



cutting through complexity

Lesser Slave Lake Regional Urban Interface Wildfire – Lessons Learned

Final Report

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1. Executive Summary

The Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfires saw almost 15,000 people evacuated from the region for more than two weeks.

The Slave Lake Town Hall burned, along with 730 homes, a number of local businesses and community infrastructure.

The Insurance Bureau of Canada has reported that this was the second costliest disaster in Canadian history for the insurance industry, estimated at over \$700 million.

The wildfires that threatened the Lesser Slave Lake region in May of 2011 resulted in the largest disaster in the history of Alberta. Never have so many people been evacuated, or so much property been lost. Never has there been a rebuilding job like the one faced in the aftermath of the wildfires – roughly a quarter of the Town of Slave Lake was destroyed along with a large number of structures in the adjoining Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No.124. Governments, citizens, first responders and groups across the province came together in a heroic and unprecedented way to help fight the wildfires, support residents and help the affected communities to rebuild and recover.

When an event unlike any seen before occurs, there are always lessons to be learned. The Government of Alberta, through Alberta Municipal Affairs, commissioned this study to examine what happened and what insights can be gained from the experience of the wildfires and their aftermath. This review is not about blame and liability. It is about taking this rare opportunity to learn from the ways that this incredible event inspired Albertans to collaborate, even as it stretched our ability to respond. It is about ensuring that this experience leaves the province stronger and better prepared for future disasters.

This report brings together input from a great many of those people who were affected by the wildfires or involved in the events from May 14th to August 22nd, 2011. It considers how the plans, standards and protocols that existed at the time helped shape the actions taken.

The findings of this review suggest that Alberta has a strong foundation for effective emergency management, and in many ways Alberta's response to the Lesser Slave Lake disaster met or exceeded standards and leading practices from around the globe. At the same time, the scale of the Lesser Slave Lake disaster was unprecedented in Alberta's history. When reading this report it is important to remember that whenever a system is tested against extreme circumstances, there are always innovative practices to be captured for the future and lessons to be learned.

This review identifies the successes and the learnings from all those that were involved in the response and the recovery efforts. In total, nineteen recommendations are made based on the findings of this review and informed by input and advice from international subject matter advisors and a review of leading practices.

Although the scope of the review was limited to the Lesser Slave Lake disaster, the recommendations are intended to inform broader systemic opportunities for enhancing emergency preparedness, response and recovery. These recommendations suggest actions to be led or undertaken by the Government of Alberta, with the acknowledgement that there are many people and organizations that have a role and a stake in emergency management across the province.

Finally, this report gives voice and recognition to the personal and professional experiences of those affected by the Lesser Slave Lake regional disaster.

The Story

What follows is a recollection of the experience of the wildfires and their aftermath. Understanding the story from the perspective of residents and those involved is essential to making sense of what happened and what can be learned.



One day. High winds. Out of control wildfires.

That's all it took for a disaster to unfold unlike anything seen before in Alberta. On the morning of May 14th, 2011, a widespread evacuation from the Lesser Slave Lake region seemed unthinkable.

Notwithstanding the hot, dry weather of the previous days, there was no grave concern about the wildfires in the region. For people living in this region, seeing smoke on the horizon was not uncommon. But circumstances changed very quickly, and by Sunday night thousands of people were fleeing their homes, driving out through flames and smoke so thick that at times they couldn't see anything in front of them.

Hundreds of homes burned as residents were evacuated from the Town of Slave Lake (the Town), the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No.124 (the Municipal District), and Sawridge First Nation (the First Nation). In the aftermath, Albertans stood shoulder to shoulder to help affected residents, families, and communities to cope with the experience, and to recover.



A Weekend to Remember: May 14th – 15th, 2011

On Saturday May 14th, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency was monitoring a number of wildfires across the province. Early in the day, several of them looked to be a bigger threat than any of the fires in the Lesser Slave Lake region.

Before the day was out, though, two more wildfires started in the region, and both the Town and the Municipal District had declared states of local emergency and activated their respective Emergency Operations Centres. By early Sunday, as the two wildfires were burning out of control, a highly unusual combination of weather and circumstances began to emerge that would result in a disaster that could not be prevented by the best efforts of all those involved.

On Sunday morning, the Municipal District evacuated many of its residents and moved its Emergency Operations Centre into the Town for safety reasons. As the threat to the region grew, provincial personnel began preparing to lend a hand to local communities, but there was no expectation that the fires would threaten the Town itself until the winds picked up on Sunday afternoon, gusting over 100 kilometres per hour. Everyone was caught off guard by how fast the fires advanced with this wind behind them.

As winds gusted to more than 100 kilometers per hour, the wildfires advanced toward communities in the region with incredible speed. The situation changed very quickly.

One young person from the Town didn't even know there was a fire burning nearby until she saw people running.

Elsewhere, a mother described how she was bathing her baby when the flames arrived and she had to simply grab her children and throw them in the car.



By the time it became clear that the wildfires were an imminent threat to the Town, there was little warning or time to prepare. The extreme winds and raging wildfires created a firestorm that made it very difficult to get people out of danger. Highways into and out of the region were closed due to smoke. High winds made it impossible for aircraft to safely operate in the area, and aircraft that were being used to fight the wildfires were grounded. Basic infrastructure began to fail; water pressure and electricity were offline, and telephone service became unreliable as buildings were consumed. Structural firefighting crews found themselves without adequate water and began loading trucks from the river to compensate. It was difficult to even stay standing at times in such powerful wind, let alone to suppress the flames.

Meanwhile, people in the Town had been going about their daily lives, getting ready for the upcoming week of work and school. Many had little or no warning that the wildfires could spread to the Town. Almost all sources of information available to the public said to stay calm. For a number of residents, the decision to evacuate became clear when they could see the flames coming. People fled their homes to escape the fires, scrambling to get their children, pets and whatever possessions they had time to grab into their cars.

Leaving the Town was no simple matter, however. There were very few access points in and out of the Town, or in and out of neighbourhoods within the Town. Gas stations were no longer operational. In addition, roadblocks that were erected to protect drivers from the smoke and fires also prevented many from using their first choice of route. Locked in bumper to bumper traffic, residents nevertheless recall that there was a certain sense of order to the evacuation as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) kept everyone moving and people would let cars join the flow of traffic in front of them. At the same time, others recalled harrowing experiences like driving through smoke so thick they could barely see the license plate in front of them, or feeling so much heat they feared their windows would crack.



Reception centres were quickly assembled, but many of those displaced found other support as well; homes across the province opened to provide shelter for family members, friends, and even strangers.

The dedication of workers to remain in the evacuated area without beds, basic amenities or their families should be recognized and applauded.

Firefighters slept in the fire hall, where for a time they didn't have blankets, and other people stayed at Northern Lakes College where there were shortages of food and water for days. Others were in beds and on cots at a local hotel, where they were supported by hotel staff who went above and beyond their job descriptions.

Once people had evacuated from their homes, it wasn't always clear where they should go. Many people gathered at safe spaces, such as the local Walmart parking lot, where they anxiously waited for news and direction. When the word of an official evacuation reached them, these individuals joined other residents heading out of Town. People sought out hotels, family members, friends, and even businesses in surrounding areas for shelter that first night.

The extraordinary efforts of everyone involved prevented the fires from claiming any lives as people fled the Town and the region. It's remarkable, but every single person evacuated from the area got out safely.

The Evacuation Period: May 16th – June 1st, 2011

Individuals, families and busloads of evacuees began to arrive in Westlock, Athabasca, Edmonton, and other Alberta communities in the early hours of Monday, May 16th. Together, governments, communities and citizens brought to bear remarkable resources and compassion in response to the scale and suddenness of the evacuation.

People found clothes, toiletries, cots and other supplies waiting for them in the reception centres. These centres became important gathering places for those who were displaced, whether they stayed there during the entire evacuation period or just checked in to register and get information.

During this time, some residents banded together, sharing updates and looking at pictures of the event on digital cameras. The internet and social media in particular became a crucial channel of information from both official and unofficial sources. One resident commented that if anyone wanted to know what was going on, they had only to ask the teenagers, who were online.

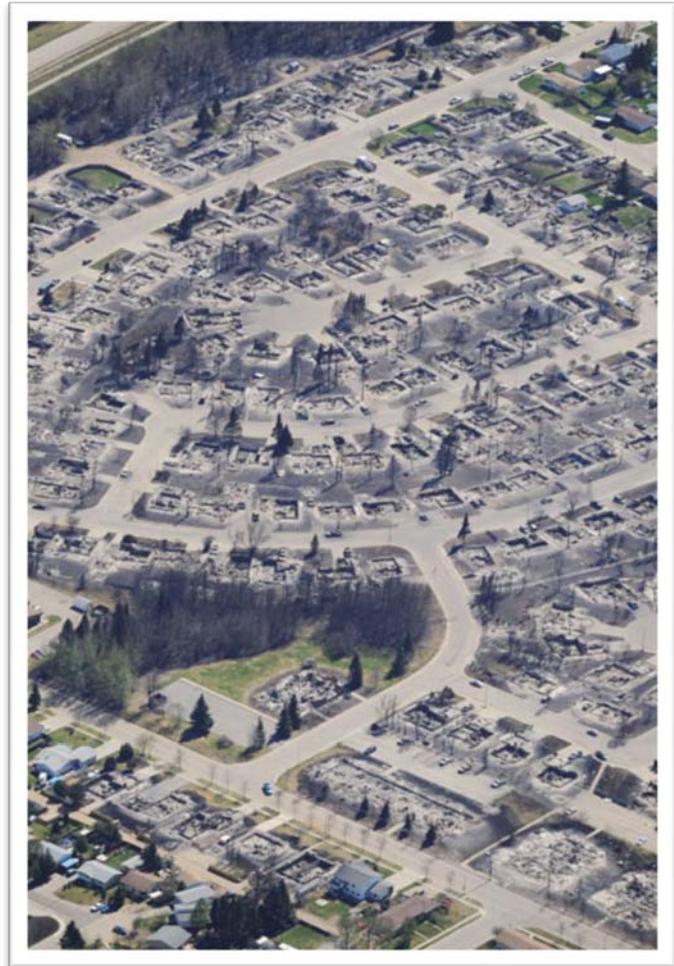
While the mandatory evacuation order was in place, one of the most pressing concerns was the condition of houses and businesses. People were worried and frustrated as they sought any and all information about whether their houses had survived or burned. Rumours spread as quickly as the wildfires had.



People were overawed at the outpouring of generosity from other communities.

It is a testament to the generosity and ingenuity of the people of this province that everyone evacuated from the region had access to food, shelter and basic support during this time.

At this time, many people were already trying to initiate insurance claims, reconnect with their employers and families, and find the food, clothing and supplies to get through each day. Money and day-to-day living were real concerns for many of those displaced. Albertans and organizations across the province stepped in to help. The Government of Alberta provided emergency funds on debit cards. Donations of money and goods arrived in a steady stream. Many companies supported their employees, including some continuing to pay salaries while their businesses were closed. The stories are many, the generosity amazing.



While displaced residents were coping in surrounding communities, many people were working to make the Lesser Slave Lake region safe to return. Up to 1,700 municipal firefighters and other workers flocked to the region to help with the fires and then with getting the region ready for residents to return. Essential staff were asked to return early to get important services up and running, even as their own homes and possessions needed attention. Many of these people didn't have a bed or roof over their head for days at a time.

Once residents were allowed to return, they found re-entry into the region to be a bittersweet, emotionally charged experience. More than one person described the experience as surreal. Some were relieved to return to their homes, while others laid eyes for the first time on the place where their house used to stand. Some broke down and wept during re-entry, while others related a sense of anger at the media presence. Many recounted reaching out to find comfort among neighbours and friends, and a greater sense of community than they had experienced before.

The Beginning of Recovery: June 2nd – August 22nd, 2011

The Lesser Slave Lake region has been forever changed by the wildfires that swept through the region. For many residents, returning to the region meant that their personal losses set in. These losses were devastating in some cases, especially for those who lost all their possessions, photos and other keepsakes.

While everyone recognized that getting back to normal would take time, local and provincial resources got to work immediately on a recovery plan. Local governments hosted town hall meetings to give updates on the state of clean-up and planning for recovery. Schools reopened quickly to give children a sense of routine and familiar social setting where they could see their friends and teachers, although school itself was far from normal in many ways. Many of the teachers, administrators and support staff had themselves lost homes; others didn't return and classes were grouped together. Examinations were cancelled, and the final weeks of the school year were focused on healing and support for one another.

For many adults, getting back to normal would take time as well. Returning to work was difficult, as feelings of shock, worry and guilt persisted. Most were still working through the emotional experience of the disaster itself. Residents related how they had trouble dealing with being unable to gather keepsakes, save pets or act sooner as the wildfires advanced. Many residents whose homes did not burn felt guilty about their good fortune.

By early August, residents began to see the first signs of recovery. The Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan was announced, and reconstruction had begun. As well, by that time there had been an opportunity for the governments and communities in the region to recognize and thank many of those people and organizations who helped during and after the disaster. While not everyone could be formally recognized; those who had been thanked spoke about how important this was to them.



Disaster recovery and the healing process were by no means complete by August 22nd, 2011. But many of those involved were by that point looking to the future.

A tremendous effort has been put into the recovery and rebuilding process after unprecedented wildfires struck the Lesser Slave Lake region in May 2011.

The Government of Alberta has allocated \$289 million toward the wildfire response, recovery and rebuilding efforts to help return the Lesser Slave Lake area to a pre-disaster condition.

Findings

The findings of the review are based largely on the knowledge and experience of the many stakeholders that were involved in the emergency response and recovery efforts. Findings were captured across seven themes:

- Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination
- Community Evacuation and Associated Communications Protocols
- Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations
- Transition from Response to Recovery
- Hazard and Health Concerns
- Non-Government Organization Integration and Coordination
- Economic Recovery Activities and Revenue Stabilization Requirements

As many of the actions taken were not documented at the time, there may be discrepancies between what actually occurred and what stakeholders have shared and recollected. People worked hard. They worked well, and worked together under extraordinary pressure to help save lives and property, and help people to cope and recover. The following findings reflect their wisdom and insights about what happened, what they experienced, and what can be learned.

Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination

There were a minimum of 30 separate entities involved in the emergency response, as well as 38 fire departments. Effective collaboration was therefore essential in this rapidly developing emergency situation.



At a provincial level, the Provincial Operations Centre served as the hub to coordinate support efforts among the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, twelve Alberta Government ministries,¹ non-government organizations, first responders and health services. The scale of this disaster required creativity and quick thinking in stretching beyond the standard emergency management structure. By convening an Assistant Deputy Minister Task Force, reaching out to other municipalities, and leveraging relationships across the province, considerable expertise, personnel and resources were brought to bear very quickly. At the same time, a number of the coordination challenges were experienced because Alberta had not fully implemented the Incident Command System, or trained all relevant parties on their roles in this new incident command model.

Locally, officials from the Town and Municipal District came together in a single Emergency Operations Centre, which then had to be relocated as the first location in the Government Centre burned. They were joined in the Emergency Operations Centre by Sawridge First Nation as well. Initially, it was difficult to get the local response organized, and both supplies and infrastructure were limited. With support from Strathcona County Emergency Services, the Calgary Emergency Management Agency and Alberta Emergency Management Agency, however, leadership and processes took shape and the Emergency Operations Centre took on coordination of local efforts. Between the Emergency Operations Centre and the Provincial Operations Centre, a massive amount of interagency coordination was achieved. Adaptability and engaging the right people proved to be essential, as existing decision making structures were challenged by the sheer size of the response. In particular, pre-existing structures could not integrate First Nations effectively as part of the initial response, nor was it clear how to jointly address a wildfire that moved from the forest into an urban area.

Community Evacuation and Associated Communications Protocols

A great success of the response to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires was that everyone was able to be evacuated before any lives were lost. The process was not perfect, but it was ultimately successful.

Alberta had never experienced a disaster like this, and so no plans were available at local or provincial levels to accommodate the need to evacuate so many residents. In addition, it seems clear that most of those involved were not well-prepared or trained for the possibility of a large evacuation, from individual residents to governments to first responders. In particular, the speed of the wildfires made it difficult to warn residents or issue an evacuation order in a timely fashion.

¹ This report references the Government of Alberta ministries that existed at the time of the response.

Adaptability in rapidly changing circumstances was critical to the success of the evacuation. Given the unprecedented and incredibly difficult situation being faced, those involved performed admirably, mustering resources quickly to help people leave the region safely. The municipalities and the Emergency Operations Centre were supported in evacuating residents by external resources such as



the RCMP, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, Alberta Health Services, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Alberta Transportation road crews. Timely communications proved a challenge in the midst of a chaotic wildfire response, but residents and responders alike pulled together to get everyone out of the region safely.

Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations

Evacuees from the Lesser Slave Lake region travelled to a number of surrounding municipalities. Those municipalities who received large numbers of evacuees received little or no notice of the influx of people from the Lesser Slave Lake region in the late hours of May 15th, 2011. These communities welcomed evacuees with open arms, although each had a different level of understanding and readiness for setting up a reception centre, operating one once established, and understanding how the centres fit into the command structure. They worked with local agencies and the provincial government to provide supplies, supports and services to

address the range of needs experienced by those who were displaced. It became challenging to communicate effectively with residents who were spread across the province and over



time the reception centres also became important sources of information for all evacuees, not just those staying within the centres. Despite efforts to offer social and mental health supports, in hindsight it was difficult to properly service the emotional, social and mental health needs of the evacuees.

Following the wildfires the need for short-term and interim housing was unprecedented in our province's history. No local or provincial plans or procurement relationships were in place in advance to provide access to the required housing. Processes had to be developed from scratch in order to manage access to evacuated areas and short-term accommodations during and after the evacuation period. Provincial government and municipal personnel were innovative in pioneering successful ways to deal with the challenges that this unprecedented situation presented. This included the Alberta Government stepping far beyond their normal role by taking direct action to provide suitable longer-term temporary housing for those whose homes were lost. The experience of doing so yielded both successes and opportunities for the future.

Transition from Response to Recovery

Planning for re-entry was accomplished in an extremely short period of time, which was made possible by assigning highly experienced and expert resources exclusively to this task, and by including a wide range of local and provincial perspectives. As a result, the re-entry process was efficient and well-executed, and the plan itself can serve as a foundation for future efforts.

Normally, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency supports local officials to conduct recovery planning after an emergency. In this case, the scale of the task meant that a cross-ministry Government of Alberta Task Force was required to coordinate and support local recovery planning. Capacity has also been provided to support local implementation of the plan in the form of a Regional Recovery Coordination Group.



The Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan (the Recovery Plan) stands as a testament to cooperation under pressure. Developing this plan, however, was by no means a simple task. It was quickly determined that there was no established format, process or template upon which to build a recovery plan. Consideration needed to be given to whether the plan should be about restoring the Town to its pre-disaster state, or whether improvements were in scope. As well, close collaboration between the two municipal governments, the First Nation and the provincial government was going to be critical to success. To facilitate a regional focus for recovery, the Municipal District, the Town and Sawridge First Nation began meeting as a group on May 27th 2011. This collaboration evolved into a “Tri-Council” shared governance structure that was the first of its kind in Canada, and was identified as being a critical success of the recovery phase.

Hazard and Health Concerns

An urban interface wildfire and evacuation creates a number of unique hazards to health and safety. Aside from the immediate risks associated with the wildfires themselves and with smoke, the aftermath raises specific health concerns: entire buildings had burned, creating the possibility of toxins in the air, water and soil; power had been lost and refrigeration with it; burned houses had been demolished and the rubble removed, exposing potential hazards related to propane tanks, gas lines and sharp material left behind; the water infrastructure had been shut down and possibly been contaminated; and people had been exposed to a harrowing ordeal that in some cases included extreme working conditions.

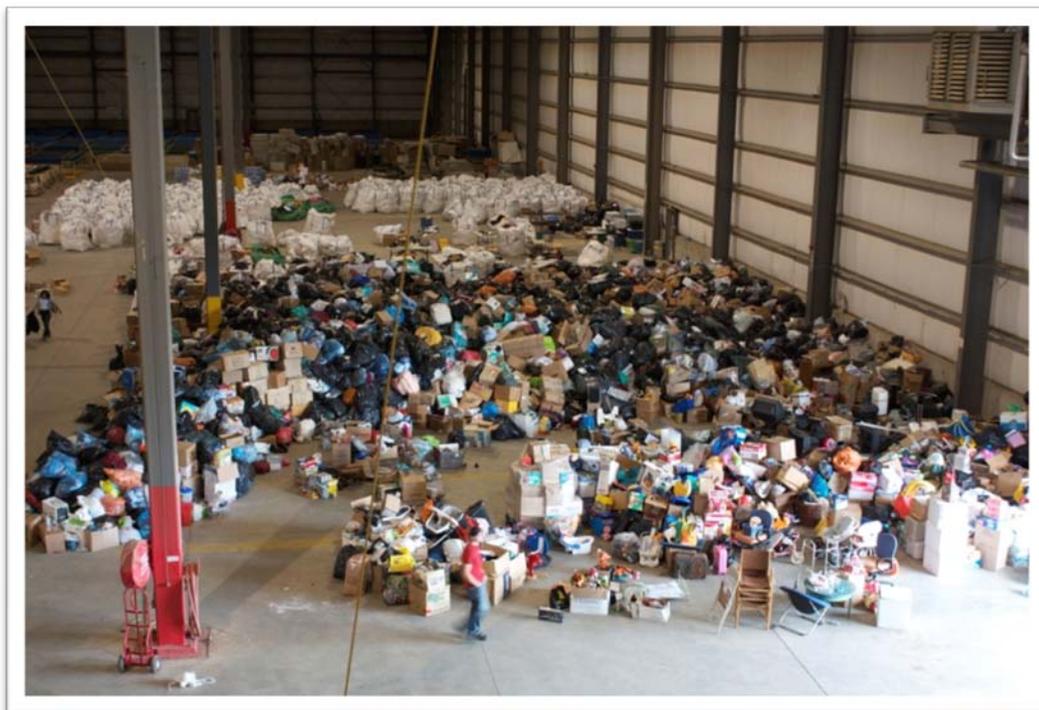


Alberta Environment completed environmental monitoring to determine whether and when the ground, air and water in the Town and surrounding areas were safe so that residents could return, and Alberta Health Services determined and communicated the level of hazard. Overall, this experience points to the need to understand likely toxins in advance, and to be able to compare them against guidelines or samples and then communicate results quickly and in an effective way.

Following the disaster, Alberta's emergency response efforts were efficient in keeping residents and workers safe from hazards to their physical health. Further, clear messaging was provided to the community during re-entry on safe practices related to their houses, food, sanitation, water, and damage from smoke. Much of this had to be communicated before people could come back in to the community, primarily in the form of information packages included in re-entry kits. This information was well-received and valued by residents. On the other hand, given the little take up for the support offered for mental health and wellbeing many felt that a different approach is needed in case of future disasters.

Non-Government Organization Integration and Coordination

A strong working relationship between the Alberta NGO Council (NGO Council), local elected officials, faith communities, the Government of Alberta, and municipal staff allowed for considerable resources to be mobilized in support of residents in the region. In many cases, the NGO Council took on roles that were outside the mandate or capacity of other groups to do, and focused the efforts of member non-government organizations where these needs emerged. For instance, the NGO Council was effective and indeed essential in leveraging volunteer resources and connections with local faith communities.



The Canadian Red Cross proved to be a key partner as a member of the NGO Council, providing support and registration services to help evacuees and reception centres following the disaster. The Red Cross was contracted directly by the provincial government, which was unusual and unique in Alberta's history. This new partnership was ultimately quite successful, and this experience also demonstrated the need and potential for a well-defined relationship in the future; in other words, to determine and agree upon the role of the Canadian Red Cross in advance of future large-scale disasters.

In the wake of the wildfires and the evacuation, there was an incredible outpouring of generosity in support of the affected communities. Given that Alberta had not previously experienced a disaster of this magnitude, local and provincial authorities were not prepared for the scale of donations management that would be required. In particular, sorting, storing and distributing physical donations was a very large and resource-intensive undertaking. Multiple organizations and many volunteers stepped up to assist in managing donations, which ultimately demonstrated the opportunity in the future to align different agencies in advance, to the extent possible.

[Economic Recovery Activities and Revenue Stabilization Requirements](#)

The economic implications of the Lesser Slave Lake disaster are vast, not only for the region, but for residents, business and the province as a whole. The Government of Alberta quickly realized that the Lesser Slave Lake region's tax base would be decimated by this disaster, and that displaced residents could be facing difficult financial circumstances. As a result, significant revenue stabilization was undertaken, beginning with the quick approval of \$50 million early in the response, and followed over the next three months with additional amounts of \$50 million and \$189 million to support recovery.

Initial emergency funds were approved with significant flexibility in how they could be spent, which proved to be effective in channelling funding rapidly to address



needs of residents, first responders, and communities. Clear direction was provided that people should make the “right” decisions without first waiting to have dollars approved. This kind of creativity was especially important in the absence of streamlined emergency procurement processes. Another key revenue stabilization decision was emergency payments paid to displaced residents using debit cards. This was an innovative and successful measure that was critically important in helping displaced residents to meet their needs during the evacuation period.

In addition to supporting residents, actions were also taken to support the local economy, as local businesses are always vulnerable after a disaster. For instance, considerable Disaster Assistance Benefit loans were made available under the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation’s Commercial Loan Program and Value-added and Agribusiness Program, among other initiatives. In turn, businesses supported the wellbeing of returning residents; many local employers were extremely supportive of their staff and the community during and after the evacuation.

The importance of the role that the insurance industry played should be recognized as well. In particular, the province worked with insurance companies as a group to simplify the task of liaising with the industry and expediting demolition, cleanup and claims processing. This proved a successful venue for collaboration.



Epilogue: Recovery One Year After The Fire

In the year following the wildfires, huge strides have been made in the Lesser Slave Lake region and recovery is well underway. It is a testament to the resilience of the communities in the region, and the high level of cooperation between local leaders and provincial officials how quickly and efficiently this important work is being accomplished.

The Recovery Plan announced in August 2011 has continued to provide the blueprint for the many initiatives underway to help the Lesser Slave Lake region rebuild and recover. The Recovery Plan outlined priorities around four key pillars, and progress under each of these pillars is outlined below:

- **People:** Ensure the right resources are in place to support the communities' needs and individuals' safety, health, physical, mental, and social wellbeing.
- **Reconstruction:** Rebuild the residential, commercial and public buildings and the associated utilities that were damaged or destroyed.
- **Economy:** Support the economic recovery of the region to ensure that people, business and industry, infrastructure and government are well supported to return to normalcy.
- **Environment:** Protect and re-establish a healthy environment for the benefit of nature and residents.

People

In the time since the wildfires, many initiatives and activities have evolved to support the people of the Lesser Slave Lake region in their recovery. A new family care clinic has opened, with plans to connect health services with social supports. Additional training and counselling for stress and trauma is being provided to the schools and community frontline workers, and to others through them. The Slave Lake Wellness Committee has come together to implement community wellness initiatives including a monthly speaker series and family fun nights. The communities have also made an effort to rebuild normalcy by maintaining annual events, like Riverboat Days and the Sand Castle Competition. To recognize the one-year anniversary of the wildfires, a resilient community conference and a weeklong series of community events were organized, such as barbeque block parties. In addition, a formal event recognizing the experience and the one-year milestone were held, and a memorial was unveiled to recognize the sacrifice of Jean-Luc Déba, who was killed in a helicopter crash as he was helping to fight the fires.

Meanwhile, the Tri-Council continues to meet monthly to make decisions related to recovery, supported by the Regional Recovery Coordination Group and the CAO Secretariat. A Governance Protocol has also been developed which sets out the roles, responsibilities and procedures for these groups. The Task Force also continues to meet on a monthly basis, in large part to monitor progress on the recovery and to oversee the provincial government’s ongoing involvement.

Reconstruction

The clean-up of fire debris began on July 7th, 2011 and was completed by the end of September, 2011, months earlier than expected. An engineering study has been conducted to assess non-insurable damage to the Town’s infrastructure, which was extensive. Funding has been allocated by the Alberta government toward the costs of the extensive work involved in reconstructing the town’s damaged infrastructure.

Significant progress has also been made in housing construction. The Interim Housing Project (a partnership between the Town, the Municipal District, and the Alberta government) resulted in the installation of 267 modular housing units, providing almost 250 families with temporary (two to three years) housing in record time. The table below demonstrates how quickly interim housing was completed.

Modular Unit Development Tasks	Normal Timelines	Interim Housing Project Timelines
Engineering plans	6-8 months	15 days
Site grading and services	3-4 months	35 days
Unit delivery and utility hookup	20-25 days per phase	10-15 days per phase
Stairs and skirting	10-15 days per phase	5-10 days per phase

Displaced residents have been moving into permanent housing faster than expected due to robust construction since the wildfires. The first rebuilt house was completed just over four months after the fires. By early September of 2012, approximately 280 development permits had been issued by the Town for homes, garages, two churches, three multi-unit buildings, a convenience store, and commercial space. The MD has issued permits for 42 family dwellings and 37 accessory buildings.

Support for rental market housing was also provided following the wildfires, as well as for alternative housing such as campus residences, campgrounds, and social housing. Initially, support was provided as part of the emergency housing program, which covered the full costs of rent, moving, deposits and utilities. In addition, people were given the opportunity to stay in their rental accommodation beyond the original August 31st, 2011 deadline for this program, receiving a rent subsidy of up to 60 percent but assuming their own utility costs. Forty-two households received a rent subsidy from September 1st to November 30th, 2011.

As part of reconstruction, the Town, Municipal District and First Nation have been working to become a model FireSmart community through education and awareness initiatives, installation of dry hydrants, and vegetation management. FireSmart is a provincial program based on wildfire mitigation practices and preparedness planning.

Economy

In support of local small businesses, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation waived application fees for small businesses in the disaster area, and offered interest-free loans for 24 months and up to 24 months without payments to help businesses establish, rebuild and/or expand. By September 30th of 2012, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation had approved 127 applications for a total of \$89.5 million in loans.

Stabilizing local revenue and funding was also important. With support from the Government of Alberta, the Town and Municipal District were able to forgive the 2011 property taxes that would have been owed by residents who owned destroyed or uninhabitable property, without decreasing their tax revenues. The Government of Alberta also agreed to maintain its regular grant funding at pre-fire levels

Through the collaborative efforts of the Slave Lake and Area Chamber of Commerce and the Alberta government, a Rural Alberta Business Centre was established in January of 2012 to provide business information and advisory services to the region's small business community. As well, through another joint agreement with the province, and with the Town acting on behalf of Tri-Council, a regional economic development office is being established and recruitment is underway for an economic development professional. Tri-Council has also set up an Economic Development Committee with equal representation from the members. Planning is also underway and funding earmarked for improvements to the regional water supply infrastructure and a new fire hall at the Mitsue industrial site, both of which are key elements in the region's plans for future industrial and residential growth.

Environment

Environmental monitoring was conducted by the provincial government for several months after the wildfires. The monitoring confirmed that there should be no negative lasting impacts from the wildfires on the environment or human health. Design has also begun for further fire attenuation and a noise reduction barrier for communities bordering Highway 88.

Lessons Learned

During a disaster of unprecedented size, people, agencies and governments made the best of extraordinary circumstances. Their actions, insights and experience provide a wealth of successes to be celebrated and built upon as communities, governments and Albertans ready themselves to face future emergencies. There is a tremendous opportunity now to leverage the ways in which people were forced to adapt and create new ways of dealing with challenges that had not been encountered before.

The insights and learning from the Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire response and recovery efforts have been captured as a series of eleven lessons:

Preparedness An advanced level of planning and preparation is required so that emergency response and recovery systems are scalable to address incidents of similar magnitude to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires. Ultimately, the response to this disaster was able to adapt, augment and build upon the core emergency management structures in place. In future, more thorough planning, timely training and a clear incident command structure are critical for local and provincial organizations to collaborate effectively. Oversight and quality assurance are also important elements of comprehensive emergency preparedness.

Coordination A clear and well-understood command structure is necessary to coordinate the many people and resources involved in responding to a disaster. This experience demonstrates the importance of fully implementing the Incident Command System in Alberta, but also points to several ways to augment and customize this system in our provincial context.

People It is crucial to involve people who have the right experience and expertise to respond to an emergency, and then to empower them to make decisions. Much of the success during the response to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires has been attributed to effective decision making and involving the right people. Throughout the response and recovery, a wide range of expertise and many decision makers have been engaged in creative ways that could be repeated, like the Task Force and the Tri-Council.

Jurisdiction People must be empowered to do what is right during an emergency, irrespective of everyday boundaries related to jurisdiction, mandate or geography. In this case, provincial and municipal governments were able to reach beyond their mandates in several ways, especially by participating in the Task Force, the Tri-Council and the Provincial Operations Centre. At the same time, it was more challenging to deal with jurisdiction related to fighting the fire in the Town, and to working with Sawridge First Nation.

Evacuation When it is time to evacuate, everyone has to be ready to act together based on a shared evacuation plan with defined roles and responsibilities. Every single person evacuated from the Lesser Slave Lake region made it out safely. This incredible feat was the result of good fortune, good judgement and quick decision making, which is to be commended – but this experience also shows that planning and preparedness can be improved a great deal.

Communications Clear communications, which are absolutely critical during a disaster, require planning, preparation and organization in advance. Clear communications from a consistent source can help defuse rumour, speculation and misunderstandings. This requires that everyone involved in the response understands from the start whose job it is to develop, to approve and to release communications. In addition, it is important to know what media, infrastructure and warning systems will be used.

Local Capacity Although local communities must be prepared for emergencies, they also will likely require a great deal of outside support and expertise to cope with disasters similar in magnitude to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires. Alberta's emergency management system should always be ready to provide communities with support and expertise to assist with assessing risks, coordination during an emergency, supporting affected residents, transition to recovery, and administration.

Health and Wellbeing A deliberate approach is required to mitigate the profound impact of a disaster on the long-term health, wellbeing and recovery of individuals, families and communities. Following the disaster, Alberta's emergency response efforts were efficient in keeping residents and workers safe from hazards to their physical health. Other supports could be enhanced, however, such as occupational health testing for volunteer firefighters, guidelines for reception centres, and Disaster Social Services. Also, environmental testing could be streamlined by identifying likely toxins in advance, and being prepared to quickly test for these against baseline samples from affected communities.

Financial Support Communities that experience a disaster of this scale require significant, coordinated financial support not only to respond to the emergency situation, but also to make long-term recovery possible. After the Lesser Slave Lake region was evacuated, funds were provided quickly to residents, responders and communities. In addition to making funds available, people were empowered to be creative and make the right decisions in spending them. The Government of Alberta also directly supported local businesses and worked with the insurance industry, which are not roles that have been required after smaller emergencies in the past. These measures were seen to be very effective.

Donations Planning and preparation can help in managing the outpouring of generosity to support those affected by a disaster. The generous donations provided to help the Lesser Slave Lake region were difficult to manage. This is not at all unusual; jurisdictions around the world have had the same experience after an emergency. In Alberta, there is an opportunity to build on the model of the Alberta NGO Council to help align disaster donation management efforts. Together, the NGO Council and governments can encourage people to donate money only, and to give it to one or a few organizations, with clear guidelines for how the donations will be used.

Recovery Recovery is an essential element of a comprehensive emergency management system. Although some aspects of recovery will be specific to each event, other aspects can and should be planned in advance. After the wildfires, plans and planning processes had to be built from scratch, and this was done quite successfully. These can be used to help guide future recovery and re-entry planning efforts. On the other hand, this was a bigger disaster than ever before in Alberta, and so more support for recovery was provided than had been after past emergencies. For instance, the Government of Alberta also took on new roles, like providing interim housing, helping local business and working with the insurance industry. It is important to recognize the many ways in which these expanded recovery efforts were successful and also to be mindful of the kinds of support that future recovery efforts may require.



Recommendations

Emergency management is a complex and essential undertaking involving a wide range of governments, organizations, communities, experts, workers, First Nations and individual Albertans.

The following overarching recommendation proposes seven principles and underpins each of the more specific actions recommended. These seven principles have been informed by the successes and challenges of the response and recovery efforts to the Lesser Slave Lake regional disaster, and the expertise of stakeholders and experts engaged in the review. These principles serve to ground and tie together the more specific opportunities that follow to enhance preparedness, response and recovery.

Overarching Recommendation

1. Build on the successes and experience of addressing the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires to ensure that emergency preparedness, response and recovery systems across the province are consistent with the following shared principles:
 - Emergency preparedness is commensurate with the risks facing Alberta and its communities.
 - A single, clear command structure is essential to emergency response.
 - All Albertans have access to support for emergency management that is appropriate to the magnitude of the situation being faced.
 - Emergency response is led by a single authority with the commensurate skills and training to address the incident.
 - The autonomy of communities needs to be respected, recognizing the need to balance this autonomy with the limitations of those communities in terms of emergency management.
 - After a wide-scale disaster, communities are supported to become “whole” again, and not simply to replace what was lost.
 - Highly effective emergency management is dependent upon role clarity and coordination across the range of activities from preparedness through to recovery.

Recommendations for Preparedness

2. Enhance the system of supports for emergency planning and preparation by local communities.
3. Reinforce Alberta’s emergency response system by formally incorporating a Task Force or similar cross-ministry governance model, and by ensuring the availability of additional ministry personnel to support response and recovery efforts following large-scale disasters.

4. Strengthen the Government of Alberta's role in quality assurance for emergency management.
5. Build on existing programs that enable regional collaboration by establishing formal expectations for, as well as more actively encouraging, municipal collaboration and resource sharing in emergency planning, response and recovery.
6. Work with local communities to improve the preparedness of individual Albertans commensurate with the risk of an emergency.
7. Improve provincial capability and infrastructure to manage personal information during an emergency.
8. Improve local and provincial preparedness for the possibility of evacuation, building on the experience gained from coordinating the evacuation of much of the Lesser Slave Lake region.

Recommendations for Response

9. Ensure that Incident Management Teams are available to quickly deploy so that local governments have access to qualified incident management where needed and requested.
10. Fully implement the Incident Command System so that emergency response roles and mandates are firmly established within a single, clear chain of command.
11. Build provincial and local capacity, competencies and strategies for crisis communications.
12. Improve integration of provincial expertise in environmental hazard testing and public health, in order to streamline testing, interpretation and communication of results following a wildfire.
13. Develop an approach for the Government of Alberta to coordinate delivery across ministries of those Disaster Social Services that are delivered provincially.
14. Create guidelines to help plan and execute re-entry following an evacuation, building on the successes of the re-entry after the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires.
15. Build on the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires experience by formalizing policy, improving processes and building capacity to ensure timely distribution of funds, effective financial management and demonstration of accountability during future emergency response efforts.

Recommendations for Recovery

16. Clarify the Government of Alberta's overall disaster recovery philosophy and specific role with respect to housing and stimulating the local economy following a disaster.
17. Formalize a provincial approach to support disaster recovery planning, building on the success of the shared planning process used after the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires including the regional Tri-Council model.
18. Develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach for funding of disaster recovery plans that coordinates streams of funding that are essential to restore an affected community, including government funds, the insurance industry, and donations.
19. Develop and implement a province-wide approach to managing donations following a disaster.





2. Introduction | Project Approach

Introduction

The Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires were a disaster of unprecedented scope and impact in Alberta's history. In May of 2011, wildfires swept through the region, threatening lives, property and communities. In the wake of the flames, the region and its residents are forever changed. Swiftly evacuated, many Albertans would return to find their homes and possessions in ashes. The toll was higher still, though, as many people in the Lesser Slave Lake region lost not only property, but also their livelihood, the community in which they lived, and their sense of security; it was not simply houses but homes consumed by the wildfires. No one in the region was untouched by this tragedy in which 730 households lost their homes and one-quarter of the Town of Slave Lake was destroyed. The human and economic costs will be felt for years to come.

Tragedy is not the full measure of this historic event, however. In the face of catastrophe Albertans stood shoulder to shoulder: emergency personnel, firefighters, citizens, government and agencies came together to fight fires, evacuate communities, and to provide aid and relief. Stories of heroism, success and promise are to be found alongside those of loss. Sheltering and assisting residents of the region required an efficient, coordinated response by a multitude of parties, both during the emergency and in the difficult months that followed. First Nations, municipal, provincial, and federal governments mobilized resources to ensure an orderly transition from disaster response to recovery, including economic stabilization. The residents of the Lesser Slave Lake region demonstrated resilience and purpose as they restored their lives and communities.

Lessons Learned Project

The need for intensive, timely coordination by a number of organizations to respond to the wildfires represents a unique learning opportunity, both for those who were involved as well as the emergency response community across Canada. To capture the complexity of the event, a multi-faceted approach was used based on three pillars:

- understanding of the response through the lived experience of residents and the stakeholders involved;

- review of the standards, procedures and protocols that existed at the time as well as those that were developed through the response; and
- engagement of experts to assist in the analysis and development of recommendations for the future.

From March to July 2012, KPMG and our partners at ADR Education engaged with stakeholders and the public to facilitate dialogue around recovery efforts and to identify lessons from the May 2011 wildfires in the Lesser Slave Lake region. The timeframe under examination focused on the immediate response and recovery efforts from May 14th to August 22nd, 2011. In so doing, this review recognizes that recovery did not end on August 22nd, but rather is an ongoing, evolving activity.

During this timeframe, the Assistant Deputy Minister, Electricity and Alternative Energy Division, Alberta Energy led the Slave Lake Regional Recovery Task Force prior to transferring authority to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Local Government Services Division, Alberta Municipal Affairs. This review was not designed to replicate, nor to specifically exclude items addressed by the Sweeney Committee, under the mandate of the Flat Top Complex Wildfire Review. This review looks at the actions that were taken, the protocols that were in place and known leading practices of today, to pave the way for new, improved procedures to guide future emergency responses.

Outline of the Report

This report brings together the full range of input and analysis over the course of the review as follows:

- Chapter 3: The Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfires Story – The lived experience of the people involved in the disaster and recovery
- Chapter 4: Backgrounder – Overview of Alberta’s Emergency Management Framework, the key stakeholders involved in the response and the timelines of events
- Chapter 5: Findings – The analysis was guided by seven themes that cross Preparedness, Recovery and Response:
 - Theme 1: Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination
 - Theme 2: Community Evacuation and Associated Communications Protocols
 - Theme 3: Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations
 - Theme 4: Transition from Response to Recovery
 - Theme 5: Hazard and Health Concerns
 - Theme 6: Non-Government Organizations (NGO) Integration and Coordination
 - Theme 7: Economic Recovery Activities and Revenue Stabilization
- Chapter 6: Lessons Learned
- Chapter 7: Recommendations

The magnitude of the Lesser Slave Lake disaster is unprecedented in Canada, and it required a heroic, multi-faceted, cross-jurisdictional response to the immediate crisis and to the immense task that lay beyond: the recovery of the community as a whole. This report not only identifies lessons and catalogues procedures for use in future crises – but also provided more than one hundred community members who were affected by this disaster with the opportunity to talk about their experiences as part of their personal and community efforts to move forward.



Thank you to everyone who shared their stories and identified lessons.

One year stronger, together.



3. The Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfires Story

A Weekend to Remember: May 14th and 15th, 2011

On the morning of Saturday, May 14th, 2011, a widespread evacuation from the Lesser Slave Lake region seemed unthinkable. Notwithstanding the hot, dry weather of the previous days, there was no grave concern about the wildfires in the region threatening lives or property. The threat of wildfires was familiar to residents of the region; more than one individual noted that having wildfires in the area or seeing smoke on the horizon was not wholly unusual. At the Provincial Operations Centre, monitoring wildfires was also a common occurrence. As one resident noted, “people had been saying it was bound to happen. This is fire country.” Within the Provincial Operations Centre, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency was monitoring a number of wildfires across the province on May 14th, and early in the day several of them seemed a greater threat than any of the wildfires in the Lesser Slave Lake region.

Before the day was out, though, two more wildfires started in the region, and both the Town of Slave Lake (Town) and the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No. 124 (Municipal District) declared states of local emergency and activated their respective Emergency Operations Centres. With two wildfires burning out of control, the Municipal District evacuated many of its residents and its Emergency Operations Centre into the



Town for safety. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development² continued their efforts to fight these wildfires, both on the ground and from the air, but extremely high winds made the out of control wildfires unpredictable. The highways in and out of the region closed intermittently, and the fires could not be contained.

As the threat to the region grew, provincial personnel began preparing to lend a hand to local communities. Early on Sunday, two Alberta Emergency Management Agency Field Officers arrived in Town to assist municipal leaders in the Emergency Operations Centre, which by now included both Town and Municipal District officials. Alberta Health Services began to evacuate its patients from the Town as a precaution, and the Provincial Operations Centre began gathering resources in case the Town should need to evacuate.

As winds gusted to more than 100 kilometres an hour, the wildfires advanced toward the communities in the region with incredible speed, and the situation quickly became a crisis. Inside the Emergency Operations Centre, people were challenged to get a handle on what was happening, reacting to information from multiple sources ranging from those fighting the fires to individual residents phoning people in the Centre with concerns or information. At the Provincial Operations Centre in Edmonton, plans to support an evacuation were complicated by the winds; highways into and out of the Town were closed due to smoke, and aircraft could not safely continue to operate or fight the fires in the area due to the strength of the winds – even the airtankers were grounded in these conditions.

With tremendous speed, the wildfires reached the Town, at which point many residents were still unaware of the imminent threat. In fact, stakeholders and members of the public spoke candidly about the absence of any warning that the wildfires could spread to the Town. For instance, one youth from the Town related how a friend didn't even know there was a fire burning nearby until she saw people running. Elsewhere, a mother described how she was bathing her baby when the flames arrived, and had to simply grab her children and throw them in the car. Even personnel within the Emergency Operations Centre had to react quickly as the Town offices in the Government Centre where they had assembled caught fire; they grabbed what supplies and information they could and relocated to Northern Lakes College, and behind them the Government Centre was consumed.

Amidst the confusion of this rapidly developing crisis, no alarm, siren, or other emergency message was broadcast to warn people of the danger, which many residents later recalled with surprise. In fact, as the fires approached, almost all sources of information available to the public advised calm. In particular, many people recall that the radio told them that there was no need to evacuate – ironically, this same message continued to broadcast on a loop after the radio station itself was evacuated, meaning that people were being advised there was no need to leave even as others were already in flight. Similarly, several people recalled phoning the RCMP and being told that everything was fine, and

² This report references the Government of Alberta ministries that existed at the time of the response.

that the fires would miss the Town. Not only did many residents experience little or no warning of the need to evacuate, but many also did not receive any formal evacuation order at any point. Instead, a great many people simply self-evacuated, whether because their own house was on fire, a neighbour's house caught fire, or because they were aware of others evacuating. People's experiences of the wildfires burning in the Town were often vivid and evocative. For example, interviewees related the following experiences:

It was "horrifying", amidst the "blackness and the constant popping of things exploding."

It was "scary", "surreal" and "eerie" throughout.

One person recalled the sight of so many ashes on the side of the road, and described the road as "white like snow."

"Everyone got hysterical. It was like a war zone."

When one woman was leaving, the scene was "complete mayhem." She almost crashed several times on her way out because she couldn't see anything past the smoke.

One man's older daughters "just closed their eyes and buried their heads" as they drove; his younger daughter "saw the trees candling and had fear in her voice."

One youth recalled texting with her friends as they headed out of Town, asking one another whether their houses were gone. During this exchange, one friend's house caught fire while she was still inside.

A man recounted his son's remark as they drove through the Town: "if there is a hell, we are driving through it."



The advancing fires not only threatened people and homes, but basic infrastructure as well. Water pressure and electricity failed, and telephone service became unreliable as buildings were consumed. This meant that many people preparing to evacuate found that they couldn't fuel up at gas stations. Firefighting crews found themselves without adequate water, and even began loading trucks from the river at one point to compensate. One woman related how the loss of electricity actually trapped her vehicle in her garage, as she was unable to raise the door without power. In the confusion of an emergency, however, most everyone was impacted by the loss of telephone service. People scrambling to locate friends and family members often had a hard time connecting. One Town resident described this experience as "truly terrifying", and many people reported feeling "cut-off" or trapped.

For first responders, the situation was equally challenging and chaotic. Firefighters were working to contain wildfires burning out of control with winds gusting over 100 kilometres an hour. It was difficult to even stay standing at times in such powerful wind, let alone suppress the flames. For many of the local firefighters, however, there was at least the comfort of knowing that their loved ones were safe, as many of their families had assembled at the Fire Hall.

As the fires closed in, people got into their vehicles to head out of the Town. Leaving Town was no simple matter, however. There were very few access points in and out of the Town, or in and out of neighbourhoods within the Town. In addition, roadblocks that were erected to protect drivers from the smoke and wildfires also prevented many from leaving via their first choice of route. Numerous people related how they drove from one highway to another, waiting in heavy traffic only to be turned around by RCMP and directed back through the Town. Often when they were turned around, people weren't given information about where to head next. Others were directed to convene at the local Walmart parking lot, where they would be out of immediate danger. Upon reaching an open highway, people recalled that both lanes were cleared for outbound traffic, which expedited things.

Meanwhile, in the Town itself, traffic was heavy and slow due to the volume of vehicles. Locked in "bumper to bumper" traffic, residents nevertheless recall that there was a certain sense of order to the evacuation – RCMP kept everyone moving, and people would stop to let cars join the flow of traffic in front of them. At the same time, others recalled the experience of smoke so thick they could barely see the license plate in front of them, or feeling so much heat they feared their windows would crack. Even during this stressful situation there were also examples of caring and cooperation, such as residents helping others fix tires. As one local youth noted, on the day of the fire "it was like everybody was one big family."

Once people had evacuated from their homes, it was not necessarily clear where they should go. Many people convened at safe spaces within the Town, such as the local Walmart parking lot, and waited for a time, anxious for news and direction. Once the word of an official evacuation reached them, however, these individuals joined other residents heading out of Town. No one was directed to proceed to any particular location, and evacuees ended up in many surrounding



municipalities. People sought out hotels, family members, friends, and even businesses for shelter that first night. Some were very resourceful; for example, one family stayed the night at the pulp mill where the husband worked. Others camped or even parked on streets in surrounding communities. Often, these communities received them with open arms; some had posted signs on their lawns to welcome evacuees and followed up with generous support.

The extraordinary efforts of everyone involved prevented the wildfires from claiming any lives as people fled the Town and the region. Every single person evacuated from the area got out safely.

The Evacuation Period: May 16th – June 1st, 2011

Individuals, families and busloads of evacuees began to arrive in Westlock, Athabasca, Edmonton, and other Alberta communities, in the early hours of the morning on May 16th, 2011. It is a testament to the spirit and ingenuity of the people of Alberta that everyone evacuated from the Lesser Slave Lake region had access to food, shelter and basic support during this time. Reception centres were quickly assembled, but many of those displaced found other support as well; homes across the province opened to provide shelter for family members, friends, and even strangers. Together, governments, communities and citizens brought to bear remarkable assistance and compassion in response to the scale and suddenness of the evacuation. People found clothes, toiletries, and cots waiting for them in the reception centres, provided by municipalities, community agencies and the Canadian Red Cross.

Evacuation and being displaced from homes of course created anxious or even frustrating circumstances. Throughout the evacuation period, however, stories of extraordinary kindness and support among Albertans were commonplace. For

example, restaurants and stores in surrounding municipalities gave sizable discounts and even donations to evacuees. Hotels in many cases went above and beyond their usual levels of service to ensure that displaced residents were comfortable and well-supplied. Many people had their hotel costs covered by their employers, while others relied on the Canadian Red Cross and the Government of Alberta (GOA) for financial support. Employers from the Lesser Slave Lake region also lent a hand in other ways; for instance, one company hosted a barbeque for staff and their families at their Edmonton location, and helped some get set up in a pet-friendly hotel. Individual Albertans and families were generous and welcoming as well, and stories of small acts of kindness were widespread. In one instance, for example, an evacuated family parked their trailer in a cul-de-sac in Stony Plain, with a sign reading “Evacuees from Slave Lake” to let people know why a strange trailer was parked in their neighbourhood. Soon after they arrived, people from the neighbourhood made contact, brought food, and offered to help however they could.

Reception centres were an important gathering place for those who were displaced, whether they stayed there during the entire evacuation period, or merely checked in to register and get information. The experience was varied; some displaced residents told stories of chaos and confusion in the reception centres, while others recalled the range of well-organized support services available, including schooling, support for pets, personal amenities, access to medical personnel, and recreation opportunities. To some, the centres were loud and stressful, while others seemed to find a sense of shared community, common experience and mutual support in this setting.

One of the common experiences reported among displaced residents was a feeling of being detached, or afloat. Having lost their homes, people acutely felt the need for more information about what was going on in the Town, what had happened to their possessions and what the future would hold. Some were also searching for family members or friends who had been evacuated to other locations, such as elderly parents in long-term care facilities. During this time, some residents banded together, sharing updates and looking at pictures of the event on digital cameras. The internet and social media in particular became a crucial channel of information – information both from official and unofficial sources – such that one resident commented that if one wanted to know what was going on, they had only to “ask the teenagers” who were online.



While the mandatory evacuation order was in place, one of the most pressing concerns was the condition of houses and businesses – in particular, whether one’s house had survived or burned. People were very frustrated at how long they had to wait for “official” information about their houses from the government. In the meantime, they were vulnerable to rumour and conflicting reports from multiple sources, which caused considerable anxiety. Even when official maps were released, some people could not tell from the maps whether their house had survived. Many displaced residents relied on phone calls from first responders or others who had access to the region and could tell them whether or not a given house was still standing. In this situation, people experienced a range of emotions: some were optimistic, others were in shock, and some were caught up in anger and frustration.

While displaced residents were coping in surrounding communities, there were also a number of key personnel who remained in the Lesser Slave Lake region through the evacuation period and who did not have formal accommodation for days at a time. Not only that, but thousands of firefighters and other workers were swiftly deployed to help with the fires and getting the region ready for residents to return. The dedication of these individuals to remain without beds, other basic amenities or their families should be recognized. Firefighters slept in the Fire Hall, where for a time they didn’t have blankets, and a number of people stayed at Northern Lakes College where there were shortages of food and water for days. Other personnel stayed in beds and on cots at a local hotel, where they were supported by hotel staff who went above and beyond their job descriptions. Many of these hotel staff had evacuated to Edmonton, only to be asked

hours later to make the trip back to the Town of Slave Lake to help care for first responders in a building where there was no water and unreliable electricity. In short, people from the region and from across the province worked day and night in the evacuated area to get residents home as soon as possible.

While this work was underway, displaced residents were registered at reception centres, and received emergency funds on debit cards from the Government of Alberta to help meet their needs during and after the evacuation. At this time, many people were already trying to initiate insurance claims, reconnect with their employers and families, and find the food, clothing and supplies to get through each day. Money and day-to-day living were real concerns for many of those displaced.

Meanwhile, several events subsequent to the disaster were featured in the media in the days following the fires, raising the profile of the situation on a national scale. For instance, both the Premier and Prime Minister visited the region to survey the damage. On the same day, the emergency response effort claimed the life of a helicopter pilot, Jean-Luc Déba, adding to the sense of tragedy.

Once they were allowed to return, residents found re-entry into the region to be a bittersweet, emotionally charged experience. More than one person described the re-entry experience as “surreal”, especially for those essential workers asked to come back early to find a town mostly deserted. Some people were relieved to return to their homes, while others laid eyes for the first time on the place where their houses used to stand. Some broke down and wept during re-entry, while others related a sense of anger at the media presence, and still others recounted reaching out to find comfort among neighbours and friends. For those essential staff asked to return early, the experience was even more complex, as they wanted to get their own homes and possessions in order, but were also obliged and duty-bound to first prepare their worksites and the Town for the return of residents.

Just days after the evacuation order was lifted, May 30th, 2011 saw many of the first responders, emergency management personnel and other outside workers leave the Lesser Slave Lake region en masse. This was reported to be a difficult, emotional event for those who remained, as many people acutely felt the loss of so many of the heroes and workers who had worked tirelessly to save lives, clean up, and help the region get back on its feet.

The Beginning of Recovery: June 2nd – August 22nd, 2011

The Lesser Slave Lake region has been forever changed by the wildfires that swept through the region. For many residents, returning to the region and leaving behind the sense of a disaster situation meant that their personal losses set in. These losses were devastating in some cases, especially for those who lost all their possessions, photos and other keepsakes. One woman phrased it simply: “I lost 60 years of memories.” Another long-time resident lost her house, truck, van, and all her keepsakes, and had this to say:

“for the first while I couldn’t talk about it...I have been here for 35 years and I’m not leaving. This is home.” This sentiment was heard a number of times, in fact; a profound loss was experienced, but many people felt a deep (and even deepened) connection with their community and a commitment to stay.



As many residents were experiencing a tremendous sense of loss and grief, the period following re-entry was also characterized by tremendous giving and appreciation. Residents were glad to receive donations and support that helped them to begin to recover; the generosity of those who donated to and otherwise supported the region and its residents was called “overwhelming.” In the same vein, one resident who is an immigrant to Canada offered the perspective that she was glad to be in a country where the government would help so much. Many people were touched and overawed at the outpouring of generosity from other communities. Some of the stories of donations received are especially touching: for example, children from Romania mailed \$17 to help with the recovery, and one resident recounted how a little girl ran a Kool-Aid stand for two days in her neighbourhood to raise money.

The downside of this immense generosity was the difficulty in managing the sheer volume of physical donations. Volunteers were asked to sort, store and distribute these donations, and their experience was that this was an extremely difficult task. Several people related stories about truck after truck parked in Town waiting for the donations therein to be unloaded and sorted by too few volunteers. Much of what was received

could not be put to use; for example one interviewee told a story about unloading hundreds of kitchen chairs from a truck knowing that these would not be helpful to people who had lost their entire homes. At the same time, these volunteers felt some discomfort and confusion about how to allocate the donations.

Soon after returning to the region, it was seen as extremely important for children to go back to school, both to re-establish a sense of routine, and to return to a familiar social setting where they could see their friends and teachers, although school itself was far from “normal” in many ways. Many of the teachers, administrators and support staff had themselves lost homes as well, but in some cases at least they were compelled to return to work and did not have the benefit of a debrief or counselling. Some teachers did not return, and certain classes were grouped together as a result. Coursework did not proceed as normal either, and both the diploma examinations for grade twelve students and provincial achievement tests for those in grades three, six and nine were cancelled. In all, the final weeks of the school year were focused on healing and support for one another.



For adults, getting back to “normal” was a challenge as well. Returning to work was difficult for a number of people, particularly perhaps for those who worked with children or provided support to people as part of their jobs. It was suggested by several of these support workers that they themselves were not in the best state emotionally to help others cope. Meanwhile, feelings of shock and guilt persisted – guilt, in particular, was a common emotion reported by residents. For instance, many residents whose homes did

not burn felt guilty about their good fortune. More than that, though, many people were still feeling guilt and regret about the events of the disaster itself. For instance, residents related how they had trouble dealing with being unable to gather keepsakes, save pets, or act sooner as the wildfires advanced. One woman poignantly described trying and failing to catch a dog that fled downstairs after the fires arrived, and being forced to evacuate without this beloved member of the family. Another shared her terrible guilt at having left her two young children alone for a panicked moment to run next door and alert the neighbours that their house was on fire. Clearly, the emotional experience of recovery after the disaster was complex and powerful.

In the weeks following re-entry, residents experienced a region that had markedly changed in a number of important ways. Not only were many buildings gone, but so too were some of the doctors, teachers, and other members of the community who were unable to return or chose not to rebuild. Some tension and discomfort emerged between people who had lost homes and those who had not, which was reported to persist in some ways even today. Some changes have been more positive, however, and their importance should also be noted. For instance, some community members have drawn closer together. As one Slave Lake resident put it, "since the fire, we've made a lot of friends." Others reported feeling a deeper connection with the Town of Slave Lake. One youth from Slave Lake went so far as to declare having a lot more pride in the Town.

Even as individuals and families struggled to regain a sense of equilibrium, it was clear that recovery would not be achieved overnight. Local governments began to have town hall meetings to give updates on the state of clean-up and planning for recovery. Reportedly, these meetings surfaced a lot of emotion and even anger among residents who had concerns and input about what had occurred during the response to the disaster, and what should happen next. In particular, many people reacted strongly to the fact that their basements were emptied without their permission as a safety precaution during the evacuation period.

Meanwhile, housing was an extremely important issue for those whose homes had burned. After the evacuation order was lifted, there was of course less housing remaining in the region than was needed. Some people felt that the process used to decide who received temporary accommodations was not fair, or at least not clear. Moreover, those staff tasked to deal with housing requests and allocations found it difficult to do so because of the fragile emotional state of so many of the residents they were required to contact.

Longer-term or "interim housing" was a similarly frustrating issue for many displaced residents. Many people felt it took much too long to make interim housing units available, and others complained about the housing itself, being asked to live with strangers, or the need to prioritize access (for families as opposed to single adults, for example). Before the provincial government was able to provide housing, a number of residents found temporary or permanent housing elsewhere. Some of these arrangements yielded negative experiences, such as scams, price-gouging, and unsuitable accommodations.

People were often left with little choice, however, in the face of a compelling need to find housing.

At the same time, the community was taking steps toward rebuilding permanent homes. People began to receive insurance payouts, and builders and contractors were in high demand. The Government of Alberta supported the Town, Municipal District and First Nation in launching an information fair on June 11th for residents to get information about reconstruction, bylaws, insurance, consumer protection, safety codes, and other important facts related to rebuilding. A housing fair was hosted on June 25th by the Regional Recovery Coordination Group, home builders associations, and the Chamber of Commerce. These fairs were very well-received as an opportunity to come and hear directly from a variety of experts.

By late August, people had begun to experience the first signs of recovery. A Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan (Recovery Plan) had been announced on August 3rd, and reconstruction had begun. As well, by that time there had been an opportunity for the governments and communities in the region to recognize and thank many of those people and organizations who helped during and after the disaster. While not everyone could be formally recognized; those who had been thanked spoke about how important this was to them.

Disaster recovery and the healing process were by no means complete by August 22nd. However, it was plain that everyone involved was looking to the future, though they would carry the experience of this disaster with them for years to come.

The communities of the Lesser Slave Lake region were undoubtedly drawn closer together by the shared experience of the disaster and the need to plan together to recover. Under the joint leadership of a new Tri-Council representing the Town, the Municipal District and Sawridge First Nation, these communities continued to work as one to rebuild and restore the region.

For the Government of Alberta, the experience of this disaster was unique in its scale and in the breadth of government response required. This was not experienced as a response by the Provincial Operations Centre or Alberta Emergency Management Agency, but rather as a truly government-wide response effort. Moving forward, the different departments involved were eager for opportunities to learn from the experience.

Residents of the Lesser Slave Lake region were entering a period of construction and rebuilding as they work to restore communities and heal. Alongside loss were feelings of excitement and opportunity as reconstruction began, as well as a newfound togetherness forged through shared experience of the disaster. At the same time, people have taken to heart the need to be prepared for an emergency; again and again residents noted they now have their important possessions, keepsakes and documents packed and ready in case wildfires were to threaten their homes again in the future.



4. Background

This chapter provides an overview of the Emergency Management Framework, which is based on the *Emergency Management Act*, Government Emergency Management Regulation, and the Alberta Emergency Plan. This section is followed by a summary of the key stakeholders that played a role in the response and recovery efforts and the timelines of events for the timeframe under review.

Emergency Management Framework³

Alberta's emergency management system reflects a network between different levels and orders of government, industry and other public safety partners that often respond independently to a hazard. The *Emergency Management Act (Act)*, Government Emergency Management Regulation (Regulation) and the Alberta Emergency Plan (Plan) describe emergency management roles and responsibilities for the local authorities, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency and the provincial government.

The Alberta Emergency Management Agency is the coordinating agency within the Government of Alberta that provides strategic policy direction and leadership and works collaboratively with its emergency management partners. As the coordinating agency, it develops, implements, manages and maintains the Alberta emergency management system as described in the Alberta Emergency Plan. In consultation with other departments, it coordinates the development of hazard-specific plans to be implemented and maintained under the responsibility of one or more of those departments. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development are also responsible for establishing mutual aid agreements with jurisdictions outside the province, and maintaining liaison with the Government of Canada and bordering provinces, territories and states. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development is the lead agency for wildfire suppression in Alberta within forest protection areas. At the time of Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development was fighting the

³ Created using the information contained in the *Emergency Management Act*, Emergency Management Regulation and Alberta Emergency Plan. This section reflects the Framework as it existed at the time of the wildfires in cases where changes have been made since.

wildfires burning outside the Town of Slave Lake, in addition to other wildfires across the province.

Under the *Act*, local governments are required to maintain an emergency management agency, appoint a Director of Emergency Management to coordinate required response efforts, have municipal emergency management plans and programs developed and in place, and provide direction and control of the response in the event of an emergency.

The *Act* also provides the local authority with the authority to declare a State of Local Emergency which enables them to use extraordinary powers in accordance with the *Act* when deemed necessary to deal with an emergency. Such extraordinary powers include, but are not limited to, declaring and enforcing mandatory evacuations, controlling or prohibiting travel, and authorizing the warrantless entry onto private property in the course of implementing an emergency plan or program. The provincial government may also declare a state of emergency through the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which would provide the Minister responsible for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency certain powers such as conscripting Government of Alberta staff. A provincial state of emergency has never been declared.

Municipalities are strongly encouraged to have an Emergency Operations Centre ready that can be activated in the event of a major incident in order to manage the larger aspects of the emergency and to exercise the authority of the local officials. The Emergency Operations Centre functions as a point of coordination addressing the needs of the municipality as a whole as well as anticipating and supporting the needs of one or more incident sites. Coordination and dissemination of information is another essential function of the Emergency Operations Centre.

The Director of Emergency Management for the municipality coordinates resources for emergency operations during an incident and is in charge of the Emergency Operations Centre. Representation at the Emergency Operations Centre would include members of emergency management agencies such as a disaster social services manager, an emergency public information officer, and representatives of municipal departments as well as emergency response agencies such as structural and wildland firefighters, police and emergency management services.

Initially, the Town and the Municipal District had setup their own Emergency Operations Centres to coordinate response efforts. These two Emergency Operations Centres were combined on May 15th, 2011 after the Municipal District offices were threatened by advancing fires.

When required or requested, the provincial government provides incident or disaster support through the Provincial Operations Centre. The Provincial Operations Centre is comprised of the facility and staff which coordinates cross-government response and support when local governments, Government of Alberta departments, agencies and/or industry cannot manage an incident alone. It is located within the Alberta Emergency

Management Agency under Alberta Municipal Affairs. The Provincial Operations Centre operates on a 24/7 basis at one of four levels of readiness which include:

- Level 1: Information on routine and potential incidents assessed and circulated to public safety partners on a daily basis
- Level 2: Elevation of Provincial Operations Centre readiness due to an incident or conditions with the potential to be significant (disrupt community functioning)
- Level 3: Mandatory coordination of key Government of Alberta organizations to respond to a significant incident that has occurred or is about to occur
- Level 4: Mandatory full Government of Alberta coordination of cross-government response to a significant incident that has occurred⁴

Other provincial departments, federal agencies and non-government organizations also staff the positions of Consequence Management Officers to provide subject matter expertise and liaison/resource coordination with their parent organizations. Some ministries also have their own operations infrastructure and resources that work collaboratively and in coordination with the Provincial Operations Centre.

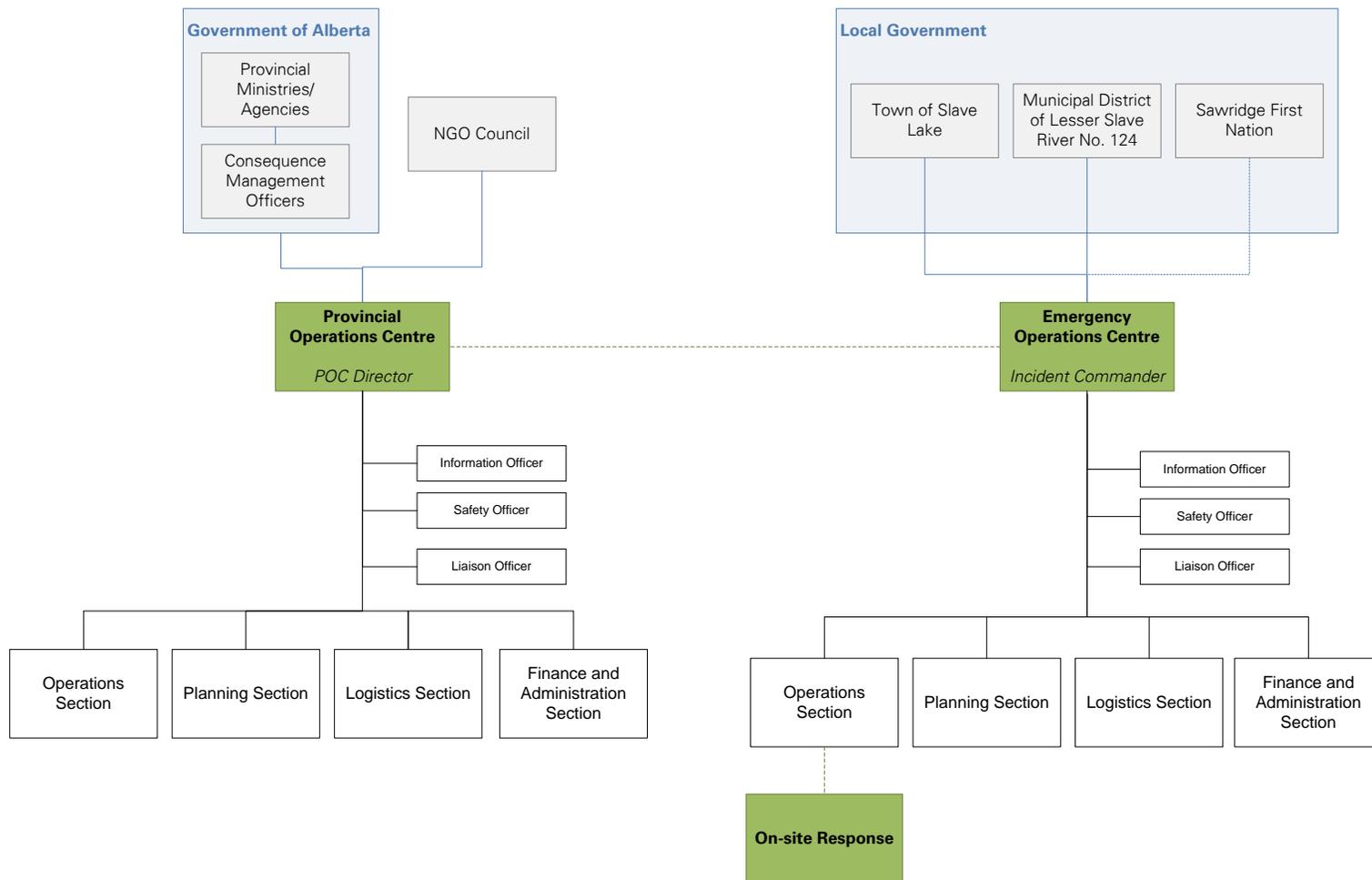
The NGO Council of Alberta was formed in 2000 to support Alberta municipalities in their response to major emergencies and disasters, while reducing the possibility of duplication of effort among responding member organizations that comes from an uncoordinated response. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency is a founding affiliate member and key stakeholder who supports its efforts. The NGO Council provides staff to the Provincial Operations Centre if required.

Liaison between the Provincial Operations Centre and the local authority during an incident typically occurs at the Provincial Operations Centre to Emergency Operations Centre level. To facilitate this liaison function, and to provide provincial subject matter expertise to the Emergency Operations Centre Director during an incident, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency deploys field officers to the Emergency Operations Centre. These field officers are regionally based, and during routine operations assist local authorities with their activities in the prevention/mitigation and preparedness pillars of emergency management, thereby establishing relations with local emergency management personnel before the critical response and recovery phases of an incident. On May 15th, 2011, two field officers were present in the joint Emergency Operations Centre in the Town of Slave Lake.

⁴ Public Safety Governance Appendix provided by Alberta Emergency Management Agency (May 2012).

The incident command structure that was established to manage the response and recovery efforts for the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires is depicted in Figure 1 below. It is important to note that this represents the initial, formal structure, which was understood differently by different stakeholders, and also evolved during the response itself.

Figure 1: Incident Command Structure



To support recovery, the Slave Lake Regional Recovery Task Force at the Assistant Deputy Minister level was created on May 16th, 2011. Assistant Deputy Ministers from various ministries were included as part of this Task Force and their objective was to coordinate provincial efforts, provide guidance on the recovery efforts and to provide support to the local governments. Another objective of the Task Force was to facilitate streamlined decision making and act as a liaison between the provincial and the local governments.

The Municipal District, the Town and Sawridge First Nation each have their own separate councils. Recognizing that recovery from the effects of the wildfires would require a regional approach, the three entities began meeting together and with the Government of Alberta. Eventually, a formal Tri-Council was formed to jointly and collaboratively lead the recovery process for the region. The Tri-Council was and continues to be supported by the Chief Administrative Officers from the Municipal District and the Town and the Executive Director for Sawridge First Nation, known collectively as the CAO Secretariat.

A Regional Recovery Coordination Group consisting of Government of Alberta resources was created and external consultants were engaged to provide additional support and guidance to the Tri-Council, through the CAO Secretariat, on the implementation of the Recovery Plan and other recovery efforts. The Regional Recovery Coordination Group has a two- to three-year mandate and continues to be based primarily out of the Lesser Slave Lake region with significant support being provided by Alberta Municipal Affairs in Edmonton.

As part of the response effort, a Housing Coordination Office was formed under the direction of the Mayor and the Emergency Operations Centre. This team was initially made up of volunteers and was later supported by the City of Edmonton's Capital Region Housing Corporation. The Housing Coordination Office oversaw access into the evacuation zone, and organizing short-term accommodation for essential workers. As part of the re-entry, the office also provided assistance by completing housing assessments for displaced residents. During the recovery phase the Lesser Slave Lake Regional Housing Authority (Housing Authority) is managing and acting as a landlord for the interim housing units in the Lesser Slave Lake region. The Housing Authority is currently overseen by a board of seven members and has representatives from the Town and the Municipal District, along with other representatives.

Key Stakeholders⁵

In addition to the formalized structures identified above, the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires involved stakeholders from various emergency agencies, different levels of government, various ministries from the Government of Alberta and a significant number of non-government organizations. The displaced residents and public were instrumental to supporting a variety of roles during and after the wildfires. These roles ranged from

⁵ Created using information available on agencies' websites and collected during stakeholder interviews or focus groups

providing support to the emergency personnel during the response to providing volunteer support at the reception centres, during the re-entry and throughout the recovery process. Despite the challenges and losses faced by the residents, they demonstrated resilience and purpose to respond to the emergency and restore their lives and communities.

The following provides an overview of all stakeholders with a key role. Detailed descriptions for all stakeholders that had a key role in the response and recovery efforts are provided in Appendix C.

First Responders & Other Emergency Management Structures:

1. **Fire Departments and Wildland Firefighters:** Firefighters from across the province and other provinces were dispatched to respond to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires. These firefighters provided invaluable support to the Lesser Slave Regional Fire Service and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development in responding to and suppressing the wildfires.
2. **Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP):** RCMP officers were closely connected with the combined Emergency Operations Centre on May 15th, 2011, and supported the evacuation of the residents of the Lesser Slave Lake region. The RCMP also played a key role in controlling access into and out of the Town of Slave Lake before, during and after the evacuation and during the re-entry phase.
3. **Strathcona County Emergency Services:** As the first external emergency services unit on scene, Strathcona County Emergency Services provides a full range of emergency response services, including coordination and fire suppression support. During the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, Strathcona County Emergency Services provided assistance to the local and regional firefighters in the Lesser Slave Lake region. Moreover, they provided initial incident management and later the fire ground command role.
4. **Calgary Emergency Management Agency:** The Calgary Emergency Management Agency is the emergency management agency serving the City of Calgary. During the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, the Calgary Emergency Management Agency was deployed to provide assistance to the Lesser Slave Lake region and had a lead role within the Emergency Operations Centre.
5. **Fire Commissioner of Alberta:** The Fire Commissioner of Alberta is a member of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. During the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, the Fire Commissioner coordinated incident management teams, firefighting resources, equipment, and established water supplies for firefighting efforts from across the province for the Lesser Slave Lake region during the response phase. The Fire Commissioner also provided support during the recovery phase by providing assistance to the local firefighting agencies in their investigation responsibilities.

Support Services and Surrounding Municipalities:

6. **Alberta Health Services:** Alberta Health Services (AHS) supported the evacuation of patients from the Slave Lake Healthcare Centre and other health facilities. AHS also activated its Zone Emergency Operations Centre in Edmonton on May 15th, 2011. Staff provided other health services to first responders throughout the response and recovery phases. AHS was also responsible for communicating the results of the environmental testing.
7. **NGO Council of Alberta:** The NGO Council of Alberta (NGO Council) was formed in 2000 to support Alberta municipalities in their response to major emergencies and disasters and to reduce duplication of effort of responding member organizations. Membership is open to any not-for-profit non-government organization which meets certain criteria and subscribes to the Council's guiding principles. The NGO Council also provides staff to the Provincial Operations Centre if required. The NGO Council accepted donated goods for the Lesser Slave Lake region.
8. **The Canadian Red Cross:** The Canadian Red Cross is a registered charity that provides disaster management support to communities in Canada affected by emergencies and disaster. During the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, the Government of Alberta contracted with the Canadian Red Cross to provide evacuee registration services, and the Red Cross was asked in some cases by local authorities to provide evacuee support and assistance with operating the reception centres. The Canadian Red Cross also accepted monetary donations from the public for Alberta Wildfires.
9. **Canada Task Force 2:** Canada Task Force 2 (CAN-TF2) is one of five nationally recognized heavy search and rescue teams and is based out of Calgary. CAN-TF2 is a team of highly trained individuals and has significant experience in incident management. CAN-TF2 was initially dispatched to support Alberta Health Services in setting up a hospital in Westlock. However, they were asked to continue to the Lesser Slave Lake region to support in the response efforts – but did so as members of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency, and not representing CAN-TF2.
10. **Surrounding Municipalities:** In response to the mandatory evacuation of the Lesser Slave Lake region, surrounding municipalities opened their communities to provide accommodations for the fleeing residents. Reception centres were set up in ten locations to address evacuations from numerous communities throughout northern Alberta including those in the Lesser Slave Lake area: Athabasca, Westlock, Boyle, Edmonton, High Prairie, Grande Prairie, Peace River, Valleyview, Smith and Wabasca. Local municipal officials provided direction to other stakeholders within the reception centres.

11. **Government of Alberta:** The following Government of Alberta departments and organizations were also stakeholders, in addition to the structures, organizations and supports mentioned above.

- Alberta Aboriginal Relations
- Alberta Children and Youth Services (now part of Alberta Human Services)
- Alberta Education
- Alberta Employment and Immigration (now part of Alberta Human Services)
- Alberta Environment and Water (now Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development)
- Alberta Executive Council including the Public Affairs Bureau
- Alberta Finance and Enterprise (now part of Alberta Treasury Board and Finance and Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education)
- Alberta Health and Wellness (now Alberta Health)
- Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs (now part of Alberta Municipal Affairs)
- Alberta Infrastructure
- Alberta Municipal Affairs
- Alberta Seniors and Community Supports (now part of Alberta Human Services and Alberta Health)
- Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (now Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development)
- Alberta Transportation
- Alberta Treasury Board (now Alberta Treasury Board and Finance)

This event demonstrates that in the face of catastrophe Albertans stood shoulder to shoulder; emergency personnel, firefighters, citizens, government and agencies came together to fight fires, evacuate communities, and to provide aid and relief and continue to work together to rebuild the communities.

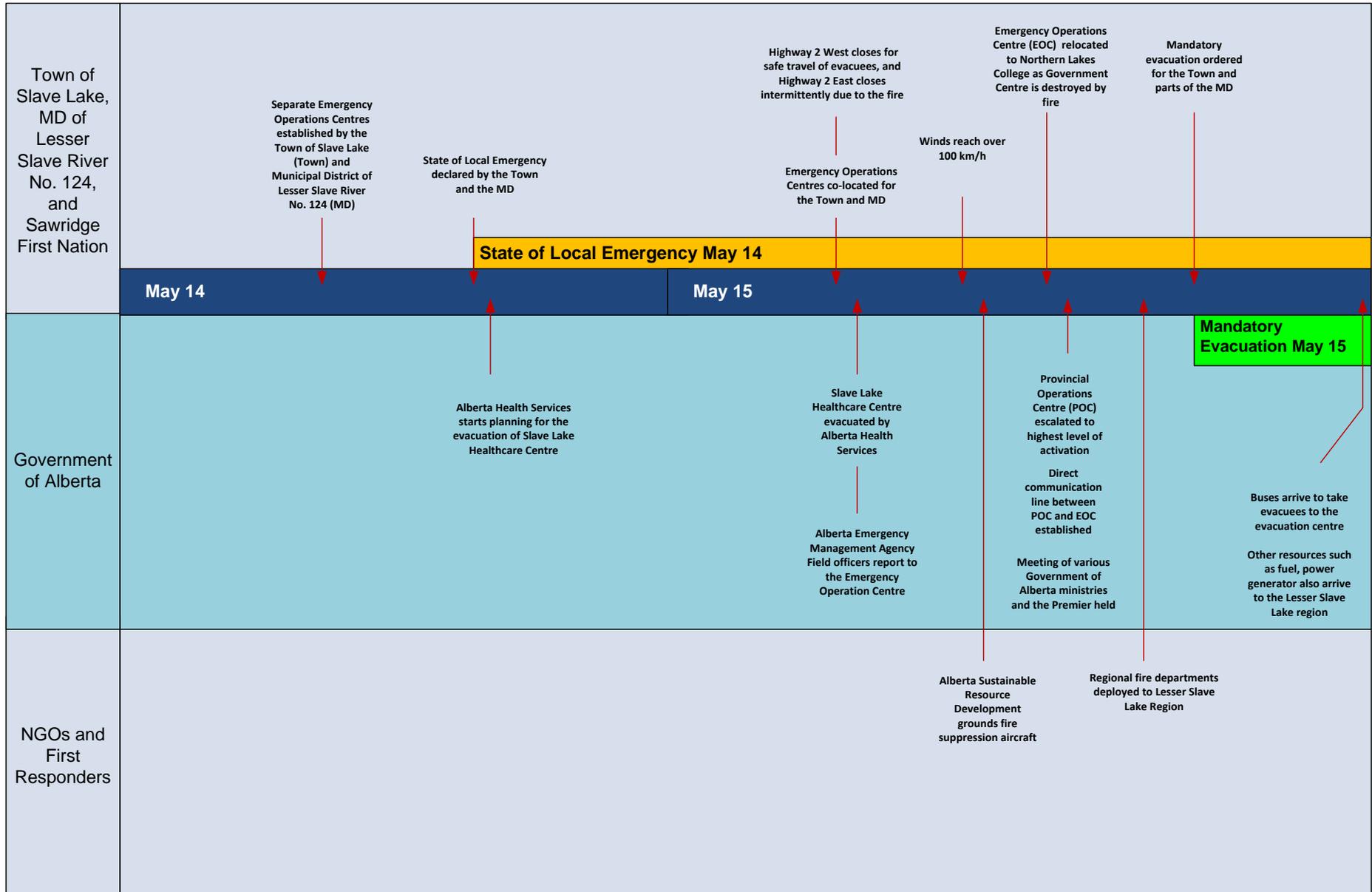
Timeline of Events⁶

The timeline of events that follows on the next three pages provides a high-level understanding of key actions, decision points and the extent of stakeholder involvement during the three distinct phases of the incident which include:

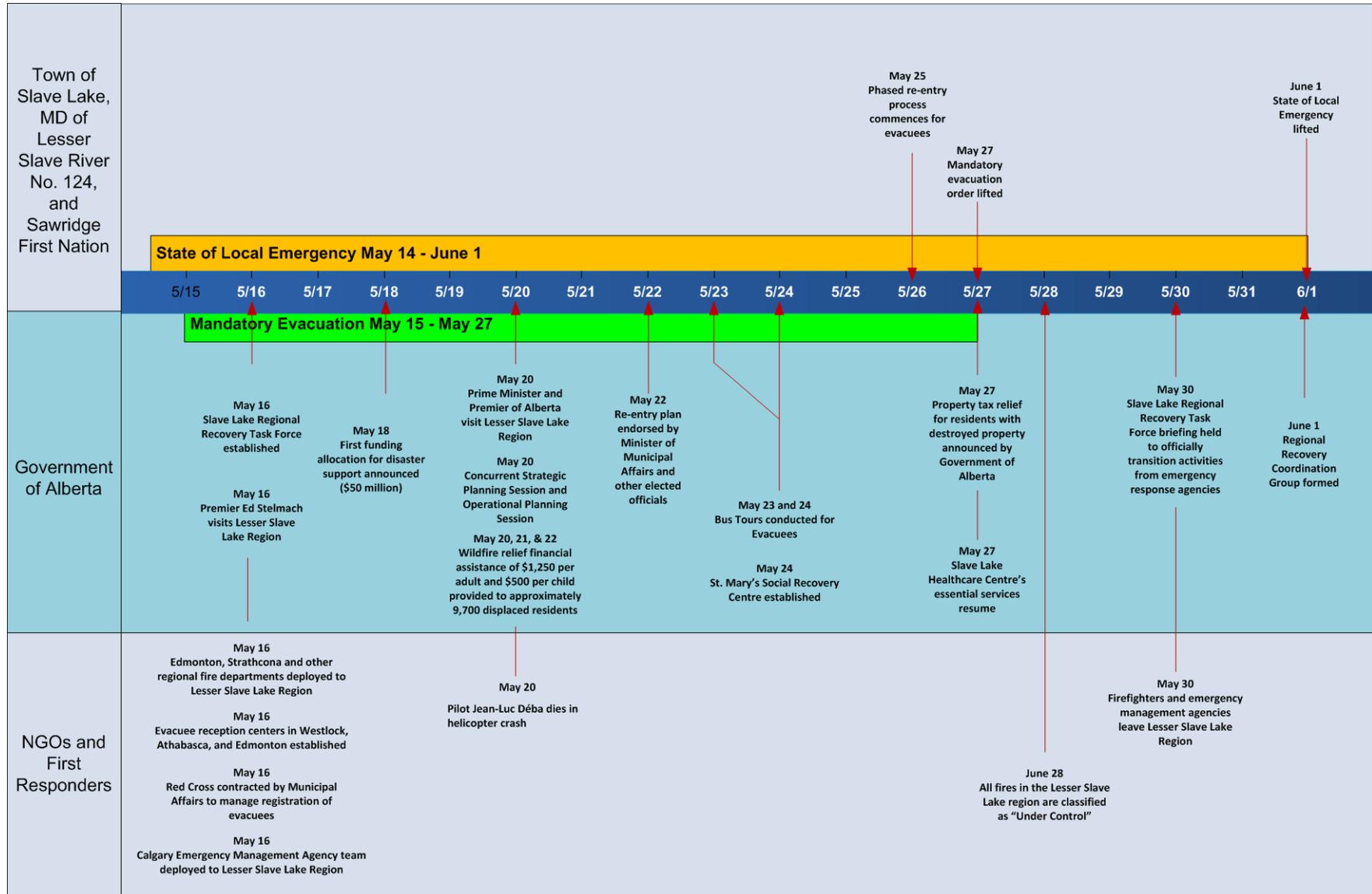
- May 14th and 15th, 2011 timeline encompasses events leading up to the mandatory evacuation of the Town of Slave Lake and parts of the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No.124;
- May 16th to June 1st, 2011 timeline follows the mandatory evacuation to the end of the State of Local Emergency; and
- June 2nd to August 22nd, 2011 timeline encompasses events following the State of Local Emergency to the transfer of authority of the Slave Lake Regional Recovery Task Force from the Assistant Deputy Minister, Electricity and Alternative Energy Division, Alberta Energy to the Assistant Deputy Minister, Local Government Services Division, Alberta Municipal Affairs.

⁶ Timeline dates and key events based on multiple sources of information including: media releases, GoA presentations and stakeholder interviews or focus groups.

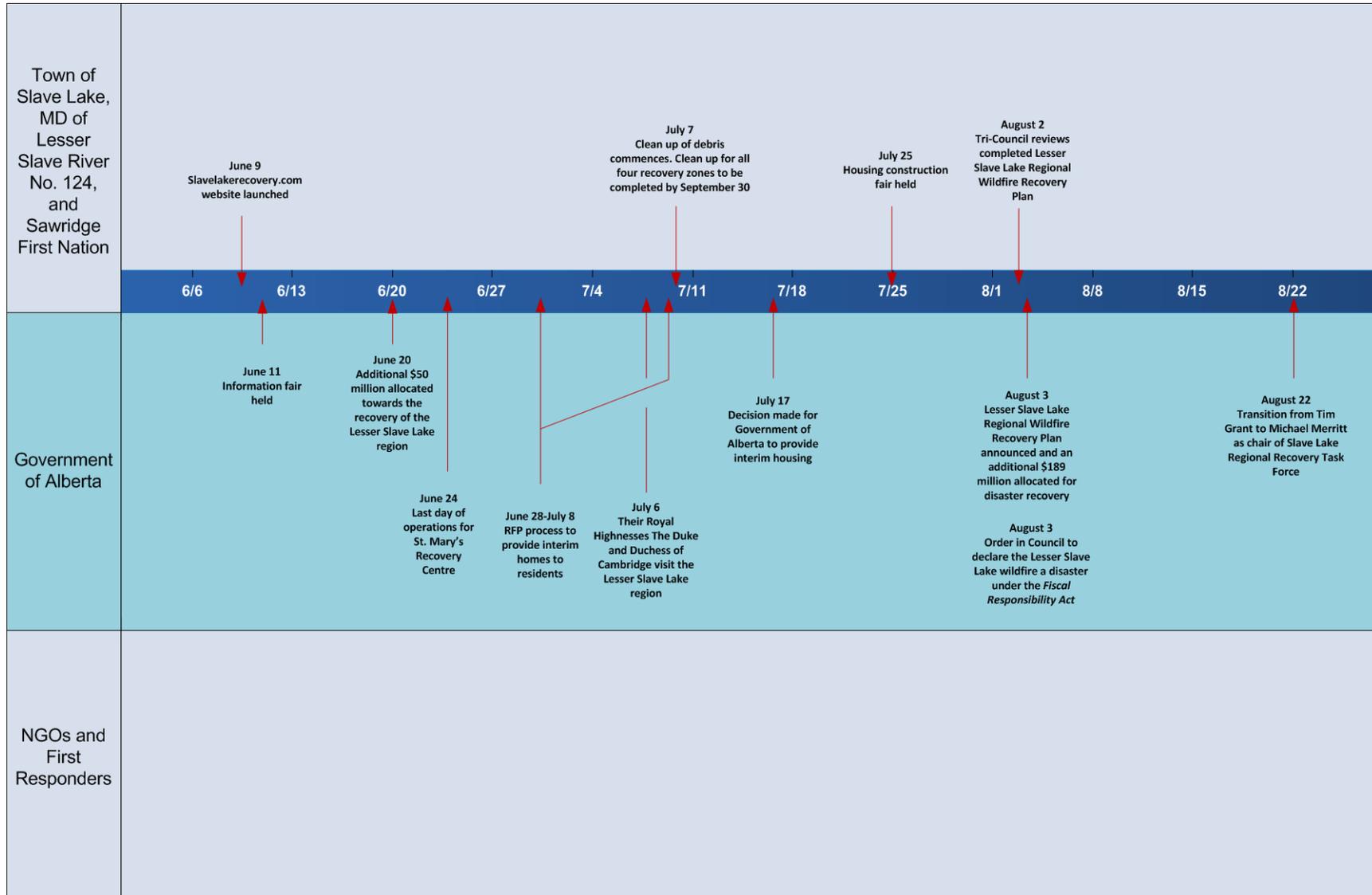
Timeline of Events May 14th and 15th, 2011



Timeline of Events May 16th – June 1st, 2011



Timeline of Events June 2nd – August 22nd, 2011





5. Findings

This review employed seven themes that typically occur in any major incident. These themes were used as the basis to capture the data collection and the analysis. From these themes, the lessons learned that cross preparedness, response and recovery were formed.

Themes	
1	Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination
2	Community Evacuation and Associated Communications Protocols
3	Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations
4	Transition from Response to Recovery
5	Hazard and Health Concerns
6	Non-Government Organization Integration and Coordination
7	Economic Recovery Activities and Revenue Stabilization Requirements

The findings that follow are based largely on the input from the many stakeholders that were involved at the time. These findings represent the collective knowledge and experiences from the stakeholders that were interviewed and consulted through the course of this review. As many of the actions taken were not actually documented at the time there may be discrepancies between what actually occurred and what stakeholders have shared and recollected. An overview of the legislation, protocols and procedures as well as available documentation from the time is included at the end of each theme and, where relevant, these sections reference the input received from stakeholders.

Theme 1: Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination

A large number and range of resources were deployed to fight fires, evacuate and support residents, and begin planning for recovery in the Lesser Slave Lake region. Stakeholders have offered a number of insights about the complex coordination efforts involved in responding to the wildfires specifically addressing the interagency responses and coordination related to:

- the Emergency Operations Centre;
- the Provincial Operations Centre;
- Consequence Management Officers;
- The Fire Commissioner;
- municipal resources;
- First Nations; and
- the health system.

These findings have been grouped according to the following categories:

1. the initial response;
2. ongoing emergency operations;
3. municipal resources;
4. First Nations; and
5. the health system response.

The scope of this theme includes interagency coordination and command structures for the response effort only, and does not include:

- coordination during the transition from emergency response to recovery, or during the recovery period itself (see Theme 4);
- evacuation efforts and communications (see Theme 2);
- interagency coordination related to revenue stabilization and economic recovery (see Theme 7); and
- coordination of non-government organizations (see Theme 6) or support services for displaced residents (see Theme 3).

In reviewing this section, it is important to remember that the high winds and the speed with which the wildfires evolved into a threat to people and property resulted in little warning and preparation time for any of the initial responders.

Theme 1 – Findings

The Initial Response

Establishing the Emergency Operations Centre

On May 14th, 2011 both the Town of Slave Lake and the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No. 124 declared states of local emergency and activated their respective Emergency Operations Centres.

On May 15th, 2011 these two Emergency Operations Centres were co-located in the Town, as Municipal District personnel relocated to avoid the wildfires and ultimately their efforts combined to act as one Emergency Operation Centre. On the same day the Provincial Operations Centre escalated to its peak level of activation.

It was initially challenging to get the Emergency Operations Centre in the Town running and integrated within the response effort. It was suggested, for instance, that the Emergency Management Manual used to set up the Emergency Operations Centre was missing certain information, such as contact information for local contractors and other local service providers. Supplies and infrastructure were an early problem as well; the Emergency Operations Centre did not have adequate food, water or supplies to support emergency management resources, nor did it have enough phone and internet communications capability to connect effectively with different components of such a large emergency response.

These issues combined with the speed with which the wildfires advanced to create coordination challenges in the Emergency Operations Centre. Initially, communications were not as smooth or efficient as desired. For example, when the wildfires reached the Town, people in the Emergency Operations Centre reportedly received the news from other residents before they had officially been told by Sustainable Resource Development, firefighters or the RCMP. In part, this was related to the fact that no member of the fire department or Sustainable Resource Development was initially based at the Emergency Operations Centre to liaise and share information, resulting in a lag in situational awareness in the Emergency Operations Centre. This situation is further discussed under *Situational Awareness*.

Soon after combining the Emergency Operations Centres in the Town offices, the building caught fire, and they were forced to evacuate and relocate to an alternate site in town (Northern Lakes College). During the relocation, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency Field Officers' satellite phones were the only consistent form of communication available, as cellular networks became overloaded, rendering phones unreliable.



Activating the Provincial Operations Centre

As the threat grew, the Provincial Operations Centre escalated its level of activation, quickly engaging additional staff and resources to respond to the rising intensity of the emergency. This proved an essential venue for emergency management experts and Government of Alberta staff to pool their efforts and knowledge in a timely fashion.

At the same time, however, some challenges were experienced with fully activating the Provincial Operations Centre, owing to ongoing efforts to improve operations. Most importantly, at the time of the response the province was in the process of implementing an Incident Command System structure for emergency response. The Incident Command System is recognized across North America as a leading practice that enables clear roles, responsibilities and terminology for coordinated incident response, wherein all participants know who they should be reporting to and communicating with. At the time of the disaster, a number of provisions consistent with an Incident Command System model had not yet been formally implemented, and training related to this new command structure was not complete.

The Provincial Operations Centre was also in the process of transitioning from the Alberta Emergency Notification System to a new system for calling resources into the Centre in the event of an emergency. Although it is not clear whether there were other factors, this transition along with regular server maintenance on Sunday, May 15th, 2011 appear to have resulted in a number of individuals that were summoned via email to the Centre on Sunday, May 15th, 2011 not actually receiving the emails. The Provincial Operations Centre was not aware of the miscommunication for several hours and this delayed the call of resources to the Centre.

Consequence Management Officers

Consequence Management Officers are a critical point for cross-government coordination as members of different ministries who are trained to participate in emergency response efforts at the Provincial Operations Centre. Ultimately this structure proved to be a successful way to bring to bear a range of Government of Alberta expertise in support of the Lesser Slave Lake region.

These Consequence Management Officers did not have a clear role within the Incident Command System and their respective accountabilities to the Provincial Operations Centre and to their own ministries were not fully clear. This dual accountability caused some initial confusion and tension about how the time and efforts of the Consequence Management Officers were being allocated, and who was in charge of doing so. This did not prevent the Consequence Management Officers from making valuable contributions to the response effort. Further, after several days the Consequence Management Officers and Provincial Operations Centre staff had developed strong relationships and understanding of one another's roles and strengths. From that point, they were reportedly very well-aligned and collaborated effectively.

The Fire Commissioner

The Fire Commissioner is a member of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency who has broad oversight, capacity building and quality assurance responsibilities for fire response and prevention services across the province. The Fire Commissioner and the Provincial Operations Centre were successful in quickly engaging and deploying additional firefighting and Incident Management Team resources from other municipalities and provinces to the Lesser Slave Lake region. In large part, the quick engagement of additional firefighting resources seems to have been due to personal relationships with respective municipal fire chiefs, and not as a result of an established process for coordinating available resources across the province. As a result, firefighters from across the province were quickly deployed through provincial leadership and strong ties among first responders. It was not fully clear to the Fire Commissioner exactly what fire resources were in the Lesser Slave Lake region at the start because of self-deployment by municipalities and activation of resources by the Slave Lake Fire Dispatch, which were not initially accounted for. Clarity about the total actual fire resources in place was not

achieved until the middle of the first week – but the most important thing was getting them there in the first place.

Structurally, the Fire Commissioner was placed under the planning group within the Provincial Operations Centre, which is where it would report under an Incident Command System model. It was suggested by stakeholders that the state of transition to the Incident Command System resulted in some confusion about the role, reporting relationships and communication channels between the Fire Commissioner, the planning group and the Provincial Operations Centre Director. The following are illustrative of this situation:

- It was not fully clear which coordination functions would be taken on by the Provincial Operations Centre Director, and which would be taken on by the Fire Commissioner working under the planning group.
- The planning group within the Provincial Operations Centre did not take on responsibility for the Fire Commissioner within the structure of incident command, resulting in Provincial Operations Centre Directors engaging directly with the Fire Commissioner.
- Sustainable Resource Development was engaged in fighting the wildfires outside the Town, and not the fires in urban areas, as per their mandate. It was reported that Sustainable Resource Development firefighting resources were not well-connected to the Provincial Operations Centre or the Fire Commissioner during the early stages of firefighting and evacuation.



Decision Making in the Joint Emergency Operations Centre

A number of stakeholders described the command structure within the Emergency Operations Centre as clear, although they did not all describe it in the same way. From the point of view of the Provincial Operations Centre, Town officials under the Mayor were ultimately responsible for emergency management decision making, this was the official command structure for the Town Emergency Operations Centre. This decision making model was complicated in a number of ways, however, due to the unique circumstances of this emergency. For instance:

- The presence of Municipal District officials, the Municipal District's Emergency Operations Centre personnel, and later representatives of Sawridge First Nation created a situation where two municipal governments and one First Nation were present without a formal governance structure to establish shared authorities and decision making powers.
- An experienced emergency management team arrived and was asked to take a leadership role in coordinating the local response. It was generally understood that the leader of this team, the Director of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency, was in command of the Emergency Operations Centre from that point. Representatives of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency concurred their Director took over management of the Centre when he arrived, but note that no formal letter was provided to grant him this authority. Instead, he had to approach the Town Council (but not officials from the Municipal District or First Nation) every day to get approval to command the Emergency Operations Centre for the day.
- It was suggested that there was no clear incident command structure within the Emergency Operations Centre before the Calgary Emergency Management Agency arrived, which was in fact why the request for this incident management assistance was made. Others suggested that Chief Administrative Officers from the Town and Municipal District were in command. It was also noted that by May 15th the Managing Director of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency was in direct contact with the local leaders, and was able to support and guide the efforts of the Emergency Operations Centre to manage the situation under the direction of the Mayor.
- Local firefighting resources began their efforts under the direction of Town and Municipal District Chief Administrative Officers. As the emergency situation escalated, however, communications with Town and Municipal District officials became more difficult and many operational decisions had to be made quickly by the local Fire Chief. As outside firefighting personnel arrived on the scene, they too received direction from the regional Fire Chief. Formal transfers of command occurred as necessary to ensure senior officers remained in command of all firefighting resources.

In spite of the complexity of decision making and command within the Emergency Operations Centre, it is important to emphasize that no conflicting decisions or disagreements about authority within the Emergency Operations Centre were reported. Instead, it was reported that the team convened regular meetings, leveraged their individual strengths and experience, and worked together toward a common goal. Further, the external resources such as the Calgary Emergency Management Agency, the Fire Commissioner and Alberta Emergency Management Agency Field Officers were all critical in supporting the Emergency Operations Centre during its early stages. The main area where greater clarity was desired was where the authority of the Emergency Operations Centre ended and that of the Provincial Operations Centre began.

Situational Awareness

Initially, as the wildfires developed on May 14th and early May 15th, 2011 the Provincial Operations Centre was reportedly monitoring the progress of the wildfires, but not directly connected with local personnel within the Town and Municipal District. It should be noted that municipalities are not required to initiate communications with the Provincial Operations Centre when they begin an emergency response. Direct communication between local officials and the Provincial Operations Centre was initiated after the combined Emergency Operations Centre was established in the Town, at which point a direct line was established.

During the initial response, timely and accurate information about the progress and status of the wildfires was not always available to all parties, due in part to rapidly escalating wildfire conditions. The Provincial Operations Centre was able to maintain timely situational awareness of the wildfire situation primarily through the presence of the two Alberta Emergency Management Agency Field Officers in the joint Emergency Operations Centre. The Field Officers were equipped with satellite phones and trained in emergency management. The “on-the-ground” reporting from Field Officers was considered invaluable to the coordination efforts of the Provincial Operations Centre in these early days.



It was difficult to predict the extent to which the Town would be impacted by the wildfires due to a combination of factors, especially extreme winds. Although the Provincial Operations Centre had been in touch with Sustainable Resource Development (regarding several wildfires across the province) in the hours and days before the interface wildfire, no formal report was provided about this situation until the interface wildfire was burning out of control and threatening the Town.

In general, it was suggested that Sustainable Resource Development could have been more closely tied into coordination and information sharing processes. The following findings reflect Sustainable Resource Development's linkage to the broader response effort:

- Regional firefighting resources were directly linked with Sustainable Resource Development and reported good communication with Sustainable Resource Development's firefighting teams, owing in particular to shared radio frequencies.
- As firefighting resources from other jurisdictions became involved in the response communication and coordination became more complex.
- Sustainable Resource Development was heavily focused on operational communications related to the progress of the wildfires in the region, as opposed to coordinating with the Provincial Operations Centre or the Emergency Operations Centre. Briefings were provided to the Emergency Operations Centre every few hours on the progress of wildfires, but no Sustainable Resource Development staff members were based there.
- The Provincial Operations Centre independently accessed Sustainable Resource Development communications and information (e.g., weather briefings, wildfire updates, etc.), and a Consequence Management Officer from Sustainable Resource Development was situated in the Provincial Operations Centre as a liaison. There were several examples of coordination challenges and delayed communication between Sustainable Resource Development and the Provincial Operations Centre throughout the response, owing to the scale and the complexity of the situation.
- A number of different stakeholder groups suggested that it does not make sense for Sustainable Resource Development and municipalities to fight wildfires independently. Although people generally understand that Sustainable Resource Development's mandate does not include fighting urban interface wildfires, there is a perception that the jurisdictional barrier led to confusion and firefighting coordination challenges. Communication within Sustainable Resource Development and among responding agencies was impacted by a variety of factors outside of their control (overloaded radio systems, power outages, loss of cell phone coverage, texting restrictions). In addition,

there was inconsistent interpretation of policies and procedures regarding Sustainable Resource Development's role in protecting structures.⁷

Ongoing Emergency Operations

Over the several days following the evacuation, the Emergency Operations Centre became more focused under the leadership of the Mayor, with strong support from the Reeve of the Municipal District and the Chief of Sawridge First Nation. In addition, these local leaders received essential guidance from several emergency response experts, including the Provincial Operations Centre, the Field Officers onsite, an incident management team from Strathcona County Emergency Services, and the Director of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency.

In particular, the Calgary Emergency Management Agency and Field Officers from the Alberta Emergency Management Agency provided an invaluable resource to the Emergency Operations Centre due to their training and experience in emergency response; local personnel had little or no emergency management training or experience. Providing guidance to the Emergency Operations Centre was not a formal role for Field Officers, but it was considered appropriate to lend a hand at the time, and their training and experience was relied upon.

With the support of these emergency response experts, the Emergency Operations Centre began to convene regular meetings and to play a more focused role in coordinating local response and planning efforts. A teleconference line from the College directly to the Provincial Operations Centre was established early on, together with scheduled times to connect. Eventually, the line was simply left open at all times, which greatly aided coordination of local and provincial resources and information sharing. Representatives from the Provincial Operations Centre have suggested that leaving the line open even earlier might have improved communications further. Notwithstanding the regular contact by phone, there were still difficulties experienced in addressing local requests (e.g., providing sufficient administrative support).

The Provincial Operations Centre took the lead in coordinating Government of Alberta emergency response actions, including operations and logistics, planning for recovery, and bringing expertise and resources from different ministries to bear. The Provincial Operations Centre was critically important in coordinating communication, since they were linked directly to the two Field Officers in Slave Lake, the Emergency Operations Centre, Members of the Legislative Assembly, municipal government representatives, and also senior decision makers within the provincial government. This multifaceted coordination role is not unusual for the Provincial Operations Centre, but the scale of this disaster magnified the complexity of coordination required.

⁷ Minister of Environment and Sustainable Resource Development. (May 2012). Flat Top Complex.

A degree of fluidity existed between the role of the Emergency Operations Centre and the Provincial Operations Centre, whereby the Provincial Operations Centre took on certain tasks because of access to resources and capacity, as opposed to a strict interpretation of command structure. For example, although the Provincial Operations Centre is not formally responsible to make preparations for the evacuation of residents, they took on this role because they were best positioned to manage the logistics and communication required. This adaptability is reflective of the general perception that the response to the wildfires was successful in part due to the innovation and creativity of decision makers at multiple levels. Further, the successes experienced during the response are especially impressive in light of the personal challenges related to fatigue and stress experienced by local resources in the Emergency Operations Centre. Many had lost homes, and the team worked intensively for days, with little time for breaks or sleep.

Information Management

Through the efforts of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, its Field Officers, and Government of Alberta communications personnel (including those from the Public Affairs Bureau), timely information was received at many levels. This was essential to keeping everyone involved with the response informed, including on-site operations and planning, Government of Alberta decision makers, and political and media communications. This ability to coordinate and disseminate operational and factual information during the emergency response was considered by many to be a critical factor contributing to the success of the response. It was also reported that once the single Emergency Operations Centre was established, it too became a good venue for operational information sharing.

The relationship between Field Officers, the Provincial Operations Centre and the Emergency Operations Centre was not fully clear, and this did impact the flow of information. As Alberta Emergency Management Agency employees, the Field Officers appeared to be concerned first and foremost with providing information to the Provincial Operations Centre, who would then transmit some of that information to the Emergency Operations Centre. In other words, situational information would initially bypass the local command structure for incident response in some cases.

It was also noted that the volume of information management requirements during a disaster of this scale stretched the capacity of the Provincial Operations Centre. At the same time, some remarked that although there was no specialized "crisis communications" team available, Government of Alberta communications and Public Affairs Bureau staff stepped into this role and performed admirably. In particular, the Public Affairs Bureau was seen to be essential in performing this crisis communications function, which was a part of their mandate. One focus group suggested adding trained Information Management Officers to the Provincial Operations Centre as a way to incorporate additional communications capacity in the future.

The Provincial Operations Centre and Public Affairs Bureau took on the majority of the external communication activities during the response, meaning that considerable effort was devoted to channelling information from the local situation to the provincial government. It was not clear to all stakeholders why the Provincial Operations Centre or the Public Affairs Bureau should lead and approve communications, as opposed to the Emergency Operations Centre. In practical terms, however, local resources in the Emergency Operations Centre did not have adequate capacity or access to the same level of communications expertise, resources or infrastructure as the Provincial Operations Centre.

Combining Resources “Inside” and “Outside” the Provincial Operations Centre

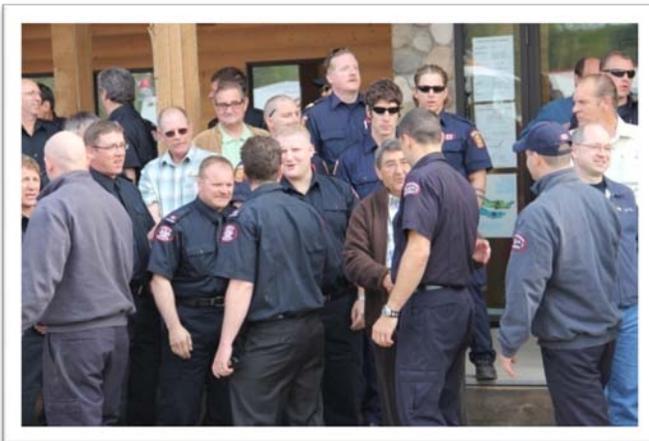
A number of groups, such as the provincial cell coordinating support for the evacuation, the planning group, and the Assistant Deputy Minister Task Force were operating outside of the Provincial Operations Centre structure, but with close ties to the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. Stakeholders consistently applauded the choices of who was tasked to work in these groups, as well as the initiative of Alberta Emergency Management Agency executives in engaging them. However, this combination of internal and external coordination resources added an additional layer of complexity to the response. It was not always clear who was acting under the direction of the Provincial Operations Centre Director, as compared with other Government of Alberta decision making structures. Coordination and reporting became less clear as a result.

On balance, however, it seems that resources external to the Provincial Operations Centre were instrumental in strengthening and deepening the response effort as a whole. The “right” people were engaged, and their leadership and contributions were highly valued, although the structure may have been confusing at times.

Municipal Resources

It is important to profile the fact that municipalities from across the province provided resources in support of the response to the wildfires. Several notable coordination successes were achieved with respect to municipal resources:

- The Society of Local Government Managers of Alberta happened to be hosting the Municipal Administration Leadership Workshop (Mountain Refresher Course) for municipal Chief Administrative Officers in Kananaskis from May 17th – 20th, 2011. Municipal Affairs took advantage of this conference to invite participants to a special session to brainstorm specifically about how to deal with the Lesser Slave Lake disaster. In addition,



Municipal Affairs used the conference to connect with, and ultimately engage, the former Chief Administrative Officer for the Town of Slave Lake to assist with the response and recovery effort. As well, the ministry worked with the Local Government Administrators Association and the Alberta Rural Municipal Administrators Association to arrange for other municipalities to provide staff to the Town on a rotational basis once the State of Local Emergency was lifted. Engaging the municipal sector in such a way helped foster patience later when there were delays on the part of government in responding to their requests, in light of the focus on the Lesser Slave Lake region. If this conference had not already been arranged, it may have been more difficult and time consuming to engage other municipalities in assisting the Town.

- The Government of Alberta engaged a qualified consultant with considerable experience in emergency situations as well as in urban and rural municipal government and community governance. This consultant was responsible for initially assessing and advising the province on the needs of the region's local governments. He was also critical to the establishment of the Tri-Council and shared leading practices in local decision making throughout the recovery process.
- Engaging the former Chief Administrative Officer for the Town proved to be extremely helpful because of the quality of her local relationships and the depth of her knowledge about the administration and its bylaws – especially given that the Town offices and records had been destroyed in the fire.
- In Slave Lake, Town and Municipal District administrations were able to cooperate and share information with provincial and local stakeholders to help coordinate response and evacuation efforts. Every morning the Town would host shared briefings, led by the Chief Administrative Officer, and they were in regular contact with Government of Alberta resources via the Provincial Operations Centre. There were also daily recovery planning meetings including the Municipal District, key local leaders, and others such as utilities and insurance representatives.
- Structural firefighting resources arrived very quickly from other municipalities. Altogether, 38 different fire departments and over 200 structural firefighters contributed, drawn from as far as Lethbridge and High Level. They were complemented by wildland firefighters from other provinces.

Notwithstanding these successes, it was noted that the command structure for firefighters was challenged by the sheer volume of assistance that was required. A single Fire Chief and Deputy Chief were responsible for coordinating all of the firefighters, meaning that many important, time-sensitive decisions were being funnelled to two people, with no intermediate level of decision making.

First Nations

The provincial government does not have jurisdiction over First Nations reserves, although the Alberta Emergency Management Agency is empowered under an agreement between the federal and provincial governments to provide emergency management support on reserve. During the response, a federal government representative was present in the Provincial Operations Centre to facilitate coordination with Sawridge First Nation. It was not clear to some, however, what the role and expectation of the federal government was in emergency response, and further it was difficult for a single federal representative to provide much timely information or support to Sawridge First Nation. As a result, Sawridge First Nation reported that they did not experience a meaningful connection with the Provincial Operations Centre or with provincial coordination efforts.

Locally, there were also challenges reported in establishing connections between Sawridge First Nation and the Emergency Operations Centre. Initially, Sawridge First Nation was not invited to participate in the Emergency Operations Centre with the Town and Municipal District, and indeed received no notice of the evacuation of the Town. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency had deployed First Nations Field Officers to support and liaise with Sawridge First Nation, but it took some time for these resources to link the Chief with the Emergency Operations Centre. Supported by these First Nations Field Officers, the Chief of the First Nation insisted that Sawridge First Nation be included and present onsite at the Emergency Operations Centre. This direct connection greatly improved communication between the First Nation and the Emergency Operations Centre.

Even after the arrival of the Chief, however, it appears that the First Nation was only partly included in the initial response effort. No members of the First Nation were enlisted by emergency personnel to assist, in spite of the offer of equipment, supplies and access to the First Nation's gas station.

Health System Response

Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness orchestrated health system response efforts in parallel to local coordination by the Emergency Operations Centre. The health system has a separate emergency management infrastructure, which was activated and operated in parallel to the Emergency Operations Centre. In the event of a local emergency, Alberta Health Services convenes a Zone Emergency Operations Centre to coordinate the health system response and recovery actions. The Zone Emergency Operations Centre is the physical location where zone representatives come together to coordinate the resources of the Sites and Services within the zone. The Zone Emergency Operations Centre liaises the Site/Service Command Posts and with local partners and stakeholders.

The initial focus of the Zone Emergency Operations Centre in this case was on the safety and wellbeing of Alberta Health Services patients and staff, especially in connection with evacuation of the Slave Lake Healthcare Centre and other patients in home care. Soon however, Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness expanded this role to include health services for evacuees and first responders, as well as addressing health hazards in the area.

The following insights reflect the operation of the Zone Emergency Operations Centre and the health system response:

- The experience gained during the H1N1 response and other health incidents has been valuable in testing and refining the operation of a Zone Emergency Operations Centre. The Zone Emergency Operations Centre was able to mobilize quickly.
- Different departments within the health system (such as public health, for example) were able to collaborate effectively through the Zone Emergency Operations Centre structure. Resources from across the province were brought to bear.
- The zone-based structure proved extremely valuable, as Alberta Health Services was able to shift resources within and between different sites to provide added support to Slave Lake.
- The Zone Emergency Operations Centre had only intermittent contact with the joint Emergency Operations Centre, and operated independent of that command structure. In retrospect, having a dedicated staff person present in the Emergency Operations Centre would have been an asset to coordination. The health system had a closer tie to the Provincial Operations Centre through their Consequence Management Officer as well as close communication at the Assistant Deputy Minister level from Alberta Health and Wellness.
- Following the experience in the Lesser Slave Lake region, several areas of improvement were identified for Alberta Health Services' standard operating procedures in future emergencies in a report by Alberta Health and Wellness. These included:
 - Increased training about local and provincial emergency response command structure and decision making hierarchy in an emergency situation.
 - A stronger connection with the Provincial Operations Centre to gain better access to technical resources (e.g., storing additional supplies/equipment at the Provincial Operations Centre, access to Alberta Emergency Management Agency's electronic mapping capabilities, etc.).
 - Enhancing communication protocols (e.g., adding a standard situational briefing schedule, standard agenda items for reporting, distribution lists, etc.).

- Further clarifying roles and responsibilities (e.g., creating transition checklists, describing expected roles and responsibilities for key stakeholders during emergencies, adding a standard demobilization plan, etc.).
- Enhancing emergency management staffing resources at the Provincial Operations Centre (e.g., creating job descriptions and training packages for new staff, incorporating dedicated administrative support, etc.).

Theme 1 – Legislation, Protocols and Procedures

Document	Available on May 14, 2011	Developed from May 14, 2011 to August 22, 2011
Emergency Management Act, Alberta (2011)	✓	-
Alberta Emergency Plan (2008)	✓	-
Government Emergency Management Regulation (2008)	✓	-
Municipal Emergency Plan	Not Made Available	Not Made Available
Alberta Agency Response Plan (2009)	✓	
Forest and Prairie Protection Act, Alberta (2007)	✓	-
Public Safety Governance Review document	-	✓
Incident Command System Alberta Health Services Emergency Coordination Centre (2009)	✓	-
Alberta Health and Wellness Emergency Operations Centre Standard Operating Procedures (2006)	✓	-

Key Observations:

- Overall, the *Emergency Management Act of Alberta* (the *Act*) provides little direction around interagency response and coordination during a disaster. The *Act* does, however, set out clear roles and responsibilities of local authorities during a disaster. Specifically, all key decisions with respect to emergency planning and response are to be made at the local authority level; by the municipal council in other words.
- Multiple stakeholders related that local officials acted as decision makers during the Lesser Slave Lake disaster, though they relied heavily on experts for advice and information. The Mayor was commonly identified as the key local decision maker, as opposed to Town Council. It is not clear whether the Town Council formally designated the Mayor as decision maker during the emergency.
- Decision making at the provincial level is only permitted if a state of emergency for the province is declared – this has never occurred, and would require a province-wide disaster of some kind. The *Act* focuses on interagency response during a provincial emergency, and specifies local decision making during a local emergency. The concept of a regional response for local emergencies is not currently covered in the *Act*.
- Consistent with the *Act*, the Town of Slave Lake and Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No.124 declared states of local emergencies.
- The *Act* requires a local authority to appoint a Director of Emergency Management who shall prepare and co-ordinate emergency plans and programs for the municipality, and coordinate all emergency services and other resources in an emergency. The *Act* defines a local authority as the municipal council, so in the case of the Lesser Slave Lake region, local authority refers to the Council of the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No.124, and Town Council for the Town of Slave Lake. The Chief Administrative Officers for the Town and the Municipal District, respectively, were Directors of Emergency Management during the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires.
- In addition to the *Emergency Management Act*, the Alberta Emergency Plan requires local authorities to have a Municipal Emergency Plan in place to guide actions during a disaster. Furthermore, the Government Emergency Management Regulation states that the Alberta Emergency Management Agency shall assist local authorities in the preparation, implementation and maintenance of their municipal plans. A municipal emergency plan was not made available as part of this review, although several stakeholders asserted that plans were in place for the Town and Municipal District.
- The Alberta Agency Response Plan defines a lead agency as the organization assigned by legislation, regulation, policy or plans to lead in the emergency management of an incident. The provincial ministry of Sustainable Resource Development is the lead agency for wildfires, consistent with the *Forest and Prairie Protection Act*. When a fire

enters the boundaries of a rural municipality (i.e., Municipal District or County) or urban municipality (i.e., city, town or village), the local authority is responsible for fighting and controlling fires. According to the *Municipal Government Act*, however, those parts of a Municipal District within a forest protection area remain the responsibility of Sustainable Resource Development. In general, legislation does not define a single lead agency during an interface wildfire, as technically the local authority would be responsible for the municipality and Sustainable Resource Development would lead firefighting in a forest protection area. In the case of the Lesser Slave Lake regional interface fire, lead coordination responsibility defaulted to the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. The local Fire Chief took the lead in coordinating structural firefighting personnel and SRD maintained control over the wildland firefighters.

- It is important to note that Sustainable Resource Development has recognized an interface protocol which includes allowing wildfire management employees to extinguish fires on the *exterior* of structures until municipal fire services arrive, but not on the interior. This protocol was followed during the response. Further, Sustainable Resource Development worked closely with the local fire department to provide structural protection within the south shore communities and Poplar Estates within the Municipal District.
- The Alberta Emergency Plan states that the Incident Command System is the system adopted by the Province of Alberta to ensure clear lines of authority and a coordinated, effective response. However, based on stakeholder discussions, Alberta's Incident Command System had not been fully implemented. The Provincial Operations Centre had adopted this command structure to a large extent, but not all partners, municipalities or response agencies were aware of and trained in the Incident Command System.
- The Alberta Emergency Plan, which was last updated in 2008, states that an agreement between Indian Affairs Canada and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency should exist to support Alberta First Nations emergency management and training. However, there are no details around what this agreement should include, or what the roles and expectations of the federal government should be in a disaster situation.
- Several of the key documents that were available to guide coordination of interagency response actions on May 14th, 2011 were last updated over three years ago. Some procedures that were still under development during the wildfires were not reflected in key Alberta Emergency Management Agency documents made available to the review (e.g., revised activation levels of the Provincial Operations Centre from the Public Safety Governance Review document).
- The Alberta Health Services Zone Emergency Operations Centre Incident Commander was in contact with the Provincial Operations Centre Operations Section via the

Alberta Health and Wellness Consequence Management Officer to support the recovery of local health services and to incorporate health needs into recovery planning. This is consistent with the Incident Command System protocol for Alberta Health Services which states that the Zone Emergency Operations Centre is responsible for liaising with local partners and stakeholders throughout an event.

- Alberta Health Services had standard procedures in place for operating its own Zone Emergency Operations Centre. These standards provided guidance on how to activate, operate, and deactivate the Alberta Health Services Zone Emergency Operations Centre to support the department's response to an incident. For the most part, these protocols and procedures were seen by health system stakeholders to have been sufficient. However, it was noted that the procedures did not have sufficient guidance or protocols around connecting with the Provincial Operations Centre and around communication protocols with other emergency partners (e.g., local Emergency Operations Centre, Government of Alberta departments, etc.) during the response.

Theme 2: Community Evacuation and Associated Communications Protocols

Emergency evacuation is by nature a chaotic situation. A great success of the response to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires was that the region was able to be evacuated before any lives were lost. This overriding fact should remain front-of-mind when assessing the evacuation; the process was not perfect, but it was ultimately successful.

Still, there is much that can be learned from the experience. This theme includes not only the events of the evacuation itself, but also readiness and preparedness for evacuation. The focus is on the time period in which an evacuation became necessary and was carried out. Support and communications associated with reception centres and interim accommodations are not within the scope of this theme (see Theme 3).



Theme 2 – Findings

Findings of this review related to the evacuation have been organized into the following areas:

1. planning and preparedness;
2. evacuating residents;
3. external partners; and
4. communications.

Communities in the Municipal District (including Canyon Creek, Widewater, and Poplar Estates) were successfully evacuated over the weekend of May 14th and 15th. It is important to note, however, that this section is focused almost exclusively on the mass evacuation of the Town itself due to the scope and the findings of the review, as opposed to the Municipal District and Sawridge First Nation.

Planning and Preparedness

No one was prepared for how quickly the fires became a threat to the Town. There was general disagreement about whether the Town in fact had an evacuation plan prior to the event (and once the municipal government offices burned down it became impossible to locate most Town documents in any case). It is apparent, however, that the scale and speed of this disaster could not have been effectively addressed by any of the local emergency or evacuation plans that may have existed.

At a provincial level, there were no specific plans to evacuate this particular municipality, nor is it the role of the Government of Alberta to create or possess these plans. Alberta Health Services did consult their own evacuation plan, but described it as a “legacy” plan, which was both many years old and focused on evacuating the Slave Lake Healthcare Centre – it also presumed that Town resources would be available to assist with the evacuation of patients.

Regardless of whatever plans may have existed or been consulted, it was consistently agreed that the level of training and preparedness before the disaster could have been improved. Specifically, few of the organizations engaged had simulated or trained specifically for a municipal evacuation at all, let alone one of this size. Even partners who are regularly involved with emergency management have pointed in hindsight to knowledge or training that would have been valuable. For example, the RCMP suggested the need for more clarity about how and when to use their authority to enter homes and prevail upon residents to evacuate.

Without training specific to this kind of evacuation, considerable adaptability and creativity was required of first responders, municipal resources, external partners and residents

themselves during the evacuation. The successful evacuation of the Town without fatalities is widely attributed to both good collaboration and good fortune.

At the Provincial Operations Centre, evacuation scenarios were discussed early on Sunday, as wildfires moved closer to the Town. This planning was complicated by the closures of all main roads into the Town due to smoke, however. At one point on Sunday, the Provincial Operations Centre was attempting to coordinate bringing a plane into the Town to help evacuate people with health concerns, but the airport was closed before they were able to do so. Notwithstanding the challenges posed by the rapidly changing situation, the Provincial Operations Centre was able to coordinate some resources, personnel and logistics support to evacuate people from the Town. In addition, the Provincial Operations Centre connected with several surrounding municipalities who were preparing to take in the evacuees.

Like the Provincial Operations Centre, Alberta Health Services was also involved in marshalling resources in advance of the evacuation. In fact, the evacuation of Alberta Health Services facilities, staff and patients began before – and independent of – the evacuation of the Town, owing in part to the respiratory difficulties of some patients. Throughout Saturday evening and Sunday morning, Alberta Health Services coordinated plans to evacuate its facilities, even though evacuation was not expected to be required. This preparation has been cited as invaluable in getting patients transferred safely out of the Town; for instance, ambulances and other transportation were positioned in advance and could be quickly loaded. Due to the speed with which the wildfires advanced, the evacuation of the Slave Lake Healthcare Centre was actually started not because of a decision at the Zone Emergency Operations Centre, but by the Site Manager who observed that the fire was a few feet away from the back door.

Adaptability in quickly changing circumstances was critical to the success of the evacuation. For instance, it was necessary to overcome a number of supply and logistical challenges that hampered the efforts of those working to fight fires and coordinate the evacuation locally, including:

- Technical and communications infrastructure to set up the Emergency Operations Centre were not immediately available. Moreover, phones quickly became unreliable when the wildfires reached the Town due to the volume of calls, and then phone services were lost altogether.
- No backup plan was in place to relocate the Emergency Operations Centre when it burned. In addition, no backup power or water supplies were available at its initial location.
- The Town's emergency radios were being tested at the time of the



wildfires and the emergency team did not have them initially. When the Emergency Operations Centre burned, provincial Field Officers' satellite phones became the only means of communication as they moved to Northern Lakes College. The satellite phones were a key tool for communication once phone services went down in the Town, as well.

- There were no pre-existing agreements with local retailers to procure emergency supplies. Further, local emergency supplies were not sufficient. As a result:
 - The Emergency Operations Centre did not initially have access to sufficient food, water and other supplies to sustain its operations.
 - The blankets stored in the event of an emergency turned out to be contaminated, and more had to be acquired.
 - The owner of the *No Frills* store contacted RCMP and invited them to enter the store to take the supplies that they required for the Emergency Operations Centre.
 - Many people were coming in from other municipalities to assist with the response, but there was no plan for their accommodations or how they would be supplied. The RCMP took a lead role to access a hotel for these extra resources, and brought in cots and water for those who remained in Town.

Evacuating Residents

The evacuation of the Town was in many ways characterized by stark contrasts that serve to illustrate the complexity of the situation:

- First responders worked to evacuate the Town, yet many if not most people “self-evacuated” and began to leave to avoid the threat.
- The evacuation was chaotic, as people grabbed what they could and fled their homes to avoid the advancing smoke and flames. At the same time, however, people report a remarkably orderly evacuation in many respects – the RCMP kept traffic moving and gave instructions, both lanes of highways out of town were cleared for outgoing traffic, and residents would regularly let others join the tightly packed line of vehicles in front of them.
- People witnessed and experienced terrible losses of homes, pets and treasured property, yet no lives were lost.

- Communications became extremely difficult, yet an incredible amount of coordination was achieved by individuals, families, emergency responders, and others that made the evacuation possible.
- Amidst powerful concern for personal safety and possessions, acts of kindness and generosity among strangers were commonplace; residents helped one another communicate and share information, fix tires, transport themselves, fill gas tanks, and find safety.

Considerable confusion surrounds the evacuation order itself. Stakeholders do not agree whether an order was given, who suggested the order be given, who gave it, when it occurred, or even whose decision it *should* have been to evacuate the Town. In spite of this confusion, a number of clear findings have emerged from this review:



- There is a difference of opinion as to what extent evacuation was discussed within the Emergency Operations Centre prior to it being ordered, and when it was recommended by the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. Reportedly, Provincial Operations Centre records document a recommendation from Alberta Emergency Management Agency to evacuate at approximately 9:00 PM on May 15th, and that the Emergency Operations Centre responded that they would begin the evacuation at that time.
- At least one evacuation planning session was held at the Emergency Operations Centre and resources were put in place by the Provincial Operations Centre in advance to ensure readiness for an evacuation. The decision to evacuate does not appear to have been wholly unanticipated.

- The official decision to evacuate was made at some point from within the Emergency Operations Centre.
- Most suggested that the evacuation decision was the responsibility of the Town's Mayor. Several stakeholders also reported that the Mayor gave the order to evacuate. Notably, a number of those who participated in the review noted that the Mayor relied heavily on the information, experience and expertise of others (especially the Alberta Emergency Management Agency) in making this decision.
- An official evacuation was started by the RCMP, and teams of two were assigned to evacuate different areas of the Town. This evacuation effort was initiated to ensure public safety, however, and not as a result of an order from the Emergency Operations Centre. In part, this proactive evacuation may have been driven by a number of complaints received by the RCMP from concerned residents in their homes.
- After the wildfires had swept through the Town, the Emergency Operations Centre instructed the RCMP to complete a "second sweep" to ensure residents were evacuated.
- Alberta Health Services evacuated its patients, staff and facilities independent of any order from the Emergency Operations Centre.
- No evacuation order was issued for Sawridge First Nation to evacuate the Town, and no one notified the First Nation that the evacuation had begun. It is not clear who, other than Sawridge First Nation's Chief, may have been empowered to evacuate the First Nation.

It bears repeating that in spite of confusion about the evacuation order, residents were evacuated or evacuated themselves, and no lives were lost.

It is also important to recognize that evacuating people was not as simple as telling them to leave. The RCMP experienced a number of challenges during the evacuation:

- Many people didn't understand the severity of the situation and they didn't want to leave their homes.
- Some people hid or refused to leave. Also, if no one answered the front door the officers moved on. One sweep of a neighbourhood was not necessarily sufficient to remove everyone and therefore a second sweep was performed and random neighbourhood patrols were instituted subsequently by the RCMP.
- The RCMP have reported that some officers were unclear on the protocol to follow when evacuating people from their homes; for instance, it was not always evident how forcibly the officers were empowered to insist that people leave.



- Many residents were reportedly angry that they were not notified to prepare for evacuation in advance resulting in the RCMP becoming a focal point for this anger, as the face of the evacuation at the time. In retrospect, many residents now recognize that the changing conditions happened rapidly and the breach of the town was not expected, making it very difficult to predict or give notice of an impending evacuation.

Notably, local hotel staff faced a similar conundrum. These staff went from room to room telling people they had to evacuate, but encountered resistance from people who did not want to leave the hotel.

External Partners

The municipalities and the Emergency Operations Centre were supported in evacuating residents by several key external resources:

- The Alberta Emergency Management Agency formed a team dedicated to coordinating the evacuation and logistics.
- Alberta Health Services began evacuating the Slave Lake Healthcare Centre by bus before the evacuation of the Town was called. In addition, other health facilities and home care patients were evacuated.
- Alberta Sustainable Resource Development staff provided information regarding the status of the wildfires and assistance in directing residents to evacuate.
- Reception centres were established in surrounding municipalities to receive and support evacuees.

- The Canadian Red Cross was quickly engaged by the Government of Alberta to support evacuees and also to manage registrations at reception centres.
- The Alberta NGO Council was engaged and connected with the Provincial Operations Centre to coordinate support for evacuees.
- The RCMP played three main roles: door-to-door evacuations, road closures, and patrols within the evacuation zone. Patrols were necessary because of people returning to evacuated areas.
- Alberta Transportation contributed flagging crews to assist with road closures. As the evacuation wore on, however, these flagging crews were repeatedly asked to leave the Town because they were not considered “core” or essential services.

Engaging these external resources is seen as a definite success in enabling the Town to execute the evacuation and to support and care for evacuees. External partners were needed because municipal resources were clearly stretched such that they were unable to manage the evacuation or evacuee support directly. Therefore, the Provincial Operations Centre took the lead in coordinating and directing these tasks.

Communications

Challenges related to communications were prominent during the evacuation and were related to:

- advance warning for residents;
- communications from the Emergency Operations Centre; and
- media and external communications.

Advance Warning

A consistent sentiment among members of the public was that there was no official warning that they might need to evacuate, and many also note that they did not receive an evacuation order or notice of any kind. No siren or other large-scale alarm was employed to notify people of the danger. In retrospect, many residents now recognize that the changing conditions happened rapidly and the breach of the town was not expected, making it very difficult to predict or give notice of an impending evacuation. Examples of how messaging about the evacuation was fragmented and sometimes conflicting include:

- Cellular phone service became unreliable due to the volume of calls during the disaster, making it more difficult for emergency responders, local officials, and residents to communicate or give warning. Landlines also became unusable as electricity failed.

- Before the phone lines went down, the RCMP made good use of volunteer constables to field the numerous calls from worried residents. Generally speaking, it seems that people were not told to evacuate by these constables, because no evacuation order had been given at the time.
- A mix of rumour and fact was being communicated by residents via phone, text message and social media as different parts of the Town experienced the disaster differently. Many people were frantically trying to get in touch with their loved ones during this time.
- After the wildfires reached the Town, some members of the public report being told via RCMP loudspeaker to proceed to the Walmart parking lot, and others were evacuated by RCMP officers going door to door.

Communications from the Emergency Operations Centre

The Emergency Operations Centre was challenged to maintain real-time communications with emergency responders and other external partners due to limited communications infrastructure, the loss of phone lines, and of course the need to relocate as the first location in the Town's Government Centre burned. It was suggested that emergency responders (firefighters in particular) also experienced difficulties with radio communications and staying in timely contact with the Emergency Operations Centre.

The Alberta Health Services Zone Emergency Operations Centre lost contact entirely with the Emergency Operations Centre as the evacuation progressed. In fact, all normal communications lines to Alberta Health Services personnel in Town were lost, but many staff took the initiative to connect back with the Zone Emergency Operations Centre through creative means. In particular, the connection through social media between local staff and Alberta Health Services zone operations was seen as valuable to share information.

It should also be noted that no consistent line of communication was established between the Emergency Operations Centre and Sawridge First Nation.

Media and External Communications

Managing external communications during the disaster and the evacuation was a significant task. The Public Affairs Bureau played a strong role in coordinating Government of Alberta communications, and connected directly with the Provincial Operations Centre to do so. Stakeholders reported that the Public Affairs Bureau's efforts were valuable and that they were effective in their crisis communications role. There was more than one source for communications from the Government of Alberta, however; for example Sustainable Resource Development independently provided updates for the public on the status of wildfires on its website and on Facebook.

On the other hand, it was not always clear who was ultimately responsible for directing and approving communications from the Public Affairs Bureau – the Provincial Operations Centre Director played this role at times, but lines of authority between the Provincial Operations Centre and the Public Affairs Bureau were not entirely clear. Overall, it seems that few people within the Provincial Operations Centre were empowered to approve communications, which resulted in communication delays in the eyes of some. This was a similar issue within the Alberta Health Services Zone Emergency Operations Centre, where the processes of approving and releasing information were seen by some to slow down the flow of key information.

Considerable time and effort were devoted by the Provincial Operations Centre and the Public Affairs Bureau to managing the media and supplying them with accurate information during the evacuation and the days that followed. However, some stakeholders expressed that the media were prone to release information immediately from other sources as well, whether or not it was accurate. This reportedly resulted in confusion and, in some cases, rework to clarify mixed messages. On May 31st, 2011, the Public Affairs Bureau embedded a contracted communications consultant to provide on-the-ground communications support to local officials and to coordinate consistent messaging for local and social media channels.

Theme 2 – Legislation, Protocols and Procedures

Document	Available on May 14, 2011	Developed from May 14, 2011 to August 22, 2011
Municipal Emergency Plan	N/A	N/A
<i>Emergency Management Act</i> (2011)	✓	-
Alberta Emergency Plan (2008)	✓	-
Government Emergency Management Regulation (2008)	✓	-
Alberta Crisis Communications Strategy for Major Provincial Emergencies (2009)	✓	-

Key Observations:

- No local emergency management or evacuation plans were provided as inputs into this review. The evacuation procedure that was followed involved the RCMP dividing the Town map into sections and assigning pairs of officers to conduct door-to-door evacuations in each neighbourhood.
- Per sections 19 and 24 of the *Emergency Management Act*, on declaration of a State of Local Emergency, local authorities are given the power to do all acts and take all necessary proceedings in order to cause the evacuation of persons from any area of Alberta that is affected by the disaster.
- The Alberta Emergency Plan states that emergency management training is coordinated at the municipal level by the Director of Emergency Management. Furthermore, the Government Emergency Management Regulation states that the Alberta Emergency Management Agency shall assist local authorities in the preparation, implementation and maintenance of their municipal emergency plan. There was consistent agreement that the level of training and preparedness before the disaster, specifically around municipal evacuation planning could have been improved.
- There were no protocols available that specify who among the three local governments was ultimately responsible for declaring the mandatory evacuation and through what means. Communication protocols for declaring states of local emergency do exist as part of the *Emergency Management Act*; however details around evacuation orders do not exist. Evacuation orders most likely are part of the local decision making role under the *Emergency Management Act*. Several stakeholders reported that the Mayor of the Town of Slave Lake made the final decision to issue an official evacuation order.
- The Alberta Crisis Communications Strategy for Major Provincial Emergencies (“the Communications Strategy”), which was last updated in 2009, states that working with the Provincial Operations Centre, the Public Affairs Bureau is responsible for managing all media relations, public inquiries, and public communications for the Government of Alberta during an emergency. However, it is not clear who (within the Government of Alberta, the Provincial Operations Centre, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, or the Public Affairs Bureau) should have the authority to approve public crisis communications.

- The Communications Strategy also states that Emergency Public Information Officers in municipalities (e.g., Directors of Emergency Management, Municipal Elected Officials, etc.) should be responsible for activating the local Emergency Public Information plan, which is a specialized component of the Municipal Emergency Plan. No local emergency plans were provided as inputs into this review, so the presence or sufficiency of these protocols cannot be assessed. No evidence was observed that an Emergency Public Information Plan was executed to guide the evacuation and emergency communications. At a provincial level, there are no specific plans to evacuate municipalities (or First Nations), as it is not the role of the Government of Alberta to create or possess such plans.

Theme 3: Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations

Supporting evacuees of any disaster is a challenging, emotional situation. In the case of residents evacuated due to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, a number of clear successes were achieved. For instance, by all accounts the basic needs of evacuees were met, and met reasonably efficiently. Several components of how evacuees were housed and supported in this case bear further examination, however, in order to improve future responses.



This theme explores the resources and support services made available to assist displaced residents of the Town, Municipal District and Sawridge First Nation during the period of the evacuation order. It also discusses access to the Town and short-term accommodations in town during the emergency response period and interim housing provided after the evacuation order had been lifted. Re-entry and the transition to the recovery are addressed under Theme 4.

Theme 3 – Findings

Findings related to support and accommodations for evacuees have been grouped according to four main areas:

1. accommodations and support for displaced residents in surrounding municipalities;
2. accommodations in Slave Lake and access to the Town during the evacuation period;
3. interim housing for residents whose homes were lost; and
4. preparing to rebuild.

Support at the Reception Centres

The Lesser Slave Lake disaster was the largest displacement of residents in our province's history. As a result, there was no blueprint for how to manage this displacement. There was no local or provincial plan that anticipated evacuating the entire Town and surrounding Municipal District, and so decision makers relied on their judgment and experience in determining where and how reception centres should be established. This situation was complicated further by the fact that residents could not be systematically distributed across municipalities; most decided for themselves where to go.

Those municipalities who received large numbers of evacuees received very little or no notice at all of the influx of people from the Lesser Slave Lake region in the early hours of May 16th, 2011. Some were contacted by the Provincial Operations Centre, and others by the Canadian Red Cross. Further, they had no reliable estimate of how many people to expect at any given site. It is a testament to cooperation and ingenuity that so many people were able to be sheltered safely that night, and in the days that followed.

Getting reception centres themselves set up was no easy task. There was no single, consistent set of guidelines or procedures to explain how to set up a reception centre, or how to operate one once established. Municipalities were and are responsible for these centres, and so each municipality relied on their own emergency and Disaster Social Services response plan⁸ in setting up the centres. These plans, however, did not detail specific procedures for operating the centres, which could have been valuable. For example, in the Athabasca centre there were two reported cases of Norovirus/Norwalk-like virus, which was very near the threshold to implement additional communicable disease control measures. It was suggested that a potential cause was related to lack of adequate infection control practices (i.e., no one was cleaning toys at the centre).

Provincial templates were available for municipal emergency plans and Disaster Social Services plans, respectively. However, existing Disaster Social Services and emergency plans and templates did not specify how a given municipality or reception centre should fit into the command structure of a larger provincial or regional response. As a result, there was some difficulty in determining who was in charge of the centres, and in managing all the logistics and details associated with operating them, and coordinating with others. For example, some centres received very little information about the situation in the Lesser Slave Lake region, the number of potential evacuees, or what was happening in other municipalities. Several days after the evacuation, daily conference calls were established among all reception centres and the Provincial Operations Centre to address this communication gap.

⁸ Disaster Social Services means a planned emergency response program intended to meet the immediate and long-term survival and psychological needs of individuals impacted by an emergency or disaster.

Even so, in some cases municipalities found it challenging to coordinate provincial resources as part of the centres, and there does not seem to have been a single point of contact initially within the Government of Alberta in charge of managing this. Gaps in these provincial services were reported, and the Provincial Operations Centre convened a cell responsible for evacuee support and Disaster Social Services early in the response period to enhance coordination, as no provincial policy existed to direct the delivery of these services. For example, municipalities were asked to provide space for a “service centre” where provincial ministries could provide “one-stop” information for evacuees. This was certainly a good concept, and in some cases worked well to provide access to a range of services. Other times, the provincial employees were reportedly delayed, or did not have the necessary resources or supplies to fulfill this role. Another challenge was the absence of coordinated security for the centres; RCMP in the area were overtaxed and were not able to enhance security, and some of the smaller municipalities had access to few Peace Officers for prolonged supervision of a reception centre.

The Canadian Red Cross played a role in helping to set up the centres. Initially, the Canadian Red Cross was directed to set up a reception centre in the Town of Slave Lake itself, but once the evacuation began they were deployed in Edmonton, Westlock and Athabasca. Once there, the Canadian Red Cross assumed a supportive role, providing advice and assistance. In some cases, this advisory approach may have run counter to expectations in a given municipality that the Canadian Red Cross would provide direction or relief to local resources. Another key role played by the Canadian Red Cross was booking hotel rooms on the Government of Alberta’s behalf to make sure that people had accommodations. While helpful, this role also created some confusion and duplication of effort because the Logistics group and not the Canadian Red Cross was tasked to book rooms under the incident command structure.

Resourcing the centres was reported to be a challenge for municipalities. Significant municipal staff resources were diverted to organize, set up and operate the centres for several weeks. For example, the Community Services Branch of the City of Edmonton diverted all but one of its managers to administer the reception centre, leaving a single individual in charge of this large portion of the City bureaucracy. Notably, having one location for the centre was singled out as a key factor for success in Edmonton, as employees did not have to be divided between different parts of the city.

In addition to staff resources, there were financial implications for those municipalities that established reception centres. Multiple municipal stakeholders suggested that financial personnel should have been involved in tracking costs as soon as the centres were established, as these expenses are recoverable through the Government of Alberta’s Disaster Recovery Program.

Notwithstanding coordination challenges, it is significant that the provincial government was able to put a range of Disaster Social Services in place to support evacuees in addition to the local services provided by host municipalities. This involved coordinating

supports from different Ministries and organizations, including Alberta Health Services, Children and Youth Services, Persons with Developmental Disabilities, daycares, Alberta Works, Alberta Education, schools, Aboriginal services, seniors programming, and Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped.

Notably, there was no process or policy in place to determine who within the Government of Alberta bureaucracy should be coordinating services across Ministries. In fact, some stakeholders noted that Disaster Social Services in general did not have a prominent place within an Incident Command System structure, and needs to be more deliberately entrenched in future response efforts. As a result, it was suggested that there were challenges in ensuring residents' health and wellbeing. Specifically, it was difficult to coordinate the appropriate resources to deal with issues such as mental health, developmental disabilities, alcohol and drug dependency, medications, seniors' needs, and family violence. Further, once the evacuation order was lifted there was no mechanism for staff in reception centres to transition or "hand off" those high-needs individuals that they had been supporting to other health and human service providers. Continuity of support was impacted as a result. For example, people suffering withdrawal from drugs or mental illness could not be connected with supports in the Lesser Slave Lake region or elsewhere, as no system for transitioning case management was established.

In addition to Disaster Social Services, Government of Alberta staff and resources from housing authorities in different localities were on hand in reception centres to begin assessing housing needs. These provincial staff worked quickly to assist evacuees in securing accommodations under an emergency accommodation program.

As the evacuation wore on, one of the most valued functions of the reception centres was information sharing. Many evacuees were staying in hotels, or with friends, families or others households, but many of those staying offsite would come to the centre for information. Centres had televisions and computers set up to provide access to news and communications, and provincial representatives were also onsite to help provide answers. In addition, it is important to highlight the role that the centres played in allowing people to connect with one another, sharing information and experiences.

Members of Sawridge First Nation stayed together in hotels owned by the First Nation, rather than in reception centres. Some Sawridge First Nation members did visit reception centres, however, to seek information.

Communicating with Evacuees and Reception centres

A number of important findings were captured related to communications with displaced residents during the evacuation period:

- Establishing clear lines of communication with Slave Lake residents was delayed because the Town offices burned, taking with them records and contact information.

- The local Member of the Legislative Assembly and her office were in communication with a number of residents following the evacuation, but there was no clear role for this office in managing the evacuation and response. As a result, coordinating communications and responding to requests from the Member of the Legislative Assembly's office became an additive task for the Provincial Operations Centre.
- Timely and clear communications to reception centres were reportedly lacking in some cases. For example, residents in the Athabasca centre were told at one point that the Town was not safe for evacuees, yet at the same time the Prime Minister was seen on television visiting the site in person.
- Some reception centres had dedicated communications personnel responsible for liaising with the Emergency Operations Centre. In some cases, these communications personnel took on advisory roles and may also have at times acted as (or appeared to act as) de-facto decision makers, because they relayed information and direction from the Emergency Operations Centre.
- One reception centre created and delivered a daily newsletter to inform residents what had been learned from the Provincial Operations Centre, the joint Emergency Operations Centre and others. This communication was well-received.
- Residents were upset about restrictions on re-entering the recovery zone before the evacuation order was lifted. Although the restriction was based on concerns for public safety, the reaction of the public highlights the critical importance of the messaging and communication around the state of the affected community and personal properties. Although steps were taken using both local and social media to communicate the rationale there may in fact have been insufficient explanation at the time supporting the restriction. The underlying rationale for the restriction was reportedly not heard, understood or accepted by the public.
- One specific communications challenge during the evacuation period was related to removal of material (sometimes referred to as "scooping") from basements of houses to prevent the smouldering embers from igniting further fires. This action was reportedly taken due to the risk of new fires due to high winds and potential basement "hotspots." In a "normal" house fire situation, firefighters would flood basements with water, but were unable to do so in this case because of the limited availability of



water. In any case, many residents were confused or angry about the fact that they did not have an opportunity to search for valued possessions within the debris before it was removed and disposed of, and this rationale was not well-received or understood.

Short-term Accommodations and Access to the Town during the Evacuation

Managing accommodations for evacuees, first responders, provincial resources and other partners was not a simple task in the wake of the fires. Much of this work was taken on by the Housing Coordination Office, which formed under the direction of the Mayor and the Emergency Operations Centre. The bulk of this team had no experience or training in housing, and their work was complicated by the fact that the files held by the Lesser Slave Lake Regional Housing Authority were destroyed along with the Authority's offices in the blaze. The team felt ill-equipped for the magnitude of their task, and reported that they received shifting instructions throughout the response period. As a result, staff from Edmonton's Capital Region Housing Corporation were enlisted to assist the team of volunteers to cope with their tasks. In addition, the Government of Alberta funded several new positions within the Lesser Slave Lake Regional Housing Authority to help cope with the scale of the housing challenge facing the region.

During the period of the evacuation order, the Housing Coordination Office assumed two key functions:

1. granting permissions for access into the evacuation zone; and
2. organizing short-term accommodation for essential workers and displaced residents whose homes were lost.

With respect to access to the Town during the evacuation period, a number of notable issues were identified:

- With some exceptions, residents were not permitted into the evacuation zone during the two-week evacuation period. Some of those who were permitted entry and supervised access report a strong RCMP presence.
- During this time, RCMP were responsible for limiting access and patrolling the evacuation zone. The RCMP were also moving from property to property to check for human remains and signs of arson.
- Checkpoints along routes into the evacuation zone were the primary point of access for essential workers and emergency personnel. RCMP controlled entry using a list provided by the Housing Coordination Office detailing who should be allowed in. This list changed frequently, however, due to shifting circumstances, and was not available immediately following the evacuation. Further, many people reported difficulty with

access because the names of those cleared to enter did not always appear on the list when that person arrived.

- The RCMP report that theft of property was a very minor problem.
- Several bus tours were organized to allow residents to see and begin to cope with the state of the Town after the wildfire. These tours were well-received by residents.
- The insurance industry had many loss adjusters ready to make initial loss assessments, and expressed some frustration at the delay in accessing the Town.

As the end of the evacuation period neared, the role of the Housing Coordination Office shifted to coordinating housing for essential workers, and also for displaced residents. Managing available rooms was a significant challenge, for a number of reasons:

- Initially, there were minimal rooms available to house workers or displaced residents, and there was no clear process for allocating them, for moving individuals in and out, or prioritizing potential occupants.
- After the evacuation period, the list of essential workers eligible for short-term accommodations was challenged frequently, and changed frequently. These changes reflected the changing situation to some degree (as efforts shifted from disaster response to recovery), but also requests from Ministers and other decision makers as provincial resources moved in and out of the Town. It was comparatively easier to determine which workers were “essential” during the response and evacuation than during the transition to recovery.
- Both the Task Force and the Housing Coordination Office were reported to have played a major role in allocating rooms to residents, professionals and workers. However, the lines of authority between key stakeholders (including the Housing Coordination Office, the Emergency Operations Centre, the Mayor of Slave Lake, the Slave Lake Regional Recovery Task Force and the Provincial Operations Centre) were not necessarily clear at all times.
- No plan or procurement arrangements were in place, and so personal relationships with hotel and rental property owners became important to secure rooms quickly.

Interim Housing

Considerable effort was devoted to providing short-term accommodations for people during the evacuation order and immediately afterwards. Longer-term housing solutions were also required for residents who lost their homes to fire, and for the recovery of the region, socially and economically.

The Government of Alberta has no legislated role to provide emergency housing. Usually, the insurance and private sectors would address the need for housing following a disaster

on a person-by-person basis. Given the scale of losses in the Lesser Slave Lake region, however, delays would have been significant, and people would have been stranded in reception centres, campgrounds, and other emergency housing in the absence of timely and coordinated action from the Government of Alberta. By May 17th, 2011 (2 days after the disaster), the decision was made that the provincial government would step in to facilitate interim housing for people who did not have insurance, or who had limited resources to meet their housing needs, guided by an Emergency Accommodation Plan. These efforts later expanded to include facilitating housing for essential workers, and for other displaced residents.



The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs did not have experience in providing housing for so many displaced residents. Consequently, a number of steps had to be taken in parallel by Housing and Urban Affairs to identify and prepare for an interim housing response. For instance:

- Several tools and processes had to be developed to assess the housing needs of individuals and families. In particular, a housing needs assessment form was developed for immediate use.
- Housing and Urban Affairs built information technology infrastructure to collect and make use of the information collected from residents about housing needs.

- The Government of Alberta began the process to purchase an apartment building to make interim housing units available. This purchase was completed in September.
- A housing grant was provided to a private developer to make 70 housing units available for long-term affordable housing.
- The Government of Alberta also paid campground fees for families who were able to stay at local campgrounds.

Once a housing assessment form and related information technology infrastructure had been developed, it fell to local resources to implement them. Housing and Urban Affairs provided support and capacity through a local staff member as well as through the Provincial Operations Centre.

Beginning with a single phone line for the Housing Coordination Committee in the Emergency Operations Centre, local workers conducted a massive data collection operation to assess housing needs for 730 displaced households. There was no manual or protocol to guide them in how to complete this task. Some forms were completed in person at reception centres by volunteers from the Canadian Red Cross, and others by phone, but quality and completeness of the forms were reported as problems.

Since the forms were being completed by two different groups of volunteers (i.e., Housing Coordination Committee and the Canadian Red Cross), the forms used were not exactly the same, and when the databases were merged, it created over 200 duplicate files, as well as blanks and missing information. As a result, residents had to be contacted multiple times in some cases.

Assessing housing needs was only one of the tasks necessary to get interim housing in place. Another challenge revolved around securing land upon which to locate new interim housing units. In the Town, available land was limited, and there was considerable debate among local leaders about where it would be best to place these units. The municipality itself did not have the authority to repurpose land around the Town, and so Alberta Infrastructure consulted with Alberta Environment regarding what government-owned land was available. In the end, however, it was determined that the best option for interim housing in terms of location and use was a baseball field in Town. There was some resistance and opposition from the local community for repurposing the land for this use, as it would have eliminated this as a resource for community-building activities during the recovery phase. When the demand for interim accommodation was less than anticipated, the Fournier Place development on the baseball diamonds to the west of Town were not used for the Interim Housing Project. However, this land has been repurposed to residential property (medium density) for future housing.

The most significant task in securing interim housing was in quickly providing new housing units so that people could return to the community. This was an immense undertaking by the Government of Alberta to deliver so many housing units so quickly, particularly since this was not a role the Province had undertaken in the past. This involved not only purchasing modular home units, but also fully servicing the lots on which housing would be placed, which in itself was a large task. In the end, the success of these efforts should be recognized, as all families with school age children were housed by the end of September 2011 and all 267 modular home units were ready by November 2011. Some of these were interim housing units that were installed on private lands in the Municipal District where homes had been lost, but the majority (180 units) were installed on two sites in the Town.



The Task Force initially released a Request for Proposals to assess costs and capability of private builders. After careful consideration, it was decided that the proposed prices were too high due to the risks that vendors would have had to assume. In addition, vendors could not deliver housing any faster than the government, and therefore government would be best served taking on the task itself. There was no pre-existing plan or process to manage housing procurement on this scale and this process of receiving and considering proposals was perceived by some to have significantly delayed interim housing. As weeks passed, many people found their own housing solutions and this did result in more housing capacity being procured than was needed.

Preparing to Rebuild

Even as interim housing solutions were being developed, some notable success was achieved in laying the foundation for rebuilding homes. In particular, the information fair convened June 11th by the Town, First Nation and Municipal District with support from the Government of Alberta was very well-received. This information fair allowed residents to connect directly with insurance providers and government services, such as consumer protection. There was also an emphasis on bringing the right information to residents so that they were aware and informed about building codes and permit processes required to rebuild. This specifically included zone maps indicating timelines on demolition and availability to re-build. This information was considered valuable by residents. On June 25th, a housing fair was held that was also well-received; it was coordinated by the Regional Recovery Coordination Group, local Chamber of Commerce and provincial homebuilder associations.

Theme 3 – Assessment of Legislation, Protocols and Procedures

Document	Available on May 14, 2011	Developed from May 14, 2011 to August 22, 2011
Municipal Emergency Plan	N/A	N/A
Emergency Management Act, Alberta (2011)	✓	-
Alberta Emergency Plan (2008)	✓	-
Agency Response Plan (2009)	✓	-
Emergency Health Services Act, Alberta (2010)	✓	-
Essential Workers List	-	✓
Emergency Accommodations Program, Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs	✓	-
Allocation and Placement Policies and Procedures, Housing Coordination Office, Lesser Slave Lake Housing Authority	✓	-
Information and Communication Plan, Housing Coordination Office, Lesser Slave Lake Housing Authority	✓	-

Key Observations:

- Although the *Emergency Management Act* is clear about the powers of a local authority during a disaster, the roles and responsibilities of host municipalities in setting up and managing reception centres are not defined.
- Consistent, province-wide guidance and procedures around setting up and managing reception centres were not available for reception centre hosts. As a result, local contacts in these host municipalities had to rely on their own plans, judgment, personal relationships and experience to determine where and how the centres should be established.

- Overall, Alberta legislation (e.g., *Emergency Management Act*, *Emergency Health Services Act*, etc.) and emergency management plans (e.g., Alberta Emergency Plan, Agency Response Plan, etc.) are vague about the role that Disaster Social Services should play during a disaster. Further, no procedures or protocols were identified or provided by stakeholders that offer this clarity. Specifically, it was noted through stakeholder engagement sessions that there were no procedures in place to determine who within the Government of Alberta should be coordinating these services across Ministries.
- No protocol or procedure was identified that specified how case management would be handled as high-needs individuals left reception centres. As a result, there was no way to make sure these individuals would be looked after when they transitioned back into the Lesser Slave Lake region or elsewhere.
- With respect to Town access during the disaster, policy was developed to identify “essential” workers who would be allowed in. In addition, a list of essential workers eligible for short-term accommodation was developed during the response, but it was noted that the list changed frequently.
- The Government of Alberta has no legislated role to provide emergency or interim housing. There were no short-term accommodation plans or housing procurement arrangements in place before the disaster. When the decision was made for the Government of Alberta to provide interim housing, the procurement procedure that was followed was a Government of Alberta Request for Proposals.
- An interim or short-term housing plan for evacuated residents did not initially exist. As a result, Housing and Urban Affairs established an Emergency Accommodation Program for individuals evacuated from their homes in the region. This temporary help was intended to provide for those residents who did not have insurance or the resources to pay for interim housing. Housing placement and up to 100% of all costs related to damage deposits, hook-up fees, and basic start up household expenses were covered until August 31st, 2011.
- Several policies and procedures had to be developed during the response to allow the Government of Alberta to assess housing needs of individuals and families. These include:
 - An information and communication plan was developed during the placement period by the Housing Coordination Office. They sent group emails to residents and agencies to assess housing needs and keep them up to date on the plans for housing.

- Housing needs assessment forms were also developed, and administered in reception centres by the Canadian Red Cross volunteers and by a call centre set up by the Housing Coordination Office. The forms at the reception centres were different than those used at the call centre. Some of the questions were different and when it came to merging the information, over 200 duplicate files, blank entries, and unknowns were created. Over twenty-two volunteers manned the call centre to locate and contact all the displaced residents. There were no manuals or protocols used to guide these volunteers in how to assess housing needs.

Theme 4: Transition from Response to Recovery

It was apparent early in the response to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires that the scale of this disaster would impact the region for years to come, and that support would be required for the community to rebuild and move forward. The shift from responding to the disaster itself to shaping and supporting recovery efforts was therefore an important transition. Different skills and expertise were required, as well as a longer-term focus than was necessary during the emergency response and evacuation.

Included in this theme are the hand-off of provincial coordination from the Alberta Emergency Management Agency to the Task Force, and the shift from a state of emergency response to a recovery orientation. Interim housing is not addressed within this section (see Theme 3), nor is the building of new housing. Also addressed elsewhere are the financial aspects of recovery (see Theme 7) and the emotional/mental health facets of recovery (see Theme 5).

Theme 4 – Findings

Findings about the transition from emergency response to recovery can be grouped into the following categories:

1. planning for re-entry into the region;
2. creation of the Task Force;
3. handoff to the Task Force; and
4. recovery planning.

Planning for Re-entry

Planning for re-entry was accomplished in an extremely short period of time, which was made possible by assigning resources exclusively to this task. No template, guidance or previous plan was available as a starting point, and there was no time to review lessons from other jurisdictions. Planning was accomplished quickly, however, and re-entry was achieved ahead of initial estimates. Strengths and weaknesses of planning for re-entry have been reported as follows:

- Initial planning included a range of Government of Alberta expertise, the Calgary Emergency Management Agency, municipal officials and administrators, and other key stakeholders (such as utility providers). Little time was available to bring all stakeholders together as a group, however.

- Phasing the re-entry over two days allowed for critical infrastructure and workers to be in place before allowing residents back into the region. This also ensured that congestion on roads into the region was minimized during the re-entry process.
- Immediately after the Slave Lake Region Community Re-entry Plan (Re-entry Plan) was completed and approved, implementation began. While this created a risk that not everyone agreed with its contents, it was considered more important that residents and businesses be able to return to the region as quickly as possible.
- Not all key individuals and responsibilities could be incorporated into the plan in the time allotted. Therefore, considerable adaptability around roles was reported during implementation.
- The approved Re-entry Plan was released through both traditional news media and social media, which proved an effective approach for communicating the information.
- It was not only residents who were displaced, but government staff and services in the region as well. Alberta Infrastructure was responsible for finding new space for services in the Town and Municipal District, but their Consequence Management Officer quickly realized there was no existing plan to guide which ministries or services should be prioritized over others. The Task Force directed Consequence Management Officers to prioritize services and supports that are delivered to residents directly. On this basis, restoring services from the Health and Wellness, Employment and Immigration, and Children and Youth Services ministries were prioritized.
- It became apparent through this process that different ministries had different degrees of business continuity planning in place.
- The Chief and Council of Sawridge First Nation were not engaged to provide input into the Re-entry Plan, nor did they perceive a need to contribute at the time, which they reported as an oversight in retrospect.
- Re-entry for the public was planned for a Friday, without considering that children would still be in school, and therefore many people would be unlikely to return on that date.

The planning process was complex, but residents and stakeholders alike generally reported a reasonably quick, smooth and well-organized re-entry process. In particular, the presence of resources such as cleaning supplies and information about water, gas and power were well-received. The following few issues were highlighted, though, for future consideration:

- The Town of Slave Lake required residents to sign waivers acknowledging potential hazards in order for them to return to the area, which reportedly added to stress levels and was not well-received or well-understood by the community.

- Supplies and welcome kits were distributed at the Recovery Centre in the Town. Some Sawridge First Nation members living on-reserve did not seek out or otherwise receive these supplies initially.

Creation of the Task Force

On May 16th, 2011 the Government of Alberta created the Slave Lake Regional Recovery Task Force to help local governments to plan and coordinate recovery efforts. This was a pioneering effort by the Government of Alberta owing to the unprecedented size of the disaster and need to coordinate tremendous cross-ministry support. From the start, senior leaders within the government were very supportive of the use of the Task Force as a venue for collaboration; champions at the political level, within Executive Council and at the Deputy Minister level worked to enable significant internal resources to be devoted to the recovery effort. This level of support was seen to be a key condition for the success of the Task Force.

Initially, the Task Force convened Assistant Deputy Ministers from multiple ministries thought to be important to recovery planning, with one of these Assistant Deputy Ministers appointed in advance as Chair. An early concern for the group was ensuring that the right members were engaged around the table. A flexible approach was taken whereby each participating member was empowered to designate a colleague in his or her place in order to ensure that everyone participating was available, willing and committed to the work of the Task Force above all other priorities. It was also seen as critically important to engage decision makers who could compel quick action within their own ministries. With this emphasis on getting the “right” people involved, the membership of the Task Force evolved over the weeks that followed according to need; in all, many ministries and key groups within government participated directly as members, including:

- Aboriginal Relations
- Children and Youth Services
- Education
- Employment and Immigration
- Executive Council
- Finance and Enterprise
- Health and Wellness
- Housing and Urban Affairs
- Infrastructure
- Justice and Attorney General
- Municipal Affairs
- Public Affairs Bureau
- Seniors and Community Supports
- Solicitor General and Public Security
- Transportation
- Treasury Board

The Task Force quickly convened a group of policy staff to assist in supporting the recovery, and put resources in place locally to provide governance and financial management support to the Slave Lake region. With this structure in place, the Task Force met daily, and also connected every day with leaders at the Deputy Minister level via the Task Force Chair, and with local leaders via conference call. This connective, highly collaborative approach allowed the Task Force to mobilize government resources to help the region address some of the most significant tasks for recovery, including:

- interim housing, including securing and preparing land for temporary housing units;
- liaising with the insurance industry;
- resolving environmental and health concerns;
- security of the evacuation zone;
- support for donations management;
- financial management and cash flow; and
- empowering local leaders to plan for recovery of the whole region.

Government of Alberta stakeholders consistently reported that the Task Force was an efficient, effective and accountable venue to support the recovery of the region. The following factors were cited as enabling this success:

- making the recovery the highest priority for the government and for the members of the Task Force;
- the philosophy of supporting local communities to plan and direct the recovery;
- flexibility in membership and approach;
- engaging decision makers capable of acting quickly;
- effective leadership; and
- a culture of openness, transparency, and willingness to discuss tough issues as a group.

Handoff to the Task Force

Normally, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency supports local officials to conduct recovery planning after an emergency. In this case, the scale of the task combined with the Alberta Emergency Management Agency's need to redeploy its staff to other emerging situations meant that another solution would be required. The establishment of a Government of Alberta Task Force to coordinate recovery is a novel approach for this province, and a number of successes and challenges associated with doing so were identified:

- As part of the handoff, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency coordinated a comprehensive presentation to the Task Force that summarized the current situation and outstanding issues. Different members of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency team were on hand to address questions and points of clarification from the Task Force members. In addition, all of those Ministries participating in the Provincial Operations Centre presented their respective issues and concerns to the Task Force. This type of comprehensive briefing was reportedly very well-received and facilitated an effective handoff to the Task Force.
- At the same time, the handoff and redeployment by the Alberta Emergency Management Agency to address emerging situations elsewhere in the province felt abrupt for the stakeholders from the Lesser Slave Lake region. Nevertheless, this was an operational necessity for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency first because other situations were emerging elsewhere, but also because staff were exhausted and required relief.
- As the State of Local Emergency was lifted and many of the resources from across the province left the Town of Slave Lake this reportedly resulted in what many felt to be a significant capacity gap.
- As the Task Force took over coordination, the focus of provincial support transitioned from the urgency of emergency response to a focus on recovery. It is no surprise then that a noticeable slow down in decision making and in the flow of information was felt by some stakeholders as the Emergency Operations Centre was deactivated and immediate incident command decisions were no longer required.
- The Public Affairs Bureau departed after the State of Local Emergency was lifted (June 1st, 2011), and it was then challenging to meet the demand for communications support. The dedicated local communications resource put in place by the Public Affairs Bureau carried an extremely heavy workload, and the local Councils received less communications support than during the emergency response.

Overall, the leadership of the Task Force was generally seen to have been very successful and effective. This was attributed to the Task Force leader's military experience, leadership skills and connections into senior levels of the Government of Alberta. Further, in an effort to bolster local capacity, the Government of Alberta contracted experts to assist local officials and provide support for communications, Tri-Council governance, and financial management. These key resources proved to be invaluable to the community's recovery efforts.

Finally, a consistent emphasis of the Task Force was to ensure that local government remained in charge of the situation in the region. As a result, decisions and communications were owned and explained by local officials wherever possible.



Recovery Planning

The Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan (the Recovery Plan) was able to integrate the needs of the municipalities with the support of multiple provincial government ministries. It stands as a testament to cooperation under pressure. The plan considers four elements: people, environment, reconstruction and economy, with the concept of the local community underpinning and bridging these four areas. In fact, local decision making and local ownership of the Plan were emphasized throughout the process of developing it. This meant that the three local entities – Town, Municipal District and First Nation – were able to collaborate in a planning process facilitated and supported by the provincial government. The Government of Alberta then committed significant funds to support the implementation of this plan, which together with the costs of emergency response total \$289 million.

Developing the Recovery Plan, however, was by no means a simple task, especially since local and provincial resources were still engaged in responding to the emergency. A cross-ministry planning team was assembled early in the response phase to facilitate the recovery planning in collaboration with the municipalities. It was reported in one instance that multiple teams were planning at the same time, creating some duplication of efforts but demonstrating the clear importance of getting this work underway as soon as possible. In any case, it was quickly determined that there was no established format,

process or template upon which to build a recovery plan. Further, the scope and breadth of the document could not be immediately agreed upon by the Task Force. One key issue that emerged was whether the plan was about restoring the Town to its pre-disaster state, or whether improvements were in scope.

To address this confusion, the cross-ministry planning team working under the Task Force found some helpful guidance from international leading practices, and in particular from a report that reflected on the response to the Australian bushfires⁹ and another from the British Columbia experience.¹⁰ The Recovery Plan developed iteratively after that, as every attempt was made to be mindful of the direction and different perspectives provided by the range of municipal and Government of Alberta leaders involved. A joint visioning session was convened between the Task Force and local governments, as an early input to this process.

Throughout the recovery process, the need for collaboration among the two municipal governments, the First Nations and the provincial government was critical. Beginning with the joint visioning session on May 27th, this collaboration evolved into a formal Tri-Council governance structure, which was identified as being a critical element of the recovery phase. It took time and effort for the Tri-Council to evolve and mature; to help this process, a dedicated governance expert was contracted by Alberta Municipal Affairs to work with the various Councils and help sort out expectations, authorities, and process. In its initial stages, a rotating chair model was used, mirroring the way some municipalities operate.

The Tri-Council structure is the first of its kind in Canada, bringing together the Town, Municipal District and Sawridge First Nation to address shared issues under a joint memorandum of understanding. This model for joint local leadership has been a very positive development that significantly improved the coordination of recovery efforts. Since the creation of the Tri-Council, recovery efforts reportedly became more focused and the Town, Municipal District and Sawridge First Nation were able to contribute their respective points of view and collaborate more effectively.

August 2nd, 2011 was identified as a critical point in time. That was when the three Councils reviewed the completed Recovery Plan, which clearly outlined a recovery process that would be regional, as opposed to individual jurisdictions planning for themselves. A Regional Recovery Coordination Group was envisioned to help implement the plan, consisting of up to 12 Government of Alberta resources that would mainly be based in Slave Lake. The first elements of this team were put in place during the month of August 2011 and although initially it was somewhat smaller than envisioned, the group has evolved and has been essential in implementing and coordinating recovery efforts in

⁹ This 2010 report by PricewaterhouseCoopers was entitled *Effective Disaster Recovery: What lessons can we learn from Australia's Black Saturday Bushfires?*

¹⁰ This 2005 report (revised 2006) by the British Columbia Provincial Emergency Program was entitled *Community Disaster Recovery: A Guide for BC Local Authorities and First Nations.*

the region. These provincial resources have allowed local staff and officials to focus their attention on their accountabilities and responsibilities as a local authority, while having the much needed ongoing support specific to recovery initiatives.

In the end, this collaborative process between provincial, local and First Nation governments produced a Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan with the following stated purpose:

...to return the region to its pre-disaster state while ensuring that the communities are not socially, environmentally or economically disadvantaged by the wildfire event and are well positioned for future growth. This should not be viewed simply in terms of rebuilding to the previous status quo as this may no longer be sustainable, competitive, or functional in the community. The plan was developed to provide the region with support as it rebuilds the capacity and recovers infrastructure to support its own recovery.

Theme 4 – Assessment of Legislation, Protocols and Procedures

Document	Available on May 14, 2011	Developed from May 14, 2011 to August 22, 2011
Slave Lake Region Community Re-Entry Plan	-	✓
Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan	-	✓

Key Observations:

Although no established protocols and/or procedures were identified as part of this review to guide the transition from response to recovery, the creation of the Re-entry Plan and the Recovery Plan were key accomplishments.

The Re-entry Plan summarizes the key steps that were required to achieve the return of residents to the region in a safe and orderly fashion. This Plan was a critical component to transition from response to recovery. Overall, the Re-entry Plan was closely followed and residents began the phased re-entry into the region two weeks after the disaster, which was a much shorter timeframe than initially expected.

The objective of the Recovery Plan, created by the three regional councils and the Government of Alberta, is to provide the region with support as it rebuilds its capacity and recovers infrastructure to support its own recovery. It has been suggested that the

Recovery Plan could be developed into a template for use by other municipalities, in the event of future disasters.

Theme 5: Hazard and Health Concerns

An urban interface wildfire and evacuation creates a number of unique hazards to health and safety. Aside from the immediate risks associated with the wildfires themselves and with smoke, the aftermath of the fires gave rise to specific health concerns that had to be addressed in order for evacuated residents to return safely. Consider the condition of the Town of Slave Lake once the wildfires had been extinguished: entire buildings containing any number of substances had burned, creating the possibility of toxins in the air and soil; power had been lost, and refrigeration with it; burned houses stood waiting for demolition and the contents of some basements removed, exposing potential hazards related to propane tanks, gas lines and sharp material left behind; the water infrastructure had failed, and possibly been contaminated; and people had been exposed to a harrowing ordeal and in some cases extreme working conditions. A raft of hazards to physical, mental and public health were present, and this theme explores how these hazards were addressed, and what can be learned.

Clearly, health and environmental hazards are a significant concern for a disaster of this scale. The review explored hazard and health concerns during the emergency response, re-entry and recovery – with the exception of the fire itself that led to the evacuation. In addition, the following related topics were deemed to be out of scope for assessment under this theme:

- personal safety concerns experienced by first responders during the firefighting effort (such as avoiding the wildfires during firefighting efforts);
- the evacuation of patients from acute care, community-based or home care services and facilities (see Theme 2); and
- the health care services (or disaster social services) provided to evacuees (see Theme 3).

Theme 5 – Findings

This review captures findings related to a number of common themes that emerged through dialogue with stakeholders and the public:

1. environmental testing;
2. occupational health testing for volunteer firefighters;

3. mental health and wellbeing;
4. stress and wellbeing of workers who were involved in the response and recovery; and
5. physical health hazards during re-entry.



Environmental Testing

After the wildfires, there was a need to determine whether and when the ground, air and water in the Town and surrounding areas were safe, so that residents could return. Alberta Environment completed the environmental monitoring and Alberta Health Services determined the level of hazard. The communication of results was a challenge because:

- Technical data from Alberta Environment was difficult to present to the public in a comprehensible manner.
- The health implications of test results required interpretation by medical experts (physicians).
- Alberta Environment and Alberta Health Services both released communications about the testing, whereas normally Alberta Health Services handles this kind of communication for the government.

- Both Alberta Environment and Alberta Health Services communicated the results differently. In fact, it appeared at one point to some people that the releases from these two groups contradicted one another although technically they did not.
- Alberta Environment was also not a part of the Government of Alberta Slave Lake Recovery Task Force, an important venue for cross-ministry collaboration.



Environmental testing was also complicated by the fact that there was no baseline or standards available to Alberta Environment for how to interpret the results of their tests. For example, when pentachlorophenol (a chemical commonly referred to as PCP) was discovered near a school in the Town it was not clear if this was a result of the fires. Moreover, Alberta Environment did not have clear guidelines, policies or checklists identifying which potential contaminants and ill impacts could result from this kind of disaster, and should be tested for. As a result, and in the interest of public confidence, Alberta Environment conducted more extensive testing than they were required to. As well, they participated in trade shows and communicated directly with the public.

Considerable expertise existed within Alberta's health system to help assess risks to public safety after the wildfires. In parallel with environmental testing, Alberta Health Services worked with the local water treatment plant and liaised with the Town and with First Nations and Inuit Health (because Sawridge First Nation also received their water supply from the Town) regarding safe drinking water. One of the concerns raised by Alberta Health Services was the difficulty that they experienced in coordinating messaging to advise responders and residents about potential hazards of drinking and bathing using the local water supply.

Volunteer Firefighters

A significant issue with implications for future disasters was health assessments for volunteer firefighters. The Fire Commissioner requested assessments for many of the volunteer firefighters who contributed to the first days of the response, but Alberta Health Services did not have the capacity or mandate to complete these specialized assessments. In addition, there may have been confusion about whom, if anyone, should have been responsible to ensure these assessments were done. Community members and firefighters were upset by the delay, and in the end a private citizen paid to have a team from the United States complete the assessments. In part, the lack of clarity was related to concerns about eligibility for future benefits to address health issues that could arise as a result of the fire. A complicating issue is that no baseline health standards or assessments for volunteer firefighters were in place, which made it more difficult to determine the impact of fighting the fires on their health.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Support for mental health and wellbeing was raised by many stakeholders and members of the public as a critical issue in the wake of the wildfires. Overall, the consensus seems to be that first responders were well-supported, and that more counselling and mental health support could have helped some residents during recovery.

Emergency responders and firefighters in particular, reportedly received immediate and significant mental health support. A Critical Incident Team was convened by Alberta Health Services immediately following the disaster for this purpose. In addition, non-government organizations worked to deliver crisis intervention services to first responders, including colleagues of the helicopter pilot who lost his life in the response. These efforts to help emergency responders to cope with the disaster were seen to have been valuable, and necessary.

For residents, however, the approach was not nearly so comprehensive. Mental health services were made available to residents, both in reception centres and in Town during the recovery. However, uptake appears to have been minimal, in spite of significant anecdotal evidence of need. Partly, this may have been due to the way in which services

were offered. Specifically, the approach for offering mental health support in reception centres may have been too direct to appeal to those suffering from grief and loss. For example, a banner announcing mental health services is likely to have been a deterrent. Similarly, non-government organizations placed “emotional and spiritual caregivers” on each of the bus tours that brought residents back to Town during the evacuation, but this may not have been a private enough venue for genuine individual support. Further, some suggested that the general population may not have understood that the effects of grief, trauma and loss are normal, and can be long-term – some may not have felt that they needed support, in other words, or may not have wanted others to know that they did.

Overall, several stakeholders suggested that mental health did not receive much attention as part of response or recovery efforts up to August 22nd. For instance, it was suggested that no disaster mental health perspective was brought to bear within the Provincial Operations Centre, and that psychological health should have been a greater focus in planning and decision making. It was reported that there was no pre-existing policy or structure for provincial Disaster Social Services, and that therefore Disaster Social Services were a secondary concern during both the response and recovery phases.

The full effects of the disaster on the mental health and wellbeing of the community are not clear. Anecdotally, members of the public suggested that there have been significant mental health and wellbeing issues since the fires. For example:

- There is seen to be a lot of need for counseling and other mental health supports. Many people remarked that they or others whom they know “should” seek help, but have not.
- Representatives from the RCMP suggested they have seen an increase in the number of calls that they respond to related to domestic situations or mental health.
- People shared stories of coping through alcohol and drug abuse, which have had an impact on their work and their relationships. One woman, for example, was “pretty much drunk everyday” when she went to work after re-entry.
- A number of children and youth were seen to be experiencing social and emotional problems, ranging from anxiety and behavioural issues to drug and alcohol use.
- A number of people noted that they or others have had very strong emotional reactions to smells of smoke and certain noises such as helicopters and campfires crackling.
- The wildfires, the evacuation, interim accommodations, financial strain and the stress of rebuilding and recovery have impacted marriages and other relationships, according to stories related to interviewers.

Stress and Wellbeing of Staff

Staff and volunteers from the municipalities, agencies, and government departments were working in stressful, difficult circumstances in support of the response and recovery. These workers were impacted by a range of factors, including:

- exposure to the grief, loss, and trauma suffered by residents and first responders;
- many staff had themselves lost homes, or were spending much time separated from family members during a trying time;
- the experience of living in emergency/ temporary accommodations;
- sleep deprivation and fatigue from working very long hours;
- pressure to contribute in whatever way they could to help manage the emergency;
- limited staff capacity to complete a tremendous amount of work;
- pressure felt by some Government of Alberta staff to also complete their everyday responsibilities that were unrelated to Slave Lake;
- high visibility and political sensitivity; and
- high investment, both personal and professional, in their work.

In retrospect, the toll of this stress on staff was significant, and perhaps under-recognized. Moreover, evacuation of the region took with it the trained counsellors and healthcare professionals who might otherwise have been able to support staff wellbeing among those left behind. It is also likely that few staff would have asked explicitly for counselling or other formal support, but it is seen nonetheless to have



been a need during both the response and recovery phases. In spite of the toll of stress, however, the level of commitment shown by staff and volunteers was seen as exemplary. In particular, staff were reportedly willing to take on new responsibilities and work many hours of overtime during the response phase.

Following re-entry, the Task Force worked with municipalities to ensure that municipal staff had access to Employee Assistance Programs, as well as training about dealing with stressful situations and clients. Generally, though, the common experience among stakeholders was that support was not always available to workers who had need, and

that uptake was minimal where support was available. No occupational health testing or critical incident stress management was made available for those staff in the Provincial Operations Centre, for instance, or those staff from outside the region who contributed to coordinating the local response effort in the Emergency Operations Centre. Just as was said for residents, more attention and support on a personal and professional basis would have been helpful throughout the response and recovery period.

Physical Health Hazards during Re-entry

A number of insights regarding the successes and challenges of ensuring the health and safety of residents during re-entry into the evacuation zone were identified:

- Refrigerators from evacuated houses were removed to avoid hazards related to rotten food. Stakeholders suggest that the process of removing refrigerators was well-coordinated.
- On the other hand, there was still a large amount of spoiled food in restaurants. Many restaurant owners wanted to open their businesses immediately upon re-entry, but health inspectors were unable to inspect all of these businesses immediately upon lifting of the evacuation order. In part, this may have been due to reported confusion about who should be called by restaurant owners to get an inspection, and who should have been leading the inspection process after re-entry.
- There was a bottleneck at the local landfill, as it was severely overloaded during clean-up. In addition, ash from the fire had to be rerouted to different landfills because it contained contaminants. A plan had to be developed to manage waste and landfill use following the disaster.
- Health system stakeholders reported that clear messaging was provided to the community during re-entry on safe practices related to their houses, food, sanitation, water, and damage from smoke. Much of this had to be communicated before people could come back in to the community, primarily in the form of information packages included in re-entry kits. This information was well-received and valued by residents.



Theme 5 – Assessment of Legislation, Protocols and Procedures

Document	Available on May 14, 2011	Developed from May 14, 2011 to August 22, 2011
Alberta Health and Wellness Emergency Operations Centre Standard Operating Procedures (2006)	✓	-
Demobilization of the Alberta Health and Wellness Provincial Operations Centre	-	✓
Lesser Slave Lake Region Community Re-entry Plan	-	✓
Slave Lake Region - After The Fire Information for Residents	-	✓
Garbage and Sanitation Plan	-	✓
Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan	-	✓

Key Observations:

- It was suggested that under Government of Alberta procedure, communications about human health conditions in an emergency should be delivered by Alberta Health Services. No written policy or procedure was specified, however this is consistent with their mandate. Although Alberta Health Services did issue communications about health and safety conditions (e.g., water and air advisories), public messaging about environmental hazards was also issued by Alberta Environment.
- The Re-entry Plan, developed during the response, outlines protocols to be followed to ensure the health and safety of residents. Residents were not allowed back into the region until a number of criteria were met, including that water was declared potable, and that health services were declared operational by Alberta Health Services.

- As part of the Re-entry Plan, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency supported local governments with the development and implementation of a garbage and sanitation plan, including waste removal and having removals of refrigerators and freezers. This sanitation plan was implemented as designed: refrigerators and freezers were removed and sanitized to prevent health and safety risks. Residents were provided with signs (e.g., one for gas, water, telephone and power) and were asked to place the sign in their front window to alert workers that their utilities needed to be reconnected. The RCMP and Fire Services assisted residents with removing the fridges and freezers.
- The NGO Council, per the Re-entry Plan was tasked with coordinating the procurement and assembly of re-entry kits for residents, and developing a plan for distribution. The kits were distributed as planned from the recovery centre in the Town, and included cleaning and sanitation supplies.



It is important to note that no specific plan or guidance was in place as of August 22nd to provide long-term mental health support for residents or employees affected by the wildfires, which a number of individuals identified as a gap in the recovery effort. Within the Recovery Plan, safety, health, and social wellbeing of residents are considered, and social recovery has also been a priority for the Regional Recovery Coordination Group.

Theme 6: Non-government Organization Integration and Coordination

Non-government organizations played an important role in responding to the disaster and supporting residents. The NGO Council of Alberta existed prior to the disaster, and this was an important venue to help focus and coordinate the efforts of local and province-wide non-government organizations. In fact, the NGO Council was able to mobilize quickly and take on tasks with minimal supervision, which was beneficial to support the emergency response and recovery efforts. Coordinating multiple agencies in a time of crisis is complex, however, and a great deal can be learned from this experience, especially with respect to how an NGO Council can best contribute to disaster response, as well as how to manage donations, registration and support for displaced residents.

This theme does not include Disaster Social Services and other supports available to displaced residents during the evacuation (see Theme 3).

Theme 6 – Findings

Findings related to the efforts of non-government organizations in the Lesser Slave Lake disaster are concentrated in three areas:

1. integration of non-government organizations and faith communities into the response effort;
2. managing donations; and
3. the role of the Canadian Red Cross.

Integration of Non-government Organizations and Faith Communities

Non-government organizations were engaged early as part of the response effort, beginning with the Government of Alberta's request for a representative to liaise with the Provincial Operations Centre. Quickly, this participation at the Provincial Operations Centre expanded and the NGO Council became integrated with the Emergency Operations Centre. It was not immediately clear, however, how the Alberta NGO Council fit into the local command structure or even the physical space at Northern Lakes College. In fact, there was some confusion reported about which agencies should be using this limited space during the response.

Locally and provincially, there was no clear understanding of what tasks the NGO Council was expected to take on, or was capable of taking on. This led to some frustration and duplication of effort, such as having non-government organizations and provincial staff both working to furnish and supply interim housing units at one point. Overall though, a strong working relationship between the NGO Council, local elected officials, the Government of Alberta, and municipal staff allowed for considerable resources to be mobilized in support of residents in the region. In many cases, the NGO Council took on roles that were outside the mandate or capacity of other groups to do, and focused the efforts of member non-government organizations where these needs emerged. This could be related to the fact that the formal mandate of the NGO Council is vague, and does not define specific functions that its members will or will not take responsibility for.

A principal goal and achievement of the NGO Council during the response and recovery was leveraging volunteers from within the community. These volunteers provided valuable support to the response and clean-up efforts by assisting in the Emergency Operations Centre in various ways. The local Councils worked hard to empower these local volunteers, as opposed to bringing in more outside help for the community.

Another success was integrating the faith community into the response. The faith community in the region was described as strong and well-connected; its leaders knew and trusted one another, and so could quickly begin working together. These leaders reportedly collaborated very effectively with the NGO Council, but were not directly linked with the Emergency Operations Centre or elected officials. The contributions of the faith community were many and varied, including:

- Acquiring donations that were converted into \$100 Walmart gift cards for residents.
- Chaplains helped others to build the skills and capacity necessary to support people emotionally in the wake of the disasters.
- Churches were able to mobilize volunteers to contribute to the work taken on by the NGO Council.
- It was the faith community's idea to distribute "welcome kits" in each home, and they also tapped recent international experience to determine what would be valuable to include in these kits.

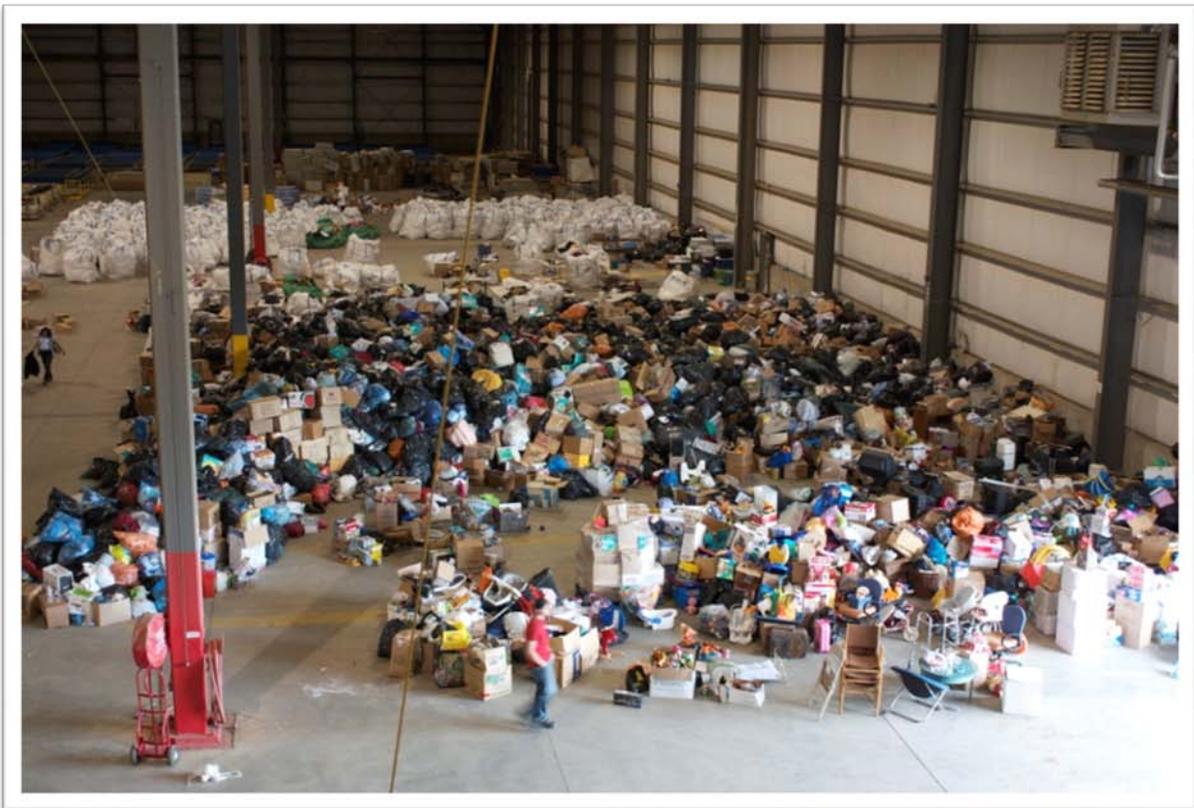
Reflecting on this experience, it has been suggested that the NGO Council could be better understood and perhaps integrated into future disaster response efforts. Specifically, the non-governmental organizations suggested that:

- Non-government organizations should be incorporated into local emergency planning such that they have a designated place to meet and clear place within the local chain of command.

- Clear roles and a pre-established scope of tasks for non-government organizations could be helpful.
- Other organizations could be better educated about the role of non-government organizations and more specifically the NGO Council. For example, it was not understood that members of these organizations have already gone through background checks and have proper insurance and therefore can be immediately relied upon. Clarification of this information wasted time and effort that could have focused on the recovery process.

Managing Donations

Experience across many international jurisdictions has demonstrated time and again how difficult it can be to manage donations after a disaster. It is no surprise, then, that donation management in the Lesser Slave Lake region was very challenging, in spite of and because of the notable outpouring of generosity from across Canada. Problems were encountered with donation volume, types and distribution, resulting in the need for considerable staff and financial resources simply to manage the donations received. Issues included:



- No single communications strategy existed or was developed to explain to the public what and to whom they should have been donating or exactly what the donations would be used for. As a result, items ranging widely in type, quality and value were collected.
- Many donations were directed toward the Town itself, but the administration lacked the capacity to manage them while responding to the crisis. The NGO Council stepped in to assist, but lacked a pre-existing plan or process for doing so. Further, the Task Force dedicated a full-time staff member to supporting local donations management, who was able to secure transportation and space, as well as provincial funding to cover costs. Private citizens also became involved in collecting and managing donations.
- Non-government organizations were not immediately prepared to handle the influx of cash; the NGO Council sought advice in setting up a community trust, but in the end large sums of money were held by a local Rotary Club until a process could be created to allocate these funds.
- Donations were being collected by a variety of organizations including the Canadian Red Cross, the Town, surrounding municipalities and private citizens, with little coordination in messaging or method until the Tri-Council made the decision to establish a coordinating body in November 2011.
- Decisions about distribution were not coordinated between those organizations who received donations. In particular, the Canadian Red Cross had full autonomy to decide how to allocate the donations that they received, and would inform rather than consult the Town or NGO Council about how they did so. Neither the Town nor NGO Council had pre-existing guidelines about how physical or financial donations would be allocated. Different stakeholder groups and members of the public were not clear about how the various organizations that received donations had used them.
- Non-government organizations reportedly would not or could not turn down donations of any kind. The Canadian Red Cross, on the other hand, only accepted cash donations.
- There was no single or formalized way to track, catalogue or recognize donations.
- Donations were collected in surrounding communities (by municipalities) in many cases, simply because there was no other structure for handling physical donations that arrived. Processing, transportation and distribution required significant extra resources in Slave Lake and surrounding municipalities.

As a result of these issues, the flood of donations created a number of logistical issues that required a great deal of resources to manage, including:

- There was no plan or easy solution for storing the massive volume of donated goods, either in the Town, at reception centres or in surrounding municipalities. Initially, the Town secured temporary donated warehouse space in Mitsue. Eventually, the NGO Council secured a 25,000 square foot airport hangar located in Edmonton to become the central donation repository, but before that many of the goods were trucked to Slave Lake where there was no immediate place or use for them.
- Transportation and sorting of physical donations was a massive task and required immense resources that could have been used for other tasks.
- The Government of Alberta provided significant financial support to assist municipalities in storing and transporting donated items.
- Many of the physical donations received were damaged or otherwise unusable. There was also a concern about the optics of dumping donations in the landfill, but at the same time there was little else that could be done. For example, there was reportedly at least one instance where radio stations held food drives and brought food to the Town while it was still evacuated. At the same time, however, the Government of Alberta Task Force was able to coordinate with an organization called Clothes Aid to ship surplus donated clothing and goods to Africa.

Role of the Canadian Red Cross

The Canadian Red Cross was contracted by the provincial government to support evacuees and manage registrations. This in itself was unusual, since generally the Canadian Red Cross will contract with the municipality being served. In this case, it was clear that the Town did not have the capacity to register and organize so many displaced citizens across multiple sites. It took several days to get a contract in place, since the Government of Alberta did not have a pre-existing agreement with the Canadian Red Cross. Even before the contract was finalized, however, the Canadian Red Cross deployed over 100 volunteers and began to quickly populate a database of displaced residents, relying heavily on remote staff to enter data. There is no standard provincial



form mandated for this kind of registration; although a provincial version did exist, municipalities were not required to use it as the standard. The Canadian Red Cross, on the other hand, reported using a standard federal form to register people.

While the speed of the Canadian Red Cross' registration efforts was helpful, Government of Alberta staff later determined that some of the information was inaccurate, and other necessary information had not been collected. The Canadian Red Cross noted that some of the problems with quality of data had to do with staff in reception centres being untrained in how to fill out the form. In addition when the forms ran out, photocopies of forms that had unique identifiers confused data entry. In addition, some people filled out forms in more than one municipality, and different centres could not enter forms into a common registration database. Others were asked to register twice, as they had already registered at a reception centre by the time the Canadian Red Cross began their work. Manual transcription of forms by Canadian Red Cross staff in Vancouver was also required, which was both inefficient and time consuming. This also meant that there was no local access to this information at reception centres. Moreover, as a result of this confusion around registrations, some residents were approached four to five times to provide their information.

A second important issue regarding the role of the Canadian Red Cross was their apparent lack of alignment in communications between the municipalities and the province regarding donations. For many Albertans, it was not clear how the donations would be used due to the inconsistent communication messages. For example, it was not clear if all the money would go to the region or only some of it. In fact, it was noted that some communications from the Canadian Red Cross about the use of donations were inconsistent with those of the province and Town, because they were following their own internal protocols. Part of this confusion seems to have been connected with the perception that the Canadian Red Cross intended first and foremost to help those residents who did not have insurance, thereby creating a system of differential payments among residents.

As a result of this confusion, it was suggested that the Government of Alberta should determine and agree upon the scope of their relationship with the Canadian Red Cross in advance of future disasters. It was also noted that other jurisdictions have included the role of the Canadian Red Cross explicitly in their emergency plans. In contrast, some surrounding municipalities clearly stated their intention not to include the Canadian Red Cross in their own plans. These municipalities felt that including the Canadian Red Cross in their plans could erode the municipality's own role and responsibility to manage local operations.

In any case, there was uncertainty among all parties as to what the role of The Canadian Red Cross should have been. The contract with the Government of Alberta reportedly contained some ambiguity, and both sides have suggested that they spent time and effort trying to educate the other about what they could and should offer to the response. A number of examples of this confusion were provided, such as:

- Government of Alberta representatives did not understand the chain of command for the Canadian Red Cross, which meant that several times it was thought that an issue had been settled with the Canadian Red Cross, only to have it resurface the following day as appropriate individuals had not been involved in the discussion or decision. For example, various individuals within Red Cross questioned whether the donations should be allocated for all wildfires in the province of Alberta or just for the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires.
- The Canadian Red Cross did not understand the scope of the Government of Alberta’s role, and would create certain expectations among the public without consulting decision makers (e.g., related to the Government of Alberta’s intent to pay for hotel rooms).

The Canadian Red Cross adapted their operational role to support different reception centres in different ways. In some cases they took on more of an advisory role, but other centres needed more active help to operate and support people effectively. Although this flexibility was generally positive it did add to role confusion.

Overall, the Canadian Red Cross was efficient, professional, and definitely valuable to the response effort. It was clear from all those interviewed that the Canadian Red Cross – and indeed all members of the NGO Council of which they were a part – brought critical expertise, capacity, advice and resources to bear in support of response and recovery efforts.

Theme 6 – Assessment of Legislation, Protocols and Procedures

Document	Available on May 14, 2011	Developed from May 14, 2011 to August 22, 2011
Emergency Management Act, (2011)	✓	-
Alberta Emergency Plan (2008)	✓	-
Lesser Slave Lake Community Donation Allocation Committee Mandate	-	✓

Key Observations:

The Alberta Emergency Plan states that non-government organizations should participate in the NGO Council with the capacity to respond to the needs of disaster victims in any community in Alberta. The NGO Council is also tasked to provide a Consequence Management Officer and alternate to the Alberta Emergency Management Agency as requested. The NGO Council did assist with the response effort, led by the Chair and Co-Chair of the NGO Council. However, the Alberta Emergency Plan does not identify specific tasks the NGO Council is expected to take on, or should be capable of taking on.

With respect to donations management, very little guidance was available. For instance, Alberta emergency management legislation does not specify who is responsible for managing donations during a disaster. In the case of the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfire donations, none of the Town, MD, First Nation or NGO Council had any pre-existing protocols, or procedures to guide decisions around how donations would be collected, managed, or allocated. Further, there was no policy or communications strategy in place to explain to the public what was needed, (i.e., money and/or physical goods) and what the donations would be used for.

The *Emergency Management Act* provides guidance around administering disaster relief funds at the Provincial level. However, there is no guidance around local authority responsibility for managing and administering public donations received. As a result, stakeholders did report some role confusion on who should be responsible for managing and administering these donations. Although not within the timeframe under examination, it is important to highlight that in November 2011, the Lesser Slave Lake Community Donation Allocation Committee was established. The committee's mandate is to act as the sole body responsible for coordinating all uncommitted monetary recovery donations to the Lesser Slave Lake region (not including those donations made to the Red Cross) and to provide recommendations as to the priorities of dispersing funds where no donor direction is provided. This Committee is a non-political body consisting of eleven community members representing the Tri-Council. Priority is given to projects (i.e., community rebuilding) or programs (i.e., social programs) to rebuild or restore elements destroyed or affected by the wildfires. Charitable local non-profit community groups must apply directly to Lesser Slave Lake Community Donation Allocation Committee for funding. Otherwise, donations received are disbursed based on donor direction.

Theme 7: Economic Recovery Activities and Revenue Stabilization

The economic implications of the Lesser Slave Lake disaster are vast, not only for the region, but for residents, business and the province as a whole. The entire cost of the wildfires (including lost opportunity costs, incidental and travel costs, and internal Government of Alberta resource costs) is not known. Considerable resources were invested to cover the costs of response and recovery from a number of sources. For instance, the Insurance Bureau of Canada has reported that this was the second costliest disaster in Canadian history for the insurance industry, estimated at over \$700 million.¹¹ An assessment of revenue stabilization and economic recovery activities is a critical component of understanding and learning from this disaster.

Theme 7 – Findings

The present review captured a number of findings related to the economic implications of the disaster, and grouped them in the following categories:

1. revenue stabilization;
2. support for local business;
3. procurement; and
4. insurance.

Revenue Stabilization

Provincial Intervention

The Government of Alberta quickly realized that the Lesser Slave Lake regional tax base would be decimated by this disaster, and that displaced residents could be facing difficult financial circumstances. As a result, significant revenue stabilization was initiated, beginning with the quick approval of \$50 million early in the response. This initial injection of funding is seen as a critical factor in successfully coping with the disaster. In addition, a property tax program was immediately put in place to relieve these costs for individuals and businesses. The quick investment of funds under the oversight of the Deputy Minister of Executive Council was unique in several ways:

¹¹ July 5, 2011 Media release from the Insurance Bureau of Canada. Available online at http://www.ibc.ca/en/Media_Centre/News_Releases/2011/07-05-2011-2.asp

- The Government of Alberta generally knows before emergency funding is approved what the money will be used for. Based on the need for immediate funding in this case, funds were approved very quickly, as reliable estimates of need could not be generated in advance.
- The funds were approved with significant flexibility in how they could be spent, under the authority of a Deputy Minister Committee, led by the Deputy Minister of Executive Council.

The size of this initial investment was unusual owing to the magnitude of the event. In addition to the \$50 million approved initially, Government of Alberta funding was approved twice more in the following three months to help the region recover, in the amounts of \$50 million and \$189 million, respectively. These amounts were determined using projections within the Recovery Plan based on long term municipal plans that had been developed prior to the disaster. During the response, there was no single, standardized process or template to track these funds. At the local level, a private contractor was supplied by the Government of Alberta to help municipalities track funds. The establishment of reporting processes and structures with clear accountabilities for future disasters was recommended.

Funding Allocation	Investment (\$)
Disaster Recovery Funding	\$125.3 million
Community Stabilization Efforts	\$56.7 million
Interim Housing	\$42.8 million
Longer-term Projects in Recovery Plan	\$64.2 million
Province's Total Commitment	\$289 million

Notably, the Town's capacity to manage and administer large sums of money was severely reduced by the displacement of staff and destruction of Town facilities and records. As a result, it was felt that the disbursement of funds to specific initiatives was taking more time than desired. Cash flow for the Town may have been a serious problem, were it not for the ability of the Municipal District to assist in managing and channelling the disbursement of funds. At the same time, the Government of Alberta facilitated interest-free loans for municipalities to undertake crucial activities such as landfill expansion and rebuilding local government facilities. The flow of funding was also

facilitated through the contract established with Canadian Red Cross, which specified appropriate spending by that agency up to a maximum over a 6 week period. The Canadian Red Cross related that the agency spent only around \$400,000 of the \$2 million authorized within their contract.

Direct Support for Residents

Another key revenue stabilization decision was emergency payments paid to displaced residents. Alberta Employment and Immigration took the lead in providing these payments, and with the cooperation of Alberta Finance and Enterprise and several banks, was able to provide debit cards extremely quickly – within less than two days of the decision. These funds were critically important in helping displaced residents to meet their needs during the evacuation period. These emergency payments also facilitated more complete registration of evacuees, since residents were required to register with the Government of Alberta via the Canadian Red Cross in order to receive the cards.

Financial support was also available from other sources. For instance, Government of Alberta staff issued emergency payments and worked to ensure seamless support for clients of the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped program who were impacted by the wildfires. The Canadian Red Cross themselves provided financial support for residents according to their protocol to assist residents in need, whether that need be an inability to pay rent, a lack of basic necessities, or other concerns. A few of those interviewed suggested that people saw the Canadian Red Cross as treating different



people differently. For example, those who had insurance may have been offered different support than those who did not.

Cost Recovery

Other municipalities who provided reception centres and other support were frustrated by the absence of a clear process for cost recovery from the Government of Alberta. Further, the cost recovery mechanisms that did evolve have challenged municipalities because:

- staff time, volunteer time and other “in-kind costs” were a significant contribution by municipalities;
- it is perceived that the Government of Alberta has requested more detail about costs than can reasonably be provided;
- no system for tracking and reporting on costs was available when municipalities became involved with the response; and
- the full scope of donations management activities (including time, space, transportation, storage, and disposal) cannot be accounted for.

It is also worth noting that federal funding was also offered to help manage the costs of the disaster. However, consistent with existing protocols the Government of Canada asked the Government of Alberta to apply for these funds after the fact through Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements.

With respect to Sawridge First Nation, federal support has reportedly not been forthcoming. Sawridge First Nation related that Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada had offered some assistance with the cost of the evacuation, but no revenue stabilization was accessed by residents, and no funding has been secured by the First Nation to offset the resources required to plan and implement recovery.

Support for Local Business

Disasters in other jurisdictions have shown that there is a high risk of failure of local businesses subsequent to a disaster, and so the Government of Alberta took an active role in promoting business and employment in the Lesser Slave Lake region as part of the recovery process. Although this is not traditionally a role that the provincial



government would take, this is also the first disaster of this magnitude. A number of actions were taken to stimulate economic recovery, including:

- Providing a staff member from Alberta Finance and Enterprise to work with businesses on a one-to-one basis and troubleshoot issues even before residents were able to re-enter the Town.
- Establishing a job board and mobile career centre to connect employers with residents in need of work. As a result, there were many employment opportunities available when residents returned.
- The Government of Alberta established the Disaster Assistance Benefit program to channel \$14 million in support for the region through the existing Agriculture Financial Services Corporation's Commercial Loan Program and Value-added and Agribusiness Program. The new Disaster Assistance Benefit was available June 1st, 2011 to commercial businesses in the Lesser Slave Lake region mandatory evacuation area, affected by the wildfires. The program assisted new or existing business owners to continue, re-establish, or expand as they recovered from the disaster. Local businesses could apply for loans with no interest for 24 months, and up to 24 months without payments, in addition to no application fees.

These actions to stimulate local business may well have helped keep some people from leaving the region and starting over elsewhere. After all, many residents of the region work in the resource industry and have many employment options around the province. Housing was noted to have been extremely important for the same reason; people without adequate housing are less likely to return to a town after a disaster. It should also be noted that the insurance industry provided support for many businesses to recover from the wildfires.

Supporting local business is also an important consideration as businesses in turn supported the wellbeing of returning residents in many cases. It is worthy of recognition that many of the employers in the Town were extremely supportive of their staff and the community during and after the evacuation; for instance:

- Employers in some cases paid for hotel accommodations for staff and their families during the evacuation, and/or interim accommodations in Town afterward.
- Some people received full or partial pay during and even after the evacuation.
- Staff of some employers received food, gift cards, and/or other supplies to support their families while displaced to surrounding communities.
- Some employers offered additional time off to employees to cope with the disaster.
- A few stories were captured of companies hosting debriefing sessions or other opportunities to cope as a group with the disaster.

- Some companies hosted events for their staff, or provided personal and financial support over and above wages and time off.

Notwithstanding the above successes, not all returning workers had the same experience, and as such in some cases would have had a negative impact on those that did not benefit from the same support.

Procurement

Multiple stakeholders suggested that flexibility in spending and minimizing layers of approval were critical in effectively addressing the needs of residents. Consistent messaging from Government of Alberta decision makers (including the Deputy Minister of Executive Council and the Task Force) ensured that people felt free to make the “right” decisions without first waiting to have the dollars approved. For instance, there was no hesitation in engaging the Edmonton and Calgary Fire Departments, the Calgary Emergency Management Agency, Strathcona County Emergency Services, or firefighting resources from other municipalities – they were needed, so they were brought in. Not all procurement proceeded smoothly, but certainly this leadership was seen to have helped. On the other hand, there was some confusion expressed about who was authorized to spend how much; certainly the large sums of money being allocated with minimal constraints put a number of these Government of Alberta representatives outside their comfort zone. On the whole, however, this seems to have been a positive and even necessary factor for success. Several people expressed that they would like to see pre-established spending thresholds in place for future emergencies as a way to build more comfort and structure for spending during disasters. Nonetheless, it is clear that “day-to-day” government processes would have been far too slow to respond to procurement needs.

Overall, the flexibility of spending during the response and recovery has been identified as a success. However, a number of issues related to procurement bear examination as part of the lessons to be learned from this review:

- Importantly, no pre-established agreements with vendors existed that could be activated quickly to mobilize services and supplies that would be required by any large disaster (such as fencing, food, blankets, etc.). This was true at the local level as well as the provincial level.
- Service Alberta did have existing relationships with approved vendors for some of the required products and services, but their procurement process was seen as far too slow to be effective in responding to a disaster. Stakeholders suggested that there was no time, for instance, to issue Requests for Proposals for necessary supplies that were not captured on the approved vendor list.

- When encountering procurement processes that were not suitable for the situation, responders seem to have circumvented them, engaging contractors through personal relationships and other channels. In some cases, non-government organizations and other responders even used personal credit cards to make purchases in support of the response, with the assurance of reimbursement.
- Significant challenges were encountered in procuring infrastructure (including space, information technology, and office supplies) to replace the administrative capacity of the Town lost due to the wildfire. Multiple rounds of procurement were required, as well as assistance from the Government of Alberta. Reportedly, these challenges in turn made it difficult to engage new and temporary staff, since they did not have the tools to contribute.
- In some instances improvised processes were developed to support procurement. For example, the Emergency Operations Centre created a cost list and pay schedule for rates relating to equipment, and also ensured there were approval signatures on everything that was ordered. However, different stakeholder groups were not generally able to coordinate their procurement activities or processes, and not all were able to implement the same level of sophistication.
- Consumer protection was identified as an issue; there were some concerns about how to ensure that reputable, high quality contractors were engaged for recovery and rebuilding jobs. No procedures or protocols were identified at the time to provide direction on this issue. On the other hand, Service Alberta made efforts during the recovery phase to provide consumer protection information in the region; for example consumer protection experts were on hand at the information fair.
- Reportedly, there was at times a certain level of animosity from the community towards contractors from outside the region who were perceived to be taking advantage of the disaster. Some offered the opinion that fewer home suppliers could have been used, with a greater emphasis on local vendors.

Insurance

The insurance industry is an important stakeholder in responding to and recovering from any disaster, but particularly one of this size. Several successes in the coordinated response of insurance providers were identified, as well as challenges and missed opportunities:

- Multiple bodies exist which allow insurance companies to collaborate and act together in response to a disaster. In this case, the Insurance Bureau of Canada took the lead, and the Government of Alberta also reached out to several insurance companies who were not members of this organization. Dealing with insurance companies as a group simplified the challenge of communicating with the industry and coordinating their

efforts, and the Government of Alberta was even able to address some concerns this way about actions taken by individual companies. The strong relationship between the Task Force and the insurance industry facilitated a consortium approach to demolition in the region, for instance.

- Many individuals and businesses suffered losses that were not insured. In some cases, alternate solutions were found such as investigating insurance for businesses through their credit cards, but many such losses could not be recovered.
- Most of those homes lost were insured, and a number of new homes are reportedly being constructed in the community using payouts from insurance. A number of people noted that this support also has an unanticipated downside, as many people have built bigger houses than those they lost. Some people interviewed believe this may lower property values for those who did not lose homes, and increase property taxes at the same time. The Town and the Municipal District have waived property taxes, however, until homes are rebuilt, and the Government of Alberta is providing an equivalent grant to these municipalities to maintain their tax base.
- Insurance companies have resources at their disposal that can be mobilized quickly, and could have helped with issues such as a lack of available maps of the destroyed area. No one from the Alberta Emergency Management Agency was responsible for liaising with the insurance industry, which may have resulted in early missed opportunities. This liaison may have helped coordinate earlier access to the Town by qualified claims adjusters, for example, thereby speeding up processing of claims.
- Insurance companies were not initially invited into reception centres along with other services for residents, yet it is likely that many people had questions and anxieties about insurance from the start. When insurance companies were permitted entry, their presence was reportedly well-received.
- Initially, when insurance companies discovered that the Government of Alberta was making emergency payments, some began deducting those amounts from their own payments. This was an issue that Employment and Immigration was then required to liaise with the Insurance Bureau of Canada to address.



Theme 7 – Assessment of Protocols and Procedures

Document	Available on May 14, 2011	Developed from May 14, 2011 to August 22, 2011
Emergency Management Act (2011)	✓	-
Alberta Emergency Plan (2008)	✓	-
Agency Response Plan (2009)	✓	-
Disaster Recovery Regulation (2006)	✓	-
Disaster Assistance Guidelines (2011)	✓	-

Key Observations:

The Alberta Emergency Plan and Agency Response Plan states that all partners (including the Government of Alberta, non-government organizations, local authorities, and the Government of Canada) are responsible for tracking their costs associated with the implementation of the Recovery Plan. Further, the Disaster Recovery Regulation states that a local authority may apply to the Alberta Emergency Management Agency for compensation related to costs incurred in conducting emergency operations. Although the regulation does not specify whether local authorities include host reception centres, it was noted through discussions with these municipalities that they did in fact apply to the Alberta Emergency Management Agency for reimbursement. The Disaster Assistance Guidelines from the Alberta Emergency Management Agency do provide some information on what costs qualify for reimbursement, but the guidance is very general in nature.

It was noted that there was no single process or standard template available to track costs. Rather, spreadsheets were created by reception centre hosts in each municipality. Stakeholders have suggested that in some cases costs were assessed retroactively. In some cases, it was noted that some of the partners involved in the response decided it was not cost-effective to assign resources to provide the supplementary information that was requested by the Alberta Emergency Management Agency following their application for compensation. Therefore, in some instances, the final invoice does not reflect the true total response cost.

With respect to procurement during an emergency response, little guidance was available in terms of policy or procedure other than standard Government of Alberta procurement practices. Stakeholders reported that they circumvented Government of Alberta (Service Alberta) processes that were seen to be too slow, relying on personal relationships and

flexible spending discretion to procure needed services and supplies. Specific spending thresholds were not established or communicated for any particular emergency response roles or decision makers.

There were also no pre-existing agreements or procurement arrangements with vendors specific to emergency management in place prior to the disaster. No list of pre-approved vendors specific to goods and services for disaster response was available.

Epilogue: Recovery One Year After the Fire

In the year following the wildfires, huge strides have been made in the Lesser Slave Lake region and recovery is well underway. It is a testament to the resilience of the communities in the region, and the high level of cooperation between local leaders and provincial officials how quickly and efficiently this important work is being accomplished.

The Recovery Plan announced in August 2011 has continued to provide the blueprint for the many initiatives underway to help the Lesser Slave Lake region rebuild and recover. The Recovery Plan outlined priorities around four key pillars, and progress under each of these pillars is outlined below:

- **People:** Ensure the right resources are in place to support the communities' needs and individuals' safety, health, physical, mental, and social wellbeing.
- **Reconstruction:** Rebuild the residential, commercial and public buildings and the associated utilities that were damaged or destroyed.
- **Economy:** Support the economic recovery of the region to ensure that people, business and industry, infrastructure and government are well supported to return to normalcy.
- **Environment:** Protect and re-establish a healthy environment for the benefit of nature and residents.

People

In the time since the wildfires, many initiatives and activities have evolved to support the people of the Lesser Slave Lake region in their recovery. A new family care clinic has opened, with plans to connect health services with social supports. Additional training and counselling for stress and trauma is being provided to the schools and community frontline workers, and to others through them. The Slave Lake Wellness Committee has come together to implement community wellness initiatives including a monthly speaker series and family fun nights. The communities have also made an effort to rebuild normalcy by maintaining annual events, like Riverboat Days and the Sand Castle Competition. To recognize the one-year anniversary of the wildfires, a resilient community conference and a weeklong series of community events were organized, such as barbeque block parties. In addition, a formal event recognizing the experience and the one-year milestone were held, and a memorial was unveiled to recognize the sacrifice of Jean-Luc Déba, who was killed in a helicopter crash as he was helping to fight the fires.

Meanwhile, the Tri-Council continues to meet monthly to make decisions related to recovery, supported by the Regional Recovery Coordination Group and the CAO Secretariat. A Governance Protocol has also been developed which sets out the roles,

responsibilities and procedures for these groups. The Task Force also continues to meet on a monthly basis, in large part to monitor progress on the recovery and to oversee the provincial government’s ongoing involvement.

Reconstruction

The clean-up of fire debris began on July 7th, 2011 and was completed by the end of September, 2011, months earlier than expected. An engineering study has been conducted to assess non-insurable damage to the Town’s infrastructure, which was extensive. Funding has been allocated by the Alberta government toward the costs of the extensive work involved in reconstructing the town’s damaged infrastructure.

Significant progress has also been made in housing construction. The Interim Housing Project (a partnership between the Town, the Municipal District, and the Alberta government) resulted in the installation of 267 modular housing units, providing almost 250 families with temporary (two to three years) housing in record time. The table below demonstrates how quickly interim housing was completed.

Modular Unit Development Tasks	Normal Timelines	Interim Housing Project Timelines
Engineering plans	6-8 months	15 days
Site grading and services	3-4 months	35 days
Unit delivery and utility hookup	20-25 days per phase	10-15 days per phase
Stairs and skirting	10-15 days per phase	5-10 days per phase

Displaced residents have been moving into permanent housing faster than expected due to robust construction since the wildfires. The first rebuilt house was completed just over four months after the fires. By early September of 2012, approximately 280 development permits had been issued by the Town for homes, garages, two churches, three multi-unit buildings, a convenience store, and commercial space. The MD has issued permits for 42 family dwellings and 37 accessory buildings.

Support for rental market housing was also provided following the wildfires, as well as for alternative housing such as campus residences, campgrounds, and social housing. Initially, support was provided as part of the emergency housing program, which covered the full costs of rent, moving, deposits and utilities. In addition, people were given the opportunity to stay in their rental accommodation beyond the original August 31st, 2011 deadline for this program, receiving a rent subsidy of up to 60 percent but assuming their

own utility costs. Forty-two households received a rent subsidy from September 1st to November 30th, 2011.

As part of reconstruction, the Town, Municipal District and First Nation have been working to become a model FireSmart community through education and awareness initiatives, installation of dry hydrants, and vegetation management. FireSmart is a provincial program based on wildfire mitigation practices and preparedness planning.

Economy

In support of local small businesses, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation waived application fees for small businesses in the disaster area, and offered interest-free loans for 24 months and up to 24 months without payments to help businesses establish, rebuild and/or expand. By September 30th of 2012, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation had approved 127 applications for a total of \$89.5 million in loans.

Stabilizing local revenue and funding was also important. With support from the Government of Alberta, the Town and Municipal District were able to forgive the 2011 property taxes that would have been owed by residents who owned destroyed or uninhabitable property, without decreasing their tax revenues. The Government of Alberta also agreed to maintain its regular grant funding at pre-fire levels.

Through the collaborative efforts of the Slave Lake and Area Chamber of Commerce and the Alberta government, a Rural Alberta Business Centre was established in January of 2012 to provide business information and advisory services to the region's small business community. As well, through another joint agreement with the province, and with the Town acting on behalf of Tri-Council, a regional economic development office is being established and recruitment is underway for an economic development professional. Tri-Council has also set up an Economic Development Committee with equal representation from the members. Planning is also underway and funding earmarked for improvements to the regional water supply infrastructure and a new fire hall at the Mitsue industrial site, both of which are key elements in the region's plans for future industrial and residential growth.

Environment

Environmental monitoring was conducted by the provincial government for several months after the wildfires. The monitoring confirmed that there should be no negative lasting impacts from the wildfires on the environment or human health. Design has also begun for further fire attenuation and a noise reduction barrier for communities bordering Highway 88.



6. Lessons Learned

This section outlines the lessons learned from the present review of the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires response and recovery efforts. These lessons cut across the seven analytical themes that structured this review, and are drawn from what was learned about each theme. Together with the findings and analysis outlined in the previous chapter, these lessons form the basis for a series of recommendations to improve Alberta’s capability to deal with future disasters. The table below summarizes these lessons, each of which is discussed in more detail below.

Summary of Lessons Learned	
Preparedness	An advanced level of planning and preparation is required so that emergency response and recovery systems are scalable to address incidents of similar magnitude to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires.
Coordination	A clear and well-understood command structure is necessary to coordinate the many people and resources involved in responding to a disaster.
People	It is crucial to involve people who have the right experience and expertise to respond to an emergency, and then to empower them to make decisions.
Jurisdiction	Boundaries related to jurisdiction, mandate or geography must not prevent people from working together in an emergency.
Evacuation	When it is time to evacuate, everyone has to be ready to act together based on a shared understanding of an evacuation plan with defined roles and responsibilities.
Communications	Clear communications, which are absolutely critical during a disaster, require planning, preparation and organization in advance.

Local Capacity	Although local communities must be prepared for emergencies, they also will likely require a great deal of outside support and expertise to cope with disasters similar in magnitude to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires.
Health and Wellbeing	A deliberate approach is required to mitigate the profound impact of a disaster on the long-term health, wellbeing and recovery of individuals, families and communities.
Financial Support	Communities that experience a disaster of this scale require significant, coordinated financial support not only to respond to the emergency situation, but also to make long-term recovery possible.
Donations	Planning and preparation can help in managing the outpouring of generosity to support those affected by a disaster.
Recovery	Recovery is an essential element of a comprehensive emergency management system. Although some aspects of recovery will be specific to each event, other aspects can and should be planned in advance.

Preparedness

An advanced level of planning and preparation is required so that emergency response and recovery systems are scalable to address incidents of similar magnitude to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires.

Alberta has been fortunate to have few large disasters in its history, and none that required the evacuation of so many people. It is important to note that the preparedness before the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires reflects this; the plans, systems and resources in place to cope with emergencies were more appropriate to smaller events more typical of the Alberta experience. Alberta's systems for emergency management were challenged to adapt to this larger disaster than has ever been experienced before, particularly since this emergency situation involved multiple communities and all levels of government. It needs to be recognized that many of the components of the system worked reasonably well, such as the coordination of health system resources, and the local support from Alberta Emergency Management Agency Field Officers.

Having experienced the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, the province now has the opportunity to make sure it is ready for an event of this magnitude in the future:

- Residents need to be prepared. In areas of the province that face the threat of wildfires or other disasters every year, individuals and families need to be prepared to evacuate. This means they should be informed about what to have ready, what to do and where to go in the event of an evacuation.
 - Governments need to be prepared. Effective planning, timely training and a clear incident command structure are critical for local and provincial governments to coordinate the resources necessary to respond to and recover from an event of this magnitude. Oversight and quality assurance is an important element of a comprehensive provincial system for emergency preparedness, response and recovery.
 - Communities need to be prepared. Each community is unique, and so too is each emergency. Therefore, communities need to have their own emergency plans, supplies, exit points, communications channels, leadership and contingencies well-established in advance.
-

Coordination

A clear and well-understood command structure is necessary to coordinate the many people and resources involved in responding to a disaster.

The Lesser Slave Lake disaster stretched governments and communities to coordinate the incredible range of expertise and resources required to effectively respond. A number of the coordination challenges experienced were due to the fact that Alberta had not fully implemented the Incident Command System, or trained all relevant parties on their roles in this new incident command model. It also highlighted a need for enhanced capacity and resources to manage information and communications during a disaster – and to do so within a well-defined chain of command. This experience shows that incident command needs to be well-understood among all those organizations that will be critical for emergency response. This requires:

- a single, fully-implemented incident command structure that defines roles and accountabilities for all parties;
- a clear hierarchy for decision making and information management between local and provincial emergency operations;
- defined emergency response roles for local, regional and provincial partners;
- well-established and well-understood roles for municipal, First Nations, provincial and federal elected officials;

- well-defined relationships between emergency incident command structures and decision makers in the provincial government;
 - clear responsibilities and decision making related to running reception centres and providing support for displaced residents;
 - agreed-upon roles for the NGO Council and the Canadian Red Cross as part of an integrated local and provincial response effort; and
 - training and simulation so that key personnel understand how they will be working together.
-

People

It is crucial to involve people who have the right experience and expertise to respond to an emergency, and then to empower them to make decisions.

Many of the successes during the response to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires have been attributed to effective decision making and involving the right people. Given the scale of the disaster, it was necessary to reach beyond established emergency response structures to engage the right expertise. Decision makers were engaged in innovative ways like the Task Force and the Tri-Council structures, and a wide range of expertise was brought to bear locally and provincially beyond what would normally be necessary in an emergency or its aftermath. This experience demonstrates the importance of empowering people at all levels of the provincial emergency response system to make decisions based on their experience, expertise, and commitment to helping the people affected. In particular:

- Experience and expertise in emergency management are critical locally and provincially to help make quick decisions in a rapidly changing situation.
- Emergencies require distinct governance and decision making relationships. Many levels of decision making are required, from politicians down to local organizations.
- Having the right mix of knowledge and skills is critical alongside engaging the appropriate organizations and decision makers.
- It is important to empower decision making at different levels within clear parameters and a clear chain of incident command. Decisions have to be able to be made very quickly, with minimal layers of approval.

Jurisdiction

Boundaries related to jurisdiction, mandate or geography must not prevent people from working together in an emergency.

A quality emergency management system should have the ability to deal with urgent risks that may challenge the existing mandates, jurisdictions or everyday job descriptions of those involved. It is important to prioritize doing what is right over what is proper, in other words, and in most cases this is exactly what happened during the response to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires. There are two areas, though, in which jurisdiction posed particular challenges: fighting the wildland urban interface fire and engaging with Sawridge First Nation.

In an effort to ensure that all residents receive required aid, organizational mandates must empower different partners to contribute their skills, expertise and resources to response and recovery efforts. It means:

- During a disaster, it should be possible to stretch past everyday organizational boundaries to do what is right. This is made possible through collaboration and partnership development in advance of emergency situations that clarify roles, responsibilities and jurisdictional issues.
- Ensuring communities, organizations and levels of government work together to clarify roles, responsibilities and authorities in advance of an emergency response, to minimize confusion about who can do what for whom whether during a wildland urban interface fire or any other wide-spread emergency situation.
- Similarly, jurisdictional boundaries must be understood and bridged such that First Nations governments and communities can be fully included and integrated into emergency response efforts and incident command when on-reserve communities are threatened or impacted. As a core principle of this relationship, the Government of Alberta should continue to offer the same emergency management support to First Nations communities as other Alberta communities, and should be proactive about doing so.

Evacuation

When it is time to evacuate, everyone has to be ready to act together based on a shared understanding of an evacuation plan with defined roles and responsibilities.

The evacuation was successful by the most important measure: no lives were lost. This was achieved in large part due to good judgement and quick decision making as no plans were available at local or provincial levels to accommodate the need to evacuate so many residents. It is clear from the review that most were not well-prepared or trained for the possibility of evacuation, from individual residents to governments to first responders.

The local community was not equipped with sufficient infrastructure or supplies for optimal coordination of a local emergency response, let alone a large-scale evacuation. Although it is recognized the speed and scale of the wildfires would have limited the opportunity for warning residents, the systems for advance warning and notification of residents were not sufficient. In addition, the process for deciding to evacuate, issuing the order and executing it were not fully clear to everyone involved.

The external resources and expertise brought to bear to support local officials in emergency management and evacuation were absolutely essential.

Good preparation is the key to minimizing chaos during an evacuation and making sure nothing gets overlooked. In particular, the following are critical to ensure evacuation readiness:

- Local plans should be in place in advance to identify likely exit routes, muster points where residents can gather, communications mechanisms, and critical resources and infrastructure. As an emergency situation develops, evacuation planning should begin as soon as it is likely that residents may be forced to evacuate.
- Multiple resources will have to be coordinated in order to evacuate, which may include health services, transportation for residents, police, roadblocks, first responders, and others. It is essential that incident command is coordinating these resources, and that each participating organization understands its role, its authorities in an evacuation, and the chain of command.
- An evacuation order should be clear, timely and issued from a single, predetermined decision maker within the incident command structure. This critical decision should be supported by expertise and advice in emergency management, as well as ongoing situational awareness.
- An evacuation order should be accompanied by messaging to help residents understand where they should go and what they should do to escape danger.

- Residents themselves are willing to help one another and contribute during an evacuation. This capacity could be leveraged at muster points or at the neighbourhood level to assist with evacuation efforts, but only if residents are prepared in advance.

Communications

Clear communications, which are absolutely critical during a disaster, require planning, preparation and organization in advance.

During an emergency, information cannot possibly flow fast enough to satisfy the desire of residents, family members, media, and the public to know what is going on. Clear communications are essential, and an emergency demands distinct skills and mechanisms to manage information and communications. The Public Affairs Bureau did an admirable job of delivering crisis communications during the Lesser Slave Lake disaster.

Nevertheless, at times provincial and local officials struggled to communicate in a timely and coordinated manner due to the sheer volume of information, tasks and demands that they were struggling with. Better preparation can help address some of the opportunities to streamline emergency communications that were identified during the present review.

Information flow cannot be fully controlled during an emergency, especially in the age of the internet, but clear communications from a consistent source can help defuse rumour, speculation and misunderstandings. This requires specific planning and preparation focused on communications, so that everyone involved in the response understands from the start whose job it is to develop, approve and release communications. In particular, communications planning should define:

- what communications media, infrastructure and platforms will be relied upon to disseminate emergency messages;
- roles for residents, first responders, local staff, elected officials, government departments and communications professionals in supporting the flow of information;
- how and by whom residents will be warned of an impending emergency, the possibility of evacuation, and when an evacuation order has been given;
- a commitment to address the needs and perspectives of local residents first and foremost;
- how spokespeople will help to channel donations and assistance in appropriate ways; and
- contingencies for when certain infrastructure fails, or key roles are unavailable.

Local Capacity

Although local communities must be prepared for emergencies, they also will likely require a great deal of outside support and expertise to cope with disasters similar in magnitude to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires.

The Lesser Slave Lake disaster challenged the ability of local communities to fulfill their legislated emergency management responsibilities, calling into question how practical those responsibilities are. Under current legislation, responsibility for readiness and emergency management lie with local communities, unless the provincial government declares a state of emergency. This has never happened, yet even for smaller emergencies the Alberta Emergency Management Agency and other external resources are often needed to help bolster local capacity. When that occurs, small communities can struggle to provide the necessary incident command and coordination, although under current legislation, responsibility for these remains local.

Consideration should be given to the question of who should be responsible for overall emergency management in situations where outside assistance is required. Overall, it seems unlikely that many small communities across the province can themselves be capable of responding to a disaster of this magnitude. Local capacity will generally need to be augmented with support and expertise to assist with:

- assessment of risk in advance of emergencies;
- situational information and advice about how to respond during the disaster;
- expertise and experience in emergency management and logistics;
- direct support to residents that can help mitigate financial, psychological, emotional, and physical strain;
- evacuee support and registration, in the event that evacuation becomes necessary;
- human resources to ensure appropriate backfill and to engage specialized skills in support of local personnel;
- transitioning from emergency response to a focus on recovery; and
- infrastructure, skills and personnel to support administration and financial management.

Health and Wellbeing

A deliberate approach is required to mitigate the profound impact of a disaster on the long-term health, wellbeing and recovery of individuals, families and communities.

Following the disaster, Alberta's emergency response efforts were efficient in keeping residents and workers safe from hazards to their physical health. On the other hand, the response was not able to deliver immediate occupational health testing for volunteer first responders. In addition, the experience of environmental testing points to the need to understand likely toxins in advance, and to be able to compare them against baseline samples and then communicate results in an effective way.

Perhaps most importantly, this experience highlighted opportunities to enhance the supports available for evacuees. In particular, it was not clear how Disaster Social Services and case management should be managed provincially and incorporated within the response effort. In addition, consistent guidelines were not available to support set-up, operation, communications, roles and decision making with respect to local reception centres.

Further, it was notable that although physical health and safety are often the primary concern in responding to an emergency this same focus needs to be applied well beyond the event itself. Once the immediate danger is resolved, it is also critical to support the mental health and wellbeing of those involved in the event. This review highlights a number of the key components of a comprehensive approach to do so, including:

- A comprehensive suite of "Disaster Social Services" that is ready to deploy as part of emergency response and incident command structures.
- Immediately following an emergency, specialized services such as trauma and crisis counselling should be available to help residents, staff and responders cope. These should be integrated within a range of activities and services to support individual and community wellbeing, particularly in reception centres, if these are required.
- A more deliberate, longer-term plan to address mental health, substance abuse and emotional wellness may enable faster recovery. This should include approaches to make sure that people are accessing the counselling and mental health supports that they need.
- Case management and continuity of support services is an important part of supporting those who have been displaced by a disaster or evacuation. Enabling case management requires solutions to collect and share personal information appropriately so that different organizations can work together to meet the needs of residents and families.

- Staff and volunteers involved in emergency response are prone to burnout and tremendous stress, and so they require appropriate backfill and may even require time off or other accommodations once the response has ended.
- Returning children to school soon after a disaster is an important part of re-establishing a community's equilibrium. Students, staff and administrators require support to help cope with the emergency.

Financial Support

Communities that experience a disaster of this scale require significant, coordinated financial support not only to respond to the emergency situation, but also to make long-term recovery possible.

A number of limitations were exposed in Alberta's systems for managing the financial dimensions of a disaster of the scale of the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires. In particular, no emergency procurement processes were deployed, and there were no pre-existing systems and tools to track, administer and manage emergency funds. In addition, the insurance industry had not been integrated into Alberta's emergency management approach.

Revenue stabilization actions were timely and effective. At the provincial level, significant funds were deployed quickly, and emergency payments were channelled to residents using debit cards, which proved an innovative and successful measure. In addition to making funds available, people were empowered at multiple levels to make spending decisions and undertake creative procurement arrangements to deliver required supplies and services. This flexibility was critical to successfully channelling funding quickly to address the needs of residents, first responders, and communities.

As the recovery proceeded, tremendous financial and human resources were allocated to help the region and its residents recover. The Government of Alberta undertook proactive support for local businesses and forged relationships with the insurance industry as key measures in providing for the long-term recovery of the region. On the other hand, these measures were ad hoc and, taken together with the need for more robust systems to track and manage spending, suggest opportunities to enhance clarity about the provincial role in disaster recovery.

The Lesser Slave Lake disaster clearly illustrated the critical importance of having immediate access to funds that can be channelled quickly to support residents, clean-up efforts and responders. Having money available is not the only important consideration; the efficient use of available funding can be enhanced by:

- pre-existing procurement agreements that can be activated quickly to provide goods and services needed to respond to an emergency;
 - spending thresholds within which staff are empowered to make procurement decisions without waiting for approvals;
 - available capacity and expertise – especially locally – to manage and administer large sums of money quickly;
 - simple tools to track costs, combined with related technical infrastructure;
 - aids to procurement such as pre-existing cost schedules and service agreements in some cases; and
 - close working relationships with the insurance industry to manage shared issues related to demolition, debris removal and rebuilding.
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Donations

Planning and preparation can help in managing the outpouring of generosity to support those affected by a disaster.

An overwhelming volume of money and physical donations were received to help the residents and communities in the Lesser Slave Lake region to recover. This generosity was inspiring, but also instructive in that it was challenging to channel the outpouring of donations in support of the region. In particular, sorting, storing and distributing physical donations was a very large and resource-intensive undertaking. The challenge of donations management was also complicated by the fact that no one was in a position to control what people donate, when, and to whom.

Alberta had established an NGO Council in advance of the Lesser Slave Lake disaster, and this proved to be a valuable structure for coordinating community resources, including those supporting the effort to manage donations. On the other hand, given that Alberta had not previously experienced a disaster of this magnitude, local and provincial authorities were not prepared for the scale of donations management that would be required. No plans to manage donations or to communicate about donations were in place.

The Lesser Slave Lake region experience points to the opportunity to align the efforts of multiple organizations in collecting and allocating donations following a disaster. The experience of other jurisdictions suggests there are no easy solutions for managing donations efficiently, but a number of important considerations for doing so in the future include the following:

- Money provides optimal flexibility in terms of where it can be allocated and is much easier to manage when compared to goods.
 - Transparency, fairness, local decision making and matching donations with need are important considerations for policies about how donations will be managed.
 - To the extent possible, it should be clear in advance which organizations will manage donations in the event of a major disaster, and what their policies are about allocating and reporting on donations received. Involving fewer organizations will reduce confusion and mixed messages.
 - All spokespeople and official communications from the response effort should provide consistent messages about how to donate, and how donations will be used.
 - It is unlikely that municipal or First Nation governments will have the capacity, expertise, financial infrastructure and/or staff resources available following a disaster to manage donations. Alternative donation management models can promote efficiency while still providing donors with assurance that their donations will be used for the purpose intended.
 - People often prefer to donate to charities, as opposed to governments, and may have specific charities that they wish to donate to, no matter which organization is identified as leading donations management.
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Recovery

Recovery is an essential element of a comprehensive emergency management system. Although some aspects of recovery will be specific to each event, other aspects can and should be planned in advance.

Alberta had not previously needed to deploy disaster recovery support of the magnitude that was required following the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires. Consequently, many of the processes to transition from emergency response to recovery had to be built from scratch and some were seen to have been more efficient than others.

On the positive side, the phased re-entry process was both efficient and successful, demonstrating laudable planning and execution. A number of innovative structures were also created to provide leadership to the recovery effort:

- At the provincial level, a cross-ministry Task Force structure was essential to coordinating Government of Alberta resources and making decisions efficiently.

- Locally, a formal Tri-Council governance structure was established between the Town, the Municipal District and Sawridge First Nation, which was the first of its kind in Canada. The Tri-Council has been a successful venue for shared recovery planning.
- The implementation of a Regional Recovery Coordination Group has been an important structure for supporting recovery efforts in the region.

Although there were several notable successes in the recovery efforts, the need to be better prepared for disaster recovery was also highlighted. For instance, the handoff from the Alberta Emergency Management Agency to the Task Force was perceived as abrupt, and recovery efforts were seen to be slowed as a result while the Task Force worked to build capacity and engage additional resources.

As well, no local or provincial plans or procurement relationships were in place in advance to provide access to the required housing. The need for short-term and interim housing was unprecedented in our province's history. The Government of Alberta took on a new role by directly providing housing for residents whose homes were lost in the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires. Similarly, processes had to be developed in order to manage access to the evacuation zone and short-term accommodations during and after the evacuation period.

Each disaster will be unique, and each community has different strengths and needs for support and rebuilding. Consequently, each recovery process should also be customized. Despite this, there are certain elements of recovery that must be at least considered each time, including those identified in Lesser Slave Lake Wildfire Regional Recovery Plan. Additional key considerations in enhancing the provincial approach to disaster recovery include the following:

- Is restoring a community or region to a pre-fire state sufficient to overcome the disadvantage and negative impacts of a major disaster?
- Who should have authority over a recovery plan, and who should be accountable for implementing it? To what extent can or should affected residents have a say?
- Who should decide if it was not in the best interests of a region or community to rebuild as before?
- To what extent should government support local business and stimulate the local economy without unduly disadvantaging other communities in the province?
- What should be the role of the provincial government in providing short-term and interim housing in future emergency situations?

- How does the recovery phase end? At what point should local governments return to normal, independent ways of operating?





7. Recommendations

Emergency management is a complex and essential undertaking involving a wide range of governments, organizations, communities, experts, workers, First Nations and individual Albertans. The findings of this review suggest that Alberta has a strong foundation for effective emergency management, and in many ways Alberta's response to the Slave Lake disaster met or exceeded standards established by leading practices from around the globe. At the same time, the scale of the Lesser Slave Lake disaster was unprecedented in Alberta's history. Whenever a system is tested against extreme circumstances, there are always practices to be captured for the future and also lessons learned that can improve preparedness for the future.

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this review, and are informed by input from international subject matter advisors and a review of leading practices. Although the scope of the review was limited to the Lesser Slave Lake disaster, the recommendations are intended to inform broad system improvements in emergency preparedness, response and recovery. These recommendations suggest actions to be led or undertaken by the Government of Alberta, with the acknowledgement that there are many people and organizations that have a role and a stake in emergency management across the province.

A single, overarching recommendation of this review underpins and ties together each of the more specific actions recommended. This core recommendation proposes seven principles that have been informed by the successes and challenges of the response and recovery efforts to the Lesser Slave Lake disaster, and the expertise of stakeholders and experts engaged in the review. These principles serve to ground and align the suite of more specific opportunities that follow to enhance preparedness, response and recovery.¹²

¹² In the recommendations section, the report references current ministry titles as opposed to those that existed at the time of the wildfires, in order to make recommendations as specific and practical as possible.

Summary of Recommendations

OVERARCHING

Recommendation #1	Build on the successes and experience of addressing the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires to ensure that emergency preparedness, response and recovery systems across the province are consistent with a set of shared principles.
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PREPAREDNESS

Recommendation #2	Enhance the system of supports for emergency planning and preparation by local communities.
Recommendation #3	Reinforce Alberta's emergency response system by formally incorporating a Task Force or similar cross-ministry governance model, and by ensuring the availability of additional ministry personnel to support response and recovery efforts following large-scale disasters.
Recommendation #4	Strengthen the Government of Alberta's role in quality assurance for emergency management.
Recommendation #5	Build on existing programs that enable regional collaboration by establishing formal expectations for, as well as more actively encouraging, municipal collaboration and resource sharing in emergency planning, response and recovery.
Recommendation #6	Work with local communities to improve the preparedness of individual Albertans commensurate with the risk of an emergency.
Recommendation #7	Improve provincial capability and infrastructure to manage personal information during an emergency.
Recommendation #8	Improve local and provincial preparedness for the possibility of evacuation, building on the experience gained from coordinating the evacuation of much of the Lesser Slave Lake region.

RESPONSE

Recommendation #9	Ensure that Incident Management Teams are available to quickly deploy so that local governments have access to qualified incident management where needed and requested.
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Recommendation #10	Fully implement the Incident Command System so that emergency response roles and mandates are firmly established within a single, clear chain of command.
Recommendation #11	Build provincial and local capacity, competencies and strategies for crisis communications.
Recommendation #12	Improve integration of provincial expertise in environmental hazard testing and public health, in order to streamline testing, interpretation and communication of results following a wildfire.
Recommendation #13	Develop an approach for the Government of Alberta to coordinate delivery across ministries of those Disaster Social Services that are delivered provincially.
Recommendation #14	Create guidelines to help plan and execute re-entry following an evacuation, building on the successes of the re-entry after the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires.
Recommendation #15	Build on the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires experience by formalizing policy, improving processes and building capacity to ensure timely distribution of funds, effective financial management and demonstration of accountability during future emergency response efforts.

RECOVERY

Recommendation #16	Clarify the Government of Alberta's overall disaster recovery philosophy and specific role with respect to housing and stimulating the local economy following a disaster.
Recommendation #17	Formalize a provincial approach to support disaster recovery planning, building on the success of the shared planning process used after the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires including the regional Tri-Council model.
Recommendation #18	Develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach for funding of disaster recovery plans that coordinates streams of funding that are essential to restore an affected community, including government funds, the insurance industry, and donations.
Recommendation #19	Develop and implement a province-wide approach to managing donations following a disaster.

I. Overarching

- #1 Build on the successes and experience of addressing the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires to ensure that emergency preparedness, response and recovery systems across the province are consistent with a set of shared principles:
- Emergency preparedness is commensurate with the risks facing Alberta and its communities.
 - A single, clear command structure is essential to emergency response.
 - All Albertans have access to support for emergency management that is appropriate to the magnitude of the situation being faced.
 - Emergency response is led by a single authority with the commensurate skills and training to address the incident.
 - The autonomy of communities needs to be respected, recognizing the need to balance this autonomy with the limitations of those communities in terms of emergency management.
 - After a wide-scale disaster, communities are supported to become “whole” again, and not simply to replace what was lost.
 - Highly effective emergency management is dependent upon role clarity and coordination across the range of activities from preparedness through to recovery.

There is nothing easy about the experience of disasters like the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires. However, these types of experiences do provide an opportunity to reflect on what kind of emergency management system Alberta needs to effectively prepare, respond and recover should a similar disaster strike the province again. In many ways, Alberta’s response to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires demonstrates an emergency management system that is already consistent with these principles. In other ways, changes can help to ensure response and recovery efforts are successful in the future.

The principles in this recommendation are specifically drawn from both the Alberta experience and the advice from experts around the globe who have faced disasters of similar or greater magnitude. With that said the principles are also forward-looking and form a foundation for the recommendations that follow. The subsequent recommendations are organized according to their potential to impact one of the three emergency management components (preparedness, response and recovery).

II. Preparedness

#2 Enhance the system of supports for emergency planning and preparation by local communities.

Alberta has many municipalities of different sizes that face annual threats due to fires, floods or other circumstances. Many of these municipalities may be challenged to plan and prepare for large-scale emergencies, due to limits in capacity and difficulty obtaining the highly specialized expertise that is required for these types of situations. This is especially an issue for those who face higher risk of disaster. For these municipalities, it is imperative that they have the resources and expertise to assess community risk and to translate that assessment into a comprehensive emergency management plan that is commensurate with the level of risk the community faces.

In order for a good emergency management plan to be put to use, local personnel require training and a clear understanding of what their roles are in an emergency. In particular, preparedness can be optimized by conducting emergency exercises, simulating actual scenarios, whereby key personnel have a chance to practice how the plan is implemented to enable efficient decision making, coordination and communications during an emergency. The enactment of responses to scenarios also allows for emergency plans to be improved and enhanced by the experience gained from simulations. In the case of the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, the emergency management system was able to adapt to the extreme circumstances. However, greater preparedness through planning and simulation exercises at both the local and provincial levels would increase the likelihood that future emergency responses would be successful and efficient. Finally, the Government of Alberta should develop and maintain an inventory of individuals trained and qualified to lead emergency responses as well as other critical skills and competencies typically required in a response. This inventory is not just for the province to draw upon, but should be shared with municipalities and First Nations so they can consider these potential resources in their planning and in the event of an emergency.

Many of the supports referenced in this recommendation are already available to municipalities through the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. However, the experience of this disaster in the Lesser Slave Lake Region suggests that there is room for improvement in terms of local uptake and provincial support so that small municipalities in particular are better prepared for emergencies. Given the Alberta Emergency Management Agency's expertise and current role in supporting municipalities and First Nations through its field officers, this agency may be the best option to support municipalities in risk assessment, planning and training, and to maintain an inventory of personnel. Other options should also be considered including combining broader emergency preparedness initiatives such as those related to public health, fire, flood and terrorism.

#3 Reinforce Alberta's emergency response system by formally incorporating a Task Force or similar cross-ministry governance model, and by ensuring the availability of additional ministry personnel to support response and recovery efforts following large-scale disasters.

The Lesser Slave Lake disaster required Government of Alberta ministries to collaborate in an intensive, sustained way in order to bring to bear the necessary range of expertise, information and services to set the stage for a successful recovery. Very quickly, a cross-ministry Task Force was established and staffed with highly experienced and qualified personnel, and actively supported by a cross-ministry working group. This proved to be a successful model for decision making and coordinating resources. The Task Force or similar cross-ministry governance model, along with a clear description of the required competencies of key personnel on and supporting the Task Force, should be formalized as a part of the Government of Alberta's emergency response system. To ensure the speedy mobilization of a Task Force in future emergency situations, a formal structure should be developed, including Terms of Reference that describe what constitutes a Task Force, under what conditions a Task Force should be convened, who should lead it, and possible actions they could consider based on the experience of responding to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires. The Task Force model employed in this case should be considered a leading practice, and due consideration given to the critical success factors identified in this review.

Despite the massive scale of the Lesser Slave Lake disaster, the Government of Alberta did an admirable job of resourcing key positions required to support both the response and recovery. Consequence Management Officers were a critical point for cross-government coordination as members of different Ministries with specific training to participate in emergency response efforts at the Provincial Operations Centre. The experience of the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires demonstrated however that individual ministries did not have enough depth of training in emergency management or Consequence Management Officers for a disaster of this magnitude. In addition to being ready to mobilize a cross-ministry governance structure, it is fundamentally important that individual ministries have sufficient capacity to fulfil their role in emergency response. The Consequence Management Officers require backfill to maintain a sustained emergency management effort and to ensure their day-to-day responsibilities are fulfilled during the emergency response. This will require training more staff to participate in the emergency response command structure, as well as ensuring that leaders within different ministries understand how their staffing and resources may be impacted by an emergency.

#4 Strengthen the Government of Alberta's role in quality assurance for emergency management.

Highly effective and comprehensive emergency management systems have a number of critical elements, including baseline standards, governance models that clearly define roles, well-developed tools and resources, and mechanisms to assure ongoing competence and quality. A clear positive for Alberta's system is the fact that municipalities are expected to have in place the plans, supplies and the know-how required to be ready for emergencies. Oversight of this preparedness is very limited however, and municipalities cannot currently be mandated by the Government of Alberta to improve their preparedness commensurate with the level of risk that they face. While requiring preparedness is a necessary precondition for emergency management, it is often not sufficient. In particular, highly effective emergency management systems typically have a strong oversight and quality assurance system as a means of ensuring minimum standards are met, demonstrating accountability, and promoting quality improvement.

Although not a core area of focus for this review, some evidence emerged to suggest that strengthening systems for oversight and quality assurance would help to promote better preparedness in the future. For instance, although municipalities are required by legislation to have emergency plans in place, they are not currently required to demonstrate that they have a plan, the plans do not have to meet a particular standard, and there are no requirements for regular training or exercises to ensure readiness. Therefore, although the Alberta Emergency Management Agency reviews the plans of many municipalities regularly, there is no way to be certain that municipalities are actually prepared for an emergency. Improving provincial quality assurance is intended to parallel the recommendation to provide more provincial support to local communities. In this way, communities can both be better prepared, and more accountable for their readiness.

As the cornerstone for enhanced quality assurance of emergency preparedness, the Government of Alberta should develop or strengthen and enforce provincial standards that establish minimum requirements in the following areas:

- conducting community and/or regional risk assessments;
- developing, archiving and updating of emergency plans;
- maintaining a state of readiness to implement emergency plans, including but not limited to designation and accreditation of key personnel, training and simulation, and supplies and materials;
- transparent reporting of the state of emergency preparedness for municipalities, regions (as appropriate) and the province as a whole; and
- improvement processes in situations where preparedness is not maintained.

Consistent with the standards noted above, the Government of Alberta should require that municipalities assess their risks, develop emergency plans, keep the plans up to date, and make the plans public (excepting specific sensitive information such as the location of hazardous materials). These plans should be commensurate with the level of risk that communities face, and will therefore vary in how detailed they need to be. In addition, active oversight is required for the state of readiness of communities to implement their emergency plans. Similar to planning, the level of oversight that occurs should also be commensurate with risk. Another potential component of local readiness that could be assessed is the awareness among residents of plans, including exit routes and notification systems.

In parallel to provincial standards and oversight activities, the assessed state of emergency preparedness for municipalities should be reported transparently across the province, to promote quality improvement and accountability to the public. Municipalities that fall below minimum standards should be mandated and supported to improve. Those who demonstrate excellent readiness should be recognized and invited to share their practices across the province.

#5 Build on existing programs that enable regional collaboration by establishing formal expectations for, as well as more actively encouraging, municipal collaboration and resource sharing in emergency planning, response and recovery.

It is not uncommon for emergency situations like wildfires to threaten entire areas or regions within the province, and to do so year after year. In these situations, shared planning and response among multiple communities may be the only way to adequately address the full scope of the threat being faced. Indeed, the Lesser Slave Lake experience demonstrated that sharing of municipal resources can be a tremendous benefit during a large-scale emergency and its aftermath. It is important, therefore, that municipalities plan, prepare and respond together where appropriate, rather than each operating independently.

While there is funding available to municipalities to undertake collaborative emergency management initiatives through several Government of Alberta programs (such as the Regional Collaboration Program), there is no expectation or requirement that they must plan regionally. The emergency management approach in Alberta should enable and clearly outline the expectation for this kind of regional collaboration.

The Government of Alberta should make it clear that some municipalities need to jointly assess risks, develop emergency plans, maintain preparedness and respond to emergencies – and facilitate opportunities for them to do so. For instance, regional planning can identify opportunities to collectively address contingencies such as relocating local incident command, or managing waste after a disaster. Opportunities for shared training or exercises should be enhanced and actively supported as well. Provincial support may also be required to help neighbouring municipalities to establish formal Mutual Aid Agreements or even regional agreements whereby resources can be shared in the event of an emergency. These kinds of agreements have been in place in Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as some parts of Alberta, and allow municipalities to share costs, facilities, supplies, first responders, and administrative personnel during a crisis. Finally, a provincial inventory of key resources should be maintained that municipalities can draw upon if necessary (e.g., interim housing, temporary mortuaries, etc.).

#6 Work with local communities to improve the preparedness of individual Albertans commensurate with the risk of an emergency.

As the Lesser Slave Lake region experience has shown, it is not only the actions of officials and first responders that determine a positive or negative outcome; Albertans themselves have the ability and responsibility to be ready to act in an emergency situation. In the face of wildfires, residents of the Lesser Slave Lake region demonstrated decisiveness, ingenuity, and compassion as they evacuated, many choosing of their own volition to flee. At the same time, it was clear that many were not prepared for an emergency like this, or for the need to evacuate, though the region is commonly threatened by wildfires. Readiness of individual Albertans commensurate with the risks faced by their communities is an important part of emergency management.

Improving individual readiness for emergencies requires significant changes in attitude and behaviour at a population level. To draw a comparison, tremendous success has been achieved in areas such as seatbelt use in motor vehicles and similar changes are underway with respect to healthy eating and distracted driving. These broad social changes are very challenging, however, and require the combined and sustained efforts of all affected stakeholders. Both the provincial and the federal government have developed resources that are available to municipalities and Albertans, and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency already provides some education during Emergency Preparedness Week. The Government of Alberta should build on these efforts and tools, and enhance its work with municipalities across the province to ensure people are appropriately aware of risks and contingencies specific to their community, and supported to take action accordingly.

It is beyond the scope of this review to recommend a specific strategy for changing the attitudes and behaviours of Albertans with respect to emergency preparedness. However, the experience of other jurisdictions suggests that targeted information about preparing for an emergency should be made available, such as messaging about what emergency supplies should be on hand. The Canadian Red Cross advocates this kind of education to take place before the season for a given hazard, and there are jurisdictions in Canada that are doing so. In addition, it is important to encourage Albertans to secure insurance for their property, especially where risks are significant. An example of this kind of action can be found in the United Kingdom, where governments and the insurance industry work together to deliver a public education program which sets out the benefits of insurance in the context of a disaster. Finally, these activities should be linked with a community's emergency plan, and in fact residents can also be better prepared to the extent that they themselves are aware of their local emergency plans, including the ways they will be notified of an impending threat, and what to do in the event of evacuation.

#7 Improve provincial capability and infrastructure to manage personal information during an emergency.

Responding to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires involved multiple communities as well as a range of local and provincial support. This experience has underscored both the critical importance and the tremendous challenge of coordinating personal information as an enabler of effective supports for residents. On the one hand, government and service providers demonstrated innovation and resourcefulness to ensure residents were registered and received necessary supports as soon as possible. Perhaps the most notable example was linking registration with distribution of debit cards pre-loaded with emergency funds. On the other hand, some notable challenges were experienced. For instance, displaced residents were asked for their information and their needs multiple times and by multiple organizations, and this information was not collated and dealt with as a whole. In addition to being stressful for residents, this made it more difficult to address personal, material, financial, medical, housing and emotional needs in a coordinated fashion.

Provincial leadership is essential given the scale of information management challenges posed by a disaster and/or evacuation, and the number of parties involved. For instance, a provincial database is required – together with appropriate information technology – to register evacuees and document their needs. Along with technical infrastructure, it will be necessary to develop simple, common forms and processes to assess residents' needs following a disaster, building on what was learned working with residents of the Lesser Slave Lake region. In this way, collection and sharing of information about need can be streamlined. In addition, one of the principal benefits will be consistent case management for a mobile population of evacuees. In part, this will require addressing data ownership and privacy issues related to personal and health information. It may not be possible to share all relevant information with all of the service providers supporting residents, for instance.

There are successful examples in other jurisdictions to build from in creating this kind of provincial information sharing capability. In Australia, for example, a National Registration and Inquiry System is used to unite families and close friends of persons affected by an emergency. Similarly, the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the United States assigns people a number that serves as a common identifier for multiple emergency services.

#8 Improve local and provincial preparedness for the possibility of evacuation, building on the experience gained from coordinating the evacuation of much of the Lesser Slave Lake region.

The evacuation of the Lesser Slave Lake region was enormously difficult given the circumstances of the wildland urban interface fire. It is clear that first responders, local leaders, residents and provincial emergency management personnel all did their best to ensure a rapid and organized evacuation. The fact that the evacuation was ultimately successful is a testament to the efforts of all involved. With that said, there was also an element of good fortune in the outcome of the evacuation, and this experience highlighted a number of opportunities to ensure Alberta's preparedness for a significant displacement of residents. These opportunities exist at both local and provincial levels, and provincial leadership is required to establish appropriate readiness for all communities.

Evacuation is not required in all emergencies, but it should definitely be considered in local emergency plans so that issues such as transportation, exit routes, and gathering points for residents are addressed. In addition, it is crucial to establish early warning and notification processes to inform residents about an impending threat or an evacuation order via multiple avenues. Technology may offer promising opportunities for notification. For example, the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the United States has partnered with the Federal Communications Commission to send geographically targeted, text message-like Wireless Emergency Alerts to the public. The experience of other jurisdictions suggests that local communities will require provincial support to ensure their planning for evacuation is adequate.

When it comes time to evacuate, it should be absolutely clear which single person (as opposed to a "local authority," or multiple local authorities, for instance) is responsible for issuing the evacuation order within Alberta's emergency management system. A consistent, province-wide approach is required under Alberta's emergency management system for this issue. Similarly, provincial guidance is required in terms of support for evacuees. The province should provide guidelines to all municipalities detailing how to establish a reception centre, what supports to provide, what they can expect the provincial government to provide, how to operate the centre, expectations regarding financial management and record keeping, and how that centre will fit into the command structure during an emergency. Established guidelines should clarify the decision making structure within and between centres, and how information and communications are to be managed between them as well.

To support municipalities in executing an evacuation and in supporting evacuees, provincial leadership is also required to ensure that key partners are prepared to assist. For instance, the role and authorities of first responders in executing an evacuation order need to be clarified at a provincial level, and integrated into emergency planning and training across the province. In the case of the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, the Government of

Alberta was also able to very quickly engage the Canadian Red Cross to support evacuees. To ensure this level of support is available in the future if required, the Government of Alberta should establish an agreement with the Canadian Red Cross or other provider that defines what supports may be required for both evacuees and reception centres. The Canadian Red Cross' role varies in different jurisdictions, and any contract with this organization should be tailored to specific needs within the emergency management approach in Alberta. For instance, the Canadian Red Cross is a member of Alberta's NGO Council, and as such their role should be defined in the context of their contributions as a member of this Council.

III. Response

#9 Ensure that Incident Management Teams are available to quickly deploy so that local governments have access to qualified incident management where needed and requested.

The Lesser Slave Lake disaster underscored the enormous complexity of effectively responding to a major wildland urban interface fire that required the evacuation of multiple communities and the coordinated efforts of several governments and many organizations. While local leaders performed well in the face of this challenge, they also relied heavily on the skills and experience of those that had been trained to respond to these emergency situations, including the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, the Provincial Operations Centre, Strathcona County Emergency Services, and the Calgary Emergency Management Agency. In fact, daily command of local operations was requested and granted to the Director of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency beginning on May 16th and each day thereafter through May 31st.

Although this procedure was functional during the Lesser Slave Lake disaster response, it also points to some clear opportunities to improve capacity for incident management within Alberta's emergency management system. Effective incident management requires training, expertise and experience that exceeds what is available in many communities across the province. It is reasonable to assume that most Alberta municipalities would require incident management expertise to assist locally when confronted with a disaster or major emergency. Capacity to provide this expertise has not been developed in a deliberate way, however; the Lesser Slave Lake region was fortunate in that several skilled incident management professionals were available and deployed to assist locally. In addition, it was admirable that the three governments were able to agree on who would be empowered to make what decisions – including critical, time-sensitive decisions. The co-location of multiple governments and “local authorities” under legislation could have created confusion but for the leadership shown by local officials. This experience of multiple governments with a stake in the management of a single emergency event highlights the tremendous importance of having incident management experts on hand to assist.

The experience of other jurisdictions such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the United States points to Incident Management Teams as an effective way to maintain and deploy incident management capacity wherever it may be required. In other words, teams are trained in advance and deployed quickly to enhance local operations or take on incident command if requested. Local authorities would still have responsibility for incident command and for the decision about what supports they require, but access to incident management expertise is ensured, as it is recognized that most communities will not be able to develop or maintain this specific expertise internally.

Incident Management Teams represent a proven way to balance local autonomy and the need for outside emergency management expertise. Moreover, these teams have the potential to enable effective incident management across an entire region that includes multiple communities, especially where more than one local government is impacted by an emergency. In these instances, vesting incident management with a single team that is well-versed in emergency management and incident command increases efficiency of decision making and reduces the potential for disagreement. It will be critical, however, to clearly define the process for how a municipality confers specific incident management responsibilities to an Incident Management Team. Local officials and Incident Management Teams must be very clear about what kinds of decisions require approval from local authorities, such as evacuation orders.

#10 Fully implement the Incident Command System so that emergency response roles and mandates are firmly established within a single, clear chain of command.

Prior to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, Alberta had already selected the Incident Command System to be the emergency response structure across the province, and it is imperative to fully implement this system as soon as possible. The Incident Command System is a leading practice under which all municipal, provincial and local participants in emergency response should be trained and prepared to act as part of a single command structure with clear roles and lines of accountability.

Full implementation requires that training and exercises be completed by key personnel in municipalities, First Nations, provincial ministries, and first responders. It is also necessary to review some of the key emergency management roles in an Alberta context, and specify how these fit into the command structure. Specifically, it was noted that more clarity is required about how Disaster Social Services, Consequence Management Officers (and other ministry staff), the NGO Council, First Nations, the Canadian Red Cross and the Fire Commissioner fit into incident command.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the Incident Command System would be impacted by the use of formal Incident Management Teams (see Recommendation #9).

#11 Build provincial and local capacity, competencies and strategies for crisis communications.

The importance of effective communications during an emergency and throughout a recovery process cannot be overstated. In the immediate aftermath of the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, the Public Affairs Bureau within the Government of Alberta provided valuable communications support, and significantly more support than had been required following smaller emergencies in the past. This was augmented by the addition of an expert communications consultant who spent several months in the Town supporting communications.

Given the unprecedented nature of the disaster, however, there are also lessons that can be applied to ensure that crisis communications are optimally effective in the future. There is a clear opportunity to formally incorporate crisis communications expertise and protocols into Alberta's emergency management approach. This experience also underscores the need for dedicated crisis communications expertise and protocols during emergency situations, including streamlined approval of public releases.

To build capacity for crisis communications, the Government of Alberta should ensure personnel with appropriate competencies are available, whether local government resources, internal government staff, contractors or a combination of the three. It is also important that specific communications strategies be integrated in provincial and local emergency planning. Information management protocols are a related component, for instance, to ensure that communicators have accurate, timely facts about operations.

Communications strategies should clearly identify who will develop and approve communications, as well as how they will be released through multiple platforms. These strategies need to be supported by training of and about communications personnel. In this way, it will be clear to first responders, governments, elected officials, incident commanders and other partners how communications are to be approved and released during an emergency.

Finally, it is important that crisis communications strategies consider not only releases during an emergency, but also messaging related to public health, planning for re-entry or recovery, and donations management following the event itself. For instance, it is critical that spokespeople are prepared to emphasize that people should donate money only, and to channel donations to predetermined organizations.

#12 Improve integration of provincial expertise in environmental hazard testing and public health, in order to streamline testing, interpretation and communication of results following a wildfire.

Extensive environmental testing was conducted following the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires to ensure the area was safe for residents and to understand the environmental impact of the fires. However, Alberta Environment was also challenged to quickly and definitively assess hazards because it was not clear to them what exactly they should be testing for, and because they did not have access to reliable standards or baseline samples to compare against. Within Alberta's health system, however, considerable expertise exists about the impact of environmental toxins on health and safety. Clearly, there is an opportunity to close this gap and better bring together the expertise of these two components of provincial emergency response. Moreover, challenges that were experienced in communicating the results of testing can be overcome through a more efficient combination of expertise in public health, environmental testing and crisis communications.

Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services and Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development should work to ensure that testing protocols, standards for likely toxins, and processes and expertise for interpreting results are well-understood and integrated. This is an issue that is particularly important for emergencies involving fire, as the chemicals produced by fires are much less predictable than hazards posed by other kinds of disasters. Therefore, specific shared protocols and expertise should be targeted to wildfires and urban fires in particular.

A more streamlined testing process should be matched with clear communications about health risks and the testing itself. The Government of Alberta should ensure that communications regarding public health and safety are tied into the crisis communications expertise and process in place during a disaster (see Recommendation #11). This means that experts in testing and interpretation will be required to work closely with communications professionals. In this way, consistent spokespeople and language can be maintained, and communications experts can help ensure that messaging is understandable by the public.

#13 Develop an approach for the Government of Alberta to coordinate delivery across ministries of those Disaster Social Services that are delivered provincially.

Disasters such as the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires place tremendous stress on individuals and families. Homes are lost, routines are broken, and there is a very real risk that necessary supports are not available. Especially for people with complex medical or social needs, the months following a disaster are a time of particular vulnerability. To their credit, this was immediately recognized by municipalities and by the province, and supports were mobilized quickly. For instance, supports were made available in reception centres, people received interim housing, and immediate medical needs were addressed.

Given the unprecedented nature of the Lesser Slave Lake disaster, the response and recovery efforts also illustrated opportunities to better integrate and align supports in the event of future disasters. Specifically, municipalities were individually responsible for supporting evacuees according to their available plans and resources, but many of the required services were provincial in nature. The Government of Alberta did not have predetermined policies, procedures or plans to coordinate this component of Disaster Social Services across both ministries and municipalities. As a result, health and human services were initially provided to residents and responders more or less independently by different ministries, municipalities, and organizations. Under the leadership of the Task Force, the province established and funded a Regional Recovery Coordination Group to coordinate support services after the evacuation period, which included a resource responsible for long-term social recovery.

It is imperative that the Government of Alberta develop and implement a model for comprehensive Disaster Social Services that encompasses both immediate and longer-term support needs of affected residents and service providers. Alberta Human Services should take a leadership role in doing so, working closely with the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, Alberta Health Services, the ministries of Health and Education, the NGO Council, and local governments. These partners are necessary to determine the range of required services and expertise, as well as how they should be deployed and coordinated locally. In addition, it is essential to define how Disaster Social Services will be integrated into the Incident Command System, as well as how they will be provided in the event of an evacuation. In the United States, for example, Disaster Social Services fits under the Operations Section of the Incident Command System, and these services are co-located and provided together in Disaster Assistance Centres.

The experience of residents and stakeholders following the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires suggests that more capacity is required for mental health supports in particular following a disaster. Providing emotional and mental health support following a disaster is a specialized skill set, and it may not be practical for Alberta's mental health system to build capacity for these services internally. Instead, the Government of Alberta should explore the potential of standing agreements with other provinces and/or private organizations to

provide counselling and other supports during response and recovery efforts. Further, wherever the capacity for these services may be built, it is critical to ensure that they can be delivered in ways that encourage uptake by those who need them.

#14 Create guidelines to help plan and execute re-entry following an evacuation, building on the successes of the re-entry after the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires.

The re-entry planning approach used for the Lesser Slave Lake region was successful in that it was inclusive, well-communicated, and effective in orchestrating a phased re-entry process. This process reflected, and indeed in many ways defined, best practices for re-entry, and should be recognized as leading practice in Alberta and beyond. In addition, related policies that were developed such as the relative priority of services to be re-established can provide helpful guidance for future re-entry planning.

Several of the successful components of the planning process should also be incorporated into a common approach for future evacuation situations in Alberta. For instance, a shared and inclusive planning process that involved a range of local and provincial expertise was an important element; it would have been quicker to have one person or a few people write a plan instead of holding a large planning session, but the complexity of a large-scale re-entry demands a range of perspectives. In addition, engaging non-government organizations and the faith community to help provide re-entry kits was a tremendous success. The combination of information and supplies in these kits was very beneficial, and should be incorporated as a standard part of the re-entry process. Similarly, the system of coloured signs for residents to post in their windows as a request for service was effective and worth repeating where needed. The re-entry planning and execution is one of the key successes of the Lesser Slave Lake regional response, which is particularly commendable given the short two-week timeline. As such, the process and components should be captured and available for use in future emergencies where re-entry is necessary after an evacuation.

#15 Build on the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires experience by formalizing policy, improving processes and building capacity to ensure timely distribution of funds, effective financial management and demonstration of accountability during future emergency response efforts.

When responding to an emergency, it is critical that large sums of money can be disbursed quickly, tracked and managed effectively. When the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires occurred, the Government of Alberta was able to quickly approve and establish oversight for a large pool of emergency funds. This was a notable success of the Lesser Slave Lake region experience and is a key factor that separates the Alberta experience from less successful disaster recovery processes in other parts of the world. It is important to build on this success and ensure that the province is able to take similar action in the future, for instance by creating a standard governance structure to oversee emergency funds, and maintaining flexibility in the provincial budget to make emergency funding available. In addition, the flexible spending approach utilized in responding to the Lesser Slave Lake disaster should be formalized as policy and enhanced to include controls such as spending thresholds at different levels during emergency response.

Efficient, accountable spending during an emergency also requires more preparation to procure services, and to track and administer funds. Many emergency response situations require similar goods and services (such as fresh water, waste disposal, fencing, etc.), so pre-existing procurement arrangements will greatly speed up the process. Similarly, establishing and enhancing lists of approved vendors – both local and provincial – will create a valuable resource for future emergency response efforts.

Given that large sums of money will be channelled into procurement, it is essential that the Government of Alberta develop simple mechanisms for responders and municipalities to track expenditures, including information technology capacity. In particular, the aftermath of the Lesser Slave Lake disaster points to the fact that municipalities require more clarity about eligibility, tracking and recovery of costs incurred during emergency response. Tools developed during the response and recovery should provide a strong foundation to build more comprehensive tracking mechanisms for future events.

Finally, municipalities in particular will be challenged to administer funds efficiently because of the volume of demand for staff resources during emergency response, as well as a lack of available capacity and expertise in some cases. In the Lesser Slave Lake region, this capacity was provided in part by seconding personnel from other municipalities and by engaging an independent accounting firm. Both of these should be considered successful and leading practices that may be appropriate in the future to deliver financial management and oversight, and to provide administrative capacity if required by affected communities.

IV. Recovery

#16 Clarify the Government of Alberta's overall disaster recovery philosophy and specific role with respect to housing and stimulating the local economy following a disaster.

The provincial government has committed a great deal of money and resources to help the Lesser Slave Lake region deal with the disaster, restore what was lost, and begin the healing process. This extraordinary support, including \$289 million in funding, demonstrates the immense potential for the Government of Alberta to facilitate disaster recovery – but also highlights the critical question of how much and what kinds of support the province should provide for future disasters.

The Government of Alberta should clarify its approach to disaster recovery in light of the Lesser Slave Lake region experience, beginning with its current philosophy. Some stakeholders suggested that the underlying philosophy was to restore community infrastructure to what it would have been, were it not for the fires. In practice, however, the goal of the Recovery Plan was not only to return the region to its pre-disaster state, but to ensure that the disaster did not put these communities at a disadvantage. The province provided an unprecedented level of support, both in terms of financial and human resources, and took on new recovery tasks, such as providing housing and support for local business. These actions would seem to be more in line with the formal positions taken in some other jurisdictions (such as the United Kingdom and Australia) that recovery requires more than simply replacing the infrastructure that was in place before.

It is important to clarify the philosophy in Alberta, and to build on the Lesser Slave Lake region experience to provide greater clarity around what qualifies as restoration and recovery, and to what extent. In other words, the province should define how far the government will go to help communities recover and to position them for future growth.

Related to the fundamental question of how much recovery support the Government of Alberta should provide, it is essential to clarify the role of the provincial government in two specific pillars of recovery: housing and stimulating the local economy. There is no question that the Government of Alberta provided substantial and critically important support in both of these areas following the Lesser Slave Lake disaster. It should be clear in advance of future disasters what kinds of housing support affected Albertans can expect, and what the boundaries of this support will be. A relevant international example is the National Disaster Housing Strategy in the United States, which provides a framework for addressing the housing needs of disaster survivors from short-term shelter, through interim housing, and to permanent housing.

Similarly, it is important to define the extent to which the Government of Alberta will support local economies following disasters, building on the successes observed in the Lesser Slave Lake region. In this case, several provincial government interventions were

undertaken and well-received, but there needs to be a formal policy discussion on what support would be most effective and appropriate. This provincial policy is required to structure support for local economies after future emergencies, in alignment with Alberta's philosophy of the provincial role in disaster recovery.

#17 Formalize a provincial approach to support disaster recovery planning, building on the success of the shared planning process used after the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires including the regional Tri-Council model.

Recognizing that the specific plans for recovering from a disaster always vary substantially according to the circumstances, the approach to recovery planning after the Lesser Slave Lake disaster was nevertheless highly successful and highlights several opportunities to build on what was done in this case as a leading example for future disasters. For instance, the Recovery Plan that was developed could be used as a reference or to create guidelines for what needs to be addressed in future recovery planning efforts.

In addition to the plan itself, the process used in planning for recovery of the Lesser Slave Lake region was successful and inclusive. It included and addressed the needs of key stakeholders at the political level, within government departments, and at the local level. A notable success was pioneering the Tri-Council model of shared governance at the local level, and contracting a strategic governance advisor to support the implementation and functioning of the Tri-Council. The Tri-Council structure allowed two municipalities and a First Nation to formally plan together for the recovery and future of the region as a whole, ensuring that shared issues could be addressed and that all local perspectives and interests could be heard. This kind of shared local governance structure may very well be needed in the future, and it will be invaluable as a starting point to have experience building the Tri-Council and access to the *Tri-Council and CAO Secretariat Governance Protocol* that was developed.

#18 Develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach for funding of disaster recovery plans that coordinates streams of funding that are essential to restore an affected community, including government funds, the insurance industry, and donations.

In the case of the Lesser Slave Lake disaster, the Recovery Plan considered how to access and channel government funding, but not the other two major sources of funding for disaster recovery: insurance and donations. That said, the Task Force realized that all three sources of funding were important and actively worked to collaborate with key stakeholders such as the Insurance Bureau of Canada and the Canadian Red Cross. Through this type of collaboration, a number of issues were managed during the recovery process (e.g., consistency of insurance payout policies, donations management, etc.).

There is now an opportunity to jointly consider how all three major sources of funding should be managed in a coordinated fashion, including but not limited to confirming roles and processes for working together in future recovery processes. In this way, future plans can better coordinate the full scope of fiscal support for recovery and the potential for duplication of resources will be reduced. For example, government funding and donations can be aligned to rebuild and reinvigorate communities. Also, aligning insurance and donations allows for deliberate decisions about the extent to which those without insurance should receive more or different support. This kind of integration means, however, that both insurance and donations will have to be considered in the provincial emergency management approach in advance of a disaster.

With respect to the insurance industry, the Government of Alberta should build on the Lesser Slave Lake region experience to ensure close and direct collaboration occurs throughout the response and into recovery. The experience in the Lesser Slave Lake region demonstrated that collective bodies representing multiple insurance companies can be an effective venue to manage issues and integrate the industry in recovery efforts. Pre-existing agreements or at least well-defined roles should be in place between the Government of Alberta and collective insurance bodies to facilitate collaboration. Insurance companies should also be immediately involved in reception centres to serve Albertans faster and allay worry. Australia provides an instructive example of this level of coordination between government and insurance: the Insurance Disaster Response Organization in that country provides a single point of contact for both government and citizens that helps to streamline and address insurance issues.

Donations should also be an integral part of recovery planning and decision making after a disaster. This will require a province-wide approach to donations management (see Recommendation #19) in order to integrate this source of funding into planning. Other jurisdictions have successfully achieved this in several ways. In Australia, for example, the Red Cross was asked in 2009 to administer the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund, through which hundreds of millions of dollars were allocated under the leadership of an independent Advisory Panel.

#19 Develop and implement a province-wide approach to managing donations following a disaster.

During the course of this review, it became apparent that virtually every jurisdiction is challenged by the immense task of managing donations following a major disaster. Alberta's experience was no exception. There are a number of opportunities highlighted by the Lesser Slave Lake region experience that should help improve donations management in the future.

Provincially, the Government of Alberta should establish a single approach for managing donations as a part of the overall recovery effort. This means that a number of steps must be taken in advance of a disaster to coordinate the different players involved in collecting and managing donations. For instance, emergency planning and response efforts should include communications strategies that encourage people to donate money only, and that channel the bulk of these donations to as few organizations as possible. Further, it is imperative to determine in advance how donations will be used, who will manage the funds and what rules will govern how they will be allocated. Those organizations involved should, to the extent possible, have similar philosophies for how donations should be collected and used – and these should be aligned with the recovery philosophy of the Government of Alberta as well. Not all organizations that may receive donations can realistically be included, but it is critical to channel donations to as few as possible if they are to be coordinated effectively.

In the Alberta context, the NGO Council is a promising venue for coordinating donations. The Government of Alberta should engage with the NGO Council and create a shared donations management strategy that its members understand and agree with. Based on this strategy, formal agreements should be established with agencies represented on the NGO Council to manage and allocate donated funds and goods in the event of a disaster. It is particularly important that the donations management strategy define governance and decision making processes for managing and allocating donations received. Governance for donations management can and should include both local representation and transparent, impartial decision making processes.

Another important plank of a donations management strategy is mechanisms to match physical donations to need wherever possible. This not only addresses the unique circumstances of individuals and families better than bulk donations of goods, but can also help to minimize challenges in allocating items fairly. This kind of approach has been demonstrated successfully in the United States, where the Federal Emergency Management Agency can provide a national online application allowing the general public to register their offers of donated goods and services, thus providing the state or local coordination team with real-time information and the ability to match offers to need.

Establishing a single approach for managing donations has immense value, not only in terms of efficiency but also as a way to integrate donated funds into an overall structure for funding disaster recovery.



Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

- C -

Chain of command means the orderly line of authority and responsibility along which directions and instructions are passed during an incident response.

Command means the act of directing, ordering, or controlling by virtue of explicit legislation, regulation, or delegated authority.

Communications means the process of transmission of information through verbal, written, or electronic means.

Consequence Management Officer is the staff member from another Government of Alberta Ministry or Federal Government Department who is assigned to the Provincial Operations Centre upon activation.

Coordination means the integration of multi-agency efforts and available capabilities, which may be interdependent, in order to achieve defined objectives.

- D -

Disaster means an event that results in serious harm to the safety, health or welfare of people or in widespread damage to property.

Disaster Recovery Program means a program approved by the Minister of Municipal Affairs under the Disaster Recovery Regulation, which is managed and delivered by the Alberta Emergency Management Agency in response to a major emergency or disaster to assist affected Albertans in their recovery efforts.

Disaster Social Services means a planned emergency response program intended to meet the immediate and long-term survival and psychological needs of individuals impacted by an emergency or disaster.

- E -

Emergency means an event that requires prompt co-ordination of action or special regulation of persons or property to protect the safety, health, or welfare of people or to limit damage to property.

Emergency management means the management of emergencies concerning all-hazards, including all activities and risk management measures related to prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) means the physical location at which the coordination of information and resources to support incident management (on-scene operations) activities normally takes place.

Emergency responder means the organization(s) required to plan and prepare a response to an emergency.

Evacuation means the organized, phased, and supervised withdrawal, dispersal, or removal of individuals from dangerous or potentially dangerous areas, and their reception and care in safe areas.

Evacuee means the person removed from a place of actual or potential danger to a place of relative safety.

- F -

First Nation means the various Aboriginal peoples in Canada who are neither Inuit nor Métis. This report refers primarily to Sawridge First Nation government and its members.

- H -

Hazard means something that is potentially dangerous or harmful, often the root cause of an unwanted outcome.

Health system is the organization of people, institutions, and resources to deliver health care services to meet the health needs of target populations.

- I -

Incident is an occurrence, natural or human induced (or caused) that requires an emergency response to protect life, property or the environment. Incidents can, for example, include major disasters, emergencies, wildland and urban fires, floods, etc.

Incident Command System (ICS) is a standardized on-scene emergency management system specifically designed to provide an integrated organizational structure that reflects the complexity and demands of single or multiple incidents, without being hindered by jurisdictional boundaries. ICS is the combination of facilities, equipment, personnel, procedures, and communications operating within a common organizational structure,

designed to aid in the management of resources during incidents. It is used for all kinds of emergencies and is applicable to small as well as large and complex incidents. ICS is used by various jurisdictions and functional agencies, both public and private, to organize field-level incident management operations.

Information management means the collection and management of information from one or more sources and the distribution of that information to one or more audiences.

Interagency means involving the participation of more than one agency.

Interim accommodation means the phase of housing assistance that covers the gap between immediate sheltering and the return of disaster victims to permanent housing (generally up to 18 months).

- L -

Lead Agency means the organization assigned by legislation, regulation, policy or plans to lead in the emergency management of an incident.

Local Authority includes the Council and Administration of the Town of Slave Lake, Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No.124, and the Chief and Band Council of Sawridge First Nation.

- M -

Municipality means a city, town, village, summer village, municipal district, or special area that includes the area comprising an Indian reserve where an agreement is entered into with the Government of Canada in which it is agreed that the band council is a local authority for the purposes of the Emergency Management Act. This includes all areas within the Town of Slave Lake and Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No.124.

- P -

Preparedness: Building capability to effectively and rapidly respond when items at risk are about to be or are affected by hazards. It includes the planning, exercising and education necessary to achieve a state of readiness for incidents, disasters and major emergencies.

Procedure is a series of actions conducted in a certain order or manner.

Procurement means the acquisition of goods or services.

Protocol is a set of established guidelines for actions (which may be designated by individuals, teams, functions or capabilities) under various specified conditions.

Provincial Operations Centre (POC) When required or requested, the provincial government provides incident or disaster support through the Provincial Operations Centre. The Provincial Operations Centre is comprised of the facility and staff which coordinates cross-government response and support when local governments, Alberta

government departments, agencies and/or industry cannot manage an incident alone. It is located within the Alberta Emergency Management Agency under the Ministry of Alberta Municipal Affairs.

- R -

Reception centre means the building that is out of danger providing basic accommodation to evacuees after an emergency for a short period of time.

Recovery means the coordinated process of supporting emergency-affected communities in reconstruction of physical infrastructure, supporting the economy, restoring the environment and ensuring the right resources are in place to support the safety, health, physical, mental and social wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Recovery plan is a plan developed to restore an affected area or community.

Re-entry means the systematic return of individuals back to the emergency-affected area based on direction of local authorities.

Resident is a person who lives somewhere permanently or on a long-term basis.

Resources means all the assets, people, skills, information, technology, premises, and supplies and information that an organization has to have available to use, when needed, in order to operate and meets its objective.

Response means executing the capability to minimize the losses to items at risk (with an emphasis on prevention of injury/loss of life) when they are affected by hazard(s).

Risk assessment is the process for evaluating risk associated with a specific hazard and defined in terms of probability and frequency of occurrence, impact, exposure and consequences.

- S -

Situational awareness means being aware and keeping track of what is happening provincially, federally and internationally. This can be achieved through sharing information on events and agency/stakeholder actions.

Sources:

- *Annex A - Definitions*, Alberta Emergency Plan, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, Government of Alberta.
- *Definitions*, Agency Response Plan, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, Government of Alberta.
- *Definitions*, Emergency Management Act, Province of Alberta.
- *Definitions*, Municipal Government Act, Province of Alberta.
- *Definitions*, Emergency Response and Recovery, HM Government, United Kingdom.
- *Manual 3: Australian Emergency Management Glossary*, Attorney-General's Department, Emergency Management Australia, Australian Government.



Appendix B: Project Methodology

The Government of Alberta, through Municipal Affairs, commissioned this study to conduct a post-operations report and to identify lessons learned from the May 2011 wildfires in the Lesser Slave Lake region. The final report brings together the full range of input and analysis over the course of the project, including:

- a catalogue of the disaster response that documents the actions taken by different stakeholders and captures the lived experience of residents and stakeholders;
- an assessment of the disaster response against existing standards, protocols and leading practices and integrates the advice of experts from other jurisdictions/events; and
- recommendations to improve Alberta's emergency management system.

Approach

The process of identifying lessons from this disaster is complex, given the range of experiences, organizations, actions and practices that are relevant. A multi-faceted approach was used, as no single method is sufficient to achieve a thorough and nuanced understanding of what occurred during the response and recovery period. The work plan included multiple concurrent, interrelated streams of work to meet the technical, stakeholder engagement and public consultation requirements of the project. KPMG worked closely with our partners at ADR Education to engage with the public and with stakeholders.

The methodology was based on three pillars to capture the complexity of the event:

1. **Understand the lived experience of residents and stakeholders:**

- **Understand the lived experience of residents.** It is fundamentally important to understand how residents of the Lesser Slave Lake region and surrounding communities experienced the wildfires response. During May to June 2012, people from Lesser Slave Lake region were provided the opportunity to share their stories and identify lessons learned.
- **Understand the experience of stakeholders.** It is similarly important to understand how those planning and delivering services and assistance experienced the response, including elected officials and staff from the Town of Slave Lake (the Town), the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No. 124 (Municipal District), Sawridge First Nation, the Government of Alberta, other first responders, supporting communities and non-government organizations. It is important to acknowledge that many local stakeholders were affected personally as well as played a professional role in the response and recovery. From March to April 2012, the first stage of engagement sessions occurred with Government of Alberta officials and staff and then from May to June 2012, the second stage of engagement sessions involved officials and staff from the Town, Municipal District, First Nation, first responders, supporting communities and non-government organizations.

2. **Assess against standards, procedures and protocols:**

- **Existing standards, procedures and protocols.** It is important to understand the extent to which established standards, procedures and protocols were followed and the reasons why – especially where actions were not consistent with these documents. During the stakeholder engagement sessions, existing documents were validated and/or identified in preparation for assessment.
- **Leading practices.** Although unique in many respects, the Lesser Slave Lake Regional Urban Interface Wildfire is not the first disaster of this magnitude in the world. Protocols, procedures and standards from other jurisdictions that are recognized as leading practices were compared with the existing documents.

3. **Engage experts in making sense of the experience.** There is not a “recipe book” to guide a response of this magnitude. Expert advisors who bring real-world experience from their involvement in recovery processes following disasters of similar scale in other jurisdictions or who bring specialized knowledge such as environmental testing, records management or health system relief reviewed the preliminary findings and assisted in identifying lessons from this event and making recommendations for future emergency responses.

These three pillars of the approach informed each of the seven themes.

Figure 2: Project Methodology



To achieve a consistent and thorough understanding of each of theme, the methodology was designed to answer the following key questions:

1. What actions were taken, and by whom?
2. What worked well and where were challenges encountered?
3. What was the experience of those involved?
4. How can future responses be improved?

By focusing the analysis around these key questions, the technical assessment of the disaster response was integrated with the experiences, insights and stories gleaned from residents and other stakeholders.

Project Work

The project was initiated with Alberta Municipal Affairs on February 16th, 2012 with a strong shared understanding of how the project activities would unfold, what would be

achieved, and what would be produced. This meeting was followed by two meetings with the CAO Secretariat and the Tri-Council.

Public Engagement (Lived Experience)

May 1 – June 30, 2012

The objective of this phase was to gather information from residents (from the Town of Slave Lake, Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No. 124, Sawridge First Nation, and surrounding communities) regarding their experience with the wildfires response and recovery efforts. In order to provide affected residents with an opportunity to fully debrief and share their personal experiences, this phase focused primarily on having people “share their story”, rather than limiting them to a prescribed set of questions or topics. In addition, we extracted valuable lessons about the experience from the community point of view, some of which are relevant to the technical assessment of the response.

The public engagement plan (developed in phase one) identified four primary segments:

1. Residents of the Town of Slave Lake, including:
 - a. Residents whose homes were habitable after the wildfires (i.e., not damaged or had minor damage).
 - b. Residents whose homes were destroyed by the wildfires and are in interim housing.
 - a. Residents whose homes were destroyed and have since left Slave Lake.
 - b. Specific age cohorts including youth and seniors.
2. Slave Lake business owners.
3. Residents of Sawridge First Nation.
4. Residents within the Municipal District of Lesser Slave River No. 124.

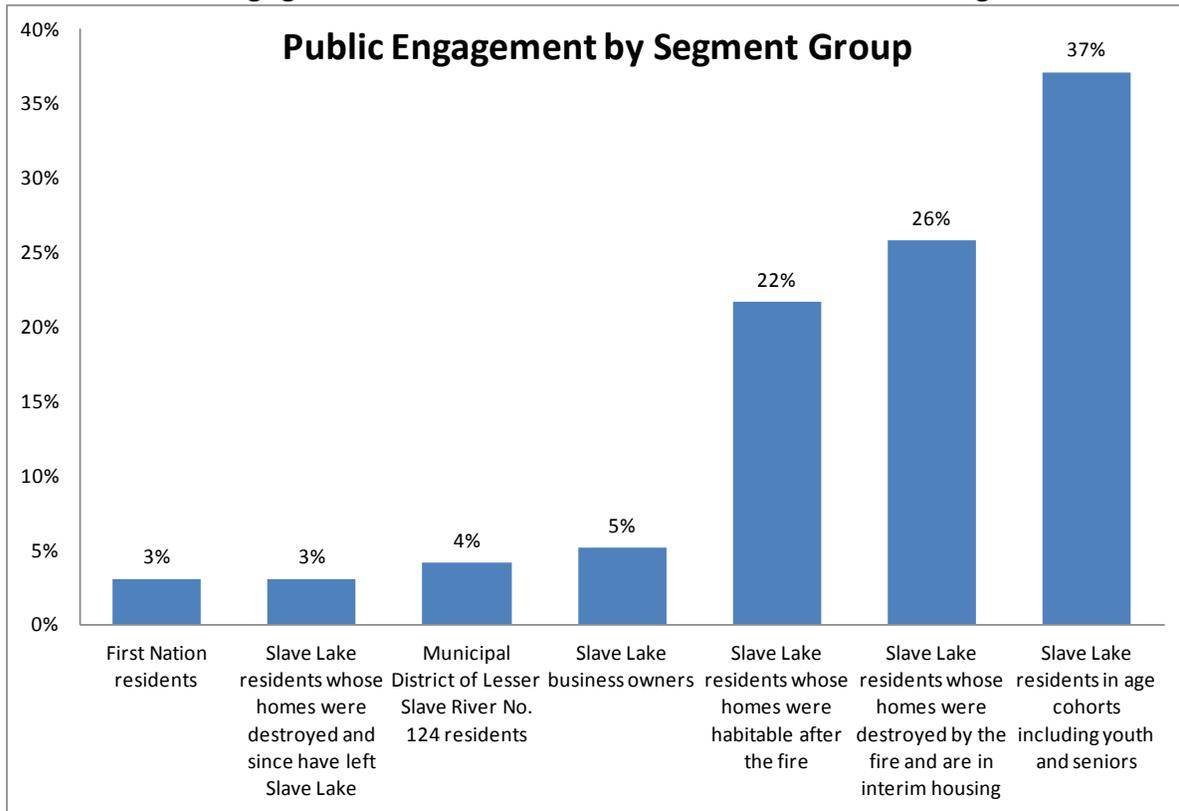
To promote public participation, multiple engagement methods were used including individual or small group interviews, focus groups, social media (i.e., Facebook, dedicated e-mail address) and informal discussions within local businesses (i.e., Tim Horton’s, McDonald’s, Holiday Inn Express). In addition, office hours were established for a five-week period within the Lakeland Centre and administrative support was provided by the Regional Recovery Coordination Group. All public engagement sessions involved at least one facilitator and one analyst and some focus groups involved more than one facilitator and analyst.

The key activities and deliverables included:

- Public communications consisted of three articles within The Lakeside Leader (project initiation, project update and project closure); posters advertised throughout region; public brochure with project insert advertised at commemorative event; web link on Town, Municipal District and First Nation websites; and news releases on radio station 92.7 Lake FM.

- Meetings occurred with 117 residents using multiple engagement methods: individual or small group interviews (57), focus groups (4) and informal sessions (20).
- Facebook and e-mail were predominately used as communication tools.

Table 1: Public Engagement: 117 Residents in the Lesser Slave Lake region



Stakeholder Engagement

March 20 – June 27, 2012

The objective of this phase was to gather data from all involved stakeholder groups regarding their experience with the wildfires response and recovery efforts. The stakeholder engagement plan (developed in phase one) identified a two-stage approach which consisted of:

- Stage 1 Stakeholders: Officials and staff from the Government of Alberta
- Stage 2 Stakeholders: Officials and staff from the Town, Municipal District, First Nation, first responders, supporting communities and non-government organizations.

The stakeholder sessions in both stages had a similar underlying structure, which enabled consistent data collection and robust analysis. Detailed guides were prepared and

distributed prior to each interview or focus group, and included key questions. The discussion approach had several areas of focus, as follows:

1. Understanding their role and experience in the response and recovery.
2. Gathering insights about themes that were identified as relevant to the particular stakeholder(s).
3. Open-ended questions to discover any relevant insights, experiences and/or improvement suggestions that have not been captured in the previous lines of questioning.
4. Requests for documents that include relevant protocols, standards, or procedures specific to their organization. In addition, any relevant research or previous reviews of the wildfires response were requested as well.

For stage one, 36 stakeholder engagement sessions were conducted with the following participants from the Government of Alberta. This included 15 individual interviews and 21 focus group sessions with 88 representatives from the following ministries that participated in the response to recovery efforts:

- Aboriginal Relations
- Education
- Environment and Water
- Executive Council including Public Affairs Bureau
- Finance and Enterprise
- Health and Wellness
- Housing and Urban Affairs
- Human Services
- Infrastructure
- Municipal Affairs including:
 - Local Government Services
 - The Alberta Emergency Management Agency
 - The Provincial Operations Centre
 - The Fire Commissioner
 - Field Operations
- Transportation
- Treasury Board

For stage two, 16 stakeholder engagement sessions were conducted with the following participants from the Town, Municipal District, First Nation, first responders, supporting communities and non-government organizations. This included 2 individual interviews and 14 focus group sessions with 77 representatives from the following organizations that participated in the response to recovery efforts:

- Alberta Health Services
- Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
- Calgary Emergency Management Agency
- Canadian Red Cross
- Reception Centre Hosts
 - City of Edmonton
 - City of Grande Prairie
 - Town of Westlock
 - Town of Valleyview
- Lesser Slave Regional Fire Services
- Lesser Slave Lake Regional Housing Authority
- Municipal District No.124: Reeve, Council and Chief Administration Officer
- NGO Council
- Sawridge First Nation: Chief, Council and Executive Director
- Strathcona County Emergency Services
- Town of Slave Lake: Mayor, Council, Chief Administrative Officer, Directors and Staff
- RCMP

The stakeholder engagement sessions identified the actions taken by various levels of government, first responder agencies and various non-government agencies. The stakeholder engagement sessions were the starting point for understanding the extent to which established protocols, procedures and legislation (referred to as 'documents' from this point forward) were followed to guide actions taken during the response and recovery efforts. During this phase, two categories of documents were identified (i.e., documents available on May 14th, 2011 and documents newly created on May 15th, 2011 to August 22nd, 2011) and the reasons why they were used were discussed. This was followed by a

comparison of the actions taken and how they align with emerging standards and leading practices. This analysis was shared with technical advisors to solicit expert opinion regarding what changes are required to align documents with leading practices.

The document review was also completed in two stages, as follows:

- Stage 1: Develop a catalogue of documents and determine what documents were used to guide actions. The catalogue includes three categories of documents:
 - key documents that were available on May 14th, 2011 (e.g., Alberta Emergency Plan) and used during the response and recovery;
 - other relevant documents that were available on May 14th, 2011 (e.g., Federal Emergency Response Plan) and there is limited evidence of their use during the response and recovery; and
 - key documents developed from May 15th, 2011 to August 22nd, 2011 (e.g., Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan) and used during the response and recovery.
- Stage 2: Assessment of key and available documents against emerging standards and leading practices. This analysis was shared with technical advisors to solicit expert opinion regarding what changes are required to align documents with leading practices.

The findings from the document review are incorporated throughout this report and the detailed analysis is available within a supplemental document. The key activities and deliverables included:

- Stakeholder engagement sessions conducted in two stages:
 - Stage 1: 88 stakeholders participated from March 20 – April 24, 2012
 - Stage 2: 77 stakeholders participated from May 7 – June 27, 2012
- Preliminary list of opportunities for improvement
- Preliminary Timeline of Events for inclusion in the Interim Report
- Initial list of key documents and additional documents
- Recommendations for leading practices

During the development of the final report, a series of working sessions were convened to bring the right expertise to address a specific area of analysis. These meetings relied on the subject matter experts to help interpret the findings, based on their experience in other jurisdictions and knowledge of best practices in the field.

Background information and detailed guides were prepared and distributed prior to each working session, and included key questions. The discussion approach had several areas of focus, as follows:

1. confirming and refining the analysis of stakeholder engagement and document review;
2. gathering insights about themes that were identified as relevant to the particular subject matter expert(s);
3. deepening our assessment of the adequacy and appropriateness of the response against the documents that were in place;
4. identifying successes and potential opportunities for improvement; and
5. identifying leading practices.

In total, seven working sessions were conducted with subject matter experts from across the globe.



Appendix C: Key Stakeholders

The Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires involved stakeholders from various emergency agencies, different orders of government, various ministries from the Government of Alberta and significant number of non-government organizations. The following stakeholders have been identified as having key roles in the response and recovery efforts:

1. **Displaced residents and public:** The displaced residents and public were instrumental to supporting a variety of roles during and after the wildfires. These roles ranged from providing support to the emergency personnel during the response; to providing volunteer support at the reception centres, during the re-entry and throughout the recovery process. Despite the challenges and losses faced by the residents, they demonstrated resilience and purpose to respond to the emergency and restore their lives and communities.

Emergency Management Structures:

2. **Alberta Emergency Management Agency:** The Alberta Emergency Management Agency is the coordinating agency within the Government of Alberta that provides strategic policy direction and works collaboratively with its emergency management partners. The agency develops, implements, manages and maintains the Alberta emergency management system as described in the Alberta Emergency Plan. The Alberta Emergency Management Agency is also responsible for establishing mutual aid agreements, and maintaining liaison, with the Government of Canada and bordering provinces, territories and states.

3. **Emergency Operations Centre:** In the event of an emergency, municipalities are required to establish an Emergency Operations Centre to manage the larger aspects of the emergency and to exercise the authority of the local officials. The Emergency Operations Centre functions as a point of coordination or “nerve centre”, addressing the needs of the municipality as a whole as well as anticipating and supporting the needs of one or more incident sites. Coordination and dissemination of information is another critical function of the Emergency Operations Centre.

The Director of Emergency Management becomes the Director of Emergency Operations during an incident and is in charge of the Emergency Operations Centre. Representation at the Emergency Operations Centre includes members of the emergency management agency (i.e., the disaster social services manager, emergency public information officer, representatives of municipal departments as well as emergency response agencies such as fire and police, and may include regional health authorities and industry).

Initially, the Town and the Municipal District had setup their own Emergency Operations Centres to coordinate response efforts. These two Emergency Operations Centres were combined on May 15th, 2011.

4. **Provincial Operations Centre:** The Government of Alberta provides incident or disaster support through the Provincial Operations Centre as and when assistance is requested. The Provincial Operations Centre is comprised of the facility and staff which coordinates cross-government response and support when local governments, Alberta government departments, agencies and/or industry cannot manage an incident on their own. It is located within the Alberta Emergency Management Agency under the Ministry of Municipal Affairs. The Provincial Operations Centre located in Edmonton, operates on a 24/7 basis at one of four levels of readiness. Some ministries also have their own operations infrastructure and resources that work collaboratively and in coordination with the Provincial Operations Centre. The Provincial Operations Centre was escalated to level four on May 15th, 2011. A direct line between the Emergency Operations Centre and Provincial Operations Centre was also established on May 15th, 2011.

Entities Created in Response to the Disaster:

5. **Tri-Council:** The Municipal District, the Town and Sawridge First Nation each have their own councils. Beginning on May 27th, 2011, the three Councils began joint meetings to discuss and plan for the recovery of the region. This collaboration evolved into a formal Tri-Council to jointly plan and govern the recovery process for

the region as a whole. The Tri-Council was and continues to be supported by the Chief Administrative Officers (CAO) from the Municipal District and Town and the Executive Director for Sawridge First Nation, known collectively as the CAO Secretariat.

6. **Slave Lake Regional Recovery Task Force:** To support the response and recovery efforts, a Government of Alberta Task Force at the Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) level was created. ADM's from various ministries were included as part of this Task Force and their objective was to coordinate provincial efforts, provide guidance on the recovery efforts and to provide support to the local government. Another objective of the Task Force was to facilitate streamlined decision making and act as a liaison between the province and local governments.
7. **Regional Recovery Coordination Group:** A Regional Recovery Coordination Group consisting of seconded Government of Alberta staff and contracted consulting resources was created and engaged to provide additional support and advice to the Tri-Council, through the CAO Secretariat, on the implementation of the Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan and to provide onsite support to local government recovery efforts. The Regional Recovery Coordination Group has a two- to three-year mandate and continues to be based out of the Lesser Slave Lake region.
8. **Lesser Slave Lake Regional Housing Authority:** As part of response efforts, the Lesser Slave Lake Regional Housing Authority (housing authority) was initially made up of volunteers and provides assistance by completing housing assessment for displaced residents. During the recovery phase the housing authority is managing and acting as a landlord for the interim housing units in the Lesser Slave Lake region. The housing authority is currently overseen by a board of seven members and has representatives from the Municipal District and Town, along with other representatives.

First Responders & Other Emergency Management Structures:

9. **Fire Departments and Wildland Firefighters:** Firefighters from across the province and other provinces were dispatched to respond to the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires. These firefighters provided invaluable support to the Lesser Slave Regional Fire Service and Alberta Sustainable Resource Development in responding to and suppressing the wildfires.
10. **Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP):** RCMP officers were closely connected with the combined Emergency Operations Centre on May 15th, 2011, and supported the evacuation of the residents of the Lesser Slave Lake region. The

RCMP also played a key role in controlling access into and out of the Town of Slave Lake before, during and after the evacuation and during the re-entry phase.

11. **Strathcona County Emergency Services:** As the first external emergency services unit on scene, Strathcona County Emergency Services provides a full range of emergency response services, including coordination and fire suppression support. During the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, Strathcona County Emergency Services provided assistance to the local and regional firefighters in the Lesser Slave Lake region. Moreover, they provided initial incident management and later the fire ground command role.
12. **Calgary Emergency Management Agency:** The Calgary Emergency Management Agency is the emergency management agency serving the City of Calgary. During the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, the Calgary Emergency Management Agency was deployed to provide assistance to the Lesser Slave Lake region and had a lead role within the Emergency Operations Centre.
13. **Fire Commissioner of Alberta:** The Fire Commissioner of Alberta is a member of the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. During the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, the Fire Commissioner coordinated incident management teams, firefighting resources, equipment, and established water supplies for firefighting efforts from across the province for the Lesser Slave Lake region during the response phase. The Fire Commissioner also provided support during the recovery phase by providing assistance to the local firefighting agencies in their investigation responsibilities.
14. **Field Officers:** The Alberta Emergency Management Agency deploys field officers to the Emergency Operations Centre during an incident to facilitate liaison between the Provincial Operations Centre and the local authority, and to provide provincial subject matter expertise to the Emergency Operations Centre Director. These field officers are regionally based. During routine operations they assist local authorities with their activities in the prevention/mitigation and preparedness pillars of emergency management, thereby establishing relations with local emergency management personnel before the critical response and recovery phases of an incident. On May 15th, 2011, two field officers were present in the Emergency Operations Centre in the Town of Slave Lake.

Support Services and Surrounding Municipalities:

15. **Alberta Health Services:** Alberta Health Services (AHS) supported the evacuation of patients from the Slave Lake Healthcare Centre and other health facilities. AHS also activated its Zone Emergency Operations Centre in Edmonton on May 15th, 2011. Staff provided other health services to first responders throughout the

response and recovery phases. AHS was also responsible for communicating the results of the environment testing.

16. **NGO Council of Alberta:** The NGO Council of Alberta was formed in 2000 to support Alberta municipalities in their response to major emergencies and disasters and to reduce duplication of effort of responding member organizations. Membership is open to any not-for-profit non-government organization which meets certain criteria and subscribes to the Council's guiding principles. The NGO Council also provides staff to the Provincial Operations Centre if required. The NGO Council was accepting donated goods for the Lesser Slave Lake region.
17. **Canadian Red Cross:** The Canadian Red Cross is a registered charity that provides disaster management support to communities in Canada affected by emergencies and disaster. They are a member organization of Alberta's NGO Council. During the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, the Canadian Red Cross provided evacuee registration services, evacuee support and assistance with operating the reception and reception centres. The Canadian Red Cross was also accepting monetary donations from the public for Alberta Wildfires.
18. **Canada Task Force 2:** Canada Task Force 2 (CAN-TF2) is one of five nationally recognized heavy search and rescue teams and is based out of Calgary. CAN-TF2 is a team of highly trained individuals and has significant experience in incident management. CAN-TF2 was initially dispatched to support Alberta Health Services in setting up a hospital in Westlock. However, they were asked to continue to the Lesser Slave Lake region to support in the response efforts as an Incident Management Team – but did so as members of the Calgary Emergency Management Agency, and not representing CAN-TF2.
19. **Surrounding Municipalities:** In response to the mandatory evacuation of the Lesser Slave Lake region, surrounding municipalities opened their communities to provide accommodations for the fleeing residents. Reception centres were set up in ten locations: Athabasca, Westlock, Boyle, Edmonton, High Prairie, Grande Prairie, Peace River, Valleyview, Smith and Wabasca. Local municipal officials provided direction to other stakeholders within the reception and reception centres.

Government of Alberta:

The following Government of Alberta departments and organizations were also stakeholders, in addition to the structures, organizations and supports mentioned above.

20. **Alberta Aboriginal Relations:** The Ministry of Aboriginal Relations activities included communications with First Nations communities and acting as a liaison

between the federal government, provincial government and the First Nation governments impacted by the wildfires.

21. **Alberta Children and Youth Services:** Alberta Children and Youth Services (now part of Alberta Human Services) provided staff to assist in the establishment and operation of reception centres, supplied professional child care for families during the Slave Lake bus tours for residents, and granted temporary financial assistance for child care while families made arrangements to secure housing and other supports.
22. **Alberta Education:** Alberta Education provided support to students in the kindergarten to grade 12 education system. Staff provided a variety of learning options for students in the region, and helped transition students who temporarily relocated to schools in new communities. The ministry cancelled Provincial Achievement Tests and granted exemptions from Diploma Examinations for students affected by the wildfires.
23. **Alberta Employment and Immigration:** The Ministry of Employment and Immigration (now part of Alberta Human Services) provided its staff to assist in establishment and operation of reception centres, provided monetary assistance to evacuees, and coordinated with various non-government organizations to provide assistance to the evacuees.
24. **Alberta Environment and Water:** The Ministry of Environment and Water (now Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development) completed the physical testing of the ground air and water in the Lesser Slave Lake region impacted by the wildfires. Alberta Environment worked closely with Alberta Health Services (AHS), and it provided the data AHS required to determine the level of hazard.
25. **Alberta Executive Council:** The Executive Council of the Government of Alberta, at the direction of the Premier of Alberta, created the Slave Lake Regional Recovery Task Force. Further, Executive Council provided assistance by allocating staff to support the evacuee reception centres, coordinating policy decisions through its Policy Coordination Office, and providing communication assistance through the Public Affairs Bureau.
26. **Alberta Finance and Enterprise:** Finance and Enterprise (now Treasury Board and Finance, and Enterprise and Advanced Education) had a key role in supporting economic recovery by providing information for local business owners and municipalities. For example, staff members from Finance also worked with business owners who had suffered damages and/or losses to enable them to

return to business as soon as possible, and also coordinated provision of insurance information for the displaced residents.

27. **Alberta Health and Wellness:** Alberta Health and Wellness (now Alberta Health) assisted in the response and recovery efforts by providing advice on air and water advisories and assisting with restoring the Slave Lake Healthcare Centre to full operations. Alberta Health and Wellness was also responsible for interpreting the results of environmental testing completed by Alberta Environment and Water.
28. **Alberta Housing and Urban Affairs:** Housing and Urban Affairs (now part of Alberta Municipal Affairs) was responsible for operating provincially owned and/or operated social housing units and administering capital grant programs for affordable housing amongst a few of its activities. The ministry was responsible for developing and implementing the Emergency Accommodation Program, providing assistance with the placement of essential and key workers and developing an interim housing solution for the displaced residents.
29. **Alberta Infrastructure:** Infrastructure also played a key role in providing an interim accommodation solution for the Lesser Slave Lake region. The ministry assisted by procuring and servicing sites for the interim housing, and installing interim accommodations on these sites. As part of its mandate the ministry also has the responsibility to decommission the properties, once their purpose has been served.
30. **Alberta Municipal Affairs:** Municipal Affairs provides assistance to municipalities across the province. Municipal Affairs provided its staff to assist with the recovery efforts, coordinated with the Town of Sylvan Lake to obtain CAO assistance and provided external consultants to provide assistance to Tri-Council. Municipal Affairs also supplied the region with equipment supplies such as office furniture, computers etc. It also assisted in implementing property tax relief for property owners with damaged or destroyed properties. Municipal Affairs continues to chair the Task Force and to assist the Tri-Council and CAO Secretariat.
31. **Alberta Seniors and Community Supports:** (now part of Alberta Human Services and Alberta Health) Alberta Seniors and Community Supports provided assistance to seniors and people with disabilities who were residents of the Lesser Slave Lake region. Staff were on hand to support clients by ensuring they had access to their government financial supports, and provided emergency funding to support clients that were evacuated. Ministry services and supports were provided in the various reception centers across Alberta, as well in the Town of Slave Lake following re-entry. Seniors and Community Supports also provided staff to assist in establishment and operation of reception centres, supporting evacuees in the various evacuation centers across Alberta.

32. **Alberta Sustainable Resource Development:** (now part of Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development) As noted in the emergency management framework, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development is the lead agency for wildfire suppression in Alberta. At the time of the Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development was fighting several wildfires burning in the region and across the province.
33. **Alberta Transportation:** The Ministry of Transportation worked with the RCMP and other agencies to coordinate road closures and set up of barricades as required. As part of its efforts it was also responsible for ensuring that access into the Town of Slave Lake was appropriately blocked off during the two week evacuation period.
34. **Alberta Treasury Board:** Treasury Board (now Treasury Board and Finance) promotes efficient and effective government through strategic advice and services relating to the ministry's core businesses of accountability, budget and capital planning, responsible oil sands growth, agency governance and government air transportation services. Treasury Board provided assistance with timely approvals for funding for the response and recovery efforts, and had a key role in supporting the emergency response funding and economic recovery.



Appendix D: “How to” Manual

Overview

Responding to a disaster such as Lesser Slave Lake regional wildfires required a significant number of actions by various levels of government and other agencies/organizations.

Based on leading practice research in other jurisdictions, discussions with stakeholders and residents, and lessons learned from the Lesser Slave Lake wildfires in 2011, the following summarizes the key actions that should be considered in preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters. The analysis was guided by the following seven themes:

- Theme 1: Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination
- Theme 2: Community Evacuation and Associated Communications Protocols
- Theme 3: Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations
- Theme 4: Transition from Response to Recovery
- Theme 5: Hazard and Health Concerns
- Theme 6: Non-Government Organizations (NGO) Integration and Coordination
- Theme 7: Economic Recovery Activities and Revenue Stabilization

Note:

The following information is built from KPMG’s findings and lessons learned from the Lesser Slave Lake Region Wildfires in 2011. The content of this how-to manual serves as a guide only and does not intend to address every situation or disaster.

Theme 1: Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination

Checklist	Useful links
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Involve those individuals and/or organizations who have the related experience and expertise to respond to an emergency</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop an inventory of individuals and/or organizations that are trained and qualified to lead emergency responses. ▪ Establish protocols for contacting these individuals and requesting their assistance in the event of disaster. ▪ Identify the critical skills and competencies typically required in a response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Market for Emergency Managers: The Core Competency Conundrum. Emergency Management. http://www.emergencymgmt.com/emergency-blogs/campus?page=5& ▪ Top 10 Core Competencies and Courses as Selected by Practicing Emergency Managers, FEMA. http://training.fema.gov/emiweb/downloads/Daryl%20Spiewak.doc
<p><input type="checkbox"/> A Task Force model, or similar cross-ministry governance structure is formalized in Alberta's emergency response system</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Members of the Task Force understand their responsibilities and accountabilities during an emergency, and how they fit as part of the overall emergency management approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ AEMA Summit 2011, Slave Lake Wildfire Response and Recovery. www.aema.alberta.ca/documents/ema/MIKE_MERRITT.ppt
<p><input type="checkbox"/> A municipal emergency management plan is in place</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A local emergency plan should exist pre-disaster. These local plans should be based on leading practices and be consistent with provincial and federal emergency management plans. ▪ Provincial support is provided to complete a thorough assessment of the risks to a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing and Maintaining Emergency Operations Plans, Comprehensive Preparedness Guide 101, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/about/divisions/npd/CPG_101_V2.pdf ▪ NIMS: Frequently Asked Questions, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/NIMSF_AQs.pdf

Theme 1: Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination

Checklist

community, and to translate that assessment into a comprehensive municipal emergency management plan.

- Conduct a community hazard and risk assessment to inform the municipal emergency management plan.
 - Hazard identification – consider what hazards exist and their causes.
 - Risk assessment – consider past occurrences, possible scenarios and how frequently hazards occur, how severe their impact can be on the community, infrastructure, property, and environment, and which hazards pose the greatest threat to the community.
 - Risk Analysis – identify which hazards should be considered a priority for emergency management programs at that particular point in time.
 - Monitor and Review – develop exercises, training programs, and plans based on the most likely scenario.
- Support community residents to improve emergency preparedness commensurate with the risks specific to the community.
- Establish protocols for declaring and terminating a State of Local Emergency.
- Formalize the roles and responsibilities of local authorities (e.g., Mayor, Reeve, Council, CAO, Director of Emergency Management) during an emergency.
- Establish protocols for ensuring local personnel are trained in emergency management and have a clear understanding of their role in an emergency.
- Schedule a debriefing session with emergency managers within 24 to 72 hours of the post-disaster stage. Use this information to improve future emergency management programs.
- Develop mutual aid and standby agreements with surrounding municipalities, NGOs, and private industry to provide assistance during a disaster.
- Establish provincial quality assurance processes over local emergency management (e.g., minimum requirements for emergency preparedness exist and is enforced).

Useful links

- Emergency Preparedness for State Procurement Officials, National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO).
http://www.naspo.org/documents/Emergency_Preparedness_EP_FINAL_compressed.pdf
- Preparing for Emergencies: Guide for Communities. Community Resilience, Cabinet Office, UK.
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/PFE-Guide-for-Communities_0.pdf
- Steps in Developing a Municipal Emergency Program, Alberta Public Safety Training, Alberta Municipal Affairs.
<http://apsts.alberta.ca/online-courses/bem/chapter-6-municipal-responsibilities/steps-in-developing-a-municipal-emergency-program/>
- Emergency Planning, Cabinet Office United Kingdom.
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/emergency-planning>
- Municipal Emergency Management Guide, Justice and Public Safety, Prince Edward Island.
http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/EMO_MUN_EMG.pdf

Theme 1: Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination

Checklist	Useful links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Formalize the expense approval and procurement protocols during an emergency. 	
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Activate, operate, and deactivate the local Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), if necessary</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Outline the activation and deactivation protocols, including roles and responsibilities. ▪ Identify the physical location of the centre, including backup plans and locations. ▪ Determine what equipment will be required (i.e., basic office supplies, emergency plans, standard forms and templates including mutual aid request forms, list of key officials and means to contact the provincial government, situational awareness report forms, news release templates and maps and overlays showing the areas affected, site layout, etc.). ▪ Outline the EOC incident command structure and staffing requirements. ▪ Develop processes to ensure appropriate backfill of those members designated to the EOC. ▪ List the external agencies to be involved with the EOC (e.g., Red Cross, RCMP, etc.). ▪ Describe the emergency procedures. ▪ Develop reporting checklists for key personnel involved in the EOC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Municipal Emergency Management Guide, Justice and Public Safety, Prince Edward Island. http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/EMO_MUN_EMG.pdf
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Activate, operate, and deactivate the Provincial Operations Centre (POC), if necessary</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review the roles and responsibilities of Consequence Management Officers (i.e., Ministry representatives) within the POC (i.e., all members should know their role within the Incident Command System structure, their accountabilities, who they should be reporting to and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agency Response Plan, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, Government of Alberta http://www.aema.alberta.ca/documents/ema/Alberta_Emerg_Plan_2008(1).pdf

Theme 1: Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination

Checklist

communicating with, etc.).

- Develop processes to ensure appropriate backfill of those members designated to the POC.
- Train members of the POC on the Incident Command System structure for emergency response.
- Formalize the activation and deactivation protocols for the POC.
- Ensure the availability of required equipment (i.e., basic office supplies, emergency plans, standard forms and templates including mutual aid request forms, list of key officials and means to contact the local government, situational awareness report forms, news release templates and maps and overlays showing the areas affected, site layout, etc.).
- List the external agencies to be involved with the POC (e.g., NGO Council, etc.).

Useful links

Mutual Aid Agreements and/or standby agreements are in place pre-disaster to access a host of services/resources during a disaster

Key considerations:

- Identify the individuals, organizations, and/or surrounding municipalities that local responders could partner with to obtain and/or deliver assistance during an emergency (e.g., pre-established agreement with the Canadian Red Cross which defines what roles, if any, Canadian Red Cross personnel will play in supporting evacuees and reception centres).
- Develop formal protocols to detail how each partner will undertake and/or allocate responsibilities to deliver tasks.
- Develop standard contract templates and mutual aid request forms.
- Prepare communication materials that describe roles and responsibilities that can be shared pre-during-post disaster.

- Mutual Aid – A Short Guide for Local Authorities, Cabinet Office, UK
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/national-recovery-guidance-generic-issues-mutual-aid>
- Emergency Response and Recovery, Chapter 3: Agencies involved in responding to and recovering from emergencies. HM Government.
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Chapter%203.pdf>
- National Incident Management System (NIMS) Document, FEMA.
http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/NIMS_core.pdf
- Mutual Aid Agreements and Assistance Arrangements. FEMA.

Theme 1: Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination

Checklist	Useful links
	<p>http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/Preparedness.shtm#item2a</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manual 5: Emergency Risk Management Applications Guide, Emergency Management Australia, Attorney-General’s Department, Australian Government. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/Manual%2005-ApplicationsGuide.pdf
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Incident Management Teams are available for quick local deployment when the scale of impact and complexity of an emergency increases beyond the capacity of local municipalities</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An Incident Management Team: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes command and general staff members and support personnel. Has clear authority and/or formal response requirements and responsibilities. Has pre-designated roles and responsibilities for members (rostered and on-call: identified and able to be contacted for deployment). Is available 24/7/365. Define clear governance and incident command relationships between Incident Management Teams, local authorities and provincial government. Define criteria and processes for Incident Management Teams to be given authority to manage an incident (e.g., multiple local governments impacted, formal request from a local authority, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incident Command System, Incident Management Teams, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/incident-command-system#item2 US Fire Administration, Incident Management Team Development and Training, FEMA. http://www.usfa.fema.gov/fireservice/ops_tactics/type3_imt/imt-training.shtm
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Elected officials understand their roles and responsibilities during response to and recovery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Incident Management System (NIMS) Document, FEMA.

Theme 1: Interagency Emergency Response and Coordination

Checklist	Useful links
<p>from disasters</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Formalize the roles and major responsibilities of elected and appointed officials in the municipal emergency management plan. Specifically, this includes the roles and responsibilities in the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), declaring a State of Local Emergency and notifying the public, advocating on behalf of and communicating with residents, knowledge of agency emergency policy, etc. 	<p>http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/NIMS_core.pdf</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Work as partners with First Nations in Alberta to clarify mandates and jurisdiction related to emergency management</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clarify the mandate and jurisdiction related to First Nations and emergency management. ▪ Develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Government of Canada, Province, and First Nation communities regarding the delivery of emergency services. ▪ Formalize the role and expectation of the federal government in emergency response and within incident command. ▪ Formalize the roles and responsibilities of the Chief and Council of First Nation communities, specifically as it relates to the Emergency Operations Centre and situations where multiple local governments are impacted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First Nation Emergency Response in Manitoba: Roles and Responsibilities. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-MB/STAGING/texte-text/fnemerg_1100100020532_eng.pdf ▪ Emergency Management, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1309369889599 ▪ British Columbia Earthquake Response Plan. Emergency Management British Columbia, Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General. http://www.pep.bc.ca/hazard_plans/EQ_Plan.pdf

Theme 2: Community Evacuation and Associated Communications Protocols

Checklist

An evacuation plan in place that is a supplement to the municipal emergency management plan

Key considerations:

- Develop guidelines that detail how to establish a reception centre, what supports to provide to residents, what to expect from the Province, how to operate the centre, expectations regarding financial management and record keeping, communications, and how the centre will fit into the command structure during an emergency.
- Roles and responsibilities of the lead and support agencies for evacuations need to be determined and importantly, agreed upon, if they are not already specified in either legislation or by any other government direction. These roles and responsibilities must be clearly outlined in the evacuation plan. Specifically, this includes noting who is responsible for communicating the official evacuation order.
- Develop standby agreements with local retailers to procure emergency supplies in the event of a disaster.
- Establish protocol and procedures for the following:
 - Transporting people and traffic management (e.g., identify likely evacuation routes, muster points where residents can gather, location of nearby municipalities, etc.).
 - Shelter and rest centre accommodation (i.e., potential options in Town and in surrounding areas).
 - Support for residents (i.e., services to be offered, etc.).
 - Assisting complex needs individuals (e.g., seniors, persons with developmental disabilities, alcoholics, etc.) so that in an evacuation situation they are not exposed to excessive risk.
 - Evacuating pets and livestock.

Useful links

- The Australian Emergency Manual – Evacuation Planning, Emergency Management Australia, Attorney General’s Department, Australian Government.
www.em.gov.au/Documents/Manual11-EvacuationPlanning.
- Evacuation Operational Guidelines, Provincial Emergency Program, Emergency Management British Columbia, Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General
www.pep.bc.ca/management/Evacuation_Operational_Guidelines.pdf
- Evacuation and Shelter Guidance, Cabinet Office United Kingdom
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/evac_shelter_guidance.pdf
- The Municipal Emergency Management Guide, Ministry of Justice and Public Safety, Prince Edward Island.
www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/EMO_MUN_EMG.pdf
- Emergency Preparedness: Get Ready Kingston, City of Kingston, Ontario
<http://www.cityofkingston.ca/residents/emergency/getready.asp>
- Emergency Preparedness, Canadian Red Cross.

Theme 2: Community Evacuation and Associated Communications Protocols

Checklist	Useful links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Protecting items of cultural interest and high value (e.g., libraries, churches, etc.). ▪ Dealing with communications and the media. ▪ Financial management and recording keeping (cost recovery, cost tracking templates, etc.). ▪ Process for returning of residents. ▪ Raise awareness and educate the community on hazard information, the need to evacuate under certain prescribed circumstances and specific actions to be taken well before an incident occurs i.e., before the start of the hazard season. 	<p>http://www.redcross.ca/article.asp?id=33847&tid=001</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> A crisis communication plan/strategy exists as part of the municipal emergency plan</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish crisis communication protocols in order to deliver accurate, clear, and timely information and advice to the public so residents feel confident, safe, and well informed. This includes protocols for dealing with and informing the media, using media to warn and inform the public, and for controlling media access at the scene, etc. ▪ Define what communications media, infrastructure and platforms can be relied up to disseminate emergency messages (e.g., radio, TV, satellite phones, sirens, social media, etc.). ▪ Ensure personnel with appropriate competencies are available to build capacity for crisis communications. Specific communication strategies should be integrated in provincial and local emergency planning. ▪ Establish information management protocols to ensure that communicators have accurate, timely facts about operations. ▪ Develop standardized message templates and examples to use during a disaster. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Municipal Emergency Management Guide, Ministry of Justice and Public Safety, Prince Edward Island. www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/EMO_MUN_EMG.pdf ▪ National Incident Management System (NIMS) Document, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/NIMS_core.pdf ▪ Manual 38: Communications, Emergency Management Australia, Attorney-General's Department, Government of Australia. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/Manual38-Communications.pdf ▪ Emergency Response and Recovery, Chapter 8: Working with the Media. HM Government. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/

Theme 2: Community Evacuation and Associated Communications Protocols

Checklist	Useful links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe how and by whom residents will be warned of an impending emergency, the possibility of evacuation, and when an evacuation order has been given. ▪ Identify contingencies for when certain communications infrastructure fails, or key roles are unavailable. ▪ Clearly identify who will develop and approve communications, as well as how they will be released through multiple platforms. It should be clear to first responders, governments, elected officials, incident commands and other partners how communications are to be approved and released during an emergency. ▪ Maintain a copy of the plan electronically as well as in paper format. ▪ Review and update the plan regularly to verify that the information and protocols are accurate. ▪ Identify spokespeople to deliver consistent and clear messages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ resources/emergency-response-recovery_0.pdf ▪ Cell Phone Preparedness: Small County, Great Example. idisaster 2.0: Social Media and Emergency Management. http://idisaster.wordpress.com/category/social-media-and-emergency-management/
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Local authorities notify residents of evacuation alerts and orders and keep evacuees informed of evacuation activities and the specific actions they should take</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An evacuation order should be clear, timely, and issued from a single, predetermined decision maker within the incident command system structure. This critical decision should be supported by expertise and advice in emergency management, as well as ongoing situational awareness. ▪ An evacuation order should be accompanied by messaging to help residents understand where they should go and what they should do to escape danger. A number of methods for notifying the public should be explored, tested, and formalized in the evacuation and crisis communication plan. ▪ A flexible and resilient communications system should exist that is not reliant on one 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS), Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS), FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/emergency/ipaws/cmas.shtm ▪ Maine Headline News, the Maine Public Broadcasting Network, October 7, 2010. http://www.mpbn.net/News/MaineHeadlineNews/t/abid/968/ct/ViewItem/mid/3479/ItemId/13786/Default.aspx ▪ Evacuation Operational Guidelines, Provincial Emergency Program, Emergency Management British Columbia, Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General. www.pep.bc.ca/management/Evacuation_Operatio

Theme 2: Community Evacuation and Associated Communications Protocols

Checklist	Useful links
<p>system alone. Systems such as telephones, radio, internet, etc. should be complemented by other means to ensure the message is delivered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Methods for disseminating evacuation alerts and orders through social networking should be incorporated into emergency communication plans (e.g., through text messaging, Facebook, etc.). 	<p>nal_Guidelines.pdf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communications and Information Management, National Incident Management System, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/CommunicationsInfoMngmnt.shtm ▪ Evacuation and Shelter Guidance, Cabinet Office United Kingdom. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/evac_shelter_guidance.pdf ▪ Warning and Informing the Public, Cabinet Office United Kingdom. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/warning-and-informing-public
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Engage external partners to support the evacuation of residents</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Multiple resources will have to be coordinated in order to evacuate, which may include health services, transportation for residents, RCMP, roadblocks, first responders, NGOs and others. It is essential that incident command is coordinating these resources together, and that each participating organization understands their role, their authorities in an evacuation, and the chain of command. ▪ Develop formal protocols to detail how each partner will undertake and/or allocate responsibilities to deliver tasks. ▪ Develop standard contract templates and mutual aid request forms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mutual Aid – A Short Guide for Local Authorities, Cabinet Office, UK. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/national-recovery-guidance-generic-issues-mutual-aid ▪ Emergency Response and Recovery, Chapter 3: Agencies Involved in Responding to and Recovering from Emergencies. HM Government. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Chapter%203.pdf

Theme 3: Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations

Checklist

Useful links

A provincial database to register evacuees and document their needs during an emergency exists

Key considerations:

- Develop simple, common forms and processes to assess residents' needs following a disaster.
- Establish protocol for addressing data ownership and privacy issues related to personal and health information collected.
- Establish protocol for improving the database system each year based on outcomes and learnings from past disasters.

- Evacuation and Shelter Guidance. HM Government, United Kingdom.
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/evac_shelter_guidance.pdf
- National Registration Inquiry System (NRIS), Australia Emergency Management, Australian Government.
<http://www.em.gov.au/nemp/nris>

Communicate with evacuees and reception centres frequently

Key considerations:

- Establish protocol for releasing timely and clear communications to residents (e.g., through daily newsletters, computers and televisions, dedicated communications personnel, etc.).
- Establish protocol for maintaining good communication with evacuees throughout the time they are displaced. This will help avoid unnecessary worry and may also discourage people from attempting to return to their homes before it is safe to do so.

- Evacuation and Shelter Guidance. HM Government, United Kingdom.
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/evac_shelter_guidance.pdf

A Disaster Social Services response plan is in place

- A Detailed Guide to Roles and Responsibilities in Humanitarian Assistance. Cabinet Office United Kingdom.
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/>

Theme 3: Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations

Checklist	Useful links
<p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a comprehensive suite of “Disaster Social Services” that is ready to deploy as part of emergency response and incident command structures. The services are typically delivered through NGOs (e.g., Salvation Army, Red Cross, etc.), through a Disaster Assistance Centre (DAC) where residents may meet directly with casework specialists and apply for disaster assistance, or via outreach teams where casework specialists go directly to residents. ▪ The Disaster Social Services should be based on the principles of psychological first aid. It is believed that Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) is inappropriate following a disaster, with some evidence even suggesting that it may be detrimental. It is now considered appropriate to adopt a three-level approach to psychological support following a disaster: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Psychological First Aid (PFA) (immediate aftermath) – believed to be the most appropriate tool in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Includes promoting a sense of safety, calming, sense of self and collective/community efficacy, connectedness, and hope. ▪ Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) (weeks to months). ▪ Specialized mental health interventions (from about four weeks onwards, or as needed). ▪ Describe how Disaster Social Services and case management should be incorporated within the response effort, and specifically within the Incident Command System structure. ▪ Formalize the roles and responsibilities of the Disaster Social Services team (i.e., Province, local municipalities, NGOs, and residents). ▪ Senior officials and decision makers, in particular, should have available to them experienced advisors who are trained on the psychosocial and mental health aspects of major incidents and disasters. ▪ Establish protocol and procedures for the following: 	<p>resources/ha_rolesandresponsibilities.pdf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Humanitarian Assistance in Emergencies: Guidance on Establishing Humanitarian Assistance Centres. HM Government, United Kingdom. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/hac_guidance.pdf ▪ Evacuation and Shelter Guidance. HM Government, United Kingdom. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/evac_shelter_guidance.pdf ▪ NHS Emergency Planning Guidance: Planning for the Psychosocial and Mental Health Care of People affected by Major Incidents and Disasters. Department of Health. United Kingdom. http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_103563.pdf ▪ Unit 1: Disaster Social Services and the Incident Command System, Disaster Social Services Participant Guide, Salvation Army. http://disaster.salvationarmyusa.org/course_files/disaster_social_services_participants_manual_2009_03.pdf ▪ Disaster Health, Handbook 1. Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series, Attorney-General’s Department, Australian

Theme 3: Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations

Checklist	Useful links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Activating and deactivating the plan ▪ Reception centre management i.e., administration, traffic control, security, care of residents ▪ Registration and inquiry i.e., standardized process for accounting for people and assisting to re-reunite families ▪ Food services i.e., process for obtaining and providing refreshments, snacks, and meals ▪ Lodging i.e., accommodation options such as hotels, motels, and billeting ▪ Clothing i.e., personal hygiene items, blankets, and clothing replacement ▪ Personal services i.e., medical and/or health support, counseling and other special care ▪ Volunteer services i.e., registration and assignment of volunteers and dealing with staff and volunteer burnout and stress. Ensure there is appropriate backfill and support once the response has ended. 	<p>Government. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%20%20Disaster%20Health.PDF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Psychological First Aid: Guide for field workers. World Health Organization. http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241548205_eng.pdf ▪ Psychological First Aid: Improving Mental Health in Emergencies. International Medical Corps website. http://internationalmedicalcorps.org/page.aspx?pid=2135
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Provide support to residents at reception centres</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Immediately following an emergency, provide specialized services such as trauma and crisis counseling to help residents, staff and responders cope. These should be integrated within a range of activities and services to support individual and community wellbeing, particularly in reception centres, if these are required. ▪ Case management and continuity of support services is an important part of supporting those who have been displaced by a disaster or evacuation. Enabling case management requires solutions to collect and share personal information appropriately so that different 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A Detailed Guide to Roles and Responsibilities in Humanitarian Assistance. Cabinet Office United Kingdom. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/ha_rolesandresponsibilities.pdf ▪ Humanitarian Assistance in Emergencies: Guidance on Establishing Humanitarian Assistance Centres. HM Government, United Kingdom. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/hac_guidance.pdf ▪ Evacuation and Shelter Guidance. HM

Theme 3: Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations

Checklist	Useful links
<p>organizations can work together to meet the needs of residents and families.</p>	<p>Government, United Kingdom. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/evac_shelter_guidance.pdf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NHS Emergency Planning Guidance: Planning for the Psychosocial and Mental Health Care of People affected by Major Incidents and Disasters. Department of Health. United Kingdom. http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_103563.pdf ▪ Unit 1: Disaster Social Services and the Incident Command System, Disaster Social Services Participant Guide, Salvation Army. http://disaster.salvationarmyusa.org/course_files/disaster_social_services_participants_manual_2009_03.pdf
<p><input type="checkbox"/> A disaster housing strategy/plan exists pre-disaster</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a disaster housing framework for addressing the housing needs of disaster survivors from emergency shelters, through to interim and permanent housing. ▪ Engage all levels of government, along with NGOs, the private sector, and individual residents, to collectively address housing needs of disaster survivors. ▪ Develop formal protocols to detail how each partner will undertake and/or allocate responsibilities to deliver tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Disaster Housing Strategy, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/disasterhousing/NDHS-core.pdf ▪ National Disaster Housing Task Force, FEMA website. http://www.fema.gov/emergency/disasterhousing/national_task_force ▪ FEMA Disaster Housing: From Sheltering to Permanent Housing. http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40810.pdf

Theme 3: Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations

Checklist	Useful links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Immediately after the disaster, set up a Housing Coordination Office that is responsible for granting permissions for access into the evacuation zone, and organizing short-term accommodation for essential workers and displaced residents whose homes were lost. ▪ Local government should identify available and suitable land and building sites to be used for disaster housing, zoning and local compliance, utility infrastructure, proximity to essential services, and potential environmental hazards. ▪ Accommodation may be provided in reception centres, hotels, motels, caravan parks, houses, transportable accommodation units, apartments, etc. Larger events may even require the provision of tents or camps established by the Army or the provision of shelter modules via organizations such as the Canadian Red Cross. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FEMA’s Housing Strategy for Future Disasters, FEMA. http://www.oig.dhs.gov/assets/Mgmt/OIG_09-111_Sep09.pdf ▪ Annex 4: Disaster housing Community Site Operations, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/disasterhousing/NDHSAnnex4.pdf ▪ Community Recovery, Handbook 2. Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series, Attorney-General’s Department, Australian Government. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%20%20Disaster%20Health.PDF
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Assess housing needs of residents</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Formalize a process for collecting information about individual housing needs following a disaster. Consider using technology (i.e., web portal, etc.) to help individuals and families, who have been displaced by a disaster, find a place to live. ▪ Consolidate rental resources identified by the Province, local municipalities, private organizations, and the public to help individual and families find available rental units in their area. ▪ Work collaboratively with the insurance industry during assessment of housing needs (see further details in Theme 7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ FEMA Housing Portal, FEMA. http://asd.fema.gov/inter/hportal/home.htm ▪ National Disaster Housing Strategy, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/disasterhousing/NDHS-core.pdf ▪ National Disaster Housing Task Force, FEMA website. http://www.fema.gov/emergency/disasterhousing/national_task_force ▪ FEMA Disaster Housing: From Sheltering to Permanent Housing. http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R40810.pdf

Theme 3: Evacuee Support and Interim Accommodations

Checklist

Useful links

- FEMA's Housing Strategy for Future Disasters, FEMA.
http://www.oig.dhs.gov/assets/Mgmt/OIG_09-111_Sep09.pdf
- Annex 4: Disaster housing Community Site Operations, FEMA.
<http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/disasterhousing/NDHSAnnex4.pdf>
- Community Recovery, Handbook 2. Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series, Attorney-General's Department, Australian Government.
<http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%20%20Disaster%20Health.PDF>

Theme 4: Transition from Response to Recovery

Checklist

A re-entry plan template exists as a reference pre-disaster

Key considerations:

- Include a range of expertise (i.e., Province, municipal officials and administrators, utility providers, etc.) to assist in the planning for re-entry.
- Establish protocols and procedures for the following:
 - Recovery of critical infrastructure and workers to be in place before allowing residents back into the region.
 - Manning the re-entry of essential services.
 - Reestablishing regional key business components.
 - General re-entry procedures for evacuees.
 - Re-entry criteria.
 - Sequencing/ phased re-entry approach.
 - Waste management.
- Develop formal protocols to detail how each partner will undertake and/or allocate responsibilities to deliver tasks during re-entry.
- Establish protocols for releasing the approved re-entry plan to the media in order to communicate the information to residents.

Useful links

- Lesser Slave Lake Region Community Re-entry Plan Outline, 2011.

Assemble a Recovery Task Force early

Key considerations:

- AEMA Summit 2011, Slave Lake Wildfire Response and Recovery.
www.aema.alberta.ca/documents/ema/MIKE_ME_RRITT.ppt

Theme 4: Transition from Response to Recovery

Checklist	Useful links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assemble a Recovery Task Force or similar cross- ministry governance structure in Alberta’s emergency response system. Members of this Recovery Task Force are responsible for coordinating support with local authorities and assisting in developing a recovery plan. ▪ Members of the Recovery Task Force understand their responsibilities and accountabilities during an emergency, and how they fit as part of the overall emergency management approach. ▪ Establish protocols for activating, operating, and deactivating the Recovery Task Force. The Task Force will be shut down once there is no longer the need for regular multi-agency coordination and the remaining issues can be dealt with by individual agencies as part of their normal business. This decision to stand-down should be communicated to all affected agencies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recovery News. Town of Slave Lake website. http://www.slavelake.ca/live/Recovery_News/Recovery_Coordination_Group ▪ Emergency Response and Recovery Guide, Cabinet Office United Kingdom, HM Government. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/emergency-response-recovery_0.pdf ▪ Community Recovery, Handbook 2. Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series, Attorney-General’s Department, Australian Government. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%20%20Disaster%20Health.PDF
<p><input type="checkbox"/> A process to transition from response to recovery phase in place</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A formal meeting should be held within the first few days of the start of the emergency to consider the criteria to be used to assess when the handover can take place from the local Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) to a Recovery Task Force, the process for the handover, and communications to other responding agencies and the community about the handover. This process should be detailed in the emergency management plans and participants at this meeting should include, at a minimum, representatives of the local EOC as well as the affected local authorities (i.e., Council, Mayor, etc.). ▪ Emphasize that local government remain in charge of recovery i.e., decisions and communications are owned and explained by local officials wherever possible. ▪ Develop formal protocols to detail how local government and the Province will undertake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emergency Response and Recovery Guide, Cabinet Office United Kingdom, HM Government. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/emergency-response-recovery_0.pdf ▪ Community Recovery, Handbook 2. Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series, Attorney-General’s Department, Australian Government. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%20%20Disaster%20Health.PDF ▪ AEMA Summit 2011, Slave Lake Wildfire Response and Recovery. www.aema.alberta.ca/documents/ema/MIKE_ME_RRITT.ppt

Theme 4: Transition from Response to Recovery

Checklist	Useful links
<p>and/or allocate responsibilities to deliver tasks during recovery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recovery News. Town of Slave Lake website. http://www.slavelake.ca/live/Recovery_News/Recovery_Coordination_Group
<p><input type="checkbox"/> A recovery plan template exists as a reference pre-disaster</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recovery planning should begin shortly after the disaster. ▪ A recovery liaison should be present in the local Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) from the outset in order to communicate the 'state of play' to the Recovery Task Force and to enable effective decision making and strategic planning. ▪ Engage NGOs and faith communities in the recovery planning process, as required. ▪ Formalize a provincial approach for disaster recovery planning. Building on experiences with past disasters, create a template or guidelines for what needs to be addressed in recovery planning. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Humanitarian aspects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Addressing the needs of people – health and non-health (both short and long-term) - Dealing with displaced communities - Community engagement - Financial support for individuals/families - Interim and short-term accommodation plans - Insurance (e.g., how to deal with the uninsured) - Commemoration, etc. ▪ Environmental aspects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan. http://www.md124.ca/sites/all/themes/zen_lsr/lsr/docs/crisis/LSR_Recovery_Plan.pdf ▪ Community Recovery, Handbook 2. Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series, Attorney-General's Department, Australian Government. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%20%20Disaster%20Health.PDF ▪ Emergency Response and Recovery Guide, Cabinet Office United Kingdom, HM Government. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/emergency-response-recovery_0.pdf ▪ Disaster Health, Handbook 1. Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series, Attorney-General's Department, Australian Government. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%20%20Disaster%20Health.PDF ▪ Manual 10: Recovery, Emergency Management Australia, Attorney-General's Department, Australian Government.

Theme 4: Transition from Response to Recovery

Checklist	Useful links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Waste management issues - Environmental pollution and decontamination, including air, water, and soil testing - Physical health hazards - Animal health and welfare ▪ Economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic and business recovery - Financial impacts on local authorities and strategies to overcome ▪ Infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Controlling access to and security of sties - Utilities - Repairs to domestic and municipal properties - Historic environment i.e., buildings, museums, art galleries, libraries, etc. - Site clearance - Insurance issues - Damaged schools and hospital buildings - Transport ▪ Use a shared local governance structure with all disaster affected communities to formally plan together for the recovery and future of the region as a whole, ensuring that shared issues are addressed and local perspective and interests are heard. ▪ The management of recovery is best approached from a community development perspective. It is most effective when conducted at the local level with the active participation of the affected community and a strong reliance on local capacities and expertise. A needs assessment should be conducted to inform the community recovery planning for programs and activities. 	<p>http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/Manual10-Recovery.pdf</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Standby agreements are in place pre-disaster to access a host of services/resources during</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unit 3: Resource Management Planning, National Incident Management System, FEMA.

Theme 4: Transition from Response to Recovery

Checklist	Useful links
<p>recovery</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Negotiate standby contracts with individuals, NGOs, and/or the private sector to deliver a whole host of services/resources during recovery. The standby contracts should be negotiated pre-disaster with the conditions to be activated (if required) that guarantee the price in effect the day before the disaster occurred, and that specify adequate quality and quantity.▪ Develop formal protocols to detail how each partner will undertake and/or allocate responsibilities to deliver tasks.▪ Negotiate contracts with local vendors if possible as they are most knowledgeable about the area and can employ local residents/staff.	<p>training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/IS703A/03_IS703_Aug2010.ppt</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> The recovery program is regularly monitored and reviewed for effectiveness</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Establish monitoring and review processes that involve the continuous observation of the recovery program's progress and success in the community. The outcomes of the review will help improve the outcomes of recovery practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Community Recovery, Handbook 2. Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series, Attorney-General's Department, Australian Government. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%20-%20Disaster%20Health.PDF

Theme 5: Hazard and Health Concerns

Checklist

A long-term plan to address mental health and wellbeing as part of recovery is in place

Key considerations:

- Establish protocols for providing ongoing mental health support to ensure that affected communities have the resources and support to prevent mental health problems and mental disorders whenever possible.
- Seek the advice of a medical advisor that can be designated to provide advice and recommendations to the Incident Command about medical and mental health services.
- It is believed that Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) is inappropriate following a disaster, with some evidence even suggesting that it may be detrimental. It is now considered appropriate to adopt a three-level approach to psychological support following a disaster:
 - Psychological First Aid (PFA) (immediate aftermath) – believed to be the most appropriate tool in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Includes promoting a sense of safety, calming, sense of self and collective/community efficacy, connectedness, and hope.
 - Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) (weeks to months).
 - Specialized mental health interventions (from about four weeks onwards, or as needed).
- Train first responders and other front-line workers in Psychological First Aid (PFA) as this provides individuals with a better understanding of common reactions to stressful events, as well as how to listen in a supportive, empathetic way.
- Return children to school soon after a disaster as this is an important part of re-establishing a community's equilibrium. Students, staff and administrators require support, however, to help cope with the emergency.

Useful links

- Disaster Health, Handbook 1. Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series, Attorney-General's Department, Australian Government.
<http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%20%20Disaster%20Health.PDF>
- Psychological First Aid: Guide for Field Workers. World Health Organization.
http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241548205_eng.pdf
- Psychological First Aid: Improving Mental Health in Emergencies. International Medical Corps website.
<http://internationalmedicalcorps.org/page.aspx?pid=2135>
- Community Recovery, Handbook 2. Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series, Attorney-General's Department, Australian Government.
<http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%20%20Disaster%20Health.PDF>
- National Incident Management System (NIMS) Document, FEMA.
http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/NIMS_core.pdf
- Emergent Use of Social Media: A New Age of Opportunity for Disaster Resilience. US National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health.

Theme 5: Hazard and Health Concerns

Checklist	Useful links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify the methods to communicate the availability of mental health services in the community. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish information telephone lines (i.e., call centres) and web service which can contain a mental health advice line. ▪ Advertise the availability of service in local newsletters, radio, and television advertisements. ▪ Use social media to offer potential psychological benefits for vulnerable populations gained through participation as stakeholders in the response. ▪ Develop a simple mental health triage process that can be used to help identify and assess those individuals who require further assistance. 	<p>http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21466029</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Processes are in place to address physical health hazards during re-entry</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create and provide standard information packages to the community during re-entry on safe practices related to their houses, food, sanitation, water, and other damage from the disaster (e.g., smoke). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide cleaning kits to residents upon re-entry. ▪ Develop a waste management plan that considers the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify the types of waste that can exist post-disaster. ▪ Develop formal protocols to detail how various agencies and organizations responsible for waste management will undertake and/or allocate responsibilities to deliver tasks (e.g., Alberta Health Services, Alberta Emergency Management Agency, local government, Alberta Environment, individual residents, etc.). ▪ Establish a process for disposing of mass waste (e.g., fridge/freezer removal) which 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disaster Waste Management Guidelines. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. http://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/DWG%20Annex%20XII.Disaster%20waste%20management%20contingency%20planning.pdf ▪ National Incident Management System (NIMS) Document, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nims/NIMS_core.pdf ▪ Slave Lake Region – After The Fire Information for Residents. Alberta Health Services. http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/feat/ne-feat-2011-05-26-after-the-fire.pdf

Theme 5: Hazard and Health Concerns

Checklist	Useful links
<p>involves consultation with the insurance industry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create standby agreements with the private sector for mass waste disposal services. ▪ Identify the locations and backup locations for landfills for waste disposal in municipal emergency management plans. 	
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Support is provided to staff and volunteers from local municipalities, agencies, and government departments that are involved with response and recovery</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff and volunteers involved in emergency response are prone to burnout and tremendous stress, and so they require appropriate backfill and may even require time off or other support once the response has ended. ▪ Identify opportunities to support staff and volunteers following a disaster (e.g., workload distribution, rotation of personnel, providing access to individual or group counseling services, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISO 22320: Emergency Management – Requirements for Incident Response. International Standards Organization.
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Environmental hazard testing is closely aligned with interpretation and clear communication of results by the health system</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop formal protocols to detail how Alberta Environment, Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services will undertake and/or allocate responsibilities related to environmental testing post-disaster, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clarify what should be tested in the event of a wildfire, and by whom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community Recovery, Handbook 2. Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series, Attorney-General’s Department, Australian Government. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/AEMHS%201%20Disaster%20Health.PDF

Theme 5: Hazard and Health Concerns

Checklist

- Identify how the results should be communicated, and link with the crisis communications expertise being employed as part of the emergency response effort.
- Develop standard templates to communicate the test results to the public in a comprehensible and clear manner.
- Develop an inventory of environmental health expertise within Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services that are available to test and interpret the results. Establish protocols for contacting these individuals and requesting their assistance in the event of disaster.
- Establish protocols for deploying specific suites of environmental tests that are commonly required following a wildfire.
- Incorporate communications regarding public health and safety within the crisis communications plan.

Useful links

Theme 6: NGO Integration and Coordination

Checklist

Donations management plan is in place

Key considerations:

- Plan and document a system for managing solicited and unsolicited donations.
- Establish a needs assessment process which can be activated immediately if an event occurs.
- Define the key roles and responsibilities with respect to managing donations (i.e., it should be clear in advance which organizations will manage donations in the event of a major disaster, and what their policies are about allocating and reporting on donations received, etc.).
- Determine how donations will be processed, transported, and distributed.
- Develop a communications strategy (i.e., publicize who to contact to donate, what to donate, etc.).
- Establish mutual aid and standby agreements in advance when possible, with recovery organizations such as NGOs, community groups, corporate donors, etc.
- Identify potential locations of storage facilities for donations.
- Formalize a standard recognition process (i.e., of volunteers, public and media, etc.)
- Implement strategy for disposal of surplus donations.
- Share information about how donations were distributed.
- Establish a process for managing donations arriving in surrounding municipalities that are hosting evacuees.
- Describe how spokespeople will help to channel donations and assistance in appropriate ways.

Useful links

- Management of Donated Goods Following a Disaster, Government of South Australia, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. <http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/pub/default.aspx?tabid=196#donatedgoods>
- National Guidelines for Managing Donated Goods following a Disaster, Government of South Australia, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. <http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/pub/default.aspx?tabid=196#donatedgoods>
- NZ “Donated Goods Management Planning” Civil Defense Emergency Management Best Practice Guide. [http://www.civildefence.govt.nz/memwebsite.nsf/Files/DonatedGoodsBPG206/\\$file/DonatedGoodsBPG206.pdf](http://www.civildefence.govt.nz/memwebsite.nsf/Files/DonatedGoodsBPG206/$file/DonatedGoodsBPG206.pdf)
- Volunteer and Donations Management Support Annex, FEMA. <http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nrf/nrf-support-vol.pdf>

Theme 6: NGO Integration and Coordination

Checklist	Useful links
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Communications and media strategies are in place</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inform politicians, community leaders, media, emergency management network, NGOs, and the general public about how best to donate. ▪ Establish and maintain a relationship with key media at local, provincial, and national levels to help the media understand and support necessary messages. ▪ Messaging with the public and media should be done early, be consistent and clear on what and to whom they should be donating or what exactly the donations will be used for. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management of Donated Goods Following a Disaster, Government of South Australia, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/pub/default.aspx?tabid=196#donatedgoods ▪ National Guidelines for Managing Donated Goods following a Disaster, Government of South Australia, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/pub/default.aspx?tabid=196#donatedgoods
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Process for dealing with monetary and physical donations in place</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage the public and corporate donors to make contributions of monetary donations and the reasons why. ▪ In the situations where material donations are still received, it is suggested that such goods be directed to the charitable organization with expertise in the management of the material of that kind. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management of Donated Goods Following a Disaster, Government of South Australia, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/pub/default.aspx?tabid=196#donatedgoods ▪ National Guidelines for Managing Donated Goods following a Disaster, Government of South Australia, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/pub/default.aspx?tabid=196#donatedgoods ▪ NZ “Donated Goods Management Planning” Civil Defense Emergency Management Best Practice Guide. http://www.civildefence.govt.nz/memwebsite.nsf/Files/DonatedGoodsBPG206/\$file/DonatedGoodsBPG

Theme 6: NGO Integration and Coordination

Checklist	Useful links
	<p>206.pdf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Manual 28: Economic and financial Aspects of Disaster Recovery, Emergency Management Australia. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/Manual28-EconomicandFinancialAspectsofDisasterRecovery.pdf ▪ Volunteer and Donations Management Support Annex, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nrf/nrf-support-vol.pdf
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Needs assessment completed post disaster to determine how donations should be distributed to the public</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assign one agency that will have responsibility for leading the community needs assessment process. ▪ Identify a list of possible individual and/or community needs. ▪ Appoint a Volunteer Coordinator to coordinate with local volunteer agencies and unaffiliated public volunteers to ensure that a needs assessment has been completed, addressing the needs of all affected communities. ▪ Use a web-based application that enables the general public to register their offers of donated goods and services and thus better match offers to need. ▪ Use a registry or database to divert unsolicited donated goods following a disaster. This provides recipients with the ability to request specific items and allows for a more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management of Donated Goods Following a Disaster, Government of South Australia, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/pub/default.aspx?tabid=196#donatedgoods ▪ National Guidelines for Managing Donated Goods following a Disaster, Government of South Australia, Department for Communities and Social Inclusion. http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/pub/default.aspx?tabid=196#donatedgoods ▪ NZ “Donated Goods Management Planning” Civil Defense Emergency Management Best Practice Guide. http://www.civildefence.govt.nz/memwebsite.nsf/Files/DonatedGoodsBPG206/\$file/DonatedGoodsBPG

Theme 6: NGO Integration and Coordination

Checklist	Useful links
<p>streamlined system of matching donations with recipients. There are various methods for establishing a registry including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Newsletter – people who wish to donate goods ‘advertise’ them in the newsletter and possible recipients can then contact the donor. ▪ Office/call centre – a scalable option. ▪ Online registry – donator and recipient liaise directly with each other. 	<p>206.pdf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State of Oregon, Volunteer and Donations Management. http://www.oregon.gov/OMD/OEM/plans_train/docs/eop/eop_sa_d.pdf?ga=t ▪ Emergency Response and Recovery, Chapter 7: Meeting the needs of those affected by an emergency. HM Government. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Chapter%207.pdf ▪ Volunteer and Donations Management Support Annex, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/emergency/nrf/nrf-support-vol.pdf
<p><input type="checkbox"/> A disaster relief fund has been set up locally</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a process for setting up the disaster relief fund. ▪ Have arrangements in place with a bank pre-disaster. ▪ Seek expert advice in setting up the relief fund. ▪ Local authorities should work in partnership with experienced NGOs in using their resources and past experience to create an effective disaster relief fund. ▪ Appoint trustees and/or a board of directors for the disaster relief fund. The trustees should be a non-political body made up of community members representing the disaster affected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community Donation Allocation Committee, Lesser Slave Lake Region. http://lslcdac.com/ ▪ Manual 28: Economic and Financial Aspects of Disaster Recovery, Emergency Management Australia. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/Manual28-EconomicandFinancialAspectsofDisasterRecovery.pdf ▪ Disaster Funds: Lessons and Guidance on the Management and Distribution of Disaster Fund. http://www.disasteraction.org.uk/publications/Disaster_Funds_Lessons_and_Guidance_on_the_Manage

Theme 6: NGO Integration and Coordination

Checklist	Useful links
<p>area. They are responsible for distributing donations within eligibility criteria identified. Accountability and responsibility for the collection and distribution of monies lies with the trustees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Set up a distribution committee that is responsible for accepting applications and distributing funds within the policies determined by the trustee. This committee is made up mostly of locally based representatives. ▪ Identify a list of possible individual/community needs. ▪ Where there are a number of organizations collecting donations post-disaster, they should be coordinated and where possible combined to achieve greater equity, reduce double-dipping, reduce administrative costs, etc. 	<p>ment and Distribution of Disaster Funds.pdf</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vermont Disaster Relief Fund. http://www.vermontdisasterrecovery.com/resources ▪ Disaster Appeal Scheme, British Red Cross website. http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Emergency-response/UK-emergency-response/For-category-one-responders/Disaster-Appeal-Scheme
<p><input type="checkbox"/> An audit of donations disbursement is conducted at regular intervals during the life of the disaster relief fund and particularly at the closing of the fund</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a process for hiring an external firm to perform the audit of disbursements to increase the credibility and independence of the process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disaster Funds: Lessons and Guidance on the Management and Distribution of Disaster Fund. http://www.disasteraction.org.uk/publications/Disaster_Funds_Lessons_and_Guidance_on_the_Management_and_Distribution_of_Disaster_Funds.pdf ▪ Disaster Declaration Process and Disaster Aid Programs, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/hazard/dproc.shtm
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Formalize a standard recognition process post-disaster</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a process for publicly acknowledging donations and volunteer assistance received through various methods including in the form of an advertisements in daily newspapers, over the radio, on television or in public addresses by local authorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Manual 28: Economic and financial Aspects of Disaster Recovery, Emergency Management Australia. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/Manual28-EconomicandFinancialAspectsofDisasterRecovery.pdf

Theme 6: NGO Integration and Coordination

Checklist

A Provincial-Red Cross contract for support services is in place pre-disaster

Key considerations:

- Clarify roles and responsibility between the Province and Red Cross ahead of time, thus enabling a more efficient and effective response during emergencies.
- Determine what services Red Cross can provide in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters. Look at what other provincial agreements in Canada exist.
- Establish a process for drafting an agreement with the Canadian Red Cross (i.e., create standard templates, etc.).

Useful links

- Province and Red Cross Sign Agreement for Emergency Service. Global Regina website. <http://www.globalregina.com/province+and+red+cross+sign+agreement+for+emergency+service/6442660501/story.html>
- Supporting Municipalities, Province, and Territories, Canadian Red Cross, Disaster Management website. <http://www.redcross.ca/article.asp?id=35292&tid=001>

Integrate NGOs and faith communities throughout the response and recovery effort

Key considerations:

- Establish a process for leveraging volunteers from within the community and faith groups early to assist in response and clean-up efforts.
- Request an NGO representative to liaise with the Provincial Operations Centre.
- Clarify how the NGO Council fits into the local command structure at the Emergency Operations Centre.
- Set up working relationships between the NGO Council, local elected officials, Province, and municipal staff to mobilize in support of residents.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities around what tasks the NGO Council is expected to take on or is capable of taking on (i.e., through development of a formal mandate).
- Establish a process for leveraging faith communities during recovery to help build the skills and capacity necessary to ease pressure on local services, build community confidence and resilience, and promote social cohesion.

- Key Communities, Key Resources: Engaging the Capacity and Capabilities of Faith Communities in Civil Resilience. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/846112.pdf>
- Emergency Response and Recovery, Chapter 7: Meeting the needs of those affected by an emergency. HM Government. <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Chapter%207.pdf>

Theme 6: NGO Integration and Coordination

Checklist

- Integrate requirements for the faith community and NGOs into general emergency planning as much as possible.

Useful links

Theme 7: Economic Recovery Activities and Revenue Stabilization

Checklist

- Depending on the severity of the incident, the Province may intervene to assist with revenue stabilization through approval of funding to assist with initial response**

Key considerations:

- Document the protocol for requesting, approving, and releasing the financial assistance for initial response.
- Determine how the funding should be spent.
- Develop standardized reporting processes and templates to track these funds.

Useful links

- Government allocates additional \$50 million for Slave Lake disaster recovery.
<http://www.alberta.ca/acn/201106/30735AEDF9B97-B2FF-BA22-4A5E9FF85B770B4E.html>

- Depending on the severity of the incident, the Province may provide immediate financial assistance to displaced people to assist with recovery**

Key considerations:

- Identify a number of ways that financial assistances (e.g., gift cards, debit cards, direct deposits, cheques, etc.) can be provided to displaced residents.
- Document the protocol for requesting, approving, and releasing financial assistance to residents.

- Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan.
http://www.md124.ca/sites/all/themes/zen_lsr/lsr/docs/crisis/LSR_Recovery_Plan.pdf

- Individuals and local government to apply for disaster recovery funding**

Key considerations:

- Disaster Recovery Programs. Alberta Emergency Management Agency. Government of Alberta.
<http://www.aema.alberta.ca/disaster-recovery-programs.cfm>
- Alberta Disaster Assistance Guidelines. Alberta

Theme 7: Economic Recovery Activities and Revenue Stabilization

Checklist	Useful links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop cost tracking templates for local governments. ▪ Formalize the cost recovery process for host municipalities who provide reception centres and other support. 	<p>Emergency Management Agency. Government of Alberta. http://www.aema.alberta.ca/images/Disaster_Assistance_Guidelines.pdf</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> An active role is taken by the Province in promoting local business and employment in the disaster-affected region as part of the recovery process</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish a process for providing support to local businesses following a disaster. Examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assign a staff member from Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education to work with businesses on a one-to-one basis and troubleshoot issues. ▪ Establish a job board and mobile career centre to connect employers with residents in need of work. ▪ Establish a Disaster Assistance Benefit program e.g., allow local businesses to apply for loans with no interest for up to 24 months, and up to 24 months without payments, in addition to no application fees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lesser Slave Lake Regional Wildfire Recovery Plan. http://www.md124.ca/sites/all/themes/zen_lsr/lsr/docs/crisis/LSR_Recovery_Plan.pdf
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Formalize emergency procurement processes pre-disaster</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create a list of pre-approved vendors that can be mobilized quickly to provide services and supplies that would be required by any large disaster (e.g., fencing, food, blankets, etc.). ▪ Formalize the expense approval protocol during a disaster. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Incident Management System (NIMS) Document, FEMA. http://www.fema.gov/emergency/nims/

Theme 7: Economic Recovery Activities and Revenue Stabilization

Checklist	Useful links
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establish protocol for promoting consumer protection as it relates to engaging contractors for recovery and reconstruction. ▪ A lead role to facilitate procurement during a disaster should exist within the Incident Command System (ICS) structure at POC and EOC level. The four primary units that fulfill the functional requirements of the Finance/Administration Section of the ICS include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compensation/claims unit: responsible for financial concerns resulting from property damage, injuries, or fatalities at the incident ▪ Cost unit: responsible for tracking costs, analyzing cost data, making estimates, and recommending cost savings measures ▪ Procurement unit: responsible for financial matters concerning vendor contracts. ▪ Time unit: responsible for recording time for incident personnel and hired equipment. ▪ The Supply Unit within the Logistics Section of ICS also plays a role in procurement. Specifically, this unit orders, receives, processes, stores, inventories and distributes all incident-related resources and supplies. It has the basic responsibility for all off-incident ordering, including all tactical and support resources (including personnel), and all expendable and nonexpendable supplies required for incident support. 	
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Engage the local private sector in the recovery process as a means for recovering the economy</p> <p>Key considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Negotiate standby contracts with the private sector to deliver a whole host of services/resources during recovery. The standby contracts should be negotiated pre-disaster with the conditions to be activated (if required) that guarantee the price in effect the day before the disaster occurred, and that specify adequate quality and quantity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Session 5: Disasters and the Private Sector. Public Administration and Emergency Management, FEMA. http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/edu/docs/publicadminem/PA&EM%20-%20Session%205%20-%20Power%20Point.ppt ▪ Public and Private Sector Relationships in Emergency Management. Disaster Recovery Journal, 2011.

Theme 7: Economic Recovery Activities and Revenue Stabilization

Checklist	Useful links
<p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Construction firms – provide specialized equipment to remove debris, transport material, etc. ▪ Engineering firms – expert advice on building standards and practices. ▪ Universities or colleges – organize volunteers, provide training, temporary shelter locations, etc. ▪ Catering firm – provide food services. ▪ Hotels – emergency shelter, emergency food services, etc. ▪ Hospitals – emergency shelter, emergency food services, counseling services, emergency medical care and training, etc. ▪ Freight companies and distributors – transport emergency food and water, clothing, building materials, etc. ▪ Funeral homes – managing mass casualties, etc. ▪ Building supply companies – provide lumber, other materials, etc. ▪ Retail stores – transport and distribution of food, water, etc. ▪ Develop formal protocols to detail how each partner will undertake and/or allocate responsibilities to deliver tasks. ▪ Negotiate contracts with local vendors if possible as they are most knowledgeable about the area and can employ local staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ http://www.drj.com/articles/online-exclusive/public-and-private-sector-relationships-in-emergency-management.html ▪ Emergency Response and Recovery, Chapter 3: Agencies involved in responding to and recovering from emergencies. HM Government. http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Chapter%203.pdf
<p><input type="checkbox"/> A process for coordinating recovery efforts with the insurance industry is in place</p> <p>Key considerations:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Manual 10: Recovery, Emergency Management Australia, Attorney-General’s Department, Australian Government. http://www.ema.gov.au/www/emaweb/rwpattach.nsf/VAP/(3273BD3F76A7A5DEDAE36942A54D7D90)

Theme 7: Economic Recovery Activities and Revenue Stabilization

Checklist

- Deal with all impacted insurance providers together. Local and provincial governments should work with these companies as a group to ensure information, expectations and actions are coordinated as appropriate. This will improve the recovery experience of policy holders.
- Establish protocol for dealing with individuals and businesses who were not insured.
- Assign one agency and/or organization from the Province to be responsible for liaising with the insurance industry.
- Encourage the involvement of insurance companies at reception centres to provide support and answer questions of displaced residents.
- Consider involving insurance companies in the development of recovery plan.

Useful links

[~Manual10-Recovery.pdf/\\$file/Manual10-Recovery.pdf](#)

- Emergency Response and Recovery, Chapter 3: Agencies involved in Responding to and Recovering from Emergencies. HM Government.
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Chapter%203.pdf>
- Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods. An independent review by Sir Michael Pitt.