TRIAL BY FIRE: NADLEH WHUT’EN AND THE SHOVEL LAKE FIRE, 2018
The Nadleh Whut’en First Nation would like to acknowledge the assistance of all the firefighters and service personnel who helped fight the Shovel Lake Fire of 2018, including firefighters from Nadleh Whut’en First Nation, Stellat’en First Nation, the Esketemc First Nation, Mexico, the Salish Unit Crew, the British Columbia Wildfire Service, and the RCMP.

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This report commissioned and authorized by the Chief and Council of the Nadleh Whut’en First Nation.

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Greetings,

Our community faced a trial this summer. The Shovel Lake Fire threatened to destroy our village. Those of us living here were forced to evacuate to Prince George; we were faced with not only a strange city, but some unfriendly and disrespectful people.

But because we worked hard, and were determined, we survived this trial. Our members fought this fire, and others this summer. Our staff worked day and night in the Emergency Operations Centre to ensure that our people were safe. Our members who were evacuated were patient and kept themselves in good spirits. We are stronger for it.

This report is the result of dozens of interviews with members of our Nation, representatives from our neighbouring communities, and people who worked for provincial agencies during the emergency. It outlines the challenges we were faced with, what we put in place to meet those challenges, and what we need to do differently in the future.

Shovel Lake will not be the last fire we face. With climate change, and the problems with modern forestry, forest fires are becoming more frequent and severe. But if we can act on the recommendations found in this report, we will be far better prepared to meet these challenges in the future.

If you have comments, questions, or concerns about this report please contact me at lnooski@nadleh.ca.

Thank you,

Larry Nooski
Chief,
Nadleh Whut’en First Nation

On July 27, 2018 the Shovel Lake wildfire was sparked and BC Wildfire Service confirmed the wildfire to be human caused (CTV News, Sept. 2, 2018). By the time this fire could be contained a total of 92,411.7 hectares of land was severely burned. This fire combined with the Island Lake fire, Foster Lake fire, and Dog Creek fire would lead to the loss of over 22% of Nadleh Whut’en’s territory in 2018. While Nadleh Whut’en lost three buildings at the Ormond Lake healing camp, thankfully no lives were lost.

The Shovel Lake wildfire would challenge the organization and the people of Nadleh Whut’en. While the events were difficult it also led to a stronger and better prepared Nation.

Climate change and increasing activities on the landscape will result in more wildfire events in the future for Nadleh Whut’en and other First Nations in British Columbia. For Nadleh Whut’en, the events of this year are an opportunity to learn from the issues and challenges they faced and to plan and be better prepared for the future.

Within a month of the start of the Shovel Lake wildfire Nadleh Whut’en had updated their emergency response plan, trained their personnel to respond to the emergency, evacuated their most at risk community members, and worked with Federal, Provincial, and Municipal representatives to protect their community.

The lessons learned from this year’s wildfire are chronicled in this report, which is designed to capture the key events, challenges, and recommendations resulting from this year’s wildfire event.

It should be noted that the recommendations made herein are in many ways unique to Nadleh Whut’en but they also reflect many of the same challenges as those identified in the Federal Government House of Commons Report - From the Ashes June 2018. It is clear that there are recurring issues that need to be addressed, and soon.
Recommendations fall into two main categories:

- Further training and preparation for Nadleh Whut’en’s staff and membership.

- Breaking down jurisdictional barriers to improve communications and operations, which caused numerous challenges for Nadleh during the 2018 fire season.

FOREWORD

The people of Nadleh Whut’en were worried about wildfires in the summer of 2018, but they had no idea what they would actually have to deal with or how it would affect their community. The previous year they watched and worried for their neighbours and family as wildfires raged out of control south of them in Tsilhqot’in territory. The Tsilhqot’in communities had to fight hard to protect their lands from the wildfires, but they also had to fight the bureaucratic process that would not recognize the rights of First Nations to manage the wildfire as they determined best. Nadleh Whut’en was more worried about the fires than the bureaucracy, but they still had to battle both.

Summer of 2018 started late, but it came on hot and dry. Several small fires had broken out in Nadleh territory but thankfully they were under control. But on July 27, 2018 a wildfire was sparked just west of Nadleh Whut’en territory. This fire would change how Nadleh managed and dealt with emergencies from that point on.

The Shovel Lake fire started approximately 45 km west of Nadleh village in the territory of their sister community of Stellat’en First Nation. While the exact cause of the fire has yet to be determined, early indications suggest that this wildfire was sparked by loggers and logging equipment, which was still operational after forest use restrictions were put in place. As the fire was so far away, the primary fire concern for Nadleh Whut’en for the first two weeks was the impact of choking smoke upon the young, elderly, and sick. According to news reports, the smoke from this fire spread all the way to Saskatchewan (CBC Aug 17, 2018). But shortly after the second week the fire situation changed dramatically and it would force Nadleh Whut’en to rally their membership and tackle the largest fire in their territory since the 1922 Lily Lake fire.

The wildfires in the central interior of BC would change the way Nadleh Whut’en and all First Nations approach the management of wildfires from now on.
Wildfires of 2017 and early 2018

2017 is considered the worst wildfire season in British Columbia history (The Canadian Press, The Province: Aug. 26, 2018). For Nadleh Whut’en the 2017 wildfire season resulted in a burn of 1,590 hectares in their territory — but that was a tiny fraction of the territory that burned during the summer of 2018.

For Nadleh Whut’en, the 2018 wildfire season began on June 20th with the Foster Creek wildfire south of Fraser Lake. This fire was started by a lightning strike during a storm. By June 28th the fire was contained and had burned approximately 327.8 hectares of land.

On July 17th a fire started in the easternmost portion of Nadleh Whut’en territory. This fire, the Dog Creek wildfire, was estimated to be approximately 80 hectares within the first 24 hours. By July 18th an Evacuation Alert was issued by the Regional District of the Bulkley-Nechako for lands located between the Dog Creek Road and the Nechako River to the south. By July 20th the Dog Creek wildfire grew to approximately 414 hectares but it was brought under control by July 21st, when the Evacuation Alert was lifted in its entirety. Only a week later, however, the Shovel Lake fire started.

Shortly after the start of the Shovel Lake wildfire, the Island Lake wildfire started on August 1, 2018 with a lightning strike. This wildfire resulted in an evacuation order in the southern portion of Nadleh Whut’en’s territory and a loss of approximately 21,380 hectares of land. However, given the distance from Nadleh’s main village the Island Lake Fire will not be addressed further in this report other than to note the additional loss of land, forest, and biodiversity.

By the end of 2018 Nadleh Whut’en had to face the loss of approximately 22% of their territory — 111,966.8 hectares — to four wildfires: Foster Lake, Dog Creek Road, the Shovel Lake, and Island Lake wildfires. Such loss of animals and plants will have long-term effects on the people of Nadleh Whut’en for generations to come.

“They need to get some trees planted now. And get a crew out there, cutting all the windfall down. I mean, there’s nothing. There’s nothing. Ormond Lake you hear birds chirping, squirrels, now there’s nothing. It’s dead all over.”


Historical Changes to Fire Severity

Nadleh Whut’en is a small First Nation community located on the shores of Nadleh Bunk’et (Fraser Lake). Their population is approximately 562 members, of which 50% live on reserve. They have lived here since time immemorial and have developed a rich culture centred on their relationship with the salmon, caribou, moose, and plants in their territory. Their grocery store is the land and waters of their territory and it has met their needs for thousands upon thousands of years.

Unfortunately, since the mid- to late 1800s the people of Nadleh have faced increasing challenges in meeting their basic subsistence needs. In order to survive, the Nadleh Whut’en have had to change their subsistence practices to adapt to the encroachment of Euro-Canadian settlers in their territory, and now they face more changes as a result of climate change.

Recent analyses have shown that wildfires are becoming larger and more intense every year (CBC July 15, 2017). Decreased rainfall, higher average temperatures, and the five warmest years on record all occurring in the last five years indicate that the environmental conditions that favour wildfires will continue (NASA Oct 15, 2018).
TIMELINE OF THE SHOVEL LAKE FIRE

JULY 27
The Shovel Lake Fire starts. According to BC Wildfire Service, it is already 500 hectares in size. The fire is being managed by an Incident Command Team based in Burns Lake, operating out of the Northwest Fire Centre.

JULY 28
Local residents notice smoke on the horizon. Chief Larry Nooski texts Mark Parker at the Regional District of Bulkley Nechako to see what information he has available. The fire has doubled to 1,000 hectares.

JULY 29
The Regional District of Bulkley Nechako issues its first Evacuation Alert for the Shovel Lake Fire covering an area North of Highway 16 and south of Lake Babine between the Sutherland FSR and Augier Main FSR.

ACRONYMS USED IN THIS REPORT

- **RDBN**: Regional District of Bulkley Nechako
- **ESS**: Emergency Social Services, Province of British Columbia
- **EMBC**: Emergency Management British Columbia
- **DISC**: Department of Indigenous Services Canada
- **FLNRO**: Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations, Province of British Columbia
- **EOC**: Emergency Operations Centre
- **IMT**: Incident Management Team
AUGUST 5
The smoke is getting very thick in Nadleh. Chief Larry Nooski meets with clinic staff to determine what can be done to improve the air quality in the homes of the sick, young, and elderly.

AUGUST 6
The smoke has become thick in the Nadleh Village. Chief and Council arrange for air purifiers to be put into the homes of elders, young people, and members with lung problems. The fire is 5,400 hectares, and at this time seems relatively stable.

AUGUST 8
High winds overnight cause the fire to double in size to 12,000 hectares.
AUGUST 9

Firefighters begin to be assigned to Shovel Lake Wildfire by Nadleh Whut’en. The Nation has an agreement with the BC Ministry of Forests to provide early firefighting management.

“The guys did such a good job that after the fires we received calls from people like Ken Kenya, said you saved our bacon because Nadleh took a stand and did what they did when they decided to go out there. It wasn’t only Nadleh, Stellako was involved with us, Bill Evans, the fireman here was also heavily involved with being on the ground, watching for the advancement of the fire. So, there was a lot of people who were involved, but Nadleh as an organization, I guess you could say, took the lead role in preventing the fire from advancing towards the village.”

— Chief Larry Nooski

AUGUST 11

The fire grows overnight from 17,500 hectares to 30,000.

AUGUST 12

The fire is now visible from the Ormond Lake Healing Camp. According to Beverly Ketlo, the fire was coming “like a freight train.” The camp residents were evacuated.

On the night of August 11th the Shovel Lake wildfire had spread 11 kilometres towards the Ormond Lake Culture Camp. The healing camp, being run by Carrier Sekani Family Services, decided to self-evacuate by 3pm on August 12th as they heard and saw the fire approach and knew it was not going to be safe. That night the wildfire reached Ormond Lake. Miraculously only three buildings were lost — two cabins and a smokehouse— and no one was hurt.

AUGUST 13

Chief Nooski gets a call from the RCMP asking if everyone was able to evacuate safely from Ormond Lake. No prior communications regarding evacuations of Ormond Lake were received.

Chief and Council bring in Juan Cereno to discuss how to respond to the growing fire risk. Juan begins working with Nadleh staff to set up an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC); Juan is named as Director of Emergency Operations Centre for Nadleh and Chief Larry Nooski is made the EOC Commander.

Nadleh declares a State of Emergency. Starting at 8pm that night the elderly, sick, and young are evacuated to Prince George due to the overwhelming smoke in the community.

The Prince George Fire Centre takes over management of the Shovel Lake Fire due to the high number of fires burning in the Northwest Fire Centre, and the fact that Shovel Lake is now mostly in the Prince George Fire Centre’s jurisdictional area. Mike Pritchard, a local with a good relationship with Nadleh, is brought in as the operations section chief for the new Incident Command Team in charge of the Shovel Lake Fire, set up at Fraser Lake.
AUGUST 14

The EOC is set up, staff are hired to fill positions, and organizing and planning begins. Communications between the Fraser Lake Incident Command Team and Nadleh EOC begin to ramp up.

“I was insisting that the incident commander or designated incident commander was attending our own meetings of the community here at nine o’clock in the morning. That was established in the beginning.”

— Juan Cereno

High winds push the fire forward. It is now 50,831 hectares.

AUGUST 15

The Province of British Columbia declares a State of Emergency for the Shovel Lake Wildfire. RCMP Aboriginal Liaison Officer Scott Van Leur starts working with the Nadleh EOC helping to navigate the various jurisdictional challenges. Florence Nooski, Anita Louie, and others begin working as Navigators helping evacuees in Prince George. Navigators assist evacuees by helping them register, communicating between the Nadleh EOC and evacuated members, transporting people to and from restaurants, stores, and anywhere else they needed to go. Navigators are essential to helping evacuees during the extremely stressful evacuation.

“There was a bunch of elders that they keeping wanting to go home. So these two I had to talk to them every day, morning, afternoon, and night and tell them, “You got to stay. You got to stay.” And that alone was just a big job.”

— Florence Nooski, Navigator

AUGUST 16

An extreme fire behaviour warning is issued by the Province of BC. Shovel Lake Fire has grown to 68,375 hectares in size.

AUGUST 17

The Nadleh Fire Crew is pulled to the south eastern side of the fire due to high winds.

Concerns were raised about drug use by the Nadleh fire crew.

The fire grows by over 10,000 hectares overnight. It is now 78,564 hectares in size. An Evacuation Order is put in place by Nadleh Chief and Council. The entire community must now evacuate. The EOC stays in place at the Nadleh Band Hall.

Marvin Salonas is hired to drive the community bus for evacuees.

The BCWS Incident Command Team from Fraser Lake has their first meeting in Nadleh. Daily meetings are now scheduled in the Nadleh Band Hall.

AUGUST 20

Navigators in Prince George organize a community dinner for Nadleh evacuees.

“We had a nice dinner with our community, right? With Nadleh. We all put up a dinner. We all, like whoever was a navigator. Florence was a navigator. Ed John brought us 20 fish. We all cooked it up, and made a dinner. And that really, like bringing the community together like that, I really, I think helped some of the members. Because, you know, I think with our First Nations, especially Nadleh, they’re always doing community, they do a lot of community driven things. Like they’re always having community dinners. They’re always, they’re a pretty tight community.”

— Miriam Louie, Navigator
AUGUST 22
Navigators have a meeting with Denny’s management in Prince George about poor treatment and disrespect towards Nadleh evacuees. Denny’s management promises to take action and fire two servers who were deemed responsible for the mistreatment.

AUGUST 23
Navigators meet with RCMP in Prince George about a room at the Ramada being damaged by a Nadleh member. The Ramada wants Nadleh to pay for the damage to the room, and to ensure that other members don’t have problems, the Navigators agree. Chief Larry Nooski requests that a cheque is made payable to the Ramada and drafts a letter to accompany the payment.

AUGUST 27
Nadleh Whut’en Chief and Council lift the State of Emergency and the Evacuation Order. It’s been two weeks and Nadleh members begin going home. They are left with smoke damaged homes, fridges and freezers filled with rotten food, and a traditional territory that has been devastated.

AUGUST 28
The BC Wildfire Service classifies the Shovel Lake Fire as 40% contained. It has burned 92,255 hectares.

SEPTEMBER 12
Nadleh Chief and Council hold a Community Update Meeting to discuss the fallout from the Shovel Lake Fire. Community members share their experiences with leadership. The proceedings are recorded for use in this report.

OCTOBER 11
Nadleh hosts a welcome home dinner for evacuees. The community is finally able to come together around food and family, having lived through a harrowing ordeal.

CHALLENGES DURING THE SHOVEL LAKE FIRE
As with any process, and especially during an emergency, there are always challenges. For the 2018 Shovel Lake wildfire challenges faced by Nadleh Whut’en First Nation and Nadleh members are broken into five main categories:

1. Communications and Jurisdictional Challenges
2. Emergency Operations Challenges
3. Firefighting Challenges
4. Evacuation Challenges
5. Recovery Challenges

These issues were identified through interviews with multiple people throughout Nadleh, the Regional District of Bulkley Nechako, the Village of Fraser Lake, the Province of BC, and the Federal Government.

However, it should be stressed that the challenges identified here are relatively few in number, and can be avoided in the future through planning, building protocols and improving relationships between government agencies, and further training.
Communications challenges were identified by nearly everyone spoken to for this report. There were communications issues between all agencies involved, as well as communications problems between Nadleh’s EOC and their Navigators in Prince George. In general, Nadleh leadership felt that they had been left out of the loop when it came to recommendations for evacuation and daily updates of the fire since its start.

When taken as a whole, it seems that without the good relationship between Nadleh leadership and their counterparts at the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako and the Village of Fraser Lake, Nadleh may not have been made aware of the severity of the fire at all.

There were also issues with communications between the Province and Nadleh. These seem to be caused by misunderstandings over jurisdictional authority between the provincial agencies and First Nations, as well as the approaches taken by specific BC Wildfire Service Personnel.

The process for alerting a non-First Nations community about evacuation alerts and orders is very clear: BCWS makes a recommendation to the community to put an evacuation alert or order into place.

However, it was unclear when speaking to BCWS personnel what the lines of communications between provincial emergency management teams and First Nations are meant to be. Some claimed that EMBC was responsible, and others acknowledged that they weren’t sure whether there were proper protocols set in place. At the time of writing this report, we haven’t been able to locate a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Indigenous Services Canada, EMBC and the BCWS which many people claim exists and apparently lays out the responsibilities of various government agencies regarding First Nations emergency management in BC.

“Evacuations, we put in a recommendation for them, and then they are communicated out through the regional district, but in terms of reserve areas, that’s done through EMBC. It’s not done through the regional district, so there’s a different process with that. It’s up to the chief and council to determine whether or not they want to have an evacuation order or an alert, and whether they want those to be rescinded as well. So if you wanted the details around that, I would recommend contacting EMBC.”

— Erin Catherall, BCWS Communications Officer

When the Shovel Lake fire first started, it was in the jurisdiction of the Northwest Fire Centre and being managed from an Incident Command in Burns Lake. Pete Laing, Incident Commander in Burns Lake, felt it was best to give responsibility
for communications with local First Nations to the Regional District, since their relationships were already in place. Nadleh’s feeling of being left out of the loop was likely compounded by BCWS handing off their communications with First Nations to the regional district.

“Before BC declared it an emergency, nobody came out. They just phoned Larry and said, “There’s going to be an order or there’s going to be an alert.” … Ormand Lake Camp was evacuated and I can’t remember the exact day and then the fire came and then the cop phoned Larry the next day and said, ‘Is Ormand Lake evacuated?’ and Larry said, ‘Yesterday, it was evacuated, so yeah. You don’t have to go out there and tell them they need to leave.’ That night, the camp burned. That’s the kind of communications we got.”

— Beverly Ketlo

The Burns Lake Incident Management Team hired a Stellat’en member to act as Aboriginal liaison. This decision to hire an Aboriginal Liaison seems to have been made locally, and not part of the BCWS protocols. Aboriginal Liaisons were also provided by the RCMP (Constable Scott Van Leur) and FLNRO (Lori Borth).

Communications staff at the Burns Lake Incident Management Team organized a series of community meetings at Stellako starting on July 31st. However it isn’t clear how well the dates of these meetings were communicated to Nadleh leadership. It also is a problem when BCWS assumes that all First Nations in the area will meet in another First Nations community.

It wasn’t until the Incident Command for the Shovel Lake Fire was moved to Fraser Lake on August 13th that Nadleh started to receive regular updates from the BCWS. On this date the Shovel Lake Incident Command was moved from the Northwest Fire Centre to the Prince George Fire Centre, and Incident Command was set up at Fraser Lake. Mike Pritchard, who is from the area, was assigned Operations Section Chief.

EOC Director Juan Cereno, and Deputy EOC Director Adam Patrick started to attend the daily evening Fire Update meetings at Fraser Lake Wildfire Complex immediately after the Nadleh Whut’en EOC was established on August 13th.

Juan Cereno also extended an invitation to Mr. Jim Richardson, Fraser Lake Wildfire Complex Incident Commander to attend Nadleh Whut’en EOC daily planning meetings held every morning at 9:00 a.m. This invitation, combined with Mike Pritchard’s relationship with local First Nations and his experience in working with Nadleh started the daily meetings between the BCWS and the Nadleh EOC around August 17th.

Once these meetings were started, communications between the Province and Nadleh improved drastically. Lori Borth, who works in FLNRO as an Aboriginal Liaison, left her holiday early to help with communications starting around August 13th. Her presence on the ground was noted as improving the communications between different jurisdictions. Many people also noted that Scott Van Leur, the RCMP’s Aboriginal Liaison, went above and beyond in assisting the Nadleh leadership and EOC with navigating the layers of bureaucracy.

The main takeaway here is that communications between the Provincial Government, who oversees fighting wildfires and ensuring public safety during these emergencies, and First Nations seems to be at the discretion of Incident Commanders rather than a result of BCWS protocols. Because of this, the success of Aboriginal Liaisons was dependent on their own initiatives, and seemed to improve when the individual liaisons were familiar with the various First Nations in the region.
Managing an Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was a hypothetical situation for Nadleh Whut’en before this year’s wildfire. There were some administrative staff who had emergency response training and there was an emergency plan for the community, but no one was familiar with the plan and it had not been updated in recent years.

Two critiques were offered to Nadleh’s Chief and Council around the same time, about two weeks after the Shovel Lake wildfire started, which raised concerns over Nadleh’s preparedness to deal with the approaching wildfire.

The first concern from a neighbour over Nadleh’s preparation for the approaching wildfire. Chief Nooski asked that this person bring the concerns to Chief and Council so they could hear them directly.

The second critique of Nadleh’s preparedness was raised by Martin Louie, a Nadleh Whut’en Council member who was familiar with the 2017 wildfire situation south in the Tsilhqot’in Nation. There were concerns that Nadleh was not quite prepared to deal with such an emergency. The Council member brought in outside contractors Juan Cereno and Maxine Stump of Tsilhqot’in Nation to help Nadleh improve their emergency response.

Following the concerns raised by the neighbouring community and having Juan and Maxine sharing their experiences from last year, Nadleh Chief and Council decided to work with Juan to help them build and improve their emergency response.

While there was resentment internally for having to seek outside help, especially in leadership roles, there was a near universal acknowledgement by the Nadleh EOC members that Juan’s experience and presence did help improve Nadleh’s response to the wildfire. From these experiences they now feel prepared enough to manage any future emergencies they may face themselves.

“So, we hired Juan to help organize our organization and what sprung from that was the Emergency Operation Center, which most of the staff and council took part in. We do have an organization chart that was formulated by Juan, and eventually Marilyn Janzen. We became a bit more organized after that, and things started working so well. In fact, Ed John came to visit with us and he was really impressed with the structure that we had here. So, it did improve our emergency delivery services through the membership, not only in Nadleh, but also to those people in Prince George. We were able to have people in Prince George who took care of those elders that were there.” —Chief Larry Nooski

Despite the hard lessons learned in this process there is no doubt that Nadleh responded quickly and adapted to the challenges they faced. They incorporated their own needs, like establishing Navigator positions to facilitate and support community members evacuated to Prince George. They also developed a more organized and responsive emergency response team.

The new Emergency Operations Centre and its policies were being developed during the Shovel Lake Fire, while the community was being evacuated, and firefighters were fighting to protect the community’s homes. It’s understandable that there were some glitches in the EOC’s development that still need to be worked out. Nadleh members and EOC staff themselves were concerned with the lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities of EOC staff.

It is recommended that the roles and responsibilities for each position be clearly described and outlined and that each EOC member be familiar with their position in advance of the next emergency.

2. EOC Operation Challenges

EOC protocols and planning: when the fire began Nadleh’s emergency protocols were’t well developed or well known by staff.

Roles and responsibilities of EOC staff were not well-understood.

Recovery Funding: EMBC is holding back on a commitment to reimburse Nadleh Whut’en First Nation for costs incurred during the Shovel Lake Fire.
Interviewees also recommended that training exercises be held by administrative staff, EOC members, and in the community to improve their understanding of roles and responsibilities but also to ensure everyone knows how to respond in the next emergency.

The other large challenge facing the EOC operational process is the understanding of what costs are covered in an emergency. One of largest concerns held by all EOC staff were costs of materials and supplies needed for the emergency. Assertions by the Director of the EOC were not sufficient to address the Nadleh team members’ concerns about the cost and coverage of supplies. The Director of the EOC contacted Emergency Management British Columbia to get clarity about the purchasing of emergency supplies.

According to Nadleh’s understanding, EMBC assured the Director that all costs associated with the firefighting effort would be covered. However, in recent weeks it has become clear that EMBC is not holding up this agreement. At the writing of this report, the reimbursement for costs incurred by Nadleh Whut’en during the wildfire emergency are being sought but jurisdictional squabbles are occurring and costs are being passed between various agencies, including EMBC, FLNRO, the Department of Indigenous Services Canada (Government of Canada), and the Red Cross. This is problematic as most First Nations do not have emergency funds available to them to incur such debts in the first place, let alone carry them for extended periods of time.

Such jurisdictional passing-the-buck has negative repercussions for Nadleh Whut’en. Carrying a high debt load can weaken a First Nation’s credit rating. This in turn affects their ability to avoid third-party management and can restrict other funding opportunities for the band.

3. Firefighting Challenges

Nadleh Whut’en does not have a standing team of firefighters but in the last year or two they have made a concerted effort to ensure that interested members of their community were provided with wildfire training. Anne Ketlo’s efforts as the Skills and Training Coordinator to address this skills gap in the community were well-timed and vital to the success that Nadleh Whut’en achieved during this year’s wildfire response. Shane Greenlees at the Ministry of Forests also worked hard to ensure members had access to the training they needed.

Anne’s efforts to reach agreement with Ministry of Forests to develop a wildfire response contract between the Ministry and the Nadleh Whut’en government were integral to the success in keeping the wildfires away from their community and the houses on the north shore of Nadleh Bunk’et (Fraser Lake).

However, even with this agreement in place, there were still misunderstandings about how firefighting should take place, and who was responsible for making decisions as to how to proceed. There were administrative problems getting the Nadleh crew into the field. Ultimately, BCWS did put a Nadleh Type 3 Firefighting crew to use, which acknowledges the hard work Nadleh has put towards improving their preparation for fire.
“We had actually worked with them [the Nadleh Firefighting crew], because we worked with them last year on fires. We actually had them on early in June this year, a while before Shovel. Then we had two other fires that we actually used them on. We wanted to get them up and running, because I thought that was a great way to use them...We had such a hard time getting them into the process for a type three. It’s got everything to do with administrative. It’s got nothing to do with the individuals. It was a government problem. It was because they’re in between years on the intake for contractors. They didn’t think it was fair to allow one crew to come in midterm versus somebody else saying no. There was a big hangup with that.”

— Mike Pritchard, BCWS
4. Evacuation challenges

In general, Nadleh Navigators — the people charged with assisting evacuees in Prince George — performed their jobs very well. They often worked twelve hour days between August 13 and August 27, the period of evacuation.

From the Navigators’ perspective, there was a lack of organization and clarity as to their job descriptions. Florence Nooski, for instance, started working as a Navigator on August 13, but it wasn’t clear what her job was going to be.

“Nobody told me it was my job to be in ESS [Emergency Social Services], so I didn’t find out until a week later that I was working with ESS, and eventually we started having meetings with the [inaudible] and other organizations, and we all had our like weekly meetings or every few day meetings.”

Navigators also didn’t have a standard protocol for keeping track of Nadleh members on evacuation. Each kept their own hand written notes, which worked for each individual, but made communication between them difficult. However, because the navigators were so in tune with the needs of Nadleh members, their instinctive reactions to the difficult situation served evacuees very well. Florence Nooski, for instance, delivered snacks paid for out of her own grocery allowance as an evacuee for people who were on the restaurant vouchers, since the voucher system did not have any room for snacks between meals.

According to Anita Louie, a Navigator who had experience during the 2017 Caribou fire, “Communication between the Nadleh EOC and the PG Nadleh navigators group was non-existent. ” Navigators would often find out about an event or an order from Nadleh through Facebook, or from an evacuee. Navigators also lacked authority — they couldn’t book meeting rooms, for instance, without the authorization of Chief and Council.

“It was frustrating but life of the evacuees had to go on and we supported them the best we could with little resources and authority.”

— Anita Louie

There were also issues with transportation. Prior to Marvin Salonas starting to drive the bus on August 17, navigators were using their own vehicles to help elders in particular with transportation. Marvin Salonas also had to go through a lot of administrative work in order to get gas for the bus and drive it to Prince George.

EVACUATION CHALLENGES

- Job descriptions and protocols were not in place.
- ESS stopped training around August 20th.
- Communications between Nadleh and Navigators.
- Administrative difficulties -- getting the bus gassed up and on the road, for instance.
- Province did not provide any guidance as to how the process should work.
- Disrespect towards Nadleh members in Prince George restaurants, particularly Denny’s.
- Nadleh was held financially accountable for the behaviour of its members.
- Food voucher system was inhumane: one restaurant only for each week of vouchers.
Outside Nadleh’s own struggles, which were overcome by the good faith and tenacity of everyone working on the ground, there were multiple issues with how Emergency Social Services (ESS) worked, and the food and lodging evacuees were receiving from the private sector through the ESS.

Navigators had little opportunity to access training from the ESS because no more training was available after approximately August 20th (Florence Nooski). While navigators would have benefited from training, even finding where they could be trained and when was difficult. There seemed to be no direct access to ESS. Instead, they were being routed through the CSTC.

Evacuees themselves experienced a lot of difficulties beyond being far from home. It was a very different atmosphere in the City of Prince George for the evacuees in 2018 than it was in 2017, when city and people went out of their way to support and assist evacuees. First Nations evacuees in 2018 were not warmly welcomed. Many Nadleh members suffered abuse at the hands of both hotel operators and restaurant staff in the City of Prince George. For instance, the North Star Inn, which housed many Nadleh members, often treated people poorly.

“I didn’t like how North Star Inn treated our people such putting them in rooms which were unfinished and actually telling our members they couldn’t check out until the “yellow sheet” is expired. They even demanded payment from one of our members and she broke down and cried. I think they just wanted money.”

— Anita Louie

The North Star started to impose arbitrary noise curfews which were enforced by a young staff member, which was insulting to elders. In one case, it was around 9pm and Florence Nooski was standing in the parking lot asking some elders on the upstairs walkway what kind of snacks they would like. The North Star staff member decided that they were being too loud, and demanded they stop. Florence saw this as targeting the Nadleh members unnecessarily since they weren’t being very loud, and it wasn’t very late at night.

Because of the disrespectful way the management was dealing with Nadleh members, Florence Nooski actually demanded they stop interacting with members at all.

“I talked to the manager [of the North Star] and I told them they’re not to deal with the members, to deal with me and I can talk to the members myself.”

— Florence Nooski

Hotels housing Nadleh members held the Nation responsible for the actions of those members. When Nadleh members were assigned to rooms at the North Star and didn’t show up to take them, the North Star demanded payment from the Nation.

When an off-reserve Nadleh member staying at the Ramada damaged her room, there was a meeting between the Navigators, the RCMP, and the management. Ultimately, Nadleh Whut’en First Nation was billed for the damage. This would be akin for the Government of Canada being billed for damage to a hotel room caused by Canadian tourists in Mexico — for whatever reason, the RCMP and hotel management did not view the individual as responsible, but passed that responsibility on to the Nation. Chief Larry Nooski, in the spirit of maintaining good working relationships with vendors in Prince George, agreed to pay for the room damages.

On the food voucher side, there were also numerous problems faced by Nadleh members. When evacuees register with ESS, they are given a choice of a grocery voucher or a meal voucher for restaurants. Because most evacuees were housed in motels without kitchens, they were forced to take the restaurant vouchers. These vouchers could only be used at one restaurant per week, and each person was allowed a total of $45 per day; $10 for breakfast, $13 for lunch, and $22 for dinner. This does not include tips or alcohol.

There was a great deal of confusion as to how these vouchers could be used. Some family members would forego their own breakfast so that a pregnant relative could eat more, for instance. But while some restaurants allowed this practice, others didn’t.

The limits on meal costs were also an issue, especially for members with dietary
restrictions. Anita Louie recalled one member who was diabetic who was forced to eat pie for breakfast because nothing on the menu was available under $10.

There were also a lot of reports of restaurant staff treating Nadleh evacuees with disrespect. While some of these reports came from the Camelot, most were focused on Denny’s. According to Florence Nooski, the Camelot took the complaints seriously and replaced the staff member who was causing issues. Denny’s took longer to act, and the issues seemed to be more widespread than a single staff member.

Nadleh members complained that they would be made to wait up to an hour to be seated at the White Spot or Denny’s for a meal, and then another hour would pass before they received their food. In one case related by Florence Nooski, a family’s bill was $4 over the total for their meal. The Denny’s staff held the evacuee’s yellow sheet -- which he needs to eat -- while he went to find the $4. Other members heard the staff laughing at the man after he left.

The problems at Denny’s resulted in a meeting between Nadleh Navigators and restaurant management on August 22nd. Denny’s management committed to replacing two staff members who were identified as treating Nadleh members poorly; although there is no confirmation that the staff were actually replaced.

Another challenge faced by evacuees during the wildfire was the lack of activities or meeting places for those who were facing evacuation. In 2017 evacuees were able to meet and gather in the large gym at CNC, and later UNBC. Having the gym open and available to evacuees provided activity areas for children to meet and play, for adults to catch up and support one another, and a central place to receive updates. Unfortunately in 2018 the same kind of facility was not available to evacuees. The Kin Centre was primarily focused on the registration of evacuees. It was difficult for evacuees to face two weeks away from home with limited activities and meeting places to support each other.

When people did meet in large numbers, as they did in the parking lot of the North Star Inn, these gatherings were faced with uncertainty and derision by outsiders. In fact, when people were gathering at the North Star Inn, for an elder’s birthday, they were initially asked to break things up.

However, it is important to recognize that the events and services that were provided by the City of Prince George were appreciated. There were many families and children who took advantage of the pool access and the free movie night went over well.
5. RECOVERY CHALLENGES

Nadleh’s challenges did not end with the evacuation. Almost immediately after he was brought on as Director of Emergency Operations, Juan Cereno secured agreement from EMBC that they would reimburse the costs Nadleh incurred associated with emergency operations. However, now that the fire has been extinguished, EMBC is refusing to honour their agreement, claiming that they will only cover very specific costs, and as noted above, passing on responsibility for reimbursement to a variety of other governmental and non-governmental agencies.

The Shovel Lake Fire and the other fires in the 2018 destroyed over 22% of Nadleh’s territory, leaving the shelves of their grocery store effectively empty. The Nadleh Whut’en couldn’t hunt — the moose and many other animals they depend on had perished in the fire or fled. Their fishing season was cut short. Berry patches and medicinal plants have been wiped out. And of course there’s no firewood left to cut.

While non-Indigenous residents in the region have been given access to millions of dollars in funding through a number of programs, Nadleh’s requests for help have been repeatedly turned down. Chief Larry Nooski has asked for firewood from the Ministry of Forests. Their response has been to recommend that Nadleh ask local corporations for charity. No other citizens of British Columbia have been told by their government to beg for charity. In fact, during the fire ranchers in the region had access to an $800,000 fund to ensure their cattle didn’t starve. Directing First Nation communities to charity organizations to meet basic recovery needs while non-first nation people receives massive financial supports is both humiliating and insulting.

During the 2017 wildfires, the BC Government allocated $ 100 Million to the Canadian Red Cross to assist with Recovery Needs. This year, after a great deal of pressure was placed upon BC, the government recently released $10 Million to the Red Cross to deal with recovery needs. The lack of a funding commitment results in communities like Nadleh going without the most basic needs such as food and fuel to heat their homes.

RECOVERY CHALLENGES

- EMBC reneging on agreement to reimburse costs associated with emergency operations.
- Destruction of Nadleh’s traditional territory has left them without access to traditional food, medicine, and firewood.
- When asked for funding to buy firewood to heat homes over the winter, provincial agencies directed Nadleh to turn to charity rather than provide funds. Non-Indigenous neighbours have access to millions of dollars in recovery funding.
- Access to recovery funding means dealing with multiple bureaucracies, and a lack of political will to help.
- DISC has a Recovery Team with no funding and no authority. Health impacts of smoke inhalation are still to be determined. Nadleh expects an influx of berry and mushroom pickers; they will require cooperation from the province in managing this strain on the environment.
- Provincial government recovery plans are not being made in collaboration with Nadleh Whut’en. Rather, the Ministry of Forests has been putting up new fencing in the territory, and is fully expected to replant a monoculture. Nadleh’s traditional approach, combined with the latest scientific knowledge, needs to be used during restoration of the environment.
The government of Canada needs to assume a more clear and direct role in recovery funding. Today, the Department of Indigenous Services Canada has a Recovery Team that has no authority or budgetary allocation to do anything other than scheduling teleconferences to look for resources. This is completely unacceptable.

At the bottom of all this, we must address social justice issues. It is unacceptable that provincial resources are expediently allocated to farmers to rebuild multi-million dollar fencing systems and to feed cattle while Nadleh community members go hungry and cold. The Department of Indigenous Services Canada must own up to its fiduciary obligations and make resources available, in advance, for First Nations to protect their citizens, their lands, the natural environments and of course non-Indigenous people.

Emergency Management best practices concludes that on average for each dollar spent on Emergency Response, three dollars need to be spent on recovery. Furthermore, the literature suggests that for every dollar spent on prevention, we save six dollars in emergency response costs. The mathematics of the issue are simple. What is needed is the political will to make the funding allocations.

As the community recovers, people are also beginning to raise concerns about the long-term consequences of smoke inhalation on the population, especially the young, elderly, and sick. Continued exposure to ash and particles is also a concern not only to people, but the environment as well.

Community members also have concerns regarding post-wildfire impacts, ranging from environmental concerns over increased water contamination, fish health and habitat disturbance from increased surface erosion, and impacts to moose and bear populations with reduced feed and cover available after the wildfire. The burn may also increase predator populations within the territory, putting further pressure on the populations of moose and other ungulates.

Members have also raised concerns about the impending influx of mushroom pickers, berry harvesters, and the increasing number of fences and cattle being found in the territory, which will cause more environmental damage on already damaged soils. Fences have begun springing up all around Nadleh’s territory with Ministry of Forest tags still affixed to the lumber. While Nadleh’s administration understand the importance of ranching to the regional economy, and to their neighbour’s livelihoods, First Nations from the region need to be included in the recovery planning that has led to these new fences.

All these issues reinforce Nadleh Whut’en’s approach to ecosystem Restoration. Nadleh cannot allow the Ministry of Forests to conduct land rehabilitation in the old fashion way: simply replanting fast growing trees in a monoculture. Nadleh is being proactive, taking control of the decisions affecting people and lands, and making sure to do so with the latest scientific understanding of how best to prevent wildfires in the future. Contemporary science and First Nations traditional ecological knowledge should lead all ecosystem restoration activities in the territory.
POSITIVE OUTCOMES

While it might not seem like there could be positive results from such a devastating experience as the Shovel Lake Fire, every person interviewed for this report did have positive experiences.

The most commonly mentioned positive outcome was the improved relationship between various levels of government through having to work together to coordinate the fighting of the fire, and other emergency operations. While many local representatives from non-Indigenous communities already had good relationships with the Nadleh community and the Chief and Council, the relationship was strengthened during the fire.

“Well, you know what, as a whole, it brought us even closer together as a community with Stellako and Nadleh. We were working in closer relationships, and working together, and helping each other. So this really brought that bond even closer together, I’m sure with … Chief Nooski’s council of course, and with Stellako. We achieved some humongous challenges that we are so proud of. “And I’m a homegrown boy here. I went to school with a lot of the First Nations, great people that I went to school with. And well, we sure bonded even closer together. Not that we were ever enemies, but we always said hi to each other, but now it’s … I mean, there’s kids on the First Nations communities call me, “Chief,” when I walk in there, and I am so proud of that.”

—Joe Pacheco, Fire Chief, Village of Fraser Lake

The close relationship between Nadleh, Stellat’en and the local non-Indigenous residents was on display during the fire. Structural Protection Units — essentially pump trucks with arrays of sprinklers — jointly owned by Fraser Lake, Nadleh, and Stellat’en were being used around the region to protect communities. Fraser Lake borrowed Nadleh’s fire truck to run a spark watch on the northside of Fraser Lake. And when Mike Pritchard, from Vanderhoof, began working on the fire, Nadleh members noticed the increase in attention they received from the BCWS.

Mike Pritchard of the BCWS was also very positive about the work done by the Nadleh firefighting crew, and after having worked with them is eager to increase their training and ensure that they can be contracted for firefighting without the administrative problems encountered in 2018.

During the fire, the RCMP respected Nadleh’s authority, and readily accepted the implementation of a permit system that allowed people in and out of the area that Nadleh’s Chief and Council had ordered be evacuated. Many people working in the EOC at Nadleh had high praise for how easy and straightforward it was to work with RCMP during the fire.

Beyond improved relationships, the Nadleh Chief and Council, staff, and community members all have a far better understanding of how to manage an emergency. There are now much better EOC protocols in place, and the staff received a great deal of training just through having to make things work.

Nadleh staff worked very hard to minimize expenses, rejecting purchases that were deemed unnecessary and keeping costs to a minimum. To fight the Shovel Lake wildfire all emergency costs were kept under $500,000 dollars. From these costs approximately 82% were long term capital investments or investments in building human capital within Nadleh Whut’en. Less that 18% of the total costs expended by the EOC went to external contractors, non-local expenditures, or perishable expenses, e.g. fuel. This close financial oversight by the EOC staff means that the significant majority of expenditures made during the wildfire in 2018 will benefit Nadleh Whut’en in the long term.

The appointment of a communications coordinator, Miranda Louie, was also integral to the success of Nadleh Whut’en by ensuring that their community members were
kept up to date on what was going on back home, by being updated about changes in the wildfire situation, and providing a mechanism by which to communicate to the rest of the Province. Facebook became the primary way in which to communicate with their membership and with the fire it has allowed Nadleh to be in more direct communications with all their membership.

Nadleh members also mentioned that there is a better sense of community now, not only among the Nadleh members but with the other Nations that faced evacuations at the same time - Yekooche, Cheslatta, Nazko, Nak’azdli, Ti’azt’en, and Takla nations. They lived through a harrowing experience together, and it has brought them closer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

“Even though they didn’t have much experience, I figure they did a very good job of pulling together, getting what had to be done.”
— Nathan Louie

The following table outlines recommendations based on the category or jurisdiction, and the issue being covered. A top level recommendation, which itself could help jumpstart the process for improving emergency management in the future, is a conference between all players to be held in the region. This would bring together Nadleh, Stellat’en, the RDBN, BCWS, EMBC and potentially other agencies to reiterate challenges, improve relationships, and develop a plan of action for the recommendations in this report. A number of officials from multiple agencies all suggested such a meeting take place.

These recommendations include improving training for Nadleh staff and membership so that they are better prepared for future emergencies. They also focus on breaking down the barriers between jurisdictions to improve both communications and operations. In 2018, First Nations continue to be a hot potato tossed between provincial and federal agencies. This needs to end, and First Nations need to be treated not only as valuable partners but as leaders in Emergency Management — as the Village of Fraser Lake and the Regional District of Bulkley Nechako already treat Nadleh Whut’en and as recommended by Chapman and Abbott’s Report Addressing the New Normal 21st Century Disaster Management in British Columbia.
### CATEGORY OR JURISDICTION: Nadleh Emergency Operations Center

#### ISSUE

- Insufficient training of staff to manage emergencies
- Emergency Response Challenges

#### RECOMMENDATION

- All staff go through emergency training.
- Hold regular training exercises.
- Ensure those holding EOC positions are willing to stay behind during an emergency.
- Ensure that buses and emergency vehicles are maintained regularly, have sufficient fuel at all times, and are properly stocked and registered.
- Provide a single sign in process for evacuees.
- Establish a single muster point for community members.
- Streamline bus/ emergency vehicle check out process.
- Run practice drills with community members.
- Make emergency response plans available to community members.
- If possible, establish an Emergency Response Fund to support upfront costs in an emergency.

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### ISSUE

- Poor communication: Critical information not being conveyed to appropriate personnel
- Lack of professionalism by EOC personnel

#### RECOMMENDATION

- Ensure that an emergency communications plan is developed and maintained.
- Details of clear roles and responsibilities for all personnel.
- Follow the emergency communications plan.
- Staff training in professionalism
- Address lateral violence
- Develop a complaints reporting procedure with a resolutions process to address employees’ concerns
### Category or Jurisdiction: Nadleh Emergency Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient understanding of roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>• Ensure all members are clear on their roles and responsibilities and who to go to for information in an emergency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not enough community members trained to fight wildfires</td>
<td>• Provide more firefighting training.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resentment of being reliant on other firefighting crews</td>
<td>• Develop a government fire code with a standing fire crew.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire fighting crew using drugs and alcohol</td>
<td>• Regular drug testing of firefighters and emergency personnel.</td>
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<td>• When fighting fires have crew bivouacked off-site to allow for centralized monitoring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crew fatigue and travel time restrictions</td>
<td>• Crew to be provided three days off and two weeks off.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evacuee fear and stress</td>
<td>• Have a point person at the village to answer questions and provide directions to evacuees.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Have an elder or counselor available in evacuation locals to work with Navigators to answer questions for evacuees; ideally someone who speaks the language.</td>
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### Category or Jurisdiction: Nadleh Post-Emergency Planning

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<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack policies and plans</td>
<td>• Develop policies and plans to address post emergency impacts:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• outside harvesters policy and licensing,</td>
<td>» Water use policy,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• water use policy,</td>
<td>» Hunting and harvest area planning for community members and non-community members,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• hunting and harvest area planning for community members and</td>
<td>» Cattle numbers guidelines,</td>
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<tr>
<td>non-community members,</td>
<td>» Fencing guidelines,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Cattle numbers guidelines,</td>
<td>» Decommissioning of firefighting access roads, and</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Fencing guidelines,</td>
<td>» Decommissioning of forestry roads in burn zones.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Plan wrap-up/update meetings with Provincial, Municipal, Federal,</td>
<td>• Develop an interim environmental stabilization plan to minimize erosion and improve natural plant growth within the burn area.</td>
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<tr>
<td>and Emergency Response personnel and departments within 30 days of emergency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Environmental Concerns</td>
<td>• Place limitations on hunting and plant harvesting in territory for several years until the region has had a chance to regenerate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Draft policy of traditional fallow rehabilitation plans.</td>
<td>• Establish a Nadleh Watchmen Program who will assist in the monitoring of the territory.</td>
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### Communications, BC

**Concerns over long term health issues**
- Cleanup of all homes on reserve – wiping down walls and steam cleaning carpets.
- Annual health monitoring for all reserve membership.
- Continued use of HEPA filters by the vulnerable population.

**First Nations not receiving critical updates and reports**
- Ensure that First Nations are included in bulletins and briefings being distributed to municipalities and regional districts.

**Lack of communications protocols**
- BC should provide BCWS protocols on how to update First Nations impacted or who may be potentially impacted by wildfires.
- Develop communications protocols with First Nation governments.
- Establish daily updates with First Nations during the state of emergency/ or the wildfire event.
- Staff and personnel should have cultural competency training.
- Each Incident Command team should have one highly ranked member who is familiar with the First Nations in the region in which they are working.

### Emergency Funding, BC and Feds

**Lack of funding for recovery after emergencies**
- EMBC, Red Cross, FLNRO should meet with impacted First Nations to review policies and guidelines for reimbursement at the start of an emergency situation.
- Streamline agreements among funding agencies to reduce response time and questions of appropriate funding expenditures reimbursement.
  - Debts carried by First Nations for more than one fiscal year adversely affect funding by DISC and their credit rating.
- Work with BC and the Canadian Government to improve and increase emergency funding to First Nations. Investment in prevention reduces expenses and costs for all parties in emergency response and post-emergency recovery.
- Secure a three-to-one formula for recovery funding: for every dollar spent on emergency management, three dollars should be made available to First Nations by Government agencies for recovery operations.
## Recovery operations, BC

**ISSUE**

Construction of new fencing, influx of berry pickers etc.

**RECOMMENDATION**

- Province of BC needs to collaborate with First Nations whose territory has been ravaged by fire prior to constructing new fences and prohibiting activities such as firewood gathering on those lands.
- Province of BC needs to collaborate with Nadleh and other First Nations on policies for mushroom and berry picking on lands affected by fire, as well as providing resources for enforcement of these policies.

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## BC Emergency Social Services

**Orientation**

- Hold orientation sessions at the start of an evacuation with the communities, navigators, and Chief and Council to familiarize them with the process.

**Training**

- Establish a Navigator’s program for First Nations evacuees.
- Provide training for community designated Navigators.
- Develop a single system process for Navigators to use when tracking and assisting First Nations evacuees.
CONCLUSION

The Shovel Lake Fire was devastating for Nadleh Whut’en, but they were lucky as no lives were lost. This does not diminish the challenges they faced or the efforts it took to meet those challenges.

For weeks the community suffered from terrible air quality. First air purifiers were brought in to help. Then it was decided that elders, the sick, and the young had to be evacuated. Soon after, the community was evacuated entirely for fear that the fire would engulf it. The sacred site of Ormond Lake was burned and they lost a number of buildings.

Communications with BC government agencies were challenging; Nadleh’s leadership felt that they were being ignored and were not being adequately informed about the movement of the fire.

It’s important to acknowledge these challenges, and work on overcoming them. Nadleh’s leadership, staff, and community members came together to manage the emergency as best they could. This meant that they put practical and actionable emergency operations management into place while the emergency was actually happening. While this isn’t an ideal situation, the results were excellent.

Nadleh’s firefighters were able to protect their community, and ultimately were integrated into the BCWS firefighting plan. Relationships with the surrounding communities, and with the BCWS, were improved.

There are numerous challenges that still need to be resolved before the next fire season. There are also outstanding debts owed to Nadleh Whut’en First Nation which EMBC had promised to pay, and are not following through on. It’s unacceptable that jurisdictional juggling continues to lead to the impoverishing of First Nations. The wildfires in the central interior of BC clearly demonstrated there is a difference in investment towards services and recovery between non-indigenous peoples affected by wildfire, as was seen in 2017, and indigenous peoples affected by wildfire in 2018.

We hope that the work done preparing this report will result in an improved process for emergency management in Nadleh Whut’en, as well as improved protocols between provincial agencies and First Nations in British Columbia.