



NEWS RELEASE

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**Omineca Beetle Action Coalition releases Regional Agriculture Strategy *plus* Report on Regional Emergency Management and shares ideas emerging on the Regional Diversification and Implementation Plan**

**Prince George, BC** – The Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC) today released the results from two of its initiatives as it continues to present recommendations for actions designed to build a prosperous future for the region.

Today's release includes the Regional Agriculture Strategy, and the report on Regional Emergency Management.

The **Regional Agriculture Strategy** is the eighth in the series of strategies developed by OBAC. The four objectives of the Regional Agriculture Strategy are to:

- Diversify and strengthen the agriculture sector.
- Form stronger partnerships across the agriculture sector.
- Increase the capacity to train and recruit the required work force.
- Increase public support for the sector and interest in locally produced high quality food.

The Regional Agriculture Strategy presents five recommendations:

- Develop infrastructure which supports the agriculture sector and remove barriers to its further development and diversification.
- Attract new entrants to the industry and provide training and education for existing and new members of the sector.
- Strengthen the industry by increasing collaboration across the sector and by forging partnerships and communication links with First Nations, local communities, governments, health and education agencies.
- Support value-added and specialized product development and the development of provincial, national and international markets for these products.
- Increase the demand for locally produced foods.

The Regional Agriculture Strategy was developed by a working group that included people with a variety of agriculture sector perspectives and expertise.

“This region has a proud agriculture heritage and a strong agriculture community” said Gerry Thiessen, OBAC Director and Mayor of Vanderhoof. “There are significant opportunities to increase the contribution that agriculture makes to our region’s well being and economy. The region's potential in this sector can be realized through targeted efforts identified in the strategy” he added. The Regional Agriculture Strategy includes 29 specific action items to support implementation of the recommendations.

The goal of the **Regional Emergency Preparedness and Management Project** is to strengthen emergency management and personal preparedness across the region by employing a collaborative approach which addresses both local and regional level emergencies and takes full advantage of available synergies and economies of scale.

The Regional Emergency Management Report presents five recommendations to support the goal:

- Facilitate inter-community and regional planning and response where it will provide efficiencies and increase overall emergency preparedness.
- Provide additional resources and information to local governments in order to improve their capacity and preparedness.
- Improve training, recruitment and retention of emergency staff and volunteers by creating synergies at the inter-community and regional levels.
- Take steps to mitigate the impacts of future threats.
- Develop local emergency preparedness awareness and education programs to ensure that the individuals and families within the Planning Area are prepared for potential emergency events.

The project report includes recommendations and actions that identify where collaboration at a regional scale across levels of government, practitioner organizations and professionals can enhance our emergency preparedness and response across the OBAC region.

The ‘next steps’ for OBAC on these two documents includes bringing together senior staff from relevant government agencies and other partner organizations to work out the details of implementation of the Action Plans presented in the Regional Agriculture Strategy and the Regional Emergency Management Report.

The **OBAC Regional Diversification and Implementation Plan** is currently under development and will present an overarching framework and a structure to move forward and begin the task of implementing the good ideas presented in the OBAC Strategies and Projects through a regional collaborative approach.

The Regional Diversification and Implementation Plan is still under development but, will draw upon the things that OBAC has learned across all of the strategy work. For each sector and for overall development, there were strategic objectives and key priorities that appear to be important ingredients across all sectors. So, the Diversification and Implementation Plan will present the themes and ideas that kept coming up at every turn along the way. These overarching objectives and priorities include things like:

- Making sure that our current and prospective workforce in the region has the training and education needed to drive the diverse range of existing and new economic opportunities in our region;

- Working to ensure that investors know about the great assets and opportunities here in our region and that we work together to clear away barriers;
- Continuing to have the infrastructure needed to enable us to be opportunistic and remain connected across our region and connected with the world beyond; and,
- Making sure that our communities have the amenities and services needed to attract people to stay or to move here to live, work, and play and retire.

“It will be essential for our communities in the OBAC region to work together with the support of senior governments and working with the private sector and other important implementation partners to leverage the opportunities and make best use of finite resources as we face the challenges of the future” said Bernice Magee, OBAC Director and Mayor of Burns Lake. “We will need to foster a culture of innovation in all that we undertake and to be open to new ideas and new paths to finding and implementing solutions” she added.

OBAC expects to release the Regional Diversification and Implementation Plan as a Discussion Paper later this summer.

The Omineca Beetle Action Coalition is developing long-term strategies that are designed to build economic and social resilience in the wake of the mountain pine beetle infestation.

OBAC is led by the region’s Mayors and Regional District Chairs working to ensure sustainable development and resiliency for the region from Valemount to Smithers and north to Mackenzie. Local government leaders joined forces in late 2005 with funding support from the Province of BC.

OBAC is a coalition of community leaders building partnerships, knowledge, methods, strategies and a diversification plan that supports forestry and many other diverse opportunities in our region’s future.

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