



Newsletter

October 2009

High Level Support for Implementation of Regional Strategies

The Omineca Beetle Action Coalition met with the Premier and six provincial Cabinet Ministers during Union of BC Municipalities Annual Meeting on September 28th–October 2, 2009 in Vancouver. The Board of Directors updated the Premier and the Ministers on the Diversification and Implementation Plan submitted in August 2009, discussed the opportunities to work together on the regional strategies' Interim Action Plans, and welcomed the input given. The Coalition was met with positive support and an active interest in working together on the specific projects related to the individual Ministry's portfolios.



Implementation of the OBAC Agriculture Strategy discussed at UBCM. (l to r) Councillor Rimas Zitkauskas, Village of Telkwa; Mayor Cress Farrow, Town of Smithers; Honourable Steve Thompson, Minister of Agriculture and Lands; Mayor Gerry Thiessen, District of Vanderhoof; Mayor Stephanie Killam, District of Mackenzie; Councillor Don Bassermann, City of Prince George; and OBAC Chair Art Kaehn, Chair, Regional District Fraser-Fort George.

Next Steps: From Plans to Action

Up until now the Coalition has focused on its primary task - to complete a well researched and credible diversification plan and strategies for the region. While a number of small implementation projects have been undertaken in conjunction with the planning phase, only now are we positioned to move into full implementation mode. Armed with action plans which have been developed for each strategy, the Coalition will spend the next several months actively working with the other levels of government, regionally based groups and industries to see implementation of as many of the 42 recommendations and 246 actions as is feasible.

The Coalition has already started to meet with senior officials in the Provincial Ministries and with local organizations to identify partnership opportunities and common priorities. Chair Don Bassermann, Councillor for the City of Prince George observed recently that, "while public funding may be tight, and we can't realistically expect to do everything right away, there is plenty that can be done now if we work together."

Coalition Vice-Chair Cress Farrow, Mayor of Smithers noted that individual communities and organizations in the region are beginning to use the strategies and recommended actions as a starting point for the development of their own specific plans and priorities. "We're also pleased to see aspects of the strategies beginning to be addressed in senior government programs" he observed.



Councillor Don Bassermann, City of Prince George will remain Chair of the Coalition

Executive Elected to Lead Implementation

At their Annual General Meeting on October 9, 2009, the OBAC Members elected their Executive Committee for 2009 -2010. Councillor Don Bassermann, City of Prince George will remain Chair of the Coalition and Mayor Cress Farrow, Town of Smithers as Vice Chair. Mayor Stephanie Killam, District of Mackenzie; Mayor Gerry Thiessen, District of Vanderhoof and Mayor Bob Smith, Village of Valemount, were elected as Members of the Executive Committee.

Capstone Objectives Provide “Big Picture” Direction

During work on the regional strategies, a number of important themes emerged. These themes indicate that by having: educated and skilled citizens; connected communities; accessible health and social services; and efficient infrastructure, we can become one of the most desirable rural regions in the country in which to live, visit and invest. This led to the adoption of four overarching, or “capstone” objectives for the region’s diversification plan:

1. By 2025, we will have the most highly educated and skilled citizenry of any rural region in Canada.
2. By 2020, community members throughout the region will be connected to each other and to the global community in a manner that allows the exchange of information and ideas as effectively as anywhere in Canada.
3. By 2025 we will be known as a model region for delivery of quality, equitable, coordinated, relevant, and cost-effective services to small and rural communities.
4. By 2020 the region will be served by an integrated infrastructure network that enables businesses and citizens to be competitive locally and in the broader marketplace.

Coalition member Art Kaehn, Chair of Regional District Fraser Fort George notes that the importance of the Capstone Objectives is that they cross all sectors and communities, linking the strategies together. He commented that, “without these common themes, we risk continuing the often lamented problem of managing in silos.”

Interim Action Plans for Tourism and Agriculture

The Interim Action Plans have been developed by reviewing the specific actions listed in each of the strategies, meeting with a cross-section of sector representatives to get input on implementation approaches, and reviewing the status of complementary initiatives. (Note: The plans are labeled “interim” to reflect an openness to fine tune them as implementation partnerships are formed.)



The Interim Action Plan for the Regional Tourism Strategy proposes six key areas where the OBAC can take a direct role to seeing the opportunities in this strategy addressed:

- Initiate one or more projects that will improve relationships and mutual benefits for tourism and forestry tenure holders working on a common land base.
- Encourage, and if necessary, convene an initial meeting to initiate an inventory of tourism related services and infrastructure along major highways. This would be intended to be a first step in identifying gaps and establishing a set of priorities to be incorporated into government decision making.
- Promote innovative business models for improved transportation services between small communities and larger centres.
- Work with Northern BC Tourism Association to establish a “Regional Tourism Advisory Group” that will help identify and provide informed leadership on implementation of key regional tourism related economic development.
- As a first priority for the Advisory Group, identify and undertake specific activities with local government staff and elected officials on sharing information about the tourism sector.
- Establish a regionally based process for tracking and reporting on achievement of sector strategy objectives.

The Interim Action Plan for the Regional Agriculture Strategy proposes five key areas where the OBAC can take a direct role to seeing the opportunities in the Regional Agriculture Strategy addressed:

- Work with regional partners and the province to develop a solid business case and proposal for funding of agriculture support officers in the region including, working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, and regional partners to develop a solid rationale for MAL additional staffing dedicated to direct farm activity and technical support.
- Convene a working group of regional partners to prepare communications material about the opportunities for agriculture in the region.
- Put in place measures designed to: Encourage consumers to purchase more locally produced food; Increase access to affordable healthy food which is produced locally; and, Encourage public and private institutions to purchase local foods.
- Work with the Province (several ministries) and local partners to undertake an assessment of the opportunities for expanding the greenhouse industry in the region.
- Establish a regionally based process for tracking and reporting on achievement of sector strategy objectives.



Linking with ED Practitioners through the 16/96 Alliance

While the regional plan and strategies developed by the local governments of the Coalition provide an important blueprint for action, it will often be the economic development practitioners working for various organizations in the region who are the key to implementation. Many of these practitioners are members of the 16/97 Economic Alliance (www.1697economicalliance.ca). At the Alliance's recent annual general meeting, held in the Village of McBride's new Community Centre, participants were presented with an update on the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition's progress and an invitation to work together to turn plans into action.

Coalition Staff - Best Wishes

Herb Langin was the OBAC's strategy coordinator from March 2008 - June 2009. Herb expertly handled the development of the 8 strategies and 1 project completed to date. On September 18th, the Board of Directors recognized Herb's immense contribution to the success of the first phase of the Coalition's work. Herb has gone back to enjoying his retirement.

Elizabeth Andersen has skillfully filled the position of OBAC's General Manager since 2005. The Board wishes to applaud her dedication and the guidance she has given as OBAC has developed a series of priority topic strategies and now looks to implement a strategic framework for diversification in our region. Best wishes to Elizabeth and her husband Dan, as they begin a new and amazing phase in their lives—raising a family.



Best wishes and thanks to Herb Langin and Elizabeth Andersen



Fraser Lake, Swan Capital of the World

Population: 1,354



The Village of Fraser Lake is located on the Yellowhead Highway about an hour-and-a-half drive west of Prince George. Aboriginal people have inhabited the area for centuries, and European settlement in the area dates back to the fur trade, with the establishment in 1806 of a fur-trading post by Simon Fraser, at Fort Fraser near the east end of Fraser Lake. The modern day town was established in 1914, during the construction of the Grand Trunk Railway, and was incorporated as a village in 1966.

The area boasts 170 lakes within a 50 mile radius and is the temporary home to more than 1000 Trumpeter Swans, making it the Swan Capital of the world. It's a playground of water and a natural wonderland, where you can try your luck for trout or char in the Fraser and Francois Lakes, or the Nautley or Stellako River. The abundance of big game, migratory birds, world class fly-fishing, spin casting and canoeing, help

make Fraser Lake a fabulous outdoor recreation community.

Hiking trails begin right at the Village's doorstep atop Mouse Mountain. The extinct volcanic activity at Red Rock, Cheslatta Falls 59 km (37 miles) south and the pictographs along Fraser Lake are only a few of the area's fabulous sights.

From its humble beginnings in the early 1900's, Fraser Lake Sawmill (owned and operated by West Fraser Timber Company Ltd.) has evolved into one of the world's most modern sawmills. Endako Molybdenum Mines was at one time the second largest molybdenum mine in the world. Endako Mine and Fraser Lake Sawmill employ the majority of Fraser Lake residents.

The east end of Fraser Lake is recorded as the site of the first cultivated land in British Columbia, while Fort Fraser is the site of the last spike of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, now the Winnipeg-Prince Rupert line of Canadian National (CN).



Aerial view of the Village of Fraser Lake.



Fraser Lake Sawmill has evolved into one of the world's most modern sawmills.



Endako Molybdenum Mines was once the second largest molybdenum mine in the world.



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