Rebuilding Resilient Indigenous Communities in the RMWB:
Final Report

Timothy David Clark
October 2018

"We were on our own."

"This wound is still very, very raw. We're not healed."

"That's what's bothering me right now: it's just like, I give up. I'm scared again. I've got no drive anymore. I didn't give up but I'm at that point where I don't care anymore."

"It was totally devastating. I just remember going by the house, the old homestead. And I cried, because it was gone. We were brought up there, raised there, the whole family. And the things that you lose, from parent's stuff and that, it's all gone. It don't matter if you lose all your furniture. That can be replaced. But this stuff will never be replaced."

"If you ever fly over this fire, or for those of us that have that opportunity, you can see it, just like a dragon's breath. When that dragon comes back again he's still got lots to burn, and if we're not ready we're gonna go this time. We got lucky last time. That's what we did: we got lucky."

"Coming back to see the disaster, my hometown, we drove around and everything was ashes. I don't know, it's hard to explain how you felt in your mind, your heart, your soul. Everything was gone. But the whole thing is, I had some trees. I had some greenery along the creek. And that's what upheld me. It brought something to me that said, 'Okay, we'll come back from the ashes.' I said, 'I'm coming back, and I am moving back. I'm going to rebuild, and this is my home. This is where I want to spend the rest of my days.'"

"The Indigenous wildfire story, I think is one of perseverance…during some of the toughest times in this province's history, in this country's history, the Indigenous community stepped up and held up this province, it held up this country, whether it be for an hour, whether it be for a day. We, as a people, showed this country that we're not just a minority. We are a part of this country. We were a light in that darkness, and I want the rest of Alberta and Canada to know it."

"The Indigenous people, they know their people the best...Our strength is in our unity, when we come together as Indigenous peoples, as First Nation peoples, as Métis peoples, we have the power to effect real substantive change that impacts the day to day lives of our community members. The municipal, provincial, and federal governments would do well to allow us to flourish in our own way; we know how to take care of ourselves."

LIMITATIONS AND TERMS OF USE

This report presents the findings of the *Rebuilding Resilient Indigenous Communities in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo* project. The project is a partnership between the Athabasca Tribal Council, the Athabasca River Métis, and the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre. The Canadian Red Cross Society provided generous financial support.

The findings and recommendations contained in this report are based upon detailed primary and secondary research carried out over a period of two years, including the following: (1) ten focus groups held with Indigenous communities and peoples in the region, covering all major geographic sub-regions; (2) more than forty interviews with Indigenous community members, staff, and leadership, as well as officials from the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency; (3) a comprehensive survey of the Indigenous population in the region; and (4) a review of the publicly available secondary information on natural disaster and Indigenous peoples at the provincial, national, and global levels, and on the Indigenous peoples and history of Northeastern Alberta.

The report, its findings, and its recommendations do not necessarily represent or reflect the views and perspectives of the Indigenous governments, organizations, and peoples of the region. Nothing in this report should be construed so as to define, limit, or otherwise constrain the Treaty, Constitutional, or legislative rights and interests of the Indigenous peoples of the region.

Cover Art: Jorna Newberry, *Waru Tjukurrpa*, YEAR, © Jorna Newberry/SODRAC 2018; thanks to Japingka Gallery (www.japingkaaboriginalart.com) for provision and use of the image.

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Friendship Centre

Athabasca Tribal
Council

Athabasca River
Métis

ACRONYMS

ARM	Athabasca River Métis
ATC	Athabasca Tribal Council
CDR	Community Disaster Resilience
CTR	Cultural Theory of Risk
CWPP	Community Wildfire Protection Plan
DFAA	Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangement
DRP	Disaster Recovery Program
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IPA	Impact Pathway Analysis
ISC	Indigenous Services Canada
ITK	Indigenous Traditional Knowledge
MEMP	Municipal Emergency Management Plan
MVRB	Mackenzie Valley Review Board
NAFC	Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre
OCAP	Ownership, Control, Access, Possession
PSOE	Provincial State of Emergency
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
REOC	Regional Emergency Operations Centre
RMWB	Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
TU	Traditional Use
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
WUI	Wildland-Urban Interface

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WHY STUDY INDIGENOUS IMPACTS?

Over the past two years, the response of many non-Indigenous persons to this study has been 'why *only* study impacts to Indigenous peoples?' Why not study the impacts to all the residents of Fort McMurray and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB)? After all, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples were evacuated, lost their homes, lacked insurance, struggled to rebuild, suffered psychological trauma, and witnessed the unravelling of family and community bonds and supports. This line of thought was similarly perceptible within disaster management organizations, where the idea of an Indigenous-specific study and Indigenous-specific disaster management programs sits somewhat uncomfortably with the general ethos and mandate of many disaster professionals: that all people be treated the same.

These questions matter because they speak to the broader challenges of inter-cultural communication and collaboration. What the question 'why *just* study impacts to Indigenous peoples' reflects is that dominant cultural groups rarely recognize that their values, assumptions, perceptions, and priorities are often specific to their cultural group. Rather, they tend to treat the values and assumptions of their cultural group as 'natural', and are surprised when others perceive policies, programs, or actions in an altogether different manner. It is worth remembering that treating people the 'same' does not necessarily mean treating them equally or fairly. When there are significant differences in resources, values, assumptions, and priorities between groups, treating everyone the 'same' can result in dysfunctional program design, poor decision-making, communications breakdowns, and unequal and inequitable outcomes.

For instance, when the decision was made not to include Indigenous leaders in the Regional Emergency Operations Centre (REOC), it was likely done on the assumption that this was the best way to maintain the Incident Command System (ICS) and provide the quickest and most effective response. What those who made the decision failed to consider adequately, however, was that their decision would be interpreted as disrespectful and exclusionary by many Indigenous peoples, as a continuation of decades and centuries of colonial disregard. Similarly, when the RMWB decided to use public schools as the physical locations for re-entry services, it likely did not occur to officials that Indigenous peoples, and particularly Elders and residential

school survivors, might not be comfortable in such an environment and this would affect whether they used re-entry and recovery services provided by the municipality.

Or take the example of Waterways, which was settled by Indigenous peoples, was the most-heavily Indigenous neighbourhood in Fort McMurray, and was almost totally destroyed. For municipal and provincial planners and risk-mitigation experts, Waterways is a high-risk development zones because of flood risks and slope stability. Risk from this perspective is understood exclusively in terms of probabilities and financial cost. For many Indigenous residents of Waterways, however, risk is viewed from a different cultural lens in which connectedness to ancestors, to the land, and to the people of Waterways predominates in the calculation of 'acceptable risk'. As one long-time resident who lost his ancestral home, which was the last trapper's cabin in Waterways, put it:

> I've been here from the date of birth. This was a meeting place pretty much, where we'd get together and talk. We used to dry meat out here and stuff. Back in my mother's days, they used to tan moose hides right here. Lots of traditional stuff went on here. I've always said: this property here is heaven because I consider it sacred, which my parents did also.[1]

For many Indigenous peoples who were born and raised in Waterways and whose ancestors had occupied the area before them, the risk of losing those connections is the greatest risk of all. In the literature on natural disasters, this is referred to as the Cultural Theory of Risk, which seeks to explain how risk is perceived through and in relation to particular worldviews and ways of life, the result of which is that risks are identified, prioritized, and responded to in ways that vary greatly across different cultural groups.

This cultural disconnect was likewise evident in the reports commissioned by the RMWB and the Government of Alberta, where the questions asked and the answers provided reflected almost exclusively the values, priorities, and assumptions of regional and provincial governments; and it

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[1] Key Person Interview – Harvey Sykes, Board Member, McMurray Métis Local 1935, interviewed on 28 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

was evident in interviews with government officials and Indigenous peoples, where perceptions varied so greatly that one wondered whether people were talking about the same events. And herein lies the fundamental challenge: until there is a recognition and understanding of the ways in which culture, history, and context shape our perceptions, our actions, our livelihoods, and our relationships, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the RMWB and beyond will continue to talk past each other and reconciliation will remain forever on the distant horizon.

More than two years removed from the devastating 2016 Horse River wildfires, the evidence of this disconnect is clear in another way: we know much about the impacts of the wildfire in terms of structures damaged and destroyed, hectares burned, people evacuated, and economic-financial cost. Yet we know next to nothing about how the greatest natural disaster in Canadian history affected the Indigenous peoples who settled the region long before the discovery of petroleum and who will continue to occupy the region long after the last drops are pulled from beneath the ground; we know next to nothing about how governments managed disaster response and recovery for Indigenous peoples and communities; and we know next to nothing about how disaster management for the Indigenous peoples of the region should be and could be improved.

In the aftermath of the wildfires, the RMWB and the Government of Alberta produced several assessments, 'lessons learned' reports, and recovery strategies (Alberta 2016; KPMG 2017a; KPGM 2017b). For the most part, these official reports lacked any serious examination of and reflection upon the conditions that shaped how the wildfire affected Indigenous peoples, whether the tense historical relations between Indigenous peoples and governments of all levels in northeastern Alberta, the underlying socio-economic and cultural sources of Indigenous vulnerability, or the specific challenges posed by disaster response and management in Indigenous communities. That is to say, they largely reflected the assumption that all people were affected in the same way and should be treated in the same way.

As a result, the specific impacts to Indigenous peoples were largely absent, save for a couple of inset boxes in the *Home Again* report prepared by the Government of Alberta. There is only a

tepid and partial acknowledgement of the failure of the RMWB and the Government of Alberta to engage and help prepare Indigenous communities more fully, generally followed by qualifying statements like "Indigenous and rural communities may not have been sufficiently considered within the MEMP [Municipal Emergency Management Plan]" (KPMG 2017b, 50). Official reports treat Indigenous governments and peoples largely as 'stakeholders', like school boards or industry, which for many Indigenous governments, organizations, and peoples represents a continuation of decades of disrespect and non-recognition:

> There seemed to be an inability for them [RMWB officials] to comprehend that Indigenous people had unique needs and they would say, 'Everyone's house burned down,' or, 'Everyone had to evacuate.' Yeah, that's absolutely true but there's a big difference between a Métis Elder on social assistance and someone who's got three quads and two snowmobiles. It was just really shocking that they tried to see it like everyone's the same. And I get it. We're all fellow citizens. We're all in it together, absolutely…but for the policy makers to refuse to see that there's a real problem here, it exposed a lot of weaknesses and exposed a lot of I would say the wrong colonial ways of doing things, and it exposed racism. A lot of racism came to the front.[2]

Because the official reports did not situate the 2016 wildfire within the history and historical legacies of the region and the province, particularly as to relations between Indigenous peoples, the RMWB, the Government of Alberta, and industry, they reproduce the painful colonial legacies of neglect and condescension, and risk reinforcing and even deepening the existing inequalities in the distribution of risk and vulnerability.

What this study will highlight is that Indigenous disaster preparedness and resilience do not and cannot take place in a vacuum. Research suggests one of the chief benefits of disasters is the potential to expose and highlight sources of vulnerability that were relatively hidden prior to the disaster event (Bones 2007; Kulig et al. 2011). Unfortunately, it is clear from the official reports

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[2] Key Person Interview – Jay Telegdi, former Government Relations Manager at McMurray Métis, interviewed on 29 September 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

that Indigenous voices, perspectives, and concerns have still not been heard. As one Indigenous leader involved in the recovery effort expressed:

> I can honestly tell you nobody understood, nobody. And I still struggle with that. There's days when I was hoping that with some of our advocacy, that our people would change things, but it really hasn't. I think that there's perception out there: well, everything's okay now so we can go back to the normal way of doing things. Nobody still understands how this affected us. How has it affected our Indigenous community…I just feel so sad that nobody gets us and nobody wants to understand what happened to us and why.[3]

This lack of knowledge of the impacts to Indigenous peoples should set off alarm bells. We know that wildfires and other natural disasters feed into and intensify existing socio-economic, political, and cultural inequalities and affect the most vulnerable more severely. This is true at all stages of the disaster cycle, from levels of preparedness and the initial direct and indirect impacts to the response, recovery, and mitigation stages. We also know that while Indigenous peoples are more vulnerable to natural disasters than are non-Indigenous peoples, Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) can play a critical role in disaster mitigation and preparedness planning and the building of resilience against future disaster events. We know that Indigenous peoples affected by natural disasters suffer a double indignity: their lives most affected, their voices least heard (Collier 2015; EMRIP 2014).

This study emerged from fears over the all-too-predictable marginalization of Indigenous voices and concerns. In the months following the wildfire, representatives from the Athabasca Tribal Council (ATC), the Athabasca River Métis (ARM), and the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre (NAFC) met to discuss their concerns that the absence of information on impacts to Indigenous peoples would result in recovery, mitigation, and preparedness planning that would further marginalize Indigenous peoples and leave them even more vulnerable to future wildfires and disaster events. While government money was funnelled to academic studies of wildfire

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[3] Key Person Interview – Teresa Nahwegahbow, former Executive Director of the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre, interviewed on 30 October 2017 by telephone.

effects, the three partner organizations developed a proposal and took it to the Red Cross, which had in many ways worked to fill the gaps faced by Indigenous governments and peoples in the response and recovery processes. The proposal identified three main objectives: (1) to assess the environmental, socio-economic, and cultural effects of the wildfires on the Indigenous peoples of the RMWB; (2) identify key concerns and sources of future vulnerability to natural disasters amongst our members; and (3) develop a series of actionable proposals to ensure that reconstruction and future-risk-mitigation plans contribute to enhancing the resilience and adaptive capacity of Indigenous communities. The Red Cross agreed to fund the project.

This ground-breaking project is as far as we know a first of its kind in Canada: an Indigenous-controlled assessment of the impacts of a major natural disaster that brings together First Nations and Métis governments, communities, and organizations from across an entire region. For decades and centuries, governments in Canada have divided Indigenous peoples and pit First Nations and Métis against each other over access to resources and services. Against these currents, this project has brought together 11 Indigenous communities/organizations[4] and three regional Indigenous partner organizations to tell the wildfire story of Indigenous peoples in the region and to make recommendations towards the reconciliation with and greater disaster preparedness and resilience for Indigenous peoples. As one of the initial sponsors of the proposal observed:

> I hope that if another disaster happens, that we won't be left out. That's my greatest hope, that this information…it's going to give a better opportunity for our people. When the report comes out, we're going to be able to show the rest of Fort McMurray and maybe Wood Buffalo that what we did and what we were capable of and the things we accomplished, even with very little or no support, those are going to come up shining and it's going to show how collaborative we

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[4] The 11 Indigenous communities/organizations were Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, Mikisew Cree First Nation, Fort Chipewyan Métis Local 125, Fort McKay First Nation, Fort McKay Métis Community, McMurray Métis, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, Willow Lake Métis Local 780, Chipewyan Prairie First Nation, the Janvier Dene Wood Buffalo Community Association, and the Conklin Resource and Development Advisory Committee.

were, how much got done when our Indigenous organizations work together collaboratively, and it's pretty phenomenal.[5]

To return, then, to the initial question posed: why is a study of the effects of the 2016 Horse River wildfire on Indigenous peoples necessary? A study of the effects of the wildfire on Indigenous peoples is necessary because Indigenous perspectives, voices, and stories were largely absent from official reports; because Indigenous governments and peoples opened their lives, their homes, and their communities to evacuees, only to be shut out of the response and recovery efforts; because Indigenous peoples are more vulnerable to disaster events and have fewer resources and supports to cope and recover; because disaster resilience requires reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; because reconciliation requires truth; and because truth requires that all voices and all perspectives be heard.

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[5] Key Person Interview – Teresa Nahwegahbow, former Executive Director of the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre, interviewed on 30 October 2017 by telephone.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

The findings presented in this report are based upon a detailed and robust set of primary and secondary data sources that includes both qualitative and quantitative sources that were collected over a period of nearly two years. The project was grounded in an in-depth review of the literature on Indigenous peoples and natural disasters that covered 135 sources in four main areas: (1) Methodology and Methods, (2) Sources of Vulnerability, (3) Sources of Resilience, and (4) ITK in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). The final product was a nearly-190 page report that summarized the main findings and included an annotated bibliography of the sources consulted. The literature review report was supplemented by a review of secondary sources on Indigenous history and political economy in northeastern Alberta, both prior to and since the large-scale development of oil-sands resources from the 1960s. Finally, the secondary research for this project included the compilation of a statistical database from the publicly available data from the Census of Canada and the censuses conducted by the RMWB, including data for respondents who self-identified as Indigenous in the 2012 municipal census.

This project has even more significant information from primary sources, both qualitative and quantitative. While one must be careful not to restrict Indigenous research methods to 'qualitative' methods (Lavallée 2009, 37), in general qualitative methods are considered more appropriate for use with Indigenous communities. Qualitative methods are more compatible with Indigenous research and knowledge traditions. Because of their bases in direct and inter-personal relationships, qualitative methods facilitate the design of research projects in conjunction with communities and lend themselves more readily to the development of trusting and respectful relationships in which partners build relationships and knowledge together (Kingsley et al. 2010, 3; Lavallée 2009, 36; Maar et al. 2011 750; Wilson 2001, 179).

The main qualitative methods used to gather information were interviews and focus groups. In total, the WSSS team conducted 40 key person interviews. Interviews were done with leadership, staff, and/or community members from every First Nation and Métis community in the region, as well as with staff from the RMWB and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA). Interviews with Indigenous participants were semi-structured to allow

ample space for Indigenous peoples to determine key areas of impact and concern. In effect, interviews served as both key sources of information as well as a kind of scoping exercise, which provided Indigenous leadership and staff the opportunity to identify and discuss issues of priority and questions they wanted answered/addressed (Goulding et al. 2016, 789).

The WSSS team carried out 10 focus groups in each sub-region of the study area: Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay, Fort McMurray, Anzac, and Janvier/Conklin. Focus groups were used for three main purposes: (1) to determine community priorities in terms of impacts and recommendations; (2) gather qualitative information on community impacts and experiences; and (3) identify key community resources for resilience enhancement. Focus groups were organized by each participant community/organization to ensure cultural appropriateness and participant comfort, and to support turnout (Goulding et al. 2016, 790). Financial resources were provided to participant communities and individual participants, in recognition of the time, energy, and knowledge shared, as per best practices (Maar et al. 2011, 750). Qualitative information from interviews and focus groups was coded and analyzed according to the principles and practices of grounded theory, which develops knowledge inductively. Qualitative data was triangulated through the use of multiple qualitative methods, consultation with project partners, and an extensive review of the existing secondary research on participant communities (Kingsley et al. 2010, 3).

Focus groups were used to introduce the regional survey. Standardized questionnaires encounter numerous obstacles in Indigenous communities, but can be aligned with Indigenous research paradigms. Research suggests that impersonal methods like surveys will have poor participant rates if community awareness of the project is low and participants and community organizations have not been directly involved in previous stages. The project team took several measures to ensure appropriateness and support response: the survey was designed with partner organizations and 11 Indigenous community researchers were trained to get surveys completed in their communities/areas, which was done to reduce inter-cultural obstacles, improve

participant comfort levels, and increase direct benefits of the project within Indigenous communities (Kingsley et al. 2010, 5; Maar et al. 2011, 749).

The question of data sources is not an either-or proposition: the key point is the relationship between qualitative and quantitative data and the worldview and knowledge systems of Indigenous communities. Quantitative data and indicators, where deemed appropriate, should be developed in a participatory manner with communities and should reflect local and qualitative understandings. These could be expressed, for instance, in Likert-type scalar measurements, rather than the more conventional, top-down, manner in which quantitative indicators are developed and selected (Boon et al. 2012, 393; Cox and Hamlen 2015, 223). For this project, and consistent with our past work with Indigenous communities, the WSSS team designed a 50-question survey with Likert-type scalar measurements to help translate qualitative and subjective concepts, such as levels of trust and frequency of community gatherings, into a quantitative representation of the broader community. The quantitative indicators and findings, moreover, are contextualized and supported by robust qualitative information, to minimize the risk of misrepresentation and underestimation of effects.

COLONIAL LEGACIES AND CONTEXT

Emergency response and disaster management are too often developed in a vacuum. Because of the speed and scale of natural disasters, assessments of disaster impacts typically focus on what can be quickly and immediately tallied: lives lost, residential and commercial buildings destroyed, effects to economic output, insurance costs, and so on. Impacts that are less easily quantified, like effects to family and community structures and bonds, traditional land use, and governance capacity, and how disasters can deepen and entrench inequalities within and between groups, tend to get left by the wayside. Similarly, vulnerable and marginalized populations, like Indigenous peoples, are less likely to have their voices and concerns heard, despite the fact that these same populations tend to bear a disproportionate share of the negative impacts. As a result, DRR planning can ignore or downplay the underlying historical, political, economic, and socio-cultural forces and legacies that shape both the distribution of risk and the effectiveness of disaster response and recovery processes, and can serve in effect to reinforce and embed cycles of vulnerability and inequality.

One of the greatest shortcomings of the studies commissioned by the RMWB and the Province of Alberta was their lack of substantive discussion around the context of 2016 wildfires, how that context shaped impacts, and how the perceptions of those impacts shaped the possibilities for collaboration between the governments, agencies, and cultures of the region moving forward. This is not to say the reports lacked any context and perspective: it was that they lacked an acknowledgement of how their assessments were rooted in the particular historical, cultural, and political perspectives of government institutions and how these shaped powerfully what questions were asked, what answers were found, and what recommendations were made.

These colonial and historical legacies have not only left many Indigenous peoples in the RMWB vulnerable to natural disasters and other external shocks and encroachments; they have fostered a climate in which trust and open channels of communication are sorely lacking. For Indigenous peoples, this is the context in which the 2016 wildfire, its direct impacts, and the emergency response, recovery, and mitigation planning must be understood. Why and how are Indigenous peoples in the RMWB more vulnerable to natural disasters? Why were the lines of

communication so poor between the RMWB and the Government of Alberta, on the one hand, and Indigenous governments and communities, on the other? Why did so many Indigenous peoples seem either unwilling or unable to access key support services and why do so many Indigenous representatives and peoples perceive issues like the rebuilding of Waterways as yet another attempt by government to push Indigenous peoples out? In order to answer these questions, we must first situate the wildfire within its historical context of the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in northeastern Alberta.

INDIGENOUS POLICY AND RIGHTS

A history of the relations between Indigenous governments and peoples, the Governments of Alberta and Canada, and local/municipal governments in northeastern Alberta is well beyond the scope of this study. It is important, however, to provide at least a brief overview of some of the major policies that have affected Indigenous peoples in the region and constructed the sociocultural, economic, and political environment into which the 2016 wildfires exploded. Indigenous policy and the struggles over Indigenous rights have strongly influenced levels of vulnerability and resilience in Indigenous communities and levels of trust and coordination between governments in the region, and they will continue to influence the possibilities for progress and cooperation moving forward. While far from an exhaustive list, several key policy areas that have shaped the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the region include: residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, the displacement of Indigenous residents of Fort McMurray, regional amalgamation, Treaty 8 and the Indian Act, and Aboriginal rights and consultation.

Between 1867 and 1996, an estimated 150,000 Indigenous children (First Nation, Métis, and non-status) were enrolled in residential schools. Of the 139 recognized residential schools in Canada, 26 were located in the Province of Alberta. Students of residential schools were subjected to often harsh and unspeakable conditions, including forcible removal from their families, denial their language, traditions, and culture, and physical, sexual, and psychological abuse (TRC 2015a; Wilk et al. 2017). As one survivor of Holy Angels residential school in Fort Chipewyan recalled: "I was screaming and hollering. And in my language I said, 'Mama, mama, *kâya nakasin*', and in English it was 'Mom, mom, don't leave me'" (TRC 2015a, 38). For many Indigenous peoples and communities, residential schools are a historical trauma whose effects extend well beyond individual students into families, communities, and future generations (Kirmayer et al. 2014; Bombay et al. 2014; Feir 2016). And while the primary targets of residential schools were 'status Indians', many Métis children were enrolled and suffered similar treatment and consequences. Levels of Métis enrolment in residential schools was particularly high in Alberta, where Church-owned residential schools did not require government authorization to enrol Métis children (TRC 2015b).

The 'Sixties Scoop' refers to the practice that began in the 1960s and continued for several decades in which Indigenous children were taken from their families and placed in foster homes or adopted by non-Indigenous families. In Alberta, the practice was regulated via a bilateral agreement between the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta in 1962 by which Children's Aid Societies (CAS) took Indigenous children from their homes. In exchange, the Government of Canada reimbursed Alberta for the per diem costs of 'service provision'. This agreement was subsequently confirmed numerous times, including in a "Memorandum of Understanding" in 1985. The effects of this noxious program cover a wide variety of individual, family, and community effects, ranging from physical and sexual abuse and the deprivation of their culture, language, and spirituality, and identity, including ability to pass these on to children, to the loss of legal status and other related benefits and supports under federal legislation (Fournier and Crey 1997; Sinclair 2007; White and Jacobs 1992).

Another key policy emerged in the 1960s with the large-scale exploitation of the oil sands, during which the small Indigenous town of Fort McMurray would undergo dramatic transformations. One of those transformations was the extraordinary influx of non-Indigenous residents and workers, which totalled approximately 30,000 between the mid-1960s and the early-1980s, which left many Indigenous families who lacked title to their land in a vulnerable position. According to the Government of Alberta, there were approximately 3,200 Métis living on Crown land without satisfactory tenure in Northeastern Alberta in the 1960s (Maillie 2009, 7). Oral history accounts and newspaper reports suggest the local government leveraged these land-tenure irregularities to move and expropriate families without formal title in several sweeps of the city between the 1960s and the early-1980s that still conjure anger and resentment among many Indigenous families, and particularly the Métis (Clark 2017; Longley and Joly 2018).

One thus requires a sense of historical context to understand the reaction of many Indigenous residents to decisions around the rebuilding of Waterways, which were for many intensely emotional and visceral. As one Elder who lost their home in Waterways commented in a focus group: "They [the RMWB] didn't try and help rebuild anything. They're just trying to help you get the hell out of there. Trying to take your property and get you out. That's all they wanted there."[6] What government officials must understand is that when many Indigenous peoples hear that they will not be allowed to rebuild in Waterways, they interpret that decision not on the basis of technical and safety reports but through the lens of more than five decades of being displaced and overrun in their community. As one Métis representative noted: "It's not only the fire that disoriented them. They felt disoriented since the industry came in here [more than five decades ago]. If you give us another story, fine, but ever since I've been here, they've been displaced."[7]

The municipal amalgamation of 1995 represents another watershed moment in Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations in the region. With the expansion of the oil sands in the decades after the

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[6] Urban Indigenous Focus Group held 22 June 2017 at the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre in Fort McMurray, Alberta; McMurray Métis Focus Group, 22 June 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[7] Key Person Interview – Bryan Fayant, Disaster Recovery Coordinator, McMurray Métis Local 1935, interviewed on 2 March 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

1960s, the City of Fort McMurray became increasingly frustrated by jurisdiction over tax revenues. The city protested that growing numbers of oil sands workers were putting an enormous strain on the urban services in Fort McMurray, while oil sands plants generated few revenues for the city because they were based in Improvement District 143. The 1995 amalgamation, which created the RMWB, was supposed to address these fiscal imbalances: Fort McMurray would expand its tax base to include the oil sands operations located in improvement district while rural areas would benefit from increased investment from the new municipal government into basic infrastructure and services such as water, sewage, and recreation. While amalgamation did result in greater tax revenue for the government based in Fort McMurray, the promised rural investment never really materialized. As one rural, Indigenous leader explained:

> In 1995, before amalgamation, we owned all the tax base, where all the oil companies are now, that belonged to the rural communities. Then in 1995, Fort McMurray came to us and requested to join forces through amalgamation, and for the benefit for us all, so we signed up. We signed up because we thought it was in the best interest of our communities to do so, when we did, we became complacent and we allowed Fort McMurray to grow and continue to flourish and all the infrastructure and program dollars going into that city, and rightly so, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying I'm against Fort McMurray growing. However, while Fort McMurray grew, we became a mushroom. The rural communities became mushrooms. We began living in the shadows, and we hardly got any projects, any attention, and anything that was built in our communities was minimized, and became very frustrating for us.[8]

The imbalance was in effect reversed: where once Fort McMurray subsidized the rural hamlets and their industrial plants and camps, now the rural areas subsidized Fort McMurray. According to the Rural Coalition, a partnership of 17 mostly Indigenous and rural organizations, rural areas receive about 5 percent of the municipal operating budget and 10 percent of the capital budget, despite containing 1/3 of the population and contributing more than 90 percent of tax revenues via industry. This reversal of the imbalance between urban and rural within the municipality has had grave repercussions for Indigenous residents: in one of the richest municipalities in the

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[8] Key Person Interview – Ron Quintal, President, McKay Métis Community Association, interviewed on 1 March 2018 in Fort McKay, Alberta.

country, most of the rural, mostly-Indigenous communities of the RMWB lacked basic infrastructure like piped water and sewage systems and pressurized fire-hydrants.

The weak and uneven recognition of Aboriginal rights in the region further drives the vulnerability of its Indigenous residents. As a recent report from the United Nations confirmed:

> The lack of legal recognition of Indigenous peoples with collective rights likewise increases their vulnerability and restricts their participation. With this lack of recognition and protection by States, the security of their persons and properties and their ownership of their lands and resources are always threatened by imposed development projects. This threat affects their traditional knowledge, as well (EMRIP 2014, 13).

For many First Nations in the region, the signing of Treaty 8 in 1899 laid the foundation for the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples based on reconciliation, sharing, and protection of cultural and economic practices and livelihoods (Candler et al. 2015, 19). Oral histories suggest the Indigenous understanding of Treaty was of a nation-to-nation agreement under which Indigenous peoples would maintain access to their traditional lands and practice their traditional ways of life while gaining access to resources for education, medical care, and other programs and services (Labour 2012, 10).

In the context of a regulatory environment that has failed to respect and protect the Treaty and Aboriginal rights of Indigenous peoples in Alberta (Mills 2017), the expansion of the oil sands has dramatically undermined the traditional way of life and culture of many Indigenous communities (Candler et al. 2015; Clark 2017; Dyck et al. 2016; Labour 2012). The political and regulatory environment faced by the Métis is even more dire: the Supreme Court has recognized (1) the existence of collective Métis harvesting rights under s. 35(1) of the *Constitution Act, 1982* (the *Powley* case), and (2) that the federal government is in a fiduciary relationship with the Métis and has a duty to consult and negotiate where there are credible Métis rights and claims in relation to areas of federal jurisdiction. And yet, non-settlement Métis governments in Alberta are not considered governments in a manner comparable to First

Nations, do not receive comparable levels of funding and support as First Nations, and do not have a provincial consultation policy to guide consultation in cases where there is a potential infringement upon their constitutionally-protected Aboriginal rights.

For decades and indeed centuries, the Métis in Canada have struggled for recognition of their existence as a distinct and rights-bearing Indigenous people. Governments both federal and provincial have repeatedly passed the buck on responsibility for and recognition of the Métis. Even where the court system has established and clarified Métis rights and the responsibilities of the Crown, many governments continue to deny, ignore, and circumscribe Métis rights. For instance, in the 2003 *Powley* case the Supreme Court of Canada recognize the constitutionally protected right of the Métis to harvest for subsistence purposes; and yet 15 years after the ruling, there remains no consultation policy in Alberta for non-settlement Métis regarding impacts and the potential infringement of their constitutionally protected Aboriginal rights. This lack of a consultation policy has meant the infringement of the Aboriginal rights of non-settlement Métis in Alberta has gone largely unmitigated and uncompensated, and adequate consultation has depended mostly upon the assertiveness of the Métis Locals and the disposition of proponents.

The non-recognition of Métis governments and Aboriginal rights holds significant negative consequences for the Métis of the RMWB and Alberta. For example, non-settlement Métis have been largely excluded from the kind of comprehensive Impact Benefit Agreements (IBA) with resource companies that have been more available to First Nations. While far from perfect and subject to legitimate concerns regarding power discrepancies in negotiations and the privatization of the duty to consult (Stienstra et al. 2016, 13), IBAs represent among the best ways available to Indigenous communities to mitigate the negative effects of industrial projects and enhance potential positive impacts in a range of fields from employment and business opportunities to gendered effects and governance capacity (Gibson 2008; McCreary et al. 2016; Mills et al. 2013). This is particularly true for the Alberta Métis, who do not receive operational funding from the federal government.

The lack of recognition and respect for Métis governments and rights was manifest in the 2016 Horse Creek wildfire. For years McMurray Métis and other Métis governments have protested that governments of all levels in Canada treat the Métis, in effect, as a series of voluntary community associations. As former McMurray Métis General Manager Kyle Harrietha observed in response to the issue of representation at regulatory hearings: "Aboriginal rights aren't held by the individual. What they're asserting is that we're basically a community association. They're treating us like a boy's and girl's club."[9] Because the non-settlement Métis are not recognized as an 'Aboriginal government' in the same way that a First Nation band government is, the Métis do not receive federal or provincial support comparable to First Nations. With the onset of the greatest natural disaster in Canadian history, then, the Métis Locals in the RMWB had no emergency response plan, were neither integrated nor considered in the disaster response plan of the RMWB, and were not eligible for AEMA support in either the response or recovery phases.

THE OIL SANDS ECONOMY

Prior to the large-scale development of the oil sands from the 1960s, Indigenous peoples, both First Nations and Métis, were the principal occupants of the region. Even Fort McMurray, which boasted a population of approximately 1,100 in the early 1960s, was a small and primarily Indigenous town, both demographically and culturally, in which traditional Indigenous ways of life and livelihoods, including hunting, fishing, gathering, and trapping, were combined with seasonal labour on the docks and the rail. The region was likewise characterized by a high degree of mobility, with the Cree and Dene populations moving throughout their territory according to the seasonal round and the Métis travelling regularly along the rivers and later

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[9] Weber, Bob. "Alberta Won't Review Who Speaks At Energy Hearings." *Global News*. October 20, 2013. Available online: https://globalnews.ca/news/913273/alberta-wont-review-who-speaks-at-energy-hearings/

railways that integrated smaller settlements into a wider regional Métis community (Candler et al. 2015; Clark et al. 2015; Clark 2017; Labour 2012).

The arrival in the 1960s and 1970s of the Great Canadian Oil Sands (GCOS), now Suncor, and Syncrude to develop open-pit mines between Fort McMurray and Fort McKay radically transformed the regional economy. The dramatic structural transformation that took place between the early 1960s and the early 1980s is evidenced in Figure 1, which shows changes in the distribution of the labour force by industry from 1961 to 1981.

Chart 1 - Fort McMurray Labour Force Distribution by Industry
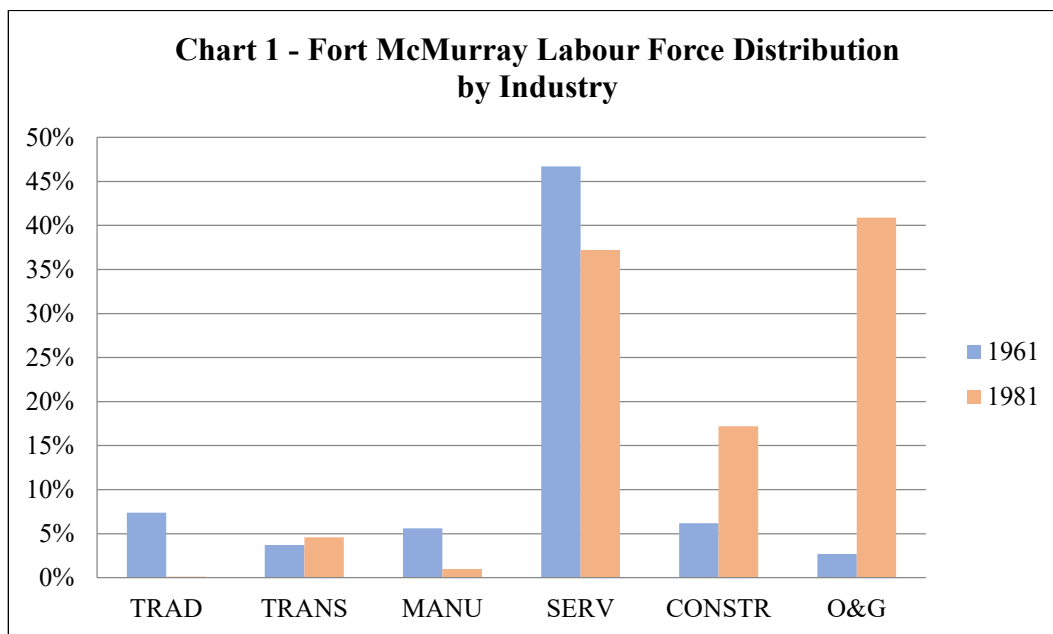
Source: Krahn, "Labour Market Segmentation in Fort McMurray, Alberta," p.45.

The first significant fact is that the traditional (trapping, fishing, forestry) and transportation sectors, which were predominately Indigenous, collapsed both as a share of the labour force but also in absolute terms, as there were nearly 50% fewer people employed in the traditional sector in the early 1980s compared to the early 1960s (Krahn 1983, 45). The second important fact to note is the decline of employment is the other sectors in which Indigenous peoples were

traditionally employed: transportation and manufacturing, which fell 88 percent and 82 percent respectively. Between 1961 and 1981, then, the three industries that provided the bulk of employment to Indigenous peoples (traditional, transportation, and manufacturing) fell from 50% of the labour force in the early 1960s to just over 5% by the early 1980s.

As oil sands development exploded, the traditional ways of life and livelihoods of Indigenous peoples came under assault. In particular, traditional land use and the consumption of wild foods declined under a wide range of stressors, from the loss of land and environmental contamination to government regulations of trapping and hunting, among other factors. The decline of traditional livelihoods, moreover, held profound effects throughout Indigenous communities and cultures. While many non-Indigenous peoples consider traditional land use as simply a form of subsistence, for many Indigenous peoples traditional land use is embedded in a web of cultural norms, spiritual values, sense of self, place, and purpose, and knowledge that connects Indigenous peoples and their territories. Traditional land use is not a 'job' or 'recreation' that can be replaced; it represents an axis around which Indigenous culture, identity, families, and communities are reproduced (Candler 2015; Clark 2017; Dyck et al. 2016).

As traditional livelihoods and ways of life eroded, Indigenous peoples found themselves unevenly and inequitably integrated into the oil-sands-based economy. As Krahn concluded in the early 1980s:

> In short, examination of labour force participation rates, unemployment rates, and skill and training levels of the native Canadian population in the Athabasca region leads to a rather bleak conclusion: Indians and Métis residents of both Fort McMurray and surrounding communities appear to be only marginal participants in the oil sands economy (1983, 73).

While the Indigenous hiring practices of oil sands companies have improved since the 1970s and Indigenous peoples in the RMWB are employed in the oil and gas sector at rates similar to the general population, they tend to be concentrated in the most precarious and lowest-paying jobs

and continue to face numerous obstacles to their more complete integration into the oil-sands-based economy. As a result of this more precarious labour force integration, Indigenous peoples in the region continue to face socio-economic adversity. Figure 2 shows the comparative levels of labour force integration for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the RMWB, based on the 2011 Census of Canada.[10]

Figure 2 – Participation Rate (PR), Employment Rate (ER), and Unemployment Rate (UR) in the RMWB
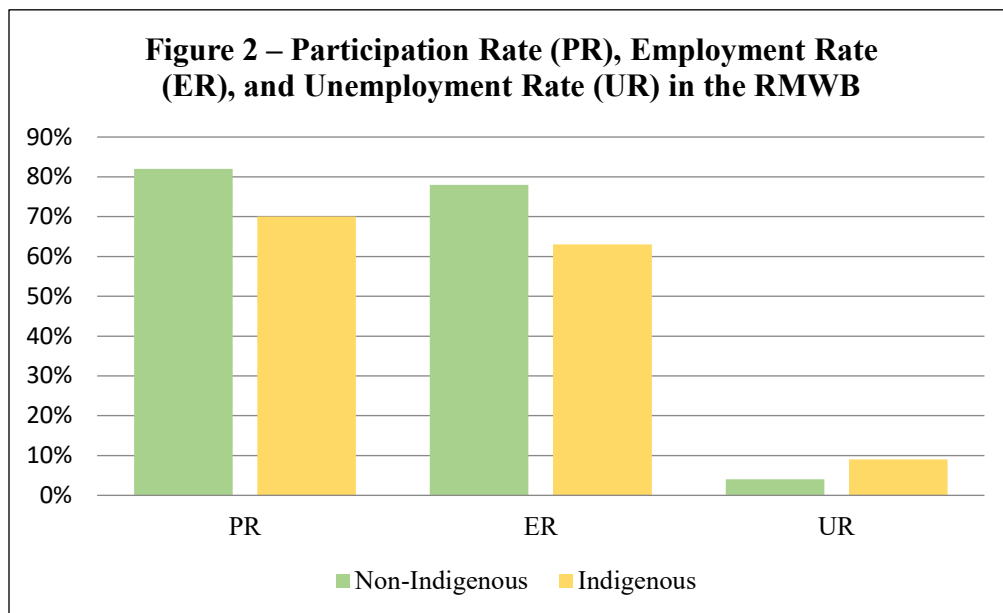
Participation and employment rates of Indigenous peoples are nearly 20 percent and 25 percent below the regional averages, while the unemployment rate for Indigenous peoples is nearly double. The 2011 Census of Canada similarly contains data on average and median incomes for Indigenous peoples in the region, presented below. Figure 3 provides evidence of significant income inequality between the Indigenous population and the regional population. The median Indigenous income is 65 percent of the regional median while the average Indigenous income is

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[10] The participation rate measures the percentage of the working-age population that is presently in the labour force, i.e., working or actively looking for work; the employment rate the number of employed as a percentage of the labour force; and the unemployment rate measure the number of unemployed as a percentage of the labour force. At the time of writing, the Aboriginal Population Profile for the 2016 census was not available.

81 percent.[11] What this discrepancy between the median and average income suggests is that not only is there a high level of income inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, but also that there is greater inequality *within* the Indigenous population than there is within the regional population as a whole.

Figure 3 – Average and Median Income
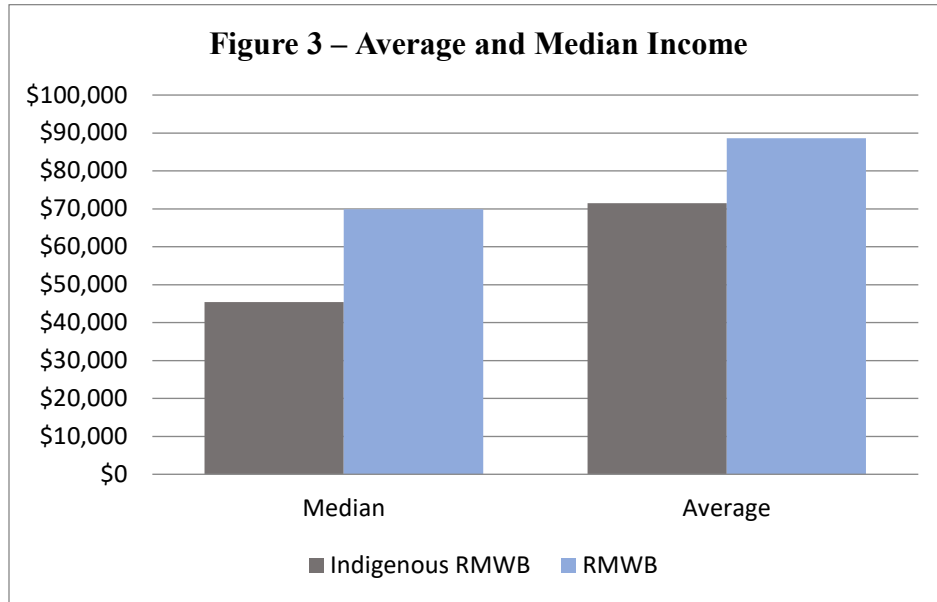
This is even more so in the comparatively more affluent Nations, such as Fort McKay, where average income is nearly two times greater than the median. Inter and intra-group inequality is similarly evident as the lower ends of the income distribution, where Indigenous peoples are more than 40 percent more likely to be classified as low income and Indigenous peoples over 65 are twice as likely to be low-income compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts.

There is evidence that the severe economic crisis in Alberta that began with the collapse of oil prices towards the end of 2014 hit Indigenous peoples more harshly. As Figure 4 demonstrates,

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[11] The 'median' income represents the person in the middle of the income distribution, while the 'average' is calculated by dividing total income by the population in question. Because average income can be skewed by a small number of very high-income individuals, median income is generally considered a more accurate portrayal of the income of a 'typical' or 'average' person.

economic indicators for the off reserve Indigenous population deteriorated far more between 2013 and 2016 than the provincial averages: the Indigenous participation rate declined four times more than the provincial average while the Indigenous employment rate sank almost twice as much as the provincial average. At the same time, the off reserve Indigenous unemployment rate more than doubled, an increase 50% higher than that experienced in the province as a whole.

Figure 4 – Alberta and Off-Reserve Indigenous Economic Indicators, 2013 and 2016[12]				
Indicator	*Community*	*2013*	*2016*	*% Change*
Participation Rate	Alberta	73.1	72.5	-1%
	ORI	71.5	68.8	*-4%*
Employment Rate	Alberta	69.8	66.6	-4.6%
	ORI	67	61.4	*-8.4%*
Unemployment Rate	Alberta	4.6	8.1	+76%
	ORI	4.9	10.7	*+118%*

This suggests that Indigenous peoples suffered disproportionate job losses and that many were knocked out of the labour market entirely. These findings are consistent with studies of the effects of recessions on Indigenous peoples in Alberta and elsewhere (CSLS 2012, 11).

JURISDICTION AND GOVERNANCE

From jurisdictional and governance points of view, disaster management in the RMWB is a veritable quagmire. Within the region, you have a highly centralized regional government that is

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[12] Compiled from multiple editions of the Government of Alberta's *Annual Alberta Labour Market Review* and *Labour Force Statistics: Alberta Indigenous People Living Off-Reserve*.

under the jurisdiction of the Government of Alberta but with which there is considerable tension. There is also a great deal of tension between the municipal government based in Fort McMurray and the surrounding rural hamlets. Within those rural hamlets, moreover, you have five Métis Locals, plus Métis Local 1935 based in Fort McMurray, that belong to the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA. Around the rural hamlets you have a significant number of large-scale oil sands operations and camps and five First Nations that are under federal jurisdiction.

On the disaster management side, the RMWB is responsible for emergency management under the *Alberta Emergency Management Act*. Where a disaster event exceeds the capacity of the municipality to respond, the province can declare a Provincial State of Emergency (PSOE) and assume control of emergency response. Each First Nation is responsible for emergency management on its reserve and is required to have a Director of Emergency Management (DEM). First Nations are not required, however, to have emergency response plans and do not receive dedicated funding to develop and maintain them.

Through a ten-year agreement signed in 2014, the Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) delegates responsibility for emergency management support on First Nation reserves to the AEMA. The AEMA provides a range of services to First Nations across the province, including annual training sessions and courses, online modules, and in-person support for emergency planning. ISC provides funding for up to four First Nations field officers (at the time of writing there were three) to liaise with, train, and support First Nations in emergency preparedness, as well as a Disaster Recovery Advisor (DRA) who works with First Nations to apply for reimbursement following a disaster event via a parallel Disaster Recovery Program (DRP) that is administered by the AEMA but financed by ISC.

Despite the 2016 *Daniels* decision, non-settlement Métis are not included in any of the disaster and emergency management programs funded by ISC and administrated by the AEMA. The MNA and the Métis Locals are not considered Indigenous governments by the Province of Alberta or the RMWB, but rather as voluntary societies, which means that non-settlement Métis

are treated the same as any non-Indigenous resident of the RMWB for the purposes of emergency management. Non-settlement Métis exist, in effect, in a kind of legal and jurisdictional limbo: on the one hand they are 'Indians' according to the Constitution that fall under jurisdiction of the federal government and hold constitutionally-protected Aboriginal rights; while on the other hand they are systematically excluded from many of the policies and programs designed to benefit and support Indigenous peoples in Alberta, from provincial consultation policies to disaster and emergency management.

There are several significant implications to the jurisdictional complexity of the RMWB. First, there is a clear lack of federal leadership in disaster management for Indigenous peoples. ISC delegates programs to the AEMA but First Nations reserves remain outside of provincial jurisdiction and there is very little coordination support and guidance provided by ISC. As a result, there is inadequate coordination between the RMWB, the Province of Alberta, and First Nations, which feeds jurisdictional territoriality and impedes cooperation. As the KPMG report noted, there were limited formal processes in place to encourage rural and Indigenous communities to come together to collaborate on disaster risk reduction strategies (2017a, 37). In fact, in was clear in interviews with First Nations, Métis, RMWB, and AEMA officials that there had been no significant sharing and coordination of disaster and emergency plans prior to the wildfire. This lack of coordination in turn undermines the capacity of understaffed Indigenous governments to maintain disaster and emergency response plans.

Second, this lack of federal leadership and coordinating authority splinters disaster management efforts. For instance, the AEMA provides support to First Nations for preparedness and response, partial support for recovery, and no support for mitigation, which is handled separately by ISC, while none of these services are coordinated with the RMWB. First Nations Field Officers of the AEMA had no relationship with the Indigenous and Rural Relations (IRR) department of the RMWB prior to the wildfire, which caused problems and contributed to communications breakdowns when the disaster struck.

Third, there was and continues to be a lack of clarity regarding the authority of First Nations governments, the RMWB, the Province of Alberta, and industry vis-à-vis First Nations in an emergency event. This lack of clarity resulted in provincial overreach during the evacuations, particularly involving Fort McMurray First Nation. In subsequent interviews with AEMA officials, moreover, the confusion regarding the authority of the AEMA vis-à-vis First Nations in a PSOE remained. And fourth, the MNA and Métis Locals have no clear roles and responsibilities and continue to be excluded from AEMA programs despite the 2016 Daniels decision that found that the Métis are 'Indians' under s. 91(24) *the Constitution Act, 1867*.

Jurisdictional obstacles and uncertainties were made worse by the low levels of trust and poor communication between the distinct levels and types of governments in the region. Both AEMA and RMWB officials noted how tensions between the region and the province related to a variety of policy decisions affecting the oil sands and the distribution of revenue contributed to an atmosphere of tension between the two governments during the wildfire response and recovery. And as mentioned above, there was no working relationship between the AEMA's First Nations Field Officers and the RMWB's IRR Department prior to the wildfire, which fuelled tension and miscommunication in the early response period and fed into a lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved.

The most significant trust and relationship issues, however, existed between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments in the region. In particular, the history of racist and discriminatory policies had created pent-up tensions between the RMWB and the Indigenous governments and peoples of the region. As rural Indigenous residents noted, the relationship with the RMWB was poisoned well before the wildfire:

> It's just that municipality, you know...even if we ask for changes and stuff like this, you would write as much as you want and we probably wouldn't get any results back from municipality. Why I say this is, I meet with municipality people here quite often, and ask them about different things that we'd like to

have done. They never do anything, nothing. So, you know, municipality to me is just a waste of time.[13]

The lack of trust coloured perceptions of the RMWB's response to the wildfire, particularly in rural areas: "I can say that it was a long standing issue with respect to being under-serviced by the municipality in the rural areas. And the fall out of the fire was added to a long list of shortcomings that the rural community has felt that they weren't receiving since amalgamation. So certainly that the whole fire response and the Fort McMurray focus kind of played into that."[14] As much as admitted by one employee of the RMWB, who observed: "That history of amalgamation in particular, at least for our municipality, the mistrust between our organization. Our level of government and their levels of government was so significant that they didn't trust our organization, and rightly so."[15]

Jurisdictional fragmentation and weak intergovernmental relationships aggravated the capacity deficits faced by many First Nations and Métis governments. Officials from the RMWB, AEMA, and First Nations all expressed concern about the capacity for disaster and emergency management on reserves. While each Nation has a DEM, the position is unpaid and is often occupied by a Band Manager who is already overworked and wearing multiple hats. As the DEM/Band Manager at Fort McMurray First Nation explained: "The AEMA comes in, right, and they come in and they do their training, like I said, for three days. That's all great, but…you go to this training, and then you don't use it."[16] The problem of understaffing is compounded by staff turnover, where a DEM is appointed and then trained, only to be replaced in a couple of years. Similarly, turnover of Chief and Council was another challenge, and when a disaster

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[13] Athabasca Chipewyan/Métis Local 125/Mikisew Cree First Nation Rural Focus Group, held at the Métis Local 125 office, Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, on 29 September 2017.

[14] Key Person Interview – Dwayne Roth, Chief Executive Officer, McKay Métis Group, interviewed on 20 December 2017 in Fort McKay, Alberta.

[15] Key Person Interview – Elena Gould, Manager, Department of Indigenous and Rural Relations, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 15 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

[16] Key Person Interview – Cindy Miller, Band Manager, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September 2017 on the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.

strikes, the role and relationship of Chief and Council vis-à-vis the DEM and municipal and provincial officials and agencies are not always clear.

The governance capacity challenge faced by Métis Locals is even more severe. Métis Locals receive no dedicated federal funding to cover their operational costs. What is more, because the Province of Alberta has yet to implement a non-settlement Métis consultation policy (now fifteen years after the *Powley* ruling), oil sands and other industrial operators are not required to consult with non-settlement Métis, which restricts considerably the capacity of the MNA and Métis Locals to negotiate Impact Benefit Agreements (IBAs) with industrial proponents that could be used to finance operations, provide programs and support to members, and promote Métis-owned and operated businesses. For the Métis Locals, the issue of disaster management is inseparable from the issues of Métis rights, recognition, and governance. As former the former General Manager of McMurray Métis Local 1935 commented, the wildfire heightened the urgency for many Métis governments to address the issues related to rights and consultation that has limited their governance capacity:

> All I know is it really turned up the importance of making the credible assertion tasks, or figure out a working solution to the issue, because right now, this whole see no evil, hear no evil, see no evil thing is not really working up here with the government just kind of turning a blind eye...Not taking a direct role into trying to find a common solution, almost 20 years behind First Nation consultation policies. It's not from lack of effort, I think, on the Métis side.[17]

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[17] Key Person Interview, Dan Stuckless, former General Manager of McMurray Métis Local 1935, 30 October 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta.

CULTURE, PERCEPTION, AND MEANING

As discussed above, dominant groups rarely recognize the cultural embeddedness of their worldviews and assumptions; rather, they tend to treat the values and assumptions of their cultural group as universal and often struggle to understand why other groups should be treated differently. 'Culture', in so far as the concept is recognized at all, is a property of those who are different, much in the way that many white-Euro-Canadians casually refer to everyone else's food as 'ethnic food'. One often comes across this kind of thinking in Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA), where the term 'culture' is applied almost exclusively to Indigenous peoples, to reference their distinctive traditions and practices. Indeed, if you just read EIAs you could be forgiven for thinking Indigenous peoples were the only people with a 'culture' that guides and shapes their worldviews, perceptions, and practices.

But of course this is a fallacy: culture is not some discreet property of Indigenous peoples; it is the basic matrix through which we all understand the world and relate to each other; it is the "complex whole", as E.B. Tylor put it. Cultural assumptions shape what we value when we prepare for and respond to disasters, how we view and understand risks, and how we perceive actions and events. And in the 2016 Horse River wildfires, cultural values and perceptions shaped powerfully how actors and institutions prepared for and responded to the disaster and how they perceived actions and events.

Take the example of Waterways, which was settled by Indigenous peoples, was the most-heavily Indigenous neighbourhood in Fort McMurray, and was almost totally destroyed. For municipal and provincial planners and risk-mitigation experts, Waterways is a high-risk development zones because of flood risks and slope stability. Risk from this perspective is understood exclusively in safety and financial terms. For many Indigenous residents of Waterways, however, risk is

viewed from a different cultural lens in which connectedness to ancestors, to the land, and to the people of Waterways predominates in the calculation of acceptable risk. As one long-time resident of Waterways who lost his home put it:

> I've been here from the date of birth. This was a meeting place pretty much, where we'd get together and talk. We used to dry meat out here and stuff. Back in my mother's days, they used to tan moose hides right here. Lots of traditional stuff went on here. I've always said: this property here is heaven because I consider it sacred, which my parents did also.[18]

For many Indigenous peoples who were born and raised in Waterways and whose ancestors had occupied the area before them, the risk of losing those connections is the greatest risk of all. In the literature on natural disasters, this is referred to as the Cultural Theory of Risk (CTR), which explains how risk is perceived through and in relation to particular worldviews and ways of life, the result of which is that risks are identified, prioritized, and responded to in ways that are informed by and reinforce the worldviews and ways of life of the community and its members (McNeeley and Lazrus 2014, 507; Lazrus 2015, 58).

Culture and cultural assumptions similarly shaped and complicated response and recovery efforts. Whereas the RMWB and the AEMA decided not to include Indigenous-government representatives from the REOC from the perspective Incident Command System (ICS) and operational efficiency, Indigenous leadership and communities perceived the decision as a fundamental lack of respect. Similarly, Indigenous peoples struggled to convey Indigenous perspectives and priorities to the RMWB, who in general failed to appreciate how their actions would be interpreted by Indigenous peoples:

> I know that we ... I felt at the time, and I think this is sort of where Maggie [Farrington, CEO of the ATC at the time] was sitting as well through some conversations, let recovery do whatever they're going to do, we're going to do our own recovery. Because, anything they do at this point, isn't going to

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[18] Key Person Interview – Harvey Sykes, Council Member, McMurray Métis Local 1935, interviewed on 28 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

work…it was so hard to communicate an Indigenous perspective. Even the coined term, "Here for you," was offensive in the rural communities. It was offensive. I've been screamed at. "You weren't here for me.'"[19]

Moving forward in disaster preparedness and management, it is crucial that all parties involved be aware of how their assumptions, perceptions, and actions are shaped and informed by their cultures and worldviews, and work to ensure that priorities and plans are based upon the values and priorities of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments and communities.

A DISASTER WAITING TO HAPPEN

Indigenous peoples have occupied and used the lands of what became the RMWB for centuries prior to the arrival of Europeans. Even Fort McMurray, the quintessential resource 'boomtown', was largely settled and predominately populated by Indigenous peoples until the 1960s. The steady encroachment of the Canadian state and settler populations throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, however, has gradually undermined the traditional way of life of Indigenous peoples in the region. The rapid expansion of the oil sands over the past five decades fed into these trends, as Fort McMurray went from a small Indigenous town of 1,100 in the 1960s to more than 70,000 and the large-scale extraction of oil and gas reserves dramatically transformed the traditional resources upon which Indigenous peoples had for centuries depended.

The historical and contemporary conditions that fed into the 2016 Horse River wildfire were a perfect storm that powered a disaster of unprecedented scale in Canadian history. Decades and centuries of mistreatment, neglect, disrespect, and abuse from governments of all levels

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[19] Key Person Interview – Elena Gould, Manager, Department of Indigenous and Rural Relations, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 15 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

contributed to an environment of high risk and high vulnerability for many of the region's Indigenous peoples. The cumulative traumas of residential schools and the Sixties Scoop, the trail of broken promises and disrespect from Treaty to the regional amalgamation, and the constant infringement and negation of Aboriginal rights from displacement and weak consultation to industrial development and environmental destruction. In an extended quote that is worth presenting in full, the Disaster Recovery Coordinator at McMurray Métis captured powerfully the context of cumulative historical trauma that set the stage for the wildfires and explained eloquently the historical and cultural barriers that impede reconciliation and cooperation in areas like disaster recovery:

> So the wildfire as I explained earlier, it was traumatic. It was traumatic for everybody… But the First Nations and Métis people, that's only one trauma in their lives…our people went through the same thing and then some. So when I talk to you about trauma on trauma on trauma, what we're talking about is other experiences that have affected them in this region, in their lives, in this community. There's a history. In McMurray for example, the people were bulldozed off their homes, bulldozed off their properties. That's a loss. That's a loss of their homes. They're pushed into different areas; they're disoriented and displaced…that's traumatic. You start going back into our history on residential schools, that's traumatic. You get placed on a reserve, that's traumatic. You cannot go and hunt and trap and feed your families. That's a huge loss…for a people who had the ability and the freedom to do that, that's devastating. That's awful. And who's there to counsel them? It's going to be the same people. They're going to send the government people that took it away from them. And we're going to say oh, yeah, thanks for coming and talking to me about these losses that you took away from me…no, we have to talk to our own people. The agencies, they don't see themselves that way because they don't have the history, they don't have the knowledge. They don't realize the left hand over here at the environment is taking away the property; the therapist doesn't put that together. It doesn't make sense to them. They can sympathize all they want but they don't really appreciate the devastation that's really happened in our people's lives.[20]

State policy and encroachment dovetailed with the oil sands economy from the 1960s to further transform and marginalize the Indigenous peoples of the region. Once the clear majority of the

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[20] Key Person Interview – Bryan Fayant, Disaster Recovery Coordinator, McMurray Métis Local 1935, interviewed on 28 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

WILLOW SPRINGS
STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS

population of Fort McMurray and the region, Indigenous peoples found themselves progressively marginalized by industry and the influx of oil sands workers from outside the region: the population of Fort McMurray exploded from 1,100 in the early 1960s to more than 30,000 by the early 1980s to more than 75,000 by the early 2010s, with a regional population of approximately 120,000 when the population living in work camps is included (RMWB 2012, 17).

The oil sands economy dramatically transformed the traditional ways of life of the region's Indigenous peoples. A variety of factors have eroded the traditional subsistence and trapping economy, from loss of land to the perceived health and safety of traditional resources to governmental regulations. These transformations in livelihood strategies have in turn held significant repercussions throughout the cultures and ways of life of Indigenous peoples, as harvesting and trapping integrated families and communities across generations, transmitted values and knowledge to the next generations, and provided a sense of self and place. As the traditional economy declined, moreover, Indigenous peoples faced many barriers to their full integration into the oil sands economy.

This political and economic context resulted in an Indigenous population that was highly vulnerable to wildfires and other disaster events. Vulnerability to natural disasters is strongly correlated to variables such as age, gender, income, labour market integration, housing and infrastructure, and governance. By almost any of these measures, the Indigenous population of the RMWB was highly vulnerable to a disaster event. Consider that prior to the wildfires:[21]

> ➢ Indigenous peoples concentrated in the most vulnerable age groups: they were 40% more likely to be *either* under 15 years old or over 60 years old;

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[21] Statistical data for this report was extracted from the 2011 Census of Canada and the 2012 Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo Census.

➢ Indigenous peoples had lower levels of labour force participation and were more than 90% more likely to be unemployed; and the unemployment rate for Indigenous women was more than 40% higher than Indigenous men;

➢ Indigenous peoples had fewer financial resources with which to cope: the median income for an Indigenous person was less than two-thirds the regional average; that number fell to under 50% for Indigenous women;

➢ These vulnerabilities intersect: Indigenous children under 6 and Indigenous Elders over 65 were twice as likely to live in a low-income households as their non-Indigenous counterparts;

Indigenous peoples were more than 90% more likely to live in homes that required "major repairs" and 20% more likely to live in "unsuitable" housing conditions. Survey results, moreover, shed light upon a phenomenon that was discussed often in focus groups and interviews, but for which there was little data: the number of Indigenous peoples without a permanent address, who are in effect either homeless or are 'couch surfing', i.e., living on a non-permanent basis with family or friends. Figure 5 presents the results for the survey question that asked participants to describe their living situation (owned or rented home, living with parents, no permanent address, et cetera).

The numbers in the below figure should be a source of great concern. In Fort McMurray, 5 percent of survey respondents had no permanent address (homeless, mobile trailer/car, cabin, et cetera) while 12 percent lived with family. The situation is more serious in rural areas, where 11 percent of respondents had No Permanent Address (NPA) and 22 percent lived with family. The most vulnerable group in terms of residency was rural males, nearly 15 percent of which had NPA and more than 30 percent of which lived with family members.

Figure 5 – Pre-Wildfire Indigenous Living Arrangements
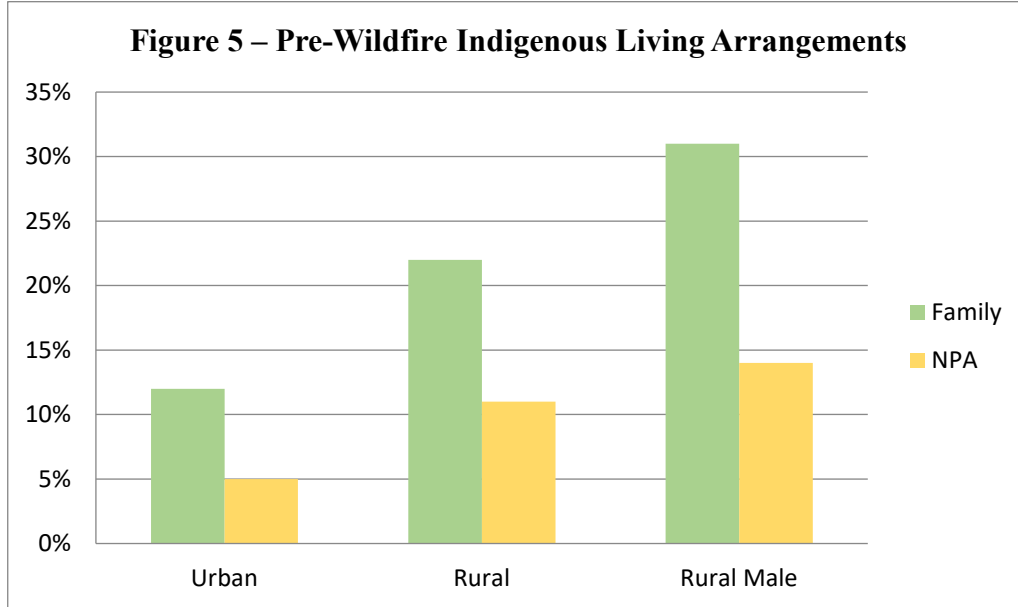
It is difficult to determine the reasons for and stability of arrangements where adults are living with family members. We do know, however, that the average age of those living with family is 40 years old and that 20 percent of those were living with family members who are not their parents. It is safe to assume, then, that an important number of those who lived with 'family' cannot afford to live on their own. It is also likely that a number of those do not have ID with their current addresses, which was reportedly a problem for some Indigenous peoples during the evacuation. These figures, it should be pointed out, likely *underestimate* the severity of the situation, given that Indigenous peoples with no permanent address or with unstable living arrangements probably completed the survey at a lower percentage than the average population.

Infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, was another source of pre-wildfire vulnerability. One of the most common concerns expressed in focus groups, both urban and rural, was the lack of adequate exit routes in case of future disasters. As one staff member at Fort McMurray First Nation remarked: "I think that the real problem lies within, with only one way out. That's the

biggest concern."[22] As the wildfire risk assessment noted, numerous service areas have only one access route, including Fort McKay, Draper, Anzac, and Janvier (Walkinshaw 2017, 4), as well as First Nations. The lack of non-winter access routes to Fort Chipewyan is also a concern for emergency response, which is a serious issue given the high risk of wildfires in the region. As the Fire Chief commented: "Fort Chipewyan is, they're pretty much on their own. In the summer time there's no rural. We can't get up there by ground, so we would have to go up by air."[23]

Another infrastructure deficiency was the lack of piped water and sewage and pressurized fire-hydrant supply. As Walkinshaw noted, there is presently no pressurized fire-hydrant supply in Gregoire Lake Estates, Draper, Janvier, Fort Fitzgerald, and Conklin, though water supply upgrades in 2017/18 include pressurized fire-hydrant installation/upgrades for Anzac, Conklin, Gregoire Lake Estates, and Saprae Creek Estates (2017). The lack of adequate pressurized fire-hydrant supply in rural areas was cited numerous times in focus groups as a major obstacle to home insurance. In Conklin and Janvier, participants suggested that many residents do not have insurance because of the lack of adequate fire hydrant and water supplies:

> A lot of them don't have insurance. They can't get insurance because of the distance that they are away from water. Like, you have to remember, these are not piped out services. These are trucked in. So, in Conklin, if you want a fight a fire, you've got to fight it with a pumper truck. You don't get to fight it with a hydrant. As a result, the insurance companies find that to be too risky.[24]

The concerns expressed in focus groups and interviews about levels of home and content insurance are supported by the survey. Figure 6 presents the findings of the survey question on the type of insurance prior to the wildfire.

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[22] Key Person Interview – Brad Callihoo, Chief Executive Officer, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September at the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.
[23] Key Person Interview – Jody Butz, Regional Fire Chief, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 15 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[24] Key Person Interview – Jeffrey O'Donnell, Chief Executive Officer, Conklin Resource Development Advisory Committee, interviewed on 8 November 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

Figure 6 – Home Insurance by Type and Location
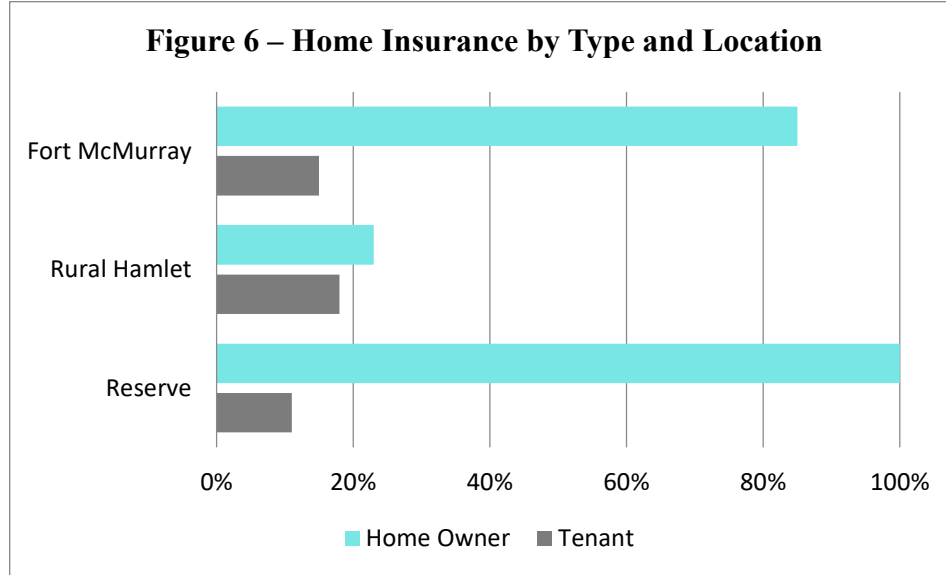
The results are serious, particularly in rural areas. In Fort McMurray, 15 percent of Indigenous homeowners lacked insurance, while 85 percent of renters had no tenant's insurance. In the rural hamlets, the situation is considerably more severe: more than 75 percent of homeowners lacked home insurance while only 18 percent of renters had tenant's insurance, which means than more than half of residents in rural hamlets had no insurance. While upgrades to rural infrastructure should alleviate some of the obstacles to rural home insurance, there will likely need to be a concerted effort to increase insurance levels. On reserves, all homeowners had insurance on their structures through the bands, but barely 10 percent had additional content insurance on their possessions, which suggests that a more concerted outreach and support system will be required to increase insurance levels in rural areas.

The acute vulnerability of many Indigenous peoples in the region to natural disasters and other external shocks was reinforced by jurisdictional complexity in a region where disaster management involves multiple branches of the municipal, provincial, and federal governments, plus five First Nations and five Métis Locals. One way to address the gaps created by multiple, overlapping, and competing jurisdictions is through strong intergovernmental ties and relationships. The opposite, however, characterized the region. Relationships between the

RMWB and the Government of Alberta were often tense or non-existent. Relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments were fraught, particularly with the RMWB. As one Indigenous leader eloquently stated, when asked about the relationship with the RMWB: "We didn't have that relationship; we'd developed an estranged relationship."[25]

This estranged relationship between the RMWB (and to a lesser extent the Province and industry), on the one hand, and Indigenous governments and communities in the region, on the other, was reinforced by the profound cultural divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the region, which reinforced a negative feedback loop that impeded the establishment of strong channels of communication and the trust. The distinct and often divergent cultural values, assumptions, and priorities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities fuelled an environment of deep mistrust that was tinderbox set aflame by the wildfires. The lack of a common understanding and perception impeded response and recovery efforts time and time again and the wildfires reinforced the mutual suspicion and distrust.

The absence of intergovernmental linkages, clear channels of communication, and trust fed into the capacity challenges that many Indigenous governments face. Within the region, Indigenous governance capacity varies widely, and the lack of strong intergovernmental relations, communication, and supports can leave Indigenous governments and communities vulnerable and overwhelmed. The Director of Emergency Management (DEM) at Fort McMurray First Nation, whose full-time job is Band Manager, explained the challenges of maintaining preparedness without adequate support:

> All those processes take time. The thing is, you have limited capacity within your own band structures. You often have people that are doing multiple jobs already…you need to have funding available maybe to hire people to, not just to put together a plan but to work with the Nations on a consistent basis. You can't

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[25] Key Person Interview – Bill Loutitt, Chief Executive Officer, McMurray Métis Local 1935, interviewed on 12 December 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

just have a consultant come in, write a plan for you, and then leave, and say, 'Here's your plan. You take care of it.' You need to actually have somebody more hands on. We're so busy. We've got so many things coming at us in a day. Your priority list is forever changing. It's really hard to just say, 'Okay, stop these 10 things that need to be done today or this week. Now, we're gonna focus on the future.' Meanwhile, you're still dealing so much with the actual what's happening today.[26]

Turnover and movement of leadership, staff, and community members further undermines governance capacity. AEMA officials repeatedly pointed to turnover of leadership and staff, which is not surprising given the limited resources and staff burdens, as one of the key challenges they faced in providing training and support to First Nations governments. The regular movement of Indigenous peoples between urban and rural areas likewise makes it difficult for Indigenous governments to keep track of their members. In numerous communities with which we spoke, administrative personnel lacked up-to-date information on members, which undermines disaster response capacity. As one First Nation staff explained, the regional nature of the Indigenous community means it is hard to keep up-to-date information on your members and people who are part of your specific 'community':

I think our biggest one is having our members, and it's such a hard thing to do, but encouraging and telling your members to update your contact information. That's the biggest thing. Knowing who's at what home at any given time. How do you do that? Our people are, a lot of them are like transient people. They're in and then they're out. This week you might have three extra families living with you. Next week, you might have none. It changes, and that always changes. That was one of our biggest challenges, was trying to figure out how many actually were evacuated from this community, in addition to our actual registered on reserve members.[27]

These governance challenges are compounded for the Métis Locals, which do not receive comparable funding from governmental and industry sources and which generally have less

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[26] Key Person Interview – Cindy Miller, Band Manager, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September 2017 on the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.
[27] Key Person Interview – Cindy Miller, Band Manager, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September 2017 on the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.

reliable information on their members as a result of Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) rules that restrict membership to those 18 years or older and impose severe geographic boundaries on membership, i.e., when a member of a Local moves away, they cease to be a Local member.

Given the deeply-rooted socio-economic, cultural, and political marginalization of Indigenous peoples in northeastern Alberta and the RMWB, the jurisdictional gaps and low levels of communications and trust, the profound cultural differences and divergences, and the limited capacity of Indigenous governments to address large-scale disaster events, the 2016 Horse River wildfire was in many ways a 'disaster waiting to happen'.

It is imperative in this context that all parties learn from the experience of the 2016 wildfire and take strong, concrete, and sustained measures to invest in stronger and more equitable relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments and peoples, founded upon mutual respect and support, and work together to develop comprehensive emergency response and disaster management programs for the region that are rooted in the conditions, strength, and knowledge of Indigenous governments and communities and the wider spirit of reconciliation and resilience.

Colonial Legacies and Context – Key Findings

✓ Policy legacies from residential schools and municipal amalgamation to the infringement and negation of Treaty and Aboriginal rights shaped how Indigenous peoples were affected by the disaster. Disaster management must be embedded in a framework of reconciliation and recognition of Treaty and Aboriginal rights;

✓ The cumulative effects of oil sands development upon the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples, including the 2015 recession, left many Indigenous residents with fewer socio-economic resources to cope with disaster events;

WILLOW SPRINGS
STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS

✓ Jurisdictional fragmentation resulted in gaps in disaster management services, particularly vis-à-vis the Métis, poorly understood roles and responsibilities, and weak channels of communication and institutional cooperation. Jurisdictional fragmentation left underfunded and understaffed Indigenous governments inadequately prepared and supported. There is a lack of leadership and coordination from ISC, which delegates responsibility but fails to provide adequate guidance and support to the Province, and a lack of intergovernmental coordination and cooperation between Indigenous governments, on the one hand, and the municipal, provincial, and federal governments on the other;

✓ Divergent cultural values, assumptions, and perceptions of risk, combined with a lack of cultural self-awareness and sensitivity, fuelled an atmosphere of tension and mistrust that drove a negative-feedback loop in which communication breakdowns were frequent;

✓ These colonial legacies and contextual factors combined to create a perfect storm of high risk and high vulnerability for Indigenous peoples; more than a natural disaster, this was a 'disaster waiting to happen'.

RESPONSE AND RECOVERY: A 'SECONDARY DISASTER'

In natural disasters most attention is paid to the primary and immediate disaster, whether an earthquake, wildfire, or flood, and the direct impacts of the primary disaster event. The disaster event, however, can sometimes trigger a secondary disaster, whose effects can be equal or greater to those of the initial shock. A classic case would be the primary disaster of an earthquake that triggers a secondary disaster of a tsunami. Scharbach and Waldram apply the concept of a 'secondary disaster' to their assessment of the impacts of an evacuation of an Indigenous community in northern Saskatchewan.[28] A similar approach seems appropriate here.

EVACUATION AND RESPONSE

The impacts of the wildfires on Indigenous peoples in the RMWB were not restricted to the direct and immediate effects. To the contrary, a host of factors complicated the proper functioning of evacuation and response efforts, including the lack of preparedness, centralization of disaster planning, jurisdictional and coordination problems, communication failures, and the lack of appropriate evacuation centres. Together, these factors triggered a 'secondary disaster' for Indigenous peoples whose impacts continue to affect Indigenous communities years after.

PREPAREDNESS

It is almost impossible to be fully prepared for a disaster of the scale and scope of the Horse River wildfires. Nevertheless, when the disaster struck in May of 2016 the main authorities responsible for disaster response were woefully unprepared. The Canadian Standards Organization recommends that emergency response plans be updated on an annual basis, but the

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[28] Scharbach, Julia and James B. Waldram, "Asking for a Disaster: Being 'At Risk' in the Emergency Evacuation of a Northern Canadian Aboriginal Community," *Human Organization* 75 (2016): 59-70.

RMWB's Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP) had not been updated since 2010, more than five years before the wildfires. As the KPMG report observed, many municipal staff were unaware of their roles and responsibilities during an emergency (2017a, 50) and the Rural and Indigenous Relations (IRR) Department was evacuated, which hampered communication between the REOC and Indigenous communities in the first week.

In the years prior to the wildfire the RMWB had carried out several Fire Smart programs, but these lacked adequate scope and maintenance. Both KPMG and the current RMWB Fire Chief acknowledged that Fire Smart activities were inadequately institutionalized and financed in the period prior to the disaster.[29] Indigenous communities also noted the limited and inconsistent use of wildfire mitigation activities by the RMWB and the Province. Representatives from Fort McKay, Conklin, and Willow Lake commented on how poorly maintained the firebreaks were in the areas surrounding their communities: "It's not that this stuff [mitigation] never happens, but the fire breaks, they never maintained them. You've got three feet of tall dry grass and bunch of small trees that have grown in; that's not a firebreak anymore."[30]

Disaster preparedness on First Nations was similarly inadequate. Of the communities with which we spoke, none had up-to-date emergency response plans prior to the wildfire, and First Nation staff was generally unaware of emergency response plans and responsibilities. Of the communities that were evacuated, Fort McKay First Nation and Fort McMurray First Nation both had emergency plans, but neither had not been updated and maintained, and when the disaster hit neither community utilized their plans. This lack of preparedness within First Nations, in terms of an updated plan and staff trained and aware of the plan and its delegation of roles and responsibilities, speaks to a more significant gap in disaster preparedness: the current model in which the AEMA provides online and in-person support to prepare disaster plans does

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[29] Key Person Interview – Jody Butz, Regional Fire Chief, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 15 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[30] Willow Lake Métis Local 780 Focus Group held 22 August 2017 in Anzac, Alberta.

not provide adequate support within the context of the resource limitations and governance challenges faced by many First Nations.

The AEMA services can help communities prepare a plan, but they are less effective at supporting its maintenance: "AEMA comes in, right, and they come in and they do their little training, like I said, for three days. That was all great, but it's just general overview of stuff. There's no real plan or anything. So then you go to this training, and then you don't use it."[31] Nor do the services provided by the AEMA support coordination between the three main kinds of local government: First Nations, Métis, and the RMWB. In an environment of highly fragmented and contentious jurisdiction like the RMWB, however, communications and coordination between the local authorities is paramount.

CENTRALIZATION

There is an abundant literature on the shortcomings of centralized disaster management and response plans, particularly where Indigenous peoples are involved. Highly centralized disaster planning tends to ignore local resources and capacities and can undermine the capacity of local officials to reduce vulnerability and respond to emergencies (Bhatt and Reynolds 2012; Cretney 2016; EMRIP 2014). Prior to the wildfire, the MEMP was highly centralized and lacked specific plans for rural communities. When the crisis struck, the RMWB's plan did not integrate rural communities into a wider regional plan. AFCN Chief Allan Adam expressed his frustration when he realized that the RWMB's plan did not consider the surrounding rural areas:

> When I realized the plan that RMWB had and how they went about it, and stuff like that, I quickly realized that they have no plan for the surrounding areas. They have no plan for the First Nations communities, nothing. They started telling the premier that 'Highway 63's closed. Everything's closed in Fort McMurray. Everybody that goes south of Fort McMurray are not going to be

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[31] Key Person Interview – Cindy Miller, Band Manager, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September 2017 on the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.

coming back in,' and stuff like that. And I'm thinking, 'Okay.' So I stopped them right there, and I asked a question: 'so what's going to happen with the people in Fort Mackay?' They said, 'What do you mean?' I said, 'How are they going to get groceries?' 'Well, they could go and pick up groceries.' I said, 'So they're going to drive from Fort Mackay, and through Fort McMurray, and they're going to pick up groceries, and they're going to drive back and go back to Fort Mackay? You just said that nobody's going to be re-entered. So what's the plan of action for that one?' They were lost for words...they had no plan of action for the surrounding communities or for First Nations altogether, whatsoever. There was nothing, completely nothing.[32]

Not surprisingly given the lack of a truly regional plan, representatives of the rural communities were unaware of the RMWB's plan: "Well, we fall under the municipality, and their emergency evacuation plan, right? We didn't have it; we didn't have the plan; we didn't know the plan."[33] Several rural communities even mentioned approaching the RMWB in the period prior to the wildfire about putting together local emergency response plans but were rebuffed or put off. The former CEO of the Conklin Resources Development Advisory Committee (CRDAC) explained his attempts to work with the RMWB to develop an emergency response plan for Conklin:

I'd had numerous meetings with an emergency management crew with the municipality and they were very reluctant to discuss any individual community emergency management plan. They said there was an overarching plan that covered everything, and when there was an emergency, they'd just initiate the plan to go over it. I had a meeting with them in February [2016] letting them know that we had finally gotten our air monitoring station up and that we were able to show how bad the fire was in 2015 and we needed a plan immediately in place because there had been no precipitation during the winter and it was critical for us to have that plan in place prior to May...That never happened.[34]

The problem of centralized planning was not exclusive to the RMWB; First Nation's plans, where they existed, suffered a lack of community awareness and involvement. Part of the

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[32] Key Person Interview – Allan Adam, Chief, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, interviewed on 27 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[33] Willow Lake Métis Local 780 Focus Group held 22 August 2017 in Anzac, Alberta.
[34] Key Person Interview – Jeffrey O'Donnell, Chief Executive Officer, Conklin Resource Development Advisory Committee, interviewed on 8 November 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

problem is the lack of resources and prioritization of emergency response within First Nations. In focus groups, First Nations members repeatedly expressed their frustration that emergency response plans were not well communicated and rehearsed. The other part of the problem has is the AEMA's support system, which focuses on online modules and has only one field officer for northern Alberta. At present, the AEMA support system focuses on working with the DEM and leadership to get a plan done, rather than on building plans that involve community members as more active participants. The literature on disaster management, however, is clear: disaster management and emergency response plans that are more integrated into the operations of Indigenous and local governments and involve community members more closely are more likely to be maintained and function effectively (Christianson 2012; Charnley et al. 2015; Fernandez-Gimenez et al. 2008; Jakes and Sturtevant 2012).

JURISDICTION AND COORDINATION

Overlapping and competing jurisdictions are common problems in disaster management and emergency response (Fleeger and Becker 2010; French 2014). In the 2013 Manitoba floods, for instance, the governmental review noted serious jurisdictional issues and confusion about roles and responsibilities of the distinct parties: "The question of who has the responsibility to do what in relation to First Nations communities and reserve lands seems to have been at the heart of many difficult issues related to the 2011 flood. Jurisdictional problems exist at the federal, provincial and municipal levels" (Manitoba 2013, xi). The problem of overlapping and competing jurisdictions is particularly acute in the RMWB, where the municipal, provincial, and federal levels of governments interact with multiple First Nations and Métis Locals.

The lack of jurisdictional clarity resulted in confusion and misunderstandings about the roles and responsibilities of the partners. For one, there was a lack of clarity and divergent expectations regarding the roles of Indigenous governments in the Regional Emergency Operations Centre (REOC). From the perspective of the First Nations and Métis, they should have been involved in

the REOC as partner governments in disaster management and response, while from the perspective of the RMWB, First Nations were the responsibility of the AEMA/ISC and the Métis Locals were not governments. Similar questions had emerged in the Slave Lake wildfires, where the Sawridge First Nation was initially excluded from the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) but was later invited to participate (KPMG 2012, 9).

The decision to exclude First Nations and Métis governments from the REOC was a source of consistent frustration for Indigenous governments and tension with the RMWB. Fort McKay staff, for instance, attempted to involve themselves in REOC operations but were rebuffed by REOC officials, despite the fact that the community was receiving enormous numbers of evacuees from Fort McMurray and was directly threatened by the wildfire:

> We were left out. We made several requests to be included in those communications. We were left out. We actually listened in on a phone one day, and the person that had their phone there [from the AEMA], that let us listen to the meeting, got scolded…There was a jurisdiction thing where oh, now you're supposed to talk to this person because you're First Nation. They just decided we weren't to be included.[35]

The Métis also conveyed how their attempts to be included in the REOC were rebuffed by emergency response officials:

> I remember talking to, I can't remember her name, she worked at REOC, and saying we needed our Indigenous communities to be in there, in REOC, in the nerve center and be a part of it and be in the know. You know what she said to me? 'There's not enough room.' There's not enough room? Build a bigger room, move another desk, whatever it is. Not 'Hey, that's a great idea. Let's work to implement that or something.'[36]

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[35] Key Person Interview – Cort Gallup, former Director of Emergency Management, Fort McKay First Nation, interviewed on 27 September 2017 on the Fort McKay First Nation Reserve.
[36] Key Person Interview – Jay Telegdi, former Government Relations Manager at McMurray Métis, 29 September 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta.

The lack of clear roles and lines of authority between governments also led to provincial overreach in their relations with First Nations during evacuation. In particular, uncertainty regarding the authority to evacuate under a Provincial State of Emergency (PSOE) led to tension with Fort McMurray and Fort McKay First Nations, both of which were told not to evacuate without authorization by the AEMA. As the CEO of Fort McMurray First Nation recalled:

> From my perspective, the day that we were evacuated, Chief made the decision at 3:18 in the afternoon to evacuate us, and as Chief said, we were on our own. We were on our own island here. We had to make our own decisions and execute our own plan. If it wasn't for that, I think we would have been in a world of hurt. Saying that, you know, prior to Chief even making the decision to evacuate at 3:18, he was being threatened by the province that if he made the call, and he didn't receive notice from the province, that everything would be on our dime. Our members would be turned away from all the evacuation centres in Lac La Biche or in Edmonton until official word had come down.[37]

In interviews with AEMA officials more than a year after the disaster, there remained a lack of clarity regarding the authority and responsibilities of parties in a disaster event that impacts a First Nation but in which the Province has declared a PSOE.

Jurisdictional overlap fed tensions between the RMWB and the Province that hampered the response effort, and confusion between Indigenous communities in close proximity. Both RMWB and AEMA officials recognized that tension between the two sides impeded a more adequate response. In particular, the protection of jurisdictional turf between the RMWB council and the Province was singled out by staff from both sides as a significant impediment, while tension between the AEMA's First Nations field officers and the RMWB's IRR staff over who should be the primary contacts with Indigenous governments and communities made collaboration more difficult, particularly in the early stages of the response.

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[37] Key Person Interview – Brad Callihoo, Chief Executive Officer, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September at the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.

Jurisdictional squabbles and uncertainties contributed to tensions and a lack of coordination between Indigenous governments as well. In Fort Chipewyan, for instance, the AEMA had arranged for shipments of food and provisions to support the communities. The RMWB, however, refused to let the Indigenous governments use the community hall, which meant the supplies had to be taken to the MCFN reserve at Allison Bay. That supplies were taken to Allison Bay then became a source of tension between the Indigenous communities of Fort Chipewyan, as it gave the impression the Province was providing support to MCFN and not the other Indigenous peoples of the area.

Another example took place in Fort McKay. The First Nation and Métis communities of Fort McKay live side-by-side and largely come from the same core family groups. Despite these facts, the two communities are subject to distinct evacuation protocols, with the First Nation working with the Province of Alberta and the Métis under the authority of the RMWB. One Indigenous representative explained how the distinctive jurisdictions complicated the evacuation:

> People didn't know what to do. And just as an example, the First Nation followed a different standard in terms of evacuation protocols than the Metis community because of the two jurisdictions. So the First Nation was telling people they didn't have to leave but then the Metis community, which is part of the municipality, said they did, because the municipality called a state of emergency and an evacuation. The Metis community said everybody had to evacuate, not just the elderly and the people with respiratory problems or people with children. We ran into the issue of well what do we do if somebody in the Metis side of the community says, 'No, I don't want to leave. Why should I have to leave when the First Nation is not leaving?' We did run into that particular issue with the two levels of evacuation.[38]

A similar lack of coordination was observed in Fort Chipewyan, where competing 'command posts' sprang up and resulted in tension between the Indigenous and municipal governments, as

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[38] Key Person Interview – Dwayne Roth, Chief Executive Officer, McKay Métis Group, interviewed on 20 December 2017 in Fort McKay, Alberta.

well as in Chipewyan Prairie First Nation/Janvier, where community members expressed frustration that the local school was evacuated but not the communities.[39]

COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

Poor preparation, centralized planning, and jurisdictional uncertainties drove a serious breakdown of communication between the RMWB, the AEMA, and Indigenous governments. On the one hand, the RMWB evacuated their IRR staff and there was virtually no communication from the REOC to Indigenous governments for the first week of the disaster. In fact, Fort McMurray First Nation did not become aware of a command centre until after the evacuation: "Right off, I knew there was poor communication, right? There was no communication with the outside world. I know they had a command post in McMurray, but I found that out after. I thought everybody was gone or whatever. That was a problem."[40] While communications with First Nations gradually improved, the Métis remained largely out of the loop. As the former General Manager of McMurray Métis commented: "I'll tell you, officially from the organizational point of view, I got my updates much like the general public…With the RMWB, there was no communication."[41]

While communications between the AEMA and First Nations were somewhat more fluid, there were several key miscommunications and breakdowns. As mentioned above, there was significant confusion over the authority to evacuate First Nations and the AEMA told both Fort McMurray and Fort McKay First Nations not to evacuate without prior authorization, despite the fact that Alberta's emergency management legislation does not apply to First Nation reserves. There were also breakdowns in the communications between Fort McKay and Fort McMurray

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[39] MCFN/ACFN Urban Focus Group held on 11 September 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta; Janvier Dene Wood Buffalo Community Association Focus Group held 12 July 2017 in Chard, Alberta.
[40] Key Person Interview – Brad Callihoo, Chief Executive Officer, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September at the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.
[41] Key Person Interview – Dan Stuckless, Manager, Industry Relations, Mikisew Cree First Nation, interviewed on 30 October 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

First Nations and AEMA's First Nations field officers, with both communities reporting a lack of support from their field officers.

EVACUATION CENTRES

Finally, the evacuation process was marred by the lack of appropriate evacuation centres for Indigenous peoples. The literature on natural disasters and the experience of evacuations of Indigenous peoples elsewhere in Canada demonstrates the importance of providing safe and culturally appropriate evacuation centres for Indigenous peoples. In the 2011 Manitoba floods and Saskatchewan wildfires, for example, the evacuation of First Nations from reserves to urban centres produced a number of negative effects, including culture shock, negative impacts on wellbeing, exposure to negative media coverage, and insufficient support services (Manitoba 2013, 151; Scharbach and Waldram 2016). In the 2016 Horse Creek wildfires, the lack of safe and culturally appropriate evacuation centres for Indigenous peoples contributed to family and community separation, the exposure of vulnerable populations to high-risk environments, and the lack of adequate support services for evacuees.

Communities were scattered across the province as a result of the lack of planning, clear meeting points, and the resources to direct members to the same area. A staff member from Fort McMurray First Nation described their struggles to find an adequate evacuation venue: "The aftermath was difficult too, because we didn't have the resources. Our go-to is either Fort McMurray or Lac La Biche. Fort McMurray was evacuated, we had very little choice but to go to Lac La Biche, and then Lac La Biche, because of all the evacuees there already, was full."[42] Fort McMurray First Nation described how the lack of a central evacuation site left Elders in particular scattered and isolated: "I think we need spots for the Elders, where they keep Elders together, that way because I know a lot of the Elders were lonesome and like someone said like

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[42] Fort McMurray First Nation, Key Person Focus Group, 19 September 2017, Fort McMurray First Nation #468 Reserve, Alberta.

with the food, they could just…it would be nice if they could be kept together…work with them or feed them the food they like to eat, that way they could visit with each other."[43]

The lack of safe and culturally appropriate evacuation centres exposed vulnerable populations to high-risk environments beyond the control of normal community structures, controls, and supports. Several communities described how the exposure of populations with addiction problems to a large urban environment in Edmonton when combined with infusions of cash fuelled substance abuse among young people in particular. Staff further reported that the spikes in substance abuse during the evacuation continued to pose a challenge within rural communities more than a year after community members had returned home.

The case of Janvier in particular is instructive of the potential negative effects of rural Indigenous communities to unsafe and culturally inappropriate and insensitive environments. Much of the Janvier community was initially evacuated to the Bold Centre in Lac La Biche. At some point in the evening, according to focus group participants, there was an incident at the centre in connection with a small number of youth who returned intoxicated, at which point Bold Centre officials forced all community members to leave the facility, including Elders and children. As recounted by a member:

> They could have just kicked those [intoxicated] people out, and okay, you know? They dealt with the whole community in the same way. They announced on the intercom in the Bold Center and said, 'Everyone that is from Janvier, you need to leave.' That was two buses full of kids, Elders, everybody that had to leave. That was late at night…they painted the whole community with the same paintbrush, which is not right, because there's only a few, maybe a handful of bad, I hate to say the word bad, but people that don't do right. We're all painted with that brush.[44]

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[43] Fort McMurray First Nation Focus Group, held on 15 of May 2017 at the Fort McMurray First Nation Band Office, Fort McMurray First Nation Reserve, Alberta.
[44] Janvier Dene Wood Buffalo Community Association Focus Group held on 12 July 2017 in Chard, Alberta.

From Lac La Biche some community members went back to Janvier, where the wildfire was heading. One community member described the anguish of an Elder and the sense of discrimination and frustration that all members were being kicked out and sent into harm's way:

> But what was really traumatic about all that was that a couple of days being at the Bold Center, I got a phone call from an Elder at 11 o'clock at night, and she was crying. And she says 'Marina,' she says 'You know what?' She says, 'They woke us up and they said that we were all going to have to leave the Bold Center. We have to go home.' She said 'They're putting us all on the buses now.' So everybody has to go. So long as you're from Janvier, you have to go. Because there were a few people of course who got rowdy and stuff, but they had security there, they had cops there at all times. But instead of taking care of the two or three people that were causing problems, they decided to send everybody back here. To send back into this environment where…you couldn't even see five feet in front of you at times because of the smoke. And they sent our people back like that. Well, that caused a lot of controversy with us. We could see how we were being treated.[45]

Finally, the lack of a safe and culturally appropriate evacuation centres undermined the provision of services and support to rural Indigenous peoples. In focus groups and interviews, Indigenous government staff and community members discussed the challenges of coordinating and accessing support. For Indigenous governments, scattered populations made it considerably more challenging to provide support to members; for members, the absence of a safe and recognizable environment made them less likely to seek support. As one Métis representative explained, many Indigenous peoples – and particularly Elders – are less able to advocate for themselves and a safe environment with people they know and trust in order to access services and gain support: "If I had a problem, I knew how to advocate for myself. If I needed to get a hold of someone I could. I had a bank account that I could deposit the money in, all that kind of stuff, whereas a lot of the Métis people were left behind."[46] In several focus groups, participants

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[45] Key Person Interview – Marina Nokohoo, Member, Chipewyan Prairie First Nation, interviewed 7 December 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[46] Key Person Interview – Jay Telegdi, former Government Relations Manager at McMurray Métis, 29 September 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta.

identified a centralized evacuation point that is organized and controlled by their Indigenous government as key to coordinating and providing support to members.[47]

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Evacuation and Response – Key Findings

✓ The RMWB was woefully unprepared for the wildfire, both in terms of mitigation programs and response planning. AEMA support was inadequate to address the needs and challenges of First Nations and excluded the Métis;

✓ The RMWB's MEMP was overly centralized and focussed on Fort McMurray and there was little to no consideration of the rural hamlets or First Nations. The tendency towards centralized disaster planning was repeated in First Nations, reinforced by AEMA programs;

✓ There was a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities and a general lack of coordination between governments. Tension emerged between the provincial, municipal, and Indigenous governments at multiple levels, Indigenous governments were excluded from the REOC;

✓ In the first week there was a serious breakdown of communications between First Nations and the REOC, while the Métis remained excluded throughout the evacuation and response. The AEMA similarly suffered key communications and support breakdowns and miscommunications;

✓ The lack of safe and culturally appropriate evacuation sites contributed to family and community separation, the exposure of vulnerable populations to high-risk environments, and a lack of support services for evacuees.

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[47] Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation/Mikisew Cree First Nation Urban, held 14 June 2017 at the Mikisew Cree First Nation office, Fort McMurray, Alberta; Fort McKay First Nation, held 12 May 2017 at the Fort McKay First Nation Reserve, Alberta; Fort McMurray First Nation #468, 15 May 2017 at the Fort McMurray First Nation Band Office, Fort McMurray First Nation Reserve, Alberta.

RE-ENTRY AND RECOVERY

Poor preparedness, the breakdown of communications, and the lack of meaningful integration of Indigenous governments and communities into evacuation and response left Indigenous governments excluded and frustrated and their members exposed to high risk environments and without adequate support. Unfortunately, the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments did not improve significantly in the re-entry and recovery phases. Much as was the case for evacuation and response, Indigenous governments and communities were largely excluded from re-entry and recovery planning and lacked adequate reception areas and support. Moreover, Indigenous communities expressed concern that their skills and resources were not properly utilized in the recovery and experienced frustration with the reimbursement process for disaster expenses.

RE-ENTRY AND RECOVERY PLANNING

Re-entry and recovery planning was done with very little direct input from Indigenous governments. Within Fort McMurray, there was little consideration of the needs of Indigenous peoples upon re-entry, which was evident in the plan itself. As one Indigenous interview participant noted regarding the selection of re-entry points: "They [the RMWB] picked all schools; they picked schools. The only place that wasn't a school was Vista Ridge. And schools hold a very uncomfortable history for Indigenous people in general, and I can't imagine asking an Indigenous person to have to go get their Red Cross money at a school if they haven't stepped in a school since they were in residential schools." The rural hamlets were similarly left out:

> Well, for Fort McKay it was a lack of participation. It was so heavily focused on Fort McMurray and Fort McMurray leadership were participating in the different emergency planning response committees and response teams and so forth…support set up, no place to go and register to let people know that you got back. No plan for any of the rural communities as far as I saw in terms of supporting their re-entry. It was just mostly focused on Fort McMurray.[48]

The lack of coordination between the RMWB, the AEMA, and First Nations caused additional problems. As the Manager of the RMWB's IRR department commented:

> What are the re-entry dates for the First Nations? What color of bands do they get? How do the First Nations get bands in order to prepare for re-entry? And so even trying to get Chief and council in [Fort McMurray First Nation] 468 access into Fort McMurray was a huge challenge…I started stealing bands and driving them out to the checkpoints myself to hand over to First Nation…And even going and trying to get security groups to understand, like, 'Your rules don't apply to these people. If they say this, you let them do whatever they want to do, because they're allowed.' So RCMP had impeded 468 members from coming back. And it took a call from Dennis [Director of IRR] to whoever the operations person was in POC in order to let 468 enter their own reserve. Which, we should never have to go to those lengths of calling in every possible personal or professional favour to get someone access to their own reserve.[49]

Recovery planning, which was done on the fly because the region had no recovery plan in place, similarly excluded Indigenous governments. The RMWB's recovery plan made scant mention of Indigenous peoples and identified Indigenous governments merely as 'stakeholders' (RMWB 2016). This exclusionary approach stands in stark contrast to the approach taken in Slave Lake, where recovery was planned and managed via a 'Tri-Council' governance structure comprised of the Town of Slave Lake, the municipal district, and the Sawridge First Nation. In fact, so successful was the Slake Lake model that KPMG recommended the Province of Alberta formalize a province-wide approach to disaster recovery planning on its basis (2012, 172).

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[48] Key Person Interview – Dwayne Roth, Chief Executive Officer, McKay Métis Group, interviewed on 20 December 2017 in Fort McKay, Alberta.
[49] Key Person Interview – Elena Gould, Manager, Department of Indigenous and Rural Relations, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 15 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

The recovery committee set-up up by the RMWB consisted of one council member from the Rural Service Area, two councillors from Ward 1, and six members from the public at-large appointed by the council, with no direct representation for any of the Indigenous governments of the region. Indeed, IRR staff expressed frustration that the recovery committee considered IRR staff as there to 'represent' the views and interests of Indigenous governments. It was not until March of 2017 that formal Indigenous representation was established with the hiring of one First Nation and one Métis wildfire coordinators to sit on the Recovery Task Force, but by that time, as IRR's Manager remarked, "It was almost too late."[50]

RECEPTION AREAS AND SUPPORT

Because of their exclusion from the re-entry and recovery planning process, there was no re-entry point for Indigenous peoples in Fort McMurray, and those locations that were chosen were considered culturally inappropriate by the RMWB's own IRR Manager. The C.E.O. of McMurray Métis concurred and explained his reaction to visiting an official re-entry point:

> And I went there and you know that was the one thing I noticed right away was that there were Aboriginal people sitting there on the side…they were sort of shuffled off to the side. Right away, you know, as the president of the Friendship Centre I was contacted by Red Cross. I mentioned to them right away, you know we got to have a separate entry point for our Aboriginal people because they're not comfortable. They're being shuffled through the side and there's a big long line-up. They're feeling like they're in the wrong place.[51]

In response, the NAFC, McMurray Métis, and the Red Cross worked to set-up a re-entry point for Indigenous peoples at the Friendship Centre. The initiative was a considerable success, but was undermined by the fact that information on the NAFC reception area was not included in the RMWB's re-entry package and that many First Nations were unaware of the program.

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[50] Key Person Interview – Elena Gould, Manager, Department of Indigenous and Rural Relations, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 15 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[51] Key Person Interview – Bill Loutitt, Chief Executive Officer, McMurray Métis Local 1935, interviewed on 12 December 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

The absence of an Indigenous re-entry point in Fort McMurray speaks to another deficiency in the recovery process: the lack of Indigenous support services for recovery. In focus groups, Indigenous peoples expressed concern over the lack of Indigenous resources workers and a marked preference for support programs run by Indigenous organizations.

Figure 7 – Preference for Services Provided by Indigenous Organizations
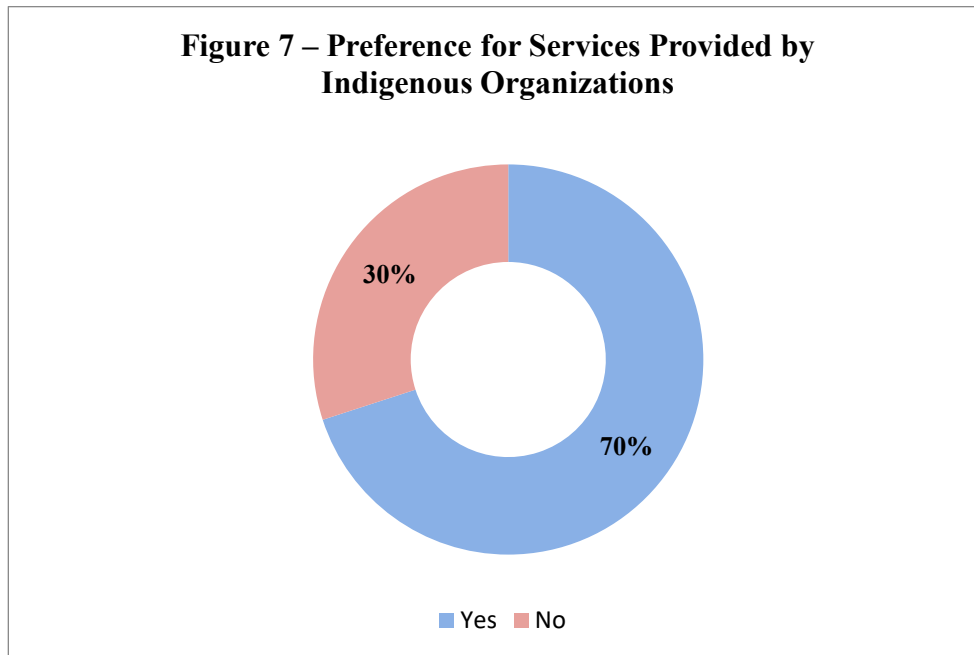
As Figure 7 demonstrates, survey participants indicated a clear preference for disaster support services provided by Indigenous organizations and governments. The barriers to service provision posed by non-Indigenous organizations and support workers were evidenced in rural areas as well. As Fort McMurray First Nation staff explained:

> I think if you just put information out there and it said, 'Here's a pamphlet.' If you have issues or you're experiencing anxiety or mental illness, or whatever the case is, people are not likely to take it upon themselves to call to some vague, unknown individual or group and say, 'I need help.' They'd rather just stay within the Nation here, right? We have more success that way.[52]

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[52] Key Person Interview – Brad Callihoo, Chief Executive Officer, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September at the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.

Staff from Fort McKay First Nation concurred: "We had some family support, but no one actually would, but it wasn't really utilized. It wasn't used. Two or three people we had in place, from mental health that came in. We figured out that, nice people, but again there wasn't a comfort level for them to open up about their emotions…we've seen that so many times."[53] These cultural barriers extended to non-governmental organizations like the Red Cross. As one woman explained, "It was a huge thing, I felt like, for me, to go to Red Cross. I felt like—I don't know if everybody felt like that. It felt like you weren't supposed to be there."[54] The need for more frontline Indigenous support workers was a constant theme for the RMWB, Alberta Health, and the Red Cross: "It would have helped if we had had more Aboriginal workers…They didn't have the Aboriginal workers there in the right proportion for that population."[55]

INDIGENOUS SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Related to the question of more Indigenous support workers on the frontlines was the concern that the response and recovery processes did not take full advantage of the skills, capacity, and knowledge of Indigenous peoples in the region. The use of Indigenous knowledge and skills can help maximize the effectiveness of disaster response, recovery, and management mechanisms by using all available human resources and can advance the objectives of reconciliation and equity between Indigenous peoples and the governments of the region.

Focus groups suggested there are significant fire knowledge and firefighting experience and expertise within the Indigenous communities of the RMWB. Numerous participants described how Indigenous peoples did much of the fire fighting in the region historically, and particularly those who worked in the forestry industry:

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[53] Key Person Interview – Simon Adams, Director of Community Services, Fort McKay First Nation, interviewed on 27 September 2017 on the Fort McKay First Nation Reserve.
[54] Janvier Dene Wood Buffalo Community Association Focus Group held on 12 July 2017 in Chard, Alberta.
[55] Key Person Interview – Bill Loutitt, Chief Executive Officer, McMurray Métis Local 1935, interviewed on 12 December 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

But you see we were trained years ago for firefighting and that. We used to be all the families that were pretty good in forestry. I even have my little red card yet. We took courses for running pumps, all kinds of things. I fought a lot of fires, quite a few. I flew all over around all over Wabasca, all around the north. Played in fires; the people were the old timers put those fires out.[56]

Many of those with fire-fighting experience, however, have over time lost their credentials, and younger Indigenous people have failed to obtain formal training. This is consistent with the history of firefighting in Alberta, in which the role of Indigenous knowledge and peoples in fire prevention and firefighting has been minimized over time (Christianson 2015).

Indigenous communities expressed their frustration that their resources and companies were overlooked in the response and recovery phases as well. Leadership at Fort McMurray First Nation expressed their dismay that their equipment and people were overlooked for external support during the firefighting and evacuation stages:

As Chief said, he made the decision to stay behind. We have all this equipment that we used with Christina River, our business. He had made sure all the water trucks were filled. Made sure all the equipment was ready to go, full of fuel. We didn't know where to take it, where to use it, who needed it. You see equipment coming up from south. It just didn't make a lot of sense about that level of communication. It was right in our own backyard. We're bringing equipment from all over. Why?[57]

These concerns echoed the sentiment in all the focus groups that inadequate effort was made to integrate Indigenous peoples into the recovery effort via employment and contracting opportunities; participants contended that because Indigenous peoples have borne so much of the burden in terms of negative impacts, they should be the primary beneficiaries of the rebuild. Indigenous governments felt shut out when the province took over and used their own vendor's

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[56] Urban Indigenous Focus Group held 22 June 2017 at the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[57] Key Person Interview – Brad Callihoo, Chief Executive Officer, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September at the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.

list. More contracting opportunities were made available to local, Indigenous companies once the RMWB intervened and convinced the Province to use the municipality's vendor list. However, Métis companies were still at a disadvantage because many Métis companies are owned by individuals and not communities and are thus lower on the priority list vis-à-vis First Nation-owned companies. This disadvantage is the legacy of federal investments in band-owned businesses and stronger First Nations-industry relationships that have resulted from the consultation policies exclude non-settlement Métis in Alberta.

DISASTER REIMBURSEMENT

The recovery process was further undermined by problems with the disaster reimbursement program run by the AEMA. The previous Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangement (DFAA) program had encountered numerous problems with First Nations related to the lack of information and understanding of the program and long wait times for reimbursement (Manitoba 2013). In Alberta, ISC works through the AEMA for provide disaster assistance to First Nations on the basis of its Disaster Recovery Program (DRP). In response to problems with information, expectations, and wait times, the AEMA hired a First Nations DRP Advisor to support First Nations making DRP claims. As the program exists now, First Nations make claims to the AEMA with the support of the Advisor, who then makes recommendations to ISC as to what should and should not be covered. ISC makes the final determination and provides all funds.

While the existing program represents an improvement, there exist several significant flaws. The first flaw is the lack of First Nations' information and capacity to manage the requirements. Given the workloads faced by understaffed First Nations and the related problem of staff turnover, it is a challenge for the AEMA to maintain staff trained, informed, and prepared for making a submission. The second problem is the mutual suspicion and mistrust that exists between First Nations and non-Indigenous governments. The effects of this mutual suspicion were evident in the experience of Fort McMurray First Nation.

According to Fort McMurray First Nation, the requirements of the AEMA program were excessive to the point of discriminatory. In the words of the Nation's CEO:

> That [the DRP process] was the most disgusting process that we've ever encountered. It was on the verge of racism to be honest. We had MNP as an accounting firm leading the process, and they said it wasn't good enough. DRP was a moving target. They couldn't tell us what they needed, and what they required on a day-to-day basis. Every time we provided the data or the information they requested, that target changed. Some of the comments, we've been through forensic audits in the past, and this was even way more on us than a forensic audit. They wanted to know serial numbers of pieces of equipment, what time it started, what time it shut off, who was there. It was absolutely crazy; it was absolutely absurd.[58]

From the perspective of the AEMA, the submissions made by the Nation were inadequate and covered items that were either not covered by the program or exceeded its scope. ISC then intervened and eventually approved some of the expenditures the AEMA had rejected. But this introduces another potential problem into the system: what are the criteria used by ISC to adjudicate conflicts between First Nations and the AEMA? In the absence of clear guidelines, the process runs the risk of arbitrary and inequitable treatment across First Nations, and could in turn fuel misinformation about the program and drive further tension between First Nations who feel they are being treated differently and the AEMA.

Finally, the Métis are excluded from the AEMA program, which is discriminatory and inconsistent with the spirit of the Daniels ruling. The Fort McKay Métis Community Association made a claim under the program but was rejected. The Willow Lake Métis Local estimates it spent more than $100,000 to support its members during the wildfire and McMurray Métis ran down its reserves to the point where they could not get a bank loan. All Métis communities expressed that their exclusion from the program dramatically restricted the ways in which they could support their members during the evacuation and response.

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[58] Key Person Interview -- Brad Callihoo, Chief Executive Officer, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September at the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.

Re-Entry and Recovery – Key Findings

✓ Indigenous governments were largely excluded from re-entry and recovery planning at the municipal level. This stands in stark contrast to the approach taken in Slave Lake, where a Tri-Partite Committee comprised of the town, municipality, and the Sawridge First Nation managed recovery planning;

✓ Indigenous peoples demonstrated a clear preference for support services run by Indigenous organizations and staffed by Indigenous peoples. However, the RMWB had no Indigenous re-entry point in Fort McMurray and did not properly plan for and support rural re-entry, while participants reported a lack of Indigenous support workers. Taken together, these factors impeded Indigenous access to support services and undermined Indigenous recovery;

✓ Indigenous skills, knowledge, and companies were inadequately integration into the response and recovery phases. Indigenous knowledge of disaster risks was ignored while Indigenous resources were poorly integrated into the disaster response effort. During the recovery phase, local Indigenous companies were largely left out of the contracting process during the PSOE; while the situation improved once the RMWB's vendors list was utilized, that list is biased against Métis companies that tend to be owned by individuals rather than communities;

✓ There are significant challenges with disaster reimbursement at the provincial level. There were variously information deficits, misalignments of expectations, and difficulties in tracking and presenting the information required for reimbursement, which caused tension and hardship in several cases. The Métis remain excluded from the disaster reimbursement program;

✓ Because the AEMA establishes the guidelines for disaster reimbursement but ISC makes the final decision on what will be reimbursed, there is a risk of arbitrary and inequitable treatment across First Nations.

INTERCONNECTIONS AND IMPACTS

Impacts to Indigenous peoples cannot be assessed and mitigated using the same tools used for non-Indigenous populations. Divergent historical and cultural contexts, value systems, ways of life, and governance structures mean that disasters affect Indigenous peoples in ways that are fundamentally distinct from non-Indigenous populations. Emergency response and disaster management plans must account for these particularities and challenges. The deep connections to their traditional territories and the interconnectedness of their cultures and ways of life amplify the effects of wildfires on Indigenous peoples and produces ripple effects across the region. At the same time, decades of maltreatment and discrimination, cultural disconnect, and poor communication pose significant obstacles to the development of response, recovery, and mitigation plans that build upon and reflect the strengths and aspirations of the region's Indigenous peoples and communities.

Impacts from the 2016 Horse Creek wildfires are examined through the lens of interrelatedness. As will be discussed below, one of the major failures of the RMWB's preparation for and response to the wildfires was the lack of awareness of the deeply interconnected nature of the region; impacts to one part of the region invariably ricochet into others via networks of kin, economy, and place that integrate individuals, families, and communities across the region. A disaster whose effects are concentrated in one sub-region, then, will have significant effects throughout the entire region, and all the more so for the regional hub of Fort McMurray. Unfortunately, disaster response organizations were poorly prepared for this reality, which was reflected in key breakdowns and oversights in the preparedness, response, and recovery phases.

By interrelatedness we refer to four phenomena. The first is the fundamental interrelatedness of impact 'categories' within and between Indigenous communities. While standard impact assessments separate impacts into discrete categories, such as economic, infrastructure, political, etcetera, this practice downplays the interrelatedness of these categories and how impacts in one category cascade and reverberate into others. The former General Manager of McMurray Métis summarized well the interconnectedness of impacts and how these ripple from the initial impact into other aspects of the community's life:

If you wanted to statistically look at it, we had a lot of members that were really hard hit, and a lot of members that probably weren't hit very hard. It looks like, maybe you could say 40 or 50 of our members…were really hit hard, but each of those members would have had ties to other people in the community, which then have secondary and tertiary effects on the family. Mom doesn't have a home now, or Mom didn't have insurance, Mom and Dad split up, so now the kids are spending half their time in Lac La Biche and half their time in Fort McMurray. So we ended up dealing with a lot of members that had that.[59]

Similarly, impacts to traplines do not simply affect the annual income of trappers, because trapping for many Indigenous peoples is more than a job: it is a way of life. For many Indigenous families and communities, the trapline is a place of family and community gathering; it is a place where traditional knowledge and values are passed down to younger generations; it is a place where the past, present, and future intersect, where ancestors, relatives, and unborn generations are connected. Impacts to traplines therefore extend into family and community bonds, traditional knowledge and values, and a sense of self and place in the world.

The second phenomenon refers to the deep interconnections of kin between Indigenous peoples in the region, both within and between First Nations and Métis. Despite the differences in terms of socio-economic status, cultural practices, language, political authority and legal rights, many of these fomented and intensified by government policy, there are powerful interrelations between the Indigenous communities of the region. From their movement along the Athabasca and Clearwater rivers to the kin bonds between First Nation and Métis that emerged from the arrival of Europeans, the Indigenous peoples of the region have been and remain highly interconnected. As one Métis leader explained:

The Métis and First Nations community in this region started on the rivers of the Athabasca…and Métis families, Métis men and European men, would marry into First Nations families for the purpose of expanding trade routes and trade areas so…that you'll see the Métis community and the First Nations community

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[59] Key Person Interview – Dan Stuckless, Manager, Industry Relations, Mikisew Cree First Nation, interviewed on 30 October 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

is very close, because a lot of us are interrelated, inter-married, you know, a lot of us are related.[60]

The deep interconnections of the Indigenous peoples of the region are further evidenced by survey responses. Figure 8 presents the results of a survey question that asked respondents to identify whether they knew any one from the following categories who had their property 'destroyed' or 'significantly damaged'.[61]

Figure 8 – Socio-Demographic Ripple Effects
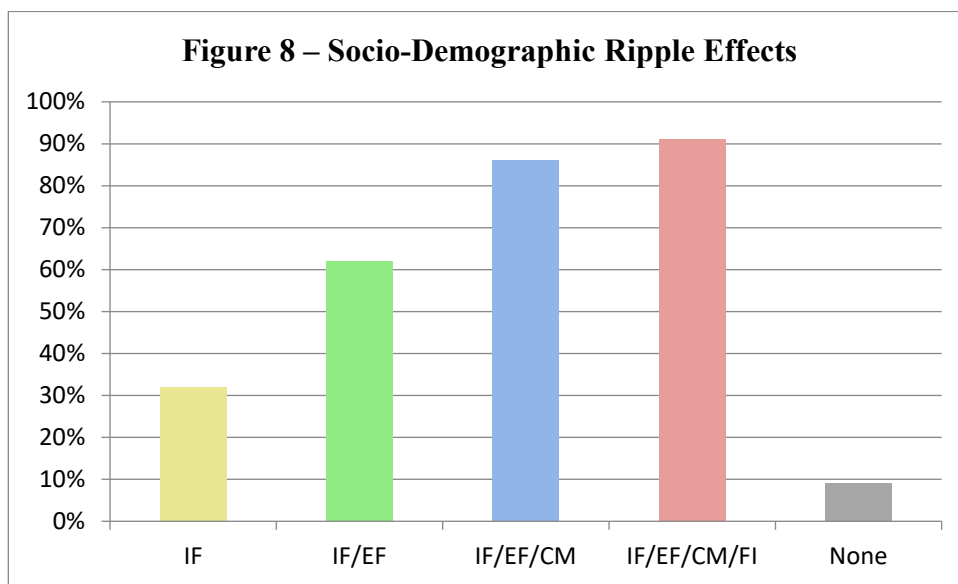
The interconnections among the Indigenous peoples of the region are evident: more than 30 percent had a member of their immediate family whose property was either destroyed or significantly damaged; that figure rose to more than 60% for immediate and/or extended family, to more than 80% for immediate family, and/or extended family, and/or community member you know, and more than 90% for immediate family, and/or extended family, and/or community member you know, and/or friend who is Indigenous but not a member of their community. Put

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[60] Key Person Interview – Ron Quintal, President, McKay Métis Community Association, interviewed on 2 March 2018 in Fort McKay, Alberta.

[61] Acronyms for Figure 8 are as follows: IF (immediate family), EF (extended family), CM (community member), FI (friend who is Indigenous but is not a member of your community).

another way, only 9 percent of respondents knew no one from any of the following categories who had suffered property destruction or significant damage.

The interconnections among Indigenous peoples were similarly evident in the survey results on residency. Figure 9 presents the findings of two questions on residency: one prior to the wildfires at one at the time of the survey (late-2017-early-2018).

Figure 9 – Indigenous Residency in the RMWB
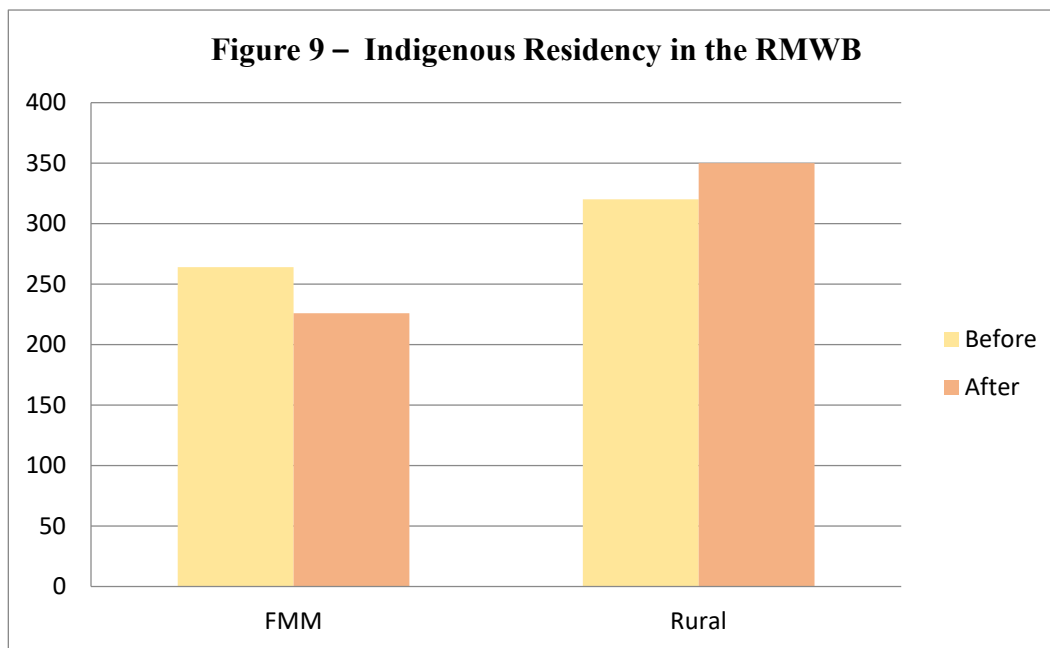
Figure 9 suggests a significant movement of the Indigenous population from Fort McMurray to the rural areas: on the one hand, the Indigenous population in Fort McMurray fell by 15 percent while the Indigenous population residing in rural areas rose by approximately 10 percent. These figures likely underestimate the magnitude of the movement, because of the greater difficulty in reaching those who remain displaced and/or are living temporarily/informally in rural areas.

This intra-regional migration towards rural communities has placed considerable stress on the already-overburden infrastructure and resources in rural communities. As discussed above, many rural communities and reserves in the region face shortages of adequate housing. In

Conklin, for instance, members who had left for Fort McMurray because of the shortage of housing have returned since the wildfire. As the former CEO of the CRDAC Jeffrey O'Donnell explained: "I think you have to remember, because of the housing crisis in Conklin, people have moved to Fort McMurray. And when the people from Conklin that have moved to Fort McMurray and then lost their houses in Fort McMurray, well, they've come back to Conklin."[62] But there is no adequate housing for these community members: according to survey results, 27 percent of adult Conklin residents live with family or friends while another 12 percent have no permanent address at all. The influx of urban residents to rural areas since the wildfire has placed enormous pressure on rural communities like Conklin, which lack the infrastructure and resources to accommodate even small increases in the population.

The third manifestation of interconnectedness was economic: because of its role as the commercial hub for the oil sands and the lack of investment and commercial development in the rural hamlets, Fort McMurray represents the hub for the regional economy and the rural areas that depend upon Fort McMurray for employment, services, and supplies. When Fort McMurray is impacted by a disaster event, then, rural areas run the risk of losing access to critical supplies and services. Residents of Fort Chipewyan and Fort McKay described how their communities temporarily lost access to basic goods and provisions:

> So have people look at Fort McMurray as being affected by the wildfire but they don't realize that the whole region was affected of course. And the community that I work in relies heavily on Fort McMurray's to purchase all those goods and services. And so our residents were basically cut off for a month from being able to purchase goods and services including foods, and pampers, and milk, and formula, and water and all that type of stuff.[63]

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[62] Key Person Interview – Jeffrey O'Donnell, Chief Executive Officer, Conklin Resource Development Advisory Committee, interviewed on 8 November 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[63] Key Person Interview – Dwayne Roth, Chief Executive Officer, McKay Métis Group, interviewed on 20 December 2017 in Fort McKay, Alberta.

The vulnerability is particularly severe in remote communities where prices for basic goods are already very high, and residents of Fort Chipewyan described how the disaster prompted a panic and an immediate run on provisions: "You go to the Northern, to go and try to purchase something, there was nothing. When they knew that we were getting people in here, people went and stocked up on water, stocked up on canned stuff…there was nothing on the shelves."[64]

Rural communities to the south found themselves in a similarly precarious position as a result of highway closures and the lack of access for provisions: "Roads were closed. We had no access to services. We had no food coming in. And in the case of an emergency, there was nothing. If somebody got really sick, basically we were on our own."[65] Another complication arose from the reliance of many in the rural communities upon Fort McMurray for medical attention and services. Indigenous community members described the difficulties in accessing medications and determining dosages without medical histories, which were in Fort McMurray:

> We were lucky enough to have a pharmacist from Fort McMurray; when he went to Edmonton he was sending us medications. And he was paying for it himself to come in, the medications, from Sherwood Park. So yeah, it was a big thing. And we'd phone around and request help for insulin, get us pills or something. And we had a real hard time. They were coming from the Territories, their medication. The drugstore in Fort Smith was kind enough to send meds, but we were just going based on people saying, 'Well, I'm on blood pressure meds,' but how do you know their history?[66]

Shortages of services and supplies hit vulnerable members particularly hard. In Fort McKay, staff reported severe shortages in spaces for addictions treatment in Fort McMurray and elsewhere in the province. When the community faced a spike in addictions following the

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[64] Athabasca Chipewyan/Métis Local 125/Mikisew Cree First Nation Rural Focus Group, held at the Métis Local 125 office, Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, on 29 September 2017.

[65] Key Person Interview – Marina Nokohoo, Member, Chipewyan Prairie First Nation, interviewed 7 December 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

[66] Athabasca Chipewyan/Métis Local 125/Mikisew Cree First Nation Rural Focus Group, held at the Métis Local 125 office, Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, on 29 September 2017.

wildfires and evacuation, First Nation staff had to search out of province for available treatment facilities because everything in Alberta was full.

The fourth source of interconnectedness is the deep people-place connections between the region and its Indigenous peoples, including both the natural and built environments. This interconnectedness is both a source of vulnerability and resilience for Indigenous peoples and must be considered in any assessment of impacts and disaster management plans. As one trapper from Anzac described, there is a deep sense of connectedness for many Indigenous peoples and harvesters to this region:

> I'm born and raised here in Anzac. I work out here, my kids play out here, I come out here to practice my traditions, my traditional way of life. The biggest impact came to me was when the fire had hit Anzac. I may live a million places around the globe, but this will always be home. This will always be where I come home to practice my traditions, my culture, be with my family, my friends, people I've known all my life.[67]

Perhaps nowhere did the Indigenous peoples of the RMWB converge to a greater extent than in Waterways, the most heavily impacted neighbourhood. Waterways was historically an area where both Métis and First Nations resided and visited for decades and centuries, and which in the pre-wildfire period housed a disproportionate number of Indigenous residents. As one Elder in Fort McKay observed: "Then you see Fort McMurray in flames. I was born there, all my family, my ancestors, from Waterways area, and that's gone. Everything is just snuffed right out."[68] Another Waterways resident described returning to his ancestral neighbourhood with his brothers and son after the wildfire, and his reaction to the devastation:

> And to go back, we grew up together, and the night of the fire, myself and my son, my brother and his wife, and one other guy, we ended up on the river, threw the boats in the water…we stopped in Waterways where we used to swim down there. We went up to have a look. My son was the first one up on the ridge and

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[67] Willow Lake Métis Local Focus Group, held 22 August 2017 at the Métis Local office, Anzac, Alberta.
[68] Fort McKay Métis Community Association Focus Group held on 21 August 2017 in Fort McKay, Alberta.

he looked at me and my brother, and he said, 'Just be prepared for what you guys are going to see when you come up,' and I said, 'Wow.' I just heard a lot about them stories. It was total devastation and worst thing about it is that's the oldest and Waterways was on the map before McMurray was. We were the Waterways Boys. We grew up there. That's who we are. To see what we seen at that moment was devastating.[69]

From the dense network of kin and economic connections across the region to the deep sense of connectedness that many Indigenous peoples feel to the natural and built environments of northeastern Alberta, these interconnections among the Indigenous peoples of the region shaped powerfully impacts of the wildfires and will continue to shape disaster events in the future. It is crucial that these interconnections are acknowledged and considered when designing and implementing disaster management plans, from preparedness to recovery and mitigation.

Physical/Economic

For natural disasters more generally and wildfires in particular, the focus of impact assessments has traditionally centered on material/economic effects, and rightfully so: studies suggests these are among the most significant impacts experienced and that their effects can continue for years after the initial disaster event (Kulig et al. 2011; Paveglio et al. 2015b). The most devastating impact of any natural disaster is the loss of human life. While there were no direct and official Indigenous deaths from the wildfire, several communities reported Elders passing in the aftermath of the wildfires, which community members consider to be an indirect effect of the

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[69] McMurray Métis Focus Group, held 22 June 2017 at the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association (WBEA) offices in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

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disaster. Fort McKay First Nation reported that two of its community members died shortly after the evacuation, while McMurray Métis lost one of its Elders.[70]

Given the geographic vulnerability and proximity to the wildfire, it is no surprise that numerous Indigenous peoples lost or suffered damage to their homes. Of the survey participants who resided in Fort McMurray prior to the wildfire, a full 25 percent responded that their homes were destroyed, while 36 percent reported that their homes were damaged.

Figure 10 – Indigenous Housing Damage in Fort McMurray

25%

36%

■ Destroyed ■ Damaged
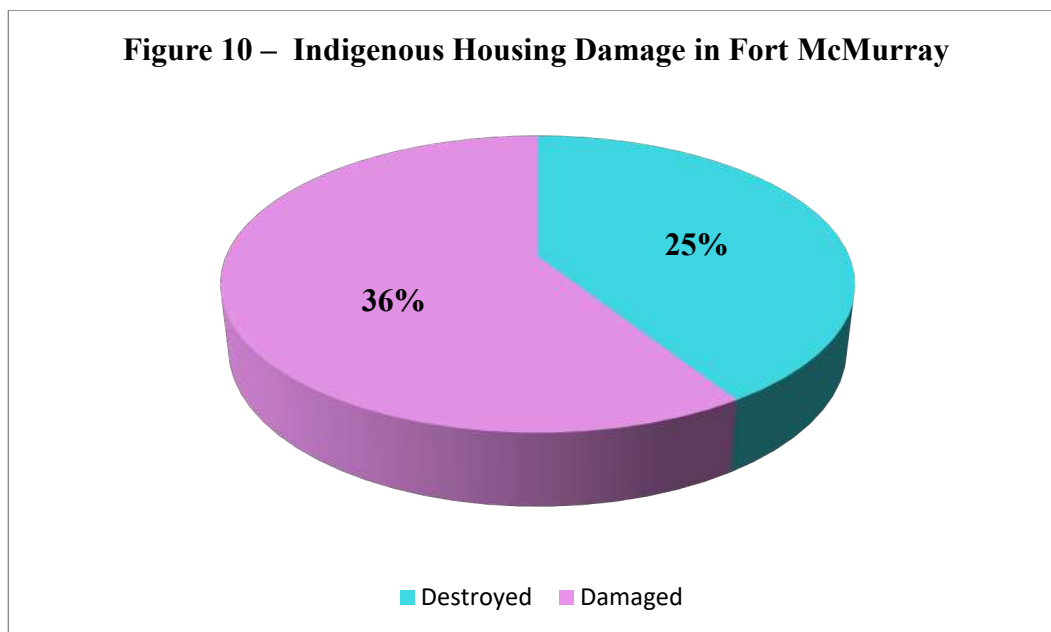
While not strictly comparable, only 8 percent of dwellings in Fort McMurray were destroyed on the basis of the 2015 municipal census and figures on property destruction.

The significant property destruction suffered by Indigenous peoples is consistent with the internal tallies of Indigenous communities, as well as the distribution of Indigenous peoples in

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[70] Key Person Interview – Simon Adams, Director of Community Services, Fort McKay First Nation, interviewed on 27 September 2017 on the Fort McKay First Nation Reserve; Key Person Interview – Bill Loutitt, Chief Executive Officer, McMurray Métis Local 1935, interviewed on 12 December 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

the most heavily impacted neighbourhoods. According to 2012 census data provided by the RMWB, Waterways, Beacon Hill, and Abasand accounted for 10% of the dwellings in Fort McMurray but nearly 75% of the dwellings destroyed; while these three neighbourhoods housed just over 10 percent of the city's population, they were home to nearly half its Indigenous residents. As a result, Indigenous residents were more than four times more likely to live in one of the three most impacted neighbourhoods.

Evidence suggests that those Indigenous peoples who lost their homes were already more vulnerable than the average. Of the 25 percent of respondents whose homes were destroyed, 36 percent had no insurance, which is consistent with the concentration of effects in the oldest neighbourhoods. Survey data similarly suggested that Indigenous people who lost their homes in the wildfire were more likely to be older: of those survey respondents who lost their homes in the wildfire, 25 percent were 60 years or older, compared to 16 percent of the respondent who were 60 years or older and the less than 10 percent of the Indigenous population in Fort McMurray.

Figure 11 – Post-Wildfire Changes to Indigenous Employment and Income
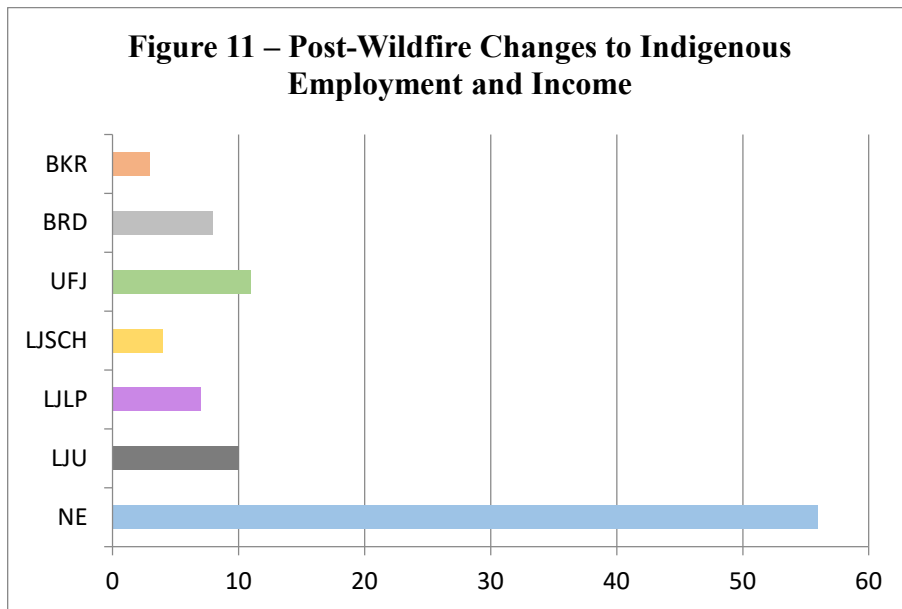
The wildfires hit an already battered economy hard, and despite the injections of money from governments and insurance companies and the stabilization of the broader economic

environment, the evidence suggests Indigenous peoples remain worse off in economic terms than before the wildfires. Figure 11 presents the findings of a survey question that asked respondents to identify changes in the socio-economic situation since the wildfires.[71] The findings suggest that the wildfires have had a strong and negative net effect on the socio-economic status of Indigenous peoples. Of those who responded, 32 percent registered a negative change, whether bankruptcy, reduced business income or loss of employment and income. Only 11% registered an improvement, i.e., people who were unemployed prior to the wildfire and then found a job. 56 percent of respondents registered no change.

The findings of the survey are supported by the findings of focus groups and interviews. Participants in numerous focus groups and key person interviews noted how community members have seen hours reduced and jobs lost, trends that were observed by leadership, business people, and members of Indigenous communities. The wildfire poured fuel onto the economic downturn that began towards the end of 2015:

> Financially too like, a lot of people within the community were effected with the fire. Hours were cut; people were laid off. No money coming in. Everybody's trying to recover the money that was lost during these sites being shut down, that's millions of dollars and it affects us too, because for McKay, that's their bread and butter too, so there's a lot of that and even some of the businesses in town are shutting down because they couldn't get back up for whatever purposes. So here we are a year later, but it's still affecting us. I don't know other people's personal experiences, but as my own, my husband's not getting any overtime, the belt's been tightened, certain businesses shutting down. Even in the community, seeing people being laid off all the time. Lack of work, can't get the money for projects.[72]

Owners of small businesses described a similar downturn in the level of economic activity since the wildfire. For some, the loss of business was related to the general decline of economic

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[71] Acronyms for Figure 8 are as follows: BKR (Business has gone bankrupt), BRD (Business Revenue Decline), UFJ (Unemployed but Found Job), LJSCH (Lost Job and Went Back to School), LJLP (Lost Job but Found Lower-Paying Job), LJU (Lost Job and am Unemployed), and NE (No Effect).

[72] Fort McKay First Nation Focus Group held on 21 August 2017 at the Fort McKay Reserve, Alberta.

activity and loss of clients for their services. As one owner of a transportation business described: "Half of my business is gone and I'm still not recovering much, because the airport was closed for long time too and I used to do all those airport runs, and even the businesses, they don't come back, a lot of them don't come back, about 15 of them that I used to work with, they don't come back."[73] Another owner of a small tour operator described how the downturn in tourism and the destruction of key tourist destinations was impacted his business:

> I run a business with a friend here in town. We had, we were doing some tours and stuff and we were working through, most of it was Northern Lights tours to international people that would come from other areas and they'd be visiting the mountains and they want to see it so we set up so we were doing it. We were doing pretty good. You know, we'd get a busload of people here and there. We'd do smaller tours too but we used Camp Yogi, which is that little camp down by the Draper area. That's flattened, run over, there's nothing there. So, it's essentially, that was where we could do our tours. Now we have nowhere so we haven't done one of those for over a year, you know?"[74]

Indigenous leadership, staff, and businesspeople identified two key additional drivers that have fed into the downturn and wildfire: first, that several key oil sands operators are utilizing the decline in the Fort McMurray labour force to shift towards greater use of fly-in-fly-out workers; and second, that companies have used to wildfire to further cut expenses via offloading risk onto contractors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

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[73] Fort McKay First Nation Focus Group held on 21 August 2017 at the Fort McKay Reserve, Alberta.
[74] Willow Lake Métis Local 780 Focus Group held on 22 August 2017 at Anzac, Alberta.

Socio-Cultural

Effects from the physical destruction of the wildfire extend well beyond the realm of individual lives lost and material property destroyed, into the bonds and sense of connectedness between members of families and communities of people. The literature suggests that wildfires can significantly disrupt key social structures and networks and undermine relations within and between groups. The interruption of routines, for instance, has been correlated to psychological wellbeing in the aftermath of wildfires. Similarly, wildfires can affect relationships within communities, in terms of the differential effects between groups, and between communities and external agents in ways that can contribute to psychological stress and feelings of helplessness (Bones 2007; Cottrell and King 2010; Paveglio et al. 2015a; Paveglio et al. 2015b). Focus groups, interviews, and survey results found numerous negative efforts to the socio-cultural bonds within Indigenous communities. In particular, the physical destruction of the wildfire, particularly in Waterways, has torn the social fabric that underpins the Indigenous communities in Fort McMurray and has fuelled family and community breakdown.

The shock and separation of families and community members began from the evacuation. Figure 12 presents the results of the survey question on family separation (from grandchildren to grandparents) during the evacuation. Of those who were subject to an evacuation order, more than 60 percent were separated from at least one member of their family over the course of the evacuation. Nearly 30 percent of respondents were separated from at least one child when 25 percent were separated from a parent and 22 percent were separated from their spouse/partner. Approximately 10 percent of respondents were separated from grandparents/grandchildren.

Figure 12 – Family Separation During Evacuation
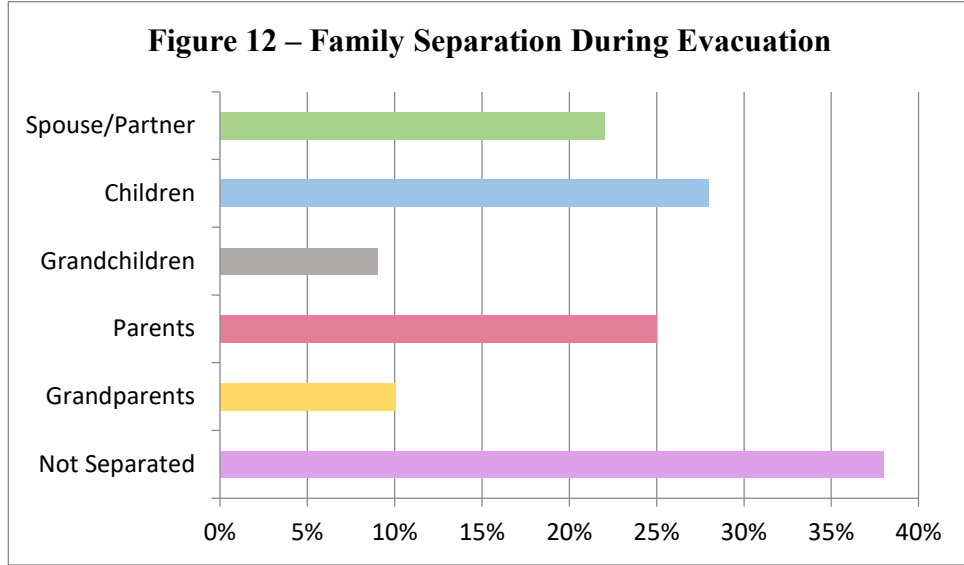
Figure 13 presents the results on length of family separation. 55 percent of those who were separated from at least one family member during the evacuation were separated for less than one week, with over 20 percent separated for less than 24 hours; on the other hand, 17 percent were separated from at least one family member for less than a month while 28 percent were separated from at least one family member for more than one month.

Figure 13 – Length of Family Separation
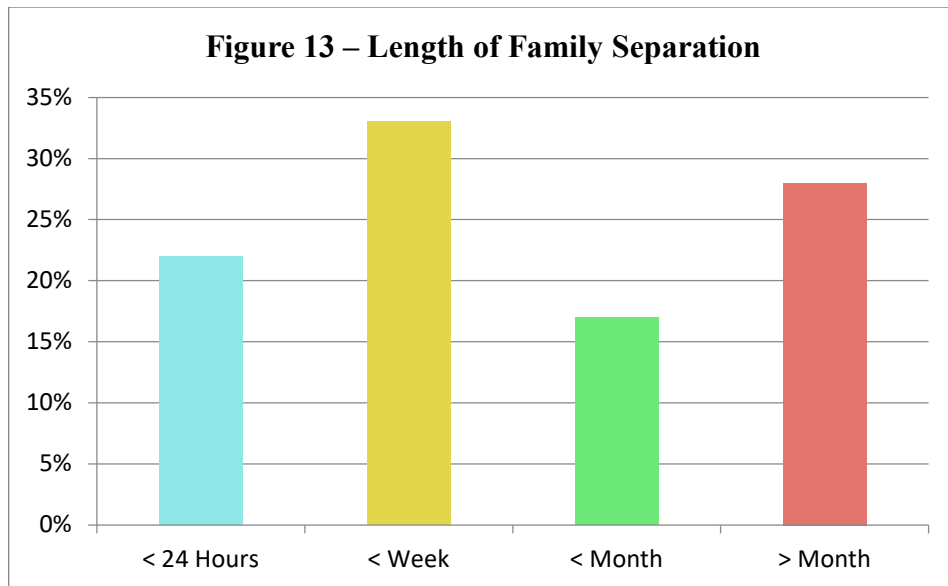
When asked to appraise the state of their family relationships within the first month of the wildfire and at the time of survey completion, responses indicated the wildfire had taken a toll of families in Fort McMurray. 25 percent of respondents who lived in Fort McMurray prior to the wildfires claimed that their family was more divided within the first month of the wildfire, a figure that had declined to 15 percent by the time of the survey. The survey findings corroborate the results of focus groups and interviews, which reported negative impacts to families and marriages from the wildfire, including separation and domestic abuse. One community leader described how the wildfire has taken its toll on marriages in his community:

> I have seen some big changes in our elderly people. I've seen elderly people that had been together for 25-30-40 years splitting up. One of our Elders him and his wife they had a place and the lost everything. They had to move away to Lac La Biche. When they're away there's no way she would come back. She didn't want to come back to the place anymore. And he had to come back to rebuild. So, it really did a lot of damage to their relationship. And that's not only their relationship that I've seen hurt like that.[75]

Relations within and between communities suffered similar if somewhat distinct negative effects. In several focus groups, participants discussed that while the wildfire and evacuation produced an immediate sense of solidarity and mutual support within and between Indigenous communities, over time these bonds of family and community have frayed under the traumatic weight of the disaster and the obstacles to reconstruction and recovery.

In the survey, participants were asked to rate changes in the quality of relations within their Indigenous community in the first month following the fire and then again at the time of the survey. The results in Figure 14 suggest that the wildfire had the immediate effect of bringing evacuated communities closer together, with nearly 50 percent of respondents responding that their communities were more united within the first month of the wildfire.

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[75] McMurray Métis Focus Group held on 22 June 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

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Figure 14 – Community Relations Following the Wildfire
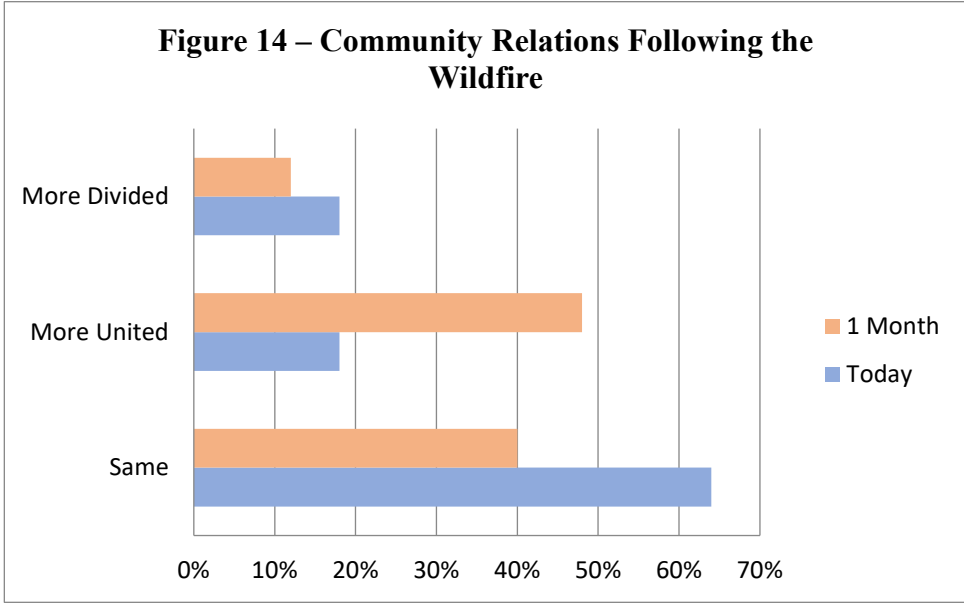
By the time of the survey, however, another trend had emerged: the surge of unity within the evacuated community had dissipated while intra-community divisions and tensions had increased. These findings are consistent with the literature on natural disasters, which suggests that while communities generally come together during the immediate response period ("therapeutic communities"), latent conflicts tend to resurface in the reconstruction and mitigation phases ("corrosive communities"), based on a range of variables from the actions of disaster-management agencies and governments to inequities in the distribution of impacts and recovery resources (Bones 2007; Burchfield 2007).

After the initial burst of unity and mutual support in the face of the immediate crisis and devastation, the bonds of community and solidarity begin to weaken: "It's like we don't support each as much anymore. For me, it's just the unity is not as strong."[76] In numerous focus groups, but particularly in Fort McMurray, participants described how people were more isolated, less

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[76] McMurray Métis Focus Group held on 22 June 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

inclined to go out, and less involved in community events and affairs.[77] Residents in Fort McKay told a similarly story of how old rivalries and divisions have re-emerged, both within the First Nation and Métis communities and between them.[78]

Indigenous communities were further weakened by the loss of community members who did not return following the wildfire. Survey results placed the loss of the urban Indigenous population at about 15 percent, which is almost certainly an underestimation given the greater challenges of reaching displaced persons; in several focus groups, participants estimated the percentage of family and friends that have yet to return at 20-30 percent.[79] Anecdotal evidence from the focus groups suggests that a disproportionate number of those impacted in Waterways was either uninsured or underinsured and that a significant number of these Indigenous Elders either will not return or have returned but intend to leave. In particular, the loss of community Elders holds significant impacts for Indigenous communities, as Elders are among the key sources of traditional knowledge, ways of life, and cultural practices. For instance, the wildfire forced the Métis Elder who teaches jigging classes in Fort McMurray to relocate permanently and the community has since struggled to find a replacement.

These Indigenous Elders are in many ways are the living memory of Fort McMurray in the pre-oil-sands period and their loss would be devastating not just to the Indigenous communities of the region, but to the city itself. In focus groups there was a sense of despair and resignation that Elders, their knowledge, and ways of life were being lost forever: "Well maybe it's for the younger generation of more or less Fort McMurray. They can live the way they want now. Our

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[77] Urban Indigenous Focus Group held 22 June 2017 at the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre in Fort McMurray, Alberta; McMurray Métis Focus Group, 22 June 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta; MCFN/ACFN Urban Focus Group, 11 September 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta; Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation/Mikisew Cree First Nation Urban, held at the Mikisew Cree First Nation office, Fort McMurray, Alberta.

[78] Fort McKay First Nation Focus Group held 21 of August 2017 on the Fort McKay Reserve, Alberta; Fort McKay Métis Community Association Focus Group held 21 August 2017 in Fort McKay, Alberta.

[79] Urban Indigenous Focus Group held 22 June 2017 at the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre in Fort McMurray, Alberta; Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation/Mikisew Cree First Nation Urban, held at the Mikisew Cree First Nation office, Fort McMurray, Alberta.

old ways are gone."[80] It is not just the loss of people that is potentially permanent; it is the loss of knowledge, traditions, and a very way of life.

TRADITIONAL LAND USE

The physical/economic and the socio-cultural impacts of the wildfire on Indigenous peoples come most clearly together in Traditional Knowledge and Use (TKU). Over the past five decades, oil sands operations and their related infrastructure and population pressures have destroyed and degraded much of the Crown land between Fort McKay to Conklin (Figure 15).

Figure 15 demonstrates the extent of oil sands-related disturbance of the areas around the First Nation and Métis communities from Fort McKay to Conklin, including both open-pit and in-site oil sands mines, well pads, pipelines, and roads. The areas around most communities are heavily disturbed, with the exceptions of areas to the northeast and to the south of Fort McMurray, where significant portions of intact boreal forest remained, as well as the areas to the south of the Clearwater River and east of Anzac. As the figure demonstrates, however, those areas were directly hit by the Horse River wildfire. From northern communities who travelled and trapped to the south to southern communities that travelled and trapped to the north, the perimeter of the wildfire represented among the best accessible and intact boreal forest areas for hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering.

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[80] McMurray Métis Focus Group, 22 June 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta; MCFN/ACFN Urban Focus Group, 11 September 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta.
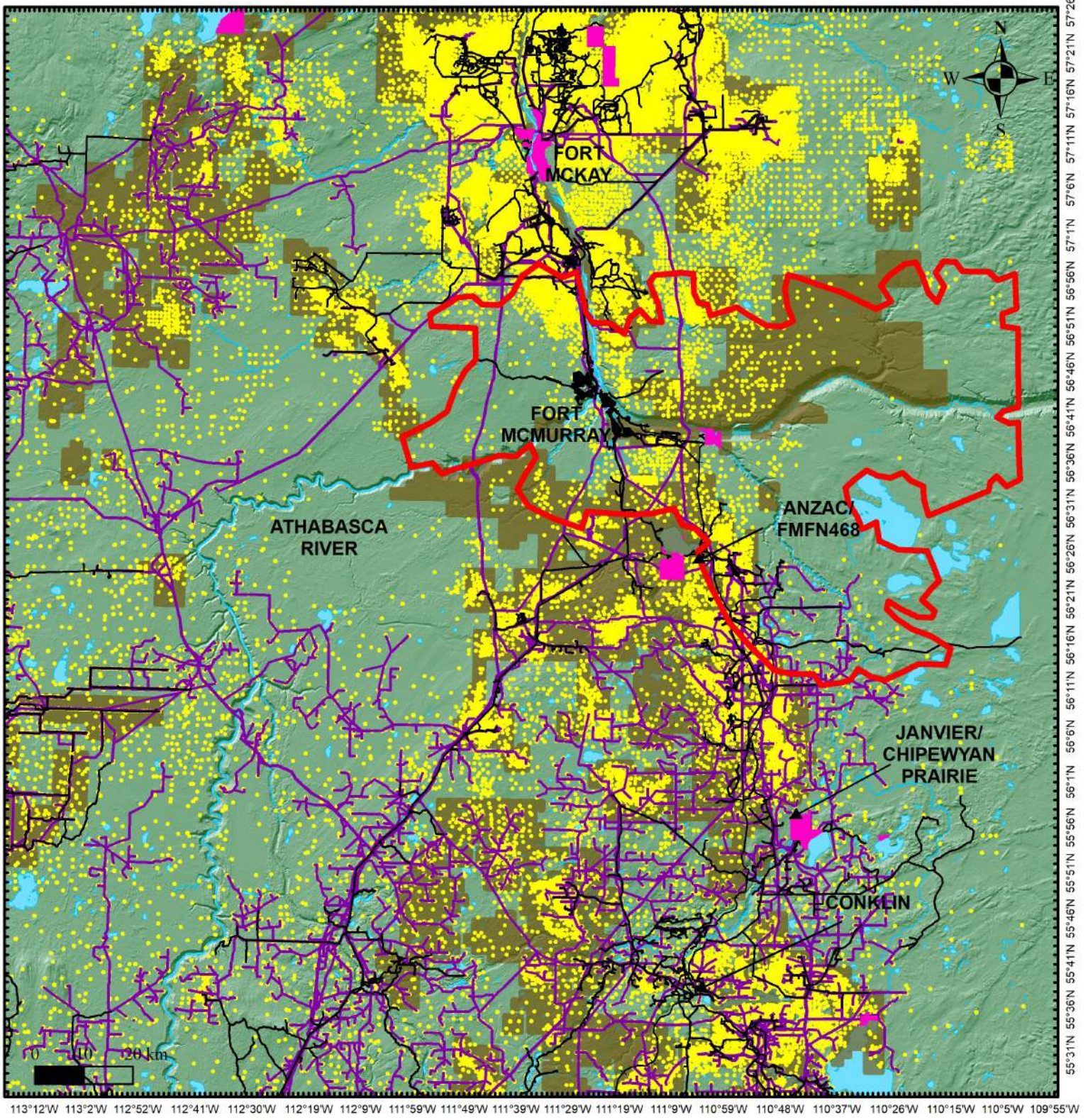
Figure 15 - 2016 Wildfire Perimeter and Cumulative Oil Sands Development

**Legend:**

- Reserve Lands
- HRW Perimeter
- Road
- Railways
- Well Pad
- Oil Sands Projects
- Waterbodies

WGS 84; UTM 12N
Sources: ESRI 2008,
AEP, GeoGratis,
Alberta Wildfire,
Scale (8.5" X 11"):
1:1,092,391

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Not surprisingly given the geographic location of the wildfire perimeter within the cumulative footprint of more than five decades of oil sands development, traditional land users from Fort McKay to Janvier reported negative impacts from the wildfires. Figure 16 shows the response to the survey question on impacts to TLU.

Figure 16 – Impacts to Traditional Land Use
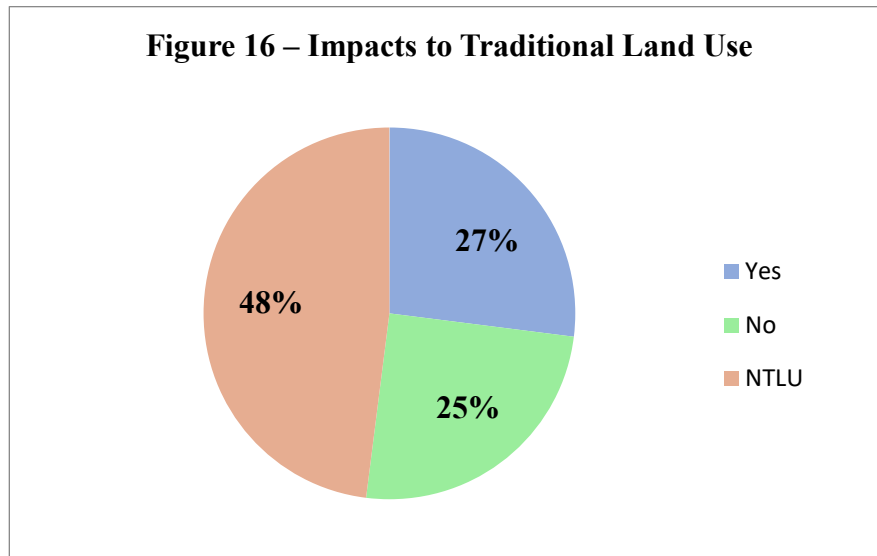
27 percent of all survey respondents reported negative impacts to TLU, which accounts for 52 percent of those respondents who were active traditional land users. The geographic and community distribution was wide: members from all five First Nations and all five Métis Locals were impacted. Indigenous residents of Fort McMurray were the most heavily impacted, followed by Anzac and Fort McKay, as well as Chipewyan Prairie, Conklin, and Janvier. The significant impacts to southern communities possibly reflect that oil sands developments have driven more and more harvesters from those communities to the north.

In addition to TLU, traplines registered to Indigenous community members from Fort McKay, Fort McMurray, Anzac, and Janvier were all noted in focus groups. Trappers in all these communities reported damage to traplines of which they were either Registered Fur Management Area (RFMA) owners or junior partners. Most trappers with whom we spoke had received

financial compensation and support from the Red Cross, for which they were grateful, particularly since they are unable to get insurance from conventional sources. However, trappers emphasized that the impacts to traplines extend well beyond cabins and lost income, as years of work and maintenance are burned away and must be rebuilt over years and even decades:

> The thing about that that they don't necessarily realize is that as a trapper, yeah okay, we lost the cabins and that's a boatload of work to try to get back…but it's the little things that go unnoticed and people don't realize. All the trails, all the trails where we trap are now burnt…it takes years and generations to cut those trails in and year after year and working them. To have a fire come through like that and now you have to almost restart on your trail making again, it's going to be years before we'll have all of our trails and lines open again."[81]

Beyond the trapline, traditional land users in the region identified numerous impacts of the wildfire on their ability to harvest traditional resources and exercise their Aboriginal rights. On the one hand, land users observed fewer animals on the land than before. As one Indigenous resident of Fort McMurray observed: "It's not like how it used to be driving through the bush and you hear squirrels and bugs and everything. You can't see 10 feet in the bush but now you can see a distance. You know what I mean? Everything's just black and you don't hear or see animals like you used to. Even squirrels for instance and stuff like that, right?"[82] At the same time, traditional land users have noticed predators, such as bears and wolves, have moved closer to rural hamlets in search of food as prey become more scarce.[83]

In addition to impacts to traditional resources, the wildfire damaged specific traditional use sites. For example, the Willow Lake Métis were affected by the wildfire through the lost of Camp Yogi, which had served as a traditional use and gathering site for community members: "We lost Camp Yogi and the ability to utilize that piece of our community that's been here forever."[84] The decline in undamaged natural spaces and resources around Fort McMurray and its surrounding

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[81] Willow Lake Métis Local 780 Focus Group held on 22 August 2017 in Anzac, Alberta.
[82] MCFN/ACFN Urban Focus Group held on 11 September 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[83] Fort McKay First Nation Focus Group held on 21 of August 2017 at the Fort McKay Reserve, Alberta.
[84] Willow Lake Métis Local 780 Focus Group held on 22 August 2017 in Anzac, Alberta.

hamlets, in turn, placed greater pressure on existing traditional use sites and resources, which made many places less attractive because of the greater numbers of people, noise, disturbance, and waste: "Well yeah, it's just like I said. You go somewhere and there's 50 people there too now so there's not as much privacy."[85]

For many Indigenous peoples, moreover, the trapline and other traditional use sites are nexuses for the interconnections between economic, social, and people-place connections embedded in a deeper sense of time and place. One trapper described how impacts to his trapline affected family, culture, and sense of self and place: "They don't realize it's a culture to us, and we're used to being out there. Not being able to go, it was hard to the whole family."[86] The connections to family, moreover, are not just to the living; the trapline is a place where many Indigenous peoples connected to their ancestors:

> The fire ended up taking everything out, there was nothing that was salvageable; it was completely wiped out. I know from our family's perspective, it was less about the materiality of it, and more about the heritage and the history. You know, grandpa is not around anymore, he built that with his bare hands. It was a big loss to the family, and to see that… there's always going to be a missing piece out of that area now, going forward.[87]

This disruption of the connections between people across generations through the land is among the most challenging impacts to measure, assess, and compensate. One traditional land user eloquently described the people-place connections, the connectedness of the regional community, and the rootedness of culture in place:

> It wasn't just—I live in Fort McMurray. I'm born and raised here in Anzac. I work out here, my kids play out here, I come out here to practice my traditions, my traditional way of life. The biggest impact came to me was when the fire had hit Anzac. I may live a million places around the globe, but this will always

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[85] MCFN/ACFN Urban Focus Group held on 11 September 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[86] Willow Lake Métis Local 780 Focus Group held on 22 August 2017 in Anzac, Alberta.
[87] Willow Lake Métis Local 780 Focus Group held on 22 August 2017 in Anzac, Alberta.

be home. This will always be where I come home to practice my traditions, my culture, be with my family, my friends, people I've known all my life.[88]

Impacts to traplines and TLU, then, extend far beyond sources of income or food: they ripple throughout an integrated way of life to affect connections to ancestors and the land, bonds of family and community, and a sense of self and belonging.

HEALTH

Natural disasters and wildfires exert a range of potential effects on human health, including mental health. Reported health problems from wildfires include breathing and respiratory illnesses, heart attacks, stress and anxiety, depression and nervous breakdowns, and suicidal thoughts and behaviour (Bonanno 2010; Bones 2007; Cottrell and King 2010; Kulig et al. 2011; Townshend et al. 2015). In focus groups in Fort McMurray and the surrounding hamlets, numerous participants described health impacts from the wildfire ranging from respiratory illness and stress and anxiety to substance abuse and other addictions. Numerous participants identified respiratory illnesses related to smoke inhalation and damage to homes and other buildings as a significant health impact. Figure 17 presents survey data on changes to self-reported health.

Effects to self-reported health were much more significant within the communities that were evacuated: more than 35 percent of evacuated respondents reported their health was either 'worse' or 'significantly worse' than before the wildfire, compared to less than 10 percent for the non-evacuated population.

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[88] Willow Lake Métis Local 780 Focus Group held on 22 August 2017 in Anzac, Alberta.

Figure 17 – Changes to Self-Reported Health
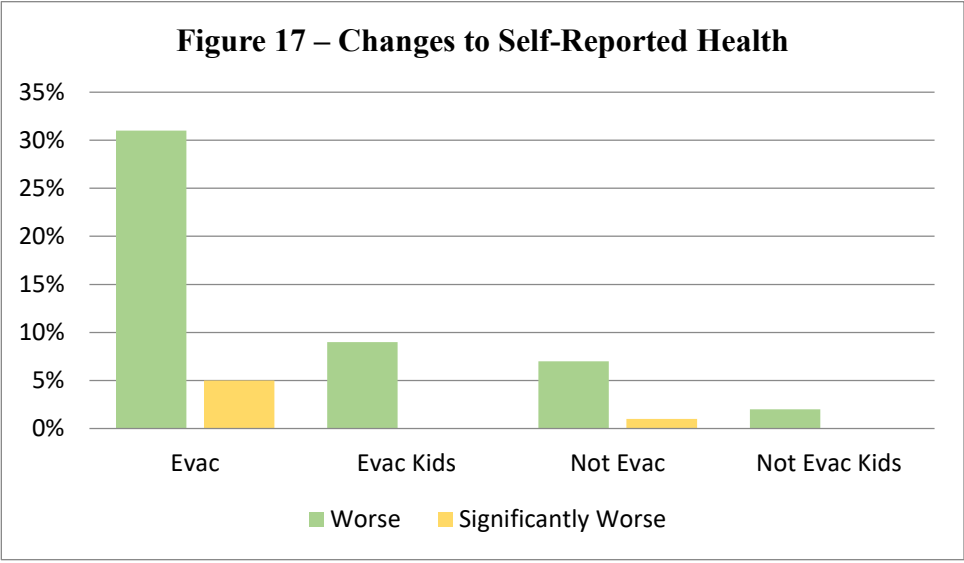
Focus group participants described high levels of stress and anxiety more than a year after the event, and parents reported cases of children who were still having nightmares about the wildfire and evacuation. The survey corroborated the findings of focus groups. Figure 18 presents changes to self-reported levels of stress (high and very high) by geography/evacuation status.

Figure 18 – Self-Reported Stress Levels (High/Very High)
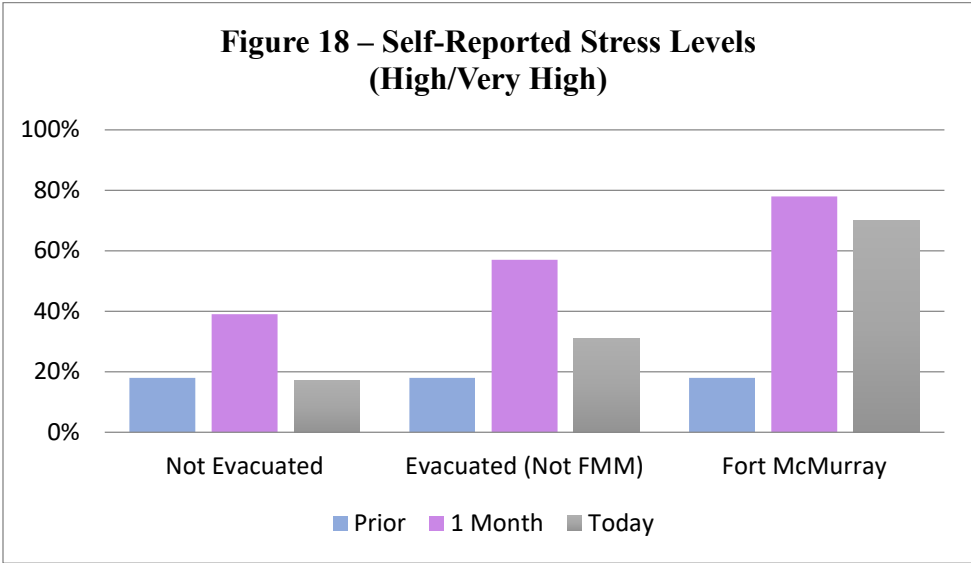
While levels of stress prior to the wildfire were similar for those who lived in evacuated and non-evacuated communities, there is a significant gap that emerges from the wildfire. For those who lived in communities that were evacuated (not including Fort McMurray), levels of high and very high stress rose to nearly 60 percent within the first month before falling to about 30 percent at the time of the survey, still more than 70 percent above pre-wildfire levels. For those who lived in Fort McMurray, however, levels of high and very high stress spiked to nearly 80 percent within the first month after the wildfire and remained at 70 percent at the time of the survey, nearly four times the pre-wildfire stress levels.

In the focus groups held in Fort McMurray, levels of angst, anxiety, frustration, and despair were palpable. Urban participants painted a vivid picture of how the wildfires continue to weigh heavily on community members as they struggled to recover and rebuild their lives:

> Participant 1: You see a lot of them that are changed…There's something like in the back of their minds that's pushing them away from each other. It's like they've been damaged a little bit inside and they don't, they can't understand why.

> Participant 2: It's trauma.

> Participant 3: Now we're just like getting to know each other again. It's all different. We don't know how to approach each other anymore.

> Participant 4: We're not as happy as we used to be. Because we never had anything over our heads, you know, bothering us, troubling us. Now we've got all this devastation to go through. And it bothers you. It does. It does me, anyway. You don't forget it. It's there.

> Participant 5: It's always in the back of your mind.[89]

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[89] McMurray Métis Focus Group held on 22 June 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

As one Indigenous resident of Fort McMurray described powerfully, "We have aura of PTSD surrounding this community and it's going to be around for a long time."[90] Stress and anxiety were particularly severe for those Indigenous Elders who lost homes in Waterways and were unsure whether they'd even be able to rebuild. One Elder expressed their anguish at the struggle to remain in Fort McMurray: "It's not the same. It's gonna be a different thing. That's the whole bloody thing is trying to live with that now: a new life. And it makes you want to run away."[91]

The evacuation was linked in interviews and focus groups to a range of negative health effects, particularly for those from the more vulnerable and isolated rural communities. The late evacuation of numerous rural hamlets was blamed by many for respiratory complications, particularly among the elderly and those in poor health. In several communities where underlying problems with addictions exist, the combination of trauma, an influx of financial resources and enhanced access to drugs and alcohol, and the temporary loss of community control and support mechanisms resulted in a spike in mental health and addiction challenges, especially for younger people.[92] Unfortunately, many of these issues have followed rural community members back home upon the end of the evacuation.

Where these underlying health challenges were related to the mishandling of the evacuation, they contributed to what we refer to below as the 'secondary disaster'. As the Director of Community Services at Fort McKay First Nation explained: "We never lost a house here, but it [the wildfire and evacuation] was pretty devastating from a social standpoint…the social issues went from being bad to worse. That's one of the biggest effects. We're still trying to get back on our

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[90] Urban Indigenous Focus Group held 22 June 2017 at the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre in Fort McMurray, Alberta;
[91] McMurray Métis Focus Group held on 22 June 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[92] Janvier Dene Wood Buffalo Community Association Focus Group held 12 July 2017 in Chard, Alberta; Key Person Focus Group, Fort McKay First Nation, 27 September 2017, Fort McKay Reserve, Alberta; Key Person Interview, Key Person Interview – Jay Telegdi, former Government Relations Manager at McMurray Métis, interviewed on 29 September 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta.

feet."[93] Another administrator who helped handle the evacuation of Fort McMurray First Nation was even more blunt: "The evacuation was a bad thing."[94]

GOVERNANCE

Impacts to governance capacity are often overlooked component in the assessment of disaster impacts. And yet, impacts to governance institutions and capacity represent important short-term and long-term effects of natural disasters on disaster resilience and management. Governance capacity is positively correlated with individual and community resilience and represents a key component in the success of disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation plans (Frankenberger et al. 2013; Kirmayer et al. 2009; Magis 2010; Patel et al. 2017). Focus groups and key person interviews identified several key impacts to the capacity of Indigenous governments that heightened existing capacity deficits and undermined the ability of Indigenous governments to respond to the disaster and participate in the recovery, including physical loss, effects to overworked staff, and resource drain.

As an immediate effect of the wildfire, the administration offices of both the Athabasca Tribal Council and McMurray Métis were destroyed. McMurray Métis and Fort McMurray First Nation also lost data as a result of inadequate backup systems.[95] For McMurray Métis in particular, the loss of their offices and data significantly impaired their ability to communicate

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[93] Key Person Interview – Simon Adams, Director of Community Services, Fort McKay First Nation, interviewed on 27 September 2017 on the Fort McKay First Nation Reserve.
[94] Key Person Interview – Cort Gallup, former Director of Emergency Management, Fort McKay First Nation, interviewed on 27 September 2017 on the Fort McKay First Nation Reserve.
[95] Key Person Interview – Jay Telegdi, former Government Relations Manager at McMurray Métis, interviewed on 29 September 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta; Key Person Interview – Cindy Miller, Band Manager, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September 2017 on the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.

with and support their members. Several staff members commented that community members were more hesitant to visit the Local while their were temporarily housed in former Shell Canada offices and it was much more challenging to connect with members, even after many had returned to Fort McMurray.

Governance capacity was further undermined by impacts to staff members. On the one hand, staff members faced a considerable increase in their responsibilities. The wildfires did not stop the normal operations of Indigenous governments: "We had to do both. We never had the option to not do certain parts of our job, like industry consultation, for instance. We still had to do that. We were still negotiating; we were still traveling; we were still working." [96] Disaster management for Indigenous staff, then, was in addition to their regular responsibilities, as were other informal duties that emerged. For instance, as the former Executive Director of the Friendship Centre explained, the lack of Indigenous support workers and counsellors resulted in the staff of Indigenous governments and organizations often fulfilling these roles:

> We just could never get an Indigenous social worker, and I think that was the hardest part of all the people were coming in on a daily basis, especially in the first two months and they wanted somebody to talk to because they were scared or because things were happening in their home. Violence erupting, just because everybody was feeling so displaced, and they needed…So what happens, my staff and I and then my husband were kind of becoming makeshift counsellors for these people, just so that they could leave the center not all stressed out. It was difficult, not having professional staff in there to help us through that.[97]

One top of these extraordinary responsibilities and burdens, many staff members were themselves directly impacted by the wildfires. At the Friendship Centre, for instance, four Board

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[96] Key Person Interview – Dan Stuckless, former General Manager of McMurray Métis Local 1935, 30 October 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[97] Key Person Interview – Teresa Nahwegahbow, former Executive Director of the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre, interviewed on 30 October 2017 by telephone.

members and three staff members lost their homes, while 8 of the 32 ACFN staff members lost their homes, three of whom had no insurance.[98]

The burden on staff began to produce resignations and staff shortages. Within a little over a year from the wildfire, the leadership of the three partner organizations for this project, the ATC, the ARM, and the NAFC, had turned over. Fort McMurray First Nation shared how the impacts of the wildfires led to staff being unable to come in and work: "We had staff who just couldn't work for one reason or another, either the anxiety was just too much for them and they just couldn't work right at that moment, or they had families and young children."[99] Among staff on the front lines of community support, there was a palpable sense of burnout. To paraphrase a discussion in one of the focus groups, when everyone is hurting, who will help the helpers?

Finally, the wildfire undermined the governance capacity of Indigenous governments via its drain on resources, particularly for the Métis Locals that have fewer resources and do not qualify for recovery assistance from the AEMA/ISC. Staff at McMurray Métis described how the resources dedicated to wildfire response efforts placed the Local in a precarious position:

> [We got] none of that [AEMA/ISC support]. All that stuff came out of pocket and we talked about it. I remember sitting in wildfire recovery task force with the top guys in the province on it and we were like, 'We've got nothing now,' because we had a bit of a war chest or whatever but we had to spend it all. Then immediately afterwards, we got to talk about trying to rebuild our office but now we have no money and now we can't get bank loans because there's not enough money in their accounts.[100]

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[98] Key Person Interview – Teresa Nahwegahbow, former Executive Director of the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre, interviewed on 30 October 2017 by telephone; Key Person Interview – Allan Adam, Chief, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, interviewed on 27 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

[99] Key Person Interview – Cindy Miller, Band Manager, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September 2017 on the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.

[100] Key Person Interview – Jay Telegdi, former Government Relations Manager at McMurray Métis, interviewed on 29 September 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta.

Disaster response and recovery burdens were significant and burdensome, even for the larger and better financed First Nations. For example, Fort McMurray First Nation officials estimated the Nation spent approximately $6 million of its own funds in wildfire response:

> Financially, $6 million out of the Nation…it was a lot of money, especially in the economic times we're in…We were basically paying $50,000 on our Visas, because every day they were being billed, and billed, and billed. Not knowing where we're going, what we're doing. Everyone's spread out everywhere."[101]

The high cost of disaster response and the lack of resources and support, particularly for the Métis, introduce a potentially perverse incentive structure in which Indigenous governments have to choose between paying emergency response costs out of pocket and undermining their organizational capacity or withholding support from members during the crisis to protect their financial solvency down the road. It is worth reiterating, moreover, that this discrepancy should not be exploited by governments to pit First Nation and Métis against each other: the Métis Locals were clear they do not begrudge the First Nations the additional support they received; rather, and consistent with the recent Daniels ruling, they want ISC to ensure that comparable resources are made available to Métis Locals to support their members during disaster events.

Interconnections and Impacts – Key Findings

✓ Because of their interconnectedness, the wildfires were a *regional* disaster for Indigenous peoples. The devastation of Fort McMurray and its environs reverberated across the region via impacts to family members, migration to overburdened rural areas, interruptions of goods and services, and disturbed connections to places settled and occupied by ancestors for generations;

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[101] Key Person Interview – Brad Callihoo, Chief Executive Officer, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September at the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve.

✓ Because of their high levels of risk and vulnerability, Indigenous peoples suffered heavy losses: a quarter of survey respondents in Fort McMurray lost their homes while nearly a third suffered losses of employment/income from the pre-wildfire period to the time of the survey;

✓ The socio-cultural effects were similarly severe: more than 60 percent of evacuees were separated from family members, in nearly 30 percent of the cases for over a month, while 15 percent of Fort McMurray residents reported deteriorations in their family relations and 18 percent of residents in evacuated communities described an erosion in community bonds after an initial coming together, known as the supersession of "therapeutic communities" by "corrosive communities";

✓ Indigenous peoples suffered numerous health effects, including self-reported declines in health from more than 30 percent of Fort McMurray residents and reported levels of high/very high stress of 70 percent above pre-wildfire levels in evacuated rural communities and nearly 300 percent in Fort McMurray;

✓ Indigenous governance capacity was undermined by the disaster: several Indigenous organizations lost their offices, overworked staff resulted in exhaustion and high turnover, and response and recovery drained resources, particularly for the Métis who are not eligible for reimbursement from ISC.

RISK AND RESILIENCE

A central theme of this report is that disaster management involving Indigenous peoples cannot take place in a vacuum, absent of culture, history, and context. Disaster management that respects Indigenous rights, that empowers Indigenous peoples, that integrates Indigenous perspectives, and that listens to Indigenous knowledge will produce more robust programs and more resilient communities. Indigenous disaster management is about much more than natural disasters: disaster management provides a key enabling environment for the promotion and protection of Indigenous self-determination, rights, culture, knowledge, and livelihoods, and for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (EMRIP 2014). Disaster management cannot be simply about reducing risk and minimizing vulnerability; it must also seek to identify and build upon sources of resilience within and between communities to ensure a more resilient future for all the peoples of the region.

HAZARDS

Risk and hazard assessments carried out for the RMWB in the past two years have identified several key hazard threats. The highest-risk hazard in the region remains Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) fires, followed by flooding of the lower townsite, Waterways, and Ptarmigan Court in Fort McMurray. The hazard and risk assessment that was completed right before the 2016 wildfires noted, "All communities within the RMWB have wildland/urban interface and are at risk to wildfire" (Black Shield 2016, 14). The report on wildfire risk and mitigation submitted to the RMWB in 2017 broke down the risk by geographic region and by community-level, i.e., within the community boundary, and landscape-level, i.e., extending to two kilometers from the community boundary (Walkinshaw 2017, 1).

Figure 19 is reproduced from the report submitted by Walkinshaw (2017) to the RWMB. There are three communities at present that face a high-extreme risk level at both the community and the landscape levels: Fort McKay, Fort Chipewyan, and Fort Fitzgerald.

Figure 19 – Wildfire Behaviour Risk

Area	Wildfire Behaviour Potential	
	Community-Level	*Landscape-Level*
Fort McKay	High-Extreme	High-Extreme
Fort Chipewyan	High-Extreme	High-Extreme
Fort Fitzgerald	High-Extreme	High-Extreme
Conklin	High-Extreme	Moderate
Fort McMurray	Moderate-High	Low
Anzac	Moderate	High-Extreme
Gregoire Lake Estates	Moderate	High-Extreme
Janvier	Moderate	Low
Draper	Low-Moderate	Low
Saprae Creek Estates	Low-Moderate	Low

Conklin is next with a high-extreme risk at the community level and a moderate risk at the landscape level. While the 2016 Horse River wildfires reduced the landscape level risk for Fort McMurray to low, the community level risk remains relatively high at moderate-high. Anzac and Gregoire Lake Estates remain at comparatively high risk, with landscape risks at high-extreme and community-level risks at moderate. Finally, Janvier, Draper, and Saprae Creek Estates are at low levels of landscape risk and moderate-to-low-moderate risk at the community level. In general, the wildfire risk assessment found that wildland fuel clearance was inadequate for many rural areas and recommended additional clearance activities (Walkinshaw 2017, 3).

RESILIENCE

It is ironic but not surprising that the concept of resilience was generally developed without consideration of Indigenous peoples, given that few peoples have overcome more adverse circumstances to continue to persist and flourish as Indigenous peoples (Merritt 2007, 11). Until recently, most work on community resilience had been done from the perspective of 'Western' researchers in relation to 'Western' communities. When research on resilience has sought to integrate Indigenous peoples, it has tended to focus on youth and addiction from the perspective of psychologists (McLennan 2015, 1). This disproportionate focus on youth and addiction suggests that much research on Indigenous resilience remains rooted in a deficit-model approach that defines Indigenous peoples by what they are not and have not and by the priorities and perspectives of government agencies (Lavallée and Clearsky 2006, 4).

Despite these facts, there are potential synergies between resilience and Indigenous peoples. Given the enormous impact of colonial policies that have sought to eviscerate Indigenous culture and identities in Canada, the existence of Indigenous peoples today as distinctive cultural groups is a testament to their resilience. Indeed the Michif term *débrouillard*, which translates roughly as resourceful or resilient, remains a key aspect of Métis culture and identity in many places (Kirmayer et al. 2011, 88). As a forward-looking and developmental concept, resilience can help to reverse the historical focus on Indigenous 'vulnerability' that has downplayed the role of external forces and actors and defined Indigenous peoples in terms that negate their affirmative values and strengths through a myopic focus on deviations from a statistical norms presented as stylized facts (Haalboom et al. 2012, 324; McGuire 2010, 121).

In interviews and focus groups, Indigenous peoples repeatedly referred to the strength, persistence, and resilience of their peoples as a source of pride and optimism for the future. As

one Indigenous community leader noted, Indigenous resilience is not something that emerged from colonialism but rather has characterized Indigenous peoples for millennia:

> The thing is that we're a resilient people, just by nature. It's in us; that's why we were nomadic. That's why we traveled with the seasons. We traveled with the animals, and we were able to survive severe winters and there were fires back when my ancestors were young. So resiliency isn't coming out of the experience that we've had, because the Canadian government has done these things to us. Our resiliency comes because that's the nature of us and how we were created.[102]

It was this resilience, moreover, that helped Indigenous peoples navigate the worst natural disaster in Canadian history, despite the breakdowns of communications and support from the municipal and provincial governments. The former General Manager of McMurray Métis described with admiration the strength and resilience of community members in the face of the wildfires and evacuation: "We just said, 'How are you doing?' And they said, 'I'm fine. I'll deal.' That may have meant their house was still burnt down, but 'I'll be fine. Go help someone who needs it.' We got a lot of that from our members. A lot of resiliency."[103]

INDIGENOUS RESPONSES TO THE WILDFIRE

A consistent theme in the communities from Fort Chipewyan in the north to Conklin and Chipewyan Prairie in the south was the sense that the Indigenous communities of the region were never properly recognized for the way they responded to the evacuation and supported the tens of thousands of evacuees, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. Despite the lack of preparedness for a disaster of this scale, despite the lack of resources and institutional capacity, and despite the history of discrimination and injustice, the Indigenous peoples of the region opened their buildings and their lands, shared their food and their homes, and offered whatever

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[102] Key Person Interview – Teresa Nahwegahbow, former Executive Director of the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre, interviewed on 30 October 2017 by telephone.
[103] Key Person Interview, Dan Stuckless, former General Manager of McMurray Métis Local 1935, 30 October 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta.

resources they had at their disposal to all those who were fleeing the wildfires. They did this not because they had to or because they expected something in return; they did this because it is who they are; it is part of their culture. The Indigenous peoples of the RMWB are proud of the role they played; the rest of the region, the province, and the country should be proud too:

> When I think back about…things that I'm proud of, of our Indigenous communities, was how they really stepped up to the plate. Each First Nation and Métis community have their own story about how they heard about the wildfire, and immediately, like all small communities do, start gathering their resources, trying to identify who's going to go out to the road, who's going to open up a camp…what they can do in terms of the response. We had Nations who opened up camps. We had community members who were standing on the roads, directing people to different places to go, and I have countless stories that I would really start to probably shed some tears if I started telling each of the really amazing stories that I heard. The Indigenous communities were like no one else. They stood up, they stepped up, and they did it without asking for anything, and that's really what makes me proud, because I know that that's the type of communities that we have in our region.[104]

When the evacuation of Fort McMurray began, the epicentre of the response was the reserve/hamlet of Fort McKay, where around 600 people received thousands and thousands of evacuees for several days before they were themselves evacuated as the wildfires moved north. One evacuee described arriving at Fort McKay and the warmth and support she felt:

> We were tired, we were hungry, and as soon as we got to that corner that Fort McKay First Nation councillor, he had a cooler and he asked us just to pull over before we got to the community, and he gave us homemade sandwiches that community members had made, Quaker bars, juice boxes, just to have that sustenance. And there's nothing that tastes as good as food someone made for you, right? It just felt like home right away. We actually went to the Fort McKay First Nation's band office, and they had burgers on the go, we were able to reconnect with a lot of our friends that we knew were heading up north as well, so it felt like a real family experience. I was able to stay at the home, everybody, my whole crew was able to stay at the home of the mother of

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[104] Karla Buffalo, Chief Executive Officer, Athabasca Tribal Council, interviewed on 2 March 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

Councillor Raymond Powder and her husband were so kind to put us up that night, and so warm and loving, it felt really comfortable.[105]

As supplies ran low in Fort McKay, their brothers and sisters from Fort Chipewyan came up the Athabasca River to pick up evacuees and drop off supplies:

> They organized boats to go down from Fort Chipewyan about 30 boats went from Fort Chipewyan down to Fort McKay and helped bring people home. You got to think, it's a lot of work, it's a lot of gas, it's a lot of money, it's a lot of organizing, but they did it. They were able to bring their family members back home to live with them…they set up a command station I guess to organize donations and food, and they really came together…they organized food going down to McKay, because Fort McKay, there were stories that Fort McKay was having food problems. There were people in Fort McKay that couldn't get all access to food, so that restaurant was running down food from Fort Chip on the boat, on the river to Fort McKay.[106]

While many evacuees headed north, the majority fled south, past Fort McMurray First Nation and Anzac. As one RMWB employee noted, when the disaster struck the nearby Indigenous communities were the first ones calling to offer their support: "[Fort McMurray First Nation] 468 was the first one to send a message saying, 'If anybody needs somewhere to stay they can stay at Indian Beach. We will provide water, we will provide space, we've got food, we've got gas.' Fort McKay did as well. It was immediate, the amount of support that came from First Nations in particular, just written confirmations to the mayor, and to Dennis, and to myself."[107] Fort McMurray First Nation opened Indian Beach and sold discounted gas to evacuees so they could make it farther south. The Métis of Anzac opened their doors as well: "I don't know if Dennis told you, he was invited to stay at an Elder's place in Anzac and there had to be 25 people there

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[105] Maggie Farrington, Chief Executive Officer, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, interviewed on 8 February 2018 in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, and 27 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[106] Maggie Farrington, Chief Executive Officer, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, interviewed on the 28 of February in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[107] Key Person Interview – Elena Gould, Manager, Department of Indigenous and Rural Relations, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 15 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

and they were sleeping on floors, anywhere they could. The people were giving everything off their backs in order to help people that were fleeing from this fire."[108]

But as the wildfires moved southeast, makeshift evacuation centres became evacuation zones and Fort McMurray First Nation and Anzac evacuated to the south where they were received by Chipewyan Prairie First Nation and the Métis of Conklin. One Chipewyan Prairie First Nation member described opening and preparing their facilities:

> At first, it was really nice. We were making the beds, making everything pretty darn nice. But in the first two or three hours after that, we were just putting stuff on the bed. And we were going from wing to wing. We opened up the last…it was about five o'clock in the morning when they told me, they said 'Marina, we have two more wings to open,' but they said, 'I need daylight for that, because I don't know if the generator's going to be able to kick in.' And he says, 'So hopefully we're not getting anymore.' And then as soon as he said that we got another call: security was informing us each time the bus was coming. And he said 'There's two more buses at the gate.' So we had no choice but to open up those two bunks.   We did really, really well. People were really good. There was a lot of anxiety, of course, there was a lot of tears, you know? They really didn't have the food to hold all these people. But most of these people that were coming in, they didn't care, they just needed to get out and then they'd sleep. People were being bunked together. There were lots of tears. Imagine the stress level, right? We did what we could to accommodate people and to calm them down. And people were really good. They were willing to share rooms, even with complete strangers. They were so tired, and then from all that stress, they said, 'We'll sleep on the floor.' As long as they have somewhere where they can rest. It worked out really well. I just put another call out to some people in the community, and the women came. They got food together and they brought more sandwiches and soup, all during the night. And then at the drop-in center, we had the youth center working early in the morning. They started about four o'clock in the morning and they were making breakfast. This was food from our homes that we were bringing in, right? Some of the things that really brought… I mean we were helping. But my phone was going crazy. Somehow it got out. It must have been on Facebook or wherever that we were helping. I was getting calls from family and from strangers saying they had family that were stuck out on the road, that ran out of fuel, and they had children with them. So we

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[108] Key Person Interview – Elena Gould, Manager, Department of Indigenous and Rural Relations, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 15 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.

mobilized two trucks with a little bit of food, not much, with some water and some fuel, diesel and gasoline. And they were out on the road. They were out there all night. They were just coming back to fuel up. We did all we could. We kept the store open, our little convenience store that we have for gas. We kept that open. T he girls worked all night. They worked right through their shift. Normally they would close about eight o'clock, but they stayed open all the way through. They never closed anything down. And if they ran out of fuel, they ran out. But they were going to keep open and serve as many people as they could, right? Our community put in a lot of effort.[109]

The Métis from Conklin brought in food and supplies to support evacuees as well: "Conklin did everything they could for us who were evacuating from Fort McMurray during the wildfire, they were serving food, they organized themselves. I know, even one of my staff is from that, when I was working at ATC, he's from the Conklin area and he was going from car to car with a jerry-can putting gas in people's vehicles; that's the level of love and community, a sense of community and support that they have for their RMWB friends, their neighbours."[110]

For many Indigenous peoples, this was the silver lining of the disaster, the thing victims and support workers will never forget: how Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples from across the region, from across the province, from across the country came together to support those in need in their darkest moments, regardless of history, ethnicity, or socio-economic status:

> You know, the Indigenous people have always been like that. They've always helped. You come to somebody's house and they'll feed you. And it's just a given…they all really come together. The community came together, seems to me like it was a lot stronger than they ever have been. Everybody was doing things together, helping each other guiding each other. There was a lot of people in some pretty tight spots there. But on the other end of it too, the people of Canada, basically, I've never seen so many people come together and help. We

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[109] Key Person Interview – Marina Nokohoo, Member, Chipewyan Prairie First Nation, interviewed 7 December 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[110] Maggie Farrington, Chief Executive Officer, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, interviewed on 28 February 2018 in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta.

were in different cities, and there were signs up, it was just overwhelming how much people helped, and not only in the Métis community, but all of Canada.[111]

CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Focus group and interview participants identified traditional cultural practices and community bonds other key sources of resilience. In particular, participants identified traditional values of sharing and mutual support as critical to the disaster response and recovery processes. In Fort McKay, for example, community members discussed how traditional values of mutual support were activated during the evacuation of Fort McMurray: "It's in our culture to share, even though she didn't have a lot and we had to feed a lot of people, you're not going to say no, you're always willing to help somebody else, you're always trying to help somebody else."[112] Similarly, leadership in Anzac described how community members pulled together to support one another following the evacuation and initial return to the community:

> I think Anzac, as a community, has always been very strong and very, your neighbour always has your back out here, so I think that coming back after the fire, I know, I know for me personally, when it came time to move my stinky fridge out and what not, I had neighbours that were coming over to help me with the heavy lifting, and likewise, and I go help them. From that aspect, we were able to band together as a community.[113]

Focus group participants likewise identified traditional cultural practices as central to the recovery and healing process following the wildfire. In Willow Lake, for instance, trappers and other community members described how getting back on the land was central to their personal recovery, and how the Local organized activities on the land as part of the healing process:

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[111] Key Person Interview – Darrin Bourque, Council Member, Willow Lake Métis Local 780, interviewed on ## February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[112] Fort McKay First Nation Focus Group held on 21 August 2017 at the Fort McKay Reserve, Alberta.
[113] Willow Lake Métis Local 780 Focus Group held on 22 August 2017 in Anzac, Alberta.

That's what we're calling it, too. 'Back on the land' because you know what, we're never leaving. Our family is always going to be here and we'll always utilize our land right, so we're back. I think it's not only part of our recovery; it's part of our preservation. This is what we do daily, yearly; it's never going to go away. So, we can't say, 'Oh, we're just going back on the land because we're trying to reconnect after the fire.' We just, Justin summed it up to me the other night. The bush is church for us; that's what it is.[114]

In Fort McMurray as well, focus group participants signalled Indigenous cultural symbols, practices, and identity as key repositories of strength and resilience: "So with me, I try to go by that traditional medicine wheel, which is physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional. Try to get that all balanced out, right? Culture has helped and the activities with the [McMurray] Métis Local. Right now like the physical is good but what's lacking is the emotional and the mental, right? I just don't really feel quite balanced yet."[115] Another Fort McMurray resident noted how his work with his Indigenous community has provided him with the energy and hope to continue rebuilding: "What's giving me strength the most is my work…I've got to find strength and hope in us rebuilding something that we can look forward to, like our cultural centre, so hopefully we can get our community back. That's what my hope is. That we can bring back our community, our sense of home again to this place so that everybody's gonna feel like they want to return."[116]

GOVERNANCE AND KNOWLEDGE

While the ad hoc nature of the emergency response in Indigenous communities exposed their vulnerabilities to disaster events, it also highlighted the fact that community knowledge and capacity represent key sources of resilience. For instance, one former staff member at McMurray Métis explained how community knowledge and connections helped to facilitate the emergency response efforts:

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[114] Willow Lake Métis Local 780 Focus Group held on 22 August 2017 in Anzac, Alberta.
[115] McMurray Métis Focus Group held on 22 June 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[116] Focus Group #2, McMurray Métis, 22 June 2017, Fort McMurray, Alberta.

We were able to have that all in one place and one really cool story that came out of it was there was one woman, so we were making our calls, who we got a call and she was just beside herself because she lost her three-year-old daughter during the evacuation. She was at a private daycare and was just packed up in a car and evacuated and this woman couldn't find her. We added the child's name and description to the script and gave it out to the callers and the callers started making those calls and one of the first things they would ask, 'We're looking for this child,' and they found her in minutes.[117]

The experience of other Indigenous communities demonstrates the considerable leadership and capacity that can be activated during a crisis. Staff at Fort McKay First Nation described how leadership, staff, and community members came together to support evacuees, despite the absence of planning and adequate preparation:

> We made a plan, didn't really follow that. It was kind of a custom plan with what was going on, all the evacuees here and stuff. We created a core emergency response team, and we were meeting all day long, three or four times at first, and then every second day for a month, and then once a day for about another month, and just coordinating everything…We created a plan immediately. It was amazing that the staff that we had, they really stepped up. The people that were paying the people didn't bolt, and they were just amazing. I was really impressed with how efficient they were, and how well they worked together in the whole process with taking care of the evacuees, dealing with feeding everybody, taking people out, getting people accommodations for people that left, even though there wasn't really a detailed, specific plan in place, specific to Fort MacKay, we came up with one right away.[118]

In addition, focus groups identified Indigenous fire knowledge and Indigenous firefighting experience as sources of resilience to future wildfires. There remains considerable and untapped traditional fire knowledge and fire-fighting experience within the Indigenous communities of the RMWB. This knowledge and experience, however, must be better nurtured and strengthened to prepare Indigenous communities – and the entire region – for future wildfire events, with a focus

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[117] Key Person Interview – Jay Telegdi, former Government Relations Manager at McMurray Métis held on 29 September 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[118] Key Person Focus Group, 27 September 2017, Fort McKay First Nation, Fort McKay Reserve, Alberta.

on youth, who have suffered from a disruption in the transmission of traditional fire knowledge and who lack accreditation: "They need to train the young generation so they can go fight these fires. Give them a chance at least."[119] The deep historical and spiritual connections of Indigenous peoples to the region are a source of vulnerability but also of resilience, and focus group participants contended that no one knows the geography and ecosystems of the RMWB better than its Indigenous peoples, and no one is more invested in securing its future.[120]

The experience of the wildfire similarly bolstered Indigenous governance in an unexpected way: by bringing Indigenous communities together to support each other and galvanizing the long-overlooked rural communities to band together and make collective demands upon the RMWB. For much of the past two centuries, governments and industrial proponents have successfully played First Nation and Métis communities against each other, whether the decision between Treaty and scrip, the differential access to government resources and support, or the differential levels of consultation and compensation from the regulatory process and the infringement of Aboriginal rights. These policies, whether intentional or not, have served to divide families and Indigenous peoples and have had a significant impact on Métis communities insofar as commensurate opportunities and supports have been withheld and community members have opted for First Nations' status in order to access greater opportunities and supports for themselves and their children.

During the wildfire, however, focus group participants observed the coming together of First Nation and Métis peoples. For example, in Fort McKay community members lauded how both sides came together during the crisis, despite past conflict and animosity. As participants of the Métis focus group explained:

> The biggest thing was pulling together with First Nations. We actually pulled together with them, instead of the community being separate, we pulled together

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[119] Focus Group #1, 22 June 2017, Nistawoyou Friendship Centre, Fort McMurray, Alberta.
[120] Focus Group #1, 22 June 2017, Nistawoyou Friendship Centre, Fort McMurray, Alberta.

with them and then actually worked it out with Alberta Works and Revenue Canada, that anybody that needed help from this community, the band was covering, which actually, I was working with them and I had to sign off on it and, for our members, that were actually out there, because the Band assisted with us, instead of going separately, because I was over here and everybody's just scattered, but then once we pulled together, we knew where everybody was, each and every member of this community, we knew where they were.[121]

Similarly, Indigenous organizations and peoples in Fort McMurray worked together and forged closer bonds to support the urban, Indigenous community:

What happened, when the fire happened, it could have been so detrimental to the Friendship Center because [McMurray] Metis Local 1935 lost a building and ATC, they couldn't access their space for the longest of time. What happened is that it created an opportunity for the Friendship Center to become a gathering place again, and it started to meld Metis Local 1935, the Athabasca Tribal Council, the Indigenous Relations Department, and the Friendship Center as a community, an Indigenous community body. And because of that relationship and because we were all working towards the one goal, which is to make sure that our community members were looked after, it didn't matter who did it, it didn't matter how it was done. It was just going to be done, and I think that was so monumental in helping a lot of our community members through those early days, and I know, even for myself, I saw the people that were coming and that were working in re-entry areas are Indigenous people, it was helpful to them to come in the center and just see it bubbling. So we went from a center of having maybe 5 to 10 people a day to having 50 to 70 people a day. Now, because of our partnership and that collaboration, the Friendship Center has become a gathering place again and it's got a renewed presence in the community.[122]

Perhaps the most significant and potentially durable political result of the wildfire was the Rural Coalition, an agglomeration of 17 rural Indigenous communities and organizations, both First Nation and Métis. As one of the founders and main organizers of the coalition explained: "After the fire, we understood that something needed to change. Something had to change, and from the ashes of the Beast, this was how the Rural Coalition was born, by the rural community

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[121] Fort McKay Métis Community Association Focus Group held on 21 August 2017 in Fort McKay, Alberta.
[122] Key Person Interview – Teresa Nahwegahbow, former Executive Director of the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre, interviewed on 30 October 2017 by telephone.

standing up and saying no more."[123] Since its founding, the Rural Coalition has successfully lobbied to save the Conklin Multiplex and advocated for investments in piped water and sewage service, a review of the municipal amalgamation agreement, an inquiry into the displacement of Indigenous peoples at Moccasin Flats, and a prioritization of rural service areas within the RMWB's strategic plan, among other accomplishments.

Risk and Resilience – Key Findings

✓ Significant hazard risks remain in the region. For wildfires, Fort McKay, Fort Chipewyan, Conklin, and Anzac are all at high-extreme risk levels for community-level and/or landscape-level wildfires;

✓ Despite the lack of preparedness, the lack of resources, and the fact that they were under the threat of evacuation themselves, rural Indigenous communities from Fort McKay and Anzac to Janvier and Conklin opened their lives, their homes, and their communities to the tens of thousands of evacuees from Fort McMurray. First Nations and Métis alike took in strangers, opened facilities, shared food and water, and distributed gasoline and other key provisions to those fleeing the disaster for days on end. That these same Indigenous communities were then shut out of re-entry and recovery planning reinforced the existing perceptions that the RMWB views its Indigenous residents and neighbours as 'second-class citizens';

✓ While the wildfire exposed the high levels of risk and vulnerability faced by Indigenous communities, it likewise revealed key sources of strength and resilience that should serve as the foundation for disaster management planning moving forward. Several of the sources identified here include:

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[123] Key Person Interview – Ron Quintal, President, McKay Métis Community Association, interviewed on 2 March 2018 in Fort McKay, Alberta.

- ✓ Cultural values and practices: in times of crisis, the Indigenous peoples of the region relied upon their traditional values and cultural practices to support evacuees and heal the members of their communities;

- ✓ Despite the lack of external communications and support, particularly from the RMWB, Indigenous governments and staff did a remarkable job of receiving evacuees, evacuating their communities, and then supporting members. There is considerable knowledge and capacity within Indigenous communities; the challenge is to put in place the institutions and support structures to harness that capacity to its fullest;

- ✓ There is an emerging movement towards reconciliation between First Nations and Métis communities within the region. After decades and centuries of being played against each other by governments and industry, Indigenous governments are beginning to work together on a range of activities, from the Rural Coalition and pipelines to this study.

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has identified several contextual factors that contributed to the high levels of risk and vulnerability faced by Indigenous communities and peoples prior to the 2016 Horse River wildfire, as well as numerous deficiencies related to the preparedness, response, and recovery phases of the disaster. Consistent with the vision that disaster management and emergency response must take into account these contextual factors, be rooted in local knowledge and capacity, and support the self-determination of Indigenous peoples, this report makes 36 recommendations for the Government of Canada and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), the Government of Alberta and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA), the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB), and the First Nations and Métis governments of the region. The recommendations are divided into six sections that correspond to the main contextual dynamics and phases of disaster management: (1) Reconciliation, Recognition, and Rights, (2) Jurisdiction, Relationships, and Responsibility, (3) Regionalization, (4) Community-Based Preparedness, (5) Response, Re-entry, and Recovery, and (6) Mitigation. It is hoped these recommendations will support reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments in the region, strengthen Indigenous governance, and encourage a more prepared and resilient region for all its residents.

RECONCILIATION, RECOGNITION, AND RIGHTS

Reconciliation is central to the construction of a disaster management and emergency response system that provides adequate and equal levels of protection and support to all the residents in the region. This report has documented how historical and contemporary injustices and inequities had left the Indigenous peoples of the region at unacceptable levels of risk and vulnerability to natural disasters and other external shocks, and how this risk and vulnerability shaped the disproportionate impacts suffered by Indigenous peoples. The report similarly

chronicled how the lack of recognition and respect for Indigenous governments from RMWB, the Government of Alberta, and the Government of Canada undermined preparedness, response, and recovery. In particular, it is unacceptable in light of the *Powley* and *Daniels* rulings that the Métis are treated as volunteer societies rather than as Indigenous governments representing Indigenous citizens with constitutionally protected Aboriginal rights. To these ends, this report makes the following recommendations towards the advancement of reconciliation and the recognition of Indigenous governments and Indigenous rights:

> **RECOMMENDATION 1**: Disaster management and emergency response in the RMWB must be conducted within a wider framework of reconciliation with the Indigenous governments and peoples in the region;

> **RECOMMENDATION 2**: The Government of Canada, the Government of Alberta, and the RMWB should formally adopt and fully implement the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) as the broad legal framework for reconciliation;

> **RECOMMENDATION 3**: The RMWB should establish a Reconciliation Advisory Committee with representatives from the municipality, First Nations, and the Métis to develop and implement a Framework Agreement for Reconciliation, based upon the principles of UNDRIP and the historical experience of the Indigenous peoples of the region;

> **RECOMMENDATION 4**: Disaster management and emergency response in the region should be designed and implemented on the basis of government-to-government relations between the RMWB, the Government of Alberta, and the Government of Canada, on the one hand, and First Nation and Métis governments, on the other;

➤ **RECOMMENDATION 5**: Disaster management and emergency response programs should be designed with the clear objectives of strengthening Indigenous governance capacity, developing the human and other resources of Indigenous communities, and equalizing the standard of living between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples;

➤ **RECOMMENDATION 6**: The Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta should continue to work with the Métis Nation of Alberta, its Regions, its Locals, and its citizens to implement a framework agreement to advance Métis self-determination in the Province of Alberta, recognize Métis governments and governance structures as Indigenous governments that represent the citizens of the Métis Nation of Alberta, and provide funding to support the operations of Métis governments and the provision of services to Métis citizens in Alberta;

➤ **RECOMMENDATION 7**: The Government of Alberta should continue to work with the Métis in Alberta to recognize the constitutionally protected Aboriginal rights of the Métis and design and implement a consultation policy for non-Settlement Métis;

JURISDICTION, RESPONSIBILITY, AND RELATIONSHIPS

Another key set of themes identified in this report are related to questions of multiple and competing jurisdictions and relationships between governments and organizations. Disaster management in the RMWB is a jurisdictional quagmire that involves the Government of Canada, the Government of Alberta, the RMWB, five First Nations, and five Métis Locals. As this report demonstrated, jurisdictional fragmentation resulted in confusion over roles and responsibilities,

key gaps in disaster management, jurisdictional overreach by the Government of Alberta, and weak and splintered relationships. Jurisdictional fragmentation was aggravated by the abdication by the Government of Canada and the ISC of its responsibility for the Métis and its lack of leadership and guidance in disaster management for Indigenous peoples. A more adequate disaster management system in the region requires improve vision and leadership from ISC, clarification over jurisdictional responsibility, and a greater commitment to improving relationships between the different governments and organizations operating in the region. To these ends, this report makes the following recommendations in the areas of jurisdiction, responsibility, and relationships:

> **RECOMMENDATION 8**: Consistent with the *Daniels* decision, ISC should recognize the federal responsibility for disaster management involving Métis communities and include Métis governments and citizens in all programs and services offered for the purposes of disaster management and emergency response for Indigenous peoples;

> **RECOMMENDATION 9**: ISC should work with the Government of Alberta and First Nations/Métis at the provincial level to draft and sign a partnership and framework agreement that clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all partners in disaster management for Indigenous peoples in the province;

> **RECOMMENDATION 10**: ISC should amend its agreement with the AEMA to include disaster mitigation programs and funding; this would unify disaster management services for Indigenous peoples in Alberta, from preparedness and response to recovery and mitigation, in one organization, which would facilitate a more integrated approach to Indigenous disaster management in the province;

> **RECOMMENDATION 11**: ISC should work with Indigenous organizations in Canada to develop a national policy for disaster recovery funding for Indigenous

governments and communities. Because of the inadequate condition of infrastructure in most rural Indigenous communities in Canada, this national standard should make explicit the objective of disaster recovery funding to *improve* the infrastructure and resilience of Indigenous communities, not simply return them to their pre-disaster state, which is the present standard deployed by the AEMA across the province;

➢ **RECOMMENDATION 12**: There must be better coordination between the AEMA and RMWB officials responsible for supporting Indigenous peoples. To that end, the AEMA and the RMWB should sign a Memorandum of Understanding that lays out their respective roles and responsibilities regarding Indigenous peoples and commits each side to improving relationships and lines of communication. AEMA First Nations fields officers, for instance, should make a point of visiting RES and IRR officials from the RMWB when they visit Indigenous communities in the region to share information and coordinate;

➢ **RECOMMENDATION 13**: All governments in the region, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, must prioritize disaster management in their communities and commit to greater coordination and cooperation between governments in the areas of disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation;

REGIONAL COOPERATION

One clear by-product of the jurisdictional complexity of disaster management in the region was a lack of regional coordination. There was little to no coordination between the RMWB and First

Nations and Métis, between First Nations and Métis within sub-regions, or between the RMWB's RES and IRR and the AEMA's First Nations Field Officers. When disaster struck, the structures and institutions to coordinate emergency response for the region were non-existent and chaos ensued. The lack of regional coordination, moreover, left First Nations and Métis governments under-prepared and under-supported, which stretched and exceeded the capacity of many Indigenous governments to support their citizens fully. A more adequate disaster management plan will require regional organizations and coordination to integrate the plans on a government-to-government basis. To these ends, this report makes the following recommendations towards the regionalization of disaster management:

➤ **RECOMMENDATION 14**: The RMWB, First Nations, and Métis governments in the region should negotiate and implement a Disaster Management Framework Agreement that defines institutions, roles, responsibilities, and relationships for disaster management in the region on a government-to-government basis. The Framework Agreement would lay the foundations for the design and implementation of the regional disaster management plan based upon local autonomy, mutual respect, and mutual aid; that framework agreement should address all phases of disaster management from preparedness to response to recovery and mitigation;

➤ **RECOMMENDATION 15**: As part of the regional framework agreement, the RMWB should convene a Disaster Management and Emergency Response Advisory Group consisting of representatives from the municipality, Indigenous governments, and industry. The Advisory Group would be responsible for making recommendations for the design and coordination of disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation plans and initiatives;

➤ **RECOMMENDATION 16**: As a longer-term goal, ISC should work with the AEMA and Indigenous governments in the province to establish and fund an

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Indigenous Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (IDEMA). The Agency would be funded by ISC but should be coordinated with and potentially housed by the AEMA. The Agency would assume control of all ISC-funded disaster and emergency response programs and could governed by a Board of Directors consisting of representatives from First Nations and Métis governments in each major region of the province;

- **RECOMMENDATION 17**: ISC, AEMA/IDEMA, and the RMWB should work with Indigenous governments in the region to hire and train First Nation and Métis Directors of Emergency Management (DEM) at the regional level. The positions would be funded by ISC but operate under the control of the ATC and ARM. These positions could be located at the RMWB to facilitate coordination with the municipality. The DEMs would be responsible for working with Indigenous governments to ensure emergency response plans are in place and regularly updated, liaise between Indigenous governments, the RMWB, and the AEMA/IDEMA to maximize intergovernmental coordination of disaster management planning, and represent Indigenous communities in Emergency Operations Centres (EOC) in disaster events. Where desirable and practical, this initiative could be replicated in all major regions of the province;

- **RECOMMENDATION 18**: The AEMA/IDEMA should consider a pilot program to hire and train an Indigenous All-Hazards Incident Management Team, similar to the existing provincial team. The All-Hazards Management Team would be deployed to provide immediate support to Indigenous communities during disaster events. Ideally the team would have representatives in each region of the province to facilitate strong relationships and trust with local Indigenous governments and communities;

Community-Based Preparedness

Disaster management within both the RMWB and First Nations was characterized by an excessive centralization and a lack of community participation in plan design and maintenance. This is despite the abundant literature on the benefits of community-based disaster management planning (Bhatt and Reynolds 2012 81-82; Cox and Hamlen 2015; Cretney 2016; Hicks et al. 2014; Jakes and Sturtevant 2013; McCaffrey et al. 2012; Patel et al. 2017). Over the course of the research for this report, it was clear that Indigenous peoples want disaster management and emergency response planning to be done with their local governments with substantial community input. To these ends, and based on the information collected in interviews and focus groups, this report makes the following recommendations for community-based preparedness:

- ➢ **RECOMMENDATION 19**: All First Nations and Métis governments in the region should have a Director of Emergency Management (DEM) and an Assistant Director of Emergency Management (ADEM). Insofar as possible, the DEM should be a person who lives in the community and knows the community and its members well. Indigenous governments should seek to minimize turnover in the DEM position and use to ADEM to ensure institutional memory and continuity where DEMs do leave their positions;

- ➢ **RECOMMENDATION 20**: All First Nations and Métis communities in the region should design their own community-based disaster management and emergency response plans to (1) determine key hazards; (2) identify the major sources of vulnerability within the community; and (3) design emergency response plans based on community priorities and local knowledge. Community-

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level plans should be integrated into the regular operations of Indigenous governments to the greatest extent possible, should be updated and review by the community and its members on an annual basis, and should utilize and build upon the skills and knowledge of community members. Where desirable, community-based plans could be done on a sub-regional level;

➢ **RECOMMENDATION 21**: Based on the gaps identified in interviews, community-based disaster management plans should consider the following:

  ➢ Regular updating of members, residences, and contact information;
  ➢ A centralized communications plan, social media presence, and plan to contact and support Elders and other vulnerable individuals;
  ➢ Backup for all key data, including governance and historical documents, and identification of cultural artefacts to be evacuated;
  ➢ Design and use of a database to track impacts to members and needs in the event of a disaster event and evacuation;
  ➢ Preparations to receive evacuees and provide support where a disaster event takes places in another part of the region;
  ➢ Identification of a centralized, safe, and culturally appropriate evacuation site for the community to maintain families and community members together and provide support more efficiently and under the control and supervision of Indigenous governments;
  ➢ Staffing roles and responsibilities for emergency response, including the roles and responsibilities of DEMs and leadership;
  ➢ Staffing requirements and the potential need to hire additional staff to support existing staff and provide relief;

➢ A dedicated individual to work on tracking expenditures and making submissions for disaster recovery funding; this person should be trained by AEMA staff;

➢ An employee assistance program for staff who are themselves victims of a disaster event;

➢ Consideration of the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), including a single point of contact for NGOs within the community to coordinate external NGO support services;

RESPONSE, RE-ENTRY, AND RECOVERY

This report highlighted how the lack of intergovernmental cooperation and Indigenous involvement undermined the response, re-entry, and recovery phases of the disaster. Indigenous peoples were scattered across and beyond the province and separated from family and community supports. During re-entry and recovery, Indigenous peoples and their particular needs were not considered by the RWMB, which contributed to difficulties in providing adequate support to Indigenous peoples in both urban and rural areas. This failure of outreach was compounded by the marked lack of Indigenous support workers. To these ends, this report makes the following recommendations to strengthen the Indigenous role and improve the provision of support to Indigenous peoples in the response, re-entry and recovery phases:

➢ **RECOMMENDATION 22**: The RMWB's MEMP should include direct representation for First Nations and Métis in the REOC. Representation should be negotiated with Indigenous governments and should reflect the spirit of government-to-government relationships;

➢ **RECOMMENDATION 23**: Municipal and Provincial EOCs should provide First Nations and Métis leadership with daily/regular leadership briefings/updates, as they would other elected officials;

➢ **RECOMMENDATION 24**: ISC and AEMA/IDEMA should work with First Nations and Métis governments to identify and establish a network of Indigenous evacuation centres on or at First Nations reserves, Métis Settlements, and and/or Indigenous organizations that could provide centralized, safe, and culturally-appropriate evacuation sites for evacuated Indigenous communities, where Indigenous governments can coordinate and provide support to members;

➢ **RECOMMENDATION 25**: The RMWB should work with Indigenous governments to design a Re-Entry and Recovery Plan that includes Indigenous governments and communities as full partners. The recovery plan should contemplate a Tri-Partite Recovery Committee consisting of representatives from the RMWB, First Nations, and Métis, similar to the Slave Lake model;

➢ **RECOMMENDATION 26**: As part of the re-entry and recovery planning, the RMWB should work with Indigenous governments to identify and set-up Indigenous re-entry and recovery centres for the urban Indigenous population, for example at the Friendship Centre, as well as for rural areas. These centres will provide safe and culturally appropriate re-entry and recovery spaces where Indigenous peoples can get information and receive support and services;

➢ **RECOMMENDATION 27**: One of the most common concerns expressed by Indigenous peoples was the lack of Indigenous workers at the RMWB and in other governmental and non-governmental agencies, including the Red Cross. Response, re-entry, and recovery efforts would be facilitated considerably be the existence of more Indigenous employees within the RMWB, who are able to

interface and work directly with Indigenous peoples. The RMWB should review its hiring policies and work with Indigenous governments to increase the number of Indigenous employees in the municipality;

➢ **RECOMMENDATION 28**: Alberta Health Services (AHS) should similarly emphasize the hiring of more Indigenous counsellors and support workers. AHS could consider the establishment of an Indigenous Disaster Response and Recovery team comprised of Indigenous counsellors and support workers that can be deployed to areas where disasters have affected Indigenous communities;

➢ **RECOMMENDATION 29**: The RMWB and AHS should require that all staff undergo Cultural Safety Training to address the need for increased Indigenous cultural safety by bringing to light biases and the legacies of colonization that affect service accessibility and health outcomes for Indigenous peoples;

MITIGATION

Finally, mitigation was another area where clear deficiencies were observed. At present, the AEMA is responsible to provide support for First Nations preparedness, response, and partial recovery support, while ISC is partially responsible for recovery and fully responsible for mitigation, and the RMWB carries out its own mitigation programs. This fragmented system impedes a more holistic and regional approach to disaster management. Similarly, Indigenous peoples repeatedly expressed their frustration that Indigenous knowledge and skills are not adequately integrated into mitigation activities, which could be facilitated via a greater role for Indigenous governments in the design and implementation of mitigation programs. To these

ends and in addition to the previous recommendation (#9) that ISC amend its agreement with the AEMA to incorporate funding for mitigation activities, this report makes the following recommendations for mitigation:

> **RECOMMENDATION 30**: Given the increasing frequency of disaster events and the disproportionate risk of and vulnerability to natural disasters in Indigenous communities, ISC should prioritize preparedness and mitigation initiatives for Indigenous communities and peoples and significantly increase funding for such activities from current levels;

> **RECOMMENDATION 31**: The RMWB should establish a Disaster Mitigation Advisory Sub-Committee as part of the Disaster Management and Emergency Response Advisory Group. The sub-committee should have representatives from the RMWB, First Nations, and Métis governments and would work to identify mitigation needs across the region, coordinate initiatives, and support applications made to the AEMA/ISC by First Nations and Métis for mitigation projects;

> **RECOMMENDATION 32**: The Disaster Mitigation Advisory Sub-Committee should work to identify deficits related to regional and community-level egress routes and develop and coordinate funding proposals for rural hamlets and First Nations reserves as part of a regional emergency evacuation plan. Eventually each rural community and reserve should have at least two access routes in case of an emergency;

> **RECOMMENDATION 33**: The Disaster Mitigation Advisory Sub-Committee should develop a plan to increase levels of home and tenant insurance for Indigenous peoples, particularly in the rural hamlets. Such a plan could consider an educational campaign, regional coordination with insurance companies, and subsidies, among other initiatives;

➤ **RECOMMENDATION 34**: The RMWB should work with First Nations and Métis governments to form a FireSmart Regional Advisory Committee, similar to the one set-up by the Town of Slave Lake, the Municipal District of Slave Lake, and the Sawridge First Nation after the Slave Lake wildfire. The Advisory Committee would coordinate FireSmart activities and ensure maximum benefit accrues locally;

➤ **RECOMMENDATION 35**: The Disaster Mitigation Advisory Sub-Committee should seek to maximize the input of Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) holders in the design and implementation of mitigation and monitoring initiatives;

➤ **RECOMMENDATION 36**: The RMWB, First Nations, and Métis governments should work together to establish an Indigenous Summer Firefighting Crew that could be deployed during wildfire season. A similar program was set-up in Slave Lake after the 2011 wildfires. This program could build upon the existing Indigenous firefighting knowledge and provide training and employment for Indigenous youth in the summers.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT AS RECONCILIATION

More than two years removed from the 2016 Horse Creek wildfire, we still know comparatively little about how the wildfire impacted the more than 5,000 Indigenous peoples of the region. The reports produced by and for the RMWB and the Government of Alberta failed to assess the specific impacts to Indigenous peoples, beyond several in-text boxes. Even more seriously, none of the reports attempts to grappled with the complex legacies of relations between Indigenous communities, the RMWB, the Government of Alberta, and the Government of Canada. Absent such a context, however, one cannot answer the most important questions facing emergency response and DRR planning in Indigenous communities. Not surprisingly, the reports produced by governments at both levels appear largely to reproduce the paternalistic and inadequate approaches of the past, with minor modifications and commitments to improved communication and integration of Indigenous perspectives.

This report represents an attempt present Indigenous perspectives and concerns regarding the impacts of the 2016 Horse River wildfires and the future of disaster management and emergence response in the region. To this end, the report has made 36 recommendations to Government of Canada and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), the Government of Alberta and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency (AEMA), the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB), and the First Nations and Métis governments of the region. To achieve this goal, however, action will be required that goes beyond the specifics of disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. To be effective, disaster management policies must be part of a wider process of truth telling and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and of the development of equitable and respectful relationships between governments and peoples in the region. Otherwise, the region and its peoples will continue to talk past each other, condemned to repeat the errors of the past.

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APPENDIX

List of Focus Groups

Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation/Mikisew Cree First Nation Urban, held 11 September 2017 at the Mikisew Cree First Nation office, Fort McMurray, Alberta

Athabasca Chipewyan/Métis Local 125/Mikisew Cree First Nation Rural, held 29 September 2017 at the Métis Local 125 office, Fort Chipewyan, Alberta

Conklin Métis Local 125, held 22 November 2017 at the CDRAC office, Conklin, Alberta

Fort McKay First Nation, held 21 August 2017 at the Fort McKay First Nation Reserve, Alberta

Fort McKay Métis Community Association, held 21 August 2017 at the Fort McKay Métis Community Association officers, Hamlet of Fort McKay, Alberta

Fort McMurray First Nation #468, held 24 October 2017 at the Fort McMurray First Nation Band Office, Fort McMurray First Nation Reserve, Alberta

Janvier Chipewyan Dene Community Association, held 12 July 2017 at the Janvier Municipal Office in Janvier, Alberta

McMurray Métis, held 22 June 2017 at the Wood Buffalo Environmental Association (WBEA) offices in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Urban Indigenous, held 22 June 2017 at the Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Willow Lake Métis Local, held 22 August 2017 at the Métis Local office, Anzac, Alberta

LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Allan Adam, Chief, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, interviewed on 9 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Bill Loutitt, Chief Executive Officer, McMurray Métis Local 1935, interviewed on 12 December 2017 and 27 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Brad Callihoo, Chief Executive Officer, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September 2017 and 3 March 2018 on the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve

Bryan Fayant, Disaster Recovery Coordinator, McMurray Métis Local 1935, interviewed on 28 September 2017 and 27 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Cindy Miller, Band Manager, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed on 19 September 2017 on the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve

Christopher Graham, Deputy Director of Emergency Management, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 16 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Cort Gallup, former Director of Emergency Management, Fort McKay First Nation, interviewed on 27 September 2017 on the Fort McKay First Nation Reserve

Dan Stuckless, former General Manager of McMurray Métis, interviewed on 30 October 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Darrin Bourque, Council Member, Willow Lake Métis Local 780, interviewed on 28 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Dennis Fraser, former Director, Department of Indigenous and Rural Relations, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 15 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Dwayne Roth, Chief Executive Officer, McKay Métis Group, interviewed on 20 December 2017 in Fort McKay, Alberta

Elena Gould, former Manager, Department of Indigenous and Rural Relations, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 15 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Fran Byers, Manager of First Nations Field Operations, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, interviewed on March 13, 2018 in Edmonton, Alberta

Harvey Sykes, Council Member, McMurray Métis Local 1935, interviewed on 28 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Jay Telegdi, former Government Relations Manager at McMurray Métis, interviewed on 29 September 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Jean L'Hommecourt, Traditional Land Use Researcher, Fort McKay Sustainability Department, interviewed on 27 September 2017 on the Fort McKay First Nation Reserve

Jeffrey O'Donnell, former Chief Executive Officer, Conklin Resource Development Advisory Committee, interviewed on 7 November 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Jocelyn Marten, Community Coordinator, Mikisew Cree First Nation, interviewed on 27 November 2017 by telephone.

Jody Butz, Regional Fire Chief, Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, interviewed on 15 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Karla Buffalo, Chief Executive Officer, Athabasca Tribal Council, interviewed on 2 March 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Lauretta Waquan, Director of Finance, Fort McKay Métis Community Association, interviewed on 1 March 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Maggie Farrington, former Chief Executive Officer, Athabasca Tribal Council, interviewed on 8 February 2018 in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta, and 27 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Marina Nokohoo, Member, Chipewyan Prairie First Nation, interviewed 7 December 2017 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Mel Grandjamb, Fire Chief, Fort McKay First Nation, interviewed on 1 March 2018 in Fort McKay, Alberta

Michelle Voyageur, Council Member, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, interviewed on 8 February 2018 in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta

Nancy Hollman, former Executive Director, Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre, interviewed March 23, 2018, via telephone in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Rein Tonowski, Direction of Central Operations, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, interviewed on 21 February 2018 in Edmonton, Alberta

Ron Kreutzer, Chief, Fort McMurray First Nation 468, interviewed 19 September 2017 on the Fort McMurray First Nation 468 Reserve

Ron Quintal, President, McKay Métis Community Association, interviewed on 1 March 2018 in Fort McKay, Alberta

Scott Long, Executive Director of Provincial Operations, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, interviewed on 21 February 2018 in Edmonton, Alberta

Simon Adams, Director of Community Services, Fort McKay First Nation, interviewed on 27 September 2017 on the Fort McKay First Nation Reserve

Stephen Carr, Director of Field Operations, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, interviewed March 14, 2018, Edmonton, Alberta

Teresa Nahwegahbow, former Executive Director, Nistawoyou Association Friendship Centre, interviewed on 30 October 2017 by telephone

Teri Villebrun, Council Member, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, interviewed on 8 February 2018 in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta

Tina Marten, Member, Mikisew Cree First Nation, interviewed on 27 February 2018 in Fort McMurray, Alberta

Winston Delorme, First Nations Field Officer (North), Alberta Emergency Management Agency, interviewed on March 13, 2018, Edmonton, Alberta