



A joint Natural Resources Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada program.

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Regional collaboration underpins First Nations forestry opportunity

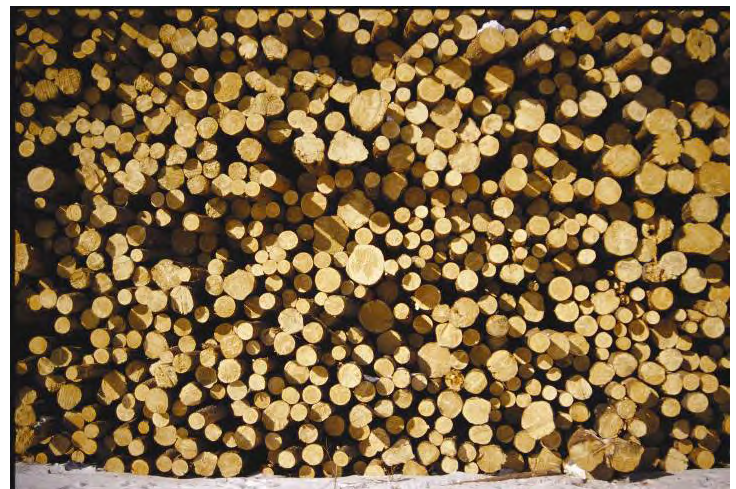
British Columbia's Similkameen Valley is brimming with orchards, ranches, wineries, parks and commercially valued forest lands.

When the provincial government opened up its forest tenure system in 2003, the communities saw an opportunity to increase local participation and benefits from forestry. Communities in the Lower Similkameen Valley—including the village of Keremeos, the Upper and Lower Similkameen First Nations and the Regional District of Okanagan/Similkameen formed a partnership to apply for a community forestry licence. “We applied to the First Nations Forestry Program (FNFP) for funds to help set up the partnership and put together the licence application,” says Project Manager Steve Borcsok.

Throughout 2006–2007 the partnership and application took shape. “We had numerous meetings with the communities and other stakeholders and we hired lawyers and accountants to work out the legal and financial aspects of the agreement,” Steve explains.

“Once FNFP provided funding, I was able to get commitments from industry partners. Everyone was very helpful. Companies provided GIS analyses and information about the resources in the forest, and the communities provided space for meetings and made a variety of in-kind contributions. Everyone made real, measurable contributions. It's really a showcase for how partnerships between First Nations and non-First Nations can operate.”

The newly registered Similkameen Valley Planning Society submitted its licence application to the BC government at the end of the 2006–2007 fiscal year. The land the Society applied to manage extends from Keremeos in the north to the US border in the south. It's bordered by Cathedral Provincial Park on the east and by another expanse of Crown forest on the west.



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The 54,217-hectare tract includes almost 40,000 hectares of forest, about 20,000 of which is open to harvesting. As licence holders, the Society will also manage the 34,000 hectares that are non-forested. This land is home to mountain goats and sheep, and is a significant source of traditional First Nations foodstuffs. It also has potential for small business development opportunities in eco-tourism and traditional foods.

To apply for a forestry licence, the Similkameen Valley Planning Society had to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the timber supply and address conservation issues. It also had to consult with First Nations and other communities, and with stakeholders such as major forest licensees, rangers, trappers, and hunting and recreation organizations. “We had to show community awareness and support for the application,” Steve says.

The licence application is under consideration by the Province. “The initial tenure would cover five years,” explains Steve. “During those years we have to show that we have public involvement and can provide prudent and diligent stewardship of the land. If we do, the Province will extend the agreement for 25 years, and review and renew it every 25 years after that.”

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Youth Attracted to Forestry Summer Employment Program



Having completed its ninth year, the First Nations Natural Resources Youth Employment Program (FNNRYEP) in northern Ontario continues to be an effective channel for engaging First Nations youth in forestry opportunities. It is also a successful example of First Nations communities partnering with government, industry and educational institutions to address unemployment, underemployment and barriers to education.

This two-year summer program, funded in part by the First Nations Forestry Program (FNFP), provides Aboriginal youth aged 17 to 24 with live-in bush camp training. The students build forestry skills and learn about the tasks that typically comprise a working day for an average forestry worker. Each year, 25 to 30 First Nations high school students participate.



The program grew out of the First Nations Ranger Program that Bowater (now AbitibiBowater), a forest products company, established in the Thunder Bay area in 2000. The Forestry Centre at Thunder Bay's Confederation College later took on the lead organizing and facilitating role.

Now, in 2008, the program has expanded to encompass a large area of northern Ontario and to include the participation of over 30 Ontario First Nations communities, as well as industry, academic, federal and provincial government partners. Since 2000, approximately 209 youth have participated, of which 93% completed the first-year program. Over 60% returned for the second year, with 91% graduating.

For some sessions, such as tree planting, the youth are paid on a piecework basis, which, according to Brian Kurikka, General Manager of the Confederation College Forestry Centre, helps to promote friendly competition and a positive work ethic.

The program is not all work, however. Field trips include a visit to Confederation College, where participants learn about the various programs offered in the natural resources field. Students also take part in a "Road Map" exercise, which encourages them to think about their potential future career paths. Kurikka feels that the exercise serves as "a real morale booster" and "encourages the youth to continue on with their education."

The proof of the effectiveness of this program can be seen in its graduates. Many have gone on to work in the natural resources sector. Others have continued their forestry education after high school. One past participant is entering his third year of the forestry degree program (BScF) at Lakehead University and has completed his second summer working with Domtar, one of the program's key partners.

The key to the FNNRYEP's success has been this partnership approach. "Even with the current downturn of the forestry industry, many of our forest industry partners, such as Abitibi-Bowater, Domtar and Tembec, remain dedicated to the success of this program," observes Kurikka, adding "not one organization or individual can do this. The continued support of the FNFP has provided the base to get additional funding—a track record of financial support goes a long way when trying to establish new partnerships."

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UPCOMING EVENTS

10th Annual Aboriginal Land and Resource Management

November 27 - 28, 2008

Four Seasons Hotel, Vancouver, BC

For more information visit: www.insightinfo.com/index.cfm?ci_id=25663&la_id=1

Inter-Nation Trade and Economic Summit

March 9 – 11, 2009

Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Toronto, ON

For more information visit: www.afn.ca

Federation of Canadian Municipalities 72nd Annual Conference and Municipal Expo

June 5 – 8, 2009

To be determined, Whistler, BC

For more information visit: www.fcm.ca

