

Section 9 Burns Lake – Physical Characteristics

9.1 History:

Burns Lake and the Lakes District history dates back to the early 1900's when it was a major supplier of railroad ties for the new Grand Trunk Pacific Railway connecting the west coast port of Prince Rupert to the rest of Canada. Today this quiet little community depends on its main industries of logging, lumber production, farming, ranching, and tourism for its livelihood. With a friendly population of 2600, and a further 2600 in the Lakes District, Burns Lake meets the needs of the tourist, with a good range of shopping and support services. Area campsites and resorts abound, providing facilities for fishing, hunting, and recreation. The outlying areas of Burns Lake, generally referred to as the Lakes District, boast over 1000 lakes, and some 3000 miles of fishing. Most of the lakes are within easy driving distance and have campsites suitable for recreational vehicles as well as boat launch facilities.

9.2 Access:

Burns Lake is located near the geographic centre of British Columbia approximately 224 km west of Prince George, (approximately 1/3 of the way between Prince George and Prince Rupert), on the Yellowhead Highway # 16. This highway carries traffic between Prince George and the coast connecting there with coastal ferry systems going both north to Alaska and south to Vancouver and Seattle, as well as the Stewart Cassiar Highway # 37 going north to the Yukon and Alaska. This traffic consists of all types of large trucks carrying all types of commodities as well as major tourist traffic in summer. Highway # 35 connects Burns Lake with a farming / tourist / logging area to the south. The area surrounding Burns Lake is interlaced with logging roads of varying degrees of condition offering access to countless large and small lakes. CN Rails' main northern line also travels this corridor with numerous trains daily, carrying commodities of forest products, general freight, coal, and hazardous goods. Both these transportation corridors travel through the village.

9.3 Physical Characteristics:

Burns Lake is situated on the northeast shore of Burns Lake. The Endako River, which flows through the lake, into the Nechako River which in turn flows into the Fraser River, drains this area. Highway # 16 follows this river valley, both east and west of the Village. Highway # 35 which joins Highway # 16 within the Village boundaries, crosses the lake at a narrow part of the lake via a short bridge and serves the areas to the south including Francois and Ootsa Lake areas.

The downtown core is on relatively flat ground near the lake where the highway and rail corridors are also located. Northeast of Highway # 16 (which is also the main street in town) the land rises abruptly about 100meters to a bench or flat above the downtown core. This hill and bench is where the majority of the residences are located. Streets accessing this residential area are fairly steep causing some concern during winter months.

The village and regional district administrative offices as well as the fire hall and RCMP buildings, Ministry of Forests, the Lakeview Shopping Mall, as well as a strip mall, are located between the highway and the railway. Lakes District Senior Secondary School and the College of New Caledonia Campus are also in this area. The hospital and BC Ambulance Station and 2 elementary schools are situated on the bench above town.

The areas east and west of the Village along the Endako River valley consists mostly of private land with mixed open pasture/hay field and forests. North and south of the Village, beyond the private land, is the working forest, a mixture of logging, mature and immature forest.

9.4 Administration:

Burns Lakes elected officials consist of a Mayor and four councillors. The Village administration is made up of the Chief Administrative Officer, the Director of Engineering & Development Services, the Director of Financial Services, the Director of Protective Services (Fire Chief), Clerk, and three support staff.

9.5 Population:

The Village of Burns Lake serves as the Lakes District's primary service centre. It's a vibrant, progressive, and socially diverse community whose residents come from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds; in addition to having a large, active, and stable First Nations population (the Lake Babine Nation is one of B.C.'s largest). It boasts residents of European, Asian, African, and North American descent. Indeed, it can be said that Burns Lake provides a demographic snapshot of rural British Columbia in the 21st Century. Population figures for the Village of Burns Lake are approximately 2,778 which includes First Nations people on Reserves within the Village. The total area population for the region which is serviced by Burns Lake is approximately 6,771.

9.6 Organizations:

Dozens of organizations operate within the community and region. In addition to well-established and stable municipal, regional district, and First Nations' governments (which, for the most part, have historically enjoyed a good working relationship), the community is served by the College of New Caledonia, School District #91, the Burns Lake & District Chamber of Commerce, the Burns Lake Native Development Corporation, the Burns Lake Community Development Association, and a host of smaller groups (such as the Rotary Club) dedicated to enhancing quality of life in the region as a whole.

9.7 Economy:

Forestry fuels the Lakes District economy, employing 65 per cent of its population. Two large processing plants (Babine Forest Products and Decker Lake Forest Products) and several smaller family-owned processing facilities operate in the area; it is also home to one of the largest and most active Small Business Forest Enterprise Programs in the province. With bountiful wildlife resources and spectacular scenery, the region supports significant recreation and tourism

industries, which in turn employ approximately eight per cent of the local workforce. Service-related industries and mixed farming/ranching operations also provide significant levels of employment.