



## Canadian Rural Partnership Rural Dialogue

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### LEARNING AND COMMUNITY TRANSITION IN THE LAKES DISTRICT RURAL DIALOGUE

#### RURAL DIALOGUE SUMMARY REPORT

## Burns Lake, British Columbia March 29, 2006

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For further information on the Rural Dialogue, please call 1-888-781-2222 (toll-free number).

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## 1. FOREWORD

This report is a summary of discussions that took place at the Learning and Community Transition, Lakes District Rural Dialogue, held in Burns Lake, British Columbia, on March 29, 2006. No limits were placed on the participants during discussions. In order to present a true report of the free-ranging discussions, recommendations made by participants that fall outside federal jurisdiction are also included. Views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Government of Canada.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

This event was part of the Rural Dialogue, an ongoing, two-way discussion between the Government of Canada and Canadians from rural, remote and northern regions. Launched in 1998, the Rural Dialogue is a key citizen-engagement component of the Canadian Rural Partnership (CRP). The CRP is designed to support a horizontal approach to rural development within the Government of Canada that responds to rural, remote and northern priorities. The Dialogue process helps the Government of Canada to understand local and regional priorities, and provides rural, remote and northern citizens with an opportunity to influence government policies, programs and services that affect them.

The 18 participants in attendance (one of which was a young person between 18 and 29 years old) included: representatives of regional rural and youth organizations; community, economic and social development officers; representatives of First Nations organizations or communities; and representatives of the federal, provincial and municipal governments (which includes two members of Rural Team-BC).

This dialogue emerged further to a meeting of northern federal representatives which was organized to better coordinate federal support for northern B.C. communities. The objectives of the dialogue were to:

- discuss the role of community learning in helping the Lakes District manage community transition;
- explore what is available at the local, provincial and federal levels to support community learning; and
- discuss strategies that mobilizes community learning to manage economic transition.

The results presented in this report will help guide the future actions of the Government of Canada in support of rural communities and will contribute to the ongoing development of the proposed National Rural Framework (NRF). The over-arching goal of the proposed NRF, a framework to facilitate federal, provincial and territorial collaboration on rural issues, is to ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of rural communities by creating an

environment in which communities and citizens have access to improved social and economic opportunities.

The proposed NRF is based on five areas of focus that affect community sustainability. The issues and priorities discussed at this event are presented under the relevant areas ([section 4](#) of this report).

### **3. THE NATIONAL RURAL FRAMEWORK'S (NRF) FIVE AREAS OF FOCUS**

<b>Sustainable Livelihoods</b>	Factors affecting how Canadians can provide for themselves and their families to live in rural communities that are economically and socially healthy.
<b>Environmental Stewardship</b>	Ways in which rural and urban communities can share with governments the responsibility for good management, the benefits of natural resources and a healthy environment.
<b>Innovative Approaches to Rural Infrastructure</b>	Approaches allowing communities, working together with governments, to develop and maintain physical, social and knowledge-based infrastructure that addresses their needs.
<b>Engaged Populations and Institutions</b>	Opportunities for institutions and governments to provide the environment where Canadians can actively participate in making decisions that affect the community.
<b>Demographic Adaptation</b>	Openness to the range of options rural communities may need to consider in order to adapt to ongoing changes in population, economics and services.

### **4. ISSUES RELATING TO THE NRF'S AREAS OF FOCUS**

The issues and priorities discussed at this event related to the following areas of focus: sustainable livelihoods; environmental stewardship; innovative approaches to rural infrastructure; and engaged populations and institutions. Proposed actions and solutions that could address the issues discussed are also included in this section.

#### **4.1 Sustainable Livelihoods**

##### **4.1.1 Economic Development**

Participants expressed that one possibility for increased community economic development in the region is through increased tourism. The community could build a local tourism economy through the development and marketing of the region as an outdoor adventure and sports destination. They added that with proper planning and through an inclusive community consultation, international markets could be developed and a communications link between travel organizations and tourism planners around the world could be fostered. Additionally, if tourism is to be a key component of the Lakes District's community economic development plan, there will need to be a strong focus on marketing.

It was noted that tourism creates many lower paying jobs which do not compete with the wages that can be earned from trades jobs. However, these jobs have the capacity to develop into higher paying, more sustainable employment opportunities.

Participants indicated that any plan to move forward with community economic development should include an in-depth and inclusive community consultation. It is also important to begin building partnerships around bigger projects (e.g., large economic development projects) which can facilitate relationship building with larger corporations. In turn, these corporations could either bring components of projects into the community or support the development of new projects in the region.

- The community should undertake an inclusive community consultation process on the development of a local tourism economy. Focus should be placed on sustainability.

## **4.2 Environmental Stewardship**

### **4.2.1 Natural Resource Management**

Participants expressed that the community should determine a realistic way of sustaining itself in the aftermath of the Mountain Pine Beetle outbreak by preparing an economic development plan. This beetle plays an important role in the life of a forest by attacking old or weakened trees and speeding the growth of a younger forest. Unusually hot, dry summers, mild winters and other factors in central B.C. over the last few years have led to an epidemic. To date, these beetles have destroyed millions of pine trees, which are the most commercially harvested trees in B.C. In an effort to slow the outbreak and reduce losses in timber values, the provincial government supported aggressive logging of infested and dead trees.

It was noted that a land use training program that examines diverse uses of land in the community would be an effective first step to ensuring sustainability. Such a program should include two components: business and entrepreneurial training for residents aimed at effectively using the community's assets; and education on alternative uses of deforested land (e.g., agriculture).

- The community should promote the creation of a land use training program to address the realities of the aftermath of the Mountain Pine Beetle outbreak.

## **4.3 Innovative Approaches to Rural Infrastructure**

### **4.3.1 Social Infrastructure**

Participants stressed the importance of gathering information that sheds light on current and future community training and learning needs. As stated by one participant, training is about "planting the seeds of information".

It was noted that research on the local labour market had recently been undertaken and that the results were available to the community. The Burns Lake and District Labour Force and Skills Base Study and Strategy project, which took place in 2002, assessed the skills, education, and life style trends of Lakes District residents. The researchers received over 1,600 completed questionnaires from local residents. The document entitled "Labour and Life in the Lakes District - Opportunities and Opinions" was produced from this survey. Participants indicated that this research and any further research on the subject should be used to determine next steps.

Participants briefly outlined a plan for moving forward with training and learning initiatives in the Lakes Region. As noted above, existing relevant research should be reviewed to determine what trades and skills are currently needed in the Lakes District and will be required in the future. This would help to determine the types of training individuals desire and where they want to take the training. Armed with this information, communities would then have increased capacity to forward plans for supporting pertinent educational opportunities and information that addresses the needs of the community through desired and necessary training and services (e.g., grade twelve courses and other pre-requisites, a skills and employment center to provide information about training programs across British Columbia and/or information on financial support to facilitate training and education).

- The community should identify the training and learning needs in the Lakes District and use the information to leverage appropriate training resources for the community or support the training of citizens elsewhere.

## **4.4 Engaged Populations and Institutions**

### **4.4.1 Collaborative Relationships**

Participants stressed the importance of moving forward one step at a time, carefully building individual connections and trust amongst organizations, when fostering collaborative relationships. However, as one delegate wisely noted, it is important to "take care of your business at home [within your own organization] before you can be of any use to the community". Participants also indicated that when coming together to form partnerships, individuals and groups need to commit to being open and constantly self-evaluate their openness. Additionally, before individuals and organizations "open up", safe and trusting environments must be created. Participants expressed that resources were needed to help community members become more engaged and work together. It was noted that the United Way has trained facilitators who can come and work with organizations to promote organizational development.

Participants expressed that building relationships with the six First Nations communities in the region should also be a priority. For instance, personal communications (e.g., extending an invitation in person rather than by e-mail) is fundamental to ensuring that First Nations are included in community discussions.

It was noted that Rural Team-BC, Service Canada and Industry Canada are available to support further dialogues with the community but will only act if requested by the community. This would ensure that the government is not driving the community agenda, and would reflect the federal departments' support of community-led initiatives.

- The community should take advantage of the relationships that were created through the dialogue process and continue to build and foster community relationships.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The majority of participants at the Learning and Community Transition, Lakes District Rural Dialogue felt that the event was constructive and many noted that their expectations had been met to a large degree. Participants appreciated that important issues had been addressed and that they could engage in pertinent discussions with community champions and partners. They also expressed that the event provided them an opportunity to make good connections with people and organizations in the community. The dialogue was also effective in providing "outsiders" to the community with an understanding of the complexity of the region. Participants also indicated that through the dialogue process, they had gained awareness that there is currently a "doubling up" of work and efforts. They added that through the connections made at the dialogue, this duplication of efforts can be reduced.

Many important lessons were learned both from the perspective of the community participants and the organizers (Rural Secretariat, Service Canada and Industry Canada).

- It is important that a dialogue to discuss the First Nations positions be initiated.
- For dialogues to be meaningful and inclusive, First Nations should be involved from the start. This requires the fostering of personal relationships.
- To ensure greater First Nations participation, organizers should consider making a request to host a dialogue on traditional lands of First Nations.
- The community should develop a common vision. It is important to recognize that if some community representatives are not in the room, it does not mean that the process of moving forward with a vision should not get underway. The ball should get rolling as positive talking and action breeds interest.
- The dialogue is the beginning of an ongoing conversation.

The following summarizes the two key issues raised by participants, namely the need to: develop a common community vision; and foster partnerships. Participants' recommendations and suggested actions to address these issues are also provided.

### Common Community Vision

- There is a need to develop a common vision for the community. This work should include: focusing on issues of youth employment and recreation; removing barriers to education; supporting learning; and promoting healthy lifestyle choices.
- Community members should come together to define the heart and spirit of the community as it is this spirit that connects people and creates understanding.

- Roadblocks are often created due to lack of communication, but through inclusive and open dialogue, roadblocks can be avoided or removed.

### Partnerships

- Partnerships are dependent on effective communication. As stated by one participant "when you talk about community, you are talking about communication".
- It is imperative that there be an examination and recognition of historic relationships and the influence that this will undoubtedly have on creating partnerships.
- In terms of fostering better partnerships with the government, it is not productive for government representatives to come into communities uninvited. The community should invite government departments to engage its citizens.
- "Rural consciousness" raising or training should be provided to politicians and civil servants.
- Community members should come together to identify potential roadblocks and to begin removing existing ones to individual initiatives.

The organizers of this dialogue are keen to continue the dialogue process and to work on these issues with the Lakes District communities. However, to ensure that the community moves forward on its own terms it was agreed that the community would take the lead on initiating further joint projects with Rural Team-BC, Service Canada and Industry Canada.

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 [Important Notices](#)