizens directly; rather, the Chief was the sole authority who had any clout. In some cases, some Yunesit'in staff preferred to rely on the Chief or the Band Manager for this, as they feel uncomfortable talking to government. Clearly, consistent and long-term trust and lines of communication need to be cultivated, so that in an emergency situation, those relationships are already established. One first step was a meeting held in September 2017, following the fire, which included nine support agencies and during which a lot of issues were put on the table. Quite a few fire crew and citizens recommended that many more of these meetings should take place.

Due to evacuations, the band had to disassemble and re-establish 'satellite' offices out of which to run emergency operations on three different occasions. They first established themselves at the TNG negotiations office in Williams Lake, where they developed an organizational chart and order of operations. When Williams Lake was evacuated on July 15th, they were given a space at Thompson Rivers University (TRU) in Kamloops. However, after a battle with TRU's Wi-Fi, they pulled out and brought the equipment back to the reserve. Each move was stressful for staff, who were already stretched too thin. Nevertheless, they successfully ran local emergency operations for the community.

The Chief took on responsibility for communication, including with government, community members, media, and the public. On the reserve, only one household with access to a generator had Wi-Fi, and this became the de facto communications hub. Facebook played an important role in providing updates. However, any lapse in updates would fuel rumours and misinformation, so posting regularly became a priority. Local media also began to rely on Yunesit'in's posts for updates on the situation, and even used photos from members' personal pages in their news stories. Keeping up with media requests proved too onerous on the Chief's time, and hiring a media liaison would have been beneficial.

It became the responsibility of one councillor to keep track of where people were and how they were faring, relying on scouts in Prince George, Quesnel, and Kamloops to report back on who was where. With people constantly moving around, the councillor would get calls all hours of day and night, from people trying to track down their family members. In addition to advocating for their needs, wherever they may be, the band had to make sure that those on social assistance—about 40-50 people—were still receiving funds.

Coordination with other Tsilhqot'in communities was also a challenge. Inundated with emergency burdens, each community operated largely in isolation from each other, and knowledge sharing, even around the bureaucratic and financial processes, was limited. There were successes when the nation did come together. TNG set up daily calls, during which each community could check in, and talk about any new issues they might be facing. CRD also set up a conference call, which would happen back-to-back with the TNG calls, during which support needs, weather updates, key contacts, and other information would be shared.

Recovery

Disaster Compensation

Uncertainty as to which essential expenses would be reimbursed and by which agency created significant undue stress. This had a direct impact on decision-making, causing leadership to oscillate between exercising extreme caution, or taking a financial leap of faith, in hopes that expenses would eventually be repaid. The band and YDE had to bankroll expenses—everything from paying fire crews' wages, to equipment, to food, medical supplies, and accommodations. While they knew that at least some expenses had to be covered by EMBC, and that INAC holds federal reserve funds for these situations, these were not initially made available. After expending YDE's full line of credit, the band had

to open an additional line of credit as a backstop. As the Response Coordinator recalls, "you can't get paid... as fast as you spend it, so you are having to bankroll hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt just to keep the ball rolling."

Despite verbal assurances given to the Chief from the federal Minister of Indigenous-Crown Relations, Carolyn Bennett, that all expenses would be covered, in reality, this has not borne out. The process for reimbursement has taken much longer than expected, while recovery plans have not been addressed adequately or in a timely manner. There are still major portions of reimbursement and recovery funding that is outstanding and under review at the provincial and federal levels, over a year later.

Once the wildfires were better under control, financial scrutiny tightened up. Everything that was spent has come under a microscope. With a new finance representative every 12 days, each has different expectations and a different interpretation of the same form. The Response Coordinator often had to resubmit everything, or face the Wildfire Branch unilaterally reinterpreting the timesheets he submitted.

Conflicting instructions from FNESS, EMBC, and INAC caused staff to re-write and re-submit reimbursement forms on multiple occasions. After hours of wasted work and frustration, by late September an individual from each of the three agencies visited the band office to guide Yunesit'in through the forms. However, a box of invoices that had been sent to the Province was lost in the mail, and staff had to go down to Victoria with the originals. Others, which INAC took with them from the band office are still outstanding, and it is unclear where they are. Yunesit'in did receive a "first batch" of reimbursement funding in December, for emergency on-call staff, including cooks and security. However, they haven't received anything for the second batch, which includes supplies and equipment, and still a third and fourth batch are also outstanding. Ultimately, this was far too

much work for one finance person, who had to resume regular duties to keep the band's operations running. Eventually the Executive Assistant stepped in, but they realized they should have hired someone to take this on.

In making the transition from response to recovery, Yunesit'in has continued to gamble on the assumption that funding that has been promised will eventually come in, while going into debt in the meantime. But, for something as simple as rebuilding fencing, where funding approval was supposed to expedite, these funds still had not come through a year after the fires. In October 2017, the community had to apply for funding from the Provincial government to hire a Recovery Manager. By October 2018 the funding still had not been provided to Yunesit'in. After going into debt to draft a Recovery Plan, the Band Manager had to lay off those he had hired to help him draft that plan. Recovery work is hugely time consuming, and the Band Manager still spends almost 50% of his time towards it. In large part, this is because recovery funds are still in negotiation with the Province. Leadership had hoped this would be funded well before summer 2018, so the community could begin preparations for the next fire season. Instead, the government continues to negotiate down the community's Recovery Plan—an extensive and thorough document, which was drafted in close consultation with Yunesit'in leadership and membership.

Rehabilitation

Yunesit'in is participating in the rehabilitation work that has begun on Crown land through a joint venture between the two communities of Yunesit'in and Tl'esqox and a local firm, Celtic Engineering. The company, Elhdaqox, holds a contract to lead rehabilitation in one of the "zones" of the Hanceville fire complex. However, without a territorial land use plan, leadership feels this work lacks long-term vision, according to Tsilhqot'in authority.

In the meantime, Federal funding has not been set up for comprehensive



Fields Surrounding Yunesit'in

Photograph By: James Smith

rehabilitation work on reserves. While certain projects have begun, money seems to come slower on reserves, and in bits and pieces. Not knowing whether or when funding is coming, planning becomes impossible, and there are missed economic opportunities, particularly now that the field season is over. Again, they had to spend YDE money or ask the band to borrow money, paying interest on it, just to make repairs, buy hay, and cut firewood. There is a strong desire for the community to set its own priorities and choose the groups it collaborates with in rehabilitation work. While certain areas have been identified and prescriptions written, there are still lots of decisions to be made, and a lack of clear expectations from the federal government prolongs this uncertainty.

Other Community Impacts

Over a year later, the cultural impacts of the wildfires are still coming to light. The community members rely on traditional foods, including fish and deer, and so, as one councillor put it, “not being able to go out and practice that, so that really affected the yearly supply of food for our people and our community members.” Compounded with the loss of the foods they had frozen from previous seasons, many households were driven to depend on food donations. Meanwhile, things have become more dangerous on reserve, with more cougar, grizzly and brown bear sightings, in search of prey. While the vast majority berry and plant bushes are gone—including those traditionally used as medicine—the community was lucky in that the area people traditionally gather tea didn’t burn.

Water treatment continues to be a huge concern, and the community had to implement a boil water advisory until long after the evacuation was lifted. The fire season proved that the need to repair the existing reservoir and water treatment plant and expand its capacity is urgent. However, INAC has only committed to repairing the damage directly caused by the 2017 wildfires, not to improving the facility to properly meet the community’s needs, particularly in the case of a future fire.

There have been residual impacts on other areas of community development as well, including delayed projects such as school and greenhouse construction, which band leadership then has to justify to its funding agencies. Meanwhile, with so many fences burnt and delays in the recovery programs to rebuild them, loose livestock have eaten up the hay they people rely on for income, causing lost revenue.

Mental Health and Community Wellbeing

In addition to the ongoing and chronic physical health impacts of the wildfire smoke, residual trauma has created an acute need for mental health supports, addictions counselling, and community healing. There is evidence of PTSD both among those who were working outside community and those who stayed and were exposed to the wildfire, as each experience was traumatic for different reasons. Burn out was a big issue for those who were working through the fires, many of whom haven't had a break since. Unfortunately, one healing initiative—a horse-riding trip focused on

“If we aren't taught these reflections and how to look at things you might not have seen some of the blessings that came along with it; it just seemed like chaos.”

DUANE HINK

cultural activities and recovery—only received half the funding requested by the band.

Part of the work that needs to be done is also to mark the ceremonial element and importance of fire in Tsilhqot'in culture.

Indeed, while the depth of the community's resilience was demonstrated, and there is a profound sense of pride in what the community was able to do together, some of the lessons, including the cultural and spiritual significance may have been missed.

Mitigation and Preparedness

Infrastructure and Capacity

While there was an existing emergency management plan going into the wildfires—and a comprehensive one at that—the community was not prepared for an event of this magnitude. The existing plan needs careful review to reveal where it did work, where it fell short, which contacts need to be updated and any other adjustments that need to be made. But most importantly, it must be made as clear as possible so that a diversity of community members are able to implement it, including, but not limited to, the addition of templates for evacuation orders and alerts and procedures for checking on Elders.

Further, leadership, staff, and citizens all need training and education to prepare for the next emergency. But this needs to be accompanied by more holistic strategic planning and year-round capacity building at the community level so that both leadership and citizens feel better prepared and more secure going into future wildfires. The fire crews have to maintain updated

training and certifications and continually record lessons learnt from the wildfire experience.

In addition to capacity building, the band has the need for an expanded credit limit, and/or assurance that it has expedient access to emergency reserve funds. Preparedness should also include planning around flooding and landslides as a result of wildfires. Finally, the community has identified a long list of hard infrastructure and equipment that is needed. Staff and leadership are unanimous in the opinion that it would be better for the band office to own this equipment, rather than having to wait for Ministry to provide supplies or approval.

“We did all that, without a lot of help, and I think the real pat on that back is that... disaster brings out the best and worst, people pull together and the staff for sure pull[ed] together.”

DWAYNE EMERSON
Yunesit'in Band Manager



Fires Burning Behind Yunesit'in Residences
Photograph By: James Smith

Yunesit'in Best Practices

- Achieved collective and consensus decision making despite leadership being strewn throughout the Province, and despite moving offices three times.
- Set out clear roles and responsibilities among Chief and Council and staff.
- Established an ad hoc 'ops centre' out of the band office.
- Initiated and managed community-led wildfire response, by drawing on strong coordination and land-based knowledge.
- Smoothly rolled forestry crews into fire crews and arranged training and certification.
- Assembled fire crews with a mixture of experience, including veteran crew members who could provide mentorship to those with less experience.
- Provided essential services, support, and food to fire crews and citizens who stayed on the reserve.
- Developed a culturally-appropriate approach to evacuation and re-entry.
- Communicated with, supported, and advocated for evacuated citizens in Prince George and Kamloops, and when possible stayed together and provided accompaniment.
- Bankrolled all expenses despite uncertainty as to how and when they would be reimbursed.
- Provided constant, up-to-date information to citizens, media, TNG, and other levels of government.
- Liaised with all levels of government on response and recovery.
- Strengthened relationships with non-Tsilhqot'in neighbours, and worked together to rebuild ranches and clean up debris.
- Effectively asserted, maintained, and practiced community leadership and authority in all aspects of wildfire response, community services, and recovery.
- Gained a network of governmental and local contacts.
- Brought in key assets and services, such as FNESS, early on in the emergency.



TL'ESQOX FIRST NATION

Toosey First Nation



Riske Creek Complex Wildfire
Photograph By: James McLure

Tl'esqox is located 40 kilometres west of Williams Lake, BC. Due to the proximity to Williams Lake, BC the citizens can easily travel to the city for employment, supplies and education.

The population on and off reserve of registered citizens is over 360 people. The majority of the citizens reside on Tl'esqox IR#1, the closest reserve to Highway 20. There are a few homes located on IR#2, which is farther from the main reserve and also bordered by the Chilcotin Military Block – Lot 7741. Tl'esqox has had longstanding conflicts with the Department of National Defense and the operations that take place on the military block. There have been several documented requests for the ordinances to be cleaned up and a complete transfer of land returned to Tl'esqox.

Two other reserves, IR#1A and 3 make up the remaining reserves identified by the Indian Act. However, Elders' teachings have indicated that larger parcels of lands that Tl'esqox citizens dwelled on or used have been omitted from records and that they do not agree with lines segregating their communities.

Tl'esqox is associated with two Nation-level organizations - the Tsilhqot'in National Government and the Carrier Chilcotin Tribal Council. Tl'esqox is not a signatory to the Aboriginal Fishing Agreement with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and had not entered a Community Tripartite Agreement (CTA) with Province and Federal Government for policing on the reserve. Much work needs to be done to strengthen the relationship between Tl'esqox and the BC and Canadian Governments.

The community's public works, band-operated gas station and convenience store are run through Toosey Enterprises. Chilcotin Plateau Enterprise Ltd., a forestry silviculture company, runs many of the business operations at the Toosey Old School. The Toosey Old School, an 'old school' renovated in 2014 to become a multi-use building that houses trades, skills training, meeting rental space, sawmilling operations and various business operations generates significant employment and revenue for the community.

A new health centre and band office was constructed and has a kitchen and meeting space. Most recently in the summer of 2018 the community opened a new multigenerational community learning centre. The learning space will house children, youth, adults and Elders in an integrated learning and culturally-responsive atmosphere.

WILDFIRE FUEL ASSESSMENT

The community with the majority of dwellings in Tl'esqox lies within grasslands. There are patches of aspen north and east of the community and some are within a few metres of infrastructure. North east of the community Douglas fir, low-to-moderate in density, covers a smaller area and is mostly distant from structures.

Douglas fir stands create significant forest cover approximately 1km west of the main reserve and surround the other reserves. Although this forest partially burnt in 2017 Riske Creek Complex fire there are still significant areas that remain heavily forested.

Robert Gray, Fire Ecologist
R.W. Gray Consulting Ltd.
Tsilhqot'in Wildfire Fuels Assessment

The Tl'esqox Experience

On the evening of July 7, 2017, the community received an alarming call from the British Columbia Wildfire Service that Tl'esqox was under evacuation alert. The leadership met initially together and then with staff to devise a plan. Overlooking the community's outdated emergency operations plan, made many years previously, the leadership addressed the emergency in real time.

On that same day, a fire northeast of the Williams Lake Airport caused the evacuation of the airport and the Cariboo Fire Centre. The Cariboo Fire Centre made an announcement that they were forced to log off from their communication

channels even though multiple fires were progressing. Their last message, before the Fire Service went dark, included instruction to wildfire interface crews to do the best that they can and to stay safe.

Tl'esqox's wildfire personnel were dispatched to assist in the fires surrounding Williams Lake, moving them away from the community. Meals were not provided to them, so support staff was sent in to cook for them for one week. The on-reserve health and band office was opened to provide supports to their citizens and act as

a central place for gathering. The leadership established a list of citizens that would need to travel to and from the community to provide essential services because roadblocks were already underway.

The Toosey Old School was opened to provide a base location to muster and

develop an approach to fight the fires. The site was equipped with basic services necessary to operate as a pop-up emergency operations centre.

After mere hours, it became clear that the community and local residents were on their own. Craig Kennedy, the Manager of Toosey Old School, connected with wildfire personnel

and received acknowledgement that the community would not receive support from them at that time and therefore the government gave authorization to implement an industry-led fire suppression strategy. Toosey, supported by local residents and business operators equipped with heavy-duty machinery and a locally owned helicopter started by building a fire guard around the Riske Creek Complex Fire. After one week they finally received external assistance.

At the Toosey Old School, they were able

"In each community we came together to fight the wildfires and provide services to our people."

The fire mobilized us, building strength. We will always be here to protect our land and help one another to do that."

The Nation has become even stronger now."

CHIEF FRANCIS LACEESE



Riske Creek Residents Assisting with Moving Livestock
 Photograph By: Monica Lamb-Yorski - Williams Lake Tribune

to provide an extensive array of services: providing meals, unloading trucks with heavy duty equipment, and connectivity via phones and internet. The site also had safe and secure storage spaces, large areas for gathering to eat, and a backup generator powerful enough for the whole school. Staff were actively working to assist by whatever means necessary.

For days, Kennedy sought a contract to host a fire camp, but it was difficult to overcome the perception that the community was ill-equipped to administer the services necessary. Invaluable time was wasted

on persuading government officials to understand the capabilities of staff at the Toosey Old School were credible.

Meanwhile, in the community, various tasks to safeguard buildings and dwellings were being conducted. Sprinklers were placed

on the roofs of houses, water hoses were hooked up and tested, and yards were cleared from debris.

On the evening of July 11, 2017, the Chief and Council signed an evacuation order. A

number of police cruisers drove door-to-door to give citizens notice. A council member had offered to assist by talking with each household and accompanying the RCMP to provide translation services and a familiar face, so as not to scare the home owners. At each house, the council member spoke with citizens, not knowing that at the same time

ribbons were being placed on porches to represent which houses had children in them, for apprehension purposes if necessary.

These acts further strained Tl'esqox's relationship with the RCMP. A Community

"To hear the last announcement from the BC Wildfire Cariboo Fire Centre that they were signing off and that we were all on our own was striking.

I was really proud of our crew, they really managed well. They were the first to go in when the Cariboo Fire Centre was evacuated. Throughout the entire summer we had 30 firefighters working around the clock."

CRAIG KENNEDY
 TOOSEY OLD SCHOOL MANAGER

Tripartite Agreement (CTA) which would enable the RCMP to provide services on the reserve with a memorandum of understanding has never been signed by the community. Reconciliation efforts are required as well as strong protocols need to be established before the Tl'esqox leadership feel comfortable with these types of agreements.

Tl'esqox leadership has expressed that they would not sign an evacuation order again unless it contained a recognition of Tl'esqox authority over their people and does not enable arrests or child apprehension.

After the evacuation on July 11th, a smaller delegation of Tl'esqox leadership and staff stayed behind and operated from the government and health office to keep communication lines open to field continual calls and emails. Immediately, a community check-in system was established to ensure that everyone was tracked regardless of whether they were staying or evacuating. If they chose to travel, the check-in system was alerted when they arrived at their next destination.

People were asked to refrain from posting images of the fire on Facebook to prevent spreading unintentional fear. At times, the images could look more extreme and closer to the community than they were, and incited numerous calls from worried evacuees who had seen these graphic images in the media. To provide accurate information to citizens, selected staff would travel the roads to assess the fires frequently throughout the day. If there were any changes during the evacuation, citizens were updated via phone or in person.

Leadership and staff who needed to evacuate visited the Emergency Operations

Centres in the cities of Prince George and Kamloops to attend to citizens' needs and keep in constant contact with those who remained. This was a busy job because people needed phone access, transportation, and assistance with completing forms.

On July 20, 2018, the Toosey Old School was finally contracted to operate as a fire camp. Various wildfire crews were already using the site, which established a basis for the decision. Camp facilities, complete with wash trailers, a kitchen, and sleeping quarters were delivered to the site. The camp housed 250 people.

Initially, the Toosey Old School had been threatened by the wildfires and risked evacuations. Eventually a fire guard was built around the building area, and structural protection unit crews placed water bladders and sprinklers around the

whole facility. The system would have saved the building from wildfires, but these were eventually removed and placed in different areas around the Tsilhqot'in territory.

One day, the Cariboo Fire Centre issued an evacuation order for the Toosey Old School. The Riske Creek Complex Fire had already travelled through the area two times at this point. This time, it came back and burned through both local residences at Riske Creek and Tl'esqox citizen, and outbuildings. The Toosey Old School was providing essential services and Kennedy later confirmed with the Cariboo Fire Centre that they should not have had to evacuate and that the orders were incorrect.

Once the fires stabilized, Kennedy held a meeting with Tl'esqox citizens, neighbouring residents and industry-led wildfire personnel. Without official

"I feel very upset that the RCMP placed ribbons on houses without my knowledge of what they were doing. The RCMP were deceitful to me and my people were upset with me – they thought I was actively assisting the RCMP with plotting the apprehension of our children.

We were there to help for our peoples' safety and it worked against us. It was an abuse of their power."

COUNCILLOR GINA JOHNNY

ministerial wildfire personnel, they proceeded with a meeting based on the available maps and the most-current information. The ever-changing fires encouraged a constant need to seek as much information as possible to manage the risk. This information was so scarce that even enforcement staff at roadblocks often sought an update from him.

The fire camp was thought to be both a blessing and a curse. Once the fire camp was established at the school, the decision-making power had been removed from those who had been successfully managing the fire in the industry-led crew.

There was an overwhelming concern that the fire was exacerbated because new strategies were employed and backburning was prioritized without local input. An additional growing fire camp was also developed less than 10 kilometres away. The Toosey Old School Fire Camp soon began to dwindle in attendance, without any notice, which became an inconvenience for logistical planning. Eventually, the fire protection group slowly diminished as well. Staff, whose services were no longer necessary, were encouraged to apply to the other fire centres, however they were not hired.

Some community primary functions continued to operate, while at the same time, additional processes put added strain on the remaining staff. Bookkeeping was maintained to ensure accurate tracking and reporting.

Initially, to preserve the fuel supply, the Toosey gas station provided fuel to residents and workers in moderation. After appropriate permits were secured, the local Petro-Canada commercial station continued regular shipments of fuel, which could be then sold to everyone without restriction. Supplies and food from outside of Williams Lake were delivered to the community and fire centre.

Tl'esqox cooks and staff were required to travel to and from the community and the Toosey Old School, a five-kilometre

distance, along the highway. Since enforcement personnel at the roadblocks were inconsistent, many times these delivery drivers were denied access. A substantial amount of effort was put into obtaining official Cariboo Fire Centre documentation even when the Tl'esqox leadership authorization to travel should have sufficed. The evacuation order reduced leadership's ability to provide circumstantial access to the community. As a result, community citizens perceived that the Tsilhqot'in leadership had lost authority, when in fact, they never stopped providing services to fight for the protection of their lands and people.

The Compounded Issues on the Land

Over fifteen years ago, Chief Francis Lacease, with other citizens from his community, blockaded industry at Bald Mountain from clear cutting a large area. The dispute ended with a court decision that the Tl'esqox should work together with the industry on an acceptable plan for harvesting.

For years the community maintained its stand to halt mass resource extraction. But as a result of the 2017 wildfires, industry proceeded with accelerated logging extracting a significant amount of the salvageable burnt timber. This is frustrating for leadership since they have long established their wish to work with industry to be involved in planning for forest management within their territory.

The citizens were not surprised that massive wildfires came, and many expressed dismay toward the government and industry's past management of the forests. Over countless years, their advice has not been regarded.

The Chilcotin Military block, located within Tl'esqox caretaker area, was intensively impacted by the 2017 fires. It has long since been a concern because the dense fir belt was thought to be stressed by military activity throughout the years. Tl'esqox has had a strained relationship with the

Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) since the military block restricts access to significant sites important to the community citizens. Breakdowns in communication amplified with the community's' discontent with military activity impacting the forest and the wildlife. This led to a disrespectful relationship between the CAF and Tl'esqox. Caravans of CAF recruits would travel to the training grounds during the evenings without giving notice to the community for training endeavors. Senior officials that did speak with Tl'esqox leadership would

turnover quickly and therefore a consistent interaction could not be maintained. Additionally, significant amounts of technical information would be sent to Tl'esqox without the funding to review the documents appropriately.

In recent years, the CAF has made attempts to bridge their relationship with Tl'esqox. They have rented space from the Toosey Old School to provide simulated military training and have offered more notice when travelling to the military block.

"I am considered a criminal under Canadian Law because we were in court for blockading the military protecting our territory. The military block is on our title land and we want the ordinates cleaned up and the land returned to us.

Our people are familiar with the military, but when I saw an army tank travel down our main reserve road during the wildfires of 2017, it surprised me. Some of our people have bad memories of that time.

Protocols need to be established for RCMP and military to lay out our ground rules."

CHIEF FRANCIS LACEESE

Tl'esqox Best Practices

- Established an emergency operation process through consistent Chief and Council communication.
- Established cooking team to support and travel with firefighters since they did not receive access to meals.
- Opened the band office to create a muster point and gathering point for citizens while Chief and Council assumed roles in emergency management.
- Commenced basic emergency operations at the Toosey Old School.
- Launched an Industry-led fire suppression strategy with the support of the local residents.
- Initiated a BC Wildfire Service Fire Camp offering meals, communication connectivity, support staff, heavy-duty equipment, large indoor gathering areas and back-up power.
- Persuaded BC Wildfire Service to accept the Toosey Old School as a fire camp through continual advocacy as to the suitability of the infrastructure and services.
- Coordinated community approach to working together through an emergency situation (i.e. prepare houses for wildfire protection, hiring on-call cooks, etc.)
- Escorted RCMP through the community when they arrived on the reserve.
- Maintained constant communication networks for citizens who were evacuated.
- Established a check-in system for citizens who chose to stay and those who chose to evacuate.
- Inhibited negative communication through limiting Tl'esqox citizens from posting graphic wildfire images which would scare citizens.
- Provided updates to community, local non-First Nation residents and enforcement personnel about the state of the wildfires equipped with detailed and sophisticated maps developed by Tsilhqot'in National Government.
- Maintained fuel services.



TSI DELDEL FIRST NATION

Redstone, Alexis Creek First Nation



Flight Over Chilcotin
Photograph By: Grand Chief Ed John

The Tsi Deldel (Redstone) community is located approximately 177 kilometres west of Williams Lake on Highway 20. The name of the community depicts the red rocks surrounding the community. Oral teachings account that the Alexis Creek First Nation, once governed by Chief Alexis, was located 63 kilometres south on Highway 20 where the township of Alexis Creek, BC is now located. Once settlers moved in they moved the First Nations peoples to farther west parcels of land. Nevertheless, Tsi Deldel is situated amongst beautiful mountains, meadows, creeks and rivers. Tsi Deldel is the second largest Tsilhqot'in community with around 700 people as registered citizens as well as 38 designated reserves (Indian Act).

Tsi Deldel operates many successful businesses. The numerous economic and social ventures include Tsi Del Del Enterprises Ltd., Redstone Gas Bar, Crazy Horse Energy Drink, Tsi Del Del Resources, and ?Eniyud Community Forests. The community hosts the Redstone Rodeo and Gymkhana yearly, which is a BC Rodeo Association sanctioned event.

Tsi Del Del Enterprises Ltd., a joint venture logging company between Alexis Creek First Nation and partner Tolko Industries Ltd., established in 1992, has grown to be the largest logging company in the Williams Lake area.

Tsi Deldel citizens speak their language and practice their culture regularly. Traditional gatherings are held yearly in the summers where the people hunt, fish and gather, and language and story teaching is shared.

Within the community, there is a band office, health building, Kindergarten to Grade 9 school, cultural centre, daycare, gas station, and an outdated and unused fire centre. Many of the citizens are farmers and ranchers.

WILDFIRE FUEL ASSESSMENT

Tsi Del Del's main inhabited reserve is located on both sides of Highway 20 in the Central Chilcotin. The Northern part of the community has a grassland buffer for approximately 100 metres and has an open slope dominated by Douglas fir. Surface fuels are moderate-to-light in both the grasslands and the forested slopes.

South of the highway, the forest fuel within the community is light however on the edge of the residences forests are within metres of structures. This second growth lodgepole pine forest has discontinuous crowns and low-to-moderate surface fuels. The many other reserves are surrounded by older Douglas fir and lodgepole pine forests which have continuous crowns and an abundance of ladder fuels.

Robert Gray, Fire Ecologist
R.W. Gray Consulting Ltd.
Tsilhqot'in Wildfire Fuels Assessment

The Tsi Deldel Experience

While the fires were igniting in several areas throughout the Central Interior of British Columbia, the Tsi Deldel community began to see signs of fires starting to surround their reserves. The Chezacut fire began on July 7, 2017, approximately 50 kilometres north east from the reserve. The Kleena Kleene fire also started that day and was around 40 kilometres further west from the village. The community was placed on evacuation alert.

In the first three days, the community members prepared for a potential evacuation.

Efficiencies were created to eliminate overlapping duties. A community nurse cared for the medical needs of the community and ensured the delivery of medicines.

A team traveled door-to-door frequently through the weeks to collect details of people remaining in homes, while reinforcing the need to maintain communication in the event of leaving the area. It was important to discuss the many restrictions on travel with the citizens.

"We did what we could with what we had in the community and came together during the 2017 fires. It was a learning experience and we hope to never go through that again."

This past year in 2018, we have been able to become more involved in the wildfires. Our logging company has a skilled workforce and we have many citizens that can do the jobs."

Tsi Deldel will be recognized for our authority over our lands."

CHIEF OTIS GUICHON

Otis Guichon, now Chief of Tsi Deldel, was a council member at the time and had worked in operations and maintenance for years in the community. Chief Guichon's initial steps ensured that backup generators were functioning for the community water treatment plant, gas bar, and band offices. Chief Guichon became a point person for communications with government, the TNG, and community members at large. Tsi Deldel connected with the Cariboo Emergency Operations Centre call-in for daily updates, and frequently connected with staff at the Tsilhqot'in National Government.

The Tsi Deldel Finance Manager immediately worked to connect with Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Canada (INAC) to seek paperwork to access the emergency funding from Emergency Management British Columbia (EMBC). Once a State of Emergency was declared they were able to start this process.

Daily financial transactions were maintained to keep the community operational. Financial assistance was provided to citizens who were caught in between roadblocks and not able to get to Emergency Response Centres. Supplies and food were constantly being ordered. In haste, and with several people on the ground, it was difficult to maintain all receipts and proofs of payments. At times, such receipts were misplaced, and resulted in a loss of reimbursement for large portions of expenditures during the wildfires.

The Redstone Gas Bar maintained services full-time. The gas bar had a backup generator, and therefore service was not interrupted by the power failures. Fuel was limited to ensure that there was enough until deliveries were stable.

As prepared as the community was, it was not prepared for an influx of evacuees relocated from local Tsilhqot'in communities. Supplies, food, and lodging essentials were not readily available; however, the community pulled together to offer a comfortable setting for everyone at the community centre and some were placed within homes in the community.

Tsi Del Del Enterprises Ltd., the largest logging company in the region, was logging at Minor Lake, BC, at the first signs of wildfires on July 7, 2017, but lightning strikes had shut down the operations for the day. The fire began to progress aggressively.

Equipment had been staged for a few days on the Tl'etinqox reserve and was available immediately when dispatched. The company foreman with backup equipment was instructed by Chief Alphonse to create a fire guard around the Tl'etinqox reserve

with backup equipment. TDDE manager, Phil Theriault connected with the Alexis Creek Ministry of Forests staff for approval to assist where possible, but to proceed safely.

The company employs over 80 staff and contractors and therefore was able to organize efficiently with experienced equipment operators familiar with Tsilhqot'in territory. Through their joint

venture partner, they were able to attain permits to travel back to Williams Lake and for those who needed it, take wildfire training.

Meanwhile, a community councillor and previous Chief, Percy Guichon was coordinating the wildfire crews and registering them to work on the local fires. This was quite a process to ensure that the crews were

established with safety equipment and reliable vehicles that were registered with the BC Wildfire Service.

Within three days, the Cariboo Fire Centre deployed a fire camp in Puntzi Lake, B.C. However, in Chezacut, the fire was smaller in comparison and had burned quietly with little response for one week. Ervin Charleyboy, then Chief of Tsi Deldel, traveled to Chezacut to assess the situation and assisted by extinguishing fire spots along the road. When he stopped at the Chezacut Ranch, he was startled to find that there was no assistance for the residents. He immediately sent Tsi Deldel firefighters to help them. Heavy duty equipment and water trucks from the logging company further supported the effort.

Several days into the wildfires, a temporary First Nations Liaison Officer working at the Puntzi Lake fire camp, by

“At the beginning, the Puntzi Fire Centre was disorganized, but it was to be expected. On the safety front they did make some sound decisions. The fires were as tall as buildings in some areas. Like it or not, it is a pretty humbling experience. There would have been casualties if we had people out there without communication or the proper equipment.

I can see a strong emergency response if there was a partnership between the people that know the territory and the government – it is a complement of skills. At the fire in Kleena Kleene, we built the roads that we logged and we should have been considered a bigger asset to them.”

**PHIL THERIAULT, MANAGER
TSI DEL DEL ENTERPRISES LTD.**



Sun Through the Smoke
Photograph By: TNG

happenstance ran into the Tsi Deldel crew at the Redstone Gas Bar. His position was going to be vacant soon and he urged Tsi Deldel citizens to apply to fill the position. After lengthy discussions attesting to his qualifications, Councillor Guichon was officially named the liaison between the fire centre and the community.

The Fire Centre's shift changed every two weeks, creating a lack of continuity and follow through. TDDE had company staff, contractors, and equipment spread between four fire complexes: Hanceville, Chezacut, Kleena Kleene, and Anaham Lake. It was difficult to maintain Safe Certification protocols and appropriate safety measures with such a geographical span and different Incident Commanders at each site. On the two-week shift turn over, Theriault pulled the company operators together in one crew

so that he could manage the crews with safety measures employed by the company.

Even though the company had an extensive amount of safety gear, vehicles, and heavy-duty equipment, they did not have all the tools necessary to fight fires. The company suppliers shipped in truckloads of pumps and hoses. Those that were able to work on the fires did not have access to vehicles, but TDDE was able to provide them with company vehicles, so they could deploy firefighting crews.

Advice was often given to the provincial wildfire personnel, however it was not often heeded. The community expressed that they were kept in the dark. For example, during helicopter flights for aerial views of the land, community assessors observed that other aircrafts were backburning in

areas. Their requests for clarification were often met with silence.

The fires were moving closer to the logging site where there was still equipment and logged wood left from the first day of the fires. Backburning near the site had been expressly discouraged by Tsi Deldel because of the stored equipment, and the differing climate and mountainous geography of the region. However, the request was disregarded. That evening, the wind changed and TDDE had to work throughout the night to move equipment away from the fire. They managed to move all but one piece of equipment from harm's way. As the fire converged on the site, it burned all around the last piece of equipment, but remarkably left it intact. However, weeks' worth of bunched wood had burnt in the fire.

Highways were closed, and roadblocks were set up throughout the Tsi Deldel community and Williams Lake, yet many of the community's citizens had been constantly fighting the fires and needed provisions. Chief Ervin Charleyboy met the RCMP at a roadblock, followed by a convoy of travelers, and had to exercise his authority to push through the roadblock. Later into the wildfires, a helicopter delivery had dropped off supplies and food.

In the community, Elders were constantly stressed seeing the fires and the smoke, but leadership reassured them about the fire locations and that they were safe from harm. The Elders community hall was established as the main communication hub where people could gather to receive updated information about the fires and share meals together.

Enforcement authorities not local to the area, had made the mistake of issuing evacuation orders a number of times to the Tsi Deldel citizens because they did not understand the difference between the First Nation community itself and the town of Alexis Creek, BC Redstone and Alexis Creek are populated centres, but should not be confused with the Tsi Deldel (Alexis

Creek/Redstone) First Nation whose Indian Reserves (I.R.) are located farther west on Highway 20. These mix-ups were not simple to work through.

The band office internet was on a server and with power outages, the staff and leadership were unable to connect. Many of the residents had internet through Xplornet, which is a broadband voice and data communication company tailored to rural customers; it is operated through wireless and satellite networks. The community kept in contact additionally through Facebook Messenger.

Tsi Del Del citizens who owned generators were able to stay at their houses, but others who did not have power, gathered at the Cultural Centre so they could cook with portable propane stoves and BBQs. The community held gathering activities to bring their people together.

The Tsilhqot'in National Government mapping team sent out maps to the community regularly to show fire progression in relation to areas of Tsilhqot'in significance and community boundaries. The maps were helpful for the Tsilhqot'in citizens because the locales were clear, timely, and culturally relevant.

Where Experience Meets Local Knowledge, *The Next Years*

Tsi Deldel has continuously endured wildfires in the area and has progressively strengthened the planning and coordination for such events. In 2018, the TDDE was designated as a 'strike-team,' which if initiated would pool personnel and equipment resources into tactical response for wildfires. They were initiated for eight fires within their geographical area and had them extinguished within 48 hours.

Tsi Deldel is confident that they are prepared to handle the next wildfire but require additional training, supplies, equipment and infrastructure.



Fire Retardant Drop on Highway 20
Photograph By: TNG

Tsi Deldel Best Practices

- Provided a venue for neighbouring First Nation communities when they were evacuated.
- Assisted the Tl'etinqox with Tsi Del Del Enterprises Ltd.'s (TDDE) heavy-duty equipment support to build fire fuel breaks.
- Maintained fuel services.
- Received support by TDDE's joint venture partner to get immediate access to training, supplies and authorizations.
- Persistently advocated to BC Wildfire Service to hire a competent Tsi Deldel leader and citizen in a First Nation Liaison role.
- Assumed control of TDDE equipment and staff over BC Wildfire Service direction to ensure that safe procedures were maintained, and the entire crew was operating from one command.
- Continued to make recommendations regardless of the fact that they were not being followed to maintain a consistent voice.
- Persisted in local wildfire suppression efforts at the onset of the wildfires while touring local residences to identify the community and local non-Indigenous neighbours' vulnerability.
- Advocated for wildfire support for local residents.
- Honed emergency management operations within the first three days while preparing for an evacuation.
- Provided medical support and identified prescription and medical needs in the event of evacuations or abandonment.
- Frequented Tsi Deldel citizens homes to maintain communication.
- Sustained emergency back-up systems on major infrastructure to ensure the continual operation.
- Appointed main contacts for government, the Nation and community citizens.
- Maintained an electronic communication system for evacuated citizens and family despite the power outages and established a community gathering site for persistent communication.
- Advanced community needs through innovative methods.
- Established a positive reputation through TDDE in wildfire management and were designated as an initial 'strike-team' in 2018 with 100% success.



ʔESDILAGH FIRST NATIONS GOVERNMENT

Alexandria First Nation



Smoke Filled Skies at Fort Alexandria, BC
Photograph By: Richard Lam/PNG - Vancouver Sun

Situated between Williams Lake, BC and Quesnel, B.C, ʔEsdilagh (Alexandria) is separated by the Fraser River, and the two main reserves are known as East Side or the West Side.

ʔEsdilagh has faced many challenges over the years. Houses have not been built on the community for over 40 years. For many years, until 2004, the citizens could utilize the Marguerite Ferry to travel across the river to either one of their communities. The ferry was removed, increasing the community commute. In 2014, the band office, the only building besides the church at the time, burnt down, losing a plenitude of important records and documentation. Currently, the band office is located in Quesnel, BC

ʔEsdilagh citizens have been striving to build back the community, and in 2016 the community constructed a new health centre. The health centre is utilized as a gathering space as well. In 2018, a youth centre, skating rink, ball diamond, and pump track were built to provide healthy recreational infrastructure close to home. In addition, for the past two years, the community has been advancing its agricultural rural development.

Over the past few years, the community has been seeking dependable high-speed internet connectivity. High speed internet access is necessary to provide the broadband power to run Telehealth technologies, which not only eliminate travel for specialized health appointments, but also support public safety services.

WILDFIRE FUEL ASSESSMENT

ʔEsdilagh is located on the east and west side of the Fraser River located between Quesnel, BC and Williams Lake, BC Forest fuels that surround the community consist of steep and moderately sloped forest dominated by Douglas fir, aspen and paper birch.

Areas of these forests have been harvested but generally the forests are mature & continuous, with high crown closure, abundant ladder fuels and moderate-to-high surface fuel loads.

On the west reserve, between the community dwellings and the river, are large irrigated hayfields on flat bench lands that are densely dominated by Douglas fir on the sloping hills.

Robert Gray, Fire Ecologist
R.W. Gray Consulting Ltd.
Tsilhqot'in Wildfire Fuels Assessment

The ʔEsdilagh Experience

The ʔEsdilagh Band Office, located in Quesnel, BC, fielded emergency calls on July 7, 2017, which alerted the staff and leadership that wildfires were developing in close proximity to the west side reserve. Immediately, a team of staff commuted to the community, and while travelling south on West Fraser Road, the team passed through many wildfires that were already burning. Roadblocks were already established, and the team was not permitted to travel through. They had to find an alternate route to reach the community, leading them closer to the wildfires.

Once at the west side community, the team worked diligently to identify who was still there, as well as remove flammables from around buildings, and to set sprinklers on and around the homes. They assisted Elders with packing and helped transport them to Quesnel. A wildfire was advancing rapidly, less than four kilometres southwest of the reserve. Some of the team members

volunteered to stay to keep the fires away from the main structures and keep the water systems operating. The irrigation pump fed water from the river to assist with fighting the fires surrounding the community.

Local non-Indigenous residents banded together to fight the fires that threatened their ranches and homes. Fire personnel performing aerial checks stopped over to update them on the fire development and in turn informed them that the abundance of wildfires were detrimental to them assisting the residents. The residents were on their own.

“Our priority is toward our people. I sat in a number of emergency meetings with government and did not feel that my voice was being heard. I would not sit there again unless I knew there were protocols in place that take our leadership input into account.

We have so many issues with emergency accessibility that I need to see some changes. The road washed out between Quesnel and the east reserve adding a lengthy drive for our members. The ferry stopped in the early 2000's creating a separation between the two reserves on each side of the river.

We need a bridge because when the wildfires come back again we are at risk. “

CHIEF VICTOR ROY STUMP

The band office was opened as an emergency operations centre in Quesnel. Staff remained in close and constant contact throughout the day with the team back on the reserve. The office became the main communication centre for members, and the staff turned into an emergency response team.

Staff were constantly busy. They worked with the Canadian Red Cross to register ?Esdilagh citizens. Blocks of accommodation were booked for relocated citizens. ?Esdilagh partnered with Red Bluff First Nation to coordinate meals and events at the Red Bluff Quesnel-based community hall and they offered many activities for the children and youth. Staff assisted with hauling supplies, and cooking and cleaning. The Elders were kept busy. On one occasion they offered a health and healing day where a local spa hosted an evacuee program and healers specializing in trauma were invited. The healing services were later expressed as a need throughout the entirety of the evacuation and after.

Days into the wildfires, the ?Esdilagh neighbours who remained on their properties to ward off the fires were low on supplies for themselves and their livestock. They were unable to cross the roadblocks to shop, at risk that they would not be allowed to go back to their homes. They expressed that they were made to feel as though they were irresponsible for staying behind to care for their livestock and protect their homes and businesses from the wildfires. At the same time, ?Esdilagh leadership was reluctantly provided with access passes to deliver food and supplies to their citizens that were left in the community.

After the protection systems were in place and the wildfire threat had subsided, some staff maintained the community garden and carried on daily activities to look after the homes and buildings. However, the wildfires had threatened access points on both sides of the community and the team was evacuated.

Although there was some animosity towards the RCMP from the disagreements held at the roadblocks, the relationship still grew strong. The RCMP would check in with ?Esdilagh leadership daily. The RCMP also escorted an ?Esdilagh parent from Quesnel to Anahim Lake, BC to retrieve the child who was visiting family, but became stranded when the Anahim Lake area was also evacuated. ?Esdilagh First Nation expressed gratitude for the respect and support that they had eventually received.

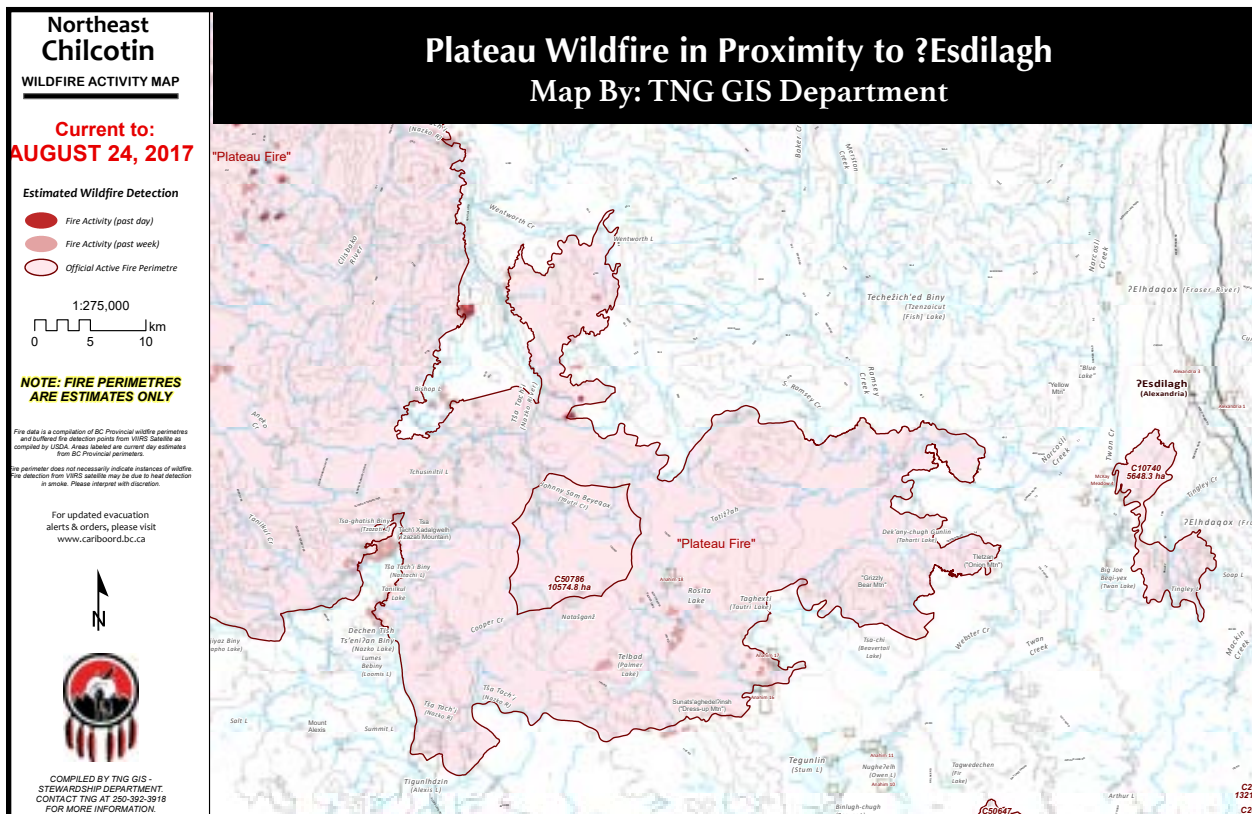
From the outset, ?Esdilagh leadership participated in emergency management meetings with the local authorities. The comments and concerns from ?Esdilagh representatives were not acknowledged, and suggestions were ignored. Most notably, leadership expressed animosity toward the senior fire marshal for this behaviour. For five meetings, the ?Esdilagh leadership attempted to have their voices heard, but stopped attending when they did not feel it was beneficial anymore. The meetings were taking time away from the citizens and other important duties, but bearing no results.

?Esdilagh felt it was difficult to receive support and information from the government. The many bureaucratic silos made it difficult to seek assistance. They were met with resistance if the information they sought was outside of the staff members' portfolio.

Furthermore, staff found it particularly hard to seek financial support for expenses that were overlooked. The ?Esdilagh First Nation assisted evacuated citizens with the purchase of clothing, everyday toiletries, fuel, and various other daily expenses. These expenses were financially impossible for the citizens.

On August 16, 2017, the West Fraser Road area was downgraded to an alert and citizens were able to return home. Knowing that the fires had subsided incredibly and that the community was out of immediate danger, the leadership received a permit for the maintenance and operation manager to prepare the community water system for the arrivals.

Once the citizens were back at home, numerous issues came to light. Citizens had accumulated expenses and needed assistance to pay back these debts. Hydro and phone lines were at risk of being cut off and even one year later, some Elders have not been able to recover financially. The burden has been felt even from the people who were financially independent because their employers had laid them off during the wildfires.



Continual Impacts From the Wildfires

The work that was put into maintaining the community garden was highly praised since the staff were able to provide families with an abundance of fresh vegetables. The food in individual freezers had spoiled during the evacuation due to power outages.

Post-traumatic stress has impacted ?Esdilagh citizens. The leadership are concerned for the wellbeing of their elderly because this type of stress could be especially dangerous to their health. These issues seem to be presenting themselves in different ways. Added sicknesses and unexplained health issues are increasing.

Since the wildfire of 2017, ?Esdilagh has been working to conserve the impacted resources and protect traditional areas that are culturally significant. In October of 2017, ?Esdilagh declared a ban on moose harvesting within its caretaker area. The moose populations were at an unprecedented low level prior to the 2017 wildfires, and the wildfires further

devastated the wildlife. As a community, they encouraged their own citizens who rely heavily on moose for the majority of their meals to sacrifice hunting moose for conservation purposes. Leadership was disappointed that the government did not recognize the efforts of the people and support their efforts with a moratorium on the Limited Entry Hunt.¹⁶

The challenges that the community face regularly have been recently compounded by the 2017 Plateau Wildfire. The community was evacuated for over two months and is still working to secure recoveries for their displacement. On May 7, 2018, the West Fraser Road—connecting ?Esdilagh to Quesnel—at the Deep Creek Hill was severely damaged by a landslide as a result of the intense wildfire damage to the forest floors. Recent news reports have indicated that the road will be closed until at least 2020.

The community now travels an hour and a

16 ?Esdilagh First Nation Government. ?Esdilagh Declare a Ban on Moose Harvest. 2017, http://www.esdilagh.com/PDF/2017_10_16_Esdilagh_PressRelease_BanMooseHarvest.pdf

half through the detour to get to Quesnel – this has increased the commute by an extra 30 minutes each way. Such a detour has created a significant financial and emotional strain on ?Esdilagh as they are part of the Northern Health service area (situated in Quesnel) and their children are enrolled within the Quesnel school district. The bus route has increased in time and children are spending more time away from the community. ?Esdilagh had long asked for the ferry service to be reinstated for safety, ease of travel and most importantly to once again restore the connection between the communities. Recent discussions have reinforced the need to develop a bridge across the river.

In April 2018, within ?Esdilagh traditional territory, the leadership imposed a ban on mushroom harvesting, restricting activity within the Castle Rock-Twan Lake area

because of the effects of the wildfires. An endangered pelican species native to the area's habitat had been negatively impacted. Cultural artifacts within the

area's traditional burial grounds had been disturbed. The ban was in place to allow the lands to regenerate. While this area was off limits, the Nation provided permits for other areas within its territory.¹⁷

In the event of another wildfire close to the community, the leadership and selected emergency staff have decided that they will not evacuate based solely on external source information but

would also consider their own assessment of risk before determining the best course of action. ?Esdilagh staff and leadership feel comfort in knowing that as a community they established a system and can work united as a team with their neighbours to handle another emergency of its kind.

“As a community we surrendered our right to hunt moose because the wildfires had such a negative impact on the species. I see our people daily struggling from this as a consequence and meanwhile BC continued to allow an LEH.

We brought in meat and we had food from the community garden. We put on meals weekly. This is extremely important to the leadership and staff that BC recognize the impact from their decisions. The decision makers in the province are not left hungry.”

COUNCILLOR CHAD
STUMP

¹⁷ ?Esdilagh First Nation Government. No Mushroom Harvest in ?Esdilagh: Castle Rock/Twan Lake South Wildfire Area. 2018, [http://www.esdilagh.com/PDF/Castle%20Rock_TwanLk%20_Mushroom_PSA_APRIL_11\[1\].pdf](http://www.esdilagh.com/PDF/Castle%20Rock_TwanLk%20_Mushroom_PSA_APRIL_11[1].pdf)

?Esdilagh Best Practices

- Responded quickly from Quesnel-based Band Office to immediately travel to the community to support the on-reserve citizens with relocating.
- Relocated ?Esdilagh citizens to safe and suitable lodging.
- Cleared fuel generating debris away from community houses quickly and as a team.
- Established an emergency centre at the Quesnel band office and transformed all staff to emergency operations.
- Partnered with Red Bluff First Nation to provide meals and events for evacuees.
- Provided a health day for citizens with trauma support needs.
- Established a strong working relationship with the RCMP.
- Persisted with attending local authority emergency management meetings and made the decision to spend time on community needs after advice and recommendations were not heeded.
- Provided consistent communication system with citizens.
- Maintained community garden throughout evacuations and the community relied upon the produce after they returned home.
- Launched conservational efforts with restrictions to moose and mushroom harvest within their traditional territory and enforced restrictions within the community.



XENI GWET'IN FIRST NATIONS GOVERNMENT

Nemiah Valley First Nation



Ministry Firefighters Extinguishing Hot Spots
Photograph By: Jason Payne/PNG - Vancouver Sun

The Xeni Gwet'in First Nation is located 250 kilometres west of Williams Lake, BC in the Nemiah Valley or a mere 60 minutes by air from Vancouver, BC. The caretaker area of the Xeni Gwet'in lies between Chilko Lake and Taseko Lake.

The community of Xeni is situated in a rural valley surrounded by snow-capped mountains, lakes, and glaciers. Public access to the area began after a road was built into the community in the 1970's. The community is off the grid; buildings operate with generators, houses rely on propane, and a telephone system was only connected in 2009. The area is virtually un-touched.

The community's traditions and culture are strongly intact, and many of the people only speak only their traditional language. Much of their territory has been declared as a protected area, designated under the Aboriginal Wilderness Preserve (1989), and the ?Elegesi Qayus Wild Horse Preserve (2002).

The Long Road to the Title Lands

The Chilko River is marked by a well-known landmark, “Henry’s Crossing”. In 1989, the “Nemiah Trapline Action” was brought forward in the Supreme Court of BC to claim Aboriginal rights to the community trapline in order to protect it from intended logging activities, which would clear-cut the Brittany Triangle, a wild horse inhabited area. In 1992, access to the logging development started with an attempt to build a bridge into the area, at which time Xeni Gwet'in blockaded the road. By December 1998, the “Brittany Triangle (Tachelach'ed) Action” began with a claim to approximately 438,000 hectares of land.

A 339-day trial commenced in 2002 and ended in 2007. The court heard the oral history traditional evidence from the people and also considered information from many historical documents. In 2007, Justice David Vickers ruled that the Tsilhqot'in people have proven rights to the territory claimed in court and had established Aboriginal title to a part of the land, but he stopped short of declaring Aboriginal title. This was appealed by BC, Canada, and Tsilhqot'in Nation. In 2012, the BC Court of Appeal upheld the Aboriginal rights to hunt, trap, and trade in their traditional territory, but disagreed that Aboriginal title could be proven to anything more than small, intensively used tracts of land. Therefore the Nation went back to court.

For the first time in Canadian history, on June 26, 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada unanimously granted a declaration of Aboriginal title to approximately 1900 square kilometres of land. Aboriginal title includes the rights to control the lands and decide how it should be used.

Transition of Lands Back into the Community Control

Transitioning the land now termed the “Declared Title Area” to full Tsilhqot'in management and control is a complex and expensive process. Through the Nenqay Deni Accord, a process to ‘transition’ the lands back to the community is a restorative healing progression that the community strives to do respectfully. While the transition is underway, financial resources to manage the lands to the extent necessary are not in place.



A challenge lies in delineating the responsibilities between government and the Xeni Gwet'in in emergency response and mitigation of risk. The community and Nation must ensure they have the capacity (human and financial) to manage such issues as they arise. The Declared Title Area (DTA), since it sits in a grey area through the transfer of ownership, does not qualify for Provincial funding to participate in fuel mitigation measures while other First Nation communities do. This delay in funding leaves the community and its citizens extremely vulnerable to wildfires. Without the assistance of government funding or alternatively settlement compensation it is impossible to address suitable land management measures.

British Columbia has accepted responsibility for emergency response and wildfire liability in the Title Area under the Emergency Response Protocol, 2015. Accordingly, it is in all parties' interests to take adequate and proactive measures to mitigate fire risk in the DTA.

The DTA did not burn during the 2017 wildfire season. It is known by the Tsilhqot'in Nation and the province to be a high-fire risk forest area. While forest management is properly in the jurisdiction of Xeni Gwet'in and supported by the Tsilhqot'in National Government, capacity issues and an unwillingness to collaborate on the part of provincial agencies is impeding proper preventive emergency measures. As a result, the Tsilhqot'in Nation has not had access to the support needed to develop and implement Forest Management Planning in the DTA. The DTA therefore continues to pose a significant fire risk within Tsilhqot'in territory and beyond.

WILDFIRE FUEL ASSESSMENT

In Xení Gwet'in fuel management is necessary surrounding Konnie Lake and within the dwellings around Chilko Lake. The forest fuels are the highest, most extensive and continuous than any other Tsilhqot'in community examined. They consist of high-to-moderate density lodgepole pine with some woody debris in places.

The fuels are moderate-to-heavy on the western edge of the community centre with a number of structures in the interface. The eastern side of the community consists of grasslands with aspen that has some coniferous patches, however on the north and southern side the forests are dominated with conifer. Vegetation along the valley consists of a variety of hayfields and wetlands of both herbaceous and shrubby vegetation. The fuels in this area are patchy and discontinuous, but a number of dwellings are located in and adjacent to the heavier timber around this open area.

At the west end of Konni Lake, the forest fuel is mixed with low productivity aspen and pine stands with some dense Douglas fir patches. Surface fuels are light and tree crowns are both mixed and discontinuous. The eastern half of the north shore of lake is open with grass/herb vegetation with a number of aspen patches. On the southern side there are continuous coniferous forests across the entire area, which increase the fuel load.

Robert Gray, Fire Ecologist
R.W. Gray Consulting Ltd.
Tsilhqot'in Wildfire Fuels Assessment

The Xení Gwet'in Experience

In Xení Gwet'in, the skies were blue, and the air was clear of smoke. Because the community is virtually off the grid, the power outages did not affect them. Although the fires were kilometres away, there was much work to do.

The first signs of fires began around Williams Lake, BC and in the Tsilhqot'in territory on Friday, July 7, 2017. Xení Gwet'in citizens became increasingly concerned that access in and out of their community would be obstructed via the one road in. The community of Yunesit'in was evacuated, and some of their citizens began arriving in Nemiah Valley and were placed with families or in vacant homes.

Staff within the community reviewed their Emergency Management Plan at the outset of the wildfires. In a meeting, Xení began

planning to establish evacuation muster areas, prepare water trucks, and validate the GPS points for emergency helicopter

landing sites; all emergency protocols were collectively decided upon with the community.

At the meeting the Xení Gwet'in Elders decided they still wished to go to the BC Elders Gathering in Campbell River, BC They were escorted through the various roadblocks to Williams Lake, BC to meet their chartered bus to begin their

journey with Elders from their neighbouring community, Tl'etinqox First Nation.

Xení Gwet'in citizens still in Williams Lake assisted with transporting livestock to safety, and shopping for supplies and food to be delivered to remote communities. When travelling to the community, enforcement

"Our mandate is to protect our land. We know how long it has taken to build the communities we have. With the very little resources we have, we need to fight for the community and our resources since no one else will.

We need a relationship with our local governments in order for them to understand what our values are and support us. We cannot spend all of our time in court, but we also cannot continue to be disrespected on our own land."

CHIEF JIMMY LULUA

personnel at road blocks did not understand the location of Xeni Gwet'in and would often obstruct all traffic, even those with TNG-approved passes.

The band office was then transformed into a communication centre, which would become a safe place for people to meet. The gas station, laundry mat, and convenience store remained open. Because of the geographic separation between leadership and citizens, a private Facebook page was created to keep the community connected.

Due to the intensity of the situation, a handful of staff assumed roles. On the first day, the small group of people available to assist visited the citizens going door-to-door. They created a list of residents in each house, and determined what, if any, additional rooms were available in case of the need to harbor evacuees from other communities. Types of available transportation, vehicle reliability, and fuel quantities were recorded. A nurse in the community helped with medical support. The Tsilhqot'in Land Rangers were sent to assist with day and night fire watches in the other communities and also were stationed within the higher elevations of the Nemiah Valley for better views.

David Setah, now a councillor for Xeni Gwet'in, managed the Xeni Gwet'in Enterprises and made assessments on the status of supplies. He was to determine how long the vehicle fuel would last and how long the community infrastructure generators could run for without receiving a delivery of fuel. However, fuel was delivered a few weeks after the fires had started in the Tsilhqot'in.

The Xeni Gwet'in connected with the Yunesit'in to receive \$100 training for some of their citizens, and to order supplies. Xeni sought insight into which supplies

would be reimbursable if they were purchased in advance. Advance purchases were necessary to prepare their teams for fighting the fire, but they felt overall that the government was not openly communicating what they could expend. The community thus limited their purchases, and in turn were unable to send more crews out to assist.

A fire progressed towards the community, at the 22-kilometer distance sign along the Nemiah Valley Road. The community was told that they should prepare for an evacuation but still the location of the fire was 63 kilometres away. Residents determined that the community was not at risk. Xeni Gwet'in provided their main firefighting crews and cooks to support the wildfire suppression efforts and the fire was eventually extinguished. The citizens were surprised that wildfire personnel and emergency staff did not appreciate the location distances and terrain to determine that the community was still very far from the fire.

Another fire began close to Teztan Biny (Fish Lake). The community took this fire into their own hands and the fire was quickly suppressed. Teztan Biny has profound cultural and spiritual significance to the Tsilhqot'in people. Uniquely abundant with 85,000 rainbow trout, the site is where Tsilhqot'in people come for ceremonial purposes and to hunt, trap, and gather. The Xeni Gwet'in citizens were not going to wait to see if additional support would arrive before attempting to stop the fire from decimating an area of such significance.

Part of the Xeni Gwet'in leadership had accompanied the Elders to the 41st Annual BC Elders Gathering in Campbell River, and while they were at the gathering, they realized that the magnitude of the fires back

"I feel the fires could have been extinguished much quicker.

I heard from people on the fires and some said at times they didn't receive direction until noon. They said they had to sit back and let it burn"

**COUNCILLOR JAMES
LULUA JR.**

in the Tsilhqot'in was intensifying in the territory. After the gathering they moved the Elders to Abbotsford, BC and leadership and family chaperones worked tirelessly to care for the needs of their Elders. When it became evident that they would not be able to travel home due to the Williams Lake BC evacuations they had received immediate external support. The Stó:lō First Nation assisted the Xení Gwet'in Elders and leadership by arranging rooming and meal vouchers at the affiliated restaurant in Abbotsford, BC. Fifty-four people were on the chartered bus and 20 rooms were blocked off indefinitely for them.

The Elders were hosted for dinner by the Stó:lō Nation, and The First Nation Health Authority (FNHA) assisted with providing medical support for the Elders and arranged activities such as canning, every other day. The Canadian Red Cross visited the people at their accommodations, and form filling was a constant process.

In the community, staff helped people connect with their families and the Elders that were evacuated and unable to travel back to Nemiah Valley. The community felt that it was virtually ignored at times during the wildfires but understood that the focus was on immediately impacted communities. Certain staff and leadership advocated on behalf of their people's needs to eventually receive support.

The conference calls with the Cariboo Fire Centre were helpful for Xení Gwet'in to understand what was happening outside of their caretaker area, so that they could in turn determine their own level of risk.

The Tsilhqot'in Title Rangers visited each home to develop a list of needs from each of the 62 households. Provisions and supplies were then flown into the village for the citizens. Community summer students and the Title Rangers divided delivery tasks between them, ensuring that everyone, including homes with pets and livestock had enough supplies and support. Satellite phones were also delivered in the event that other methods of communication were

"We have a large land base to manage but very few resources to manage it with.

This is especially the case with respect to wildfire management. We have very high fuel loads and intact forests but to date it has been very difficult to find support to help control fire risk in the Title Lands.

As a result, the Xení community and other residents of the Title Lands are at high risk - forests here could burn catastrophically."

JOHN LERNER, DTA SUB-TABLE MANAGER

cut off.

The Nemiah Valley was not impacted as significantly as the other five Tsilhqot'in communities. Still there were wildfires and later flooding. A growing concern regarding the impact on fish and wildlife was still at the forefront of people's minds. The extent of the burnt land within the Tsilhqot'in territory will inevitably drive people into the declared title area. As this area had not been as impacted additional resources will be required to govern the lands in the title area as a conservational measure.

Additional Issues in the Midst of the Wildfires

On July 31, 2017, the Tsilhqot'in Nation challenged a provincial drilling permit issued to the Taseko Mines Ltd. on July 14, 2017, in the BC Supreme Court. The permit would approve extensive drilling, road

clearing, the creation of hundreds of test pits, and kilometres of seismic lines, right near Teztan Biny, where the Government of Canada had already twice rejected the proposed "Prosperity Project".



Tsilhqot'in National Government Loading Supplies for Communities
 (Right to Left) Tl'etinqox Councillor Daana Gilpin, Chief Jimmy Lulua, Linda Haig-Brown
 Photograph By: Jason Payne/PNG, Vancouver Sun

The proposed project has been a thorn in the Tsilhqot'in Nation's side for years as it has undergone extensive environmental assessment under the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012. For the first time in Canadian history, this project underwent two environmental assessments and each time it was deemed to have significant and immitigable adverse environmental and cultural impacts that could not be justified.

Xeni Gwet'in and Tsilhqot'in representatives appeared in court in Victoria, BC while fires were still threatening their livelihoods back at home. One year later, the BC Supreme Court upheld the permit for Taseko Mines Ltd. to undertake the drilling program, however the Tsilhqot'in Nation appealed the ruling and was granted an injunction temporarily prohibiting drilling to enable the court to hear the case.

Shortly after the Elders, leadership, and chaperones left the court in Victoria, the evacuation of Williams Lake, BC was lifted. Part of the group stayed in Abbotsford due to health issues, to ensure that the air was cleared from smoke and that the community had time to prepare for their homecoming. Various areas flooded along the Nemiah Valley Road making safe accessibility an issue. Upgrading the road to ensure that the road safety has become a priority.

The Aftermath of the Wildfires

Campfire bans prohibited drying salmon. Traditional fishing sites were inaccessible. Long-established medicine and berry grounds were restricted. Hunting ceased. Xení Gwet'in citizens feel the consequences now, but also believe that the environment needs a chance to rest and recover.

Xeni Gwet'in was not on an evacuation order but was obstructed from travelling within Tsilhqot'in territory or even to Williams Lake, BC due to the emergency road closures. Virtually stranded, the community felt that they were not acknowledged as being disadvantaged, however they were still in need of everything from food to medicine.

Workers were prevented from working for months since the wildfires ceased operations of numerous companies in and around the Tsilhqot'in and Williams Lake, BC. Consequently, these individuals experienced financial impacts. At first it was difficult to receive Red Cross assistance, so the community still supported their people to bridge the burden.

Before the Nemiah Valley is ever threatened by a wildfire again, extensive planning in emergency management and fuel management is required to ensure safety. The overall need in Xení Gwet'in is for adequate financial resources to manage the Declared Title Area. Financial resources have a significant impact on developing capacity and managing the land.

Xeni Gwet'in Best Practices

- Reviewed emergency management plan at the outset of the wildfires.
- Established duties and emergency procedures at a community meeting informed by the citizens.
- Assisted with livestock transportation.
- Transported an immediate cache of food and supplies to the community.
- Transformed the band office into the main community communication centre.
- Created an electronic communication system to inform off-reserve or relocated citizens of daily events.
- Traveled door-to-door to all Xení Gwet'in citizen homes to establish an inventory of transportation ability, additional rooms and to determine who was in the community.
- Stationed Tsilhqot'in Land Rangers at higher elevations to scout the distance of wildfires in proximity to the community.
- Assessed the fuel and propane supply and determined the days until the supply would run low.
- Collaborated with Yunesit'in to provide training and receive supplies.
- Utilized own best judgment when determining the true location of wildfires and the vulnerability of the community.
- Worked with the Stó:lō Nation and First Nation Health Authority to provide safe accommodation for Elders, events and services.
- Assigned summer students to deliver supplies to 62 houses making use of all available staff.
- Challenged Provincial drilling permit issued to Taseko Mines Ltd. despite being amid an extreme emergency situation to advance the community citizens' continual opposition of the Prosperity Project.

CONCLUSION

The 2017 wildfires continue to leave a lasting impact on the Tsilhqot'in people and lands. Nevertheless, in the face of overwhelming odds, the communities, the Nation and their neighbours worked together effectively and successfully, demonstrating true expertise and leadership. Within the Nation, individual differences were set aside, and people united to work for their common goal. The wildfire tragedy healed long-standing relationship breakdowns. The strength and amazing capacity for resilience in these rural remote communities can never be forgotten.

Despite all of the challenges laid out in this report, the wildfires also revealed the strength of Tsilhqot'in stewardship and exposed important traditional knowledge that can support the Tsilhqot'in in its goal of playing a central role in land management and long-term planning at the territorial level. Tsilhqot'in people noted that the forests are their foods that sustain them. Their traditional structures support and encourage knowledge of the land and conservational measures. The wildfires took this away. However, there have to be structures in place that honour this knowledge, which not only make space for, but are built around community stewardship on the land.

The archeological sites that were exposed as a result of the wildfires need protection measures and the Tsilhqot'in need the opportunity to expand their knowledge and history on these sites. These provide a window to learn more about Tsilhqot'in history, heritage, rights, and title. In this way, the wildfires may provide an opportunity to strengthen Tsilhqot'in knowledge, to better understand the full story of how Tsilhqot'in lived on the land prior to colonization, and pass this on to future generations.

The process to recovery in the communities has been taxing on the citizens, staff and leadership and is also negatively impacting the lands and wildlife that are within the territory. The recovery process from emergencies is slow, however financial resources can alleviate the stress on staff who are already significantly overburdened. In addition to this, the communities require dedicated financial resources to properly prepare for future emergencies.

The health and safety of the many residents in the Tsilhqot'in, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, were threatened by the 2017 wildfires. The lack of emergency operation centres and satellite centres in the rural communities revealed the vulnerability that could impair the entire territory. By several accounts, many areas across the expansive territory were neglected; however, a very different scenario is possible through progressive inclusion of local First Nations and residents.

The true strength of the Tsilhqot'in people shone through and demonstrated that the communities can undeniably unite to take care of their homes, lands and people and they will voluntarily. In the aftermath of the wildfires of 2017, the mental and physical tolls that the Tsilhqot'in people have endured through historical oppressions have intensified. The fires awakened the people marked the earth and animals—these marks have revealed the dominant colonial practices that the Tsilhqot'in have long resisted.

It is impossible to ignore the systemic problems with a purely government-led emergency response that was non-inclusive of local First Nations and residents. Nation-wide media

coverage, matched with several documentaries, oral testimonies and reports have exposed the urgent demand for a sizably restructured approach to emergency response and management in the Tsilhqot'in territory.

Overall, management of the lands and resources does not squarely fit in provincial and federal decision making. A united approach to decision making on the lands where the Tsilhqot'in have lived since time immemorial is overdue and critical. To finally achieve this level of respect and recognition would be revolutionary and a true testimony of reconciliation.

APPENDIX A

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

APPENDIX A - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

Tsilhqot'in Nation in a State of Emergency

The Tsilhqot'in Nation is comprised of six First Nation communities – ?Esdilagh (Alexandria), Tl'esqox (Toosey), Tl'etingox (Anaham), Tsi Deldel (Alexis Creek/Redstone), Xeni Gwet'in (Nemiah) and Yunesit'in (Stone). The Tsilhqot'in Nation and the Tsilhqot'in National Government (TNG) promote the autonomy of their governance systems and protect the interest of the Tsilhqot'in citizens' culture and traditional life.

On July 7, 2017, lightning strikes ignited over one hundred wildfires throughout the Province of British Columbia. That same evening, Todd Stone, BC Minister of Transportation, declared a Provincial State of Emergency. That same afternoon citizens of the Tsilhqot'in Nation had observed a progression of lightning strikes, which led to the advancement of several wildfires surrounding their communities. At the early stage of the wildfires, the Tsilhqot'in had no idea what they would have to deal with for well over two months. At first the communities awaited provincial support, but soon realized that they would have to take the helm in managing the emergency situation.

The Nation fought relentlessly to protect their homes and community buildings from being engulfed by the wildfires. The citizens were overextended and endured mental, physical, emotional and spiritual demands on their health. From the outset, the communities not only faced the threat of the wildfires, they were met with threats of intimidation by law enforcement officers to apprehend children from families and to forcibly evacuate or arrest citizens that chose to not evacuate.

The fires revealed the ongoing struggle between the Tsilhqot'in and the provincial government over the exercise of jurisdiction in Tsilhqot'in territory. Tsilhqot'in leadership exercises inherent jurisdiction over Tsilhqot'in territory and people. During the wildfires, leadership exercised this inherent responsibility to act in the best interest of its citizens and to protect its traditional territory. The Tsilhqot'in communities worked with local residents to fend off the Kleena Kleene fire and two of the largest wildfires in 2017— the Plateau Fire and the Hanceville Complex Fire.

The Tsilhqot'in have deep traditional knowledge of their territory, which they have inhabited since time immemorial. Their awareness of the lands and weather systems are part of their daily teachings. Many of the people work on the lands that surround the communities and make a livelihood because of their familiarity with the terrain. Despite this, the Tsilhqot'in were underutilized, their jurisdiction was disrespected, and their knowledge was disregarded and treated with disdain.

Tsilhqot'in Nation Inquiry Into Wildfires

After the 2017 wildfires had subsided and the Tsilhqot'in leadership had time to reflect on the scope of what their Nation as a whole and their individual communities experienced, they began their long work to recovery. On Nov. 21, 2017, the Tsilhqot'in National Government called for a public inquiry into the wildfires stating that the government agencies failed to acknowledge the Tsilhqot'in Nation — their authority, expertise and capabilities. The Tsilhqot'in Nation challenged the Provincial and Federal government

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to take a hard look at developing coordinated emergency response efforts integrating Tsilhqot'in legal authorities.

In April of 2018, the Nation signed a Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement with both the Federal and Provincial Governments. The agreement was founded upon establishing emergency response assistance comparable to those availed to non-Indigenous communities, providing safety and security to the First Nation communities.

The Tsilhqot'in Nation compiled a team of experts to capture the wildfire experiences from their communities, develop a collective set of recommendations and highlight the best practices in a Tsilhqot'in-led inquiry report — *The Fire Awakened Us*. The research team consisted of a cross-section of expertise and perspectives. This included: senior level Tsilhqot'in National Government staff experienced in negotiations, health, forestry, lands and resources; community representatives and knowledge holders; as well as external partners with expertise in disaster management, fire ecology, and disaster law. Over five months, the team conducted extensive research in each of the communities through interviews, facilitated Nation and specialized services meetings. In addition, the research included a review and analysis on the statutory and regulatory laws governing emergency management for First Nations in British Columbia, an extensive review of existing reports, a scientific assessment of the wildfire forest fuel risks and community risk vulnerability assessments.

The report highlights a series of calls to action based upon the core challenges that the Tsilhqot'in experienced throughout the wildfires. The challenges that the Nation encountered are a/an:

- Inadequate building and water infrastructure on reserve not at a standard to meet basic emergency guidelines;
- Lack of respect and acknowledgement toward First Nation leadership and decision making;
- Complete disregard to community skills, qualifications, and knowledge of the lands;
- Widespread treatment of inferiority felt by local First Nation and non-First Nation residents and regional industry experts;
- Tremendous shortage of emergency management financial resources devoted to First Nation community mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery measures leaving them disproportionately susceptible to risk compared to similar size non-First Nation communities;
- Shortfall in a collaborative approach by First Nation service agencies to provide support to the affected communities during the wildfires; and
- Disregard for Tsilhqot'in advice and recommendations on recovery measures within the Chilcotin provided by Tsilhqot'in.

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The 33-recommendation report outlines infrastructure requirements, pre-disaster agreements, land-based stabilization measures and dedicated financial resources through all stages of emergency management. The condensed recommendations are:

1. Developing a centralized Indigenous-led Emergency Centre in Tsilhqot'in territory with satellite sites at each community with advanced safety and emergency equipment.
2. Constructing or updating equipped fire halls in each reserve.
3. Building gathering spaces and safe muster areas.
4. Creating an immediate on-reserve housing & infrastructure strategy fund to address recovery and basic needs.
5. Establishing lodging in and around each community to accommodate emergency personnel.
6. Investing in basic public services along Highway 20 and Taseko Lake Road corridor.
7. Establishing highway signage to clearly identify community locations.
8. Widening and maintaining roads to communities and egress routes.
9. Investing in an extensive and advanced protocol agreement that establishes an active and collaborative leadership role for the Tsilhqot'in Nation.
10. Ratifying Nation-to-Nation evacuation location agreements with First Nation partners.
11. Entering into a Service Agency/ Tsilhqot'in agreement built upon respect and recognition of Tsilhqot'in jurisdiction.
12. Developing an inter-agency First Nation service provider agreement in the event of an emergency.
13. Launching a progressive framework contract with British Columbia for on-the-ground emergency response within Tsilhqot'in territory.
14. Establishing subsidized direct, ongoing, dependable funding for training and certification promoting Tsilhqot'in expertise.
15. Providing subsidized direct funding for Tsilhqot'in communities to plan in all areas of emergency management.
16. Establishing subsidized direct funding for Tsilhqot'in emergency management personnel.
17. Establishing a subsidized Tsilhqot'in Association of Emergency Responders with the responsibility to coordinate an integrated Nation-level response emergency management.
18. Providing direct funding for Tsilhqot'in-led targeted skills and employment training and reduction of barriers to employment initiatives.
19. Crafting a holistic health support system that includes short-to-mid and long-term health support initiatives.
20. Piloting forest fuel reduction practices with training through Indigenous-led fuel mitigation measures.
21. Conducting a Tsilhqot'in-managed comprehensive study on the Cariboo Chilcotin forest ecosystem affected by the wildfires.

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- | | |
|---|---|
| 22. Applying joint management methods to the Tsilhqot'in territory beginning with the separation from the Williams Lake Timber Supply Area. | collaborative enforcement efforts on Tsilhqot'in territory to promote cultural, economic and ecological values as the land recovers from wildfire. |
| 23. Engaging in Tsilhqot'in-led rehabilitation planning at the territorial level. | 29. Establishing a one-stop reimbursement process for First Nations governments. |
| 24. Creating a mechanism for tracking and compensating ongoing cultural impacts and cumulative impacts. | 30. Reimbursing communities in accordance with the principle of building back better to mitigate future disaster risk. |
| 25. Performing geotechnical work to stabilize banks, roads and install culverts in response to wildfire vegetation damage. | 31. Advancing Tsilhqot'in recovery requests for financial assistance towards community rebuilding before 2019 (seventeen months after the 2017 wildfire began). |
| 26. Conducting a damage assessment to archeological sites and creating/ implementing mitigation and protection measure for sensitive sites. | 32. Developing clear financial arrangements and compensation measures in advance of the next emergency. |
| 27. Developing a Tsilhqot'in Economic Diversification report in anticipation of the decrease of forestry-related economics. | 33. Applying Jordan's Principle to emergency management on reserve. |
| 28. Strengthening and expanding | |

The core challenges highlight a complete disregard for First Nation authority governing their citizens and the lands on which they reside. These calls to actions are the first steps to recognizing the role of First Nations governments in leading emergency response in their own communities and territories.

Perseverance Despite All Odds

The Tsilhqot'in territory, while expansive and remote, is deprived of major emergency infrastructure, leaving Tsilhqot'in citizens and non-First Nations residents vulnerable to disasters. The First Nation communities have unsatisfactory basic infrastructure and are not prepared with a cache of wildfire suppression equipment. Nevertheless, the Tsilhqot'in commenced culturally-informed emergency operational processes, appointed emergency operational staff and established wildfire crews immediately. They set up Emergency Operation Centres, base camps, muster camps and provided food to hundreds of people at outdoor kitchens operating without electricity.

Despite threats of child apprehension, intimidations of arrests, an overall lack of wildfire suppression support and cooperation, the Tsilhqot'in communities knew the only way to protect their homes, community and territory was to assume the responsibility of fighting the fires.

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The 2017 wildfires and the provincially-led response has had devastating effects on the Tsilhqot'in people and their lands. As advocates for their citizens and First Nation people, the Tsilhqot'in Nation has chosen to publicly tell their story and are actively seeking methods to instill true participation in emergency management that is respectful of their values and traditions.

This is an opportunity to reconcile government-to-government relationships in an area that is complex but critical. Advancements to co-management in emergency management create fundamental building blocks that could be applied to resolving the many First Nation jurisdictional battles. A transformation in emergency management should be led by First Nations but supported by the Provincial and Federal Governments to make the most appropriate and meaningful change. Recognizing First Nation values and decision making require courage and leadership by all governments.

APPENDIX B

RECOGNIZING TSILHQOT'IN JURISDICTION IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

DR. JOCELYN STACEY & EMMA FELTES

Recognizing Tsilhqot'in Jurisdiction in Emergency Management

Dr. Jocelyn Stacey & Emma Feltes

This appendix analyses the question of jurisdiction arising from the 2017 wildfires that spread across Tsilhqot'in territory. Jurisdiction answers the question: who has the authority to govern or decide? The attached report, Nagwedižk'an gwaneš gangu ch'inidžed ganexwilagh; The Fire Awakened Us, notes numerous significant decisions and actions taken during wildfire response, recovery and mitigation in which the answer to the question of jurisdiction was unclear or contested. These issues are flagged throughout the report with the Tsilhqot'in flag.

This appendix addresses those jurisdictional markers that are flagged throughout the report. It explains the core jurisdictional challenge, source of the jurisdictional ambiguity, conflict or gap and it elaborates the specific calls to action that are identified as jurisdictional recommendations.

That the emergency revealed a complex set of jurisdictional issues is a symptom of the complex legal web in Tsilhqot'in territory. This web creates barriers as well as opportunities for the exercise of Tsilhqot'in jurisdiction. Preparedness for the next emergency requires British Columbia, Canada and the Tsilhqot'in Nation to collaboratively and meaningfully work toward addressing fundamental jurisdictional challenges with respect to land, resources, people, and economic opportunities in Tsilhqot'in territory. This chapter of the report is one piece of this ongoing collaborative project.

The appendix discusses jurisdictional calls to action in relation to three headings: (1) Pre-Disaster Agreements, (2) Land Based and Economic Stabilization Measures, and (3) Dedicated Financial Resources.



Photograph By: TNG

Prime Minister Trudeau Delivered Statement of Exoneration for Tsilhqot'in Chiefs
 (Right to Left) Chief Jimmy Lulua, Chief Joe Alphonse, Prime Minister Trudeau, Chief Otis Guichon,
 Chief Victor Roy Stump, Chief Francis Laceese and Chief Russell Myers Ross

Pre-Disaster Agreements

Core Challenge:

First Nations leadership ought to be at the centre of effective and appropriate emergency management in First Nations communities. This requires the recognition of Indigenous emergency management laws and practices and the coordination and support of regional, provincial and federal agencies.

Emergency management in Tsilhqot'in territory is governed by the Tsilhqot'in people's inherent jurisdiction over their land, resources and people. It is also governed by delegated powers exercised under the federal Indian Act, RSC 1985, c 1-5. In Tsilhqot'in territory, emergency management is also governed by local and provincial authorities exercising powers under the Emergency Program Act, RSBC 1996, c 111. The federal government plays a supportive role in emergency management through Emergency Management Act, SC 2007, c 15.

As described in the report, these overlapping authorities created conflict and confusion. The failure on the part of regional, provincial and federal agencies to recognize Tsilhqot'in jurisdiction and expertise left Tsilhqot'in communities and territory vulnerable to ineffective, disrespectful and traumatic emergency management operations.

Multiple emergency management regimes must be reconciled through respectful, clear and detailed pre-disaster agreements that honour Tsilhqot'in authority.

CALL TO ACTION 9

Advanced protocol agreements that outline an active and collaborative leadership role for the Tsilhqot'in Nation

A fundamental step for building on the Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement (2018) is to establish advanced protocol agreements that place Tsilhqot'in jurisdiction at the centre of emergency response in Tsilhqot'in communities.

Protocol agreements ought to recommit the parties to a partnership of mutual respect and understanding. It is clear that in recognizing and maintaining a respectful, collaborative partnership in emergency management there is no place for threats to force Tsilhqot'in leaders into decisions that are not in the best interests of their communities in which they govern.

These advanced protocol agreements should outline how British Columbia and Canada can play a supporting and coordinated role in Tsilhqot'in emergency management by outlining the procedures, roles and responsibilities for critical emergency management decisions such as the declaration of a state of emergency and evacuation orders. When the Province and Tsilhqot'in leadership agree on evacuation, for example, established protocols should recognize a tiered approach to relocations with room for Chief & Council led conditions. Effective emergency management in Tsilhqot'in territory requires advanced protocol agreements that address jurisdictional coordination at all stages of emergency management (preparedness, response, recovery and prevention).

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Implementing these protocols will also require updating existing regional, provincial and federal emergency response policies which currently assume passive involvement of First Nations governments and deference to provincial decisions. For example, British Columbia's Evacuation Operational Guidelines (2009) and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada suggest that Band Councils should have a standing, pre-signed evacuation order in place, presumably so that it can be invoked automatically whenever a provincial evacuation order is issued. This effectively neutralizes First Nations' legal jurisdiction over evacuations. This policy should be changed to address provincial emergency response procedures when First Nations communities have assessed their emergency risk exposure and decided not to evacuate.

Recognition of Tsilhqot'in adaptable emergency measures, orders and culturally appropriate relocation protocols that differ in form and substance from regional, provincial and federal actions

Recognition of Tsilhqot'in leadership entails respect for emergency measures that differ in both form and substance from regional, provincial and federal emergency measures. Tsilhqot'in leadership implemented innovative emergency measures during the 2017 wildfires. In Tl'etinqox, Chief and Council issued a "relocation order" rather than an evacuation order. The relocation order directed vulnerable citizens to move to another Tsilhqot'in community (Tl'etinqox 2017 Wildfire Report). In contrast, an evacuation order would have required Tl'etinqox members to move to evacuation centres in larger cities. The relocation order was designed to avoid the harmful effects of the 2009 and 2010 evacuations that were reminiscent of community members' experiences in Residential Schools.

In Yunesit'in, after the evacuation order had been downgraded to an alert, Chief and Council understood that the air quality conditions were too poor for vulnerable community members to return. In response, they worked to identify vulnerable community members, and facilitate a staggered re-entry process into the community. This allowed for continued support for Yunesit'in members, despite the lifting of the evacuation order. Esdilahg evacuated their citizens to the city of Quesnel, but only after ensuring that there were adequate lodging available for their members. While the community evacuated they made arrangements to ensure that key personnel were enabled entry to maintain the existing community systems and facilities.

These orders are examples of the exercise of Tsilhqot'in emergency management practices that can and should be recognized through protocol agreements. They present concrete opportunities for regional, provincial and federal support in realizing Tsilhqot'in leadership in emergency response.

Protocols for child protection during emergencies

The threats of child apprehension and preparations for removing children from Tl'esqox were excessive and disrespectful. If acted upon, they would have undermined the exercise of Tsilhqot'in jurisdiction over emergency management. Notably, Tl'etinqox had in place a relocation order for vulnerable citizens. This demonstrates that leadership had already established Tsilhqot'in emergency response plans to protect children during the wildfire.

In light of Canada's recently announced plan to transfer responsibility for child welfare from provinces to Indigenous governments, protocols specifically addressing child

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protection during emergencies ought to be developed between the Tsilhqot'in Nation, Ministry of Child and Family Development and Indigenous Services Canada. These protocols should delineate the supportive role that the Ministry of Child and Family Development can play in facilitating the development and implementation of Tsilhqot'in emergency response measures for the protection of children. To this end, the Tsilhqot'in Nation notes the existence of detailed yet unimplemented recommendations on improving child protection services on reserve that provide a strong foundation for moving forward on this issue.¹

Protocols on geographic coordination of wildfire response that reflect Tsilhqot'in fire crew knowledge of the land

As the report documents, the 2017 wildfire response contained countless missed opportunities for integrating Tsilhqot'in knowledge of the territory. Moving forward, protocol agreements that focus on geographic coordination of local fire crews can help ensure that firefighting expertise is strategically deployed to reflect knowledge of the land. Protocol agreements can incorporate a tiered approach that prioritizes Tsilhqot'in crew work in the crews' home communities; secondarily, elsewhere in Tsilhqot'in territory; and finally, other locations across the province where additional fire fighting capacity is needed. Formalized protocols will help ensure that Tsilhqot'in capacity and expertise is harnessed in a way that protects both Tsilhqot'in communities and the province at large.

Protocols should also address opportunities for collaboration and sharing of technical expertise on wildfire response to protect Tsilhqot'in lands. The Tsilhqot'in National Government has significant land-based and technical expertise. The Tsilhqot'in National Government GIS and mapping team provided detailed and dynamic information on the fires to Tsilhqot'in communities throughout the 2017 wildfire season. Only at the end of the 2017 wildfires was this mapping and technical expertise incorporated into wildfire strategy to minimize or avoid impacts on important cultural sites.

Protocol agreements should immediately establish formalized community liaison positions within regional and provincial emergency operations for Tsilhqot'in citizens as an immediate stop-gap measure for the next emergency. This will establish a direct community-incident commander communication channel as BC, Canada and the Tsilhqot'in Nation move toward an emergency management model that has significant First Nations expertise embedded in provincial agencies (see Call to Action 13).

Revision of protocols to ensure that land, resource and wildlife recovery and mitigation decisions are based on Tsilhqot'in cumulative impacts assessment and value-based approaches and incorporated into territorial management plans

Moving forward on wildfire recovery requires a commitment by all parties to make informed decisions that account for cumulative impacts and are respectful of different value-based systems with respect to land, resources and wildlife. For example, BC's 2018 Limited Entry Hunt decisions for moose have been based largely on well-developed studies on the impact of human threats. The Tsilhqot'in Nation opposes this approach because it has been taken in the absence of a full cumulative impacts assessment of

¹ *Representative for Children and Youth, Lost in the Shadows: How a Lack of Help Meant a Loss of Hope for One First Nations Girl (February, 2014); Special Advisor Grand Chief Ed John, Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness and Reunification – From Root Cases to Root Solutions: A Report on Indigenous Child Welfare in British Columbia (November, 2016).*

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human, habitat and non-human predation threats to the moose population. Tsilhqot'in law accounted for these three pillars of threats identified in the Tsilhqot'in Moose Management Plan. The Nation has also taken into account the well-established environmental principle of precaution, which guides decision-making in the absence of full information about environmental impacts.

The 2018 Moose Co-Management Agreement affirms a partnership between BC and Tsilhqot'in governments in establishing a moose management framework for 2019. It remains to be seen whether this co-management agreement will adequately incorporate and implement Tsilhqot'in cumulative impacts assessment and values with respect to wildfire in Tsilhqot'in territory.

CALL TO ACTION 11

Enter into Service Agency/Tsilhqot'in agreements built on respect and recognition of Tsilhqot'in jurisdiction

At a fundamental and practical level, recognition of Tsilhqot'in leadership requires that emergency response officials — regional, provincial and federal — have a basic understanding of Tsilhqot'in communities, including their jurisdiction and governance structure. Agreements with service agencies must enshrine a commitment to respectful, ongoing and collaborative working relationships with Tsilhqot'in communities. Building these relationships is a year-round task, not limited to the fire season.

Agency-specific agreements should establish protocols for entering into the communities and working with the communities on all matters, including emergency management. These protocol agreements should mandate cultural awareness and sensitivity training for all agencies providing services to the community. Training ought to include fundamental training in Tsilhqot'in governance structures and jurisdiction in order to avoid confrontation based in misinformation on the part of officials during the 2017 wildfires.

Land Based and Economic Stabilization Measures

The wildfires revealed a set of fundamental jurisdictional challenges and opportunities in relation to land and wildlife stewardship. The exercise of concurrent jurisdiction by British Columbia and the Tsilhqot'in over mushroom harvesting and moose hunting in Tsilhqot'in territory present case studies in collaboration and conflict. Long-term rehabilitation efforts and fire mitigation measures present opportunities for collaborative planning and decision-making throughout Tsilhqot'in territory.

The jurisdictional issues over land and stewardship arising from the 2017 wildfires are products of the complex jurisdictional web that overlays Tsilhqot'in territory. The Tsilhqot'in Nation exercises inherent jurisdiction over its territory. Canadian law recognizes and affirms Tsilhqot'in rights and title in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. Tsilhqot'in title to a portion of Tsilhqot'in territory was recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2014. Since this decision, issues of jurisdiction with respect to the Declared Title Area (DTA) and the rest of Tsilhqot'in territory are guided by Nenqay Deni Accord (BC and Tsilhqot'in Nation) (NDA)² and the Letter of Understanding (LOU)³ between the Tsilhqot'in Nation and Canada: January 27, 2017.

² "Nenqay Deni Accord" February 2016, http://www.tsilhqotin.ca/Portals/o/PDFs/Nenqay_Deni_Accord.pdf

³ "Letter of Understanding" January 27, 2017, http://www.tsilhqotin.ca/Portals/o/PDFs/Press%20Releases/2017_01_27_Tsilhqotin_Canada_LOU.pdf

CALL TO ACTION 28

Strengthen and expand collaborative enforcement efforts on Tsilhqot'in Territory to promote cultural, biocultural, economic and ecological values as land & wildlife recover from wildfire.

The implementation and enforcement of Tsilhqot'in laws over mushroom harvesting in the post-fire 2018 mushroom picking season was a tremendous collaborative success. The successful mushroom permitting scheme was the product of a supportive and collaborative enforcement relationship between Tsilhqot'in Rangers, provincial conservation officers, provincial natural resource officers and the RCMP. This model of enforcement cooperation can serve as a foundation for strengthening and expanding compliance and enforcement efforts on Tsilhqot'in territory.

The enforcement partnership developed to implement Tsilhqot'in mushroom permitting law should be formalized and expanded to other areas of land, resource and environment regulation, including biocultural restoration. Strengthening and enhancing collaborative enforcement mechanisms appropriately reflect the complex jurisdictional web that overlays Tsilhqot'in territory.

APPENDIX B - STACEY & FELTES**CALL TO ACTION 23**

Engage in rehabilitation and fire mitigation planning at the territorial level with Tsilhqot'in communities playing an active leadership role.

Tsilhqot'in jurisdiction, extensive land-based knowledge and deep connection to the land through cultural and subsistence practices all require the Tsilhqot'in Nation and the communities to play a leading role in forest planning decisions around rehabilitation and mitigation in the territory. Rehabilitation after the 2017 wildfires has involved opportunities for some Tsilhqot'in forest companies to take on particular rehabilitation contracts. But the Tsilhqot'in have not been treated as a collaborative partner in landscape-level planning decisions taken by British Columbia in Tsilhqot'in territory.

The Nenqay Deni Accord and the Tsilhqot'in Stewardship Agreement set out guiding principles for an active and collaborative role for Tsilhqot'in leadership in land and stewardship decision in Tsilhqot'in territory. The Tsilhqot'in National Government calls for recognition and recommitment to these principles to ensure the Tsilhqot'in Nation has a key role in determining the vision, priorities and specific decisions that will be taken in its territory.

The jurisdictional gap with respect to the DTA is acute. As the DTA is in the process of transition back to full Tsilhqot'in management and control, British Columbia has committed to continuing to "prepare for and respond to emergencies in around the Title Area" in accordance with provincial laws, plans and policies under the Emergency Program Act.⁴ Moreover, British Columbia has assumed all liability and risks arising from emergencies within the DTA, as if it were provincial Crown land.⁵ These provisions in the agreement speak to emergency preparedness, response and compensation.

Yet, the Emergency Response Protocol is silent on mitigation and prevention. Forests within the DTA are a known wildfire risk in immediate need of proper forest stewardship planning and fuel management to mitigate this risk. However, as a result of the transfer of ownership of the DTA, the Tsilhqot'in National Government and Xeni Gwet'in have not been able to access existing provincial programs for implementing fuel mitigation measures. Without support, the Nation and Xeni Gwet'in lack capacity to take the necessary steps to mitigate known fire risks.

Fire mitigation planning in Tsilhqot'in territory, and particularly in the DTA, requires a regional planning process in collaboration with the Tsilhqot'in Nation and with Tsilhqot'in communities playing an active leadership role.

4 *Emergency Response Protocol (2015), s 2.*

5 *Emergency Response Protocol (2015), s 5.*

Dedicated Financial Resources

Core Challenges:

The financial risks and inadequate disaster compensation experienced by Tsilhqot'in communities are the products of jurisdictional gaps in emergency management in First Nations communities. From an emergency financing perspective, the Tsilhqot'in communities were treated as equivalent to local governments – expected to cover up-front emergency response costs and seek reimbursement. Yet Tsilhqot'in communities lack the financial capacity to operate on a reimbursement model, creating significant financial risk and uncertainty for the communities. Moreover, disaster compensation that simply restores Tsilhqot'in communities to their pre-fire state leaves these communities vulnerable to future wildfire. The 2017 wildfires present a crucial opportunity to recover communities in a way that attends to the major infrastructure gaps that create disaster vulnerability.

Reimbursement and recovery costs for First Nations communities are ultimately sourced by Canada. However, BC is responsible for administering the reimbursement process for BC First Nations. This added level of jurisdictional coordination created a significant and stressful administrative burden for Tsilhqot'in communities attempting to recover from a disaster. Moreover, it has meant that costs have yet to be fully recovered, over a year after the wildfires ended.

CALL TO ACTION 32

Establish clear financial arrangements and compensation measures developed together between Tsilhqot'in, regional, provincial, and federal authorities in advance of an emergency

Recognition of First Nations as lead authorities for emergency management requires enhancing the financial capacity of First Nations to carry out this responsibility. Funding arrangements that enable Tsilhqot'in leadership to effectively implement emergency management practices – prevention, preparedness, response and recovery – are required. (See Calls to Action 13-17, which are necessary to realize this commitment.)

Proportionate compensation and restitution processes that accurately reflect the Nation's reliance on land-based sustenance

Disaster compensation must attend to the different ways in which disasters result in loss of livelihood in Indigenous communities. Tsilhqot'in citizens are coping with the immediate and long-term impacts of the wildfires on land-based practices, including traditional sustenance and use of medicinal plants. Hunting, fishing, gathering and cultural practices have been and will continue to be affected for decades. The Red Cross provides some short-term relief for "cultural livelihood" funding, but there exists no known mechanism for supporting and repairing communities which are experiencing long-term loss.

The Tsilhqot'in Nation can, with the support of provincial and federal partners play a leadership role in monitoring and assessing long-term land-based losses and formulating new models of disaster restitution that respond to cultural and subsistence losses. Financial assistance agreements should provide for adequate support to monitor long-

APPENDIX B - STACEY & FELTES

term losses in game, fish, medicine, berries and other cultural losses in Tsilhqot'in territory. The Tsilhqot'in Nation calls on provincial and federal partners to develop disaster compensation agreements that incorporate Tsilhqot'in principles of restitution and which accurately reflect the individual and collective impacts of disaster over time.

Reserve fund for Tsilhqot'in emergency response and a commitment to the timely advance of federal reserve funds for emergency situations

Tsilhqot'in leadership in wildfire management requires access to funding for immediate emergency response. Establishing a reserve fund for emergency response will enable Tsilhqot'in leadership to take urgent and needed action to address wildfire threats without also taking the financial leap of faith that is entailed by a reimbursement structure. Protocol agreements for accessing the reserve fund can be drafted in advance to address, for example: necessary pre-conditions for reserve fund access (e.g. declaring a state of emergency), and a non-exclusive itemized list of automatically authorized expenditures (e.g. salary, sustenance and travel expenditures for fire crews). The creation of well-understood guidelines for acceptable and pre-authorized expenses alleviates the uncertainty of negotiating expenses piece-by-piece while also allowing communities to respond appropriately and effectively during the emergency.

CALL TO ACTION 29

Pilot project for a one-stop, coordinated reimbursement process for First Nations governments in BC

The Tsilhqot'in Nation recommends a reimbursement process that has a clear lead authority which works directly with Tsilhqot'in communities to reimburse communities for emergency response expenditures that are not covered by the reserve fund. Identifying and empowering a single lead authority responds to the cumbersome reimbursement process experienced by Tsilhqot'in communities in 2017-18. A single lead authority supports the adoption and implementation of Jordan's Principle in this context.

Reimburse communities in accordance with the principle of building back better to mitigate future disaster risk

Canada should commit to and implement the principle of building back better in a way that recognizes the systemic inequality experienced by First Nations communities. The principle of building back better is identified as a key priority in international disaster best practices.⁶ 'Build back better' recognizes that disaster recovery is a crucial opportunity to rebuild communities in a way that better prepares communities for the next emergency.

The Tsilhqot'in Nation recognizes Canada's commitment to 15% mitigation enhancements through the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements.⁷ The 15% rule reflects the need for additional funding to restore and improve damaged infrastructure after a disaster. This rule should be extended to First Nations communities receiving compensation for

⁶ UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), Priority 4.

⁷ Guidelines for the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements - Interpretation Bulletin 7 (January 1, 2017).

APPENDIX B - STACEY & FELTES

disaster recovery. Tsilhqot'in Nation requests a baseline commitment from Canada to 15% mitigation enhancements to public and private infrastructure in Tsilhqot'in communities.

Moreover, the significant and well-known disparities between infrastructure on First Nations reserves and in non-First Nations communities requires Canada and the provinces to negotiate in good faith with First Nations communities to provide enhanced critical infrastructure and ensure basic infrastructure standards are met. Accordingly, and in addition to the financial baseline, the Nation requests an ongoing commitment by Canada and British Columbia to work with communities to mitigate all future concerns.

CALL TO ACTION 33 *Apply Jordan's Principle to emergency management on reserve*

The Tsilhqot'in Nation identifies Jordan's Principle as the appropriate basis for guiding funding for emergency management in First Nations communities. The Tsilhqot'in Nation recommends that British Columbia and Canada commit to extending Jordan's Principle to ensure that jurisdictional ambiguity and complexity do not deny or delay the provision of essential services in First Nations communities during and after an emergency. Jordan's Principle is explained below.

Just as jurisdictional ambiguity and complexity exacerbates the vulnerability of First Nations children in need of social services, jurisdictional ambiguity and complexity operate to enhance the vulnerability of First Nations communities to threats such as wildfire. Jurisdictional complexity interfered with the ability of Tsilhqot'in communities to respond immediately to the perceived wildfire threat. Jurisdictional complexity caused significant delays in reimbursement of emergency management expenses further threatening the ability of communities to run their governments for the remainder of the year. As noted above, dealing with multiple departments and a complex reimbursement process placed a substantial administrative burden on small communities in the midst of wildfire recovery.

The Tsilhqot'in Nation recommends that British Columbia and Canada adopt a community-first approach. It recommends that the governments recognize the spirit and intention of Jordan's Principle and extend the application of this principle to emergency management on reserve.

APPENDIX C

TL'ETINQOX COMMUNITY HEALTH REVIEW

LISA HARTWICK



Tl'etinqox Health
Box 168 Alexis Creek
Ph 250.394.4240
Fax 250.394.4234

Tl'etinqox Community Holistic Health Review of Effects Summer Wildfires, 2017

"Families should not underestimate the cumulative effects of evacuation, displacement, relocation, and rebuilding."

**-National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) report
on wildfires, trauma, and effects on families, 2017.**

APPENDIX C - HARTWICK

The purpose of this document is to outline some of the effects observed in the community after the wildfires this past summer, 2017.

This summer, with the wildfires, every member of this community experienced the spectrum of factors outlined in the document cited above:

- weeks of smoke and visible fire
- the threat of substantial loss and danger to person and property
- the abrupt change to land, loss of traditional activity and places, and stress on animals
- relocations and separations from family, community, and land
- the requirement to seek assistance from agencies; in some cases, weeks of temporary and/or foreign housing
- problems with food, water, communications, and electricity
- cut offs from transportation
- abrupt changes in work
- disruption to regular routine, especially impactful on children.

Beyond the reaches of this NCTSN report, special considerations apply to this community when assessing the effect of the wildfires: 1) Tl'etinqox was the first First Nation to claim the right to stay in their community to protect their land despite government orders 2) simultaneously, the people were being managed and handled by imposing government organizations and 3) all of these factors were taking place on the backdrop of decades of past unremitting traumatic action by the same government. 4) As a people of land-based tradition, there is great meaning and practical significance to connecting to the land that sustains them; loss of that land contributes greatly to levels of distress.

My colleague, Hana Kamea Kemble, RCC and I, Lisa Hartwick, RCC, as community therapists, have been listening to and providing support to all ages of people in diverse roles in the community through one on one, and large and small groups of different designs - creative, debriefing, therapeutic, healing, supportive, workshops, circles, and meetings - through and since the wildfires, extending from early summer right through the fall.

In general (though there were remarkable positive ways that people came together through the summer), many people, despite good and solid appearances, are deeply struggling beyond the typical and normalized ways of handling long-standing distress.

APPENDIX C - HARTWICK**EFFECTS**

Here are some of the subtle and overt behaviors and symptoms we are seeing in people who are coping and dealing with the effects of the intense, prolonged stressful summer and fall:

- 1. increased tension in the workplace** - people are struggling with interpersonal dynamics, uncertainty, lack of clarity, mistrust
- 2. people have been keeping to themselves and not asking for help** - this is now starting to shift, but there has been a noticeable collective reaction to stay close, withdraw, and self-protect.
- 3. intensification of negative coping strategies (eg. addictions)** -referrals and self-referrals have magnified for counselling as negative patterns escalate and create more obvious disruptions to daily life, work, relationships, etc.
- 4. heightened startle response and hypervigilance** - people have been reporting escalated arousal to smoke, to police/uniforms, to external organizations (eg. MCF)
- 5. cascade of trauma response** - new life stressors (e.g. loss, unexpected alarm, tension at work) that might normally be smoothly integrated are intensely triggering past trauma, thus affecting the whole person's overall function and capacity.
- 6. serious mental health disturbance in greater numbers** - depression, suicidality, complex grief, anxiety, psychosis.
- 7. intensified interpersonal violence** - more reports of family discord and violence, interfamily tension, upset and disputes, and, accordingly, increased instability for children.
- 8. increased demand for support/therapy** - more requests/waitlists plus more falling through the cracks. People who are now building up the courage to ask for help are frequently unable to follow through.
- 9. a rise in self-reports of feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, confused and undersupported**, which makes for missed days at work, unreliability, and increased health risks
- 10. a notable rise in negative perceptions** - interpreting communication in negative and narrow ways, thereby creating more defensiveness, more self-protection, more blame, and more suffering
- 11. children have expressed fear regarding next summer, increased anxiety, and nightmares**; in play therapy, children are also often spending time processing their experience of the fires
- 12. increase in physical symptoms related to stress** - people are generally fatigued and energetically low (confirmed by Bryn Thompson, Physiotherapist)

APPENDIX C - HARTWICK**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Put a lot of focus on staff and improving the internal organization. Staff (all of whom are coping with their own response and the community's responses) require the support of a healthy, high-functioning organization, increased structure, places to be heard, and places to work through conflict.

I recommend facilitated circles for staff, conflict resolution strategies and teachings, and more ceremony/song/tradition, as well as focusing heavily on organizational development, establishing partnerships for capacity building, clarifying community priorities, advancing policy, defining roles, etc.

2. Care for firefighters, staff, parents, and children: honor firefighters, all those who were on the front lines - firefighters, cooks, EOC, regular staff, etc; provide series of places and ways to share stories and receive support and education on what to expect and how best to work with stress.

***This was recommended right from the start (see letters July 2017 to TNG and FNHA) and has only partially been looked after to date due to the reaction locally in the community (as outlined above), insufficiency of local staff and missing staff (for example, the Traditional Wellness worker was away looking after Elders off-reserve during the fires), lack of high-level support, and systemic barriers.*

3. Continue to build a strong holistic health team and develop comprehensive health services. Support is needed to recruit and retain high-quality human resources:

- a) Hire another therapist to create more availability of 1:1 sessions and to help design and deliver consistent group offerings. A community of this size warrants a full-time therapist.
- b) Hire another Traditional expert to help guide healing and ensure that all health services and other community developments are infused with language and culture. This is something that was named and prioritized in the community CCP.
- c) Develop ways to enhance the model for frontline counseling services so that people from the Nation who are interested in counseling as work (several people have spoken to me with this interest) have the opportunity to receive good supervision, training, and jobs to serve their people.

RECOMMENDATIONS (Continued)

4. Build a multi-use building and traditional longhouse for gathering, dance, drumming, ceremony, teachings, and exercise for people of all ages. Again, identified strongly in the CCP - a multiuse Traditional, supportive, accessible space for Health and Healing is greatly needed.

5. Create a Land-based, Equine, Recovery, Healing and Leadership Program: There is a lack of creative, land-based healing programs, especially one that would use Traditional strengths (for recovery from addictions, youth & family programming, and justice programs) and relational models.

6. Open a Safe House for people in transition or needing extra support, crisis response, 24-hour access. This was also identified in the CCP.

7. Form an End of Life, Palliative Care/Hospice Society - Taking care of Elders was a strong theme in all community engagement sessions pre-fires, and has only intensified through the challenges of the summer. Many Elders experienced very intense situations, abrupt change, and threats to health and safety. Investing in the community in this way would address issues of poverty, Elder abuse, and respectful care.

In conclusion, the stressful summer amplified many of the issues that already exist in the community and pointed out systemic gaps and racism, all which increase the urgency and need for positive sustained action.

These above recommendations are aiming at responding to the immediacy of the current situation while at the same time creating lasting and meaningful change. Many recommendations for community development need to be prioritized by Chief & Council through the CCP process.

APPENDIX D

LIST OF ACRONYMS

APPENDIX D - LIST OF ACRONYMS

Acronyms

BCR	Band Council Resolution
CAF	Canadian Armed Forces
CRD	Cariboo Regional District
CTA	Community Tripartite Agreement
DISC	Department of Indigenous Services Canada
DSS	Denisiqi Services Society
DTA	Declared Title Area
EI	Employment Insurance
EFF	Emergency Fire Fighter
EMBC	Emergency Management British Columbia
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
FNESS	First Nations' Emergency Services Society of British Columbia
FNHA	First Nation Health Authority
FNS	First Nation Summit
GIS	Geographic Information System
GPS	Global Positioning System
INAC	Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
I.R.	Indian Reserve
LEH	Limited Entry Hunt
LGIC	Lieutenant Governor in Council
LOU	Letter of Understanding - Tsilhqot'in Nation & Canada, Jan. 27, 2018
MCFD	Ministry of Children & Family Development
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
NDA	Nenqay Deni Accord - Tsilhqot'in Nation & BC, Feb. 12, 2016
PREOC	Provincial Regional Emergency Operations Centre
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RSBC	Revised Statutes of British Columbia (Canada)
RSC	Revised Statutes of Canada
S100	Basic Fire Suppression and Safety
S185	Fire Entrapment Avoidance & Safety
SUP	Structural Protection Unit
TDDE	Tsi Deldel Enterprises Ltd.
TEOP	Tl'etinqox Emergency Operations Centre
TNG	Tsilhqot'in National Government
TRU	Thompson Rivers University
UBCIC	Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs
YDE	Yunesit'in Development Enterprises

APPENDIX E
METHODOLOGY

Methodology

The Tsilhqot'in Wildfire project began by seeking and building partnerships with a diversity of experts in the field. Under the leadership of consultant Crystal Verhaeghe, a project team was struck in April 2018, bringing together a cross-section of expertise and perspectives. This included senior level TNG staff with experience in negotiations, health, forestry, lands and resources, as well as external partners with expertise in disaster management, fire ecology, and disaster law. Out of this, a strong partnership developed with two experts from the University of British Columbia, Dr. Jocelyn Stacey (Peter Allard School of Law) and Emma Feltes (PhD Candidate, Anthropology), who joined Crystal as research collaborators and co-authors of the report. Dr. Stacey and Feltes additionally analyzed the complexity of emergency management laws and the intersection of government and First Nation jurisdiction. Dr. Stacey and Feltes developed recommendations to improve cooperation and reduce conflict in First Nation wildfire management.

Informed by the 2018 Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement and TNG leadership, the project team determined the scope of the project. It was unanimous that the priority should be on thoroughly documenting the unique experiences of each of the six Tsilhqot'in communities during the 2017 wildfires, while at the same time capturing the collective impacts on the Tsilhqot'in nation as a whole and identifying in particular the inter-jurisdictional issues that arose between Tsilhqot'in, federal, provincial, and third-party entities.

To accomplish this breadth of scope, and over five months of intensive research, our methodology included:

- Extensive qualitative research in each of the six Tsilhqot'in communities, amounting to **82 semi-structured interviews**. The team interviewed Chiefs, band councillors, band staff, forestry experts, emergency management personnel, community fire crews, Elders, and other community members. Additionally, government and First Nations representatives including the First Nations Summit, Aboriginal Affairs, Canadian Red Cross and Emergency Advisory representatives were interviewed.
- **Two facilitated, open Nation-wide sessions** with the objective of enabling a venue for Tsilhqot'in citizens and staff to reflect on the 2017 wildfire experience and identify best practices, gaps, challenges and recommendations. These sessions were supported by mental health advocates since debriefing is often a time to heal and reflect about the traumatic experiences. One session was held in the Fall of 2017 and another in the Fall of 2018.
- A **facilitated community Emergency Operations Centre session** held one year after the wildfires to assess the community health and wellbeing. The session was held to reflect on the state of the community one year later and to identify how the recovery process was progressing. From this session a breadth of needs were identified.
- **Two Nation-level meetings with Wildfire Recovery managers** to review community-level and shared recovery needs for each community.

APPENDIX E - METHODOLOGY

- A **scientific assessment by a fire ecologist** to look at on-the-ground conditions and impacts.
- **Community risk vulnerability assessments** with each of the six Tsilhqot'in communities and to determine each communities' level of threat in the event of future emergencies.
- An **expert review and analysis of existing statutory and regulatory law** regarding emergency management in First Nations in British Columbia.
- An in-depth **review of existing reports** and emerging literature on wildfire and disaster management on First Nations reserves.
- A Review of **community wildfire recovery reports**.

This wealth of collected data and expert knowledge has all come to inform the final report.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

CRYSTAL VERHAEGHE

Crystal Verhaeghe is a Tsilhqot'in First Nation member from the ?Esdilagh (Alexandria) community. Previously, she worked in many capacities at the Tsilhqot'in National Government over eleven years in the roles of the Economic Development Coordinator, the Executive Director and the Special Advisor to the Chiefs and Lead Negotiator. Crystal has a Small Business and Entrepreneurship Degree from Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta and an Executive Master of Business Administration from the University of Northern British Columbia. Since 2002, Crystal has operated Emoda Design, a consulting and web development company. Crystal Verhaeghe is a Director for the Williams Lake and District Credit Union, the Tsi Deldel Development Corporation and the Esdilagh Development Corporation.

EMMA FELTES

Emma Feltes is a PhD Candidate in Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. She is a writer, community organizer, and policy analyst with ten years of experience in qualitative and collaborative research. Her work focuses on settler responsibilities in reshaping Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples. She has a BA (Combined Hons) in Contemporary Studies and International Development from the University of King's College and an MA in Anthropology from Dalhousie University. Prior to beginning her PhD, she was the Aboriginal Policy Lead in Children's Services for the City of Toronto. She is a long-time collaborator with the Indigenous Network on Economies and Trade, with whom she has led major research projects and contributed to numerous policy papers and submissions to the United Nations.

DR. JOCELYN STACEY

Dr. Jocelyn Stacey is an Assistant Professor at the Peter A. Allard School of Law, University of British Columbia. She researches the intersection between environmental issues, disaster and law. Her first book, The Constitution of the Environmental Emergency, was released by Hart Publishing in 2018. Dr. Stacey has published on disaster law and environmental law in numerous leading Canadian law journals. Jocelyn teaches Canadian environmental law and administrative law. She has a doctorate in law from McGill University, a LLM from Yale Law School, a LLB from the University of Calgary and a BSc from the University of Alberta. Prior to her graduate work, Dr. Stacey clerked for the Honourable Justice Marshall Rothstein at the Supreme Court of Canada. She is a founding Board Member of the Pacific Centre for Environmental Law and Litigation, a non-profit society dedicated to training law students and young lawyers in public interest environmental law litigation.

