

FACT SHEET

CANADA'S BOREAL COMMUNITIES

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

Forestry — An Economic Mainstay for Boreal Communities

Some 300 boreal communities rely on the forest sector for at least 50 percent of their income. They range in size from fewer than 300 inhabitants to up to 29,000. The exception is Prince George, British Columbia, whose population exceeds 77,000. Another 222 communities depend on the boreal woodlands for at least 20 percent of their income. In all, according to Canada's 2001 census, 2.53 million people live in Canada's boreal region communities.

Aboriginal peoples are the original human inhabitants of the area. 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.

More than 800 Aboriginal communities are located in Canada's productive forest. They range from single-person operations to large-scale developers such as Little Red River Forestry Ltd., operated by the Cree Nation in Alberta, which employs hundreds of people. About 1,000 forestry operations are owned by Aboriginal persons, and an estimated 15,000 Aboriginal people in Canada make their living in forestry and logging.

While forestry is the mainstay of many boreal communities, other resource-based economic activities also take place in the region. These include large-scale industries such as hydro development, mining, and oil and gas extraction, and smaller-scale operations such as hunting, trapping, fishing, tourism and recreation. A growing cottage industry is the harvesting of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as herbs, conifer boughs and berries. New uses for NTFPs, such as medicinal plants and bio-plastics from forest products, make this industry an increasingly important contributor to local and national economies, and one of Canada's fastest-growing forest exports.



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Community Stability – A Key Measure of Sustainable Forest Management

Canadians recognize that the stability and future well-being of boreal communities are a key measure of sustainable forest management. The ability of these communities to participate in resource- and land-management decision-making processes and in the creation of new economic opportunities, is key to ensuring their long-term survival.

The sustainability of boreal communities and the rights and participation of Aboriginal peoples in forest management are two central themes of Canada's National Forest Strategy. These aspects are also underscored in Canada's Criteria and Indicators Framework, which defines and measures the country's progress in sustainable forest management. Among the Framework's principles are that forest management policies, legislation, agreements and planning processes be developed with input from boreal communities and other affected groups.

Listening to Communities

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. In Saskatchewan, for example, a planning process involving industry, environmentalists, Aboriginal groups, government departments and local communities has culminated with the release of a roadmap for managing 3.2 million hectares of boreal forest resources in the province's north-central region. The plan calls for three zones, each requiring a different level of protection and development. Based on five years of extensive consultation, data collection, analysis and public engagement, the plan was released for public comment in January 2006.

Canada's model forests are another important platform for community voices. Model forests are working forests that serve as giant, hands-on field laboratories where innovative forestry ideas are researched, applied and monitored. Each model forest is managed by a partnership of groups and individuals, including communities, representing diverse forest values, with all partners having equal say. The Lake Abitibi Model Forest, for example, is run by 15 to 20 partners, depending on the year, representing government, communities, First Nations, industry, academia and non-governmental organizations. Located in the boreal forest of northeastern Ontario, this model forest focusses on community-level socio-economic development, ecological processes and education. It is also a pilot site for the development and testing of a computer model to estimate the amount of carbon stored in forests and to assess the impact of forest operations on carbon stores.

Special Initiatives to Increase Aboriginal Community Involvement

With thousands of years of accumulated boreal knowledge and experience, Aboriginal peoples in Canada merit an important place at forestry planning tables. The meaningful participation of these communities in land-use planning, before development decisions are made, is an important national goal.

Land-claim agreements and treaties are two primary 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 assume control of the management of their 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.