# Memorandum

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Subject: Flora Communications Proposal

# Summary

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# Background

British Columbia is blessed with a massive outdoor playground that attracts thousands of wilderness enthusiasts, recreators, and tourists every year [1]. Backcountry recreation is a chance to escape cellular service and the constant barrage of notifications, emails, and breaking news, but it also comes with an inherent risk. When an emergency arises, contacting medical and rescue services it is essential to get help as soon as possible to prevent serious injury or death.

## Current Solutions

The current technologies for emergency backcountry communication rely on expensive subscription-based satellite devices like the Garmin InReach and SPOT families of devices. Devices that allow text-based communications start at $150 USD [2] and go up to more than $800 USD [3]. They also require a monthly satellite subscription to operate which is another $15-$50 expense incurred by each user per month, depending on the device and the plan [4]. These devices make practical and fiscal sense for hard-core enthusiasts who spend a lot of time in the backcountry or people who regularly work in remote locations on their own or in small groups.

## Petal Radio & AVAlink Network

For most people, an expensive GPS satellite messaging device is not feasible; However, this doesn’t mean that they should be on their own if they ever want to venture past the bounds of cellular service and experience nature to its fullest!

Figure 1: AVAlink logo.

LoRa (Long-Range) digital radio is a recent innovation that provides a robust text-based communication protocol [5]. FLoRa Communications is designing a LoRa-capable digital radio called *Petal* and a full-stack repeater network solution called *AVAlink*. Instead of requiring users to have an expensive satellite device, our repeaters will host a browser-based web application so that anyone with a smartphone can access the network. It is important that this system is available year-round, so solar panels and battery banks will power each repeater. The repeaters will form a LoRa mesh network that connects to the emergency response infrastructure in the area, like search and rescue and 911. User can also send messages to other repeaters to share information with other network users. FLoRa Communications is excited to announce that we will be unveiling a prototype (Version 0) of *AVAlink* and *Petal* Radio on December 13th at the 2024 Camosun College Capstone Symposium, and we invite you to join us for this exciting event!

## Target Market

While most hard-core enthusiasts own an emergency transponder like a Garmin InReach, casual recreators do not. This product targets established outdoor tourism/recreation organizations who see a large volume of casual and seasoned outdoor visitors and who want to add a layer of redundancy to their safety communication systems that patrons can access in the event of an emergency.

The *AVAlink* and *Petal* radio system is the backbone of what FLoRa Communications offers, but as the people who know it best, we will also provide contracting services to these organizations to evaluate their communication needs, design a network, and deploy our *AVAlink* product in their region to protect their patrons.

We are already in talks with the Kludahk Outdoors Club to do a trial of our product on the Kludahk Trail.

## Moving Forward

The future of the prototype we present in December will be version 1.0 of the *Petal* radio and *AVAlink* software. In Version 1.0 we will bring cost-reduction and manufacturability improvements to the *Petal*, and improved features to the *AVAlink* suite of firmware and software. The hardware will move away from expensive specialty modules and implement its own RF circuitry for the LoRa and Wi-Fi functions. This will reduce the cost per board, and it will also eliminate the board’s reliance on specialty RF modules by using widely available parts instead. We will upgrade the firmware to allow network administrators to update devices over the air, and we will add features to the web application to improve user experience.

# Discussion

## Technical Overview

### Theory of Operation

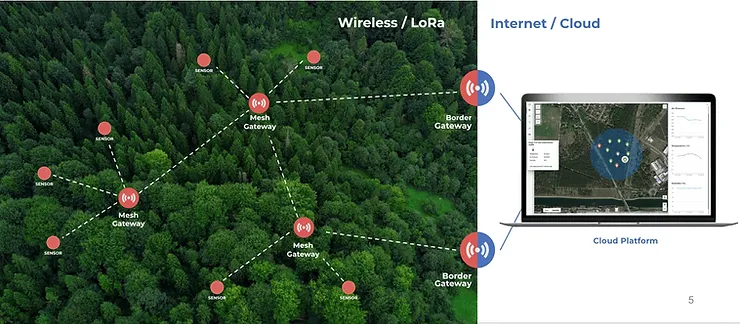


Figure 2: LoRa Mesh network topology from [7].

LoRa provides low-cost and robust text-based digital radio. The power efficiency and small form factor of the transceivers [6] is perfect for outdoor solar powered communications, and multiple LoRa nodes can be connected to form a mesh network that extends coverage [7].

The most popular LoRa mesh network solutions today, like Meshtastic, require each user to have their own LoRa device to connect to the network, and the user interface they provide is highly customizable but also highly complex. Using the Meshtastic platform requires each user to have some knowledge of LoRa and other digital radio concepts. The user interface must also be downloaded as an application before connecting to a node. Node setup is also a barrier to entry because it requires flashing firmware onto the device using a command line or web-based flasher tool. The less technically inclined will find it challenging to use the current LoRa mesh network solutions.

We will develop a mesh network that users can access at any time, without needing their own LoRa device or application. They will simply connect to a Wi-Fi access point provided by the node, scan a QR code to open the web application served by the node, and they can send messages to the local mesh chat or contact emergency services through a gateway node.

### Scope

#### Deliverables

In this prototyping stage, FLoRa Communications will deliver both hardware and software products according to our requirement specifications (Appendix B: Requirement Specifications).

Our *Petal* hardware will incorporate a LoRa transceiver, a microprocessor and Wi-Fi module, a low noise power supply capable of using a variety of battery configurations to provide 3.3V without interfering with the board RF functions, antenna connections that effectively transmit the LoRa packets, and a bespoke enclosure.

Our *AVAlink* software and firmware will provide a web application user interface without an internet connection that allows users to send text messages (chats) from one device to another. The chats will be displayed across the network in real time with an identifier for the sending device and a timestamp. The firmware will monitor the battery voltage and initiate low power disconnects to preserve the battery. It will also use a multiple access strategy to deal with the hidden-node problem [8] and prevent packet collisions while also ensuring predictable latency across the mesh network.

We will also provide documentation for each product, including a user manual for the software/firmware and recommendations for sizing solar panels and batteries for the hardware.

#### Features

The *Petal* enclosure should have an ingress protection rating of at least IPX4 which protects it from rain in an outdoor setting. The *AVAlink* software should have an SOS mode which directly connects to local emergency services and minimizes network latency at the expense of power efficiency.

#### Not Covered

The prototype will not include integration with specific emergency services or the solar power and battery requirements for an actual network deployment since this will depend on the location of the installation. We will also use specialty third-party modules for the Wi-Fi and LoRa functions to reduce our development time. These will be replaced with more widely available and manufacturable parts in production v1.0.

### Methods

#### Hardware

We will have our first PCB prototype (v0.0) based on our base hardware design (Figure 2) developed in Altium Designer and sent to JLCPCB for manufacturing by October 1st. We will develop a hardware testing schema by that date as well. Based on our testing data, we will revise the PCB and submit an updated v0.1 with appropriate change documentation by October 29th, along with the first version of the enclosure. We will have a final prototype revision (v0.2) and enclosure submitted for manufacturing by November 19th.

A diagram of a computer system

Description automatically generated

Figure 3: Petal v0.0 hardware block diagram and power usage estimate.

#### Software/Firmware

The user web interface will be built using Microsoft’s Blazor framework. Blazor apps can be compiled down to a static Web Assembly (.wasm) file which can be run on all modern browsers [9]. Using Web Assembly means that the client’s smartphone and web browser does the computing required render and interact with the web application, not the server. The demands on the *Petal*’s microprocessor are greatly reduced by this framework since it only needs to serve the initial .wasm file and provide an API for the mesh network. This will optimize user experience and reduce the *Petal’s* power consumption.

The firmware will be written in the Rust programming language because of its speed and memory safety guarantees. The firmware will include the mesh network API, .wasm file server, and Wi-Fi access point configuration.

The beta release of *AVAlink* is slated for October 28th with testing to conclude on November 11th. The first production release of *AVAlink v1.0* will be December 13th at the Capstone Symposium.

### Parts & Materials

Version 0 of *Petal* will use prefabricated modules for the LoRa transceiver, microprocessor, and Wi-Fi to expedite the prototyping process and avoid the complexities of designing a radio frequency (RF) PCB. For the LoRa transceiver, we will use the WAVE-20855-HF Core1262 module which uses a Semtech 1262 transceiver. It comes with the receiver balun, transmitter harmonic filters, RF switch, impedance matching circuits, and a temperature compensated crystal oscillator pre-installed. For the processor and Wi-Fi, we will use the ESP32-S3-MINI-1 system on chip (SoC), which contains an ESP32-S3 dual-core microprocessor, peripherals with breakout pins, and a Wi-Fi module with in-built antenna.

Although the modules *Petal Version 0* is using are relatively expensive compared to the circuits they replace, the LoRa and Wi-Fi RF circuits are very difficult to design on our PCB without the luxury of time to do several PCB revisions. Version 1, our future production release, will replace these with circuits designed in-house to reduce the cost of and reliance on third-party modules.

## Management Overview

### Our Team

### Logistics

#### Suppliers

We will only use Camosun approved vendors for our parts like Digikey, Abra Electronics, and Mouser.

#### Manufacturers

We will use JLCPCB for PCB manufacturing and assembly.

#### Transportation

Our PCBs will be transported using DHL for fast and safe delivery.

#### Storage

We will use our storage locker at Camosun to safely store project related equipment.

### Facilities

We will be developing our prototype using the facilities available to us at Camosun. We have access to a solder reflow station, pick and place machine, oscilloscopes, multimeters, and vector network analysers. We will also use the British Columbia Natural Resource Ministry’s radio shop on Bay Street in Victoria where Aaron did his co-op. They have kindly agreed to let us use their antenna testers, radio equipment, and their workshop if we need.

## Financial Overview

We have estimated the costs we will incur in the prototyping stage based on our requirement specifications.

Table 1: Overview of expected labour and monetary costs of the prototyping stage.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Cost | Amount | Notes |
| Labour | 1530 hours | No monetary cost associated. |
| Parts | $735.00 |  |
| Shipping | $300.00 |  |
| Manufacturing | $120. |  |
| Total | $1155.00 & 1530 hours | |

### Major Costs

#### Labour

Table 2: Labour time cost estimates for the prototyping stage.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Component | Milestone | Hours | Equivalent Work Weeks |
| Petal | Datasheet | 40 | 1 |
| Enclosure v0.1 | 80 | 2 |
| Enclosure v0.2 | 40 | 1 |
| User Manual | 40 | 1 |
| v0.0 | 240 | 6 |
| v0.0 testing | 80 | 2 |
| v0.1 | 120 | 3 |
| v0.1 testing | 80 | 2 |
| v0.2 | 120 | 3 |
| AVAlink | v1.0 beta | 240 | 6 |
| v1.0 beta testing | 40 | 1 |
| v1.0 | 160 | 4 |
| Documentation | 40 | 1 |
| Project Documentation | Budget | 10 | 0.25 |
| Display | 20 | 0.5 |
| Standards | 10 | 0.25 |
| Ethics | 10 | 0.25 |
| Completion Audit | 10 | 0.25 |
| Final Presentation | 20 | 0.5 |
| Formal Report | 40 | 1 |
| Gantt Chart | 5 | 0.125 |
| Progress Presentation | 5 | 0.125 |
| Progress Report | 20 | 0.5 |
| Proposal | 20 | 0.5 |
| Proposal Presentation | 10 | 0.25 |
| Risk Assessment | 10 | 0.25 |
| Risk Audit | 10 | 0.25 |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Total** | 1560 | 39 |
| **Total/Person** | 520 | 13 |

#### Parts

Table 3: Monetary costs of parts required for the prototyping stage. The subtotal is based on the assumption that 3 versions of the PCB will be ordered, with 5 PCBs manufactured per revision.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Component | Description | Unit Cost | Qty/Board | Cost/Board | Subtotal |
| Specialty Parts | | | | | |
| ESP32-S3-MINI-1-N8 | Microprocessor SoC & Wi-Fi module | $4.00 | 1 | $4.00 | $60.00 |
| WAVE-20855-HF Core1262 | LoRa Transciever module | $17.00 | 1 | $17.00 | $255.00 |
| RT9013-33GB | Voltage regulator | $1.00 | 1 | $1.00 | $15.00 |
| WS2812 | RGB LED | $1.00 | 1 | $1.00 | $15.00 |
| Antenna | SMA connector, coax, antenna | $10.00 | 1 | $10.00 | $150.00 |
| Basic Parts | | | | | |
| Resistors |  | $0.05 | 50 | $2.50 | $37.50 |
| Capacitors |  | $0.05 | 30 | $1.50 | $22.50 |
| Inductors |  | $0.60 | 10 | $6.00 | $90.00 |
| Buttons |  | $0.50 | 2 | $1.00 | $15.00 |
| Transistors |  | $0.50 | 10 | $5.00 | $75.00 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | **TOTAL** | $735.00 |

### Minor Costs

#### Manufacturing

PCB manufacturing costs will be about $40 per order, so $120 over the prototyping stage. Enclosure manufacturing costs will be covered by FLoRa Communications.

#### Shipping

We estimate $300 will be required over the course of the prototyping stage to ship parts and PCBs.

### Capital

Camosun College has agreed to fund the prototyping stage.

# Assumptions

Table 4: Operating assumptions ranked according to their expected risk to the project.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Relative Risk to Project | Assumption | Notes |
| 1 | Modules will be available throughout the prototyping stage. | The WAVE LoRa module is the most at risk. Vendors do not typically hold large stock of this module, and it has a lead time of 3-4 weeks, but our vendor has assured us they will be available. We will also proactively order the quantity we need for the project ahead of time. |
| 2 | Users will have a browser that supports Web Assembly | All modern browsers support Web Assembly on PC and mobile [9], but some niche or outdated browsers do not. |
| 3 | Our system will not interfere with existing 915MHz ISM band systems | The power efficiency and large processing gain of LoRa make it robust against interference, but this is always a possibility when using a license-exempt band. |
| 4 | The 900-928MHz band will continue to be license-exempt | The 900MHz ISM band is well established and it is highly unlikely that ISED Canada will significantly change the legislation for these frequencies. |

# Conclusion

# Appendices

Appendix A: References

Appendix B: Requirement Specifications

Appendix C: Schedule Milestones

## Appendix A: References

[1] “Reports and surveys - Province of British Columbia,” BC Parks. Accessed: Sep. 13, 2024. [Online]. Available: https://bcparks.ca/about/reports-surveys/#visitor-use-and-attendance

[2] “SPOT Gen4 | Saved by SPOT | US.” Accessed: Sep. 13, 2024. [Online]. Available: https://www.findmespot.com/en-us/products-services/spot-gen4

[3] “Satellite Communicators | Garmin.” Accessed: Sep. 13, 2024. [Online]. Available: https://www.garmin.com/en-CA/c/outdoor-recreation/satellite-communicators/#satellite-messaging-devices

[4] Garmin and G. L. or its subsidiaries, “inReach® Consumer Subscription Plans,” Garmin. Accessed: Sep. 13, 2024. [Online]. Available: https://www.garmin.com/en-CA/p/837461

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[6] “SX1262.” Accessed: Sep. 14, 2024. [Online]. Available: https://www.semtech.com/products/wireless-rf/lora-connect/sx1262

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[8] “The Hidden Node Problem — INET 4.5.0 documentation.” Accessed: Sep. 14, 2024. [Online]. Available: https://inet.omnetpp.org/docs/showcases/wireless/hiddennode/doc/index.html

[9] “WebAssembly | Can I use... Support tables for HTML5, CSS3, etc.” Accessed: Sep. 13, 2024. [Online]. Available: https://caniuse.com/wasm

## Appendix B: Requirements Specification

Table 5: Requirement specifications for the prototype.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Reference Number | Requirement | Test | Pass/Fail Criteria |
| 1-SW | R.1 – The user interface MUST be accessible through a modern web browser without the need for a separate application. | T1.0 – Connect a smartphone with a modern browser to the node and scan the web server QR code.  T1.1 – Connect a PC to the node and navigate to the web server page. | C1.0 – UI is rendered and readable on a mobile device.  C1.1 – UI is rendered and readable on a PC. |
| 2-SW | R1 – Users MUST be able to send LoRa packets using the web interface from one device to another. | T1 – Send a message using the UI to another node | C1 – The sent message is shown on the other device's UI |
| 3-SW | R1 – Chats on UI must have a username or device identifier and a timestamp of when the message was sent. | T1 – Send chat messages from multiple devices over the UI | C1 – The UI renders chat history with usernames in chronological order according to message timestamp |
| 4-SW | R1 – The repeater node MUST monitor battery voltage and disconnect when dropping below the low voltage threshold.  R2 – The repeater node low-voltage disconnect MUST implement hysteresis to prevent power cycling.  F1 – The repeater SHOULD indicate to the rest of the mesh network that it is powering down. | T1 – Supply voltage to the node with a variable power supply and document which voltages result in disconnect and reconnect. The node voltage monitor will be compared to that of the power supply and measured with an external meter. | C1.0 – The reported battery voltage is accurate within 3%.  C1.1 – The load disconnects when the battery voltage drops below the low voltage threshold and turns back on when the battery charges above threshold voltage. The implemented hysteresis prevents power cycling of the device.  FC1 – Before the low-voltage disconnect, the device transmits an alert that it is powering down. |
| 5-SW | R1 – The software MUST implement a collision avoidance or multiple access protocol that deals with the hidden-node problem | T1 – Transmit a LoRa packet from two devices to a single receiver at the same time without a connection between the two senders to coordinate between them | C1.0 – Neither message is lost, or corrupted.  C1.1 – Messages are displayed in the UI in the correct order based on their timestamp |
| 6-HW | R1 – MUST Design and order a PCB | T1 – Before each revision is submitted for manufacturing, it will be subject to an internal review by the group and an external review by the Capstone Committee. | C1 – The PCB design passes an internal review process and review from the Capstone Committee. |
| 7-HW | R1 – MUST have a bespoke enclosure.  F1 – SHOULD be protected against rain and moisture ingress | T1 – The enclosure will be inspected by professors.  T2 – Third-party parts like cable glands are IPX4 certified. | C2 – All materials have IPX4 or greater certification from reputable lab |
| 8-HW | R1 – Voltage regulator MUST effectively provide the required 3.3V to the hardware for a range of typical battery voltages. | T1 – Input a range of voltages from 5-20V and measure the voltage regulator output. | C1.1 – The hardware receives a stable 3.3V +/- 0.1V out across the range of test voltages.  C1.2 – The output voltages meet the hardware specifications provided by the manufacture in the datasheet. |
| 9-HW | R1 – MUST provide recommendations for sizing batteries and solar panels based on expected insolation. | T1 – Use recommendations to size solar and battery power for a mock installation at Camosun College using insolation data for that location. | C1 - Recommended panel wattages and battery Ah meet or exceed node requirements as calculated by our power audit (datasheet specifications, duty cycle, solar insolation modeling) |
| 10-HW | Antennas MUST be well matched to the driving Hardware | SWR/Impedance testing of antenna and source using VNA (may require tuning to meet these requirements) | Source impedance is matched to antenna so that VSWR < 2 and return loss < -10 dB |
| 11-HW | R1 – Nodes MUST incorporate an accessible user button at access points for users to initiate the web server.  R2 – The Wi-Fi access point MUST time-out after 5 minutes of inactivity to save power. | T1 – Check that the Wi-Fi access point is powered down. Press the user button to initiate the Wi-Fi access point.  T2 – Leave the access point for 5 minutes without activity. | C1 – The Wi-Fi access point is available after pressing the user button.  C2 – The Wi-Fi access point is disabled after 5 minutes of inactivity. |
| 12- SW | R1 – The firmware MUST have multiple modes:  Passive where the MPU is sleeping and listening for new messages. It will act as a repeater.  Message Available: The MPU is in passive mode, but it has saved new messages for the next user to view  Active: The MPU is powered up and advertising the Wi-Fi access point while continuing to act as a LoRa node.  Low-Power: The low voltage disconnect has taken the node offline until the battery can be recharged.  F1 – An RGB LED SHOULD indicate the state the hardware is in with different colours (Passive, New message Available, Active, Waiting, Low battery) | T1.0 & FT1.0 – Send a message from an Active node to a Passive node.  T1.1 – Receive a message repeated by a Passive node.  T1.2 – Test the current draw in passive mode.  FT1.1 – Input a voltage lower than the low-voltage disconnect but larger than the minimum voltage required by the linear voltage regulator. | C1.0 – The message is available when the Passive node is powered up later.  C1.1 – The message is received at the active node.  C1.2 – The current draw in passive mode is less than the current draw in active mode.  FC1.0 – The LED indicates a New Message state.  FC1.1 – The LED indicates low voltage. |

#### Legend

Table 6: A legend describing the syntax used for the reference numbers.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Reference Number | Requirement | Testing | Pass/Fail Criteria |
| *#-(ID):*  HW: Indicates a hardware requirement  SW: Indicates a software requirement | *R#*:  A requirement, something the component MUST have, followed by an identification number that begins at 0.  *F#:*  A feature, something the component SHOULD have, followed by an identification number that begins at 0. | *T#.#:*  The test identification number. The number matches the requirement it corresponds to. If multiple tests relate to the same requirement, a second reference number is added with a decimal point.  *FT.#.#:*  Same as requirement tests but relates to a feature. | *C#.#.#:*  The criteria identification number. The number matches the test it corresponds to. If multiple criteria exist for the same test, a second sub-reference number is added. A Pass is required.  *FC.#.#.#:*  Same as requirement criteria but relates to a feature and is not required to pass. |

## Appendix C: Schedule Milestones

Table 7: Milestones and their deadlines for the prototype.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Component | Milestone | Date |
| Petal | v0.0 | October 1, 2024 |
| v0.0 testing | October 15, 2024 |
| v0.1 | October 29, 2024 |
| Enclosure v0.1 | November 1, 2024 |
| v0.1 testing | November 10, 2024 |
| v0.2 | November 19, 2024 |
| Datasheet | December 13, 2024 |
| Enclosure v0.2 | December 13, 2024 |
| User Manual | December 13, 2024 |
| AVAlink | v1.0 beta | October 28, 2024 |
| v1.0 beta testing | November 11, 2024 |
| v1.0 | December 13, 2024 |
| Documentation | December 13, 2024 |
| Scope Document | September 9, 2024 |
| Proposal | September 20, 2024 |
| Gantt Chart | September 23, 2024 |
| dProject Documentation | Budget | September 30, 2024 |
| Proposal Presentation | October 3, 2024 |
| Risk Assessment | October 7, 2024 |
| Test Planning | October 21, 2024 |
| Progress Report | October 25, 2024 |
| Progress Presentation | October 31, 2024 |
| Standards Document | November 4, 2024 |
| Ethics Document | November 18, 2024 |
| Web Page | November 22, 2024 |
| Risk Audit | November 25, 2024 |
| Completion Audit | December 2, 2024 |
| Formal Report | December 6, 2024 |
| Display | December 13, 2024 |
| Final Presentation | December 13, 2024 |