This partnership brings together researchers, First Nation communities in Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta that were evacuated due to recent wildfires, and agencies responsible for conducting or providing support during these evacuations.

The goal is to examine how Aboriginal residents and communities have been affected by wildfire evacuations and identify ways to reduce negative impacts of wildfire evacuations on Aboriginal people.

**Overview**

Numerous presentations were given in early 2015. Amy and Kyla presented an online webinar through the CIFFC National Conversations on Forest Fire Management in April. You can find it here [http://www.ciffc.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=103&Itemid=242](http://www.ciffc.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=103&Itemid=242)

A final report was submitted to the funding agency Alberta Centre for Child, Family, and Community Research, who funded our work with Whitefish Lake First Nation 459. The report will be distributed to partners shortly.

Marcel Schneider, a Metis student, is working with Amy this summer at the Northern Forestry Centre examining evacuations of Aboriginal communities in Canada between 1980 and 2015.

Amy heads out on maternity leave in September as she is expecting her first child.

Our thoughts are with Lac La Ronge Indian Band, who have experienced a busy summer of wildfire evacuations already. Chief Tammy Cook-Searson has been doing a fantastic job of keeping her community members informed. Follow her on FaceBook or on twitter at @Chief Tammy

**Research begins in Saskatchewan**

We are proud to announce that research has begun this summer with our partner First Nations: Onion Lake Cree Nation and Lac La Ronge Indian Band. Karen Pheasant-Neganigwane (from Wikwemikong First Nation) and Adrian Waskewitch (from Onion Lake Cree Nation) will be collecting data in Onion Lake and Stanley Mission. Amy would like to thank Chief Fox, Joe Waskewitch, Hubert Pahtayken, and the rest of the Council from Onion Lake Cree Nation for their continued support. Amy would also like to thank Chief Tammy Cook-Searson from Lac La Ronge Indian Band and Gord from Stanley Mission for their help and support.
In May, Tara was in Australia and New Zealand to work on two other research projects. While in Australia, Tara gave presentations at two universities – the University of Western Sydney (Sydney) and the Australian National University (Canberra). The presentation at ANU was recorded and shown to researchers in the Northern Territory. These presentations provided background information about First Nations in Canada, described the partnership, and presented the findings from Whitefish Lake (Atikameg) First Nation. The research was of considerable interest because Australia has not completed mass evacuations of communities as we do in Canada. A recent exception was the evacuation of an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory due to Cyclone Lam.

**Research Team**

- **Dr. Tara McGee**
  University of Alberta
  Tara is the academic lead for the partnership. Her research program focuses on the human dimensions of wildfires and other hazards. She supervises graduate students and teaches undergraduate courses on social science aspects of hazards. Tara is collecting data with Mishkeegogamang Ojibway Nation and Whitefish Lake First Nation 459.

- **Dr. Amy Christianson**
  Canadian Forest Service
  Amy is a Fire Social Scientist and works with Aboriginal communities on fire management. She is collecting data with Whitefish Lake First Nation 459 and will be managing data collection with Onion Lake Cree Nation and Lac La Ronge Indian Band (Stanley Mission).

- **Kyla Mottershead**
  Kyla is an MA student in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences. She is collecting data with Dene Tha’ First Nation.

- **Henok Asfaw**
  Henok is a PhD student in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences. He is collecting data with Sandy Lake First Nation.

- **Dr. Amy Christianson**
  Canadian Forest Service
  Amy is a Fire Social Scientist and works with Aboriginal communities on fire management. She is collecting data with Whitefish Lake First Nation 459 and will be managing data collection with Onion Lake Cree Nation and Lac La Ronge Indian Band (Stanley Mission).

**University Presentations in Australia**

In May, Tara was in Australia and New Zealand to work on two other research projects. While in Australia, Tara gave presentations at two universities – the University of Western Sydney (Sydney) and the Australian National University (Canberra). The presentation at ANU was recorded and shown to researchers in the Northern Territory. These presentations provided background information about First Nations in Canada, described the partnership, and presented the findings from Whitefish Lake (Atikameg) First Nation. The research was of considerable interest because Australia has not completed mass evacuations of communities as we do in Canada. A recent exception was the evacuation of an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory due to Cyclone Lam.
In April, Tara, Amy and Kyla attended this conference. The conference was well attended by international fire social scientists and practitioners. In addition to the presentations listed below, we presented a poster on the Whitefish Lake First Nation 459 research results.

**SPECIAL SESSION ONE: INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND WILDLAND FIRE**

**Moderator:** Amy Christianson

Despite fairly extensive knowledge on traditional burning practices, little is known about how wildfire is currently managed in Indigenous communities worldwide. Indigenous communities are frequently at high risk from wildfire because they are often situated in isolated, remote locations in landscapes prone to fire. Indigenous populations are increasing rapidly compared with the general population and Indigenous communities often face a range of socioeconomic issues of increasing complexity and severity in some communities, making fire management a lower priority. Social science research with Indigenous populations on fire management can help to inform policy in the face of global changes such as climate change, biodiversity loss and economic change. This special session will host speakers from numerous countries discussing Indigenous People and contemporary wildland fire management.

**Keywords:** Indigenous, Aboriginal, fire management, social science

**19. Wildlife evacuation experiences of a First Nations community in Alberta, Canada**

**Presenter:** Tara McGee, PhD, Associate Professor, University of Alberta

**Additional Author(s):**
Amy Christianson, Fire Social Scientist, Natural Resources Canada, Canadian Forest Service

In this presentation, we will present results of research carried out as part of the First Nations wildfire evacuation partnership in Canada. The partnership includes eight First Nations in three provinces that have been evacuated due to recent wildfires, researchers, and government and non-government organizations involved in assisting during evacuations of First Nations communities. We will present findings from research carried out with Whitefish Lake First Nation Alaskan in Alberta, which was evacuated in the summer of 2011. Interviews were completed with community members who helped to carry out the evacuation, those who were evacuated, and those who stayed behind during the evacuation. In this presentation, we will describe how the evacuation was carried out, residents’ evacuation experiences, and factors that positively and negatively influenced residents’ evacuation experiences.

**Keywords:** wildfire evacuation, First Nations

**Bio:** Tara McGee is an Associate Professor in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Alberta. For the past 15 years, her research has focused on the human dimensions of hazards, mainly focusing on wildfires. Tara leads the First Nations wildfire evacuation partnership.

**20. In their words: how a wildfire evacuation affected residents of a Northern Alberta First Nation community**

**Presenter:** Kyla Mottershead, MA Student, Human Geography, Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, University of Alberta

In Canada, fire management agencies recommend the evacuation of a community when wildfires pose a threat to the health and safety of residents. This results in thousands of people being evacuated each year (Beverly & Bothwell, 2011). Although they make up only 4.3 percent of the Canadian population, almost one-third of the wildfire evacuations that took place between 1980 and 2007 involved an Aboriginal community (Beverly & Bothwell, 2011). The remote location and unique sociocultural characteristics of many Aboriginal communities can present challenges for residents and evacuation organizers. However, very little research has sought to understand how Aboriginal residents are affected by wildfire evacuations. This community-based, qualitative study explored how residents of Dene Tha’ First Nation (Mendler River, Alberta) were affected by a community-wide evacuation called in response to heavy smoke from a nearby wildfire. Data from interviews and focus groups with 31 participants illustrate that the community context and logistical characteristics of the evacuation determined how residents were affected. Three main themes are evident in the participant’s discussions of their experiences. First, they focused on the loss of control they experienced over decisions affecting their personal and collective well-being. Second, participants focused on the psychological impacts they experienced. Third, the participants focused on how the evacuation altered their risk perception and desire to implement mitigation and preparedness efforts in relation to wildfires and other local hazards. The findings from this study point to the importance of reducing pre-existing vulnerabilities in order to minimize the negative impacts of wildfire evacuations on Aboriginal communities. This research confirms that evacuations can be difficult for some Aboriginal residents and organizers must develop plans to account for the distinct sociocultural characteristics and vulnerabilities of the communities with which they work.

**Reference:**

**Bio:** Kyla Mottershead is a second year Master of Arts student in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Science (Human Geography and Planning Program) at the University of Alberta. She has a BA in Development Studies and Geography from the University of Calgary (10). Her MA research focuses on how residents of a First Nation community were affected by a wildfire evacuation with the goal of mitigating and preventing any negative impacts experienced by First Nation communities during emergency evacuations.
**Research with Sandy Lake First Nation**

Henok will be travelling to Sandy Lake in July to begin conducting fieldwork with the community.

**Research with Dene Tha’ First Nation**

Kyla travelled to Chateh and Meander River in April 2015 to present initial findings to Chief and Council and community members. She received valuable feedback from members of Chief and Council and is grateful for their time and consideration. Kyla is currently writing her Master’s thesis and plans to return to Meander River in late summer to present final research results to Chief and Council, research participants and community members.

**Research with Whitefish Lake First Nation (459)**

Amy returned to Whitefish Lake First Nation in March to discuss the research findings with Band Council and participants. Participants were most interested in the draft of the photo booklet, which details their evacuation experiences using pictures and quotes from community members. Amy would like to thank Councillor Darren Auger for reviewing the powerpoint of the results from the research at Whitefish Lake, and for his thoughtful comments and support. Amy would also like to thank Sheila Laboucan for her assistance in the community once again. Amy, Tara, Kyla, and Alberta agency partnership members will be returning to the community in early fall to host a workshop on the research results.

**Research with Mishkeegogamang Ojibway First Nation**

Tara will be analyzing interview data from Mishkeegogamang Ojibway First Nation this summer.

**UP NEXT:**
Kyla returns to Dene Tha’; Partnership workshop in Whitefish Lake First Nation (459); Research in Saskatchewan and Ontario; Tara analyses Mishkeegogamang Ojibway First Nation data.