



Media Release

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OBAC EXPANDS WITH MORE COMMUNITIES

Prince George, BC – The Chair of the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC) Mayor Len Fox of Vanderhoof is pleased to announce that the OBAC Board will invite Mackenzie, McBride and Valemount to become members of the Coalition. The three communities are interested in joining the effort to diversify the regional economy in the wake of the mountain pine beetle infestation. The expanded OBAC area includes 12 incorporated communities, many rural communities in two Regional Districts and there are also many First Nations communities in the OBAC area.

Mayor Fox states, "The OBAC Board knows that these communities are facing beetle related challenges. The communities' leaders have told us they want to be part of this regional process to produce an economic development and diversification plan to create new opportunities and minimize the impacts of the epidemic. The addition of these communities gives OBAC a larger voice for the region with greater population and a larger land base. We also look forward to welcoming the involvement of First Nations leaders and communities with the OBAC initiative."

Mayor Stephanie Killam of Mackenzie states, "When OBAC was first formed Mackenzie was not as heavily impacted by the beetle epidemic as it is now. It is essential we be a part of the community coalition seeking solutions to the many beetle related challenges. Our issues may differ slightly from those in Smithers or Prince George but are equally as important to our community's economic future as all other communities in the OBAC region. We're pleased OBAC and the provincial government have recognized this as a key priority for Mackenzie and for our region."

Mayor Mike Frazier of McBride states, "OBAC has taken the lead in our region in assessing the challenges and developing an outline to build an economic development and diversification plan to deal with the challenges. This process is critical to the survival of small communities such as ours. McBride will do its part to help identify opportunities to sustain and grow our region's economy in the wake of the beetle epidemic."

Mayor Jeanette Townsend of Valemount states, "We're pleased to be part of OBAC as the group has been very effective in articulating the challenges to communities caused by the mountain pine beetle epidemic."

"People in Valemount have been watching the epidemic spread into Mount Robson provincial park and throughout the area for over a decade and we're pleased to be included in the process aimed at finding solutions to the challenges created by the epidemic."

In September 2005 the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC) received an \$800,000 initial grant from the Provincial Government to build a diversification plan and take action that supports long-term sustainability for the Highway 16 west communities and region and reduces the impacts of the mountain pine beetle. A coalition

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led by and accountable to local communities and working with First Nations, all sectors and levels of government is well positioned to address these challenges and to create a bright future together. At its original formation, the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition included the communities and region between Prince George and Smithers, led by an Interim Board of the regions Mayors and Regional District Chairs. As mentioned above, the OBAC is now expanding to include a larger region and more communities. The Coalition believes that by acting collectively we can be more effective. The Diversification Plan that the Coalition has begun will identify ways to expand and create new economic development and diversification opportunities for OBAC communities. You can learn more about the initiative by visiting the OBAC website at: www.ominacacoalition.ca.

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