



Survey Response Report: Tourism Impact Survey Northern BC Tourism Association

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SYMPHONY
TOURISM
SERVICES

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Executive Summary

The following report summarises information collected in a survey by Northern BC Tourism Association (NBCTA) in collaboration with the BC Hotel Association related to the impact of the provincial Travel Order that was put in place at the end of summer 2023. The survey was designed to assess the immediate and long-term impacts on NBCTA stakeholders from crisis events in the summer of 2023, such as wildfires, poor air quality, road closures, the provincial State of Emergency, and the Travel Restriction Order.

On August 19, 2023, the Province of British Columbia introduced an order, effective August 19 until the end of the day on September 4, 2023, restricting people from travelling to stay in temporary accommodations for non-essential purposes in several Southern Interior communities.

The order was lifted four days later on August 23 (West Kelowna's order was lifted on August 24). However, the impacts of the order reached far beyond the original effective period. The announcement resulted in immediate cancellations of bookings for the effective period, which included the end of summer and the Labour Day long weekend. Some bookings for September and later in autumn were also cancelled.

Although it was expected that the majority of the impacts would be felt within the Thompson Okanagan region, NBCTA believed that the Northern BC region would have also been impacted. Consequently, the survey used for the Thompson Okanagan region was slightly modified and distributed to stakeholders in the Northern BC region.

This report incorporates and highlights responses from 26 respondents, submitted between October 20 and November 29.

Survey respondents shared the following:

Issues

- Most respondents (23 out of 26) reported wildfires as an event that caused an impact on their business.
- Travel restriction order was the last in importance; however, it was considered by nine respondents.

Impacts on Business Operations

- 22 out of 26 reported lost revenues
- 19 out of 26 experienced a negative perception from customers
- 13 out of 26 experienced reduced operations,
- 7 out of 26 experienced increased operational cost
- 4 out of 26 staffing change
- 2 out of 26 experienced increased marketing costs, and others
- Another two considered no impact

Impacts on Staffing

- Stress and mental health challenges were identified by 16 respondents as the main impact on employees;
- Loss of income was another important impact on employees considered by 14 respondents.
- Altogether, four respondents planned to have 29 staff scheduled to work in the summer. Of that number, five (17%) scheduled staff members were laid off, and 14 (48%) staff members had reduced hours.

Impacts on Finances

- 16 respondents saw a decrease in revenue.
- Almost half of respondents (10) estimated a decrease in revenues between 1% and 40% during the closure period.
- Six respondents foresee a reduction in revenues for the next three months, three of them between 1%-20%.
- Twelve respondents who do not estimate a reduction feel unsure about the next three months.
- A respondent estimated a reduction of CAD 200,000.

Recommendations for Provincial and/or Federal Governments

- 16 out of 26 respondents recommended incentives to encourage travel;
- 15 out of 26 respondents recommended for financial support;
- 13 out of 26 respondents recommended increasing marketing campaigns by DBC, and/or communities;
- 8 out of 26 thought that wage subsidies and change to insurance coverage is helpful.

Other recommendations expressed by the respondents were:

- Looking forward to information on DriveBC to help with decision-making
- Finding partnerships with nations and companies that can fight the fires on their behalf
- Working with travel tools (such as Google Maps) to ensure accurate information is being distributed - "for weeks after our evacuation alert was lifted, Google Maps was still indicating road closures and trail closures."
- "Avoid issuing travel advisories unless necessary after lifting advisories, a significant campaign to encourage travel to resume should be undertaken"

Introduction

The following report summarises information collected in a survey by the Northern BC Tourism Association (NBCTA) in collaboration with the BC Hotel Association related to the impact of the provincial Travel Order that was put in place at the end of summer, 2023. The survey was designed to assess the immediate and long-term impacts on NBCTA stakeholders from crisis events in the summer of 2023, such as wildfires, poor air quality, road closures, the provincial State of Emergency, and the Travel Restriction Order.

Methodology

Symphony Tourism Services, on behalf of the Northern BC Tourism Association (NBCTA), created a survey at <https://www.symphonytourismservices.com/survey/nbc> with questions about contact information, company information, and the impacts of the different events in the last summer (see Appendix A).

This report incorporates and highlights responses from 26 respondents.

Responses

Section 1. Company Information

Community(ies) of Operation by Sub-Region

The 26 respondents represent businesses in the following communities. In several instances, respondents indicated having operations in more than one community.

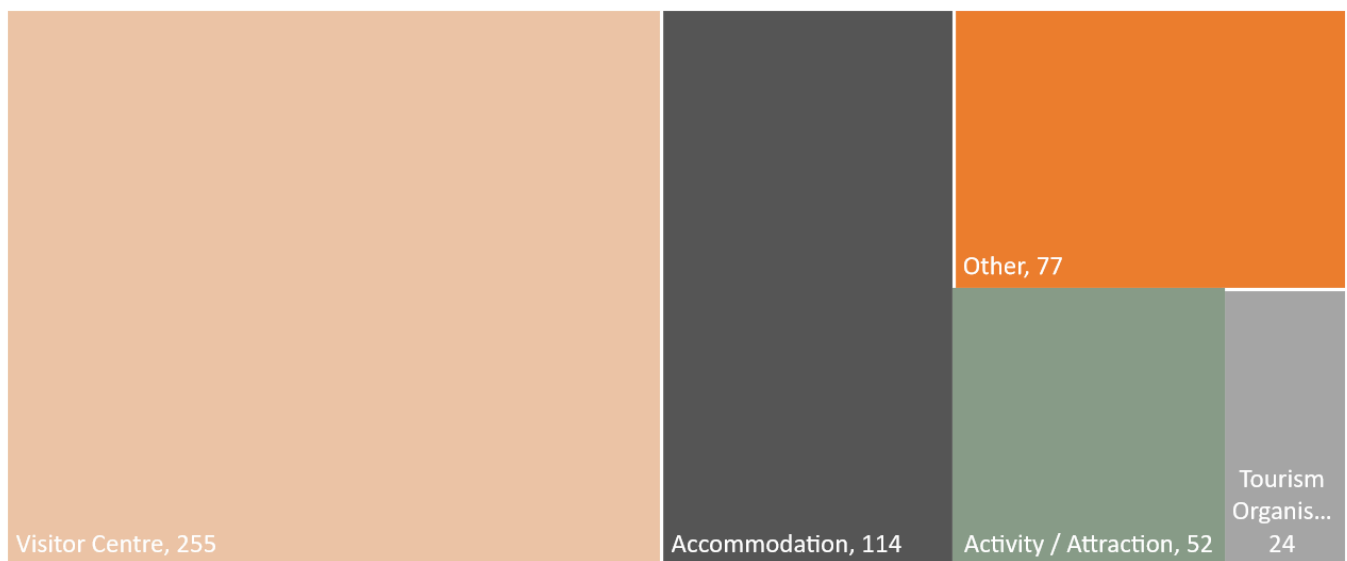
- Burns Lake
- Charlie Lake
- Dawson Creek
- Dease Lake
- Doig River First Nation
- Fort St John
- Granisle
- Houston
- Jade City
- Muncho Lake
- Northern Rockies Regional Municipality
- Prince George
- Prophet River First Nation
- Smithers
- Southside - Ootsa Lake
- Terrace
- Tumbler Ridge
- Vanderhoof
- West Moberly First Nation
- Wonowon

Business Type

Of the respondents, eight were accommodation providers, seven were activity/attraction providers, and six were tourism organizations.

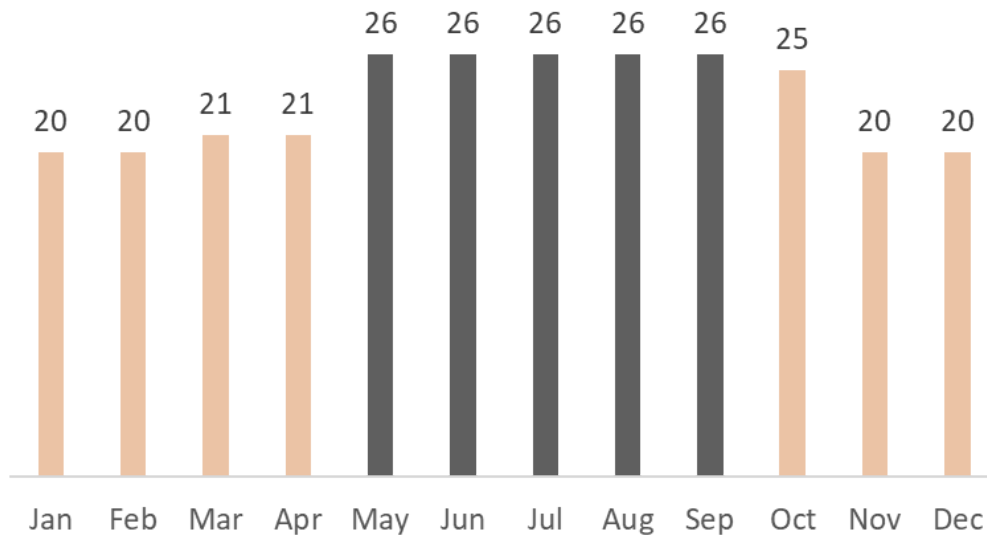
Type of business	Number of respondents
Accommodation	8
Activity / Attraction	7
Tourism Organisation	6
Visitor Centre	2
Other	2
Association / Network	1

Number of employees by business type (overall)



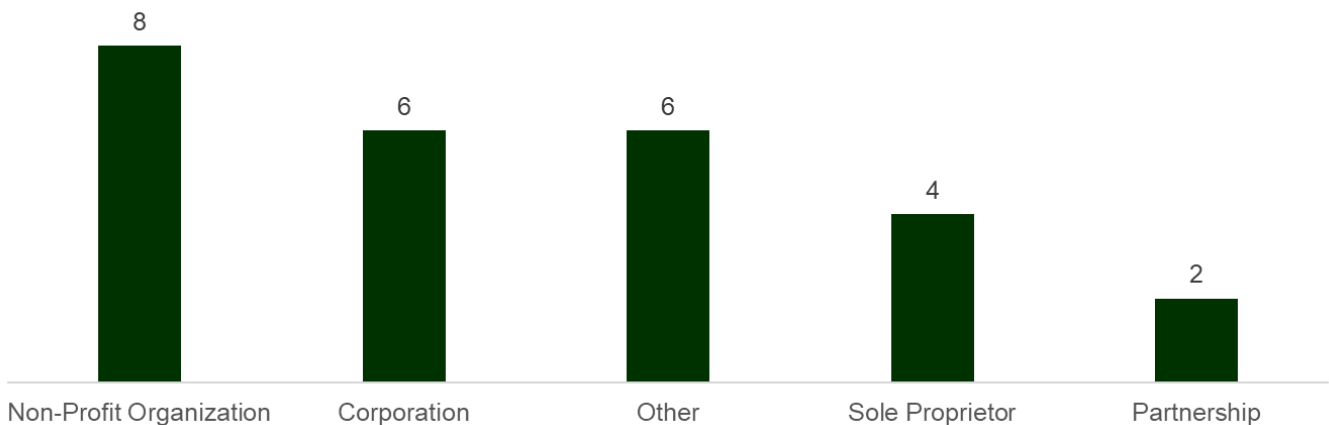
According to the size of the business by the number of employees, visitor centres had 255 employees, accommodation businesses had 114 employees, Other businesses operated with 77 employees. Activity/attraction businesses had 52 employees.

Months of operation:



20 respondents work year-round. All respondents operate between May and September, meaning these are the most significant months to generate revenue.

Ownership Type



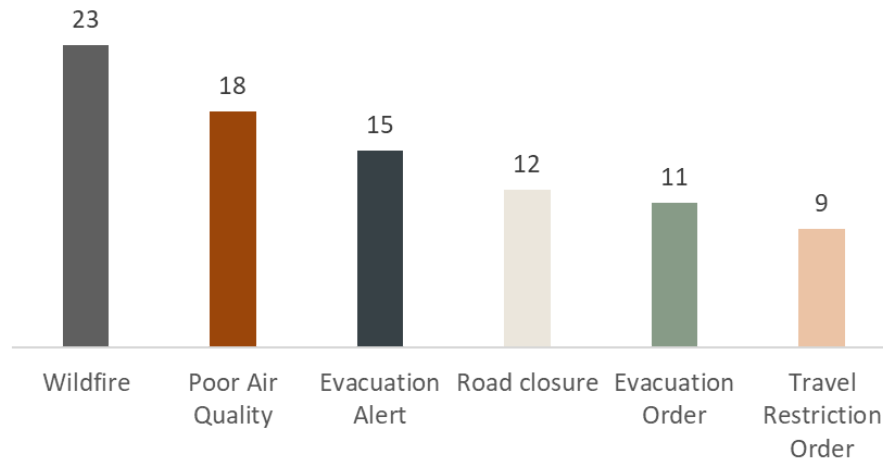
Eight respondents were non-profit organizations, six were corporations, six were others, four were sole proprietors, and two were partnerships.

Indigenous Owned	Female Owned	Youth Owned
0%	23%	8%

23 percent (23%) of respondents' businesses are women-owned, and 8% are youth-owned firms. There were no Indigenous-owned respondents.

Section 2. Impacts on business operations:

Issues that impacted businesses between June and September:



Most respondents (23 out of 26) considered wildfires the main issue last summer. Poor air quality was the second most important issue (18 out of 26) indicated by respondents.

Respondents shared that they experienced:

- "Many businesses were impacted by the Peacock Wildfire that started in July and is still considered an active fire."
- "At one time or another all the above have impacted the NRRM. Any fires or other events that close the highway have an immediate impact. We only have one road (Hwy 97) in and out of the region. Due to distance away, neighbouring communities sometimes provide incorrect information in the attempt to help."
- "One wildfire close to town. Poor air quality due to fires in surrounding communities. A lot of travellers use Dawson Creek as the start of their trip to Alaska, the fires between Fort St. John and Fort Nelson concerned a lot of people and some cancelled their trips. Dawson Creek is an evacuation hub, so we did have a lot of other communities evacuate to Dawson Creek and were looking for things to do, but with the air quality there were few options as it had to be indoor activities."
- "Pondosy Resort was closed early due to safety concerns of the wildfires in the direct vicinity on the resort. Months of income was lost."
- "The road being closed due to the wild fire impacted us but obviously couldn't be helped. What was the issue was two governments fighting over who should pay for things and lack of communication between different parties. One sign would say closed, another would say open, and the internet would say something else. The closed sign was before tourists turn off onto Hwy 37, then five minutes in there would be an open sign and nobody could check DriveBC, because there is no cell service or wifi coverage."
- "Because we were under evacuation order and alert for most of the summer we lost over 80% of our usual revenue"
- "The biggest impact was when they asked my clients (about 40 people at the time) to evacuate this summer due to wildfire. We weren't actually put on evacuation order, but as a precaution, the wildfire branch asked them to leave. This cost me thousands of dollars in revenue." "I also lost one boat and motor to fire on a remote lake, it burned up before it could be retrieved. Was not safe to go in and get it."
- "Another impact though was the rumours that we were closed because of wildfire, which kept people away even though we were open."

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- "Tse'k'wa was placed under evacuation in summer 2023, forcing us to close and relocate our staff to work from home. Then, Fort St John was also placed under evacuation alert so our staff worked from home while preparing for evacuation. Throughout the summer, our stakeholder communities were placed under various evacuations and alerts, impacting our ability to coordinate cultural activities and programming."
- "Fewer tourists this whole spring and summer resulting in fewer visitors through the museum, in our archives, or spending money in our gift shop. Several school groups or camps cancelled due to wildfire situation, road closures, or poor air quality."
- "Highway 37 Little Blue River Closure - lost approximately 40% of income in August and September due to repeated highway closures. In early May 2023, lost 50% of income that month due to road washout at Durham Creek. Usually poor communication of highway openings is what causes travellers to cancel than the actual closure itself."
- "The Blue River fire caused me immense grief due to poor communication from the government agencies regarding road closures."
- "Our community was evacuated due to wildfire. Our business was affected by air quality, travel restrictions, and road closures."
- "Early spring wildfires; Fort St. John, Alaska Highway, Highway 29, Charlie Lake, and Alberta highways & communities highway closures & evacuation orders. To some degree we were continually affected all summer by poor air quality, some days very heavy smoke. The extreme drought affected the comfort of travellers as they did not want to become stranded somewhere in the event of fires. Hudson's Hope was still affected by the construction of the Site C dam, Highway 29 reconstruction. Long waits and numerous stops between Hudson's Hope & Alaska Highway. Hudson's Hope itself was just getting the town water supply back running, we had been under a boil water advisory for a long time which affected where travellers could obtain potable water."
- "A wildfire caused the evacuation of the community for 7 days in June. Every business in Tumbler Ridge was impacted."
- "From the middle of July we have been under an evacuation order or an alert. Both in July and in August, we had fire at the resort property line and would have lost structures if we were not there to protect."
- "The wildfire season began very early in the Northeast and on June 8th Tumbler Ridge was placed under an evacuation order. Our board and staff were in separate locations spread across Northern BC and Alberta. The order was lifted on the 16th and the museum reopened on the 18th. Despite working remotely as best we could, missing that week in June left us scrambling a little at a critical juncture for seasonal hiring, leaving us short staffed for the summer resulting in a need to scale back some of our programs. We were on alert for an additional two or three weeks and the marketing messaging going out from the community at the time said to please not come here. We believe this played a role in setting the tone for the summer. From the experiences of our own staff we feel the fires, alerts, and evacuations throughout the province left many BC residents not wanting or unable to travel."
- "With the additional fires popping up as the fire season progressed resulted in Tumbler Ridge also being severely impacted by smoke, reducing our outdoor operations."
- "Wildfires were reported within one km of our lodging. The town was evacuated and guests were forced from the house. After the fire moved directions and people came back to town, the town was put on alert until almost the summer's end. We had many cancellations and trips not filled."
- "I had to cancel a couple of events due to me not being able to be there due to my property and surrounding area being on fire."
- "Temporary Travel restrictions and the corresponding change in travel habits lead to many cancellations and an overall decrease in reservations. Google maps advised many travellers to avoid our region (North Eastern BC), months after travel restrictions had lifted."
- "Smoke was pretty bad through significant portions of the summer. We are an outdoor attraction, and it affects our attendance when air quality is so poor. It most definitely impacted attendance at our largest event in July."

- "The ESS is operated by the City of Fort St. John, as is the Visitor Centre. Many staff are trained to work in the ESS when it is in place, thus pulled from their regular duties at the Visitor Information Centre and other areas"
- "The hotels are along Hwy 16 to the West of Prince George. Anything impacting access to Prince George cuts us off. Guests couldn't travel through affected areas to come stay with us."

Impacts on business operations by type



Respondents were asked to provide information about the impacts of the wildfires and other events on their businesses.

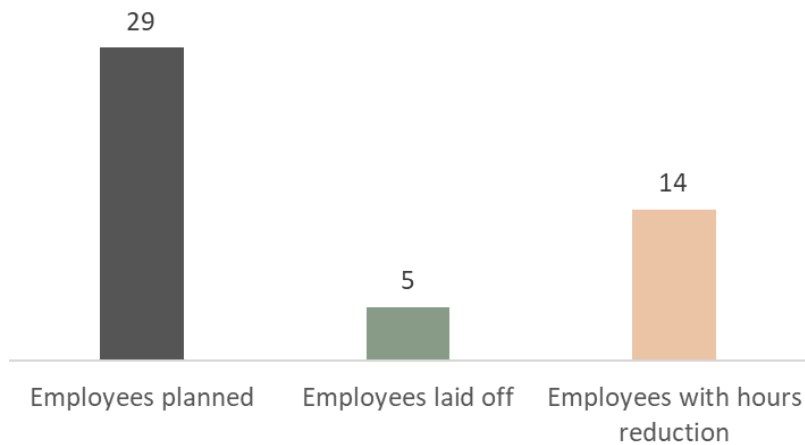
The number of respondents who reported lost revenues was 22; 19 experienced a negative perception from customers, 13 experienced reduced operations, seven and four experienced increased operational cost and staffing changes, respectively, and two experienced increased marketing costs and others. Two of the respondents reported no impact on their business.

Respondents shared that they experienced:

- "We couldn't have scheduled guests for the mining part of our business come, and those who did we ended up having to take home a different way and costing us and the guests double the amount."
- "As a single-staff team, we had to redirect my time towards emergency preparedness instead of usual operations. Additionally, nearby impacted communities meant our usual support network was also focused on emergency response. Smoke impacted our ability to complete outdoor construction, extending our planned public closure. Finally, the encroaching fire impacted our ability to insure our newly constructed building."
- "Some workers could not attend work because of evacuation orders on their homes (outside of Fort St. John). Visitors were instructed not to visit Fort St. John due to fires, evacuation alerts in town, and evacuation orders out of town. This happened early in the season, leading to reduced numbers throughout the summer. Many staff worked extra hours or were pulled from their regular duties to cover the ESS when neighbouring communities were on evacuation order."

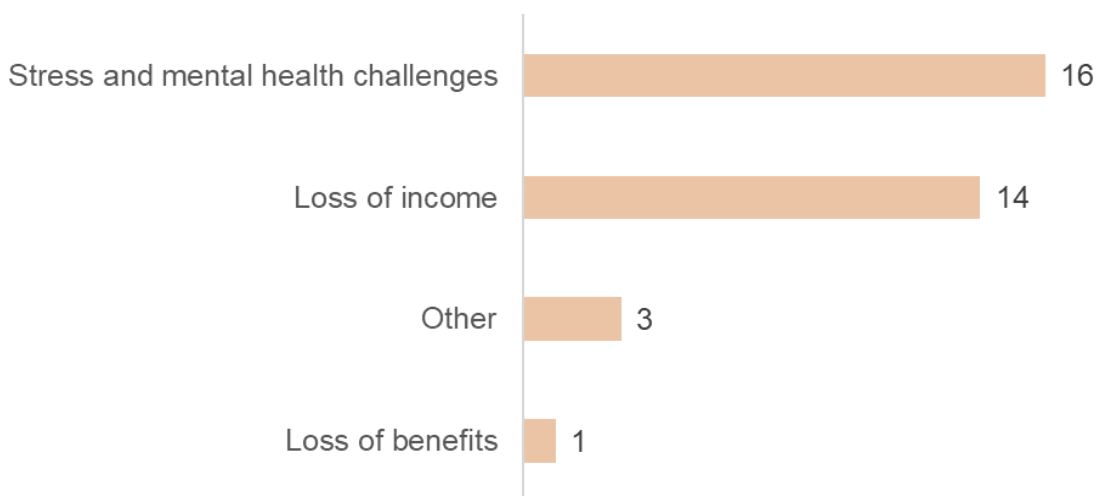
Section 3. Impacts on Staffing

Respondents were asked to provide specific information related to the impact of wildfires and other events that occurred last summer on staffing, including the number of staff planned to work, staff laid off, and staff with reduced hours in the same period of the event. Four responses were obtained for these questions.



Altogether, four respondents planned to have 29 staff planned to work in the summer season. Of that number, five members (17%) of staff planned were laid off, and 14 members (48%) of staff had reduced hours.

Other impacts of the wildfires and other events on employees



Stress and mental health challenges were identified by 16 (62%) respondents as the main impact on employees; 14 (54%) mentioned that loss of income was another important impact on employees.

Impacts on international workers

Respondents were asked to identify impacts on their international workers and indicated that foreign workers:

- "Some employers reported having to shorten hours, however, most of the impact was on the business who still had to have staff and pay wages despite a reduction in customers"
- "Reduced international workforce"
- "Government processes have slowed significantly since the start of the pandemic and there seems to be no hurry to allow things to catch up and process anything in a timely manner."

Impact on student workers

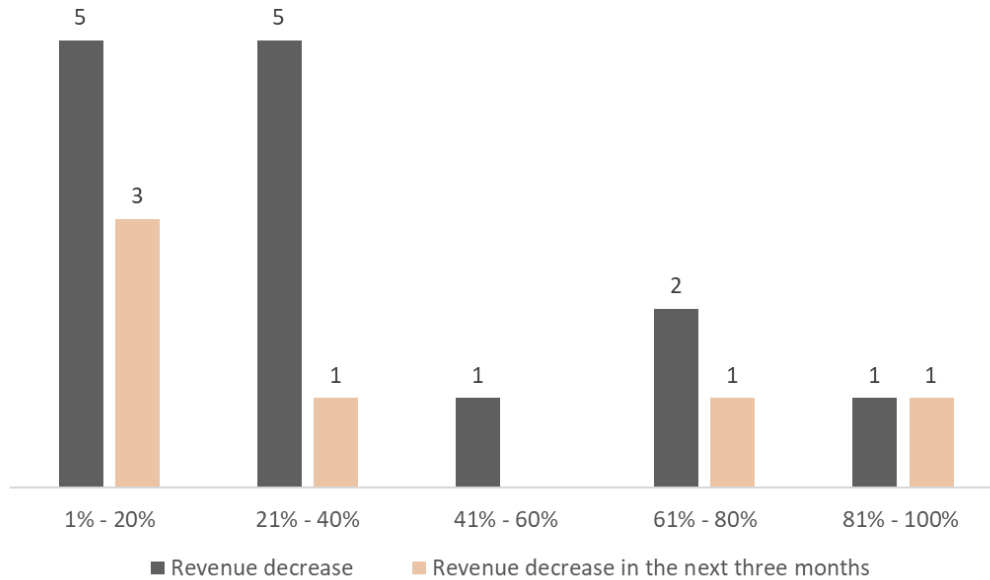
Respondents were asked to identify impacts on student workers and indicated that students:

- "Students thought poor air quality meant we should close and go home, but we had air purifiers in place and had to explain that we are a place people will seek information on what is happening, if we advertise certain hours, we need to do what we can to stick to them. Some were not impressed by this, but every precaution was taken."
- "Extra training in wildfire procedures. One student couldn't work for several days when he was under evacuation order. Making sure out of town interns would be able to evacuate if our city's alert changed to an evacuation order."
- "We had 2 full time seasonal student workers and would say that they were not affected directly as well as a seasonal assistant manager. It was difficult to plan and operate outside activities for the public. example: Our Corn Roast Fundraiser in September was a complete bust due to heavy smoke."
- "Our summer students hadn't started yet, but they were very concerned they wouldn't have jobs to come to for July. They suffered the same stress and mental health challenges as the rest of us."
- "hired less students"
- "Same as the rest of us - physical consequences of working in poor air quality (even with masks) and mental impacts (climate anxiety, general bumner)."
- "Student workers worked and were not impacted aside from being pulled from their regular duties and working overtime to cover the ESS throughout the season."
- "We couldn't get any college students to work in the busy summer because the wildfires disrupted their travel plans or they were needed for firefighting."

Section 4. Impacts on Finances

Impact on Revenues

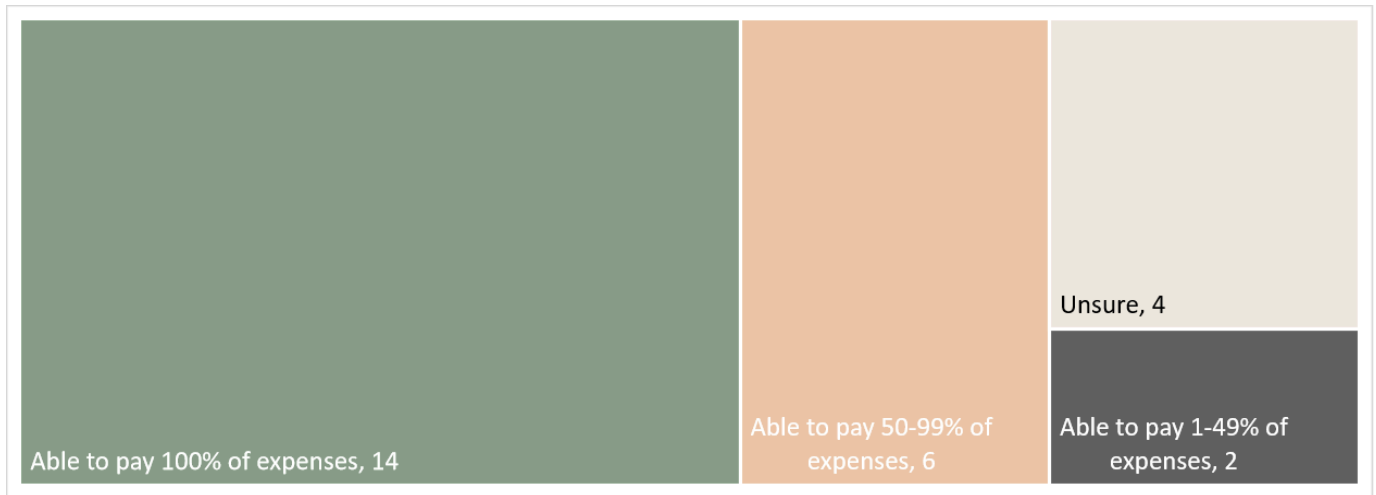
Respondents were asked to describe the estimated financial impact on their businesses.



Sixteen respondents reported a revenue decrease. Almost half of respondents (10) estimated a decrease in revenues between 1% and 40% in the closure period. Six respondents foresee a reduction in revenues for the next three months, three of them between 1%-20%. 12 respondents who do not estimate a reduction feel unsure about the next three months. A respondent considered a reduction of CAD 200,000.

Ability to pay expenses for the next 30 days:

Respondents were asked about their ability to pay expenses in the next 30 days because of the summer events.

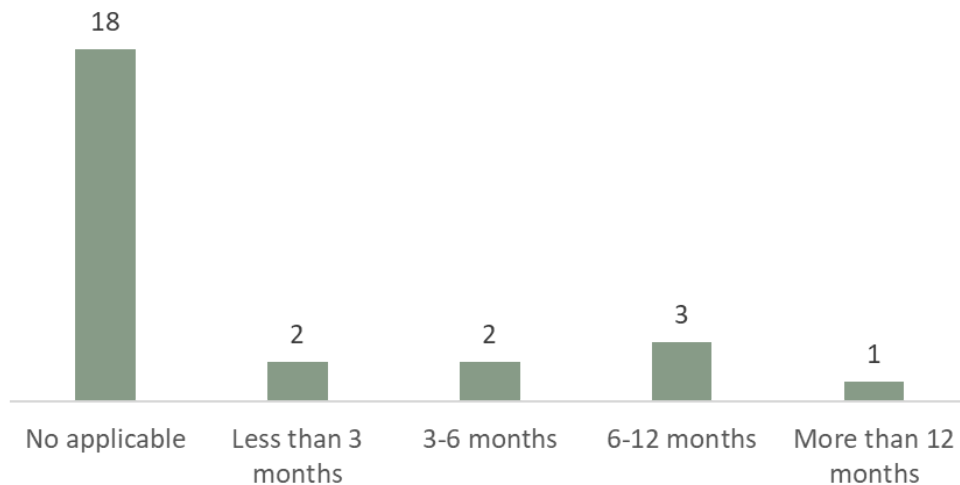


Four respondents are unsure about the possibility of paying any expenses. Two reported that they could pay only 1%-49% of their expenses, and six indicated they could pay 50-99%. Fourteen said they would be able to pay 100% of expenses.

Amount of debt incurred as a result of the wildfires and other summer events.

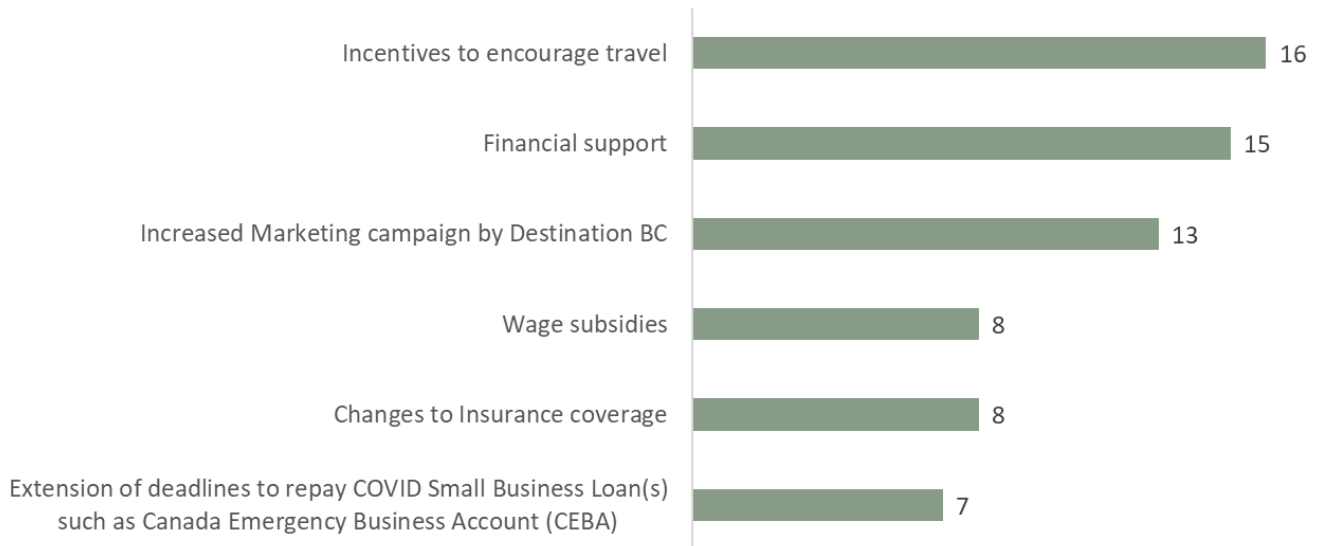
Nine respondents incurred debt; of these, one incurred debt of about CAD 250,000, three reported between CAD 20,000 and CAD 40,000, and five said their debt was less than CAD 10,000. Seventeen respondents incurred no debt.

Time to pay back the debt related to the wildfires



Of the 26 respondents, 18 (69%) reported that this issue does not apply to them. Of those who incurred debt, one reported it would take more than 12 months to repay, while three reported a repayment period of 6-12 months; four reported less than six months.

Section 5. Recommendations for Provincial and/or Federal Governments to Support Business as a result of the wildfires.



Respondents were asked to select ways in which Provincial and/or Federal governments could support their business as a result of the impact of the wildfires and other events.

The top recommendation made by 16 of the respondents was for incentives to encourage travel, followed by the recommendation for financial support that was made by 15 respondents. In the third position, 13 respondents recommended increasing marketing campaigns by DBC, and/or communities. Eight respondents recommended wage subsidies and changes to insurance coverage. Finally, seven recommended extensions of deadlines to repay COVID Small Business Loan(s), such as the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA).

Other Ways for the government to support business

Respondents shared the following recommendations of other ways for the government to support business:

- "It would have been great if the fire was put out. The air quality was terrible in Houston for many months and the back country was closed, impacting campers etc..."
- "Better communication methods so business can access information and so that agencies outside the community can better access information on a region. **More looking forward information on DriveBC to help with decision making** - right now generally just says when to expect the next update but having even an estimated time for opening during a road closure would be helpful. People may be willing to wait 24 hours but may not be willing to wait 48 for example. As it stands many turn around or agencies reroute because there is no estimate."
- "Marketing campaigns were halted, but this didn't help us financially much, but it is something we paid for that didn't happen. Travellers were worried about visiting and some cancelled trips"
- "78,486 hectares of land was burned this year in Cheslatta Carrier Nation traditional territory impacting the many economic activities that Cheslatta Carrier Nation is trying hard to succeed with. In the past 13 years, 355,961 hectares of land has burned in Cheslatta Carrier Nation traditional territory. The Province must increase its efforts to fight fires in central and northern BC or **find partnerships with nations and companies that can fight the fires on their behalf** if places like Kelowna are of higher priority to them."
- "The governments could figure out better ways of communicating with each other. It all starts from the top down. Give proper info, contact, let the Yukon help when offered, and visa versa. Have better signage, increase cell and internet coverage."
- "Pay for our losses as we had 0 choices when evacuation order is implemented and alert tourists won't book"
- "Better estimation of when highways will reopen to communicate travel plan changes with tourists better."
- "Promote travel to the region. Support with fuel costs, keep highways well maintained so travellers can visit our region."
- "We don't have any suggestions for that. Difficult to know what exactly would make a difference"
- "This survey is a bit hard to answer from a local government perspective. I will forward this to local businesses who felt more of the impact. I appreciate what DBC is doing and I hope they will offer crisis communication training again in the new year for those of us who unfortunately were unable to attend the November sessions."
- "**Working with travel tools (such as google maps) to ensure accurate information is being distributed - for weeks after our evacuation alert was lifted, Google Maps was still indicating road closures and trail closures.**"
- "Take into consideration the implications of evacuation alerts for all stakeholders and ensure that they are implemented in a timely manner. Rescinding alerts should also be considered in a timely fashion, as alerts are a big deterrent for tourists and they don't seem to always be warranted."
- "Proper reporting"
- "**Avoid issuing travel advisories unless necessary after lifting advisories a significant campaign to encourage travel to resume should be undertaken**"
- "We are reimbursed by the BC government for ESS services. The municipality is able to support the operation of the Visitor Information Centre at this time."
- "Extending the CEBA deadline would be a start. In general ensuring wildfires are extinguished as soon as possible is critical. I happen to know that forestry no longer has the man-power year-round for proper forest management as my dad did in the 60s and 70s. There are four employees in this area that is vastly covered in forest. That is absolutely unacceptable to manage forests properly, and they say so themselves."

Appendices

Appendix A - Survey Questions

* Indicates required

Question	Question Type
Company Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Company Name * ● Community(ies) of Operation * ● Company website ● Number of employees * ● In what year was your company founded? * 	Single line
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Months of Operation* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Year Round; ○ January; ○ February; ○ March; ○ April; ○ May; ○ June; ○ July; ○ August; ○ September; ○ October; ○ November; ○ December; 	Multiple checkboxes
Business Type <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Primary Type of Business * ● Secondary Type of Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accommodation; ○ Activity / Attraction; ○ Association / Network; ○ Event; ○ Food & Beverage; ○ Other; ○ Retail; ○ Tour Product; ○ Tourism Organization; ○ Transportation; ○ Visitor Centre; 	Single Select
Ownership Types <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ownership type <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sole proprietor; ○ Partnership; 	Single select

Question	Question Type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Corporation; ○ Non-profit Organization; ○ Other; ● Indigenous Owned Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No; ○ Indigenous Tourism Company (51% or more); ○ Indigenous Related Company (50% or less); ○ Indigenous Non-Profit; ● Female Owned Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yes - 51% or more; ○ No; ● Youth (30 or under) Owned Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Yes - 51% or more; ○ No; 	
Description of Events	
<p>Which of the following issues have impacted your business?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wildfire ○ Poor Air Quality ○ Flood ○ Road closure ○ State of Emergency ○ Travel Restriction Order ○ Evacuation Order ○ Evacuation Alert ○ Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Multiple checkboxes
<p>What other issues have impacted your business?</p>	<p>Multi-line text</p>
<p>Describe the details of the situation impacting your business.</p>	<p>Multi-line text</p>
<p>How have the wildfires impacted your business operations? <i>Check all that apply.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Business as usual (No impact) ○ Loss of revenues ○ Staffing changes ○ Increased operational costs ○ Increased marketing costs ○ Negative perception from customers 	<p>Multiple checkboxes</p>

Question	Question Type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Other (specify below) ○ Reduced operations ○ Closed early for the season ○ Permanently closed 	
What other ways have the wildfires impacted your business operations?	Multi-line text
Staffing	
How many employees were you planning to have on staff for the entire summer (from May to September)?	Number
How many employees did you lay off because of wildfires?	Number
How many employees had their hours reduced because of the wildfires?	Number
What impacts did the wildfires (smoke, evacuation alerts and orders, etc.) have on your employees?* <i>Check all that apply.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Loss of income ○ Loss of benefits ○ Stress and mental health challenges ○ Other 	Multiple checkboxes
What other impacts has the travel order had on your employees?	Multi-line text
If you employ international workers, please describe how the wildfires impacted your international employees.	Multi-line text
If you employ student workers, please describe how the wildfires impacted student workers.	Multi-line text
Financial	
What is the estimated decrease in expected revenue (%) caused by the wildfire impacts from May to September (including bookings, reservations, and walk-ins)?*	Single select

Question	Question Type
What was the estimated decrease (\$) in expected revenue for your business caused by the events indicated?	Single-line text
What is the estimated decrease in expected revenue (%) caused by the wildfires for the next three months (including bookings, reservations, and walk-ins)?	Single-line text
What is the estimated decrease in expected revenue (%) caused by the wildfires for the next three months (including bookings, reservations, and walk-ins)?	Single-line text
Please indicate your ability to pay your expenses for the next 30 days. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Able to pay 100% of expenses; ● Able to pay 50-99% of expenses; ● Able to pay 1-49% of expenses; ● Unable to pay any of expenses; ● Unsure; 	Single select
What amount of debt has your business incurred as a result of the wildfires?	Number
Please indicate your ability to pay your expenses for the next 30 days. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Not applicable; ● Less than 3 months; ● 3-6 months; ● 6-12 months; ● More than 12 months; 	Single select
Recommendations	
Please indicate which ways you would like the Provincial and/or Federal governments to support your business as a result of the wildfires. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Financial support; ● Wage subsidies; ● Changes to Insurance coverage; ● Extension of deadlines to repay COVID Small Business Loan(s) such as Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA); ● Increased Marketing campaign by Destination BC, TOTA, and/or communities; 	Multiple checkboxes

Question	Question Type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="220 302 667 333">• Incentives to encourage travel;	
What other ways could the government support your business after wildfires?	Multi-line text