

THE FIRE IN OUR HEARTS

A FILM BY JOSIAS TSCHANZ



Feature Documentary | 84 min | Canada | 2026

LOGLINE

As wildfire threatens a remote region of British Columbia, the Cheslatta Carrier Nation and Southside residents stay to defend their land—transforming crisis into a blueprint for resilience and sovereignty.

SYNOPSIS

When wildfire closes in on the remote Southside of northern British Columbia, the Cheslatta Carrier Nation and local residents face an impossible choice: evacuate, or stay and defend the land that defines them. With distance, limited access, and delayed outside response, the community is forced to rely on itself—drawing on Indigenous leadership, cooperation, and generations of lived knowledge to meet the fire in near isolation.

But the flames expose more than devastation. In the aftermath, the burn reveals the long-erased site of a Cheslatta village, resurfacing a suppressed chapter of history and reframing what is truly at stake.

The Fire In Our Hearts is an intimate, cinematic portrait of resilience and sovereignty—showing how community-led action, responsibility, and memory shape survival in a world increasingly defined by fire.



DIIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The Fire In Our Hearts is a first-person documentary rooted in my lived connection to the Southside — a remote, 10,000-square-kilometre region of British Columbia where fewer than 2,000 people live, work, and protect the land they call home.

I arrived here as a teenager, newly immigrated, without English and searching for belonging. The Southside gave me something I had never known before: acceptance, purpose, and community. It is a place shaped by cooperation — home to the Cheslatta Carrier Nation, other Indigenous bands, immigrants, Mennonites, farmers, and loggers — all deeply connected to the land and to one another.

That bond was tested when wildfires tore through the region. In a single season, residents faced 27 major fires, often with limited outside support. From Vancouver, I watched my community burn from afar. Unable to stay away, I crossed the lake back into the active fire zone, camera in hand, to document what was unfolding from the inside.

What I captured is rare, intimate footage of a community under extreme pressure — not only fighting fire, but navigating isolation, uncertainty, and systems unprepared for disasters of this scale. Amid the devastation, the flames uncovered something long buried: the rediscovery of a Cheslatta Carrier Nation village site, erased decades earlier. This moment reframed the disaster, revealing how land, memory, and history persist even in the face of destruction.

This film is not about assigning blame. It is about witnessing what happens when small, self-reliant communities are forced to depend on themselves — and how innovation, care, and collective responsibility emerge under pressure. As new legislation threatens to undermine hard-won local knowledge, The Fire In Our Hearts asks what we can learn from those already living on the front lines of climate disaster. This film is my attempt to honor the people who raised me, to bear witness to their resilience, and to insist that any meaningful response to the climate crisis must include the voices of those who know the land best.

CHESLATTA CARRIER NATION

The Southside lies within the traditional territory of the Cheslatta Carrier Nation. In the 1950s, the Cheslatta were forcibly displaced from their villages due to the construction of a hydroelectric project, and much of their land and history was submerged or erased. Decades later, wildfires exposed the remains of a long-lost village site — a powerful reminder that the land holds memory, even when history is buried or ignored. This rediscovery became a defining moment for the community and a central thread in the film.



THE WILDFIRE REALITY

The Southside is located in one of British Columbia's highest wildfire-risk zones. In a single fire season, residents confronted 27 major fires across a vast, remote area of approximately 10,000 square kilometres, home to fewer than 2,000 people. Distance, limited infrastructure, and delayed outside response revealed systemic gaps in emergency preparedness and communication. As climate change intensifies fire behaviour, these conditions are no longer exceptional — they are becoming the norm.



A COMMUNITY-LED RESPONSE

With official resources stretched thin, Southside residents took action themselves. Indigenous leadership, local knowledge, and cross-cultural cooperation became essential tools for survival. Together, the Cheslatta Carrier Nation and Southside residents formed the Chinook Emergency Response Society, establishing clear communication channels and acquiring fire trailers that enabled rapid initial attack when fires approached.

Farmers, loggers, immigrants, Mennonites, and members of the Cheslatta Carrier Nation worked side by side to protect homes, forests, cultural sites, and livelihoods. Their response challenged the assumption that rural or remote communities are passive victims of disaster, revealing instead a model of self-determination, adaptability, and collective responsibility. Through these practical systems, the Southside has since become a reference point — a blueprint for other communities across Canada facing similar climate-driven threats.



KEY THEMES

- **Climate Change on the Front Lines**

The film documents a future that has already arrived, where communities must live with constant environmental threat and uncertainty.

- **Indigenous Land, Memory, and Resilience**

The rediscovery of the Cheslatta village site reveals how land carries history — and how environmental destruction can also uncover erased truths.

- **Community vs. System**

Outdated, one-size-fits-all policies clash with the realities of remote regions, raising questions about who is empowered to act during crisis.

- **Belonging and Collective Identity**

A diverse population, bound not by sameness but by shared responsibility to the land, demonstrates how cooperation can transcend cultural difference.

- **Self-Sufficiency as Survival**

The Southside's response reframes resilience not as heroism, but as necessity — and as a practical model for other communities facing climate-driven disasters.



TARGET AUDIENCE & IMPACT

The Fire In Our Hearts is designed for audiences drawn to contemporary, character-driven documentary cinema that engages with urgent global issues through intimate, place-based storytelling.

Although rooted in a remote region of northern British Columbia, the film is shaped for broad resonance. Its exploration of resilience, belonging, and self-determination speaks to audiences confronting a world increasingly defined by climate disruption, uncertainty, and the need for collective responsibility.

PRIMARY AUDIENCE

The film is intended for documentary-literate audiences who engage with international festivals, public broadcasters, and nonfiction platforms, and who seek nuanced perspectives on climate crisis that move beyond spectacle toward lived experience and agency.

The story holds particular relevance for audiences interested in Indigenous sovereignty and land stewardship, as well as viewers in rural, remote, or climate-vulnerable regions who recognize their own realities reflected on screen. Educators, students, and policy-adjacent audiences may also engage with the film as a lens on environmental preparedness and systemic resilience.

Rather than positioning communities as passive victims of disaster, the film foregrounds local knowledge, cooperation, and innovation, offering an alternative to dominant crisis narratives.



BROADER REACH & LONGEVITY

Through its personal point of view and immersive access, *The Fire In Our Hearts* invites wider — including urban and international — audiences into a deeper understanding of how climate change is already reshaping everyday life. The Southside becomes a microcosm for challenges faced globally, extending the film's relevance across cultural and national contexts.

Beyond its festival life, the film is designed for long-term impact through broadcast, educational use, and community-led screenings, supporting sustained dialogue around climate resilience and local agency.



VISUAL IMPRESSIONS



FESTIVAL STATUS



- **First Look Program** – *Whistler International Film Festival*
- **Best Environmental Film** – *Sundar Prize Film Festival*
- **Best Feature Film** – *WorldFest Houston International Film Festival*
- **Best Cinematography** – *WorldFest Houston International Film Festival*
- **Best Feature Film** – *Beyond Borders Film Festival*
- **Official Selection** – *Niagara International Film Festival*
- **Official Selection** – *Kelowna Film Festival*
- **Spirit Award** – *Kelowna Film Festival*
- **Best Director Nomination** – *Kelowna Film Festival*
- **Dumbo Film Festival (NYC)** – *Semi Finalist*
- **Leo Awards** – *Best Original Score Nomination*
- **Montreal International Film Festival** – *Official Selection*

FILM DETAILS

Format: Feature Documentary
Runtime: 84 minutes
Language(s): English (with Swiss-German and Carrier)
Country: Canada
Year: 2026
Director / Producer: Josias Tschanz
Production Company: Counting Ants Productions



PRESS MATERIALS

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