

The Northern Alberta Development Council (NADC) met in Worsley, September 11-12, 2007 for its regular administration meeting and Regional Stakeholders' Forum.

NADC learns more about Mountain Pine Beetle

Alberta Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) gave a presentation on the status of the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) infestation in Alberta. The infestation was identified as a potential threat to the ecology, water, wildlife and community stability of affected areas. Preventing its spread is the primary objective of the provincial MPB Action Plan. The strategy is to aggressively detect, survey and control infested trees and to be pre-emptive in reducing the number of highly susceptible stands. The risk of spread depends largely on winter survival rates and MPB population trends. An MPB Advisory Committee advises the Minister of SRD on matters pertinent to Alberta's response to the MPB threat. More information on MPB can be found at: www.srd.alberta.ca/forests/health/pestalerts/mountainpinebeetles.aspx.

NADC Health Committee update

The NADC met with the Minister of Health and Wellness in August to talk about northern health issues. Funding formulas, infrastructure, education and recruitment of health professionals, and differential fee payments were some of the topics discussed. It was encouraging that a number of NADC recommendations were being addressed in this year's budget. The NADC will continue to work with northern stakeholders and the ministry to advance the region's health issues.



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Education, housing and infrastructure among issues raised at Regional Stakeholders Forum

Community leaders made presentations to the NADC on topics ranging from education to housing and infrastructure to economic development.

Education: Declining high school and post-secondary enrolments are presenting challenges and opportunities for northern educational institutions. The Peace River School Division outlined a "campus" high school concept for its northwest sector to provide a better standard of education in a rural area with falling enrolments. A program coordinator from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) highlighted new programs under development. The Grande Prairie Regional College delegate asserted that social infrastructure was the "forgotten" infrastructure. He talked about the positive relationship between post-secondary education and quality of life. The decline in northern post-secondary enrolment pointed to the need for a new strategy to support youth in transitioning to post-secondary education.

Housing: A lack of funding for seniors housing and homelessness were identified as issues. One presenter advocated for more provincial funding for seniors housing in rural areas to keep seniors in their local communities. Another presenter pointed out that homelessness was not only a "big city" problem as shown by the significant increase of homeless women using the local women's shelter.

Transportation Infrastructure: Benefits of minimizing the impact of transportation infrastructure development were recognized. The further development of an East-West Connector between Fort McMurray and Peace River would create a single footprint for transportation and transmission infrastructure. In addition, the connector road proposed by Clear Hills County would provide access to its rich resources with minimal impact.

Economic Development: Primary and value-added agriculture production, and tourism infrastructure and product development were viewed as important factors in community and economic development.

The next NADC meeting is scheduled for November in Fort McMurray. Confirmed dates will be available on our website.