

OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

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News Release

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UBCIC Calls on Province of BC to Immediately Declare State of Emergency due to Extremely Aggressive Wildfires

((X^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sk^wxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səilwətał (Tseil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C. – July 16, 2021) The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) joins the growing call for the Province to declare a state of emergency over wildfires that have been record-setting this year already, and are projected to continue in frequency and intensity. The wildfires are rapidly draining resources and have directly impacted thousands of people, including a disproportionate number of First Nations who have been forced to evacuate and are grappling with a disorganized network of support and a lack of consistent recognition of their jurisdiction.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC President, stated “The wildfires are an absolute climate crisis and the definition of a state of emergency. The town of Lytton is burned to the ground, with hundreds of Lytton First Nation members losing their homes, and with devastating impacts to all the surrounding Nations. Skeetchestn First Nation has fire on all sides of their community and are in dire need of more resources. With tensions high and their bags packed, British Columbians all over the province are extremely anxious and fearful as the wildfires show no sign of slowing down. These fires pose an immediate threat to their lives and homes, and although local states of emergency have been called, the Horgan government is refusing to listen to the pleas for a provincial state of emergency that are coming from various regions and towns.”

“UBCIC is joining the call for a provincial state of emergency so that government bodies can more effectively ensure adequate assistance to people, increase funding, and coordinate or obtain additional resources such as happened during the 2017 wildfires,” stated Chief Don Tom, UBCIC Vice-President. “It is our understanding that close to 2,000 square km have been burned already this year, and we still have at least six weeks of fire season to go. A lot of First Nations are experiencing fatigue and need increased capacity to run their Emergency Operation Centres, many of which have been operating since COVID began. There continue to be communication breakdowns and a lack of comprehensive and clear supports for Nations to fight fires and determine how they want to manage their territories. We are hearing rumours that the Province isn’t declaring a state of emergency because they have already maxed out the resources they can

get from outside jurisdictions, but not only does this seem impossible but also extremely unethical when human lives hang in the balance.”

Kukpi7 Judy Wilson, UBCIC Secretary-Treasurer stated, “The Abbott/Chapman report examining the 2017 flood and wildfire seasons was unequivocal in recommending the full involvement of Indigenous peoples as true partners and leaders in emergency management- we don’t see that materializing in the current wildfire season. The BC Wildfire Service was reported as providing an update on Thursday that they do not have resources to send firefighters and aircraft to fight each new fire. The First Nations Emergency Services Society is working around the clock directly with communities and leadership to assist and is struggling to increase its capacity. UBCIC joins the call for the Province to declare a state of emergency to ensure a coordinated response and to ensure public safety in what will be a long and draining wildfire season.”

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UBCIC is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

For more information, please visit www.ubcic.bc.ca

First Nations Emergency Services Society EM callout:

<https://www.fness.bc.ca/resources/news/required-immediately-emergency-management-call-out>