



Newsletter

April 2009

OBAC Explores Priority Implementation Activities

OBAC is currently exploring with a number of organizations, preparing to implement a number of the recommendations and actions proposed in the completed strategies.

A delegation of OBAC Directors met with Assistant Deputy Ministers and other senior staff from the Ministries of Forests and Range, Energy Mines and Petroleum Resources, Community Development, and Transportation and Infrastructure in Victoria on February 4.

During the discussion, a number of synergies between provincial strategies and programs and OBAC regional strategies and Action Plans were identified. There will be on-going engagement between provincial agencies and OBAC to find opportunities for the Province to contribute to moving forward on some early action opportunities. Some key items for prioritized follow-up action included:

- Examining opportunities to provide key insights on community and regional resilience into major forest management decisions.
- Looking at how we can work together to advance large industrial and medium scale alternative energy projects in the region.
- Working together to help communities access balanced information about mineral exploration and mining and, to enable people to have the information that they need to access opportunities in the sector.
- Looking at how community leaders can help to inform the prioritization of infrastructure investments in the region from a community resilience building perspective.

Strategy Development Update

While the prosperity of the OBAC region has long been reliant on its timber resources, there is a wealth of human and natural assets here that can support a diversified and resilient regional economy that includes but also moves beyond timber.

OBAC has successfully completed six of the priority topic strategies and is now heading to the finish line of the strategy development phase. OBAC will be addressing the remaining priority topics that were identified during the community dialogue sessions in 2006 in the following ways:

Tourism: A wealth of work has been done on tourism development in various different ways and communities across the region. This strategy will be turning to the work already done and will strive to find where additional work can be done at a regional scale to create values and opportunities that local governments and the sector can take action on together across the region. OBAC has partnered with the Council of Tourism Associations (COTA) to support the development of this strategy and, OBAC has retained Chemistry Consulting Group Inc. to facilitate the development of the OBAC Tourism Strategy. We will also be working closely with the Northern BC Tourism Association. The consultants have been very busy working through existing documents and strategies preparing a Backgrounder



to describe the tourism sector in the OBAC region. The working group has met twice now to review the existing work, assess new ideas and begin generating recommendations and priority opportunities for action to support growth in the tourism sector in the region.



Agriculture: A lot of effort has also been applied to agriculture development in our region and communities. As with the Tourism Strategy, the Agriculture Strategy will also be turning to the work already done and will be striving to find where additional work can be done at a regional scale to create value, support existing opportunities and find new opportunities across the region in agricultural development. OBAC has retained a small consulting group under the leadership of Don Cameron of Don Cameron Associates to facilitate the development of this strategy. The consultants are currently working through existing strategies, documents and plans and are also conducting phone interviews with specialists across the region to prepare a Backgrounder to describe the agriculture sector in the OBAC region. The first working group meeting is expected to be convened in April.

Emergency Preparedness and Response: Under the Provincial Emergency Program, local governments have developed comprehensive and detailed emergency plans. Additional work supported by UBCM has also added to local scale emergency planning. The First Nations Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative has worked with MPB impacted First Nations communities to prepare emergency response plans. The Ministry of Forests and Range has enhanced its hazard assessment and response prioritization tools. In addition to these initiatives, there are a number of other initiatives that have been undertaken by communities and by external organizations that support emergency preparedness and response.

With all of the work in place, one might think that this topic is well covered, but an initial scan and discussions with experts indicates that there are gaps that OBAC, as a regional body, could be uniquely positioned to make specific recommendations to address. These include but are not limited to:

- Increased personal preparedness;
- Increased coordination, knowledge sharing and access to resources between communities and across the region, including First Nations communities;
- Additional training and exercises to test preparedness and response;
- Increased preparedness and response for large scale regional emergencies that might impact more than one community at a time, including wildfire and severe ice storms; and
- Enhanced coordinated effort to monitoring and data collection so that we can better forecast and prepare for events such large scale flooding.

As such, OBAC will be doing an “Emergency Preparedness and Response Project” where we will assess opportunities and gaps in regional scale emergency preparedness and response and will prepare recommendations that focus on these needs and opportunities.



Conventional Energy Strategy: In the short term, development of the petroleum industry in the OBAC region is not expected because lower cost and more mature opportunities for petroleum development are available elsewhere. The major barriers in the OBAC region to this sector’s development include the complex geology of the Nechako and Bowser basins and the lack of infrastructure to collect and distribute the resource. In the long term oil and gas development may occur in the region if these barriers are overcome and demand continues as projected.

In the medium term though, the OBAC region has an opportunity to increase its role in supplying goods, services and labour to the petroleum industry in North-east BC. This is a focused potential opportunity and as such, does not lend itself to the development of a full strategy similar to other OBAC strategies. While OBAC will not be developing a stand

alone Conventional Energy Strategy, we will be pursuing opportunities to familiarize community leaders with the focused opportunity that may exist in the medium term.

Regional Cohesion and Branding Strategy: While there may be benefit to branding and profiling the region, it is premature at this time for OBAC to undertake a broad program of branding and profiling for the OBAC region. As such, the Board has chosen not to develop a stand alone Branding and Profiling Strategy at this time. It's important to note the sector specific needs and opportunities that have been identified in several of the completed strategies and are emerging in several new strategies currently under development. OBAC will promote taking action on these sector specific needs and opportunities as part of the implementation of these strategies. Also, the Regional Cohesion aspects of this topic will now be addressed under the Regional Community Relationships strategy.

Regional Community Relationships Strategy: OBAC has already presented a number of recommendations and proposed actions in existing strategies that focus on relationship and capacity building at the local and regional scale as a foundation for building a diversified economy specifically and resilience more generally in the region. The Regional Community Relationships Strategy will focus in more detail on what is the status of relationships currently across communities in the region and will reflect on what are some of the ways in which these relationships can be strengthened so that we can continue to work together into the future. The community relationships strategy will aim to enable First Nations and Local Government community leaders across the region to take collaborative action on building community resilience across the region. This will include enabling community leaders to support business development and social development.

OBAC is also beginning to write the Regional Economic Diversification Plan as well as embarking on the transition from strategy development to implementation. A six month business plan has been written which will support implementation.

Community Focus - Smithers

Nestled in the heart of the Bulkley Valley, Smithers is home to 5,200 people and a number of industries with forestry, mining, and agriculture forming the backbone of the Town's economy. Recently, tourism has also become an integral piece of Smithers' economic fabric. The majority of businesses are locally owned. Set against the backdrop of Hudson Bay Mountain, the Town offers outstanding outdoor recreational pursuits for both residents and visitors, including downhill and cross country skiing, fishing, hiking and snowmobiling, coupled with a range of urban features including cultural and indoor recreational opportunities.

Smithers is a service centre and transportation hub for the Bulkley Valley and surrounding region. The recent runway extension at the Smithers Regional Airport increases the capacity to service larger aircraft. Initiatives such as the proposed ski hill expansion and Wetzin'kwa Community Forest will further develop the local economy. The Smithers Economic Development Committee collaborates with local, regional and national organizations to initiate, incubate and develop sustainable programs and projects that meet community economic needs.



Nav Canada Proposes Scaling Back on Smithers' Flight Services

Nav Canada is currently reviewing air services at 26 locations across Canada to “re-align service delivery to provide the most efficient and effective service and to eliminate unneeded redundancies.” The community of Smithers is one of the 8 sites of the 26 where Nav Canada is proposing to replace the existing Flight Service Station (FSS) with service from a remote location or Remote Aerodrome Advisory Service (RAAS). As we understand it from the Air Traffic Service Review, the proposal for this service change at Smithers is moving ahead to the next phase in the process because “most of the reasons given (not to move ahead with the proposed change) were not directly related to aviation safety”.



As the country's civil air navigation services provider, Nav Canada's activities and decisions directly impact the ability of communities and industries to pursue a broader program of community well being, wealth creation and the pursuit of local and regional opportunities. On its website, Nav Canada explicitly states “what we do at NAV CANADA - and how we do it - has an impact on the environment”. Nav Canada has acknowledged that its decisions must be sensitive to their environmental footprint. But the federal government has made multiple commitments to sustainable development and as such, in OBAC's view Nav Canada's decisions should also be sensitive to their economic and social footprint.

There has been a steady decrease in services and support to local airports dating back to the mid 1990's. In 1994 the federal government introduced its National Airports Policy (NAP). With NAP, Transport Canada transferred the management of 150 airports to local control by airport authorities or local governments affecting Prince George, Smithers, and Vanderhoof airports. In 2004, Transport Canada released a study that examined the financial status of the divested regional and small airports. In 2005, the Airline Industry Monitoring Consortium of BC (AIMBC) reflected on the status of BC's regional airports and reported that few, if any, regional and small airports are currently able to cover both their operating and capital costs.

The importance of air access to community development cannot be overstated. Air access is a key part of the equation for a number of sectors to grow including access for the business and investment community and developing tourism opportunities. While a change to Remote Aerodrome Advisory Service may not compromise flight safety, amongst other impacts it may limit the number of flights that are able to land and take off in weather and daylight minimums possibly limiting the business case for cargo and passenger services in and out of Smithers.

In our Integrated Regional Infrastructure Strategy OBAC stated that our: “communities envision a future where infrastructure development is well-planned, environmentally sound, and expands economic diversification and wealth creation; a future where the region's infrastructure fully supports the development and diversification of a wide range of industries; a future where the region is positioned to take advantage of the pivotal Asia-Pacific gateway; a future where infrastructure supports the region as a great place to live, work, learn, play, and invest”.

NAV Canada has circulated its proposal and as part of the second phase of its review, has invited stakeholders to submit any questions, comments or concerns about the proposal. A copy of the proposal can be downloaded from NAV Canada's website at www.navcanada.ca/NavCanada.asp?Language=EN&Content=contentdefinitionfiles/services/ansprograms/levelofservice/atsproposal/default.xml and the person to contact with comments and questions is Don Henderson, Manager, Level of Service and Aeronautical Studies ANS Service Design aerostudy@navcanada.ca



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