

Wildfire Research in Northwestern BC: An MA thesis research summary

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ABSTRACT:

This research tells the story of the 2018 wildfire season in Cheslatta Carrier Nation territory through the lived experiences of community members. Integrating both Western and Indigenous ways of knowing, this thesis examines how the proliferation of a wildfire suppression mandate contributed to changes to the social, political and the physical landscape. Using a qualitative methodology and ten semi-structured interviews with community members, it details how historic events, including flooding and forced relocation, shaped how community members felt about wildfire events and their management. This research found that the record-breaking 2018 wildfire season impacted Indigenous and non-Indigenous people living in Cheslatta territory in physical, economic, and spiritual ways. The loss of timber and livelihoods was at the forefront of community concerns. Displacement due to evacuation orders and restrictions brought about conflict and struggle. While many community members felt disempowered by the wildfires and their management, wildfire was also a catalyst for political and social change. This thesis' findings explore ways that wildfires can unite, divide, and transform individuals and communities. It provides solutions to work toward community safety and resilience in a wildfire context.