

Episode 21 | Bridging communications gaps in Indian Country
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Narrator: You're listening to *Public Safety First*, a podcast to help you learn about the First Responder Network Authority and how you can be part of the future of public safety technology.

And now your host.

Adam Geisler: Welcome to the *Public Safety First* podcast. I'm Adam Geisler and I serve as the National Tribal Government Liaison with the First Responder Network Authority. We're here in Nashville, Tennessee, with the Tribal Working Group (TWG) to discuss the current and future work that the FirstNet Authority is going to be doing with tribes across Indian Country.

Today, we're joined by Danae Wilson, a leader at the forefront of tribal emergency communications, and telecommunications in general, for Indian Country. Danae has a long history in this field with more than two decades of experience working for the Department of Interior Office of Special Trustee, as a consultant for a communications company and public utilities, and a retail chain that covered New Mexico and Texas. Today, Danae serves as the manager of the Department of Technology Services for the Nez Perce Tribe, which is located in Northern Idaho, and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), Public Safety Advisory Committee representative and delegate to the PSAC Tribal Working Group. She also serves on the Federal Communications Commission Intergovernmental Advisory Committee and the Native Nations Communications Task Force. Finally, she leads the Public Safety Advisory Committee Tribal Working Group, as she did today, for our Tribal Working Group, here in Nashville, Tennessee.

Welcome to the *Public Safety First* podcast, Danae. We want to say thank you for joining us.

Danae Wilson: Thank you, Adam, for having me today.

Adam Geisler: So Danae, we want to jump right into it. Regarding your role on the Tribal Working Group, as a leader from Indian Country, how do you feel that the working group is best serving Indian Country today?

Danae Wilson: I think the Tribal Working Group is an excellent group of first responders; deployers, users of the network; and experts — subject matter experts — for tribal nations. I also think that the Tribal Working Group has developed great policy and is doing good advocacy for Indian Country.

Adam Geisler: So, I know that you are fresh and new to the advisory committee, being newly appointed here in just the last few months. But, I was wondering if you'd kind of give us some insight into what



your thoughts are about the purpose of the group moving forward as it relates to FirstNet and the Public Safety Advisory Committee.

Danae Wilson: I think the prior TWG, both iterations before my appointment to the TWG, set a good foundation for us to build upon. I think what we're going to be focusing on is adoption and deployment. We'll also be looking at meaningful input to the Roadmap that's going to be developed, and we're looking for good testimony about how tribal consultation is going to work in the benefit of the tribes.

Adam Geisler: So, now that the network is here, how do you think tribes are going to react to the deployment of the network as it starts to come online in Indian Country?

Danae Wilson: I think we're clamoring for good, solid cellular communications, emergency communications. I think having zero access, and going to meaningful access, or access that's actually going to benefit Indian Country, is a step in the right direction.

Adam Geisler: So, I think for some of the listeners that we have our there that are new to Indian Country topics or issues, can you give us a little bit of an overview about the current landscape of cellular technology and how that relates to first responders today in Indian Country?

Danae Wilson: I think there's a real lack of understanding that Indian Country truly is left behind. Rural America in general is left behind. We don't have 3G in some locations, let alone 4G or LTE service. So the deployment of the FirstNet network is going to bring us, it's a significant step forward, it's bridging a gap that currently wouldn't be bridged any other way. I mean there is no way to get from point A to point B without this particular path forward in specific locations. If you take a representative from Montana who talked today about having a northern border where 13 unmanned locations have zero cellular signal, no LMR [Land Mobile Radio] signal, it's difficult for tribes to manage a border. And that goes all across Indian Country, but definitely those tribes who are bordering international borders are seeing a more significant communications challenge.

Adam Geisler: So, I think you bring up a really interesting point that with over 573 tribes that are federally recognized across the United States, there's a lot of jurisdictional challenges that have to be taken on in doing public safety service in and around Indian Country. But I think that something that's important that you regularly share with the body and with FirstNet is your experience in working with multiple agencies that are off-reservation. Could you share with us a little bit about your interactions and how you work with surrounding communities in and around Nez Perce?

Danae Wilson: So the Nez Perce reservation is a checkerboard reservation, which means we have multiple land statuses. The issue on our reservation is we'll have county, we'll have city, state, tribal, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Forest Service, and federal agents — all on our reservation. So, jurisdictional challenges are significant for us. Who to call when an emergency happens, who's the responding



agency, who is responsible for the individual hurt, and is it on tribal land or non-tribal land, what is the status?

I think reservations all across the United States, where the tribe is a checkerboard or where they're a landless tribe, but have treaty rights, continues to be a significant problem. And deployment on reservation is a challenge too for carriers. We recognize that, and tribes are working diligently to address those issues and to bring consultation and deployment and competition to their reservations to address their issues.

Adam Geisler: So, are there a lot of casinos in Idaho?

Danae Wilson: I believe the three tribes that are in Idaho have casinos. So, but not every tribes does. I think, the perception is every tribe has gaming, and every tribe is rolling in riches. The reality is much further from the truth. And that tribal casinos, that income from that goes back into social service programs and back into our emergency responders, our police department, we don't, our tax base is limited, the incomes on reservation are limited, so the casino helps supplement service to its membership and service to its communities by funding police departments, conservation enforcement officers, social service programs, education programs.

Adam Geisler: So, I think you just brought up a really good point about the way that tribal economies function and the way that public safety is able to fund their activities in tribal communities. Often, from what we see in our travels here at FirstNet, is when we start to talk about procurement processes and lead times, and things to think about for the network as it's coming online, what we're finding is a lot of tribes are paying for all of those public safety and social services through their gaming activities. So it sounds like that's something that is going on for you as well.

Danae Wilson: It is. Our tobacco tax, as an example, helps fund our law enforcement office and our conservation enforcement gets an amount of funding from our gaming allocation. We also get Bureau of Indian Affairs funding for our law enforcement office, but beyond that, federally, we apply to Homeland Security, which helps supply funding for communications on reservation. And that's significantly important for Nez Perce because, prior to us having our own radio communications on our own towers, we had to supplement other agencies' communications budgets. And in some cases, in significant amounts of money, money that we could have easily reinvested in our own infrastructure, but to benefit the region, we partnered with regional carriers and law enforcement agencies or radio communications agencies, and we've made an effort to share that infrastructure for the betterment of the entire region.

Adam Geisler: So the advent of FirstNet coming online here and in the near future, I know you've been involved in some pretty successful and exciting conversations with our partner, so that's got to be creating a level of excitement then in the community — having an additional carrier coming into the area to help with public safety communications and also to help with the general public's access to services that maybe haven't been there. Is that an accurate representation?



Danae Wilson: It is. Nez Perce tribe has expended an enormous amount of money for what we have available for infrastructure to help build what's necessary to bring FirstNet's partner to the table and to expand services on reservation. We're really looking forward to having a network that is going to be available with preemption and priority for our emergency communicators that doesn't exist right now and that we're not able to procure with any other entity.

Adam Geisler: Wonderful. Well that's exciting stuff. I know that you've championed a lot of things related to FirstNet here in the last few months, but I also know you're championing some things prior to coming on board with our working group. Are there any processes that are available to tribes that you've experienced that have been helpful that you may want to share with some of the listeners?

Danae Wilson: I do think there's tribal consultation — of course, as always — I've been preaching that for years. Utilize the tools that you have. FirstNet is our federal partner, and they recognize that. So, championing something that we have access to and that we can call upon to bring other entities, responders, to the table is great for us.

I also think being involved in your state operations, your emergency communications, whatever those state operables are called in your state. Those emergency planning committees are going to determine how deployment is taking place in your state. Tribes need to take an active role in how their states, and demand a seat at that that table. It's their right and right now that's where the deployment monies are going, it's to states, the plans are going through the state plans, so I really think tribes need to take an aggressive role in ensuring that their lands are included.

Adam Geisler: So, I think that that kind of dovetails into some other thoughts and comments I'm hoping we can get from you related to the work that you've done specifically with the First Responder Network Authority and AT&T on planning and addressing challenges. I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about the experiences that you've had so far in implementing policies or in coordinating with AT&T and FirstNet.

Danae Wilson: I want to say, first of all, our tribal consultation was hugely successful. I can't thank FirstNet enough for taking on that government-to-government relationship with Nez Perce in particular, but tribes in general. Recognizing that federal role, federal to federal, it was enormously beneficial to Nez Perce.

In deployment, it gave AT&T a really good sense of the fact that the tribe is at a level that they may not have known we were able to perform at and that we understood what those emergency communications needs were, probably better than anybody else. And that those emergency communications were not only benefiting the tribe, but benefiting the entire region.

And so, having that ability and FirstNet responding to the request, was extremely helpful for us. And they helped negotiate where now our region is going to see enhanced deployment that previous to our



request for government to government was not as robust. We're going to see a significant increase in what's going to be available in Northcentral Idaho that would not have been there otherwise.

Adam Geisler: So looking into the future, and where FirstNet is going, you're obviously one of the first tribes to work through some of the processes and help correct some of the challenges as we all learn together, but I'm wondering if there's some points or thoughts that you may want to share with other tribes that are considering either purchasing service or working with our partner to expand coverage and infrastructure in their lands?

Danae Wilson: I do think that tribes need to recognize that FirstNet has tribal representation. They have liaisons that know reservations, they know tribal governments, and they're able to elevate issues right to the very top. And so those liaisons, like yourself and Margaret, have been really instrumental in identifying points of contact at tribes.

I think tribes need to take advantage of the fact that we have a resource that allows us to elevate our issues and help bring deployment to our reservations where, if we hadn't had that, if you weren't out doing 52 or more sites a year, or hitting all of our national conferences, we wouldn't know about it.

I do think tribes need to take a more active role. I think we need to own the expansion of the network on our reservation lands. And we need to look at this as a true partnership. We're benefiting in our communities by increased broadband, but we're also, more importantly, bringing emergency communications where, in some locations, Nez Perce as an example, we have no AT&T presence right now and we're really looking forward to having that enhanced emergency communication.

Adam Geisler: So, as we kind of wrap this up, are there any additional thoughts or closing comments you want to make related to either FirstNet, are there things that maybe we could look at doing better? Or are there things that you think we're doing well? What advice do you have for us to improve our ability to impact tribal communities in public safety?

Danae Wilson: I think for tribes it's hard because we're so different. Everybody thinks one tribe is the same as the next tribe and, frankly, we're not. And some of us are further behind than others in terms of broadband access and what's available. Fiber in the ground or microwave backhauler, whatever the situation may be. Standard POTS [plain old telephone service]. Some reservations addressing is a real problem. Not knowing that and not seeing it, it's really difficult to believe that there's still places in the United States today that don't have addressing — that there is no street name, that you have multi-generations living in one home — and that, in a lot of locations there just is no access to any type of technology.

So, cellphones aren't going to work, land-mobile-radios aren't going to work, but engaging tribes early on, especially if there is a deployment plan, it helps us become better prepared to welcome that service and to get through our processes internally. So, we heard from our Navajo Nation representative today



that it's a 24-month process for tower siting. You know, FirstNet wouldn't know that, AT&T wouldn't know that, if we didn't have a Tribal Working Group. If we didn't have tribal representatives telling FirstNet, "This is what our process is," and, "This is the steps to take to bring deployment on reservation."

Adam Geisler: So, I think you really gave some great advice here in terms of the level of consciousness that we need to have in working with our partner and developing relationships early, in order to achieve some of the network deployment elements that need to be considered when looking at site acquisition and tower deployment. So that's, those are great suggestions.

When it comes down to Indian Country sharing data, this will be our last topic and I know it will be a sensitive one, from your perspective — how do you think FirstNet will help, or hinder, the sharing of data or the willingness of tribes to want to share information over the network?

Danae Wilson: I think there's going to be a level of data sharing. Already, we have information on driver's licenses, we have information that's already shared with the state. Coming in and saying that's the data that we want, we're already sharing that as individuals, with our states, with our counties, with our local governments. So, anything beyond that — enrollment data, income data — that type of stuff is going to be extremely sensitive. Tribes are going to be really reserved in regard to how they do enrollment, what that enrollment database looks like and how our data is maintained.

But if they are truly only looking at sharing data that would already be on a public network, and they can advertise that it's already on a public network, then you're not going to have as much pushback as you would saying, "Give me connection to your tribal databases. Give me connection to your enrollment databases." You're going to see a significant pushback on that.

So, I think you're going to see, if data sharing comes down to membership and enrollment, you're going to see that there's a significant pushback against that. But if it's already publically accessible data, that's not going to be as much of an issue. And you'll see tribes adopt more if they can change that message. That, we only want the information that's already publically available.

Adam Geisler: So, it sounds like we have a topic for our next Tribal Working Group meeting, as it relates to data sharing and how we message some of those things. As we close this out, I just wanted to see if there was anything that you wanted to share that we hadn't covered, and you know, make sure you have the opportunity to share with the rest of the public safety community that's going to be listening to this podcast today. What did we miss, or what did we leave on the table? What are the thoughts that you have that you want to make sure people understand as it relates to Indian Country and FirstNet?

Danae Wilson: First, I just want to say thank you to FirstNet and their partner for bringing broadband deployment into reservations, but I would say that we're sophisticated. We were nations before anybody else came. We had a society before anybody else was here, and we truly are respectful of each



other. And so, more than anything, don't come thinking we don't know what we're doing, because although some of us are further behind than others, we definitely know what we want, we know how we're going to get there, and in 90 percent, 80 percent of the cases, we're either already building it or we're blazing the trail so that an entity can walk in, like your partner, and say, "Oh, they have an infrastructure, let's utilize what they have."

Adam Geisler: Wonderful. Well Danae, I just wanted to thank you for your time and your commitment to the working group and to making the First Responder Network Authority the best that we can, and quite frankly, your candor. We can't improve the network without having an honest dialogue and we know that the public safety community can handle the tough conversations we may have to have, whether it's in Indian Country or anyplace else.

So with that, I'm going to go ahead and wrap up this podcast today. I want to thank all the listeners for joining us at the *Public Safety First* podcast, the first tribal edition. So to all of you out there, *NoŞúun Lóoviq!* And you guys have a great day.

Adam Geisler and Danae Wilson: Thank you.

Narrator: Thanks for listening today. We're excited to have you join our podcast community. Make sure to subscribe on iTunes, SoundCloud, and YouTube. You can learn more about the First Responder Network Authority at FirstNet.gov and learn about FirstNet products and services at FirstNet.com.

