

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 in Canada. 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 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, meaningful Aboriginal involvement in sustainable forestry management increases.

Almost 80 percent of Aboriginal peoples in Canada live in forested regions, 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 Aboriginal reserve lands are suitable for resource uses such as forestry, hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering herbs and medicinal plants.

Canada's National Forest Strategy includes actions related to the rights and participation of Aboriginal peoples, from finding ways to share the responsibilities and benefits of forest land areas and resources to incorporating traditional knowledge in managing forest lands.

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 sustainable forestry practices and ecosystem-based management.
- 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 have involved and will



Institute On Governance

In April 2005, Canada's non-profit Institute On Governance released the results of a study that examined the legal and policy frameworks that impact the level of First Nations involvement in the forest sector. The study was based on interviews with 75 federal, provincial and Aboriginal officials.

The study found that while Aboriginal peoples nationwide are at greatly differing stages of involvement, there have been major successes and virtually everyone interviewed indicated that significant progress has been made over the years.

In comparison with past decades, the study found that Aboriginal peoples have more jobs and contracts, a greater say in forest stewardship, and growing forestry-related skills and business capacity. Many Aboriginal peoples have also developed strong relationships with local companies.

The Institute concluded that despite the considerable progress over the decades, there is a need for all involved to make Aboriginal forest sector participation a higher priority, especially since it is the only path to economic development for many of the poorest Aboriginal communities in Canada.

involve partnerships with Aboriginal businesses.

- In western Canada, the government of the province of British Columbia is committed to increasing economic opportunities for First Nations in the forest sector by sharing forest revenues and more than doubling their share of the province's allowable annual harvest to eight percent, much of this through reallocation from forest companies.

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 that 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 funded more than 1,700 projects across Canada. It has helped youth and workers combine traditional skills with new concepts and technologies, and it has brought benefits to First Nation 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.



Harnessing Traditional Knowledge

Aboriginal peoples have lived in harmony with their surroundings for centuries, and have gained a deep understanding of how the components of the environment are interconnected. Policy makers recognize the value of this unique perspective to sustainable forest management, and encourage the participation of Aboriginal peoples and the use of traditional knowledge in decision making. Aboriginal peoples, for their part, are becoming more comfortable with the concept of sharing their traditional knowledge.

Traditional ecological knowledge emphasizes the inter-relationships between components of the environment, and views humans as part of the natural environment, not simply as observers or controllers. While the integration of traditional knowledge and "hard science" is still in early stages in Canada, it is increasingly recognized as an important part of resource management and forestry activities.