

## FACT SHEET

# INVOLVING ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

Canada's forests have long played an integral role in meeting the cultural, spiritual and material needs of Aboriginal peoples. Encouraging more Aboriginal involvement in the forest sector benefits Canada's sustainable forest management and helps to build strong Aboriginal communities.



Aboriginal and treaty rights are protected by Canada's constitution, and this is increasingly reflected in forest policy and forest management practices. Aboriginal involvement in the land is being formally acknowledged through processes that include land claims, treaty making and treaty land entitlement. As progress is made through these processes, parallel efforts to increase meaningful Aboriginal involvement in sustainable forestry management are also underway.

About 80% of Aboriginal communities are in forested areas, and their participation in forestry is growing. There are more opportunities for employment, contracting and business development, and forest companies are entering into a variety of partnerships with Aboriginal development corporations.

More than 800 Aboriginal communities are located in Canada's productive forests, and about 1.4 million hectares (3.5 million acres) of reserve lands

are suitable for resource uses such as forestry, hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering herbs and medical plants. There are growing opportunities for employment, contracting and business development, and forest companies are entering into a variety of partnerships with Aboriginal development corporations.

Until recently, Aboriginal involvement in forest products industries has revolved mainly around the provision of labor and harvested wood. Canada's national forest vision addresses the fact that Aboriginal people are beginning to diversify their approach to forest-based development, including the development of non-timber forest products and Aboriginal tourism initiatives.

*A Vision for Canada's Forests: 2008 and Beyond* acknowledges that as dialogue between Aboriginal peoples and other forest sector partners evolves, this will create opportunities that will benefit

all while strengthening sustainable forest management.

### Building Partnerships

Provincial and territorial governments across Canada are encouraging partnerships with Aboriginal communities while continuing to watch for more ways to help Aboriginal peoples improve their economic and social well-being. The following are some examples of activities taking place across the country:

- In eastern Canada, the Innu Nation of Labrador is involved in a unique partnership with the government of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador to implement a strategic forest management plan in an area that is under comprehensive land claim negotiations. The plan itself was jointly prepared under a previous agreement designed to facilitate communication, share information and resolve issues concerning the development of

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sustainable forestry practices and ecosystem-based management.

- In Quebec, the provincial government and the Cree Nation reached an historic agreement in 2002 to continue joint development of the James Bay territory for a period of fifty years. The agreement provides increased economic and community development support for the Cree throughout the James Bay region. Notably, support will be provided for further development of the region's hydroelectric power generation potential and for increased participation by the Cree in the planning and management of the region's immense forest resources.
- On the Prairies, Manitoba Conservation has initiated co-management agreements with Aboriginal organizations to share roles and responsibilities in addressing resource management issues and opportunities. In the neighbouring province of Saskatchewan, following a reallocation of major forest licences, all new licences in the province must involve partnerships with Aboriginal businesses.
- In British Columbia, the provincial government is committed to increasing economic opportunities for First Nations in the forest sector by sharing forest revenues and by more than doubling their share of the province's allowable annual harvest to eight percent, much of this through reallocation from forest companies.

- In northern Canada, the First Nations Forestry Program (FNFP) has been active in funding programs to build forestry-related skills. For instance the FNFP funded a training program that taught Yukon First Nations members how to build log homes. In addition to providing approximately 60 students from several of the Yukon's 14 First Nations with marketable skills, the program has helped to address the Territory's acute shortage of housing.

### First Nations Forestry Program

Canada's federal government also conducts initiatives and programs to help Aboriginal peoples increase their involvement in the forest sector. For example, the First Nations Forestry Program, a partnership program between First Nations and the Government of Canada, assists First Nation communities in enhancing their forestry-related knowledge, capabilities and business skills so they can participate more effectively in the forest sector and better manage their own forest land areas.

Since 1996, the First Nations Forestry Program has contributed funding for approximately 2,000 projects in some 500 First Nations communities across Canada. The program has helped youth and workers combine traditional skills with new concepts and technologies, and it has brought benefits to Aboriginal communities through new businesses and joint ventures. Hundreds of First Nation workers have been trained in this program, providing a permanent transfer of skills and knowledge into rural First Nation communities.

### Measuring Aboriginal Participation

In 2007, Natural Resources Canada commissioned the Aboriginal Strategy Group to conduct a national survey

### Complementary Knowledge

Aboriginal peoples, who have lived in harmony with their surroundings for centuries, have gained a deep understanding of how the components of the environment are interconnected. Increasingly, policy makers and planners recognize the value of this traditional knowledge — which emphasizes the inter-relationships between components of the environment and views humans as part of the natural environment, not simply as observers or controllers — as a valuable complement to science-based approaches to managing forests sustainably.

of forest companies to determine the progress of Aboriginal participation in Canada's forest sector from 1996 to 2006.

Highlights of the survey of 14 major forest companies included:

- A 75 percent increase in Aboriginal economic and employment initiatives;
- A 100 percent increase in co-management opportunities and an 80 percent increase in partnerships;
- More training for Aboriginal staff, and some training programs for local Aboriginal communities to increase capacity; and
- Training/mentoring opportunities for Aboriginal suppliers and contractors.

The survey findings show that, in general, the forestry industry and Aboriginal communities/companies across Canada have developed many positive and profitable relationships based on open communication, cross-cultural respect and innovative training programs.