COMMUNITY VOICES AS AGENTS OF CHANGE: 2018 WILDFIRE EXPERIECES IN THE SOUTHSIDE

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the 2018 wildfire season in Cheslatta Carrier Nation territory through the lived experiences of community members. It details how sustained wildfire suppression contributed to changes to the social, political and the physical landscape. Using a qualitative methodology and ten semi-structured interviews with community members, it describes how historic events, including flooding and forced relocation, shaped the ways community members felt about wildfires and their management.

This research found that the 2018 wildfire season impacted Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in physical, economic, and spiritual ways. The loss of timber and livelihoods as well as displacement due to evacuation orders were challenging. While many individuals felt disempowered by the wildfires and their management, wildfire was also a catalyst for political and social change. This thesis explores the ways that wildfires can unite, divide, and transform individuals and communities.

Keywords: Indigenous, Cheslatta Carrier Nation, wildfire, emergency management

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Timeline of 2018 Wildfire Events in Cheslatta Territory

2018

July 12	Verdun Mountain Fire discovered 10 km southwest of Grassy Plains, 40 km south of Burns Lake (lightning caused)
July 31	Nadina Lake Fire discovered 40 km southwest of Burns Lake (lightning caused)
August 1	Nadina Lake Fire evacuation order – series of expansions of this until August 15
August 6	Cheslaslie Arm Fire discovered 85 km southeast of Burns Lake (lightning caused)
August 7	Verdun Mountain Fire evacuation order- series of expansions of this until August 22
August 15	Provincial Declaration of State of Emergency was made to support the ongoing response and management of the wildfire situation
August 17	The sky goes black in the middle of the day and causes street lights to come on in Prince George and Vanderhoof (Hennig, 2018).
August 18	Cheslatta Lake wildfire evacuation order
August 20	The BC Wildfire Service and the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako co-host a public meeting at the Grassy Plains School to advise individuals who stayed in the Evacuation Order area for the Southside of François Lake about inherent risks to safety
August 22	The Verdun fire passes over Takysie Lake and claims 3 properties
August 23	Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visits the Prince George Fire Centre- He does not make the journey to the Southside
September 7	Provincial State of Emergency rescinded
September 12	Cheslatta Lake wildfire, Nadina Lake Wildfire, Verdun Mountain Fire evacuation orders rescinded (evacuation alerts remaining) Cheslatta community members are welcomed back home. Chief Corrina Leween gives a speech at a community gathering.

Fall	Southside community members gather to form the Chinook Emergency Response Society whose goal is "…to help organize, communicate and martial resources to prepare and respond to Emergencies" (Chinook Emergency Response Society, n.d.).
2019	Cheslatta Carrier Nation begins to develop a wildfire response strategy. This initiative led to a partnership with Rio Tinto and BC Wildfire Service to better equip remote areas in the Nation's territory with wildfire response equipment. Wildfire rehabilitation works are ongoing in Cheslatta Carrier Nation territory- 2019's major focus is the Verdun Mountain wildfire and Cheslaslie Arm Wildfire as well as extensive archeological works for all fires
2020	Cheslatta Carrier Nation and BC Wildfire Service conduct a shared demonstration for how to safely use their eight wildfire equipment trailers and one industrial trailer -bought in partnership with Rio Tinto as part of Cheslatta's wildfire response strategy ('Cheslatta Carrier leads…', 2020) Wildfire rehabilitation works are ongoing in Cheslatta Carrier Nation territory- 2020's major focus is the Nadina Lake Wildfire and the Cheslatta Lake Wildfire

This information was gathered from the following sources:
(Regional District of Bulkley Nechako, n.d.; Government of British Columbia, n.d.d; Baizer, 2018; Chinook Emergency Response Society, n.d.; "Justin Trudeau thanks firefighters", 2018; "Wildfire claims 3 houses", 2018)

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Location of Cheslatta Carrier Nation

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Cheslatta Carrier Nation Traditional Territory Present and Past Fire Map

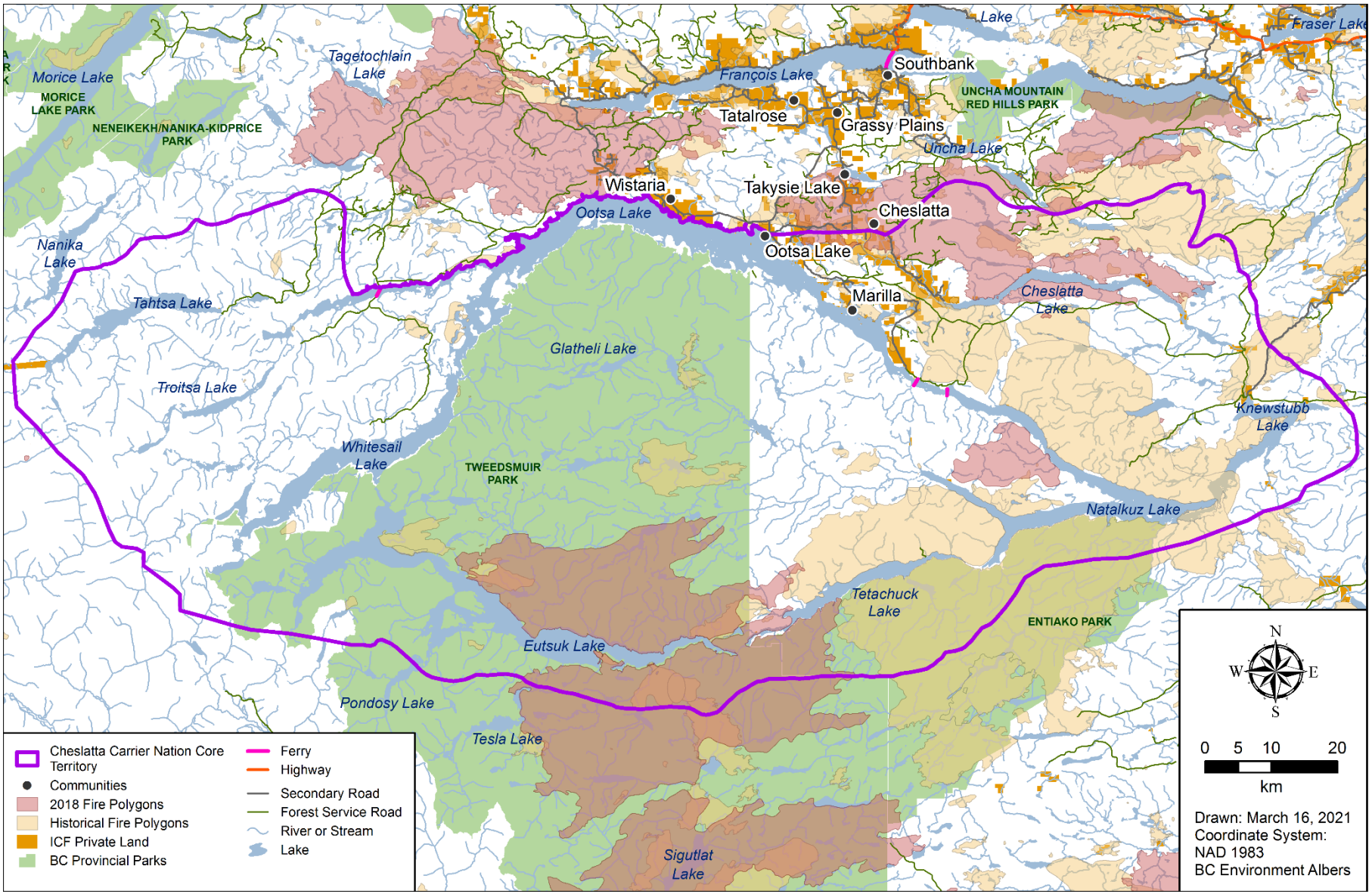

Figure 2

Map of the Southside

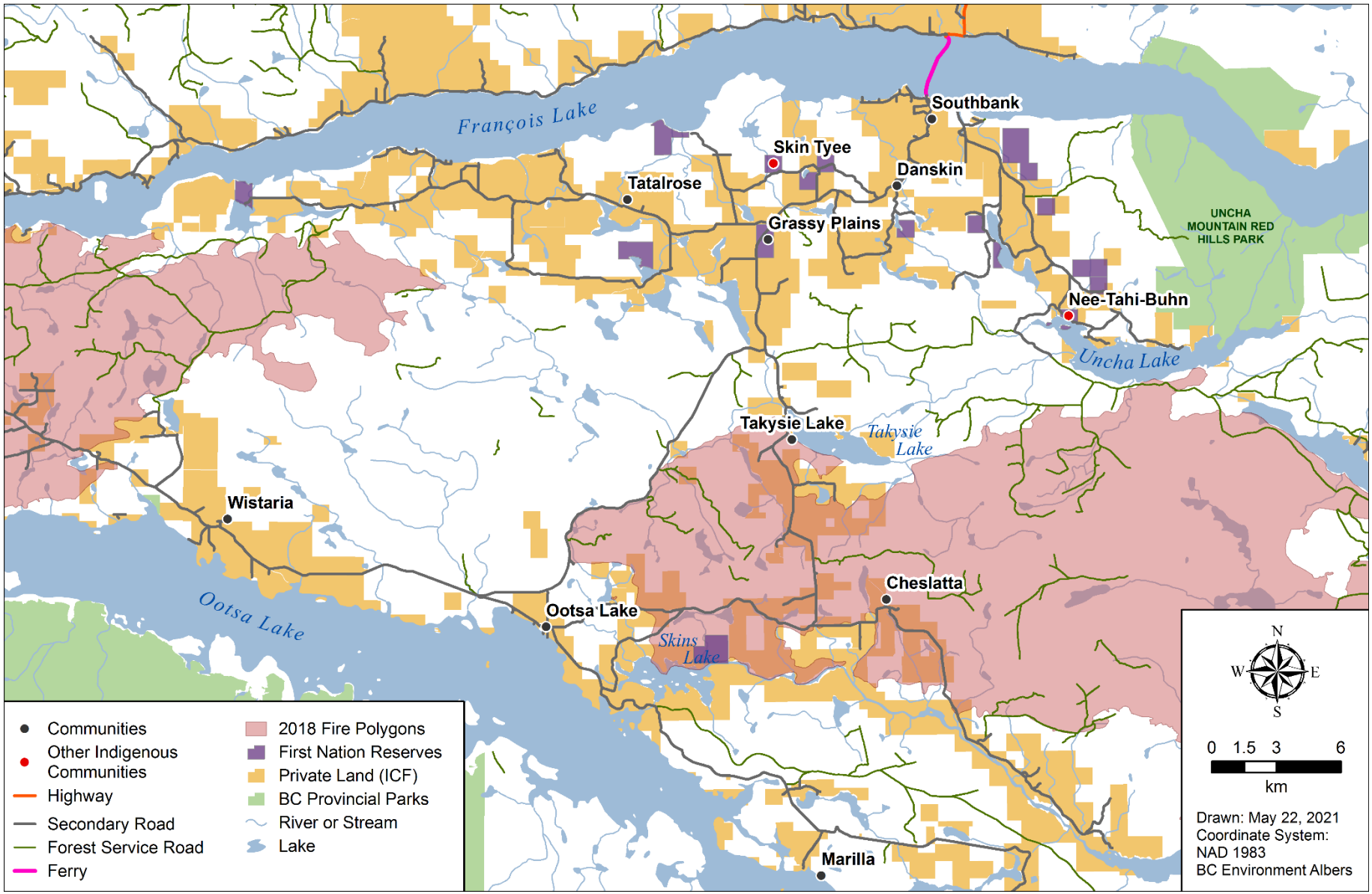

Figure 3

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

I am passionate about fire. I love watching it, I love making it, and I am in awe of both its destructive and creative powers. While my interest in fire is the reason I am involved in research, I also have a curiosity about the cultural and historical significance of wildfire and our collective relationship to it. My decision to research and write a Master's thesis grew out of my passion and curiosity about wildfire, and about Indigenous community experiences. I began this research in the aftermath of a record-breaking fire season in British Columbia (Government of British Columbia, n.d.d). While the 2018 wildfire season displaced families and communities province-wide, some of its more aggressive fires were in the Province's northwest. In considering this significant event, I became curious about what lasting impacts 2018 had for communities, along with whether any lessons might be gleaned from the lived experiences of community members.

During the spring of 2019, I embarked on a research collaboration with Cheslatta Carrier Nation to explore just that. This collaboration provided directions and guidance which shaped the content, design and results of this study from start to finish. It also grounded this work in the goals of the community itself. The purpose of this work is to promote community voices and increase awareness about community members' experiences. As such, I solicited community input throughout my process and aligned my work with community values. My goal with this thesis was to create something that is both practical and that addresses colonialism. Through my process and my writing, I believe that I have done this.

The art of conducting research is not a value-neutral exercise and as researchers, we must acknowledge the colonial underpinnings inherent in the structures that give authority and power to the universities and institutions we represent. Ball and Jaynst (2008) state that: "[r]esearchers are knowledge brokers. Researchers have the power to collect information and produce meanings

which can support or undermine values, practices, and people, and to construct legitimating arguments for or against ideas, theories, policies, and practices" (Ball and Jaynst, 2008, pg. 48). This dynamic brings with it a certain amount of power. As a way to acknowledge and expose the values which this research addresses, I have chosen to name and describe them throughout. One of these underlying beliefs which drives my approach to research is that wisdom comes from experience. Though, as a qualitative researcher I actively frame, interpret, and present information, the meanings I make and the knowledge I produce comes from the stories and lived experiences of research participants.

Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) explains how research is necessarily linked to colonialism and imperialism through its history, through its processes, and its products. She writes: "The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (Smith, 1999, pg. 1). Because the legacy of this history is woven into the very fabric of research, the importance of undoing colonial dynamics is imperative if my work is to address colonialism. In *Research is Ceremony* (2008), Sean Wilson states "…researchers, no matter how objective they claim their methods to be, do bring with them their own set of biases" (Wilson, 2008, pg. 16). In recognition of this, I choose to locate myself in order to contextualize this thesis, and the place from where it is produced. To approach research ethically, it is not enough to acknowledge research's colonial past, I must critically examine my positionality and personal relationship to research's colonial underpinnings.

I am an eighth generation Canadian woman of mixed western European ancestry. As a non-Indigenous Canadian who is privileged by both the dominant cultural paradigm and racial bias, the implicit perpetuation of this system is not always obvious to me. Cora Weber-Pillwax calls this way of being "unconscious irresponsibility" (Weber-Pillwax, 1999, pg. 37). It is through the ongoing and humbling practice of self-reflection that I will begin to work toward becoming consciously responsible. I will start with explaining what brings me to this work.

The researcher

I have worked in the forest industry in British Columbia for the past seventeen years as a treeplanter, as a firefighter, and now in Indigenous relations for the Province of British Columbia. When I started my Master's coursework in the First Nations Studies Department at the University of Northern British Columbia, I had just finished working two of the most stressful and emotionally and physically demanding fire seasons of my career. In 2017 and 2018, I worked for the BC Wildfire Service as a Wildfire Assistant out of the Vanderhoof fire zone in BC's northern interior. My choice to leave my nine-year career in wildfire August of 2018 was precipitated by the personal impact of working through these busy seasons. The sustained stress that I experienced took a toll on my mental and physical health. While I have fully recovered from the impacts of those seasons, I remain extremely curious about how communities, both Indigenous and non, experienced those same events. I am curious about how they are recovering. It is because of my personal experiences and reflections that this research topic is not only an intellectual curiosity, but a visceral one. My own personal and professional experiences provide context and motivation for this work.

When I began my career in wildfire in 2010, I was chosen to be on a crew that had historically been Indigenous. Now stationed in Pemberton, the D'Arcy Heatseekers Unit Crew had once represented the community of N'Quatqua. Working out of the same fire base, the Salish Unit Crew remains an all-Indigenous fire crew whose members live primarily in the St'at'imc community of Lil'wat. Fire Crew Members for both these crews had previously been recruited exclusively from Indigenous communities, and hiring privileged community membership. By the time I joined my crew, its makeup was rapidly diversifying. In working with my Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues, I gained a preliminary understanding of the cultural differences which separated us. I heard stories from colleagues who had survived residential schools, incarceration and addiction. I learned about my colleagues' perspectives on community values,

responsibility, and reciprocity. I also started to notice that the Indigenous colleagues I had grown to trust and respect were often treated differently than me and experienced the world in very different ways. I started noticing little things, subtle at first, which became glaring and obvious over time. This represents a significant moment in my life when I became aware of my own 'unconscious irresponsibility' (Weber-Pillwax, 1999) and started to shift my way of walking as a settler.

My process of becoming aware of the ongoing social impacts of colonialism was paralleled by a similar process of my shifting relationship to the natural world. As a child, my family of five often spent time canoeing, hiking, and camping- sometimes for weeks on end. We would pack up the minivan and set out on adventures into the wilderness carving out moments of reflection and connection that seemed distant from our suburban lives. My parents shared their love of the outdoors and connection to nature with me and my two sisters through these adventures. I thank my parents immensely for that gift, and as such, I still carry a deep connection to land and find spiritual solace in being on the land.

As a young person, I never critically examined my relationship to 'wilderness' nor questioned my assumption of wild spaces as untouched. Once I gained experience working in forestry in my teens and twenties, I started to problematize the extractive nature of my relationship with land as well as narratives of land as 'wilderness'. Through this process of unlearning, I became curious about what stories are held by the land, and the people who care for it. If I listen carefully, I can begin to hear these stories. As Tim Ingold states: "[w]oven like a tapestry from the lives of its inhabitants, the land is not so much a stage for the enactment of history, or a surface on which it is inscribed, as *history congealed"* (Ingold, 2000, pg. 150). I am coming to know that my own story and place on this land exists within a web of other stories. In learning stories from the place that I physically inhabit I hope to understand my responsibilities to this land more fully.

Setting the terms

I seek to conduct ethical and transformative research in an Indigenous context. In *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999), Linda Tuhiwai Smith gives context to the exploitative foundation of research conducted in and on Indigenous communities and peoples. She writes that "[r]esearch is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized" (Smith, 1999, pg. 8). The historical and political foundation of a non-Indigenous researchers working in an Indigenous context has been fraught with exploitation, paternalism, and racism (Smith, 1999). It is because of this history that I believe non-Indigenous researchers have to be hyper vigilant to engage ethically and reflectively with Indigenous communities. We must take responsibility for reconciliation and decolonization.

Akin to Smith, I believe that "indigenous research is not quite as simple as it looks, nor quite as complex as it feels" (Smith, 1999, pg. 5). Recognizing and navigating the complex ethical terrain of research in Indigenous contexts can feel overwhelming. To address many of my concerns relating to exploitation and colonialism, I have chosen to be as transparent as possible. To further my goal of transparency and establish a shared understanding, I will define some of the words which this thesis employs.

I use the word Indigenous. The concept of who and what is Indigenous can be slippery and hard to define. The dispossession of many people from their homelands, paired with diverse and blended identities contributes to this ambiguity. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs website defines Indigenous Peoples as "…inheritors and practitioners of unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment… Despite their cultural differences, indigenous peoples from around the world share common problems related to the protection of their rights as distinct peoples" (United Nations, n.d.). Though the shared experience of dispossession creates a commonality for Indigenous Peoples, the mechanisms and specific details of oppression are unique. Since I live, work, and write in Northwestern British

Columbia, when using the word Indigenous, I will specifically be referring to people who have been living in what is now British Columbia since time immemorial.

Because "…the word 'indigenous' is a way of including the many diverse communities, language groups and nations, each with their own identification …" (Smith, 1999, pg. 6), I will respect the ways people choose to identify. Some individuals may refer to themselves as 'Indigenous', others may uniquely identify as a member of their Nation, and some as Canadian. Along with Linda Tuhiwai Smith, I believe that the English language can be extremely limiting in its scope. Thus, I have chosen to neither interpret nor rename any of the ways people refer to either themselves or their lands. Truly "[b]y 'naming the world' people name their realities" (Smith, 1999, pg. 159).

I believe that "[i]n addition to the term Indigenous, much thought needs to go into the term used for describing things that are not Indigenous" (Wilson, 2008, pg. 34). Though my ancestors were once Indigenous to Western Europe, through colonial invasion and continued occupation, many generations of my family have come to understand Canada as our home. As such, I am a non-Indigenous person living in Canada. Though the terms Indigenous/ non-Indigenous seem to signify two "fixed, radically different, apparently homogenous groups… [t]he boundaries between "us" and "them" on the street, in the workplace, and the classroom have diminished substantially since our first encounters" (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, pg. 476). The intersectional, blended, and complex quality of each person's various identity markers cannot be distilled into binary oppositions. It would be much too simplistic to view Indigenous/ non-Indigenous as a binary since "[e]ach term forced the other into being, to distinguish "us", the ordinary… people, from the others, the white-skinned strangers" (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, pg. 473). While recognizing and honouring the fact that each one of us is Indigenous to somewhere, I use the term non-Indigenous to refer to those of us who inhabit lands which are not native to our ancestors. I also use the word settler interchangeably.

Another key concept I reference is the notion of resilience. Canadian scholar Fikret Berkes (2012) explains how this term has its roots in ecology and evolved out of the notion of ecological stability. He defines resilience as "… the ability of a system to absorb change and still persist" (Berkes, 2012, pg. 79). My research will explore the relationship between the social and ecological impacts of wildfire and will not examine ecological systems in isolation. Indigenous scholars Lake and Christianson affirm that "[i]n Indigenous cultures, resilience is considered as a holistic concept- everything is related" (Lake & Christianson, 2019, pg. 2). Given the holistic nature of resilience from Indigenous worldviews, impacts to the land cannot be viewed separately from impacts to the people. Throughout my work, I use the term 'resilience' to examine wildfire impacts on individuals, communities, the land, as well as governments and institutions. I include a discussion about the relationships and the values systems which inform contemporary wildfire suppression practices. Thus, acknowledging the many factors which contribute to community resilience is of importance. Drawing on Lake and Christianson's definition, the land and the people are mutually dependent, and a community's resilience cannot be viewed in isolation from all its relations.

Non-Indigenous Canadian scholar Paulette Regan (2010) explores her own relationship to colonialism as she writes passionately about the need for settlers to tell their stories. She believes that "[s]ettler stories as counter-narratives that create decolonizing space are both interior and relational. As such, they require us to risk revealing ourselves as vulnerable 'not-knowers' who are willing to examine our dual positions as colonizer-perpetrators and colonizer-allies" (Regan, 2010, pg. 28). I am grateful to be able to tell this story as a settler Canadian. I believe that reconciliatory relationships with both Indigenous peoples and lands require settlers to be vulnerable. Telling my own story alongside that of Cheslatta is a personal exercise in vulnerability.

Thesis Structure and Chapters

The purpose of this study is to better understand the events of the 2018 wildfire season in Cheslatta Carrier Nation territory (an area also known as the Southside) from multiple perspectives. To do this, I rely on four research question, which read as follows:

1. How did Cheslatta Carrier Nation members and people working in Cheslatta territory experience wildfire events and emergency management efforts during the 2018 wildfire season?
2. How did the 2018 wildfires impact Cheslatta Carrier Nation members' relationships to land?
3. What are the lasting impacts from the 2018 wildfire season?
4. What could individuals, communities and governments learn from this experience to manage for future wildfires differently?

These questions guide this research through all aspects of its process, design, implementation, and presentation. They are the foundation upon which this research rests.

To address these questions, the following thesis is arranged into five chapters. *Chapter 1: Introduction* provides an overview of the project and the reasons behind this study. This chapter explores the ethical and personal reasons why this thesis is written, and allows the reader to better understand the researcher and my specific cultural context. *Chapter 2: Literature Review* provides a comprehensive overview of information which relates to the 2018 wildfire season, Cheslatta Carrier Nation, and how wildfires have impacted other Indigenous communities in British Columbia. I use two theoretical lenses as a foundation to interpret this data and shape my argument. This chapter immerses the reader into the specific context of the major event and the community for which this thesis is written. *Chapter 3: Methodology* provides a complete overview of the steps I took to build a collaborative relationship with Cheslatta Carrier Nation, and to design and conduct this research. It is rooted in the methodological theory which supports my choice to use a qualitative case study framework. *Chapter 4: Findings* provides an in-depth discussion which interprets and presents the information I collected through interviews with

research participants. Throughout, I have used quotes to describe the six themes which structure this chapter. *Chapter 5: Conclusion* provides an overview of the thesis as a whole. This chapter includes a synthesis of all other chapters along with three recommendations aimed at everyone who engages with rural and Indigenous communities during times of crisis. These three recommendations emerged out of the literature and interview data, and bring about practical solutions to the various tensions identified by this research and its findings.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

As a starting point for this Master's research project, I introduce various scholarship to provide a comprehensive background and to allow for a deeper understanding of wildfire. I have organized this section into three parts. The first part includes literature about wildfires. It seeks to understand the political landscape within which wildfires and contemporary wildfire suppression activities operate. Secondly, I include literature relating to Cheslatta Carrier Nation's recent history, for which flooding and forced relocation are major themes. And lastly, I present literature specific to wildfires and wildfire suppression from Indigenous perspectives. Together, these three themes situate my research and provide contextual information within I ground this work.

To interpret the literature I present in this chapter, I draw on two different theoretical perspectives both embedded in their own distinct ways of knowing. I use Michel Foucault's governmentality theory (1994) as a way to understand how power operates and is regulated during emergencies and wildfire suppression activities. Foucault's governmentality theory is embedded in a Western epistemological framework. Additionally, I draw upon Shawn Wilson's (2008) theory of relationality which comes from his Cree perspective. Using a lens of relationality affirms the agency of the landscape itself throughout time as active and influential. When viewed together, governmentality and relationality theories offer a way to deconstruct beliefs and practices relating to wildfires and wildfire suppression, while offering a more constructive approach which incorporates a holistic worldview and affirms the agency of non-human beings. As Shawn Wilson states, "we can never really remove the tools from their underlying beliefs" (Wilson, 2008, pg.13). As such, I use these particular tools because they

reflect elements of my own personal worldview and allow me to engage in deeper discussion with the literature.

Contemporary fire landscapes

A forest's resiliency can be attributed to its complexity, and "[the boreal forest's] complexity lies in the mosaic of species and age class brought about by regular disturbance such as tree falls, wind storms, insect outbreaks, beaver activity, and stand-replacing fires" (A. Miller, 2009, pg. 37). Before colonial occupation of what is now British Columbia, both natural and human-caused fire was present on the land. There is evidence that Indigenous Peoples across North America deliberately set fire to lands for specific purposes, including (but not limited to) berry patch cultivation, manipulation and cultivation of building and crafting materials, and improvement of hunting grounds. This information is present in oral history and in current cultural practices (Berkes, 2012; Miller & Davidson-Hunt, 2010; Kimmerer & Lake, 2001; Turner, 1999; Boyd, 1999; Lewis, 1982). While scientific sources affirm that "[Indigenous] burning represented a form of 'resource intensification'" (Boyd, 1999, pg. 19), Indigenous scholars illustrate that the "[a]pplication of fires is viewed by many Indigenous groups as a spiritual responsibility to the land, a tool that was given to people to fulfill the caregiving responsibilities for the land" (Kimmerer & Lake, 2001, pg. 38). Both of these perspectives help to paint a picture wherein human-caused fire contributed to a productive and deliberate relationship with the natural world.

Furthering this concept, Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson explains that Indigenous Peoples' have a long history of resource management and land stewardship. She affirms that "…much of the intact wilderness Canadians enjoy is a direct result of Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and sustainable ways of life" (Simpson, 2004, pg. 122). Scholars have critiqued contemporary land management practices which encourage the commodification and large scale

extraction of natural 'resources' for profit (Simpson, 2004; A. Smith, 2005). Simpson (2004) explains that capitalist resource exploitation and commodification does not align with the holistic and interconnected nature of many Indigenous worldviews. She states: "[w]ithin Indigenous environmental philosophies, there is an acknowledgement that all life is related and that all of our actions and choices have impacts on other living beings" (Simpson, 2004, pg. 127).

Currently, British Columbia relies on the timber industry as one of its main sources of revenue (Government of British Columbia, n.d.a). The government of British Columbia's forestry webpage details how forest tenure holders pay fees to the government in exchange for the right to harvest timber on publically allocated land, known in Canada as 'Crown land' (Government of British Columbia, n.d.a). Because British Columbia is a province where the nature and scope of aboriginal title to land is not clearly defined, many Indigenous Nations' claims to title on their territories is still unrecognized at a federal and provincial level. Thus, the concepts of 'Crown land' and 'Crown timber' used in the forest industry undermine Indigenous Nations' sovereignty through resource management practices and decisions. I recognize that many First Nations and Indigenous People are actively involved in the forest industry, however I am specifically critiquing the ideology that drives it, not the people who work within it.

Simpson (2004) writes about the impact forestry has on Indigenous communities describing some of what is lost for many Indigenous Peoples through continued and intensive timber harvesting in their territories:

> The impact of deforestation on local communities is great: animal habitats are destroyed; sacred areas are ruined; traplines are rendered unproductive for decades; road building increases access to the land and cross-cuts animal migration routes; traditional plants and medicines are destroyed; and forests are replaced by monoculture tree farms, complete with pesticides and insecticides. (Simpson, 2004, pg. 131)

Trees as timber, and timber as a resource is indicative of a society that commodifies the natural world and does not encompass the entirety of how Indigenous Peoples relate to land.

Because of the emphasis put on revenue generated through timber harvesting, colonial settlement of land had a profound impact on cultural burning (Lake & Christianson, 2019). Wildfire researchers Lake and Christianson explain how, "[i]n Canada, burning was outlawed and replaced with a centralized system that aimed to suppress all forest fires…" (2019, pg. 4). Long standing wildfire suppression mandates fed the myth that fire is both unwanted and dangerous as the land became increasingly colonized both by residential settlement and the exploitation of timber. Furthering this notion, Canadian scholar Colin Sutherland writes:

> In the context of Canada, we have to appreciate that centuries of Indigenous forms of land care were violently replaced as settler colonialism cleared the way for a new relationship with land, and thus also to fire. Fire became inconvenient to settlement and extraction and was also eliminated from so-called pristine wilderness areas like Canada's celebrated national parks. (Sutherland, 2018, pg. 20)

Through the colonial process, land became open for business which included the extraction of natural resources, thus fire became an inconvenient and unwanted presence on a changing landscape.

Fast forward to today: The public-facing wildfire information webpage published by British Columbia's government defines a 'wildfire' as: **"**an unplanned fire - including *unauthorized* human-caused fires - occurring on forest or range lands, burning forest vegetation, grass, brush, scrub, peat lands, or a prescribed fire set under regulation which spreads beyond *the area authorized for burning* [emphasis added]" (Government of British Columbia, n.d.c). Given this definition, I understand the difference between 'fire' and 'wildfire' in government discourse to depend largely on whether a fire is deemed to be both 'wanted' and 'under control'. This definition carries with it an intrinsic bias wherein human-caused fire must be authorized and regulated by an official government body. Drawing on Foucault's (1994) governmentality theory, the system by which governments authorize wildfires is an exercise of their political control by means of regulation. Though community safety is a priority most people share, the

commodification of natural resources and the act of protecting timber from fire through suppression efforts is a cultural practice rooted in a specific value system.

Given the policies and procedures which govern wildfire suppression activities and public safety measures are created by human institutions which are not value-free, I again look to Michel Foucault's governmentality theory (1994) to better understand how they are created and implemented. Foucault defines governmentality as "…the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow this very specific albeit complex form of power…" to control people through state "apparatuses of security" (Foucault, 1994, pg. 220). In the context of wildfire, Foucault's 'apparatus of security' can be defined as the means by which the behaviour of citizens is controlled or shaped. As described above, an example of Foucault's 'apparatus of security' includes the historic vilification and exclusion of cultural burning from land management practices through colonial legislation. For example, many Indigenous Peoples, for which burning was and remains a management tool, are expected to adhere to legislation which excludes their traditional use of fire (Lake & Christianson, 2019). Another contemporary example of an 'apparatus of security' includes evacuations notices or alerts put into place around active wildfires for the purpose of public safety. When these are issued, it is expected that citizens will heed this guidance and vacate their homes and properties regardless of their own knowledge of the land or ability to suppress wildfires.

Despite a cultural shift in contemporary fire management, which has seen increased recognition and appreciation of Indigenous Knowledge (Sutherland, 2018), the legacy of fire exclusion policies have left a widespread cultural rhetoric of fire as the threat and suppression as the answer (Carroll et al., 2006). The belief that people are able to suppress wildfires, and that as societies we should organize ourselves to do so, demonstrates both an individual and institutional exercise of power. This belief system creates the conditions for a professional wildfire

management program. Through the societal proliferation of wildfire suppression, we have altered not only the physical and cultural landscape of North America, but also fed into the myth the fire is controllable (Kimmerer & Lake, 2001).

As Carroll, Higgins, Cohn, and Burchfield describe, "[s]tories of wildfires and heroic suppression efforts are part of the fabric of history…", and "[t]his perception is due in no small part to the USDA Forest Service's Smokey the Bear campaign and aggressive wildfire suppression efforts" (Carroll et al., 2006, pg. 261). Though the highly recognizable Smokey the Bear character is originally American, he is not unique to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service. Smokey is used for public education purposes in British Columbia as well. During my time working for BC's Wildfire Service, I have personally worn a Smokey the Bear suit at various community events. The highly recognizable Smokey the Bear always elicits excitement and participation wherever he appears. The ongoing Smokey campaign brings with it an important role for regular citizens to play in preventing and reporting wildfires.

In 2019, America's NPR outlined the history and impact of Smokey the Bear, who has been around for over 75 years. NPR emphasizes how this prolific campaign has shifted public opinion of wildfires toward prevention and suppression (Naylor, 2019). Scientists have dubbed the belief that all fires are bad as the "Smokey the Bear effect" (Naylor, 2019). The two embedded images depict Smokey's first poster (1944), and his changing look and demeanor (1951). Through these images, along with the lore of Smokey the Bear, we understand his purpose as a catalyst toward action. The continued use of Smokey compels regular citizens to defend the forest from the constant threat of wildfire.

Figure 4

Figure 5

In advanced liberal democracies, such as Canada and the United States, power is realized not only through regulation and enforcement, but also through the creation of citizens. Governmentality theorists Rose and Miller believe that "[p]ersonal autonomy is not the antithesis of political power, but a key term in its exercise… individuals are not merely the subjects of power but play a part in its operations" (Rose and Miller, 1992, pg. 174). Thus, Smokey the Bear can be seen as an example of Foucault's 'apparatus of security' as he advises the public to fulfil their role in preventing and reporting wildfires. Using Smokey as an example, governmentality is not solely a mechanism of social control, but can also behave as the careful and complex administration of specific knowledges by means of "…education, persuasion, inducement, management, incitement, motivation and encouragement" (Rose and Miller, 1992, pg. 175).

Furthering their discussion about governmentality, Rose and Miller (1992) describe what they call 'enclosures' and 'expertise' as two ways power is consolidated and realized in modern

society. In the context of wildfire suppression, 'expertise' and 'enclosures' can be understood respectively as the monopoly and consolidation of skill relating to wildfire suppression techniques within government organizations, as well as the moral authority that allows these organization to make decisions based on this skill. A practical example of an enclosure includes the mandated safety training all paid fireline staff need for which instructors require state-regulated accreditation (Government of British Columbia, n.d.e). Through these mechanisms, there becomes only one very controlled way to engage in wildfire suppression which is designed and regulated by a single governing body.

Disaster theorist Adi Ophir (2006) describes how highly institutionalized response agencies create moral imperatives during times of crisis. Ophir understands the professionalization of disaster response within State-sponsored response organizations to be "…places in which moral stakes and interests are most intensely articulated, institutionally embodied, and systematically pursued" (Ophir, 2006 pg. 96). As the wildfire suppression mandate is naturalized, the conditions of its regulation become imperatives and its political and ideological underpinnings are less and less apparent. Experts "…hold out the hope that problems of regulation can remove themselves from the disputed terrain of politics and relocate onto the tranquil yet seductive territory of truth" (Rose and Miller, 1992, pg. 188). The need to respond to wildfire emergencies is created by means of a moral imperative, and enclosures and expertise create conditions where the only organization with authority and expertise is the government. Because of this, local people are forcibly dependent on the government not only for wildfire suppression resources, but also for the permission to engage in suppression activities. Through professionalization and moral justification Ophir states: "large scale disasters challenge the very principle of sovereignty" (Ophir, 2006, pg. 104). Given this context, it is logical to assume that provincial and national wildfire policies and practices have the potential to undermine

Indigenous sovereignty in British Columbia during times of crisis through this same dynamic.

Through Foucault's governmentality theory (1994), I understand wildfires to be a site where power is both exercised and enforced. In the context of Cheslatta Carrier Nation's experiences of 2018 wildfires, I seek to understand how community members experienced wildfire events. Because I believe that lived experiences can contribute to lessons which will inform the future, I look next toward the history of Cheslatta Carrier Nation as a way to better understand the landscape and community for which this thesis is written.

History of the land and of the people

In 2018, Cheslatta territory and the surrounding area was a site of displacement as a result of wildfires. On August 15, 2018, the provincial government declared a State of Emergency which lasted 23 days (Government of British Columbia, n.d.d). This alert was in place as a result of the ongoing wildfires and wildfire suppression efforts across the province of British Columbia. The Babine complex, which consisted of the Nadina Lake wildfire, the Verdun Mountain wildfire, the Cheslatta wildfire, and the Cheslaslie Arm wildfire, all burned within Cheslatta territory displacing many community members and impacting many of peoples' homes. In addition to these fires, the Island Lake wildfire and the Shovel Lake wildfire, which was the largest on record for 2018, burned northeast of Cheslatta also contributing to the State of Emergency and the shortage of firefighting resources (Government of British Columbia, n.d.d). The map on page 9, shows just how prolific these fires were in size.

While the purple solid boundary shows Cheslatta Carrier Nation's Core territory, the area between its northern edge and François Lake is more densely populated with Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members and is known as the Southside. It includes Cheslatta's 'area of interest' post-1952. This area became of interest to Cheslatta after the construction of the Kenney dam flooded of their traditional lands permanently displacing community members.

“Many members of Cheslatta Carrier Nation live on 17 Indian Reserves scattered over a vast area known as the ‘Southside” (Cheslatta Carrier Nation, n.d.). The Southside includes the community of Southbank where Cheslatta Carrier Nation’s Band office resides. Cheslatta Carrier Nation has 360 members with 140 members living on Cheslatta reserves (Cheslatta Carrier Nation, n.d.). The map on page 10 depicts this area, including the location of Cheslatta’s reserves. Because Cheslatta’s reserves are scattered throughout the landscape of the Southside, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Southsiders live as neighbours. This geography contributes to an integrated community dynamic amongst the diverse group of residents that call it home.

On June 13, 2019 I first met Mike Robertson in Vanderhoof, BC. Mike is not a Cheslatta Band member, but lives on the Southside and is employed as Cheslatta’s Senior Policy Adviser. I had contacted him, along with Cheslatta’s Chief Corrina Leween, to propose a research collaboration about the 2018 wildfire season. While my interest in research related solely to the impact of wildfires in Cheslatta territory, Mike shared with me a compilation of his own research (Robertson, 1991). This literature allowed me to better understand Cheslatta and their relationship with their lands. Robertson’s work was compiled over the course of his 39 years working for and with Cheslatta Carrier Nation (Robertson, 1991). The documents he prepared told the story of Cheslatta Carrier Nation’s forced relocation due to the flooding of their territory in 1952 and affirmed that flooding and forced relocation is a primary and lasting impact for Cheslatta people and lands. In reviewing additional academic literature about Cheslatta Carrier Nation (Winkler, 2019; Buhler, 1998; Dawson, 2001), this was further reinforced. Though my research focuses on community experiences during the 2018 wildfire season, I found it imperative to first learn about Cheslatta’s 1952 relocation.

Cheslatta Carrier Nation territory lies within the Nechako watershed, which is now home to the Nechako Reservoir, created as a result of the 1952 construction of the Kenney Dam on the Nechako River (Wood, 2013). Maya Winkler’s 2019 MA thesis explores the impacts forced

relocation has had on Cheslatta people. She describes how the Kenney Dam was installed by the Aluminum Company of Canada (known then as Alcan, and now Alcan Rio Tinto) as part of the Kitimat Kemano Project (known as Kemano I). This project generates power for an aluminum smelter in Kitimat, BC. The following map, which was created by the Nechako Fisheries Conservation Program, provides a visual overview of the Nechako River system and Reservoir (Nechako Fisheries Conservation Program, n.d.). The Southside is part of this watershed and falls within its central area, north of Ootsa Lake and south of François Lake.

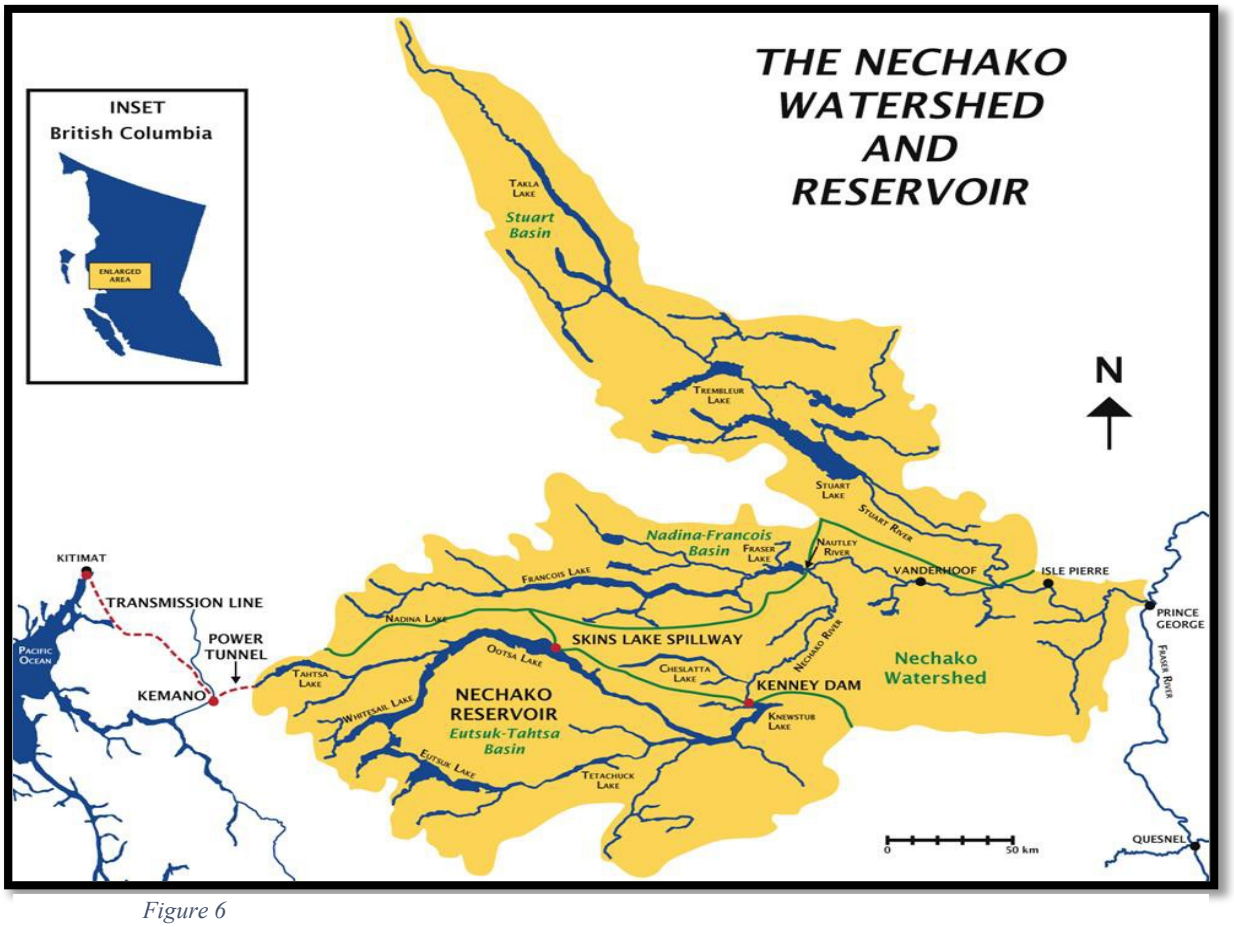

Figure 6

Because Winkler's thesis focuses specifically on how people navigate living after an experience of forced displacement, she describes the history and sequence of events which led to it. In the early 1950s, the push to generate power and produce aluminum was driven by rapid wartime development along with industry-government partnerships that privileged corporate interests and

generously granted permits to water. Winkler states: “Cheslatta homelands became a ‘sacrifice zone’ as the ideology of capitalism and colonialism legitimated their displacement and degradation of their social and material worlds” (Winkler, 2019, pg. 14). To make way for this major infrastructure project, Cheslatta people were forced out of their homes and off their lands with little notice or compensation and no support.

Examining the relocation from a legal perspective, *an analysis of the Cheslatta surrender* (Byl & Robertson, 1992) describes Cheslatta’s legal argument addressing the forced surrender of their lands. This document details of the series of events through which the British Columbia government legitimized the removal of Cheslatta people by permitting the rights to water. Byl and Robertson (1992) describe how Cheslatta Carrier Nation’s Chief’s signature was forged on official documents which paved the way for an expedited permitting process and the permanent surrender of land (Byl & Robertson, 1992, pg.11). Through a governmentality lens, generously awarding water permits became a mechanism for legitimizing the project and removing Cheslatta people. This process led to the forced relocation of a people from the lands which sustained their culture and way of life. These events reveal the values of the granting agency which failed to consider a Peoples’ way of life in favour of industrial interest and profit. *An analysis of the Cheslatta surrender* provides a roadmap for understanding the cruelty inflicted on the community and the means by which it was legitimized.

Mike Roberton’s (1991) research document *The story of the surrender of the Cheslatta reserves on April 21, 1952* describes how the Murray Lake Dam and the Kenney Dam were completed with neither notification nor consultation with Cheslatta leaders and how its effects have caused immense devastation to Cheslatta lands, displacement of their communities, and flooding of their sacred sites. Ever since 1952, whenever the Skins Lake Spillway overflows, water levels rise on Cheslatta Lake and flood Cheslatta cultural sites- including burial grounds (Robertson, 1991). Byl and Robertson describe how, after rebuilding previously flooded grave

sites, in 1992, "the newly built grave-houses were found, along with wooden crosses, floating in Cheslatta Lake. Rubbish, stumps, and foreign matter was again deposited on these sacred places" (Byl & Robertson, 1992, pg. 3). As Winkler writes, "[b]ecause of the frequent flooding of the Nechako Reservoir, the Cheslatta live in constant tension with a permanently changed landscape as the bones of their ancestors and memories of their way of life continues to wash ashore" (Winkler, 2019, iii). This continues to happen in present day (M. Robertson, personal communication, March 2, 2020).

Peter Dawson's 2001 doctoral dissertation examines the relocation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada from a human rights perspective. He includes details and stories from Cheslatta's 1952 eviction as part of this document. When writing about Indigenous Peoples' forced dispossession from land, Dawson states: "the long lasting impact of this process of collective identity dispossession cannot be underestimated" (Dawson, 2001, pg. 78). Details from Dawson's interviews with Cheslatta Elders reveal the negative impacts brought about by their personal experiences during, and after, the 1952 flooding and relocation. Reading through these, I had a glimpse into the experiences one generation back that have caused deep and lasting trauma to individuals and the collective community. These details are heartbreaking to read. While my research focuses on an entirely different event, I am acutely aware of the many parallel themes linking forced eviction due to flooding with the 2018 wildfires, including: the destruction of land, the displacement of people, and feelings of powerlessness. Not only are these traumas carried intergenerationally in people and communities; they are also inscribed on the land.

Along with Shawn Wilson (2008), I understand the world to function relationally with an interconnectedness between all beings, human and non. In *research is ceremony,* Wilson (2008) explains that "…there is no distinction made between relationships that are made with other people and those that are made with our environment" (Wilson, 2008, pg 87). Using relationality

as a theoretical tool situates my work on the land upon which it is focused and acknowledges the active role that land plays in shaping individual and collective human experiences. This interconnected relationship between humans and their environments is reflected in the writing of many Indigenous authors (Cajete, 2000; Little Bear, 2009), and central to many Indigenous worldviews. Inherent in this way of knowing is the belief that relationships extend beyond the physical and into the familial.

Tewa author and Professor Gregory Cajete (2000) describes how Indigenous knowledge systems predate Western science and bring with them a way to understand and express relationships between all beings. He writes:

> Animals and plants have ritual ways of interacting with one another, and each has a personhood, a sense of purpose, and inherent meaning expressed in many ways. In short, Native cultures understood and reflected in profound and elegant ways that 'we are all related'. (Cajete, 2000, pg. 178)

Cajete offers a comprehensive understanding and detailed information about the natural world and its relationships. In the context of this research, his focus on purpose informs my understanding of wildfires. While fires can be destructive and dangerous, Cajete's worldview invites a deeper dive. In thinking about his ideas, I would like to explore if any messages can be gleaned out of the 2018 wildfires in Cheslatta Carrier Nation territory.

In their work with several Anishnaabe Elders of the Pikangikum First Nation, Miller and Davidson-Hunt (2010) learned that, in an Anishnaabe context, fire is thought to have agency. During their interviews with Elders, several individuals classified fire into three separate categories, each distinct, depending upon its source and purpose. These include: Thunderbird fire originating from lightning, Anishnaabe fire originating from the Anishnaabe, and Whiteman's fire which can be understood as electricity (Miller & Davidson-Hunt, 2010). According to Elders, the periodic presence of Thunderbird fire is evidence that Creator is looking out for the people and for the land by allowing it a natural process of regeneration (Miller & Davidson-

Hunt, 2010). This Anishnaabe example demonstrates a Peoples' spiritual relationship to fire along with affirming their intentional use of fire on the land.

It is through Indigenous knowledge systems, which acknowledge the self-in-relation incorporating story, spiritual, and cosmological realms (Lake et al, 2019) that knowledge is affirmed and passed down to the next generation. Cajete (2000) uses the term 'Native science' to refer to Indigenous knowledge of the environment. He explains that "[n]ative science is born of a lived and storied participation with the natural world" (Cajete, 2000, pg. 2). While it is through this participation that Indigenous Knowledge is enacted, adapted and passed on, currently, there is an imbalance in the way knowledge systems are valued and how each is given authority (Simpson, 2004).

Margaret Kovach (2009) understands that the suppression of traditional land management practices is primarily realized through a dominant reliance on Western science. This is a tool of colonization. Kovach writes that "[i]n the colonisation of Indigenous people, science was used to support an ideological and racist justification for subjecting Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing" (Kovach, 2009, pg. 77). Cajete (2000) explains that diverse systems of knowledge production underpin both Indigenous knowing and Western scientific knowing. While Western knowledge systems provide a more mechanistic and biophysically technical understanding of the environment, Indigenous knowledge systems provide in-depth knowledge in context.

Leanne Simpson acknowledges the epistemic nature of colonialism and understands Indigenous Knowledge to be a tool of resistance. She writes:

> Until [colonization, colonial policies and the Canadian state's experiment with forced assimilation] are rectified, and Indigenous Peoples regain control over our territories and communities, Western science will continue to be the primary tool the dominant society uses to justify the destruction of the environment, and Indigenous Knowledge will continue to provide Indigenous Peoples with the foundation to resist. (Simpson, 2004, pg. 121)

In a dominant political and economic system that is based on defining the natural world as

resource, and utilizing resources for profit through extraction, the subjugation of Indigenous Knowledge systems aligns with the colonial subjugation of Indigenous Peoples, languages and lands. Because Western science is privileged, it is often used as a foundation for the creation of policy and governance. These "…rationalized expert systems disembed or remove social relations from local contexts of interaction, because when created, they are remote in time and space relative to the sites of implementation" (Caroll et al, 2006, p. 264).

Colin Sutherland, a former Parks Canada employee and researcher, states: "[t]he reordering of landscapes via institutions of colonial and capitalist control brought about a different set of anthropocentric relations, relations often (but not exclusively) articulated by the suppression of fire rather than the active use of it" (Sutherland, 2018, pg. 21). American scholar Andrea Smith explains how colonizers justified their theft of Indigenous lands on the grounds that Indigenous People did not properly "control or subdue nature" (Smith, 2005, pg. 56). Sutherland describes current management systems as an "…attempt to discipline nature…" (Sutherland, 2018, pg.19). In considering differing cultural relationships to fire, it is important to acknowledge that "[f]ire can be a force for good as it warms homes and stimulates grasses, but it can also be immensely destructive. The role of humans is not to control nature, but to maintain a balance between these opposing forces" (Kimmerer & Lake, 2001, pg. 38).

In the context of wildfire, I understand the proliferation of a widespread suppression mandate to be rooted in a specific worldview and to have impacts on the cultural landscape within which it is exercised. As Kimmerer and Lake state, "every landscape reflects the history and culture of the people who inhabit it" (2001, pg. 36). Both of these cultural practices exist within a web of physical, social, political, spiritual and economic relationships. As such, they reflect the values of communities and our collective relationship with the natural world. Writing about interviews conducted with Nlaka'pamux Elders in Lytton First Nation, researchers noted that "[First Nation- government] partnerships may go a long way toward supporting and

encouraging traditional fire use and knowledge and integrating these traditional contemporary fire use objectives into 'Western' or scientific fire science and management" (Lewis, Christianson & Spinks, 2018, pg. 149).

Sutherland (2018) advocates for a process of 'remembering' wherein the wisdom of the land and of the people who traditionally care for it are invited into contemporary wildfire management conversations and strategies. As the relevance and the value of Indigenous Knowledge becomes more and more apparent to natural resource managers and the Western scientific community, Indigenous People are increasingly being asked to share this information (Lake & Christianson, 2019). In suggesting the integration of Indigenous Knowledge into prescribed burn plans, Sutherland writes critically about the importance of building relationships first. The work required to revitalize and remember this marginalized source of cultural knowledge is complex. He writes:

> Memory is political, and fire is an opportunity for fire managers to remember differently, to consider how fire might be an opportunity to build not only new relationships with the planet, but with the people who have been excluded from land management processes. (Sutherland, 2018, pg. 24)

While integration of Indigenous Knowledge might seem like an inclusive step that recognizes its value, asking for this knowledge is not without its practical and political challenges.

Sutherland explains that knowledge relating to cultural burning practices and traditional uses of fire are "not always accessible or completely intact across the country, not are all communities willing (nor are they obligated) to share these memories with federal and provincial governments" (Sutherland, 2018, pg. 24). Though the integration of Indigenous Knowledge into contemporary resource management practices can be a powerful act of decolonization, gathering this knowledge is undeniably a complex process. Because colonial fire exclusion policies implemented by governments undermined traditional Indigenous land management techniques (Neale et al, 2019; Lewis, Christianson & Spinks, 2018; Carroll et al, 2010), accessing this

knowledge requires a substantial rebuilding of trust. Just as the connection between humanscapes and landscapes is important, the colonization of landscapes has subjugated entire knowledge systems and peoples. With respect to Cheslatta Carrier Nation, the flooding of the Nechako and displacement of the people has broken trust. It left an indelible mark on the land, and one that has lasting generational impacts on the people. The rebuilding of this trust is slow and incremental and requires reparations with both the lands and people.

In their book *Being together in place,* American scholars Larsen and Johnson (2017) write about how the flooding and disruption of land in Cheslatta has changed the community. They tell the story of the ongoing fight for justice for the Nechako River, and how it has brought Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together:

> The Nechako pulled Indigenous and settler-descended people into a decolonizing process that involved nonhumans of salmon, forests, and water as well; a difficult and unsettling process of unlearning colonial behaviour and finding a new sociability grounded in place. These engagements were at times challenging, frustrating, and provocative; at other times inspiring, productive and liberating. (Larsen & Johnson, 2017, pg. 39)

As part of their three-part anthology, Larsen and Johnson describe the fight for justice in the Nechako as a hopeful collaboration between diverse and community members, both Indigenous and non. Throughout the course of my time researching and writing, I was also working on the land in Cheslatta Carrier Nation territory. I spent days and weeks exploring the territory, which is characterized by expansive bodies of water and ever since 2018, by expansive fire scars. The way Larsen and Johnson write about the land and the community reflects many of the conversations and experiences I have had in Cheslatta. Both in their writing, and in my experience, the fight for justice for the Nechako watershed has seemingly galvanized the community and brought together individuals and families across difference. The community of the Southside, which includes Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Skin Tyee Nation and Nee-Tahi-Buhn Band, also includes a diverse non-Indigenous population of ranchers, farmers, loggers, and

trappers. It's cohesion between diverse individuals with different backgrounds is something that struck me as unique and special.

British social anthropologist Tim Ingold (2000) believes that relationships between humans and environments are inextricably linked to the way we relate to one another. As he writes about interactions between hunters and the landscapes they inhabit, Ingold states that "[t]here can be no radical break between social and ecological relations; rather, the former constitute a subset of the latter" (Ingold, 2000, pg. 60). Likewise, I believe that physical places have agency and can transform social relationships. Larsen and Johnson write:

> …the agency of place is educational- place teaches the intrinsic, life-supportive value of our being together and facilitates dialogue and relationship across ontological divides; its agency is also political- when threatened or damaged, place intervenes in the abstract space of state and corporate actors by calling people to its defense; and finally, at root, it is cosmogonic- place is both necessity and vehicle for the expression of Creation into many forms of life, and we come to know this "outside" world through our formative relationship with place. (Larsen & Johnson, 2017, pg. 13)

Though Larsen and Johnson acknowledge that individuals and communities shape the places where they live, this passage pushed me to rethink how a place can compel people toward action. As I delve deeper into research about the 2018 wildfires, I seek to acknowledge not only the active roles that community, individuals, and agencies played, but also the active role of the fire, the land, and their respective histories.

Lived experiences of wildfire

Provincially, after the record-breaking 2017 wildfire season, the Government of British Columbia recognized that the wildfire events encountered that summer were beyond the scale of anything previously experienced. The (2018) report *Addressing the new normal: 21st century disaster management in British Columbia* was commissioned by the Province and co-authored by George Abbott and Chief Maureen Chapman. This document is a roadmap that supports the

goal and vision of my research and gives context for understanding the goals of the Province. It also revisits recommendations made in the Province's 2003 report *Firestorm 2003: Provincial review* (Filmon, 2003). *Addressing the new normal* "…presents many opportunities for [the Provincial] Government to engage in true Nation-to-Nation relationships with the First Peoples of the province" (Abbott & Chapman, 2018, pg. ii). This document was generated through open houses, government stakeholder meetings, online feedback, and hours of conversation and is a collection of voices from all over British Columbia. The 108 recommendations it lists address many of the systemic and overarching issues in emergency response under four themes which are: Partnerships and participation, knowledge and tools, communications and awareness and investment (Abbott & Chapman, 2018). Abbott and Chapman acknowledge the political changes in British Columbia which include a new mandate which elevates the voices of Indigenous Peoples and seeks to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Addressing the new normal (Abbott & Chapman, 2018) recognizes that wildfire-related impacts to Indigenous lands have far reaching effects for Indigenous Peoples. It reads:

> Indigenous Peoples' lands and territories have been at the environmental, economic, social and cultural heart of their communities for thousands of years. Given the inter-connectedness between and among First Nations communities, this also means that not only will the effects of trauma be experienced by all First Nations directly impacted and their families, but through family ties extending across the land. (Abbot & Chapman, 2018, pg. 10)

While Indigenous Peoples are adversely impacted by large scale wildfire events across their territories because of their unique connection to their lands, they are also often positioned in geographic regions which made suppression efforts complex and challenging due to remoteness and lack of infrastructure. American scholar Rachel Luft points to the chronic lack of infrastructure, absence of capacity, and continued denial of Indigenous Nations' sovereignty as symptoms of the ongoing disaster of colonialism (Luft, 2016). Luft rejects the notion that acute

disasters are the unique problem during wildfire events, and broadens her approach to include a conversation around structural and systemic devastation leading to acute examples of disaster. Luft stresses that "[r]evised tribal disaster policy in the context of economic justice has the potential to create a more just response to sudden crisis. Only decolonization, however, addresses the original disaster" (Luft, 2016, pg. 817). In the British Columbia context, policy change is a potential solution to these acute problems, but does not address the underlying source of injustice- ongoing colonialism through the theft of land. To adequately address the original problem would require a recognition of Aboriginal title as well as the unbroken authority of Indigenous Nations to make decisions about how to govern their lands and communities.

When a wildfire threatens a community, residents "…can either evacuate well in advance of the fire front; they can prepare themselves and their property and stay; or they can wait until the fire front arrives and leave at the last moment" (Hadmer & Tibbits, 2005, pg. 81). While all three of these options exit, lessons learned during significant wildfire events in Australia have shown that the 'wait and see' middle option poses the most amount of risk to human life (Hadmer & Tibbits, 2005; Paveglio et al., 2008). Differing approaches to wildfire evacuations demonstrate "…different notions of who is primarily responsible for public safety" (McCaffrey et al., 2013, pg. 176). Removing the choice of rural residents to stay and defend their properties by means of mandatory evacuations places public safety in the hands of governments, and by extension the response agencies who enforce them. When public safety is viewed as a shared responsibility between citizens and governments, residents are encouraged to play a central role in maintaining their own safety and protecting their properties and livelihoods (McCaffrey et al., 2013). In stark contrast to Australia's "stay or go" approach, which encourages residents to either evacuate early or to stay and defend their properties as the fire front passes (Handmer & Tibbets, 2005) "…all fire management agencies in Canada recommend evacuations when public safety is in question" (Beverly & Bothwell, 2011, pg. 1).

In Canada, many First Nations communities are located in relatively remote areas surrounded by forest, As such, they are more likely to experience wildfire evacuations (Beverly & Bothwell, 2011). Recent wildfire research conducted in partnership with Whitefish Lake First Nation and Dene Tha' First Nation has shown that evacuations can be the most disruptive impact of a wildfire (Christianson et al. 2019; Mottershead et al. 2020). Specific areas of tension during the May 2011 wildfire evacuations in Whitefish Lake First Nation include: Concerns due to poverty, large intergenerational families, transportation issues compounded by cultural land-use activities, fear of loos of home compounded by existing housing shortages, information and a lack of media interest, health concerns, and most notably jurisdictional issues (Christianson et al, 2019). It is important to note that while BC Wildfire Service has expertise in wildfire suppression, and will provide recommendations about evacuation orders and alerts, these can only be issued by local governments and First Nations (Emergency Management BC, 2019). In the context of emergency orders on reserves, Luft (2016) critiques these processes through a decolonizing lens. She points out, the focus on "the details immediately surrounding a discrete emergency event in a context of permanent [colonial] disaster is short-sighted" (Luft, 2016, pg. 810). In the context of wildfire related evacuations, while First Nations have the jurisdictional authority to issue their own evacuation orders and alerts, the following example demonstrates how complex layers of colonialism can prevent true exercise of this political autonomy.

In Tsilhqot'in territory, issues around sovereignty were highlighted during the 2017 wildfire season when Chief Joe Alphonse of Tl'etinqox First Nation was asked to issue an evacuation order, and refused to do so asserting his "fundamental right to make decisions about protecting and defending the safety, health and well-being of [his] community" (Givetash, 2017). Alphonse had the right to withhold issuing an evacuation order. He chose to make a different decision based on his own assessment and knowledge of community safety. July of 2017, the media reported on tension building between Alphonse, the RCMP, and the Ministry of Children

and Family Services, alleging that an officer threatened to "remove all the children" (Givetash, 2017). In this instance, Chief Joe Alphonse was the only authority granted the right to issue an evacuation order for Tl'etinqox First Nation but was offered instead an ultimatum with the suggestion of forced removal of the Nation's children. Child welfare remains a responsibility of Provincial governments, even in Indigenous communities and on reserves (Government of British Columbia, n.d.f). The moral imperative Tl'etinqox First Nation faced, which was precipitated by the urgency of the wildfire situation, hijacked their political sovereignty and demonstrates jurisdictional tension felt by First Nations as a result of colonial governance systems. While the acute crisis of the wildfire and the wellbeing of children was at the forefront of this encounter, this incident highlight the need to address "…the larger, enduring crisis" (Luft, 2016, pg. 804) of colonialism by means of First Nations' sovereignty.

In 2017, "wildfires swept through Tsilhqot'in territory… and illuminated the issues that plague the inclusion of First Nation value systems in government-to-government relationships" (Verhaeghe, Feltes & Stacey, 2018, pg. 2). As a result, the Tsilhqot'in National Government commissioned a report titled *Nagwedîẑk'an gwaneŝ gangu ch'inidẑed ganexwilagh: The fires awakened us* (2018). Many of the challenges this report describes point to how poorly defined federal and provincial division of jurisdiction is when it comes to emergency services and First Nations. Throughout, widespread social, economic, spiritual and physical impacts experienced by Tsilhqot'in people are described in this reflective and proactive document. Its final chapter lists 33 'calls to action' which outline "…infrastructure requirements, pre-disaster agreements, land-based stabilization measures and dedicated financial resources through all stages of emergency management" (Verhaeghe, Feltes & Stacey, 2018, pg. 94). *Nagwedîẑk'an gwaneŝ gangu ch'inidẑed ganexwilagh*'s 'calls to action' were collected out of information gathered by means of 82 semi-structured interviews, two facilitated open Nation-wide sessions, and a handful of other sources (Verhaeghe, Feltes & Stacey, 2018). This report again reinforces the need for

communities to be heard, to speak for themselves and tell their own truths, and is useful comparative tool for understanding Cheslatta Carrier Nation's experiences during 2018.

On August 9th, 2018, as a result of wildfires, roughly 900 people were told to leave the south side of François Lake, BC. The following embedded map (TranBC, 2018) depicts the

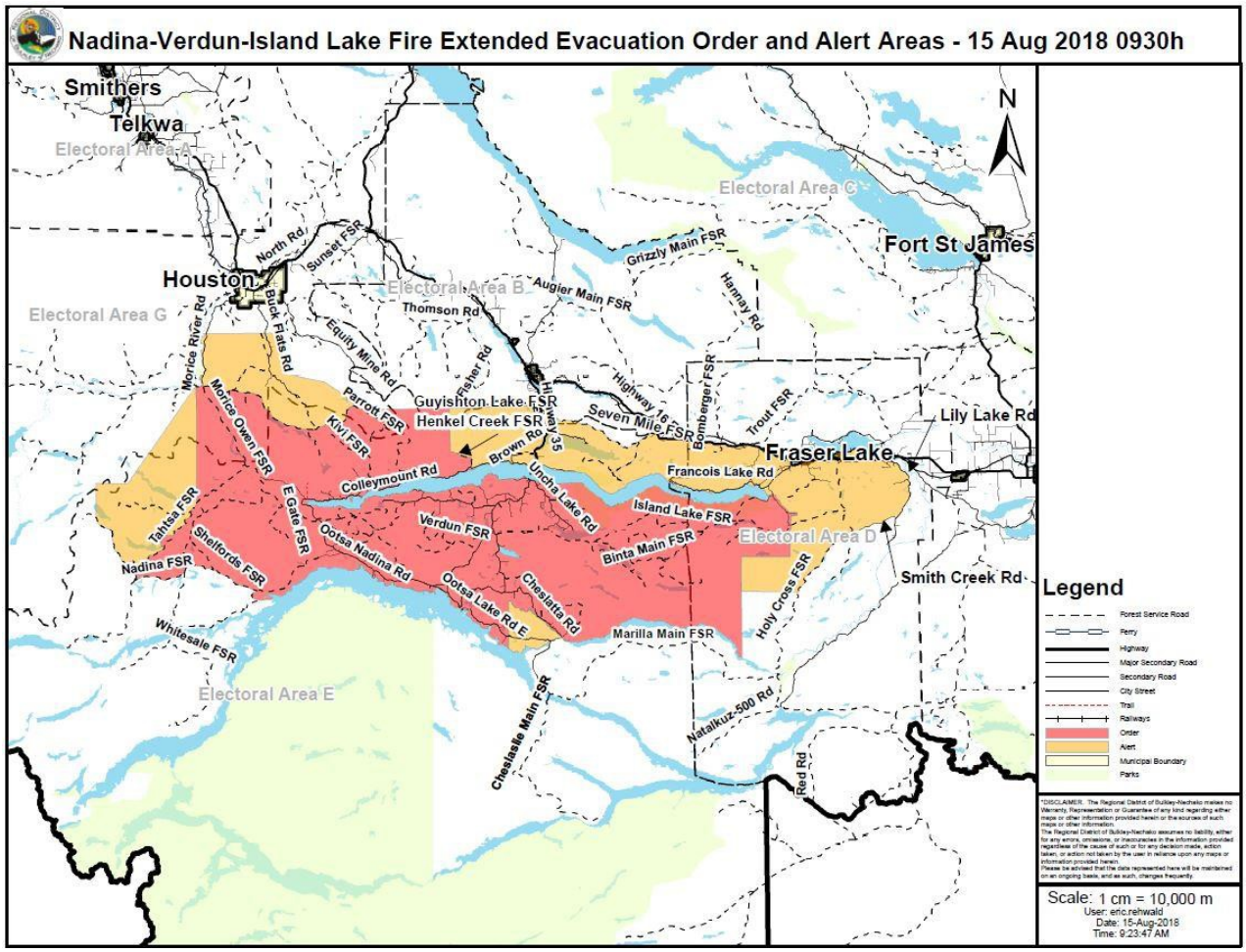

Figure 7

evacuation order area on August 15, 2018. These evacuation orders covered the entirety of the Southside where 140 Cheslatta Carrier Nation members, many on one of Cheslatta's 17 Indian reserves, reside (Cheslatta Carrier Nation, n.d.). One hundred Indigenous and non-Indigenous people chose to stay and defend their homes from the approaching fires (Ghoussoub, 2018). As reported by the CBC, the reasons behind their choices to stay included the protection of livestock, properties and livelihoods. Many of these residents who remained within the evacuation area felt

abandoned. Given that the residents south of François Lake are geographically isolated, it became extremely challenging to deliver vital supplies to those who stayed. The ferry service, which operates on François Lake connecting Burns Lake to the Southside, was impacted by the evacuation order and trucks carrying fuel and food were prevented from making deliveries. Though not the unique vehicle entry point to the Southside, other land routes were also blocked by RCMP checkpoints effectively cutting off all access to those not granted ferry passage. The Vancouver Sun reported that residents were calling for the Premier to intervene (Hoekstra, 2018).

Many people residing within Cheslatta territory are extremely independent and rely on the land for their livelihoods as ranchers, loggers, or farmers. One Wisteria resident described how frustrated people felt about the order to evacuate, which was amplified by the lack of support (Patterson, 2018). In one news article, a local resident who stayed behind to fight the fires was quoted stating that "…several local people were asked for their dental records during the wildfires" ("Officials' miscalculations cause chaos", 2018). This request was described as insulting and lacking context. As it described the RCMP's actions used to enforce the evacuation orders, an opinion piece published in the National Post January of 2020 stated that "[t]he RCMP had, in effect, imposed a blockade on law-abiding, taxpaying Canadian citizens whose sole transgression was attempting to save their own properties using their own equipment, money and sweat" (Unrau, 2020). The citizens who stayed in the Southside and worked tirelessly to protect property and infrastructure felt as though they were criminalized for doing so.

In the aftermath of the 2018 wildfire season, Nadleh Whut'en, a First Nation located approximately 130 km to the northeast of Cheslatta territory, released the report *Trial by Fire: Nadleh Whut'en and the Shovel Lake Fire, 2018* (Sharp & Krebs, 2018). This report was written in response to community impacts felt as a result of the 2018 Shovel Lake wildfire and summarizes the events and challenges from a community perspective. One of the major challenges *Trial by Fire* (2018) identified is described as follows:

> It's unacceptable that jurisdictional juggling continues to lead to the impoverishing of First Nations. The wildfires in the central interior of BC clearly demonstrated there is a difference in investment toward services and recovery between non-indigenous peoples affected by wildfire, as was seen in 2017, and indigenous peoples affected by wildfire in 2018. (Sharp and Krebs, 2018, pg. 50-51)

The 2018 wildfires burnt over 22% of Nadleh Whut'en traditional territory (Sharp & Krebs, 2018). *Trial by Fire* details how challenging it has been to secure recovery funding, and also explains how evacuations put financial strain on individuals who also faced instances of targeted racism during the time they were evacuated in Prince George.

Trial by Fire describes the process for providing provincial emergency management information to First Nations as inconsistent and unclear. While section 91 of the British North America Act of 1867 laid out Federal jurisdiction over "Indians, and lands reserved for Indians" (British North America Act, 1867, s 91(24)), changes to this Act in 1930, which came in the form of a series of Natural Resource Transfer Agreements, brought lands and natural resources for the four western provinces under Provincial jurisdiction (Hall, 2015; Constitution Act, 1930, s5). In 2018, this tension between multiple levels of jurisdictional control over lands and emergency services exposed how "First Nations continue to be a hot potato tossed between provincial and federal agencies" (Sharp & Krebs, 2018, pg. 41). In the Fraser Lake wildfire complex, of which the Shovel Lake wildfire was a part, *Trial by Fire* describes how communications with First Nations were passed off to the Regional District early on by the Incident Commander and that meetings were haphazardly communicated. Additionally, assumptions made when scheduling these meetings were problematic for Nadleh given that "…BCWS [British Columbia Wildfire Service] assumes that all First Nations in the area will meet in another First Nations community" (Sharp & Krebs, 2018, pg. 20). *Trial by Fire* lays out community-driven recommendations for increasing community safety and resilience post-fire. These demonstrate the increasing need for all levels of governments to work collaboratively toward solutions.

On a policy front, February 19, 2019 the Tsilquot'in National Government, the Government of Canada, and the Province of British Columbia signed a Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement (Tsilhqot'in Nation, Canada & British Columbia, 2018). While policy solutions are not within the scope of this research, existing agreements are useful tools to help understand the shifting nature of federal, provincial, and Indigenous government relationships. The Collaborative Emergency Management Agreement is the first of its kind in Canada, and illustrates a framework for working collaboratively on emergency management between every level of government in a cross-jurisdictional way. Unique policy solutions are directly informed by pressure resulting from the events and experiences in Tsilqot'in. This tangible political outcome is useful to reimagine what kinds of opportunities exist at the political level to address First Nations community concerns.

Summary

Finally, looking back on the 2017 and 2018 seasons, and forward to the ever increasing effects of climate change, wildfire related research is current. While "…human-caused 21st century threats intersect with those posed by Mother Nature, it is increasingly clear that no single solution can or will address the vulnerability faced by communities large and small across the province" (Abbot & Chapman, 2018, pg. 109). As the frequency and severity of wildfires increases, so does the urgency of finding solutions. This chapter presents scholarship using governmentality theory. Through this lens, times of crisis have "…provoked and facilitated the centralisation of domestic political power in the hands of state apparatus" (Rose and Miller, 1992, pg. 176). For communities who experience wildfires and their related suppression activities, "[h]ow a wildfire is put out matters to local residents; that the wildfire is put out matters most to the federal agency" (Caroll et al, 2006, pg. 264).

During wildfire response operations, governments, first responders and communities are

brought into deeper relationships with the land, while collectively forced into deeper relationships with one another. As I seek to understand the specific experiences of the 2018 wildfire season in the Southside, I note that "…everything needs to be seen in the context of the relationship it represents" (Wilson, 2008, pg. 43). Using a relationality lens to interpret literature provides a framework to understand the various components of this research topic and their contributing factors.

I believe that community safety is a concept that unites people, and that wildfire resiliency is a current and evolving issue in British Columbia. In order to understand place-based and experiential knowledge relating to the events from the 2018 wildfire season in the Southside, I draw on the stories and reflection of the people who lived through it. In this next chapter, I will detail my methodology for gathering and interpreting this information.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

I believe in the power of stories. I believe in the wisdom of lived experience. I believe that individual and collective healing requires deep listening. These values shape my approach to research and the methods of my inquiry. Specifically, I use a qualitative case study methodology to address the research questions this study poses. Because qualitative case study research seeks an in-depth understanding of a specific event (Creswell, 2013), this method of inquiry fits with my values, and my specific research goals. Professor, author and qualitative research expert John Creswell writes: "[t]he decision to focus on qualitative case studies stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing" (Creswell, pg. 29). This particular study aims to better understand how the 2018 wildfires impacted lands, individuals, and communities, as well as the relationships between them. As I seek to understand the individual and collective experiences of people living and working within Cheslatta Carrier Nation's territory during the 2018 wildfire season, insight and discovery is precisely the goal of this work.

The research process is an exercise in knowledge creation inherently bringing with it a specific history along with the researcher's assumptions, biases, and worldviews (Smith, 1999). I again draw on the concept of 'relationality', as explained by Shawn Wilson in *Research is Ceremony* (2008), to understand the depth of interconnectedness between knowledge creation and the physical landscape in Indigenous worldviews. Wilson points to the researcher's relations with people, relations with the environment/land, relations with the cosmos, and relations with ideas to demonstrate the depth and interconnectedness between ideas, values and actions.
I chose to use a qualitative case study because it allows for storytelling and insight. This methodological approach, along with the specific methods I use, demonstrate the respect and

reciprocal obligation I have to the community and to the land.

I believe that "[r]ather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationship with other people of things, we are the relationships that we hold and are a part of" (Wilson, 2008, pg. 80). Integrating reciprocity at every step of the research design integrates relationality and demonstrates the ethics I strive to embody. To do this, I ensured my process and product reflected the expectations of Chelsatta Carrier Nation throughout. I regularly checked in with community representatives making sure that we shared the same understanding of my role and this project's goals. I remained flexible with my process and my timelines allowing participants the time and space to consider this work and their participation in it. I also acknowledged the value of lived experience throughout by giving thanks to those who shared their story, and by treating each story with respect. I demonstrated reciprocity in concrete ways acknowledging and sharing the research benefits back with Cheslatta Carrier Nation and all of the research participants.

Though case study research narrows the scope of inquiry and defines its boundaries, defining the boundaries of this particular case study is deceptively complex. Professor and author Sharan Merriam (1998) states that the "… case, might be selected because it is an instance of some concern, issue or hypothesis" (pg. 28). While I have defined the temporal focus of this study to the 2018 wildfire season, and defined it geographically by the boundaries of Cheslatta Carrier Nation's traditional territory, I recognize that individuals and communities may offer differing perspectives on where the boundaries of this case should be drawn based on their diverse histories, worldviews, and relationships. To honour this, interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format. Participants were free to suggest additional topics and to elaborate on them. It is through the questions I suggest that I maintained my original research focus.

Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains that "different orientations toward time and space, different positioning within time and space, and different systems of language for making time and space 'real' underpin notions of past and present, of place and of relationships to land" (Smith, 1999, pg. 57). Living through a wildfire may bring up previous memories, or trigger individuals and communities who experience these events to make associations between other places and spaces. My definitions of what falls within the scope of this study may vary from those of the research participants. This potential discrepancy blurs the discreet nature of a well-defined 'case'. I chose to draw boundaries around this particular case for practical reasons, though I understand them to be permeable and rooted in my own particular point of view.

Because my qualitative research design includes working with a community, I had to remain extremely flexible in my process. Not only was I working toward completing an MA thesis, but I was building a new relationship based on trust and mutual respect with a community I am not a part of. This chapter describes my research process from start to finish. I describe each step I took; from reaching out to Cheslatta, to building a relationship, to inviting participants for interviews, to conducting interviews, and finally to interpreting them. Throughout this work, my process shifted many times. I found that I had to be extremely adaptive and creative due largely, but not exclusively, to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic which emerged concurrent to this project. Throughout, I relied heavily on my family, my peers, and my extended social and academic network for whose support I am eternally grateful.

How I met Cheslatta

The choice to approach Cheslatta Carrier Nation was one I made early on in my research process. While I knew that I wanted to work with an Indigenous Nation whose territory had been affected by the 2018 wildfires, I also wanted to make sure that I could visit the community with whom I worked reasonably quickly by vehicle. Given that I would be working full time

throughout the duration of this research, the logistics of being present in community to support the development of personal relationships made up a large part of my choice to approach a Nation geographically close to me. I was hoping to conduct all interviews in person, thus wanted to work in close proximity to my home, which was then Vanderhoof. Because of their locations, I identified a handful of Indigenous communities early on during my planning phase. I made plans to further refine this list before reaching out to propose the research collaboration.

As part of this initial planning process, I reviewed maps of the 2018 wildfire perimeters noticing the location of First Nations communities. Impacts to the area south of François Lake were immediately evident. This geographic area (the Southside) is home to a diverse population of ranchers, Mennonite communities, three distinct First Nations, and various rural residents. It is a remote area is serviced by a ferry which provides vehicle access across François Lake. One of the First Nations in this area, Cheslatta Carrier Nation, has a traditional territory which includes the communities of Southbank, Grassy Plains, Danskin, Takysie Lake, Uncha Lake, Tatelrose, Cheslatta, Ootsa Lake, Wisteria, Marilla, and several rural settlements. In 2018, the Verdun, the Cheslatta and the Nadina Lake wildfires all burnt in the Southside leaving vast fire scars (Government of British Columbia, n.d.d). Please see a map on page 9 which includes fire perimeters from the 2018 wildfires, the map on page 10 which depicts the Southside.

The Southside's 2018 wildfires caused the sky to blackout and the streetlights to come on midday in Vanderhoof, which I experienced. Having breathed in the smoke from these fires, I now wanted to better understand their personal and collective impacts through my research. With that as my goal, I reached out to Cheslatta Carrier Nation. I sent an email to Chief Corrina Leween, to Cheslatta's Senior Policy Advisor (Mike Robertson), and to the Nation's forestry staff which introduced myself and my research interest, and invited them into a conversation about a research collaboration. Mike Robertson quickly replied and invited me to join him as a guest of Cheslatta Carrier Nation for the first in the most recent series of Rio Tinto Water

Engagement initiative workshops in Vanderhoof on June 13, 2019.

The Rio Tinto Water Engagement workshop where I first met Mike Robertson spanned a full day, and brought together a diverse group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members, business owners, land users, and government representatives. As I observed this session and listened to the passionate comments of participants, I came to understand how the impacts of flooding and displacement are ongoing for people living within the Nechako watershed, including Cheslatta members. Though industry-community engagement projects such as this one are not new to communities with a shared interest in the health of the Nechako watershed, attending this form of engagement was a first for me. Throughout the course of an eight hour day I heard about community frustrations, their vision, and their passion for the Nechako River system. What stuck with me was the shared experience of loss held by such diverse groups of people. The conversations that I witnessed that day shed light on the ongoing impacts that resulted from the 1952 construction of the Kenney Dam on the Nechako River.

Upon reflection, Mike's choice to have me join him as a guest of Cheslatta Carrier Nation was quite deliberate. Understanding the immense and devastating impacts that damming, flooding, and relocation have had, and continue to have, for Cheslatta people was foundational for me to build a good working relationship with community members and leadership. During breaks in the day's activities Mike asked me questions about myself, my work, and my research goals and at the end of the day he gave me permission to include Cheslatta Carrier Nation in my research design. I am grateful for this welcoming invitation into a research relationship. Since that date, Mike has been providing perspective and guidance for my research and makes up one third of my thesis committee. From a traditional positivist research perspective, the choice to include Mike in my research at various levels could be viewed as a compromise of my research's objectivity (Read, Greaves, & Kirby, 2017). Because I believe in the relational nature of knowledge production, my choice to seek advice and guidance from a local person was

intentional. I believe that, as a community outsider, the depth and quality of interview data would not have been possible without the advice and assistance of a Southsider. Acknowledging the subjectivity of knowledge creation, I chose to include a trusted community insider in my process.

Professionally, the spring of 2019 brought a career change for me when I took a new position working as a First Nations Relations Advisor on the Wildfire Rehabilitation Team out of Smithers, BC. This position was with the provincial government and brought me into a professional relationship with Cheslatta Carrier Nation. Because of this career shift, throughout my second year of MA course work I was often working out on the land in the Southside. I would hike, fly, drive and quad many fireguards[1] while I simultaneously researched, read and learned about the area's history and from Cheslatta Carrier Nation's staff. At times, navigating these two roles was challenging. Not only was I physically exhausted due to the high amount of field work, but I had to pay special attention to conduct myself ethically in both professional and academic settings. To do this, I had to be very mindful about how I was communicating. I used only my government email for work communications, and only my UNBC email for academic research. I chose to disclose my dual role to all potential participants in order to ensure transparency.

Being on the land so frequently was instrumental in providing context for my work given that many of the places that participants referenced during research interviews were no longer just points on a map to me. These places were now sounds, smells and held more significance than they ever could before. During my time working in the Southside I made observations about the land, learned about specific cultural sites and values, and visited many of the geographic

[1] Fireguards are machine made control lines constructed with heavy equipment as part of wildfire suppression efforts which are constructed using heavy equipment. Because of their nature and purpose, these lines cross over impact Crown land, private land, parks and rec sites, and reserve lands alike. These lines often leave large scars and require remediation work (called wildfire rehabilitation) to mitigate the impacts of erosion, invasive species, increased access, increased fire hazard and impacts to archeological and cultural sites.

features that make up Cheslatta's traditional territory.

Over the (almost) two years that I worked with the Wildfire Rehabilitation Team, I reached out to all three the First Nations in the Southside and had various conversations about impacts to cultural and economic values as well as opportunities for collaboration throughout the wildfire rehabilitation process. In creating and implementing rehabilitation plans, I worked with Cheslatta Carrier Nation's forestry team. Throughout this time, I gained insight into Cheslatta's values, their innovative business practices, and their lands. Though I felt that I was getting to know more about Cheslatta and the Southside because of this time spent on the land, what still remained elusive to me were stories from the people who care for it. With that curiosity, I embarked on the interview stage of my research to put the pieces together and fill in these critical gaps.

Research Planning

Nêhiýaw and Saulteaux author Margaret Kovach (2009) states: "[f]or story to surface, there must be trust" (Kovach, pg. 98). Because of this, my initial intention with this research project was to spend a significant amount of time physically present in the community. I was hopeful that spending time and becoming familiar with community members would give me the chance to develop relationships and to build trust. I am not a Southside community member. As an outsider and a new researcher, my ability to introduce myself and to identify participants was not straightforward. Navigating this process became a source of anxiety and felt daunting. I had many apprehensions including: 'Who will be interested in this study?', and 'is this of value to the community?' Because of these struggles, I chose to seek direction from Mike Robertson at the research design phase. The guidance he provided was instrumental in building my confidence as a researcher and in moving the community portion of my work forward.

In designing this study, in addition to ethical processes laid out by UNBC's Research

Ethics Board, I also adhered closely to my own set of ethical principles. British researchers Piper and Simons (2005) explain this idea as they write about situated ethics. While ethical principles are a frame of reference for decision making, "[e]thical practice depends on how the principles are interpreted and enacted in the precise socio-political context of the research" (Piper & Simon, 2005, p. 58). Because this study was a collaboration with Cheslatta Carrier Nation and examined events which took place in the Southside, I chose to rely on Mike Robertson throughout for community-based advice and perspective. I was intentional and deliberate with each step of this project's' design and receptive to the feedback that Mike Robertson provided. If something did not feel right to me, I paused for reflection to ask myself why. At the design stage, one of my initial reflections had to do with my choice of topic.

The wildfire season of 2018 was record-breaking in British Columbia. Many people were displaced, and Cheslatta Carrier Nation and the Southside were at the heart of some of the largest and most active wildfires in the province (Government of British Columbia, n.d.d). As such, my research topic explored some potentially traumatic moments and memories. When asking and writing about events so significant, I remained aware of the potential to re-traumatize participants. Prior to interviewing participants, I connected with a community mental health clinician who works in the Southside for the Carrier Sekani Family Services. This individual offered to be a contact for Cheslatta members who needed support throughout my study. Additionally, I compiled a list of accessible community mental health services, which serve both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, to share with participants post-interview. This step was important for me to ensure that any mental health risks participants might experience during the interview were minimized, and that people felt safer throughout the duration of the study.

Redesign and implementation

One can never plan for the emergence of a global pandemic when designing a research process. Because the timing of my field work coincided with the emergency of COVID-19 and its related restrictions, I was forced to change my methods in order to adhere to both BC Public Health and UNBC guidelines. I had to cancel my travel plans, alter my community engagement strategy and halt all in-person research. This was difficult and emotional since the design of this project specifically incorporated extended time in community and face-to-face relationship building. I believe in the power of human connection, and without the ability to personally greet one another and look interview participants in the eye, this portion of my research design was severely compromised.

During the spring and summer of 2020, I was faced with some difficult choices about whether to continue with this work in a completely altered way, or to put this project on hold indefinitely as I awaited the global pandemic restrictions to lift. In conversation with my thesis supervisor and community members, I chose to continue with my research and adapt my methods. Because I had already made a commitment to Cheslatta Carrier Nation, I chose not to postpone or cancel this project. I recognize that this work has been impacted because of COVID-19, but I believe that through these times, we all must find a way to adapt to adverse conditions. Just as interview data revealed stories of resilience, creativity and strength, I put my faith in the process and in my creative spirit to carry on with this work.

To continue with this project, I knew I would have to identify participants I did not already know, and was not likely to meet. With the ability to be present in community and network in-person unavailable, I began by interviewing participants with whom I was already familiar. I found it most straightforward to start with these individuals in order to build confidence and gain some experience conducting interviews. During interviews, I asked

participants if they had any suggestions for who else I should talk to. This technique is called the 'snowball effect' (Atkinson & Flint, 2001) and can help researchers find interview participants in hard to reach populations and circumstances. I found this method to be the most suitable way of connecting with participants because of the close-knit nature of the Southside and the relatively small population size. I knew that each interview participant was likely to know many diverse individuals with stories that could contribute to this study. The first three interview participants provided names and phone numbers of potential additional participants, some of whom ended up being included in this study. Additionally, Mike Robertson sent out an email to various community members introducing me and my project. I got an excellent reception based on this introduction, and I attribute the momentum my study gained to his introduction.

I chose to reach out to individuals who represented a diverse group, taking community role, culture, geographic location and profession intro consideration. Whether the individual had responded to Mike's initial introduction email, and the amount of times their names were mentioned in previous interviews also contributed to my choice for which individuals I invited to participate. Once I identified a small number of potential participants, I sent out email invitations. I waited to either hear back from these people, or until a few weeks had passed without response before inviting additional participants. If I heard back from the individual, I sent a copy of my informed consent form and a list of suggested questions to help each person decide if they would like to do the interview. In providing a space of comfort for participants, I offered the choice to either be interviewed alone or with another person of their choosing. As such, three of the interviews I conducted had two participants.

Because the community of the Southside is small and most people are familiar to one another, I found it helpful to ask people I already knew to connect with potential participants and introduce me and my project. If an interviewee suggested someone for me to reach out to, I

asked to have them introduce the project and my work prior to me contacting that person. I found that having a shared personal connection was key to building trust with community members and securing interviews. This technique is called 'chain referral' (Atkinson & Flint, 2001) and can help researchers develop a shared connection with potential participants, thus increasing trust. I chose not to send out a large number of invitations at once given the possibility that each interview would reveal additional potential interview participants and change my next course of action. Notably, one participant responded to an email interview invitation three months after I sent it. This was a welcome addition and became the final interview for this project.

I ended interviewing thirteen individuals represented in ten interviews. The participant group was made up of: Five individuals working for Cheslatta, including one of Cheslatta's two elected Band Council Members; three business owners who represent two separate businesses in the Southside; two ranchers and trappers; the president of a local community forest association who also worked with BC Wildfire Service's Incident Command team throughout the 2018 wildfire season; a Mental Health Clinician with Carrier Sekani Family Services; and one anonymous Cheslatta Carrier Nation member. Out of these thirteen interview participants, three are Indigenous, and two are Cheslatta members.

Adapting my research methods to respect COVID-19 restrictions had an impact on this project. I found it challenging to identify participants and develop a rapport without the ability to meet community members and be visible in the Southside. Though I did not experience a shortage of interview participants for this study, the demographic shifted from my original focus. I did not get the chance to interview as many Indigenous participants as planned. As such, my second research question "How did the 2018 wildfires impact Cheslatta Carrier Nation members' relationships to land?" was not fully explored. Despite these limitations, this research project did produce many in-depth interviews about the other three research questions with a diverse range of participants.

To conduct interviews, I used recorded phone conversations as well as video conferencing technology. I found that most participants were more comfortable with a phone call rather than a video call. This varied based on each individual's previous experiences with technology and their familiarity with the specific online platform I was using. I suspect that another contributing factor uniquely affecting participants who reside in the Southside was the lack of connectivity. Many areas in the Southside do not yet have cell service and internet connectivity is also sparse. The lack of connectivity was a common theme that emerged from interview data and would have prevented select individuals from taking a video call in their private residence. In my initial interview invitation, I offered both of these two options. I did not push for one over the other, but rather offered participants the choice without judgement.

As part of the initial invitation, I provided potential interview participants with a copy of my informed consent form by email. This form laid out all of the steps I would take to safeguard their privacy. Most participants signed, scanned, and returned this form to me prior to our interview. Select individuals opted to review it together at the beginning of our interview as I recorded their verbal consent. Traditionally, qualitative research has required personal identities and identifiers to be changed for confidentiality (Reid, Greaves & Kirby, 2017). This practice allows for the protection of participants, but does not allow for their knowledge to be attributed to them. In *Decolonizing methodologies,* Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes about the lack of autonomy in representation as a struggle Indigenous Peoples face globally as a direct result of colonization. Akin to Smith, I believe that "[r]epresentation is important as a concept because it gives the impression of 'the truth'" (Smith, 1999, pg. 37). Because I recognize that all knowledge is subjective and embedded in its cultural and social context, I offered participants the option to have their name published. I believe that requiring stories and knowledge to be divorced from their source removes much of the social and familial context which gives them meaning.

All but two participants wanted their name in my thesis. Again, I did not attach any stigma to this personal decision, nor ask for anyone to explain their choice. As such, two of the participants have been assigned a pseudonym. Because the population of the Southside is so small, altering identifiable features in an individual's story is not easy. The process of anonymizing these two interviews was an ongoing conversation between myself and the participants given that many elements of the information they shared had potential to reveal their identities. Once they were satisfied with the steps I was taking, they consented to have their stories included. Linda Tuhiwai Smith would like Indigenous Peoples "…to be able to exercise what is viewed as a fundamental right, that is to represent ourselves" (Smith, 1999, pg. 151). While I am still authoring this thesis, and have a great amount of control over representation, these intentional steps were included in recognition of the inherent right each participant has over their own representation.

I used a series of semi-structured interviews to gather data. Prior to each interview, I provided a list of open ended questions to participants, without the expectation of interviews rigidly adhering to their specific wording or order. A semi-structured format is particularly useful in qualitative studies as it allows interviewers the flexibility to respond and adapt to the worldview and unique perspective of each participant (Merriam, 1998). The topics of these interview questions focused on events that took place during the 2018 wildfire season within Cheslatta Carrier Nation territory, including their post-1952 area of forced relocation.

In creating the suggested questions for each interview participant, I carefully considered each individual's role, their geographic location, and any stories I had heard during previous interviews. I provided each participant (or pair of participants in three instances) between eight and twelve individualized open ended questions in order for them to understand the nature of the conversation I was hoping to have. I let each participant know that these questions were merely suggestions, and that they could pass on any of them. Some of my questions were common to

every interview participant; for example my opening question 'please introduce yourself and tell me about your role in the community', while some were unique to each individual. My goal was to have interview participants tell their story from the 2018 wildfire season, and then to reflect back on the contributing factors that shaped their experiences. I ended by asking each participant about their vision and goals for the future.

Though the questions I asked were unique to each interview participant, I have included a list of sample questions below, for which all of my questions shared themes:

- Please introduce yourself. What is your role in the community?
- Do you have any experience with emergency management and firefighting? Would you please describe these?
- Were there any particular challenges unique to 2018? What sticks out for you the most?
- How did the various response agencies work together during this time?
- How was the professional wildfire response and community support? Was there anything that went particularly well or particularly poorly?
- What was your involvement with Cheslatta Carrier Nation during this time? How do you think emergency response organizations should engage with rural and Indigenous communities?
- What can be improved about how communities and governments manage for wildfire?
- How has life been post-2018? What has changed?
- How is the community of the Southside healing? Can you share some ideas about this process?
- What is your vision for the future?

Each interview trajectory varied greatly depending on the specific experiences and perspective of each individual. In the interest of transparency, I chose to disclose that I am a long-term BC Public Servant prior to each interview. This likely influenced some of the conversations I had given than there were many individuals who expressed strong emotions with regard to the way the province responded to the 2018 wildfires in the Southside. When participants expressed a strong emotion, be it loss, anger, or frustration, I asked them to explore the reasons behind these reactions with follow up questions. As time went on, and I got more experience interviewing, I became more skilled at posing probing questions. I became more

adept at immersive listening without being distracted by formulating my next question. In many cases, I did not need to ask questions at all given the natural ebb and flow of conversation and the willingness of participants to speak freely about their experiences. I took only brief notes throughout each interview, pausing to record the majority of my reflections once I hung up the call.

Due to my professional role and past work experience, I am familiar with forestry practices and with the operational elements of firefighting. As such, I found that I was able to engage in some deeper discussions with select participants. Participants who were actively engaged in firefighting provided very specific stories and examples during their interviews. For example, I was able to talk at length about specific concerns one participant brought up around shifting forestry practices and prescribed burning because I am familiar with the technical terminology related to this topic. I was also able to engage in discussion about some specific concerns another participant brought up regarding firefighting tactics because I am already familiar with firefighting principles. Because of my familiarity with the language and concepts of wildfire and forestry, I was able to understand the messages select participants expressed without asking for extensive clarification. I was able to ask informed probing questions leading to a deeper understanding of these participants' stories.

Throughout the process of contacting and interviewing participants, I drew heavily upon St:olo scholar Jo-ann Archibald's concept of becoming 'story-ready' (Archibald, Lee-Morgan & Santolo, 2019). Archibald advises researchers to approach Indigenous knowledge with respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence- also known as the four 'R's (Archibald, Lee-Morgan, & Santolo, 2019). I believe this approach, though particularly imperative in an Indigenous context, is also useful for research in any other context. I found myself feeling extremely vulnerable as I reached out to strangers asking to be told stories about their lives. Upon reflection, many of the apprehensions and insecurities I experienced throughout this process

were rooted in seeking out ways to implement Archibald's four 'R's. I did not want to engage in extractive research where the community does not benefit. I did not want to ask for intimate and personal information from participants without offering them a tangible benefit.

To address these apprehensions, I reached out to members of my MA cohort. This small group of students were undergoing similar processes. We had some online conversations about the progress we were all making and the things we were feeling. I was able to rely on my colleagues, who had become friends, to work through my own worries and apprehensions about my research. Much like Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes, I was understanding that "…indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity" (Smith, 1999, pg. 5). Through these discussions I was reminded of my need to relinquish any investment in a particular outcome. Once I began trusting myself and trusting the process participants responded well. My confidence was reflected back to me by research participants and I began feeling more secure in my interactions. Allowing my curiosity to drive my research required me to let go of my self-doubt.

During interviews, many participants prompted me, answering questions without me asking them. They elaborated on the questions I posed and suggested new topics I had not yet considered. There was no shortage of topics to explore in any of the interviews. It seemed that participants had specific stories and very specific messages that they wanted to express. I understood this to be a positive affirmation of the community's support for my work. While my original intention with this project was to improve the relationship between emergency response organizations and Cheslatta Carrier Nation through understanding lived experiences of wildfire, I began to see another benefit that my project was bringing. It had become a platform and an opportunity for participants to share and process significant personal and collective experiences.

Throughout the interview process, I was surprised by the connection I felt with people who I had never met. It was amazing to feel so immersed in these stories and to learn about participants' complex and emotional experiences and ideas over the phone and video. One

interview in particular was quite emotionally impactful. The participant shared details about her spiritual and cultural connection to land and how wildfires have significantly changed these. During this interview, I realized that I usually rely on non-verbal communication to navigate complex emotional terrain. As this participant shared deeply personal information, I was overcome with immense gratitude for witnessing her story. Because we had never met in person and were only meeting over the phone, I found it challenging to convey my gratitude without eye contact and non-verbal cues. As a method to thank participants in a tangible way, I offered a cash gift after each interview. This was not intended as a payment, rather a token of my gratitude for their willingness to participate in the study and share their experiences.

Throughout this project, many of the stories participants shared helped me to better understand the human impacts of the 2018 wildfire season. As I gained more information, I felt as though I was 'connecting the dots'. I had a mechanistic and factual understanding of the events of the 2018 wildfire season based on my own lived experience and prior research, but the stories and ways in which they were told to me brought everything to life. Each story I would hear related in some way to every other story, and allowed me to glean more meaning from all of the interview data as a whole. Throughout my interview process it felt like my thesis was moving me from two to three dimensions.

'Community' redefined

As I identified and invited interview participants into this study, I found that my expectations going into this work had been too rigidly defined. Initially, I had hoped to conduct the majority of interviews with Cheslatta members. I had not considered the direction I would get from Mike Robertson to interview a more diverse group. Based on the list of key community players he suggested, I contacted individuals who were most involved in responding to wildfires in various ways. This group included conversations with Indigenous and non-Indigenous

residents alike. When talking to non-Indigenous participants, I learned that the broader community of the Southside shares many values and experiences with Cheslatta Carrier Nation. These include a connection to land and a fierce sense of pride in community. The majority of non-Indigenous participants did not feel the need to articulate the relationship between themselves and Cheslatta Carrier Nation, stating simply that it is one community. The Indigenous participants with whom I spoke shared this sentiment and also described the Southside and Cheslatta Carrier Nation as cohesive and inclusive. I heard stories about times when Cheslatta Carrier Nation assisted non-Indigenous residents and business owners, and other times when this same dynamic was reversed.

Because of its specific geographic qualities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members live as neighbours in the Southside. This contributes to the interwoven nature of its community dynamics. Nyree Hazelton, the community Mental Health Clinician for Carrier Sekani Family Services, described the nature of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the Southside to me. She said: "I know that we designate and differentiate between the non-Indigenous and Indigenous on the Southside, but really everyone is all together… And that's one thing that Cheslatta does is they bring in everybody. Like you are part of their family, even though technically you're not". Throughout the process of identifying and interviewing research participants, my initial ideas about who and what was relevant to my research topic shifted. Regardless of my initial expectations, the individuals represented in this study are a diverse group which all have unique experiences in relation to the 2018 wildfire season. Though none of the participants in this study expressed a distinct Indigenous/ non-Indigenous dichotomy when describing their experiences, I must acknowledge the ongoing impact of colonialism. In recognition of how widely its impacts are felt by Indigenous People, I have centred Indigenous voices and experiences throughout this thesis.

Member checking

Once I had compiled all of the audio versions of the interview data, I chose to transcribe each one into a written document. Because the ten interviews ranged in duration from forty five minutes to two hours and twenty seven minutes, I had over fourteen hours of recorded data to work through. I chose to use a transcription software to save time and maximize productivity. The transcription software was very helpful. Despite using this tool, I still had hours of editing to ensure that the written versions of interviews matched the audio recordings more precisely. This process was particularly challenging for the three interviews that had more than one participant. During those interviews people often talked over one another and the quality of the recording was weakened. I also found that some of the interviews were challenging and emotional to listen to again. Not only was I critical of my own interview techniques, but some of the stories shared with me were very impactful. Listening to these, I was struck with the weight of my personal responsibility. I wondered how I was going to properly honour these important and emotional stories. Finding ways to enact Archibald's (2019) four 'R's- respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence- was at the forefront of this emotional response. I took a second round of observational notes during my editing process, reflecting on these ideas throughout.

I sent a copy of the transcriptions back to each interview participant via email and offered each participants a chance to review the document. During this process, it was brought to my attention that my original informed consent process did not account for the use of an online transcription service. To remedy this oversight, I submitted an amendment to the UNBC's Research Ethics Board which addressed this lapse in process. After requesting a secure deletion of the data from the transcription service's server, I emailed each participant whose interview was uploaded to the transcription server detailing the amount of time it was there and all potential associated risks. I asked for their written consent to continue using their interviews in this project. Because of this oversight, one participant (not listed as part of the above group)

withdrew from the study. Though I regret missing this step in my original application and informed consent process, I believe that the trust I had already established with interview participants carried our relationship through. This process highlighted the ongoing and relational nature of informed consent, which I now understand to be a conversation over time.

Reaffirming participants' continued informed consent was something I exercised in multiple stages throughout my data collection process. I checked back with participants who consented to have their name used when I shared their interview transcript. I wanted to provide another opportunity for participants to have their identity anonymized once they were able to review the contents of their interview. If participants had any apprehension about my representations of them or their story, I offered the option to review portions of my findings chapter in which their story is either mentioned or they are quoted. Implementing the First Nations Principles of OCAP: Ownership, control, access, and possession (First Nations Information Governance Centre, n.d.) was an iterative process by which I exercised transparency at all stages and checked in regularly with participants and my thesis committee. Integrating community representation (Mike Robertson) into my thesis committee was a deliberate step to ensure that community access and control of data were thoroughly addressed. To address ownership and possession, my research notes (with the exception of those interviews which requested anonymity), were given to Cheslatta Carrier Nation for storing in the community archives. The recordings of interviews were offered to each participant.

Data analysis

Once I had all of the interviews transcribed, I moved to data analysis and began working through a thematic analysis process. I chose not to use software for this. I listened to each interview again while reading its transcript and taking notes in the margin. I recorded emerging themes while looking for commonalities between interviews, along with examples and quotes. I

then grouped these themes into broader categories which reflected shared experiences and messages. I asked myself reflective questions throughout the analysis phase. These questions included: 'Is there another way I can interpret this?'; 'How does this impact my understanding of this event?'; 'Is there a reason this message is being conveyed in this way?' Margaret Kovach understands that "[a] researcher assumes a responsibility that the story shared will be treated with the respect it deserves in acknowledgement of the relationship from which it emerges" (Kovach, 2009, pg. 97). In aligning this process with my ethical intentions, I exercised reflexivity throughout the analysis phase. Reflexivity is a process by which researchers repeatedly turn their gaze inward to examine and consider their own positionality throughout their interpretation of data (Payne & Payne, 2004). It is through listening to the voices of the individuals, and through critical self-awareness that I was able to have confidence in the meanings I made out of interview data.

Social workers and anti-oppressive researchers Karen Potts and Leslie Brown (2005) describe their own information gathering process as 'political listening'. I listened repeatedly. I listened deeply. And I listened with awareness. I recognize, through this diligent process, "…that knowledge is socially constructed … that knowledge doesn't exist "out there" but is embedded in people and the power relations between us" (Potts and Brown, 2005, pg. 261). Many participants' stories reflected the theme of disempowerment. As such, this research project provided a platform for participants to tell their version of events during the wildfire season of 2018. As I interpreted and made meaning out of participants' stories, I listened for the strength and autonomy of individuals and communities. Part of my own 'political listening' process was to not only tell a true story, but to tell a story that is forward-looking and productive for the future of relationships between various political organizations and the community.

Ethical Concerns and limitations

Throughout the research process, not only did I need to remain diligent in truthfully representing interview participants, but I also did not want to create tension between the community and professional emergency response organizations. The relationship between First Nations, community members, and emergency response organization is important. Maintaining good relations can become a matter of public safety. While many individuals expressed dissatisfaction with the way things were managed during the 2018 wildfire season, without having participants from those organizations represented in this study I did not feel equipped to either pass judgements or to suggest recommendations about their actions. Though I wholeheartedly trust the experiences and reflections of participants who critiqued the professional response, my goal with this project was to cultivate a deeper understanding through telling the stories of people who lived these events.

This research includes interviews with only two Cheslatta Carrier Nation members. It is based on interviews with a diverse group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. As such, it includes the perspectives of those individuals and not Cheslatta Carrier Nation as a whole. This thesis also lacks the voices of emergency management professionals who were engaged in responding to the 2018 wildfires in the Southside. I would have liked to include interviews with BC Wildfire Service staff, RCMP personnel, and other first responders, but was unable to secure participation from those agencies. I acknowledge the challenging conditions and political nature of their work, and am grateful for the personal and professional sacrifices first responders make to protect public safety, property and infrastructure. Their perspectives are an additional area of research which would be an excellent topic for another thesis or research project to explore.

As a full time Master's student who also worked full time throughout the duration of this research, some of the most significant limitations of the study relate to my own personal

limitations. In addition to the limitations that the COVID-19 pandemic and its related restrictions posed, I also worked 40+ hours weekly for the BC Public Service throughout my course work and this research. The amount of personal effort and energy this project took was tremendously challenging to navigate and affected my personal sense of wellbeing and that of my family. As a result of these limitations, there are many additional community voices not represented in this study. I chose to limit the participant group's size to align with my personal capacity, knowing that there are key perspectives not represented. I thank my family, my social network, and the UNBC academic community for helping me through, and would like to acknowledge their support as integral to the completion of this thesis.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This research seeks to understand a specific wildfire event from multiple perspectives through a qualitative case study methodology. Its focal point is how the wildfire season of 2018 and related emergency management efforts impacted Cheslatta Carrier Nation and the broader community of the Southside. In analyzing and interpreting interview data, along with relevant literature and theory, I have made connections between stories and linked them to broader themes that help to describe individual and community experiences. In talking to individuals, I gained insight into many of my original research questions which are as follows:

1. How did Cheslatta Carrier Nation members and people working in Cheslatta territory experience wildfire events and emergency management efforts during the 2018 wildfire season?
2. How did the 2018 wildfires impact Cheslatta Carrier Nation members' relationships to land?
3. What are the lasting impacts from the 2018 wildfire season?
4. What could individuals, communities and governments learn from this experience to manage for future wildfires differently?

Due to only interviewing only two Cheslatta Carrier Nation members, I could not fully explore research question 2. Despite this limitation, I have left this question in because portions of my findings speak to this topic.

Through interviewing Indigenous and non-Indigenous Southsiders and community members, I have come to know the Southside as a community with an incredible resilience. The history of the land and of the people brings with it a story of struggle and of resourcefulness. I have come to understand the inclusive nature of Cheslatta Carrier Nation as a tremendous strength, of which the majority of interview participants spoke. The following discussion is organized into six themes which help articulate the depth and breadth of information that these

interviews revealed. These themes include: 1) Impacts to the land and to the people, 2) the physical and political landscape, 3) fire as a site of personal and collective struggle, 4) the limitations of physical infrastructure, 5) the importance of local knowledge, and 6) fire as a catalyst for change. I have described each theme and broken it down into its various components supported by specific examples from interview data.

Impacts to the land and to the people

Every interview participant talked about the land and their relationship with it. Though the focus of each individual varied from an economic focus, to an emotional, or a spiritual one, the common theme that emerged was that being close to the land is part of the fabric of the Southside. Not only did the Indigenous participants express a deep connection to land through their ancestry, but the connection many ranchers and homesteaders have in the Southside goes back several generations as well. Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants alike expressed respect for one another's histories and gratitude for the benefits of living in a place where the land provides for them and their families. In the Southside, these two groups are not discrete categories. Many families are blended or intermarried and carry both a settler and an Indigenous lineage. Though not every interview participant was born and raised in the Southside, a sense of pride and a fierce sense of independence was a common thread connecting each individual to this place and to the broader community.

During my interview with Angela[2], who is a Cheslatta Carrier Nation member, she explained how her connection to place shapes her daily life. Angela says: "I think probably being raised Carrier and First Nations, a sense of belonging and that grounding to where your ancestors are from has been instrumental in my life". She believes that having a connection to her traditional territory has influenced many aspects of herself, including her choice of career and

[2] Pseudonym

her political outlook. It is because of this connection and felt sense of belonging that the 2018 wildfire season impacted her not only physically and economically but also emotionally and spiritually. Because Angela knows that "everything has sacredness, everything has value", she feels the impacts of these fires very deeply. Angela explained that "…the devastation that you are trying to comprehend as those fast fires are moving through, is how much wildlife they are actually killing". Her worry extends beyond impacts to people's homes and livelihoods, but to the creatures big and small who also lose their homes when a fire of this magnitude passes through. For Angela, "…and I think most Indigenous People and people from rural areas our heartache and our worry and our emotions. It's hard… It's loss on so many levels". As I listened to Angela describe her deep sense of loss, my own emotions welled up. Her description of the sacredness of land and its inhabitants helped me to understand the depth of 2018's felt impacts for all those with familial and spiritual ties to the Southside. When Angela talked about how disorienting it is to go back to burnt areas post-fire, she said: "It's just a really surreal thing that your brain just doesn't really ever want to come back from because it's forever changed".

Gary and Julie Blackwell live on the shores of Ootsa Lake. They have been married for 45 years, and Gary's connection to the Southside goes back three generations to the 1800s when his grandfather came over from England to homestead the area. They make their living as ranchers, farmers, trappers, hunting guides, and also participate in the forest industry. They own two woodlots, which were both burned by the Nadina wildfire in 2018. As he reflected about the impact to their livelihoods and the land, Gary told me that "it will take years to get it back to the way it was. We lost so many jobs. A lot of the small game burnt too. All of the squirrels, rabbits for 100,000 hectares. It was a hot burn. All of that is gone. A lot of the marten and all of the fur bearing animals along with it. It takes a long time for it to come back". The Blackwells explained just how much of an economic impact these fires have on them. In a place with mostly land-based opportunities for employment, impacts to land are deeply felt by all those whose

livelihood rely on the land. As Gary explained, “it’s going to take a long time to heal”. Because of impacts to the land, the Blackwells, along with many other Southsiders, have lost their primary long term source of employment.

Angela explained that because an increase in poverty, more people are hunting. This is increasing the pressure on wildlife populations, even though the same wildlife populations are struggling to recover with a loss of habitat. She explains: “People need to eat. The cost of living went up. The cost of domestic meat went up. So people are feeling like they have to hunt”. Because of the economic impacts, Southsiders are forced to make tough choices in order to fill their freezers and feed their families. During the 2018 wildfire season, many homes lost power for extended periods of time. This resulted in people coming home to freezers full of spoiled meat.

In the Southside, households often rely on what’s in the freezer as their primary food source throughout the winter season. With the ability to run a generator during the power outage compromised due to wildfire evacuations, freezer contents were left to rot. Candace[3], who works for Cheslatta, explained that many of the foods that were lost had been part of families’ traditional harvest. These were replaced by 500 dollar gift cards curtesy of the Red Cross. While this gesture provided for the physical needs of community members, store bought foods differ from traditional foods. These foods are unable to provide for the cultural, physical and spiritual needs of Indigenous community members in the same way. Candace is grateful for this financial aid, as well as the community’s incredible ability to band together and support one another, but still expressed the deep sense of loss. As Angela explained to me, the fire exposed a lot. Not only did it expose the physical land though the loss of plants and canopy cover, but it also exposed social, emotional and spiritual impacts which are felt very deeply.

[3] Pseudonym

Candace also talked about the impacts that large and aggressive wildfires had on the land and the wildlife. Candace was working for a neighbouring First Nation during the summer of 2018, and described some of the impacts she observed in that area post-fire: “There was no fish. Nobody got moose because there was no moose around. Nobody got caribou, nobody. You know, the deer were gone. And what was there, or what you did see were injured”. When listening to her speak, I understood that the health of the land and the health of the people are connected before, during, and after the fires. When I asked about whether the wildfires changed people’s ability to harvest food and engage in land based activities, Candace responded that it affected it “in every way”. She described the lasting trauma that Indigenous communities feel as a result of the displacement and disruption of major wildfire events. In Cheslatta, people were under an evacuation order for three weeks. They were housed in various locations north of François Lake, and could not return home until all evacuation orders were lifted on September 12, 2018- Please see the timeline on page 5 and 6 for a comprehensive description of specific events.

Because participants expressed such a connection to land, there was also a recognition that historical events of displacement are very much current and relevant to how many individuals experienced the 2018 wildfire season. Angela explained how displacement due to evacuation and wildfire impacts to cultural sites and land “…just brings up a lot of rawness politically around some of those things, those historical traumas. Those are still here. They’re, they’re part of who we are”. Feelings of displacement are not new to Cheslatta Carrier Nation because of their history. In reference to the wildfire evacuations, Mike Robertson explained that “…this is what happened three generations ago at Cheslatta Lake. Basically a knock on the door saying you got two days to get the hell out of here. The people had to leave. They were forced to leave. They were evacuated”.

On September 12, 2018 Chief Corrina Leween welcomed community members back to

their homes after the evacuation order was lifted. Her welcome speech recalled how the past shapes the present and how the historic removal of Cheslatta people from their lands is still very much alive in the collective memory. At a community gathering held to welcome evacuees back to the Southside, Chief Corrina Leween said:

> …many times during our evacuation, I was reminded that my ancestors, our ancestors, suffered the ultimate evacuation in 1952. They were evicted on short notice, only took what they could carry on their backs and left their homeland forever. Their houses were intentionally burnt down and all of their life's possessions were destroyed. Our evacuation lasted about 3 weeks and now we are back in our homes. Their evacuation has lasted 66 years... (Chief Corrina Leween, shared with me via personal communication from Mike Robertson)

The trauma of forced relocation was a major factor shaping individual and collective experiences during the wildfire season of 2018. These lasting feelings of displacement and dispossession from land emerged as a common theme throughout interview data. This history is very much a part of the present for Chief Corrina Leween as it is for Angela.

The connection to a history of flooding and to Cheslatta's 1952 relocation shaped the way both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants felt about authority and about government response. Because of this history, many interview participants described having a reluctance to trust government policies and representatives. Though these historical experiences differ significantly between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Southsiders, impacts to land, which is a pillar of identity and economic prosperity was a common thread connecting all interview participants' stories and experiences.

The physical and political landscape

Cheslatta Carrier Nation is characterized by its tenacity and its incredible ability to thrive in the face of adverse conditions. Through his 39 years working for Cheslatta, Mike Robertson has seen a lot of changes. He says: "[t]he spirit of the people is what I liked and their no nonsense way of doing things. You know, they've been through the worst a human can inflict on

another group of people. They're tough and they're absolutely fearless. Nothing scares them". Through my conversations with Cheslatta Carrier Nation members, and about Cheslatta Carrier Nation with non-members, the theme of resilience was impossible to ignore. Many interview participants credited the success and the resilient spirit of Cheslatta to their consistent and forward-thinking leadership. Hazel Burt, one of Cheslatta's two elected Council members, gave an example of this as she described the support that Chief Corrina Leween provided to Cheslatta members throughout the wildfire season of 2018. Chief Leween checked on each community member individually, whether they were living in the Southside or in a neighbouring community. She did this to ensure the wellbeing of every member and to help take care of their specific personal needs. Her diligence and consistency as a leader was mentioned by many participants as a major source of pride and a pillar of strength for the community.

Ben Wilson, who worked as Cheslatta's forestry coordinator for eight and half years, described Cheslatta Carrier Nation's leadership philosophy to me. When the Chief and leadership team make decisions, "one of the kind of mantras is that it's got to benefit the entire community, anything that Cheslatta does. Yeah, it has to benefit Cheslatta, but should benefit the Southside as well, and it should benefit industry partners". The collaborative spirit and generosity of Cheslatta Carrier Nation shines through in the relationships they have built with neighbouring First Nations, with the Provincial government, and with industry partners- including Rio Tinto (formerly Alcan).

Ben went on to describe the economic benefits that forestry brings to the Southside, along with Cheslatta's trajectory to becoming economic drivers through their forestry endeavours. He explained that Cheslatta holds a community forest tenure and is a part of the Burns Lake Native Development Corporation which, in turn, owns a part of Babine Forest Products and Decker Lake Forest Products. Ben described forestry and one of two major economic development projects for the Nation, the other being working with Rio Tinto. He outlined how the Nation

secured their own tenures after concern around harvesting practices in the 1990s. This was a way for Cheslatta to gain greater control over the harvesting of timber in their traditional territory, and to invest in their economic future and that of the region. Ben explained to me that having access to a volume of timber under their own tenure acts as a sort of currency for Cheslatta. They are able to use their tenure to leverage other licensees and industry partners and to form partnerships and agreements which are mutually beneficial.

As we discussed the topic of forestry and innovation, Mike Robertson described how Cheslatta's rise to economic success also contributed to community cohesion in the Southside. As previously mentioned, the Southside is an extremely integrated community. Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike call the Southside home and live as neighbours and family members throughout the region. When Mike began working for Cheslatta 39 years ago, he observed some negative dynamics within the Southside, including "a lot of racism, a lot of dysfunction". As Cheslatta Carrier Nation's economic situation began to shift through their forestry expertise and economic development projects, the broader community increased their respect for the Nation. Presently, Cheslatta is the main driver of the economy in the Southside and their enterprises employ members and non-members alike. Mike demonstrated Cheslatta's inclusive values and collaborative spirit as he talked about employing individuals who once displayed racism and prejudice. He explained that despite their history of being unkind, "… we are ready and able to hire those same people". Throughout my joint conversation with Mike Robertson and James Rakochy, who has held the title of Cheslatta's Land and Resource Manager for twenty one years, that I understood the success of Cheslatta Carrier Nation to be a shared success for the Southside. They expressed a sense of pride in the work that they have done with and for the Nation and a desire to share that success with the broader community of the Southside.

Though Cheslatta's success in forestry is undeniable, various interview participants expressed concerned about how wildfire-related impacts to the timber supply will affect

Cheslatta's ability to thrive economically. James explained that prior to the fires, Cheslatta:

> …had just geared up and purchased logging equipment and set up a company. We started logging about a month before the fires. And here we are with brand new equipment and bills to pay and we lose 75 percent of our licence that was supposed to feed these guys. So it has made it hard to recover from that.

Because impacts to Cheslatta's tenure area has and will undoubtedly affect their economic opportunities, James expressed concern about the wellbeing of community members and Cheslatta's economic partnerships.

Although forestry is central to the economic wellbeing of the community, many interview participants discussed their frustrations with specific forestry practices. Gary Blackwell spent weeks fighting the Nadina wildfire with his neighbours. He observed that,

> …it would really build up steam when it got to the fresh logging. Like blocks that were up to maybe 6 years old. They leave so much slash on the blocks nowadays, when it hit those it would just absolutely explode and when it got to the standing green timber it would slow down… that was a big problem. They should be made to clean it up.

It is through direct observation that Gary understands what types of fuel composition become highly flammable when wildfires pass through. Also critical of particular forestry practices, Angela believes that policies and practices of the past create the volatile conditions we see on the land today. Angela would like community members' experiences from 2018 "to make some actual political change around policy and practice…if we don't, there is just going to be continued devastation". She described to me some of her frustrations, which include the way that the pine beetle epidemic was managed, the lack of controlled burning implemented to limit fuel loading, and the use of pesticides to suppress less commercially viable leaf-bearing stands of trees which act as natural fire breaks. On these particular topics, her frustrations are echoed by other community members, including Miles Fuller.

Miles Fuller, has lived in the François Lake area for over the 45 years. He is currently the President of the Chinook Community Forest Association, which is an equal partnership between

six First Nations and two Municipal Governments, including Cheslatta Carrier Nation, the Village of Burns Lake, and the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako (Chinook Community Forest, n.d.). Miles has worked as a forestry consultant, a guide outfitter, the president of the trappers association, and an ocean charter operator throughout his six decades in the region. Over this time he has seen many changes on the land base, and during our interview he elaborated on why he thinks fires are larger and more destructive today than they were 40 years ago. Miles explained that "we live in a fire based ecosystem that has not been managed as a fire based ecosystem for probably 50 to 75 years". Miles Fuller believes that "we've tried to maintain huge stands of timber that probably shouldn't have been maintained". Notably, five interview participants mentioned controlled burning as a tool to mitigate wildfire risk, but no one mentioned specific examples of cultural or historic uses of fire for this purpose. I understand this to mean that fire exclusion policies which accompanied settlement and the proliferation of wildfire suppression mandates (Boyd, 1999; Turner, 1999; Lake & Kimmerer, 2001; Sutherland, 2018) have impacted the availability of this information.

During our interview, Miles described the conditions required for large catastrophic wildfires to occur, which include: high temperatures, low humidity, high winds, and available fuel. According to Miles, the only one of these four elements we have any control over is the fuel. He stated that the continued suppression of wildfires is partially responsible for conditions which allow wildfires to burn unimpeded through an abundance of uninterrupted fuel. The largest fire to burn in the Southside in 2018 was the Nadina fire. Upon reflection, Miles told me that:

> in the last 40 years, I counted 'em up, but I've helped put out at least 30 fires inside the Nadina fire… and if those were burned…there might have been some areas in front of the Nadina fire that would have slowed it down and it would not have gotten to catastrophic levels which were allowed to reach.

Miles explained that allowing select fires burn, and intentionally lighting fires in strategic locations are possible ways to reduce wildfire risk. These methods did not fit with forest management mandates of the past century, and we are now seeing the effects of past policies which intentionally maintained high density forests.

Though burning was mentioned by many participants as a useful tool to help build a more fire resilient ecosystem, it is not without its drawbacks. During our interview, Ben Wilson told me: “I don't particularly like it as a tool”. He believes that, in addition to degrading the air quality, burning puts the mid-term timber supply at risk. He does not like this method of wildfire risk reduction because of the possibility of escapes. Based on his experience, and past involvement with post-harvest broadcast burning, Ben believes that planned burns can never really be controlled. Escapes have the potential to destroy Cheslatta’s limited supply timber and adversely impact their economic development endeavours.

While it would be tempting to view the tension between the promotion of fire and wildfire suppression as a dichotomy, fire historian Stephen Pyne (2001) explains how: “[t]he choice is not between fighting fires and lighting them, but over the proper ways and times to do each, and that within a context that transcends either practice alone” (Pyne, 2001, pg. 7). The seeming tension which separates those who would like to use fire as a risk reduction tool, and those who would not, exists within each person’s values and political position. While Ben and Miles’ beliefs about this topic appeared to be odds, I understand both of them to share many values. These include valuing a prosperous forest economy and valuing the sustainable management of timber resources.

During our discussion about controlled burning, Miles described smoke and fire as a “political hot potato”. He believes that forest management policies have been a major contributing factor for the increase in forest health epidemics which also increased the volatility

of wildfires throughout the past two decades. Miles is critical of Old Growth Management Areas and BC's Provincial Parks. He described how these areas allow beetle populations to proliferate unmanaged and infect adjacent timber. The idea of 'conservation', which was their initial reason for being implemented, has not been re-examined as the physical conditions surrounding them have changed. Miles described how these examples of values-based policies rooted in specific ways of managing land can have adverse effects on conservation in today's changing forests.

Instead of relying on prescribed fire to mitigate risk, Ben Wilson advocates for quicker wildfire response times and more industry-government cooperation. He knows that local people have wildfire suppression expertise along with extensive knowledge of the land. Ben's ideas about increased community integration into wildfire response became a major theme connecting various interviews. As such, this topic makes up part of my discussion in the 'value of local knowledge' section. With respect to forest management, Both Ben and Miles advocate for more adaptive and forward thinking policies which integrate the specifics of local conditions and local knowledge.

Through talking to community members, I have come to understand that the physical landscape is a reflection of the political and the human landscapes. The choice to suppress or to light a fire depends on the particular perspective and beliefs that societies bring with them. In the context of this research, both governmentality (Foucault, 1994) and relationality (Wilson, 2008) can offer ways of exposing and explaining specific dynamics between humans and landscapes and between ourselves and one another. Just as the tools and techniques communities and governments use to manage for wildfires are reflections of the histories and the values of the people who govern them, the places themselves also have agency and will respond to these same physical influences. While Cheslatta's rise to becoming economic drivers through forest development projects highlights the resilience and the ingenuity of the people, the physical

conditions of the forest are also a history written on the land. This history includes a long-term belief in wildfire suppression, and a recent proliferation of forest health epidemics. When paired with a changing climate, these created the conditions for wildfires to thrive. Despite these changes, the resilient spirit of the people endures.

Fire as a site of personal and collective struggle

Along with stories of resilience, and overcoming adversity, I did hear many instances about times when the 2018 wildfires brought about conflict and frustration. Many Southsiders, largely business owners and ranchers, chose to stay in order to fight the fires. These community members did not feel adequately supported by professional response organizations and took the protection of their homes, lands, and livelihoods into their own hands. Several participants who made this choice explained to me that their decisions were neither understood nor supported by response organizations and personnel.

Risé Johansen and David Gruen own the thriving business of Takysie Lake Resort. It is a small lake-side resort with a campground and rooms for rent. Its store, gas station and restaurant provide staples to locals and vacationers alike. It is a catch-all community hub with a whole lot of character. In Risé's words, her business includes a "…resort, store, restaurant, bar… psychiatric advice". As I talked with Risé and David about the 2018 season, I learned that many of the interactions they had with professional response personnel were characterized by misunderstanding and a lack of trust. They described the messaging they received from RCMP and first responders as 'scare tactics', which included overt statements about how their store and whole community was likely to burn. To Risé and David, these statements were tools to force them to evacuate. By choosing to stay, Risé told me that she and David "…were not trying to be heroes". They stayed in order to save their property and to keep their store open to support the

community's needs. This role eventually shifted into helping with emergency response as they supplied fuel for responders and housed and fed firefighters.

Throughout the 2018 wildfire season, Risé and David worked tirelessly to provide services and support for both community members and first responders despite the ongoing efforts to get them to leave. As David explained to me, "if [RCMP] use common sense and they had the information they needed, they wouldn't be asking us to leave because they knew that we were supplying everybody, all the trucks with fuel and gas for the fire pumps, and feeding people and looking after people". Inconsistency in messaging and lack of appreciation for their efforts characterized Risé and David's interactions with emergency response organizations. Because of how they were treated, Risé described losing trust in the RCMP who were stationed in the Southside stating that "one of these days, we might actually need you people and we won't call you because we don't trust you". Though this sentiment was not unique to Risé and David, they were the most articulate at describing it to me.

Many additional interview participants referenced the behaviour of RCMP officers as inconsistent and impersonal. Officers were brought in to the Southside from various places in BC, and as Mike Robertson stated, they "… came without any understanding of who we were, or where they were". The RCMP would periodically put up roadblocks in and around the Southside. Participants described these roadblocks as a challenge to navigate because they went up without warning and blocked access wherever they were installed for locals and non-locals alike. James Rakochy described how, for a Southsider who knows the backroads, there was not a single roadblock that he could not get around. Secondary roads became the primary method of transportation for many of the folks who stayed in the Southside, which only furthered their lack of confidence in the RCMP's effectiveness. Mike Robertson described how some RCMP officers were resistant to either taking a local guide or accepting advice from the community. This struck him as not only disrespectful, but extremely inefficient.

Southside resident Faith Martin, who was described to me as the 'community caretaker' is a wife, a mother, a Mennonite, a business owner, and has also worked for Cheslatta Carrier Nation for a number of years. In 2018, her and her husband owned and operated the Grassy Plains Store and Café. She has an unwavering faith in God and in the power of her community. The optimism she conveyed during our conversation nearly brought me to tears. During the 2018 wildfire season Faith also chose not to evacuate. Throughout its duration, she provided daily meals and safety check-ins for local people who didn't evacuate and were working the fires. This effort grew to include meals for professional responders, for pilots, for the RCMP and for anyone who needed dinner, lunch and a bottle of water. Faith and her team of community volunteers did this for free without the expectation of payment.

Through this service, Faith wanted to bring people together and support the safety and wellbeing of residents and responders. She had a good relationship with everyone she served, but also described experiencing inconsistent messaging from emergency response personnel. Faith described being asked by some RCMP officers to stay open, and then requests from the next ones for her dental records so that "…when you get burned, we want to figure out where you're, you know, who you are". Notably, six interview participants described being asked to provide authorities with either their dental records, or permission to access them. This request stood out to most as disrespectful and unnecessary. When talking about the request for her dental records, Faith described it as "really hard on your courage".

Interview participants who chose to stay in the Southside and those who evacuated both characterized the evacuations as feeling like a loss of control. Some of those who evacuated stated that in the future they would not chose to leave again. They felt disempowered by the lack of information about conditions in the Southside. They believed that once they crossed the ferry to Burns Lake, they would be unable to return to their homes. Hazel Burt, who is an elected Band Council member for Cheslatta Carrier Nation, chose not to evacuate. She was granted

permission to cross back and forth on the ferry. Hazel described the experience of visiting Elders who were evacuated and staying in Burns Lake as particularly tough because they had nothing to do.

Though the community of Burns Lake was instrumental in meeting the physical needs of evacuees, the mental and emotional toll that evacuations had Elder populations was mentioned by several participants. These impacts affected both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Elders. One participant mentioned how the disruption to daily routine poses a major challenge for Elders. Two interview participants mentioned how changes to the landscape affected Elder peoples' ability to remember. These stories demonstrate the linkage between place and memory which is particularly poignant for Elders. Larsen and Johnson's writings about the agency of place are helpful reflections which remind me that "place is both necessity and vehicle for the expression of Creation into many forms of life, and we come to know this "outside" world through our formative relationship with place" (Larsen & Johnson, 2017, pg. 13). As various participants expressed concern for Elder people's mental and physical wellbeing in the aftermath of the fires, impacts to land became major factors which shaped these experiences.

Community Mental Health Clinician for Carrier Sekani Family Services Nyree Hazelton works in the Southside with Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Skin Tyee First Nation, and Nee-Tahi-Buhn Band members. Nyree explained how, through her work and relationships, she has come to know how emotionally resilient Cheslatta people are. She told me that Cheslatta people have been through so much hardship and she draws a direct connection between their history and how individuals are today. Despite this resilience, Nyree described the hardest part of supporting community members during and after the wildfires of 2018, was helping people work through feelings of helplessness. Not knowing if your home was going to burn, not being there, and not being able to do anything about it was extremely challenging for community members to navigate.

Throughout the 2018 wildfire season, Nyree did not travel to the Southside. She stayed at her home north of François Lake and supported community members who were evacuated to Burns Lake. Nyree witnessed the overwhelming show of community support from other First Nations communities, the Burns Lake area residents, and various community organizations. She described their generosity and hard work as extremely heartwarming and impressive. Though individuals were working tirelessly to provide shelter, meals, and essential goods and services to all those who were evacuated from their homes, she described some of the bureaucratic processes as difficult to navigate for individuals experiencing trauma, while trying to meet their basic human needs. She and her team of colleagues supported the community as best they could. Nyree described how people from the North of François Lake banded together and how "everybody was doing everything they possibly could". She spoke about how many people were operating in 'survival mode' throughout the wildfire season, which was a sentiment also described by people I talked to from the Southside who were supporting community needs.

Gary Blackwell described working his and his neighbours' heavy equipment upwards of 16 hours a day. Because of the urgency with which they were putting in fireguards, "the machinery worked really hard all day and it wasn't looked after. When the fire was over, we had to put a lot of money back into it". Risé and David described working upwards of 20 hours a day, running on no sleep and trying to provide for the community as well as for first responders. David described how working so much and being under so much stress made him feel "like a pinball in a pinball machine". Because there was always a demand for their services, as well as an ongoing threat to their store from the fire itself, Risé and David were rarely able to rest throughout the entire wildfire season.

Several interview participants described experiencing or witnessing physical and mental health concerns during and after the wildfires due to the smoke, stress, and lack of sleep. One participant experienced heart failure in the aftermath of 2018, for which he believes stress to be

the major contributing factor. Miles Fuller, who was working directly with BC Wildfire Service's Incident Comment Team throughout 2018, described how various stressors impacted peoples' behaviours. He believes that the effects of stress became a major barrier for professional response organizations to effectively engage with community members who stayed behind during evacuations. Miles explained how "…the people that you are dealing with there may not be of hardly even sound mind anymore because of the conditions they've been put under". Miles believes that unusual behaviours due to stress contributed to interpersonal and interagency conflict which were ongoing throughout the 2018 wildfire season.

Though the relationships between professional response organizations and the residents of the Southside broke down in various instances, the overarching message that these interviews revealed was the feeling of being misunderstood. Residents that stayed in the evacuation zone felt as though they were not supported in their choice despite providing services and support for responders, for the community, and for one another. Those that evacuated experienced a void of information which contributed to feelings of powerlessness. Miles Fuller was the unique interview participant who had an in-depth understanding of BC Wildfire Service's operations. Because of his level of contact with first responders, Miles understood the day-to-day challenges they faced and had more compassion for their operational decisions. Though Miles expressed empathy for local people whose limits were stretched beyond reasonable, he also expressed understanding and compassion for the level of scrutiny that BC Wildfire's Incident Command Team was under. Based on this observation, I believe that increasing the awareness of one another's community and organizational cultures before, during, and after wildfire events has the potential to increase compassion and improve our ability to work together effectively.

Since the 2018 wildfire season, Faith's store burnt down in an accident unrelated to wildfires. And in another unrelated incident, the attic of her house also caught on fire in 2019. Thankfully, the community rallied around her and her family both times. Though they were

unable to save the store, they saved the house that she is still living in today with her husband and family. When reflecting on these events along with the 2018 wildfires, Faith stated: “I puzzle why God allows these things to happen except maybe to draw us closer together”. As I listen to many different interpretations of the same events told to me by diverse interview participants, I note that the frustration and grief some expressed is simultaneously echoed by the gratitude and the creativity of the very same individuals. Through the stories and sentiments that Faith shared, I gained a glimpse into the community support network in the Southside. When a community member needs help, Southsiders are ready and able to go above and beyond to support one another.

Limitations of physical infrastructure

Many elements of the physical infrastructure (or lack thereof) came up during interviews as contributing factors for the various challenges residents of the Southside faced during the 2018 wildfire season. Participants specifically mentioned concerns relating to ferry access, drinking water infrastructure, road closures, lack of cellular connectivity, and the lack of reliable and current information as major barriers to wildfire suppression and responder-community cohesion.

The Southside is a remote community. It is geographically separated from the highway 16 corridor and the Village of Burns Lake by François Lake to the north and to the south by Ootsa Lake and Cheslatta Lake. Please see maps on page 8, 9 and 10. Residents of the Southside rely on a year-round ferry service for consistent vehicle access to essential goods and services. During the 2018 wildfire season, this piece of critical infrastructure was used as a control point to limit the public’s access to areas affected by fires which were under evacuation alerts and orders. Access to the Southside ferry was controlled by a permit system and restricted to only essential travel and first responders. Risé Johansen explained to me how there was no clear

process or criteria communicated for the issuing of ferry permits. She and David Gruen had ongoing struggles accessing ferry passage despite their pivotal roles providing food, fuel, and lodging to community members and first responders.

Risé explained to me that when asking for a clear explanation of the ferry permitting process, "...you kept getting different stories about who was in charge, who makes the decisions". She and several other interview participants described how the criteria that the Regional District used to issue ferry permits was incongruent with the community's essential travel needs. Because many local people had not evacuated, they felt as though the ferry restrictions denied them access to essential goods, including access to food and fuel. This dynamic furthered many local peoples' mistrust of the non-local RCMP personnel who were tasked with enforcing the permit system.

As part of his industry liaison role, Miles Fuller arranged to have a local person sit with the RCMP at the northern side of the ferry to assist in determining who was a local, and who was not. Because of his relationship with the BC Wildfire Service personnel, Miles was privy to some of the stories and lessons that they had learned in the Williams Lake area during the busy 2017 wildfire season. He informed me that in 2017, evacuations were used as a convenient cover under which non-local people could clean out valuables from the vacant homes of evacuees. He explained that this was part of the reason for limiting access to the Southside. Though the threat of potential looting or theft did not concern Mike Robertson, he also described having a sort of 'local ambassador' at the southern end of the ferry in case local people needed an advocate to secure ferry passage or a safe return.

Despite these efforts which incorporated local perspectives into the Southside ferry regulation, interview participants discussed the ferry permit system as a major source of frustration. Many individuals who did not evacuate made their choice partly because they knew that they would not be allowed back to the Southside once they crossed the ferry northbound.

The ways in which they spoke about this issue indicated a lack of trust in the system, and a lack of consistent messaging about ferry permit criteria and processes. This geographic feature became a major issue that was the source of significant friction between emergency response organizations and local people.

Another piece of critical infrastructure impacted during the fires was the Three Nations Water Plant. This facility is a state of the art water filtration and distribution system which supplies water to the people of Skin Tyee Nation, Nee-Tahi-Buhn Band, and Cheslatta Carrier Nation, as well as a significant number of non-Indigenous clients. Both Candace and Hazel Burt recounted how the increased demand for water almost put this critical piece of infrastructure at risk. Community members' efforts to protect their homes drove individuals to overuse this system despite warnings that damage would occur if the reservoir ran dry. During the fires, the plant had to be shut down when its tanks were drained in order to protect the system and prevent permanent damage. Though the Three Nations Water Plant was not designed to withstand the kind of demand placed upon it, the community managed to avoid permanent damage to it.

During her interview, Candace spoke about her experiences trying to encourage vulnerable people to evacuate from the remote Indigenous community with whom she was then working. Because the air quality was so poor, paired with deteriorating living conditions, Candace's concern for the wellbeing of community members also extended to responders and community leaders. She asked: "How are you going to help if you can't help yourself? Like how? If you can't breathe, if you can't look after yourself, how do you help the rest of your members?" Candace was working in a community more remote than the Southside where road access was precarious and had the potential to be cut off completely by wildfires. Many Elders refused to evacuate. Unable to convince these Elders to leave, community members and leaders supported their physical and emotional needs despite ongoing efforts to change their minds.

Candace's experiences and reflections from this neighbouring community were quite

different from the stories I heard about the Southside. No other interview participant mentioned whether community members themselves encouraged individuals to evacuate, but described the ongoing pressure to evacuate as coming solely from emergency response personnel. Participants also described the support Cheslatta Carrier Nation provided for all of those who stayed within the evacuation area to provide essential services, protect properties and land, fuel generators, harvest gardens, and tend to livestock. Throughout the wildfire response efforts, Cheslatta supported both Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents in tangible ways. Mike Robertson described how the Nation bought and supplied fuel, food and essential goods for these individuals to access. They distributed these goods to anyone who needed them regardless of their identity, their role, or their past history. When Mike explained this act of support, I was once again reminded of the inclusive and cohesive nature of the Southside and the generosity of Cheslatta Carrier Nation.

James Rakochy was crossing the ferry daily to check on his staff and to ensure the safety of those individuals who were out working in remote areas. James explained that his staff "…were out isolated. No cell phone coverage, no nothing. So it made me very tense and worrisome". The Southside is an area of the province with very limited cell service. The lack of connectivity was brought up by many participants as a major contributing factor to the dangerous conditions locals and responders alike faced when working in the bush or on remote roads. There were many local individuals out working the front lines alone without phones, radios, or any immediate means of checking in. Because the power was out in the majority of the Southside for a large portion of the wildfire season, electronic means of checking on residents and locals were limited. I heard a handful of stories about near-misses on the front lines, during which local people put their lives at risk to ensure the safety of their friends, neighbours, and family members.

While individuals fighting the fires were out isolated without any tangible way of staying

connected, community members who had evacuated to Burns Lake also had no access to reliable and up to date information. Risé Johnasen left her store for two hours under duress the afternoon of August 22 as a flame front was advancing. When she and David returned, they saw that their neighbour's house had been burnt to the ground. Risé described the impacts of returning to Takysie Lake Resort after the fire had passed through as "like Armageddon" and "like a war zone". As she and David picked up the pieces and suppressed lingering fires in the vicinity of cabins, fuel tanks, and vehicles, Risé discovered that was no formal process set up to notify evacuees who have lost their homes. Nyree Hazelton also described the lack of up to date and reliable information as a challenge and talked about how this absence timely and accurate information created an environment for misinformation to proliferate. She explained that because of this void of information, that "…it's not even just that it's an actual threat you see, but then there's also this aspect of it being an invisible threat… [misinformation] is something that kind of became a wildfire of its own". In the absence of a formal process, Risé took it upon herself to inform this close neighbour about the loss. Additionally, she started a Facebook page to fill the information void. Risé became the eyes and ears for evacuees posting things she saw or heard to try and augment the information updates coming from emergency response organizations, which she described as being infrequent and stale.

Through hearing the stories and the visceral experiences of interview participants, I have come to understand that the physical infrastructure of the Southside played a large role in how the community experienced wildfire events in 2018. Though the remoteness of the Southside is part of what shapes its culture and its history, this same remoteness and lack of amenities posed challenges during suppression efforts. These became sources of friction between community members and response organizations at various points throughout the summer.

The importance of local knowledge

Though many of the interactions between response personnel and local people described to me were critical, there was also another storyline which included stories of cooperation, mutual support, and humour. In addition to the many moments of frustration she described, Risé also told me that "there are some real glorious moments too though that you can't forget about". The positive interactions that she described included moments of humour and gratitude. I noticed that all of the times participants expressed positive sentiments about the actions of emergency responders, these interactions were characterized by a recognition of shared humanity and a respect for the culture of the Southside. I have cherished the positive stories that were told to me throughout the interview process, and understand these messages to be part of individual and collective healing processes.

Mike Robertson summed up a sentiment that connected many of the interview participants' outlook toward emergency response in the Southside with his statement: "local knowledge is as important as water in a fire…it's like coming to a new area completely blindfolded. The only people that can take that blindfold off is the local experts". To address the lasting feelings many participants had where their local knowledge was disrespected or ignored, Mike would like for a local expert to be deputized into the Incident Command structure in the future. This sentiment was shared by other interview participants who expressed a desire for more recognition of their expertise along with increased decision-making power. Miles Fuller's role as Industry Liaison partially filled this local knowledge role within the Incident Command Team in 2018. Though he advised the BC Wildfire Service, the RCMP, and other response agencies on the culture, the land, and the people of the Southside, Miles believes that there are limits to what local people should be asked to take on during wildfire events. Because of the close contact he had with the Incident Command team throughout 2018, he was privy to some of the tough decisions they had to make. As such, Miles has a deep respect for the level of expertise

professional wildfire personnel bring with them.

Miles described watching a local resident who held a high ranking decision-making role go through a mental health crisis as a result of the stress he was put under. Miles attributes this to the amount this person knew and cared about the community and its members. Miles believes that when locals are in charge of making operational decisions during wildfire events, the familiarity they have with the community can be extremely emotionally taxing. He told me that, as locals:

> You know individuals that live on the ground out there… You've been to their house. You've had tea with them on their porch… and when it comes down to drawing a line where you need to put a fireguard where you're going to make a stand at, you really don't need to know who, as individuals, live on either side of that line.

Though all participants were adamant about the need to value and use local knowledge, their expectations regarding the degree to which local people should be integrated into decision making structures was not consistent. However, one thing that did remain consistent between every participant was valuing the integration of local skills and knowledge. The desire to increase response organizations' knowledge and respect for the unique culture of the Southside was a common thread connecting every interview.

Addressing the lack of local values reflected in public policy, Candace spoke about the challenges she faced trying to communicate Indigenous Knowledge and values to emergency response personnel. Candace was in a leadership role during the 2018 wildfire season working for a First Nation impacted by wildfires. As part of this role, she was liaising with neighbouring communities, and with emergency response organizations on behalf of the Nation. When we talked about some of the major challenges she faced, Candace described trying to communicate the Nation's priority areas for suppression to emergency responders. She told me that, in the midst of high fire activity and ongoing wildfire suppression activities, "…half our territory was

already burnt at that time. After we were e-mailing, phoning, complaining, telling whoever would care that, you know what, our trap lines, all of our- there's sites that are cultural sites like graveyards. They're going to burn if you don't get in there". Candace described this conversation as happening too late after the fires had already impacted important sites which were not seen as priorities to emergency response organizations.

Candace also explained how many First Nations community members experience barriers when they apply for first responder jobs. She explained that "there's so many things, criteria that you've got to go through that you're not going to get through. So you're automatically not qualified". Though Candace was the unique interview participant to mention this issue, the government of British Columbia has recently implemented a service available to Indigenous applicants seeking to work in the BC Public Service. The *Indigenous Applicant Advisory Service* (Government of British Columbia, n.d.b.) seeks to increase Indigenous representation in the BC Public Service. Though not an overt acknowledgement of systemic bias, this initiative would be available for Indigenous applicants seeking employment with BC Wildfire Service. As Candace explained, the lack of Indigenous People managing and working as part of response organizations further distances First Nations' values from what is prioritized for suppression during wildfire events. Candace would like to see more Knowledge Holders integrated into establishing emergency response priorities so that there is less disconnect between community values and responder priorities.

Fire as a catalyst for change

In the aftermath of the 2018 wildfire season, the Southside is still healing. Many participants expressed feelings of loss, feeling disoriented, and an increase in depression among community members. During our interview, Angela described the ongoing impacts to her community. She told me that, for community members, "there's a lot of mourning and there is a

lot of grief and loss. And it's a very emotional thing. There's a lot of anger. There's just a lot of hopelessness that people felt. And it's going to take, I think, a number of years to recover from that". The overarching message I took away from our conversation was that the land, the spirit of the people, and the wellbeing of all creatures are interconnected, and that all have suffered as a result of the fires. When she walks certain areas of the territory, Angela described feeling like her "…soul cries and aches. That's how I can describe it best". Despite these intense emotional impacts, Angela is optimistic that more conversations with communities who have been through similar experiences, and more dialogue between community members can bring about positive change. She knows that when local people respond to emergencies in their own backyard, "it's not just a paycheque for them. It's their community it's their homes and it's their livelihoods that are at stake. So I think making them a part of the solution is really important and opening up dialogue for that moving forward, I think is really important".

Various Southside community initiatives have sprung up as a response to the 2018 wildfires as a way for the community to regain a sense of control and to be more prepared should another large fire season happen. Risé Johansen is the chairperson of the Chinook Emergency Response Society. This community society was created after 2018, with the goal of increasing dialogue within the community and with other emergency response agencies. It aims to improve community response to emergencies in the future. Since 2018, conversations with the BC Wildfire Service about preparedness, about community priorities, and about expertise within the community have increased. Risé described this as a positive step toward a renewed relationship. She told me that "we're both really trying to make things better, to be better prepared as far as residents go. For them to understand the knowledge and skill set out here that can help them". Despite challenging dynamics of the past, interview participants expressed optimism and positive change having emerged in the aftermath of 2018.

During a handful of interviews, I was informed that the fires brought to light and shifted

some of the more difficult community dynamics. James Rakochy and Mike Robertson described instances where residents who would have never accepted help from Cheslatta were in need of assistance with their ranches or properties. Cheslatta provided support to all community members, regardless of their individual or collective attitude toward the Nation. Cheslatta's welcoming and generous approach transformed historically tense dynamics as they offered tangible and material help to everyone willing to accept it. James described positive insights into new possibilities for historically bad relationships. When speaking about interactions Chelatta had with community members who had once displayed prejudice, James "… saw a brief period of time, which was during the fire and probably about six months after that, that racist attitude went away". Even though Mike and James both described this change as temporary, it was significant to them both.

Faith Martin's service to the community stood out for many interview participants as an example of selflessness and resilience. She was one of the last people I interviewed and I felt as though I knew a lot about her even before we got the chance to talk. Even after her string of bad luck with fires which plagued her post-2018, Faith told me that "…we can choose one of two things: to be better or bitter. And I choose to be better". The fortitude Faith displayed, overcoming adversity and seeking out opportunities for improvement was echoed by many other participants' as they recounted events and made meaning of their experiences two years after the major wildfires of 2018. I often wonder how these reflections would have been different in 2019, or whether time has been a major contributing factor toward the personal and collective growth that participants displayed through their stories.

Since 2018, Takysie Lake's David Gruen has bought himself a fire truck. He intends to use it to fight fires on the Southside and prevent another year like 2018 from happening ever again. He has invested in this piece of equipment not only for his family and business, but for the

community as a whole. David is hopeful that renewed conversations from the outcomes of 2018 will bring about cooperation between community members and emergency response organizations. He said that “hopefully we just keep improving along the way and get more on board so that we are all pulling in the same rope going in the same direction”. I am also hopeful as I listen to stories from interview participants that showcase the strength of the community and the positive change that is already happening.

Conclusion

The magnitude of what happened in the Southside the summer of 2018 is something that each and every interview highlighted. In describing what was burnt by the Nadina fire alone, Gary Blackwell said: “I still don’t think the government realizes what the community lost. With all of the woodlots and 100 000 hectares of forest burned”. The thirteen community members represented in ten interviews each shared compelling and emotional accounts of their experiences. Their investment and connection to place gave meaning to how the timeline of events described on page 5 and 6 are felt by individuals and communities. As Risé and David stated, if Takysie Lake Resort were to burn, “we’re not just losing our home we are losing our job, we are losing everything we have”. The investment Southsiders have in the land was a common thread. For Indigenous participants, an ancestral connection to place was inherent through cultural teachings passed down generationally. For non-Indigenous participants, I heard about how the land provides for them and their families. The livelihoods of their ancestors depended on the land, and their connection to place is strengthened with each generation who grows up in the Southside.

The insights I gained through interviewing thirteen participants during ten interviews are organized into six themes, which include: 1) Impacts to the land and to the people, 2) the physical and political landscape, 3) fire as a site of personal and collective struggle, 4) the

limitations of physical infrastructure, 5) the importance of local knowledge, and 6) fire as a catalyst for change. Through conducting this research, I have built new relationships, and strengthened existing ones. I am grateful to have been privy to these stories.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Synthesis

The 2018 wildfire season saw 2,117 fires in British Columbia, which consumed over 1.3 million hectares of land and surpassed every other year on record (Government of British Columbia, n.d.d). In 2018, the Southside was at the heart of the largest and most aggressive wildfires it has ever seen, and Cheslatta Carrier Nation worked hard to support the community and its members throughout. My original intention with researching and writing this thesis was to understand multiple sides of a single event. Through reviewing literature and theories, and by interviewing community members and interpreting their stories, I was able to gain insight into four original research questions, which read as follows:

1. How did Cheslatta Carrier Nation members and people working in Cheslatta territory experience wildfire events and emergency management efforts during the 2018 wildfire season?
2. How did the 2018 wildfires impact Cheslatta Carrier Nation members' relationships to land?
3. What are the lasting impacts from the 2018 wildfire season?
4. What could individuals, communities and governments learn from this experience to manage for future wildfires differently?

As this project progressed and evolved concurrent to the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions, my ability to thoroughly address question 2 was impacted due to the demographic of interview participants. Despite this, all research questions brought about significant discussion and reflection both on my part, and with interview participants. With its original goal of better understanding a complex event from multiple perspectives, this thesis was able to provide a platform for the community voices and stories which inform it.

Through examining and interpreting literature and theories, I demonstrated that the history of a place and a peoples shapes its present. Stories shared by interview participants

described six themes, which form a cohesive message and contribute to a deeper understanding of the collective community experience. I have shown that the history of the land and its management create both physical and social environments which play a part in how communities experience events. As such, the literature that I presented all related to Cheslatta Carrier Nation and its history, to the landscape of the Southside, and to the relationships between communities and emergency response organizations. I interpreted this literature through two theoretical lenses, which include Michel Foucault's governmentality theory (1994), and Shawn Wilson's relationality theory (2008). These theories helped to relate textual sources to one another, to the stories participants shared, and to my overarching thesis topic.

In describing the political context of colonial settlement and the proliferation of wildfire suppression, I presented literature which demonstrated how contemporary land management is a cultural construct. Considering the long history of Indigenous stewardship in contemporary North America through the intentional use of fire for resource intensification (Berkes, 2012; Miller & Davidson-Hunt, 2010; Turner, 1999; Boyd, 1999; Lewis, 1982), I have shown that current wildfire suppression mandates are rooted in a specific value system (Kimmerer & Lake, 2001; Sutherland, 2018). I used Michel Foucault's governmentality theory (1994) to illustrate the ideological and political foundation upon which the practice of wildfire suppression rests. Through policies and practices, which are enacted during times of crisis through emergency management actions, the values of government become both cultural norms and imperatives. I have demonstrated how emergency management practices, which include roles for citizens to play in upholding their values (Rose & Miller, 1992), reinscribe dominant cultural values (Ophir, 2006) which may not be congruent with those held by rural and Indigenous communities. The professionalization of emergency response organizations further divorces these organizations from their political goals and naturalizes their existence (Ophir, 2006).

When wildfire emergencies occur in rural and Indigenous communities, the contested

jurisdiction of lands, the chronic lack of infrastructure, and their often remote geographies make suppression of these fires challenging (Christianson et al. 2019; Mottershead et al. 2020). Paired with ongoing economic injustices, these complexities obscure the original disaster of colonization in favour of an acute crisis (Luft, 2016). During times of crisis, this dynamic is further complicated by competing and contradictory jurisdictional authorities on Indigenous lands (Sharp & Krebs, 2018; Verhaeghe, Feltes & Stacey, 2018). The specific example of how 2017's evacuation orders played out in Tl'etinqox demonstrates how layers of colonialism within this complex system can lead to disputes about the political autonomy of Indigenous Nations (Givetash, 2017). Thus, during times of crisis, the sovereignty of Indigenous Nations has potential to be compromised through emergency management actions and policies.

Because 2018 was such a significant fire season, the fires which burned in the Southside affected all community members prompting widespread evacuation orders and a Provincial State of Emergency (Government of British Columbia, n.d.d; Regional District of Bulkley Nechako, n.d). These same fires impacted Southsiders and their properties, which include Cheslatta Carrier Nation's communities and lands. To understand the nature of this impact, I sought information relating to the history of the land and that of the people. I used a lens of relationality (Wilson, 2008) to interpret literature which narrates the story of a people in place. I presented several academic texts (Winkler, 2019; Buhler, 1998; Dawson, 2001) which affirmed community voices describing how Alcan and British Columbia's construction of the Kenney Dam (along with its related forced relocation of Cheslatta people and destruction of their villages) remains a primary and ongoing impact to community members (Robertson, 1991; Byl & Robertson, 1992). Throughout all phases of this research, I was reminded of the devastation that flooding has caused to the people and to the land. While this historical impact is still felt very deeply, the interviews I conducted with community members drew strong parallels between the

displacement of Cheslatta people in 1952 and the contemporary displacement of people as a result of wildfires in 2018.

Because relationships are central to many Indigenous worldviews (Cajete, 2000; Wilson, 2008; Little Bear, 2009), the impact of the 2018 fires on the land is inextricably linked to the health and wellbeing of the people who care for it. As such, I drew on the work of Indigenous scholars to describe how Indigenous land management techniques are embedded in complex knowledge systems (Kovach, 2009; Kimmerer & Lake, 2001; Simpson, 2004; Cajete, 2000). While recognizing the value of these systems is itself a powerful act of acknowledgement, there remain ongoing tensions in contemporary attempts to merge Western and Indigenous knowledge systems (Sutherland, 2018; Neale et al, 2019; Lewis, Christianson & Spinks, 2018; Carroll et al, 2010). There remains a steep cultural imbalance in how these knowledge systems are given value because western science has long been a tool of colonization and control of Indigenous lands and peoples (Simpson, 2004). This imbalance has left a legacy of exploitation and mistrust in a system which still treats the Earth and its inhabitants as resources for extraction and profit (Simpson, 2004; Smith, 2005; Sutherland, 2018).

Finally, to better understand how wildfires impact and shape lived experiences, I sought information from neighbouring Indigenous communities. Community-driven publications from both Nadleh Whu'ten and Tsilhqot'in Nation, highlight how jurisdictional challenges created conflict and a lack of clarity about each level of government's authority and responsibility during wildfire events (Sharp & Krebs, 2018; Verhaeghe, Feltes & Stacey, 2018). These reports both include a series of tangible recommendations for improving emergency response and increasing community safety and resilience post-fire. Additional to community-driven publications, British Columbia's provincial government also commissioned its own report. George Abbot and Maureen Chapman's *Addressing the new normal: 21st century disaster management in British*

Columbia (2018) contained 108 recommendations, which address systemic and generational issues in emergency response. Many of these pertain specifically to the experiences of First Nations and rural communities. This abundance of information reflects shared experienced between communities and links many of the issues which plagued the Southside and Cheslatta Carrier Nation in 2018 to a larger narrative.

Due to the ongoing impacts and precautions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to adjust my research methods. My original plan to spend time in the Southside getting to know community members had to shift as I found new ways of researching remotely while respecting UNBC and British Columbia's 2020-2021 evolving public health guidelines. My original research goal was to better understand a single event from multiple perspectives by means of a qualitative case study (Creswell, 2013) and using an Indigenous methodology (Archibald, Morgan & Santolo, 2019; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Because of the warm welcome I received from Cheslatta Carrier Nation and from the broader community of the Southside, my research achieved this goal. I adjusted my means of communication and was able to conduct this study collaboratively despite physical limitations and travel restrictions.

Through the course of this thesis research, I checked in regularly with my Southside community connections and heeded their direction about how to engage respectfully and successfully with community members. Because of their guidance, I was able to secure interviews with thirteen Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals during ten interviews who represent a professionally, culturally, and geographically diverse group. Each of these interview participants lived through the 2018 wildfire season, and explained their unique experience and perspective to me. I first interviewed individuals who I already knew through my existing community connections. During each interview, I asked participants who else I should include in the study and utilized a chain referral technique (Atkinson & Flint, 2001), wherein interview

participants suggest and introduce me to additional interview candidates. This method allowed me to develop a shared connection with potential participants and was helpful in securing interviews as I navigated working remotely with a community for which I am not a member.

Throughout this process, my initial assumptions of who this study would include shifted as my understanding of the Southside deepened. I broadened my understanding of community to include both non-Indigenous and Indigenous residents. As I learned more about the integrated and collaborative spirit which characterizes Southsiders, I was able to adjust my scope. Through hearing the personal reflections of participants and asking questions about their experiences, I was able to better understand how each of their stories fit together. Having access to such diverse and rich experiential information allowed me to better understand and present the collective story of a community. I integrated my own ethical principles into my research methods with the goal of balancing power between myself and the research participants. As part of this, I offered participants the option to be named in order to allow individuals greater control over their own representation. I offered the option to review a transcript of the interview data, as well as a draft of my findings chapter which made use of their stories. Throughout, informed consent became an iterative process made possible through ongoing correspondence between research participants and myself.

To interpret the information contained in each interview, I identified a series of themes from each recording or set of interview notes. I collected all of these themes together searching for commonalities and divergences between them. As I organized this information, I found ways to describe overarching messages in their collective story based on these identified topics. In doing so, I was left with six summative themes, which include the following: 1) Impacts to the land and to the people, 2) the physical and political landscape, 3) fire as a site of personal and

collective struggle, 4) the limitations of physical infrastructure, 5) the importance of local knowledge, and 6) fire as a catalyst for change.

I believe that community voices should remain central to defining these themes. Because of this, I used quotes from participants throughout the findings chapter to describe the sentiments and experiences which shaped them. As I listened, reflected, analyzed and described the stories shared during interviews, the overarching message I took away is that the Southside and Southsiders have a unique culture and way of being which is shaped by their history and cultural makeup. Though the events of 2018 exposed many tensions, and often brought about frustration and conflict, they also exposed the tremendous resilience and support network of the community and its neighbours. At various times, this crisis brought diverse community members and groups together in new ways.

For Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members alike, the experience of 2018 was a formative one and will remain a significant event that impacted various aspects of their lives and relationships. Based on some of their more challenging interactions, many expressed the desire for first responders to respect community experiences and skills at both a personal and institutional level. Southsiders are a pragmatic people, and going forward would like to be part of the solution to enhance community safety and resilience. Select participants described how an increase in discussions between Southside residents, Cheslatta Carrier Nation, and provincial emergency response organizations is already happening. It is though these partnerships that emergency response organizations and community members are strengthening their relationships and rebuilding trust. It is alongside, and in support of, these collaborative conversations that this research aims to deepen our collective understanding of how Southsiders experienced the 2018 wildfire season.

Research into Action

Because the goal of this work includes decolonization and social change, the findings of this thesis should also be a catalyst for action. As a public servant who still engages regularly with rural and Indigenous communities during times of crisis, I have collected some lessons which have become my own personal ethical guidelines for this work. Though I recognize that change happens at an institutional level, I believe each Public Servant and emergency responder has a great deal of impact when engaging with communities during wildfire events. Many interview participants cited specific interactions with individual emergency response personnel which they perceived as disrespectful and contributed to their mistrust of these organizations. As such, I have devised three rules, which act as ethical pillars for individuals engaging with rural and Indigenous communities. These are suggestions for all agencies and individuals with roles in emergency management.

1. **Assume that you don't know.** When approaching communities and community members in a place you are not from, assume that there are many things you do not know about them. If communities are truly going to become resilient to wildfire, community members and leaders need to be part of emergency response efforts and planning before the crisis happens.
2. **Treat each community as unique.** Though you may have expertise in your role and professional skill, each community has expertise in its own history and experience. Be curious about this, and find ways to honour it.
3. **Respect local culture, knowledge and skills.** In working with local people, seek out the keepers of Indigenous Knowledge, rural knowledge, and geographic knowledge. They have the ability to make your efforts more effective if you can work together and identify common goals.

While these suggestions are neither specific nor prescriptive, it is my belief that change requires each of us to build genuine relationships which are rooted in mutual respect and curiosity about one another's cultures and communities. While emergency management is often

necessarily hierarchical in nature, with rigid protocols and decision making structures, the communities that these organizations serve are diverse and complex. What this research has revealed is a need for increased information-sharing, storytelling and collaboration between communities, governments, and professional emergency response organizations.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of this research, I could never have imagined how the process would transform me. Many of the personal reflections I recorded during this process have enriched my sense of personal fortitude and resilience. The act of asking to be told a personal story about a traumatic event by a stranger made me acutely aware of the responsibility I carry as a researcher. The interactions I had with community members were both enlightening and, at times, emotional and challenging. Participants' willingness to entrust in me with their stories taught me about the reciprocal duty I owe to these stories. This responsibility includes telling the story accurately, and doing my best to find platforms which honour and amplify the storytellers. The choices I made throughout this research were ones I did with care and intention. As a result of this work, I am a more confident, humble, and trusting person.

The wildfire season of 2018 was unprecedented, and affected many communities in British Columbia. Cheslatta Carrier Nation and the broader community of the Southside was positioned at the heart of some of the most aggressive wildfires that year. The purpose of this research was to increase awareness and understanding through telling stories and shedding light on the lived experiences of community members. While I believe I have achieved this goal, through research I have also come to a deeper understanding my own experiences of wildfire at that time and how they fit in with a broader narrative. In considering this, I must heed my own advice, and treat each community as unique. I understand this study to be a reflection of a specific place, a specific time, and of specific voices. Though its themes and messages may

transcend this single example, each new wildfire event and community will bring with it its own distinct history and lessons.

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