



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Omineca Beetle Action Coalition releases Regional Tourism Strategy**

**Prince George, BC** – The Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC) today released the seventh of its strategies as it continues to present recommendations and proposed actions designed to build a prosperous future for the region. This Strategy addresses the growth and development of a thriving tourism sector in the region.

The Tourism Strategy was developed by a working group that included people with a variety of community and tourism sector perspectives and expertise. The Council of Tourism Associations and the Northern BC Tourism Association were both instrumental in helping to build this strategy as were the many business owners, economic development and tourism development specialists and other contributors from across the region. The strategy presents a vision of how the region could look in ten years with support for responsible and sustainable growth in the region's tourism sector.

"We envision a future where a thriving tourism industry is recognized as a key contributor to a diversified and resilient economy and where communities are benefiting from a regionally integrated and collaborative approach to developing the region's tourism sector" said Mayor Sandra Harwood, one of the Working Group participants. "The region has the natural, cultural and community assets to support diverse tourism opportunities and attract visitors from near and far."

The objectives of the OBAC Tourism Strategy are to:

- Establish a regionally collaborative approach to growing the tourism sector that is responsive to community interests and market opportunities.
- Make the best use of the region's considerable assets to attract tourism and to grow and diversify the sector.
- Increase government, investor and resident recognition of and confidence in the economic potential of tourism in the region.
- Provide greater certainty for operators across a range of tourism opportunities and encourage increased investment through the development of a positive business environment.
- Mitigate the impacts to tourism resulting from the Mountain Pine Beetle infestation and its management.

The OBAC Tourism Strategy includes four recommendations and 18 action items to: Address land and resource information, planning and policy issues to increase certainty for tourism operators and potential investors; improve access for travellers to and within the OBAC region; increase awareness of the nature and value of, and the opportunities associated with, tourism in the region; and, increase tourism in the region by using its features and attractions to full advantage.

The 'next steps' for OBAC include bringing together senior staff from relevant government agencies and the private sector to work with OBAC to quickly develop an Action Plan. This Action Plan works out the details on the "how to and how much" for implementation of this strategy. OBAC will also be working with partner organizations to enable implementation of the Action Plans.

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.

The Omineca Beetle Action Coalition is developing long-term strategies that are designed to support local governments, First Nations, senior governments and the many businesses and other organizations working together to build economic and social resilience in the wake of the mountain pine beetle infestation.

***For more information contact:***

Elizabeth Andersen, General Manager

P: 250-563-7005

E: [eandersen@ominecacoalition.ca](mailto:eandersen@ominecacoalition.ca)