The impacts of the Lost Creek fire on community resiliency

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Abstract

The purpose of this pilot study was to examine how resiliency is evident in the Crowsnest Pass, Alberta after its experience of the 2003 Lost Creek fire. The Crowsnest Pass is a unique amalgamated community in a mountainous and forested area of the Rocky Mountains of south-western Alberta. It has dealt with a number of historically and nationally significant disasters including the Frank Slide (the slide of Turtle Mountain in 1903) as well as being the site of the worst mining disaster in Canadian history (1914). The Lost Creek fire, the worst fire in the history of the Crowsnest Pass, resulted in a 31-day state of emergency, evacuations for a number of residents and the burning of 21 000 hectares before it was under control. This study included interviews with 30 individuals and the development of a site profile based on existing census, survey, historical and local administrative data to identify main issues within the community and how it has managed disasters in the past. The interviews revealed that the established networks and activities such as volunteerism and assistance for those who were evacuated enhanced the community’s resiliency and subsequently how they dealt with the Lost Creek Fire. There was also a sense of powerlessness in dealing with the fire, given the provincial government policies surrounding wildfire control. Recommendations from the findings provide guidance to: (1) dissuade the sense of community powerlessness during wildfire control and (2) deal with individuals at-risk due to health issues and limited social support.

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Presenter

Judith Kulig is a Professor in the School of Health Sciences, The University of Lethbridge in Canada, where she teaches undergraduate and graduate students. Her research program is focused on rural health including: nursing practice in rural communities; community resiliency; and unique populations in rural communities (eg, Hutterites, Mennonites). The research on community resiliency has been conducted in rural communities within Alberta and Kentucky and the findings have been used by practitioners, community planners and policy experts. She has widely disseminated her findings from all of her studies through presentations and publications. Judith is currently the Chair of the Canadian Rural Health Research Society.