

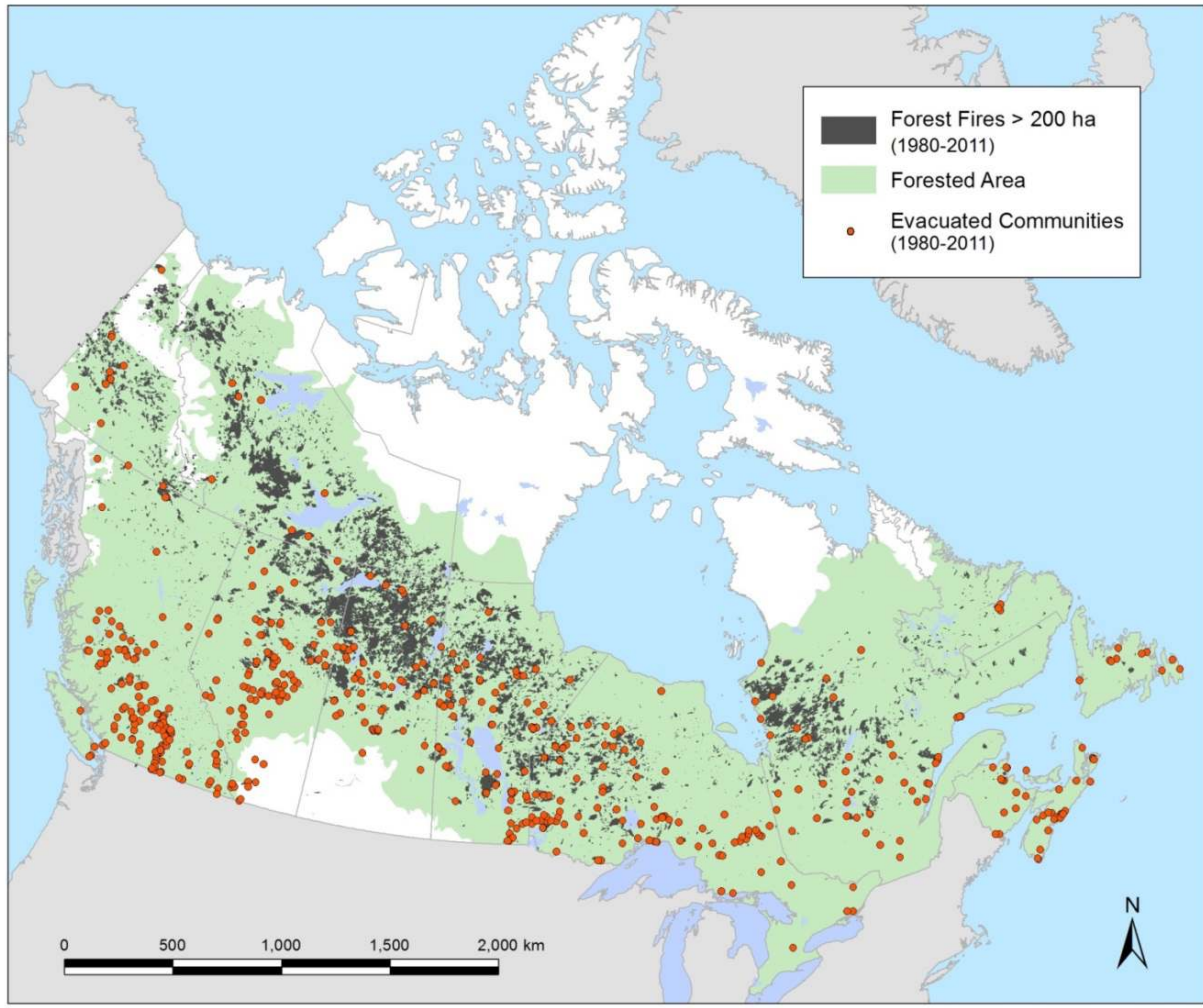
First Nations wildfire evacuation experiences: Mishkeegogamang First Nation, Ontario

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Wildfire evacuations in Canada



Source: McGee, T.K., McFarlane, B.L. and Tymstra, C. (2015). Wildfire: A Canadian Perspective. In Wildfire Hazards, Risks, and Disasters, Paton (ed.), Elsevier p. 51



First Nations Wildfire Evacuation Partnership

- Researchers
- First Nations communities in Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta evacuated due to recent wildfires
- Agencies responsible for conducting or providing support during these evacuations

PARTNERS

Ontario
Ministry of Natural Resources

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Alberta Alberta Emergency Management Agency
Environment and Sustainable Resource Development

First Nations' Emergency Services Society
Of British Columbia

SANDY LAKE FIRST NATION
TREATY NO. FIVE

Deer Lake First Nation

CREE NATION
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MISHKEEGOGAMANG
FIRST NATION

Canada
Natural Resources Canada / Ressources naturelles Canada
Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada /
Affaires autochtones et Développement du Nord Canada
Health Canada / Santé Canada

EM
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ONTARIO
GESTION DES URGENCES ONTARIO

Government of Saskatchewan
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Health

Whitefish Lake First Nation (#459)

DENE THA'
Dene Tha' First Nation

Driftpile Cree Nation

Lac La Ronge Indian Band

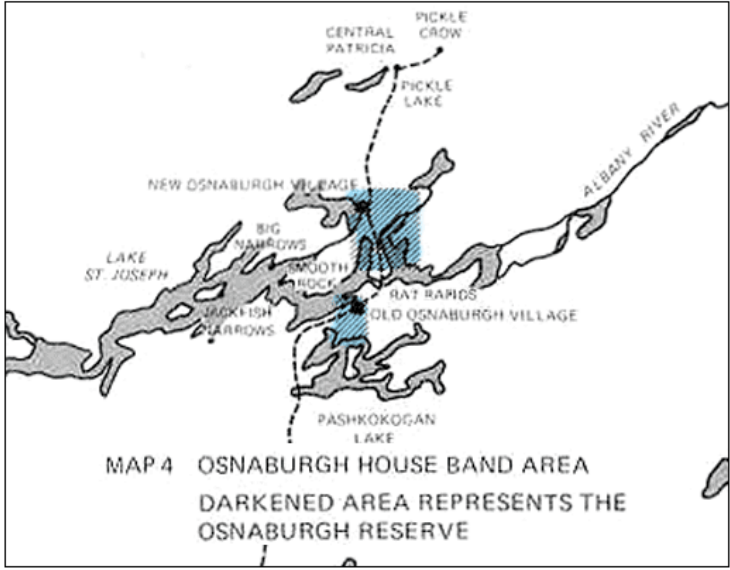
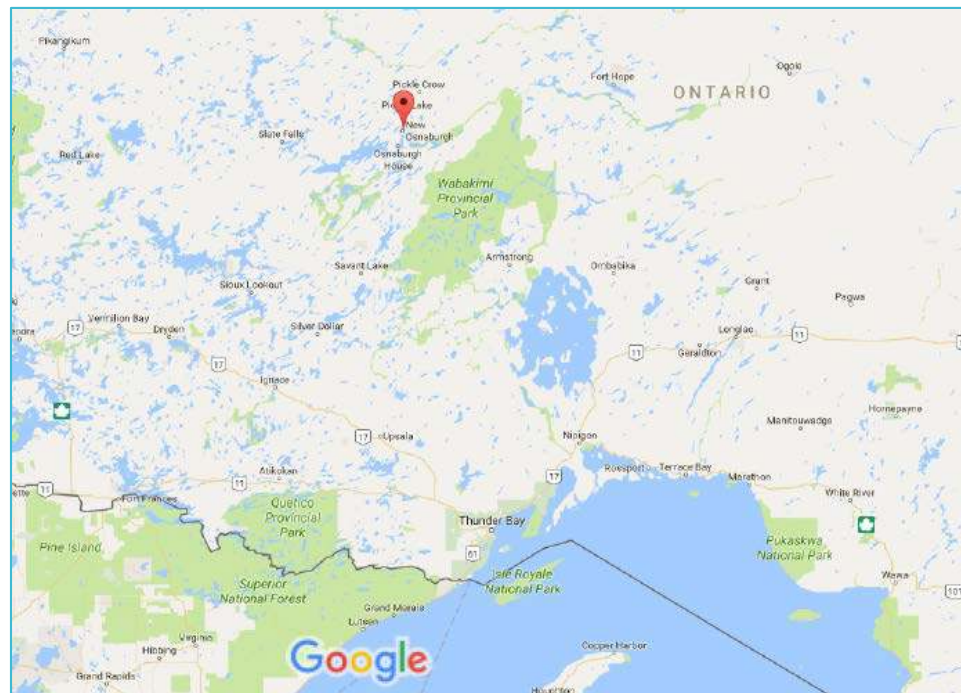


Existing academic literature

- Research on negative impact of evacuations on health of evacuees.
- Research on how natural hazard evacuations have affected the health of Indigenous peoples.
- Research on how wildfire evacuations have affected the health and well-being of First Nations.



Mishkeegogamang First Nation



Acknowledgements

- Chief Connie Gray-McKay and Councillors
- Residents and workers at the Elders home
- Residents who shared their experiences with me





Research methods

- Meeting with Chief and Council
- Semi-structured interviews
 - 28 residents
 - youths, adults, elders
 - People who had formal roles during the evacuation
 - People who evacuated to the three host communities
 - People who stayed elsewhere
 - Residents who stayed behind or near the reserve
- Qualitative data analysis





The evacuation

- “Sometimes the main reserve would have no smoke and 10 houses would just be blanketed in the stuff. There was a lot of worry about the elders and people in general breathing in the smoke every day. That’s why it became so serious.”
- Through the radio, and people would call, telling us what’s going to happen. People actually stopped by the house too. Went by every house... [they said] there’ll be a bus here going around, gather all your stuff for at least a week they said. At least we had 1 day to prepare and everything.”
- “It [the trip to Ignace] was long! It was hard because some mothers left with nothing – they didn’t leave with no pampers, nothing. They just got up and left... That was kind of hard though because there was babies crying on the bus. It was hard and I don’t know if anybody had eaten supper... Ya they didn’t have stuff to eat all the way there – three hours.”



Community leaders and other volunteers

- Some people needed medical attention or they forgot their pills. Oh that was hectic! Trying to get people to the hospital... Kept going back and forth to the hospital, especially the ones that are on the medication, to get them their medication as soon as possible.”
- “There was no freedom. You don’t feel like you’re free to do anything ‘cause you’re managing a whole bunch of people, different kind of issues. It was pretty hard. They we tried to talk to people, at least to listen, so nobody gets kicked out of the rooms. It was just very stressful, tried to manage people that we had to look after.”
- “The last day myself I have to sleep in for a few hours just to regroup a little bit. 8 days of coordinating all the stuff and sometimes it gets overwhelming. Tiring.”



Evacuees in three host communities

- “All the pregnant... pre-natals and elderly had to go to the hotel. That’s where I went and stayed there.”
- “We all stayed in what looked like an arena, indoor rink... then there was a whole bunch of beds in there that we had to choose from. I don’t know. It was the rec centre I think. It was nice though. It was really nice in there.”
- “We’d go eat lunch and supper at the Legion. The Sioux Lookout residents would cook food and stuff like that, so we’d all go. There’d be a bus that’d come pick us up and take us over there.”
- “They took us to the beach, they had the bus running every hour going to the beach, that kinda thing. Taking kids to the beach, or BBQ at the mayor’s house, we went to a couple times anyway. And he had a nice beach, so that’s where the kids went swimming. And he was really nice.”



Evacuees staying elsewhere

- “No money to buy food or anything. And I got nothing to change [clothing] too because I just leave like that [points to clothing] because I just went for 2 days or 3 days. I didn’t even have a change [of clothes], so I have nothing. And I just found out my pills... I got no place to get it over there, and I run out, so I got all those kinds of problems when I was there.”
- “Some of them [living in the bush around Pickle Lake] didn’t know their family was evacuated! They didn’t find out until they tried to come back home and the taxi said we can’t take you back:”



Negative impacts

- “My grandchildren were out there and I didn’t know what they were going through, what’s happening to them. It got me worried... I was worried about them.”
- Oh for sure I thought my house was gonna burn. Our houses were gonna burn... All I was worried about was my house and having a place to go when I came back.”
- “A negative thing was that people were writing [on Facebook] that they felt, some people felt, what would you say, unwanted or unwelcome, you know, racism.”
- ... Nobody got reimbursed [for their food that was lost]... I heard a lot of people had to start from scratch again. I had.. Moose meat, liver, and chicken, everything you could think of. They were no good when you came back... Everybody experienced that....”
- “Like even years after that, like the kids will say ‘I hope we’re not evacuated this year’. Last summer they said the same thing. Like if they see smoke, like when we’re travelling we quickly report it so it doesn’t get out of hand. We are so scared for that to happen again.”



Positive impacts

“Meeting new people [was one of the good things] and having fun... Me and my cousins I guess.”

“We had quite a few nice adventures out there. The Geraldton mayor was very opening and also the workers over there. They were so nice and they said those are the nicest crowd [of evacuees] they ever had before.”

“I just like the fact that we were out there [in Sioux Lookout] as a community. That was cool.”



Factors that affected success

- Evacuation organization and resources
- Help from band members
- Reception in host communities
- Outside the community
- Some family separation
- Food loss



Recommendations

- Ensure that First Nations have resources needed to respond in an emergency.
- Keeping families together during evacuations.
- Compensation for food lost during evacuations.
- Evacuate to a more suitable setting.
- Provide information about the potential need to evacuate.
- First Nations to have an evacuation plan.
- Ensure that emergency plans incorporate band members located off the reserve.
- Awareness training.

Thank you!

