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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Forests and Range

### **FUNDING HELPS OMINECA COMMUNITIES WITH BEETLE IMPACTS**

PRINCE GEORGE – An \$800,000 grant to the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition, to reduce economic impacts of the mountain pine beetle in the north central Interior, was announced today by Prince George-Omineca MLA John Rustad and Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman.

“As outlined in the throne speech, this government is committed to community partnerships to combat the mountain pine beetle epidemic,” said Rustad. “Funding for the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition will help build an economic diversification plan to maintain community stability for Highway 16 communities and First Nations well into the future.”

“Ensuring long-term economic sustainability for affected communities and First Nations is one primary goal,” said Coleman. “Through grants like this one, we’re giving communities the tools they need to plan their road ahead.”

Coleman returns to Prince George next week to speak at the First Nations’ Mountain Pine Beetle Forum and to get their input on the implementation strategy for the federal government’s \$100-million funding commitment.

The Omineca Beetle Action Coalition includes all the communities between Prince George and Smithers with the interim executive being the mayors of Vanderhoof, Prince George, Fort St. James, Smithers and Burns Lake, the chair of the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District, land-use planning tables, and local environmental groups and forest companies.

“This is a community-driven approach made possible with the Province’s help,” said Vanderhoof Mayor and interim chair of the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition Len Fox. “The coalition’s goal is for vibrant rural communities well after the beetle has come and gone.”

This is the second regional coalition to receive funding. The Province has also committed \$1.7 million to the Cariboo-Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition to help that region begin planning recovery efforts.

“Our government clearly recognizes that local groups are in the best position to assess local matters,” said Dennis MacKAY, MLA for Bulkley Valley-Stikine. “The Province will work hand-in-hand with the communities along Highway 16 as they work to weather the mountain pine beetle disaster.”

Ministry of Forests and Range aerial overview surveys detected about 2.6 million hectares (2,588,580) of mountain pine beetle attack in the Omineca (Prince George, Vanderhoof, Fort St. James and Nadina forest districts) in 2004. The beetle affected about seven million hectares of British Columbia last year.

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