

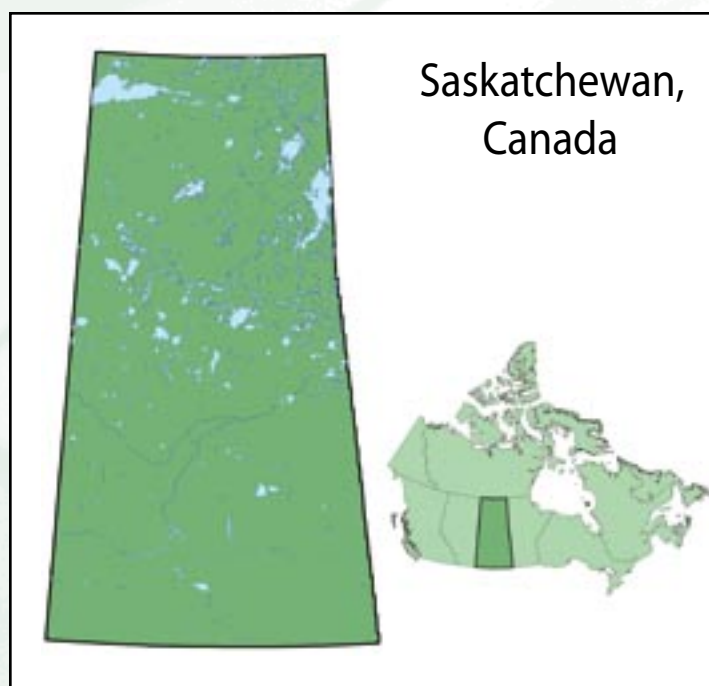
Resource Opportunities for Northern Saskatchewan Communities Pilot Program

The Challenges

Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) has a mandate to promote the sustainable development and responsible use of Canada's mineral, energy, and forest resources. With sustainable development, social, environmental, and economic considerations are integrated into resource development decisions.

Until this pilot project, NRCan had not developed a multi-disciplinary program that included all sectors of the department working from several locations to build local community skills to identify and access natural resource opportunities.

Northern Saskatchewan is located approximately north of 53 degrees latitude. It features the rugged landscape of the Canadian Shield interspersed with many lakes and rivers. It is rich in natural resources — energy, minerals, forests, and recreational opportunities. Settlements are small and remote. The majority of the people have an Aboriginal background.



The Program

A pilot "one-window" program was created by NRCan in May 2001. Funding of \$400,000 was made available for that fiscal year only, and all projects had to be completed by March 31, 2002.

Local communities, governments, industries, and associations were invited to propose 1-year community-focussed development projects in and throughout northern Saskatchewan that would increase the local population's capacity to plan and train for resource-based opportunities. The needs, concerns, and interests of Northerners were the prime consideration in the design and delivery of this pilot. The objectives and criteria were kept quite broad and flexible.

In less than 2 months, over 50 proposals were received. There was a wide variety and all proposals had a large degree of local support. An NRCan Advisory Committee reviewed all the proposals and assisted some applicants with specific resource information, scientific expertise, or suggestions for additional consideration.

A local Saskatchewan Joint Steering Committee was formed with representatives of local communities, government, industry, and associations. Sixteen projects were approved.



The Results

The initial funding from NRCan resulted in a surprising additional \$1.4 million when all the support of the communities and their partners was aggregated. Three additional projects worth \$110,000 were passed to another federal government department, Western Economic Diversification, as they met the criteria for another on-going program.

Several Saskatchewan government departments as well as the communities, local associations, and industry provided additional partnering funds as well as substantial in-kind support to develop and implement the projects. The total funding to the various communities for conducting the 19 projects was \$1.9 million.

About 50% of the projects and funding allocations were in the forestry sector. Most of Saskatchewan's forests are in this area. The forest industry is experiencing substantial growth. Recreational and ecotourism are also growth areas. The projects included

- traditional land use and occupancy research and mapping studies;
- enhancement of the northern Saskatchewan landscape-level inventory;
- feasibility studies for the production and marketing of non-timber products;
- birch wood harvesting and processing study;
- market feasibility studies for small local sawmills and specialty aspen mills;
- marketing and exporting fire fighting expertise;
- community training for fire prevention and protection;
- regional economic inventory of forestry opportunities.



About 36% of the projects and funding were related to earth sciences mapping, documentation, and development. These included

- local land surveying;
- information for the development of property rights infrastructure registry indices;
- feasibility study for a limestone quarry;
- impact assessment of potential oil sands development;
- inventory of local skilled labor and assessment of future needs;
- training of community leaders on legal rights and responsibilities related to resource developments.

About 13% of the projects and funding were related to biomass energy utilization. These involved a community cogeneration research and pilot project and a local district biomass fuel heating study. The majority of the biomass for both projects was forest and wood waste product.

Two studies that involved a renewable resource and fit within an integrated concept of sustainable community development were also funded. They were a feasibility study for a walleye fish hatchery and a regional business plan for expansion of the commercial fish processing industry.

All projects were successfully completed on time and within budget. All projects submitted final reports. A formal evaluation has been completed on this highly successful initiative.



Summary

The interactive processes used by NRCan and the local communities and decision-makers were appropriate and timely. The best practices for involvement of all stakeholders that had been developed for other federal government programs such as the First Nations Forestry Program and Canada's Model Forest Program were utilized effectively. Best of all, progress was made toward enhanced community decision-making and a community's goal of sustainability.

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