

## Northwestern Ministers' Report on Northern Economic Development

At the 1996 Western Premiers' Conference, premiers agreed that western provinces and the territories shared common concerns and interests relating to the northern economy. Recognizing that economic benefits from northern development must accrue and remain in the North, the premiers committed to establish a forum of elected officials with responsibility for northern economic development.

Specifically, the premiers requested forum participants to develop a work plan for action on issues affecting northern economies, to be forwarded to the 1998 Western Premier's Conference.

In October 1997, ministers from Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories met to review the challenges to northern economic development and to decide on a course of action for addressing these challenges.

This first meeting, the Northwestern Ministers' Economic Conference, was held in Prince George immediately prior to the British Columbia Premier's Summit on Northern Jobs and Development.

Participants identified key strategic areas and assigned responsibility for addressing shared concerns on:

- strengthening transportation infrastructure;
- increasing trade promotion and exports;
- ensuring up-to-date, relevant education and training systems in northern communities and regions;
- ensuring sustainable environments and economies;
- increasing tourism development and promotion;
- building on existing economic base in local communities; and
- encouraging strategic decision-making at the regional level.

In June 1998, ministers met in Prince Rupert, British Columbia to report on their progress and determine future priorities and actions. To support discussions and advance strategies to address the concerns that had been noted at the first Northwestern Ministers' Economic Conference, the following inter-jurisdictional reports were completed for presentation at the Prince Rupert conference:

- *Northwestern Canadian Integrated Road Network*
- *Enterprise Northwest Online: Using the Internet to Develop Enterprise in the Northwest*
- *Status Report on Northern Trade Promotion*

- *Assigning Economic Values to Environmental Assets in the Northwest*
- *Best Practices on Community Involvement in Environmental Assessments and Ongoing Monitoring of Major Development Projects in Remote Regions*
- *Successful Value-Added Products for Locally Produced Renewable Resources in Small Communities in the Northwest*
- *Strategy for Co-operation on Northern Tourism*

Ministers also reviewed inter-jurisdictional activities which had been undertaken between the two conferences, including:

- the Manitoba Rural Forum, with a special session on northern issues;
- the Northwest Online Forum in Whitehorse; and
- Co-operation with the Western Trade Officials group on the Interbuild Trade Show and Conference in Calgary

In addition, ministers reviewed the status of specific issues which they had identified as being of common concern to northern economic development. Issues included:

- the economic impact of Navigation Canada's proposed Phase II fee structure;
- the need for federal financial assistance to address the infrastructure requirements of northern communities;
- the Yukon and NWT's need for adequate federal resources to effectively manage new responsibilities resulting from federal devolution.

As a result of their discussions ministers have agreed, and respectfully submit for the western premiers' consideration, that:

- an action plan is needed to ensure completion of electronic highway infrastructure and support a Yukon on-line forum's recommendation that more attention be focused on the potential business use of the internet in the North;
- northern trade corridors must be improved and affordable access provided to northern ports;
- there is a need for co-operative efforts to expand trade and tourism promotion; and
- a long-term framework should be developed for improving and expanding northern roads.

To assist the western premiers' evaluation of these recommendations, this report includes background information on discussions at the 1998 Northwestern Ministers' Economic Conference, and a status report outlining progress on identified priority issues.

## **Background**

### **Northwestern Ministers' Economic Conference**

*Northwestern Canada has a population of 773,000 spread across 5.9 million square kilometres. It also has a large resource-based economy, with an estimated annual production in excess of \$14 billion. Oil and gas, oil sands, forestry, mining, and agriculture are major contributors to the northern economy.*

#### **Strengthening Northern Infrastructure**

Northwestern elected officials have noted that one of the important elements of southern regions' prosperity is that key infrastructure was in place to support economic development and growth. They noted the disparity between northern and southern infrastructure, and stressed the importance of addressing concerns about infrastructure in the North.

The ministers have developed a report outlining a long-term vision for an integrated road network in northwestern Canada. It will be forwarded for review by premiers. Alberta co-ordinated the report's development after last year's Northwestern Ministers' Economic Conference, to reaffirm northwestern Canada's economic importance and the key role transportation plays in the region's economic development. It is intended to serve as the basis for the six jurisdiction's joint long-term transportation planning.

As well, the ministers noted that air transportation provides additional vital links between northern economies and export and trade markets, and committed to the importance of preserving these links.

They noted that, since last year, when they joined in expressing concerns about Navigation Canada's plans to introduce new airport user fees, NavCan has begun consultations with affected northern communities. However, the elected officials of the northwest continue to be strongly concerned about how new Nav Canada user fees will impact northern communities. They emphasized that NavCan's fees should ensure fair and equitable impact on all communities, regardless of size or location. They also noted that NavCan's proposed new fee structure would negatively impact both scheduled and non-scheduled passenger and cargo services, as well as essential services such as air ambulance, forest fire detection and suppression, and law enforcement flights.

In discussions about transportation infrastructure, ministers also discussed the potential benefits of transporting Alberta grain and other products through the Port of Prince Rupert, and Manitoba and Saskatchewan grain through Churchill for

shipment. It was agreed to support the work currently underway on the Northwestern Transportation and Trade Corridor and the Mid-Continent International Corridor.

Ministers also agreed that telecommunications infrastructure is a critical component of education, training, and economic development. They discussed ways to advance the need for additional federal funding to support the development and maintenance of affordable telecommunications infrastructure in the North, particularly for communities without adequate access.

### **Increasing Trade Promotion and Exports**

Northwestern elected officials discussed key components of an action plan presented by the Western Canadian Trade Officials group. The WCTO had been asked to develop a strategy for strengthening and promoting northern trade opportunities as a result of discussions at the 1997 Northwestern Ministers' Economic Conference.

The strategy includes increasing northern companies' access to trade programs, missions and events; improving communications between the federal government and western provinces and territories, thus raising awareness of programs and events relevant to enhancing northern trade; and, establishing partnerships among northern and other regions to build the North's capacity for stronger internal trade.

It was noted that inter-jurisdictional access to trade missions could increase exports for northern companies that might otherwise be unable to participate in sectoral trade missions.

It was further agreed that northwestern jurisdictions should pursue strategic approaches that support the movement of products through transportation corridors to key northern ports. The ministers also considered how key northern ports could support increased trade and exports.

### **Community Economic Development and Strategic Decision-Making at the Local Level**

Northwestern elected officials affirmed the importance of local and regional decision making, examining it in the context of the 1998 Manitoba Rural Forum and a community economic development workshop presented at the forum. Workshop participants had highly praised the approach used at the forum, which was held as a result of discussions at the 1997 Northwestern Ministers' Economic Conference, and recommended that the six jurisdictions use it as a model for a new, annual Northern Community Economic Development Forum.

In addition, participants from the territories discussed their efforts to work with the federal government toward the devolution of Northern Affairs programs. Ministers emphasized the importance of ensuring that adequate federal resources to effectively complete and manage the devolution of new responsibilities to the territories.

### **Education and Training**

Ministers discussed the importance of supporting education, training and economic development by ensuring northwestern communities have affordable access to the internet, and agreed to continue working toward that objective through partnerships with industry and other levels of government.

In addition, northwestern elected officials accepted the conclusions of a May 1998 forum hosted by the Yukon and the Northern Research Institute of Yukon College, and agreed to further examine the potential for “hands-on” internet training and support for both entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs in the northwest’s remote regions. The ministers also committed to aggressively promote the benefits of internet use as it relates to developing and expanding enterprise.

They further noted that northern regions’ high and expanding proportion of young people requires improved access to quality education and training. They acknowledged that education and training are essential to a strong foundation for economic development, and agreed programs must be made relevant, responsive and accessible to remote northern communities.

### **Tourism Development and Promotion**

Ministers acknowledged the importance of capitalizing on the North’s unique natural beauty and heritage by strengthening the northwestern jurisdictions’ tourism industries.

To this end, they will encourage their colleagues to consider the need to co-operatively develop a strategic plan to support tourism development.

### **Sustaining Environments and Economies**

The ministers acknowledged the importance of building on northern regions’ resource-based economies while continuing to address environmental sustainability. Northwestern elected officials reviewed progress made since the 1997 Northwestern Ministers’ Economic Conference, when the jurisdictions agreed to work co-operatively and share best practices with regards to sustainable environments and economies.

They reported that substantial work on this topic had been undertaken since the last conference, and referenced a series of reports that had been produced:

- *Assigning Economic Values to Environmental Assets in Northwest;*
- *Best Practices on Community Involvement in Environmental Assessments and Ongoing Monitoring of Major Development Projects in Remote Regions;* and
- *Successful Value added products for locally produced Renewable Resources in small communities in the Northwest.*

These reports will contribute to addressing concerns the ministers raised last year about environmental and economic sustainability.

For example, the Northwest Territories presented research on how to value environmental assets when making decisions about the development of northern resources. Ministers received NWT's findings, which highlighted the importance of consistently using renewable-resource values when planning land use or deciding between competing uses of land.

Northwestern elected officials also received the results of other successful Northwest Territories research conducted since the 1997 meeting. The research documented examples of beneficial secondary, or value-added, products in northern regions, which have traditionally supported their economies by exporting renewable resources. Elected officials further acknowledged the economic and environmental benefit of effectively marketing value-added products obtained from wildlife, fish, forest, and other renewable resources.

They also discussed research Saskatchewan conducted on approaches governments and industries in western Canada successfully use to strengthen community involvement in environmental assessment processes and the monitoring of major resource developments.

Ministers agreed the research – which was undertaken in response to issues raised at the 1997 economic meeting of northwestern ministers – should be regularly updated and shared among jurisdictions. Summaries of the updated information will also be posted on the internet, to help ensure that northern aboriginal peoples, communities, and other stakeholders can be effectively involved in the assessment and decision-making processes that impact the management of northern resources.

In addition, the ministers noted the success of the May conference in the Yukon on sustainable development, which attracted representatives from eight circumpolar countries and provided an opportunity to strategize environmentally sustainable ways of improving northern economies.

***NORTHWEST MINISTERS  
RESPONSIBLE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT***

Status Report on Identified Priority Items from October 1997 to July 1998

***For Western Premiers Conference***

### ***Strengthening transportation infrastructure***

<b>Lead</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Report</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
Dan Miller BC	1. Northern Ministers to express concerns to the federal government, encouraging NavCan to conduct a thorough impact assessment and northern consultation before implementing phase II of the proposed changes on northern communities.	Minister Miller has written to, and met with Minister Collenette to express concerns about the potential adverse impacts of NavCan's actions  Other western and northern jurisdictions have also expressed concerns.	no	That Western Premiers express their opposition to the federal government to any proposed changes to the NavCanada fee structure which would have an adverse financial impact on northern communities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NavCanada fees should ensure fair and equitable impact on all communities regardless of size or location, and recognize that small communities cannot be expected to achieve full cost recovery due to the distinct challenges that they face.</li> <li>• Recommend an exemption from fees for all publicly owned aircraft and those contracted to supply public and safety services.</li> </ul>
Mike Cardinal Alta	2. Work with Western Transportation Ministers to develop a northwestern integrated road planning framework	<b>Northwestern Canadian Integrated Road Network— Conceptual Long term Vision</b>	yes	That the report be advanced to Western Premiers for endorsement as a long-term planning framework.



***Increase trade promotion and exports***

<b>Lead</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Report</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
David Newman Manitoba	Develop and implement an action plan for trade development and promotion, focusing on areas such as regional marketing approaches to sell expertise to other remote northern regions.	<b>Status Report on Northern Trade Promotion</b>  Interbuild trade show and conference in Calgary in April was huge success	yes	That Premiers endorse the plan of action as proposed by the Western Canada Trade Officials (WCTO) endorse multi-jurisdictional access to trade missions.
	Work with Western Trade officials Group, and perhaps undertake regional trade missions and market northwestern Canada to attract business investment	NWT, Yukon and Alberta representatives went to Russia to explore trade opportunities	no	That Western Premiers endorse the concept of working together to identify and support enhanced regional trade development and promote business investment opportunities.
	Share information and support the work of the Manitoba and BC in expanding the role of ports such as, Churchill and Prince Rupert			That Western Premiers support the work currently being undertaken on the Northwestern Transportation and Trade Corridor and the Mid-Continent International Corridor.

### ***Tourism Development and Promotion***

<b>Lead</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Report</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
David Newman Manitoba	1. Prepare a strategy for co-operation on northern tourism development and promotion for discussion and action with jurisdictional counterparts in northwestern Canada	<b>Tourism Development Strategy—Summary Report</b>	yes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the western provincial and territorial governments recognize the existing marketing, research, development and standards bodies which exist in western and northern Canada as resources for future development and strategic planning.</li> <li>2. That Western Premiers direct their Tourism Ministers to work with Northern Development Ministers to conduct an assessment of the western and northern jurisdictions to determine interests in forming a working group for tourism development to develop a strategic development plan.</li> </ol>

### ***Strategic decision making at the regional level***

<b>Lead</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Report</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
Stephen Kakfwi Trevor Harding NWT/ Yukon	1. Support Yukon and NWT in their bid to receive adequate resources from the federal government to effectively manage their responsibilities as a result of the devolution processes underway	NWT and Yukon reported on how the full benefits and merits of devolution may not be realized without adequate resources to execute the new responsibilities and management powers.	no	Recognizing that the current federal regulatory approval process within the territories is a disincentive to investment in northern regions, Northwest Ministers recommend to Western Premiers that they support Yukon and NWT in their bid to receive adequate resources from the federal government to effectively complete devolution of Northern Affairs programs, and to manage their new responsibilities.

## ***Building on existing economic base in local communities***

<b>Lead</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Report</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
<p>Len Derkach</p> <p>Manitoba</p>	<p>1. Hosting a special session of the Manitoba Rural Forum that will focus on successful ways and means to expand the economic bases of northern communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will include representatives of the northwest, aboriginal leaders, community and business people, federal government and youth</li> </ul>	<p>Manitoba Rural Forum was held in Brandon Manitoba, April 30-May 1.</p> <p>Workshop on Opportunities and Partnerships under Northern Lights was attended by over 100 people from all parts of northwestern Canada.</p>	no	<p>That the following action items endorsed by Northwest Ministers be forwarded to WPC for consideration in July 1998.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Ministers further agreed that these items will be cooperatively pursued by the six northwestern jurisdictions with the goal of implementation in as short a time frame as is reasonable and that a staff level working group should be established.</li> <li>2. That a "round table" process, similar to the one used in Manitoba, be shared with the other northwestern jurisdiction as a potentially powerful grassroots community development tool.</li> <li>3. That a 'twin' or 'sister communities' process be established between southern Canadian communities and northern Canadian communities.</li> <li>4. That the concept of an annual Northern Community Economic Development Forum be pursued as a cooperative initiative involving all six northwestern Canadian jurisdictions.</li> <li>5. That a northwestern community economic development strategy be developed including a 'vision' statement for Canada's northwest region.</li> <li>6. That all northern and western jurisdictions support pursuing further partnership arrangements with all levels of government to address the principal infrastructure needs of northern communities, particularly advances in the areas of information technology and sewer and water development.</li> </ol>

***Ensure relevant , up-to-date education and training systems in regions and communities***

<b>Lead</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Report</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
Trevor Harding Yukon	<p>Yukon and the Northern Research Institute of Yukon College to host a forum in spring 98 to identify the most effective ways of making entrepreneurial education and training program relevant, responsive and accessible to remote northern communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will include representatives of education institutions, economic development officials, business and community people from the six jurisdictions</li> </ul>	<p>Yukon Online Forum was successful forum, May 21 and 22 with representatives from all jurisdictions.</p> <p>Proposal:</p> <p><b>Enterprise Northwest Online: <i>Using the Internet to Develop Enterprise in the Northwest</i></b></p>	yes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>That Western Premiers support the development of an action plan to complete the electronic information highway infrastructure in Northwestern Canada.</li> <li>Recommend that Western Premier's endorse the appointment of one participant and one alternative from each jurisdiction to an "Enterprise Northwest - Online" project implementation team to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research, evaluate and then expand "hands-on" Internet training and support for entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs throughout the northwestern rural regions.</li> <li>Co-operatively develop a plan to deliver a mass media promotional campaign to get rural people excited about the benefits of using the Internet for the development and expansion of rural enterprise.</li> <li>Explore federal and local government partnership possibilities for these projects.</li> <li>Report back to Ministers with a detailed implementation plan, complete with timelines and costs by November 1 1998.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

### ***Ensuring sustainable environments and economies***

<b>Lead</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>Report</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
Stephen Kakfwi NWT	Develop a preliminary database of the newest tools and techniques used to value environmental asset in northern resource development decisions	<b>Techniques to assign Economic Values to Environmental Assets in Northwestern Canada</b>	yes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Make the report available on the NWT Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development web-site.</li> <li>2. Recognize the need for more consistent methodologies and rigorous collection and use of renewable resource values in land-use planning exercises and decision-making processes</li> </ol>
	Prepare inventory of the latest successful developments among small northwestern communities in value added processing of renewable resources focusing on commercial uses of wildlife	<b>Successful Value-added products from Locally-produced Renewable Resources in Northwestern Canada</b>	yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small businesses in northern areas need assistance to better market their goods in southern Canada and internationally. A coordinated strategy from the Northwestern Ministers to highlight the unique attributes of some of these northern goods would appeal to many southern Canadian and international markets.</li> <li>• It is recommended that an update study occur in two years to capture the more information</li> <li>• The jurisdictions should maintain a formal means for staff to exchange and evaluate information between jurisdictions on value-added products and economic development generally.</li> <li>• Businesses are often not aware that government funds are provided to non-government organizations for business assistance. If governments are not receiving recognition and credit for this support, it may be worth some effort to increase awareness of the government funding behind these successful programs.</li> <li>• The project will be referenced on the GNWT Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development's internet website in the form of a readable report with contact information for further information</li> </ul>
Trevor Harding Yukon	Whitehorse is hosting an international circumpolar sustainable development conference May 12- 14, 1998 and will ensure that regional concerns identified by Northwestern officials are carried forward to the conference.	Many of the discussions and recommendations supported improved economies in northern regions throughout the northern circumpolar region and reflected items in the Northwest Ministers action plan	no	Yukon will circulate results of conference to northwestern jurisdictions once final proceedings are completed.

**Ensuring sustainable environments and economies (cont'd)**

Lead	Action	Result	Report	Recommendations
Keith Goulet Sask	Prepare best practices inventory on public participation and/or community involvement on environmental approvals and monitoring of major resource developments	<b>Best Practices Report:</b> Community Involvement in Environmental Assessments And Ongoing Monitoring Of Major Development Projects In Remote Regions	To come	<p>That Northwestern Ministers Responsible for Economic Development:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. endorse Saskatchewan's offer to post notice of the availability of this report and a copy of its Executive Summary on the Government of Saskatchewan web site, initially, and, later this year, on a new web site being developed by the Saskatchewan Office of Northern Affairs;</li> <li>2. Encourage their colleague Ministers Responsible for Environment and Resources Management portfolios to commit to the establishment of a formal means for their respective staffs to regularly exchange and review information between northwestern Canadian jurisdictions on further developments regarding their "best practices;" and that</li> <li>3. Support, among their colleagues in their respective jurisdictions, the preparation, on a bi-annual basis, of an updated report on such "best practices" and/or a broader directory of additional practices in the area of enhanced and more effective public participation and community involvement in environmental and resource management decision-making.</li> <li>4. Agreed to share this report with appropriate senior staff and departments in their respective jurisdictions; and</li> <li>5. Agreed to forward the report to Western Premiers for consideration.</li> </ol>