

FACT SHEET

CANADA'S BOREAL COMMUNITIES

Canada's boreal region is home to hundreds of rural and remote communities that rely heavily on the forest and other natural resources for jobs and economic stability. Participation in decisions about how the forest is used and managed is central to their well-being. Federal, provincial and territorial governments have responded by developing policies, programs and other measures to foster this participation.

Forestry — An Economic Mainstay for Boreal Communities

For about 300 communities, the forest sector makes up at least 50% of the economic base — and some 500 rural, remote and forest-based communities depend on the boreal forest for at least 20% of their base income. While most such communities range in size from a few hundred to a few thousand inhabitants, Prince George, British Columbia, which relies heavily on forest industries, has a population of more than 77,000. In all, according to Canada's 2001 census, 2.5 million people live in Canada's boreal region communities.

While forestry is the mainstay of many boreal communities, other resource-based economic activities are also important. These include large-scale industries such as hydroelectric development, mining, oil and gas extraction, as well as hunting, trapping, fishing, tourism

and recreation. A growing cottage industry is the harvesting of non-timber forest products such as herbs, conifer boughs and berries. New uses for these products in, for instance, medicines and bio-plastics, are making this industry an increasingly important contributor to local and national economies and non-timber products are one of Canada's fastest-growing forest exports.

Community Stability — A Key Measure of Sustainable Forest Management

Canadians recognize that the stability and future well-being of boreal communities are key measures of sustainable forest management. To ensure the long-term survival of their communities, the people who live in the boreal region must be involved in resource and land management decision-making processes and the creation of new economic opportunities.

Forest management in Canada is shifting from centralized government regulation to community-based solutions and increased public involvement in decision making. Enhanced community and public involvement is now set out in forest policies and legislation across the country, and various approaches to gathering public views have become part of the decision-making process. A key participatory process for communities is integrated land-use planning. This process, in place to varying degrees in all provinces and territories, offers all stakeholders, including communities, the opportunity to become directly involved in the development of the forest and other natural resources so that all interests and issues are accommodated as much as possible.

Through its *Forest Communities Program*, initiated in 2006, the Canadian government is helping forest communities in Canada find ways to respond to new challenges



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facing the country's forest sector. In addition to national projects, the 5-year program will fund 11 regional sites across Canada, encouraging community-level partnerships to develop and use knowledge, strategies and tools so they can take advantage of emerging resource-based economic opportunities. Projects currently underway include research on community applications of bioenergy, business models for non-timber forest

LAND USE PLANNING IN SASKATCHEWAN

In Saskatchewan, the provincial government is committed to integrated land use planning involving industry, environmentalists, Aboriginal people, government ministries and local communities. To date these processes have resulted in the completion and approval of six integrated land use plans covering over 7.3 million hectares (approximately 18 million acres). These plans and their associated implementation processes provide ongoing opportunities for Aboriginal people, communities, and other stakeholders to be involved in the management of Saskatchewan's forests and public Crown lands.

The province has seven other integrated land use planning processes underway, covering several million hectares of land. The processes generally call for three zones — protected, sensitive and management — each geared to a different level of protection and/or development. Typically, these plans are based on years of consultation, data collection, analysis and public engagement, and provide a roadmap for managing the land and resources within their boundaries.

products initiatives, and valuation of ecological goods and services such as water, recreation and biodiversity.

In Alberta, for instance, the Land-use Framework is a comprehensive strategy to better manage public and private lands and natural resources to achieve Alberta's long-term economic, environmental and social goals. The framework provides a blueprint for land use management and decision-making that addresses Alberta's growth pressures. The framework is enshrined in the province's new *Alberta Land Stewardship Act* proclaimed in 2009.

Special Initiatives to Increase Aboriginal Community Involvement

Aboriginal peoples are the original human inhabitants of the boreal region. For millennia, they have viewed the forest not so much as a landscape or resource, but as a world — a complex natural support system which provided food and materials for shelter, clothing, transportation, medicines and tools, and was the source of their spirituality. These peoples continue to look to the forest as a means of livelihood and a source of cultural and spiritual sustenance.

The forest products industry directly or indirectly employs more than 17,000 Aboriginal people, mostly in silviculture and woodland operations, and does business with more than 1,400 Aboriginal firms. About 1,000 forestry operations are owned by Aboriginal persons — ranging in size from single-person operations to the Cree Nation's Little Red River Forestry Ltd. in Alberta, which employs hundreds of people.

The meaningful participation of Aboriginal communities in land use planning, before development decisions are made, is an important national goal. Land claim agreements and treaties are two primary

JAMES BAY FORESTRY DEVELOPMENT

In 2002, the Quebec provincial government and the Cree Nation reached an historic agreement to continue joint development of the James Bay territory for a period of fifty years. The agreement will see the Cree play an even greater role than in the past in economic and community development within the territory. Notably, the agreement seeks to promote Cree participation in the management and planning of forestry activities in Quebec's boreal region.

tools for enabling Aboriginal involvement in land-use resource decisions. Where agreements could not be reached, the courts have further defined and institutionalized Aboriginal rights and responsibilities on the landscape.

Government policies and programs, combined with innovative partnerships with industry and other stakeholders, have helped Aboriginal people find jobs and create business opportunities in the boreal forest. These initiatives are designed to help Aboriginal communities participate in the management of forest resources, integrate their knowledge, values, rights and institutions into sustainable forest management, and build partnerships.

From Local to Global

Canada's responsibility in the boreal forest ranges from local: ensuring the stability and economic development of communities, to global: maintaining the health of some of the world's last remaining boreal wilderness. The overarching goal is the sustainable development of the boreal forest.