

Landslide devastates North Kootenay Lake community of Johnsons Landing

by Jan McMurray

The people of Johnsons Landing are struggling to get back to living their lives after a devastating landslide on July 12 took the lives of four community members, destroyed four homes, severely damaged two homes and impacted three others, wiped out the community's water system, and took out a portion of the road into the community.

The 2.6-kilometre-long and 507-metre-wide (at its widest point) slide covered a total area of 34 hectares. 14 properties were evacuated.

We spoke with Kate O'Keefe, long-time Johnsons Landing resident, on Monday, July 23. "The landscape has changed – the fabric of the community has changed so drastically," she said. "There are a lot of missing pieces to the puzzle, like how our water system is going to be funded. It's like trying to do a puzzle when the pieces are scattered all over here and there and down the path. It's very stressful."

However, O'Keefe said that many residents are determined to see that Johnsons Landing continues to be a viable community.

She also said that people from the area are so very supportive and have

offered assistance in many ways.

Water is the biggest issue, she said. Residents were immediately given access to Kootenay Joe Creek without having to get licences, so for the past week and a half, residents have been hauling water from the creek, and bottled water has been brought in. There is also one commercial agriculture holding that needs water.

However, the Province is not a purveyor of water, so will not provide funding for a new system. "It's disappointing to find that the provincial government does not step forward with the critical issue of water. Other means of funding are being pursued for that," she said. A total of \$8,500 for a temporary system has been donated by Kaslo & District Community Forest Society (\$5,000) and Red Cross (\$3,500).

O'Keefe reported that a team of local people was coming on July 24 to assess the creek and provide ideas on how to address the water issue.

The surface water system on Gar Creek was owned and operated by local residents, who hold water licences through the provincial Water Protection & Sustainability Branch.

The road across the creek was

repaired and open to local traffic the evening of Sunday, July 22. Crews put in an eight-foot culvert – much larger than the original one – and two four-foot culverts in case of overflow. The portion of the road near the lake remains closed until an assessment can be done.

At public meetings held in Argenta July 20 and Kaslo July 23, many of the emergency response personnel were on hand to provide information.

An assessor for the Disaster Financial Assistance program, Tim MacLeod, had arrived and said he would start helping people fill out the application form on July 23. Funding of up to \$300,000 is available to permanent residents for destroyed or damaged property, and will help to cover either the cost of repair or replacement, or the assessed value, whichever is lower.

Dawn Atorp of the RDCK, the lead agency for the disaster, said a 'rapid damage assessment' had been done of the buildings in the evacuation area by an RDCK building inspector, and 11 people had been provided with assessments of their homes and buildings. Some owners of property in the evacuation area are seasonal residents and had not yet been able to be contacted as of July 20.

The RDCK was setting up a process to allow evacuees to go to their properties to gather up their belongings.

Peter Jordan, geotechnical expert with the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO), gave geotechnical information about the slide. "This is a one-in-a-million slide like the Hope Slide or the Frank Slide," he said. "Although it was not as big as those slides, it was exceptionally big."

Jordan said that if he had mapped the area before the slide, he would have

mapped it as being safe. "I would not have predicted a slide of this magnitude here," he said.

He said this is landslide-prone country, and small slides happen all the time in isolated areas. In the many years he has been here, he has seen only one other debris slide of this magnitude, in an isolated area upstream of Renata.

He explained what happened on that fateful day. At about 10:30

am on Thursday, July 12, a debris avalanche originating from 1,200-1,300 metres elevation – not very high up the mountain – started its course down Gar Creek. As the debris flowed down the creek gully, a large amount spilled over the bank at a bend (dog leg) in the creek, destroying three houses, two of which were occupied, impacting other buildings, and covering a large area of

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The slide at Johnsons Landing took the lives of four community members.