
Summary - Northern Labour Market Committee (NLMC) meeting**June 6 to 7, 2007, in La Ronge, Saskatchewan****Mandate**

Identify and assess emerging labour market and economic development issues in northern Saskatchewan and recommend or initiate actions that will enable residents to benefit from training, employment, and economic activities in their region.

Chaired jointly in 2007-2008 by

1. Saskatchewan Northern Affairs for the provincial government;
2. Athabasca Economic Development and Training Corporation representing Aboriginal training and economic development agencies; and
3. Northlands College, Western Region, representing training agencies/industry.

Attended by

Decision-makers in training, planning, and economic development including representatives from federal and provincial governments, school divisions, training institutions, training funders, economic development agencies, local and Aboriginal authorities, and private industry.

Agenda

1. Education and Training Initiatives

- The mobile training lab for northern Saskatchewan was purchased last year by a partnership of Industry and Resources, Advanced Education and Employment (AEE), Northern Apprenticeship Committee, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIASST), and Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission. The purpose of the lab is to provide a facility for teaching certified trades training right at an industrial site or a northern community. The facility is equipped to train electrical, plumbing/gas fitting, industrial mechanic, welding, machinist, and steam fitting/pipe fitting. Over the winter, Level I and 2 Electrical and Industrial Mechanic apprenticeship programs were delivered in the lab at Cigar Lake mine. Nine students in electrical and 8 students in mechanics graduated. The lab is being equipped for a seventh trade and then will go to Creighton until the end of the year. The province purchased two more labs, one designated for Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies and the other for other areas of the province. The partner agencies formed a committee to organize the training schedule for the lab. The committee is asking for proposals for those wishing to use the lab in 2008. The deadline for submissions is June 15.

2. Subcommittees' Training and Employment Work Plans

- The role of Athabasca Economic Development and Training Corp. (AEDTC) is to be a player in developments that improve training delivery, increase job and business opportunities, and provide a more stable transportation system in the Athabasca region. AEDTC would like to see a regional training facility established. AEDTC continues to build its business capacity through a family of for-profit companies including mineral exploration services, janitorial, construction of housing units for Rabbit Lake mine, and manufacture of pre-cast concrete segments for Cigar Lake mine. AEDTC purchased 50% of Points North Freightling last year and the company is busy serving the exploration industry. AEDTC will

explore the potential for expanding into services for mineral exploration camps, hauling concrete at mines, expanding the commercial fishing industry, and road construction opportunities on the new Wollaston all-weather road.

- Since January, the manager of the Northern Apprenticeship Committee (NAC) indentured 40 new apprentices and assisted 55 apprentices with living expenses so that they could attend training at SIAST. AEE provides the funds to support apprentices during their technical training. AEE recently confirmed \$50,000 for the manager's wages this year and is working to establish longer-term funding. Wage Subsidy Phase II, funded by Northern Development Agreement (NDA), has commenced to support 13 apprentices employed by small to medium businesses. The goal is to encourage businesses across the north to hire and indenture northern workers and motivate the businesses to retain the employees when the subsidy is finished. NAC is looking at organizing a trades forum to be held in the autumn prior to the next NLMC. Several years ago, NLMC successfully lobbied for a northern representative on the board of the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission. The representative recently resigned and NLMC will contact the Commission to request them to begin the process of refilling this position.
- The Oil Sands Subcommittee was formed in 2000 with a mandate of enabling northern residents to take advantage of employment opportunities in the oil sands sector. The subcommittee has been inactive except for the activities of the coordinator who undertook the employment referral services of the Northern Neighbours-Bridges to Employment and the Job Horizons phases. Two consulting firms undertook the administration with funding from the federal and provincial governments. Job Horizons funding expired this spring and the project has ended. Communities see a need for a renewal of the project to assist their residents to employment in oil developments and exploration. A proposal was submitted to the NDA requesting \$900,000 towards funding a new phase of the project. If approved, the subcommittee could be re-established by autumn.
- The province has provided funding for 2007-2008 for the Forestry Training Plan, administered by the Forestry Training Subcommittee. Although activity in the forest sector is slow, two training proposals were received so far. Last year, the Plan supported 50 trainees in 6 training programs. Over the years, 80% of the participants in training have been of Aboriginal heritage and 60% have been from the northern region of the commercial forest.
- Gary Tinker Federation for the Disabled is pursuing the development of an activity centre in La Ronge for disabled people from the north. The federation is continuing to deliver its wage subsidy program for employers who hire disabled workers.
- The Health Sector Training Committee was formed in the 1990's during the establishment of the Health Districts and the construction of the La Ronge Health Centre but has been inactive for a number of years. The subcommittee was re-established to address today's skill shortages and employment opportunities in the health sector. The subcommittee is searching for \$70,000 in funding to undertake research this summer to identify employment and training for the health sector and to begin negotiations for a multi-party training plan. By autumn, the subcommittee will have come to a decision about the possible melding of this subcommittee with the Northern Health Strategy's technical group and will have some training plans in place. The Committee received the moral support of NLMC in their quest for resources to hold a community health development forum and to develop orientation material for use in the recruitment of health professionals.

- Traditional Economies membership from Saskatchewan Cooperative Fisheries Ltd. (SCFL) went to Ottawa last week to meet with a variety of departments and politicians to lobby for an export license – a necessity in the plan to revitalize the Saskatchewan commercial fishing industry. Under the current sales system, Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation (FFMC), a federal crown corporation, is the only authority able to export freshwater fish. Saskatchewan can choose to opt out of FFMC as long as the other western provinces approve. An export license would enable the new Saskatchewan company – Wild Northern Fish Company - to expand their sales, fully utilize a variety of fish species, ensure quality, and market a “brand name” product as wild and sustainable. Other keys to success include evening out the seasonal spikes in production, ice-making equipment at lakeside facilities, and new oven-ready products. The fishers prefer that FFMC continue to operate but in an open market system, with fishers able to sell to whomever they wish. The project requires \$7M to purchase a new 2,300 square foot processing plant in Prince Albert, buy equipment, and establish a line-of credit and reserve funds. Training would be required for about 100 new fishers as well as fish plant workers.
- Traditional Economies trappers must operate, as of April 1, 2007, under the European Union requirement that wild fur imports into the EU be trapped with humane types of traps. Of the 800 licensed trappers in northern Saskatchewan, only 100 have been trained in the new methods. Woodland Cree Ent. and Prince Albert Grand Council, Athabasca Branch, will look at arranging funding and training through Northlands College.
- The Economic Development Subcommittee’s proposed Economic Development Conference in La Ronge has been postponed to July. However, the conference will only proceed upon making up a funding shortfall of \$30,000. Organizers are awaiting Ministers’ responses on the dates that they are available to attend.
- This spring, New North started the two-year Northern Youth Leadership program led by two youth coordinators. The coordinators will assist youth to set up two- to six member Councils in their communities. The aim of the youth councils is to work with youth to reduce youth involvement in crime, get youth participating in their communities, and help youth gain leadership skills and self-esteem. The program is open to youth between the ages of 13 and 29. The 10 communities involved in the project are La Ronge, Beauval, Buffalo Narrows, Cumberland House, Ile a la Crosse, La Loche, Pinehouse, Sandy Bay, Stony Rapids, and Black Lake. Plans are also underway for a youth leadership conference in La Ronge from October 19 to 21.
- The goal of the Multi-Party Training Plan (MPTP), administered by the Mineral Sector Steering Committee, is to increase the number of northern Saskatchewan residents working at the mines and increase their skill levels. Monitoring of employment at northern mine sites show that northern employment was the highest ever in 2006 - an annual average of 1,266 northern workers who made up 52% of the total workforce. 41% of northern company employees were in higher skilled occupations such as trades, supervisory, and technical jobs compared to 34% in 1992 before MPTP began. Since MPTP began in 1993, partners have provided \$40M to support students and businesses and fund training seats, apprenticeships, and scholarships. In MPTP Phase 3 (2003 to 2008), partners have cost-shared 1,375 enrolments in a range of programs from basic education to technical training. Businesses and residents of northern Saskatchewan earned \$283M from the mines in 2005 in contracts and payroll.

3. Economic Development

- The federal and provincial governments recently approved a one-year extension of the 5-year federal/provincial Northern Development Agreement (NDA) to March 31, 2008, in order to expend the final \$5M of the \$20M fund. The tri-partite management committee (with membership by federal and provincial funding partners and northern communities) is expecting to approve \$4M in new projects soon, leaving \$1M to be spent. A consulting firm completed a review of the agreement based on surveys and recommended that a proposed second phase should: establish a dedicated fund rather than proposals having to meet each contributing Department's funding criteria; identify sectors for strategic investment; create separate training and capacity building programs; track the training and employment results; and set deadlines for each stage of the project approval process and improve communications.
- The Boreal Regional Development Corporation could be operational in the autumn to replace the defunct Northwest Development Council. The new corporation will have 13 members from 9 communities in the northwest region. The non profit corporation will lobby for economic development opportunities and work with other northern regional economic development corporations.

4. Industrial Sectors' Initiatives

- Canada's non-timber forest industry is valued at \$350M annually. British Columbia has the largest wild mushroom harvest valued at \$20-45M/year. Nova Scotia harvests 30M pounds of wild blueberries annually. Saskatchewan's non-timber industry is valued at over \$5M, mostly from wild rice and mushrooms. Saskatchewan is the largest producer of lake grown wild rice in Canada, producing 70% of national production. The province has 200 growers, 2 processing plants (La Ronge and Denare Beach), and two major marketers (Riese's and Northern Lights Foods), all located in the northern region. The 10-year average annual production is 2.5M pounds with an average income to growers of \$1.7M. In comparison, the United States produced 38.7M pounds of wild rice last year, mostly in California paddies. Saskatchewan's harvest has been below average in the last 3 years because of high water levels. In 2007, 130 growers in the province signed on to a new wild rice crop insurance pilot program. Insurance payouts will be based on regional (not individual) production below the 10-year average. Harvesting of morel mushrooms has been low for the last few years because of fewer large forest fires to create good growing conditions. As much as 250,000 pounds of morels have been harvested in Saskatchewan with returns to pickers of over \$1M. The average price is \$4-5/pound. Saskatchewan produces some of the best quality chanterelle mushrooms in the world. Chanterelles can be harvested from July to freeze-up with an average price for pickers of \$4-5/pound. Last year, 40,000 lbs were harvested and sold mostly in Europe. More research is needed on birch sap and chaga (a fungal growth on birch trees) to increase the ecological and biological knowledge base and look at ways to increase production. Fern fiddleheads around Cumberland could potentially supply 100,000 kilograms/year, although harvest volumes have been low for the last few years. Fireweed was harvested in 2005 and 2006 and was marketed to Fytokem in Saskatoon. Pickers were paid about \$.25/pound to deliver the harvested flowers and stalks to La Ronge. Fytokem processes the extract and sells it to the cosmetic industry. Harvest levels did not meet the demand for the product. Challenges facing the industry include adequate funding to promote the development of the industry and fund more research; increased market

development and training activities; and a regulatory framework that will support development.

- At the end of April 2007, Cameco's four operations in northern Saskatchewan employed 1,043 company workers of whom 540 (52%) were Residents of Saskatchewan's North. Of these northern workers, 468 were self-declared as having Aboriginal heritage. Long-term contractors employed 592 of whom 353 (60%) were Residents of Saskatchewan's North. Most of the contractors are northern or joint venture companies such as Athabasca Catering at all the sites; Points Athabasca Construction at Cigar Lake; Mudjatik Thyssen Mining at McArthur, Cigar and Rabbit; and Snake Lake Construction at McArthur and Cigar. To promote higher education, Cameco provided: work placements for post-secondary students; 30 summer jobs to date for northern post-secondary students; 9 mine tours for teachers and students in high schools and post-secondary training; and university and technical school scholarships. The deadline for the scholarship program is June 30.
- SaskTel, in partnership with PAGC, MLTC, and New North, completed the broad band project to bring high speed internet to northern communities, schools, and health districts. Since then, SaskTel has had 1,232 new hook-ups. In March 2007, SaskTel announced \$28M for the final phase of expansion and improvements to digital cell phone service at 31 locations across the province. In addition, \$2.4 million will be invested to expand service to eight previously unserved northern communities of Stanley Mission, Pelican Narrows, Sandy Bay, Chitek Lake, La Loche West, Pinehouse, Denare Beach, and Deschambault Village. The project includes the construction of 29 new cell towers along the Meadow Lake line and Highway 2/102 to Black Lake. Each tower costs \$250,000 to \$600,000. The company must go through the Environmental Assessment process with both the federal and provincial governments, acquire the land for the towers, and design the service. Some of the northern mine sites have paid for their own cell towers to provide cell phone service to their employees. SaskTel has wireless technology to assist the mines in communications with their underground operations. To increase travellers' safety on the seasonal road into the far north, SaskTel was asked to look at providing pay phones if cell towers are not feasible.
- Last month, the Province announced it would repeal the Northern Overtime Exemption effective September 1, 2007. The Northern Overtime Exemption, in effect for over 50 years, is a labour standards regulation that exempts some employers operating north of Township 62 from the hours of work and overtime provisions of *The Labour Standards Act, 1995*. It does not apply to Uranium City or workers in La Ronge and Creighton areas. The process to review the exemption began last year after Premier Calvert appointed Mr. Harper to consult with people and report his findings and recommendations. His review of the Exemption indicated the regulation had outlived its usefulness and he recommended it be repealed. The *Labour Standards Act* has other options to accommodate the need for flexible hours and the seasonal nature of some northern occupations, such as permits for averaging of hours. Fishers and trappers will be treated as primary producers (like the traditional family farm) under *The Labour Standards Act*, so overtime provisions will not apply to these producers. Outfitters across the province and those working in mineral exploration north of Township 62 will be granted regulatory exemption under sections 6 and 12 of *The Act* because their unique work situations make these overtime regulations impractical. Mr. Harper also recommended that the government establish a Labour Standards office in La Ronge with two staff to help inform employers and employees about Labour Standards regulations.

