The Bridge #14

Newsletter from the Canadian Forest Service, Pacific Forestry Centre

Spring/Summer 2005

Sawmill pilot project success bodes well for community's future

Villagers at Gingolx, a Nisga'a community near the mouth of the Nass River in northwestern British Columbia, like to gather on the "gossip dock" to talk about what's happening. That's what the villagers like to call it – and it's a long-standing tradition in the community. These days there's a lot to talk about – including work at a new community portable sawmill that cut the boards to build the gossip dock. The First Nations Forestry Program (FNFP) partnered with the Gingolx Village Government, contributing $25,000 to get the sawmill going as a pilot project. Positive results are evident everywhere.

Today about 400 people live in Gingolx, a village deeply rooted in Nisga'a history. But the community faces familiar contemporary challenges, such as developing a vibrant economic base to earn revenue and support local jobs. That's where the sawmill comes into the picture, to determine on a trial basis if such a venture is viable.

"There's just not going to be any large company coming in here to save us," says Chief Councillor, Nelson Clayton. "We have do it one job at a time, with the community working together."

Ellen Torng, who does community development work at Gingolx, initiated the pilot project. Torng worked with FNFP staff toward start-up and operation of the sawmill.

Gingolx geography presents real challenges. Prince Rupert is 90 miles away by boat to the south. Terrace is a difficult three-hour drive away over a road just opened in 2003. It costs money to ship in raw materials, and a sawmill needs timber.

Gingolx residents call it their "gossip dock" – an informal community gathering place built from lumber cut by the FNFP-supported sawmill.

"All the wood we're using is salvage collected locally," Chief Clayton says. "We get wood from a nearby log dump or we gather it close to the roadside. Then again, some of the wood is waterborne salvage."

Clayton says the sawmill itself came to the Gingolx Village Government as a donation from Jeff Wolrige, President of Anyox Hydroelectric Corporation, a company dedicated to generating green power at sites in the Pacific northwest.

The Gingolx portable sawmill pilot project generates employment and provides a valuable tool for community development.

Two local men, Harry Moore and Keith Smythe, are using the opportunity provided by the project to train as sawmill operators. Torng says both men are experienced wood workers. Moore knows sawmill work and Smythe is a skilled local carpenter. The sawmill enables them to turn salvage timber into lumber for value-added wood products.

Results are steadily materializing. The Gingolx sawmill crew cut lumber to build four traditional smokehouses, followed by a 20 by 50 foot carving shed, a community longhouse, walkways and railings for four hiking trails, two pedestrian bridges and, of course, the gossip dock.

Torng says these products are having a positive impact on the whole community.

"With the dock, the smokehouses, and everything else, Gingolx began to visibly change. The Elders were really excited, because they remember what this place was in the past. With the beautiful wooden sidewalks and bridges, it was like walking back in time."

The sawmill produces other benefits, too. What can't be used for lumber is cut for firewood and distributed to villagers. "In summer, young people from the village work bundling cut firewood and delivering it to the Elders," Torng says.

Villagers are discovering that their sawmill helps provide infrastructure to support cultural activities, such as traditional use of smokehouses. Torng says the smokehouses were a big hit during a summer crab festival hosted by the village last year.

"The smokehouses are a real asset for tourism. Our Japanese visitors really like seeing them, because they also have smokehouses in their fishing villages," she says. "The crab festival drew 4,000 visitors – ten times our population. It really helped people see what we can accomplish by offering tourists something to see and do here."

Plans are in the works to adapt the smokehouse design for export to the Japanese market by 2008. Torng also says that people from other Nisga'a communities in the region are interested in hiring the Gingolx sawmill team to cut lumber and build smokehouses.

> ***"Community development is about building from the foundation up, mobilizing your community and getting people involved in making their community look the way they want it to look - vibrant and alive."***
>
> **Ellen Torng,**
> **Gingolx Village**

But there's also another kind of tourism linked very closely to the cultural life of the village. Torng says that a large population of Gingolx Nisga'a live in Prince Rupert. By using the sawmill to rebuild so much that was traditionally part of the community, Gingolx attracts many of its own people back for visits.

"The young people from the village who moved elsewhere can come back to visit and

learn about their own cultural heritage," says Torng. "It's just one more positive thing that is happening in our community because of this project."

In 2005, the smokehouse will host young Nisga'a from urban areas to come and learn traditional smoking skills from the Elders. This transfer of traditional skills is a very important aspect of Nisga'a life, which can only be enhanced by having available tools, such as the smokehouse.

Torng says the pilot project is proving very successful, demonstrating that the local economy can be diversified through value-added forest products. She credits the Gingolx Village Government for their support, including $3,000 cash to pay for training, and another $58,000 in-kind towards equipment and administration.

"This sawmill will always be for community projects. Community development is about building from the foundation up, mobilizing your community and getting people involved in making their community look the way they want it to look - vibrant and alive. The sawmill can help us achieve that goal and generate employment at the same time. It's a pilot project that really worked out," says Torng.

"Who knows? Maybe next year we will build on what we have already accomplished and in five years we will have enough revenue to hire six full-time workers. It's about partnerships and development, one step at a time."

Locality shapes infestation impact

Mountain pine beetle infestation cuts a wide swath across British Columbia's interior, but in specific First Nations communities the impact of the epidemic varies with local conditions.

For example, the Okanagan Indian Band is dealing with two forest insect species attacking two different kinds of pine. Physical geography particular to the region also affects the way the Okanagan Indian Band approaches forest pest management.

"Right now we are worried about western pine beetle too, as well as mountain pine beetle," says Colleen Marchand, Forest Technologist and Acting Head of Forest and Range for the Okanagan Indian Band. "Western pine beetle is threatening ponderosa pine, our principal tree species."

John Lawrence of the Okanagan Indian Band surveys for mountain pine beetle.

Marchand says the Band's lodgepole pine trees grow around the outer edges of reserve land, situated close to Vernon, at the north end of Okanagan Lake.

"We know mountain pine beetle are present in our trees, so we're participating in the Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative (MPBI)," she says. "Surveying our forestland enables us to determine the degree of infestation and identify infested trees. Then we can write a management strategy to include appropriate treatments."

Funded by the Government of Canada, MPBI includes the Federal Forestlands Rehabilitation Program – First Nations Element, focussing on reserve forests infested by mountain pine beetle. MPBI is contributing almost $22,000 to support the Okanagan Indian Band's efforts to deal with mountain pine beetle. The band is adding over $5,000.

"We've just started the program. Three Band members - Frank Louis, John Lawrence and myself - surveyed the forest for mountain pine beetle," Marchand says. "We found moderate infestation on about 2,500 hectares, but a heavy outbreak on about 120 hectares. Next we are planning to conduct a more detailed search – a beetle probe – to pinpoint infested trees. Then we'll determine what we can do to manage the situation," she says.

Okanagan Indian Band member Frank Louis surveys forests for mountain pine beetle infestation.

Marchand says that the integrity of the ponderosa, or yellow pine ecosystem could be compromised if western pine beetles significantly damage enough of the forest. Although MPBI funding does not cover costs for management of western pine beetle, the Okanagan Indian Band is taking on these costs because of the severity of the forest health situation.

"Forest health as a very important issue," Marchand says. "Dying trees can lead to other serious problems with water quality, wildlife and some traditional plant species."

She says the reserve area rises to the height of land west of the lake, and soils are very shallow. Without adequate tree cover on the steep, rocky, dry slopes, there is a danger of landslides, as well as potential impact on water quality. A lot of deadfall wood could serve as fuel for forest fires, always a concern in the Okanagan.

"Also, our band has many neighbours," Marchand says. "People drive Westside Road along the lakeshore to use recreational facilities on the water. They notice the red trees on our land, and we get lots of calls."

She says that being a good neighbour is definitely part of the Band's rationale for taking action now to manage the spread of mountain pine beetle.

"I expect we will eventually harvest in order to salvage infested wood, likely in the late spring or early summer," says Marchand. "We do what we can to protect all our tree species, because we want to sustain our natural environment for the future."

Voices for future forests

Interested in the sustainability of Canadian forests? Be prepared to listen to many voices – all with valuable information.

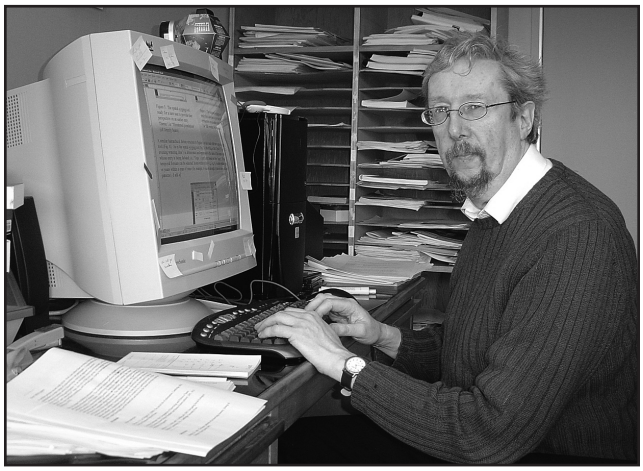
At Natural Resources Canada, one of the jobs of the Canadian Forest Service (CFS) is to promote the sustainable development of forests for all Canadians now and in future. The CFS and others are learning how important it is to get all the information to do that job, thanks to one particular program.

For First Nations, knowledge about the land is traditional. The CFS's Traditional Ecological Knowledge program shows how that information can be made available to people interested in sustainable forestry.

"It just makes sense. We're trying to bring together all the information, traditional and scientific, to make wise land-use decisions about our forests," says Dr. Alan Thomson. A senior CFS scientist at the Pacific Forestry Centre in Victoria, Thomson works with First Nations partners to find ways to use traditional knowledge and scientific research together.

"The land-use process is about getting people to agree to actions that will impact wildlife popula-

tions, or watersheds, or the nature of future forests," says Thomson. "The traditional knowledge of First Nations is an incredible resource. Science is also an invaluable source of information about the land. We want them to work together. That gives us better information we can use to do our job promoting sustainable forests."



Dr. Alan Thomson develops decision support and information systems at the Pacific Forestry Centre.

Paul Willms heads the Natural Resources Technology Department at the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology in Merritt. He agrees that it's important to hear different voices, and draw on different kinds of information, when people make land-use decisions.

"Good land-use decisions bring together people with different priorities," said Willms. "Forest companies compete in a global economy. First Nations communities want their natural resources sustained for the future."

Traditional knowledge of the land plays a big role in how First Nations see the land.

"Non-timber forest resources are important," says Willms. "Building a new logging road, or harvesting a new cutblock can impact a good berry ground. That concern has to be recognized and taken into account so that the forest resource can be sustained."

Thomson says that knowing about First Nations traditional knowledge is essential to building good partnerships. The challenge is to find a way to record traditional knowledge, and have it in a place where forest managers can use it.

"It's so important to let people tell you their story, in their words, and then be able to show how their story influences land-use decisions," he says.

To do this, Thomson directs a CFS demonstration project to build an interactive website **http://www.pfc.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca/programs/tek/index_e.html** to track information based on First Nations traditional knowledge of the land. Starting in 1997, he developed the website with the Nicola Valley Tribal Association. A detailed interviewing process gathered traditional ecological knowledge, drawing on the experience of band members.

The website posts the interview questions asked during the process of gathering information, and the traditional knowledge is contained in the answers. For example, one question asks if more road construction in a forested area has changed the relationship between the community and the land. Answers recorded for this question say that animals no longer appear as often in areas where they had been observed over long periods of time.

Thomson says those kinds of observations demonstrate how a databank of information can be built to bring the traditional knowledge 'voice' into informed resource management decisions.

"The land-use process is about getting people to agree to actions that will impact wildlife populations, or watersheds, or the nature of future forests."

Dr. Alan Thomson,
Senior Research Scientist
Canadian Forest Service

Nicola Valley Tribal Association member Sharon McIvor, of the Lower Nicola Band, says the process of gathering traditional ecological knowledge is important to local First Nations communities.

"This work is valuable because it recognizes that traditional knowledge is part of the puzzle," says McIvor. "It's not just an academic exercise. Traditional knowledge of the land is a living thing. It's real in the lives of many First Nations people."

Thomson encourages exploration of the Traditional Ecological Knowledge interactive website. With CFS, he develops decision support and information systems, many of them web-based. Holding a B.Sc. in zoology and a Ph. D. in ecology, Thomson also serves as an adjunct professor at the Centre for Non-Timber Resources at Royal Roads University.

First Nation faces major fire hazard

A potentially severe fire hazard confronts the Ulkatcho First Nation with a volatile situation putting lives and property at risk.

The Ulkatcho First Nation reserves, centred around Anahim Lake about 300 kilometres west of Williams Lake, are in the middle of a vast forest under heavy attack by mountain pine beetle. Scattered in small settlements close to surrounding forests, the Ulkatcho live with a fire hazard including fuel in the form of beetle-infested trees. In summer, 2004, major fires burned on the Ulkatcho First Nation lands.

"The community leadership recognized that Anahim Lake was at high risk for an interface fire due to the mountain pine beetle epidemic surrounding and infesting the Ulkatcho's reserve lands," says Laurie Vaughan, project manager for Chunta Resources Ltd., a forestry company owned by the Ulkatcho First Nation. "When people talk about mountain pine beetle, they discuss things like timber supply. But after the Lonesome Lake fire last summer, we got a frightening perspective on how a forest health problem can impact human safety."

Wildfires are a potential annual hazard for British Columbia communities where forests grow close to buildings, in what fire suppression specialists call the interface. In the interface, vegetation and structures are close enough together for a wildfire to spread from burning trees to buildings.

Starting last June, the Lonesome Lake fire burned for months across the Ulkatcho land, forcing evacuation of Charlotte Lake, and putting residents of other communities, including Anahim Lake and Nimpo Lake, on evacuation alert.

A mountain pine beetle-infested landscape poses a fire hazard for the Ulkatcho First Nation. Photo courtesy of Merril "Buddy" Jones

"It's a terrifying experience when it happens," says Vaughan. "But we were already developing our First Nations Forestry Program (FNFP)-funded plan to prepare for a major fire, and that really helped us organize a response."

FNFP funded the Ulkatcho First Nation Fire Readiness Plan with $24,700 and helped develop emergency management strategies for the Band. FNFP assists First Nations to build their capacity to manage forest resources.

Vaughan says community consultation also helped shape the plan, including preventative measures like cutting fireguards in the forest around each reserve.

Preparatory measures include appointing an Emergency Coordinator, establishing community warning procedures, developing evacuation plans, writing job descriptions for support staff, and designing a training program for Band members.

Vaughan says that work generated from preparing the plan proved useful as the Lonesome Lake fire grew. Preparations underway helped local people manage suppression resources, co-ordinate agencies, and evacuate people.

According to Vaughan, the plan's development was not just a timely coincidence with the Lonesome Lake fire. The impetus to prepare for an emergency came following the major fire season in British Columbia in 2003.

"Like everybody else, we watched part of Kelowna and Chilko burn down that year. We knew that could be us, and last summer, it was. In fact, there were a few critical days when the wind was on our side, or things could have been much worse."

Vaughan says the Ulkatcho communities are moving forward to implement their fire readiness plan. They are taking action to enhance fire protection. Local crews began cutting fire breaks around the Ulkatcho communities.

"We've started cutting fireguards 30 metres wide," she says. "So at least the flames will drop to ground level when they reach the fireguard, and that will make suppression easier."

The Ulkatcho crews piled and burned quantities of dead-fall and diseased pine. They also piled and bucked timber usable for fence-posts or firewood.

Additional measures include planting slow-burning tree species.

A FNFP-funded fire suppression plan helped the Ulkatcho First Nation respond to the Lonesome Lake fire in summer 2004. Photo courtesy of Lise St. Gelais James

Vaughan says that in addition to the fire hazard, the Ulkatcho First Nation still must face the ecological and economic impacts of the mountain pine beetle infestation.

"The land is basically healthy, and the forest can recover with time," Vaughn says. "But we could face years in the future when our wood supply declines to half of what it is now."

Laurie Vaughn,
Project Manager
Chunta Resources Ltd.

Funded by the Government of Canada, the Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative includes a First Nations element focussing on reserve forests infested by mountain pine beetle. It is a separate program from FNFP.

"We've had some mountain pine beetle present for as long as 25 years," she says. "But of course in recent years it has reached epidemic proportion. The beetles have now infested 100 per cent of our forests, covering a 100 by 100 kilometre square area. We're probably looking at anywhere between 180,000 and 300,000 cubic metres of beetle-infested wood on the Ulkatcho First Nation reserves that will need to be managed."

Vaughan says southward-moving mountain pine beetle spread quickly across the Ulkatcho land because there were so many mature pine trees between 80 and 250 years old. She suggests that the loss of tree cover could pose water quality and soil erosion problems in future, too.

"The land is basically healthy, and the forest can recover with time," Vaughan says. "But we could face years in the future when our wood supply declines to half of what it is now."

Skawahlook First Nation workers Dave Schneider and Brett Chapman put some finishing touches on a woodworking shop planned to open this spring.

She says that in the meantime, about 350 residents of the Ulkatcho First Nation can take some satisfaction with work that has been done to address the fire danger.

"We need to complete these fire prevention measures for the communities of Anahim Lake and Nimpo Lake," she says. "When people's safety is at issue, you've got to put that first."

Building the future today

Debra Schneider, Skawahlook First Nation Lands and Natural Resources Manager, knows that when it comes to economic planning, the future is right now. Located on the lower Fraser River near Agassiz, the band is taking steps this year to get ready for future economic opportunities.

Transportation routes have always played an important role in the life of the Skawahlook First Nation. The band has a timeless relationship to the river. Today the river valley is a major highway corridor, carrying a stream of potential customers along Highway 7, right past the Skawahlook First Nation's doorstep.

"Partnering with the First Nations Forestry Program (FNFP) in a project to promote sustainable forest-based businesses makes sense, because we get lots of people travelling year-round through the area," says Schneider. "We've just got to give people a reason to stop."

FNFP helps improve economic conditions in First Nations communities, as well as working with First Nations partners to build capacity to manage forest resources.

Schneider says that the Skawahlook First Nation plans to give travellers several reasons to stop, by developing a commercial complex beside the band administration office in Ruby Creek, just east of Agassiz on the highway.

"We are looking forward this spring to opening shops for picture framing, woodwork crafts, and fishing tackle," she says. "Also, to support the craft and framing businesses, we are opening a woodworking shop, where people can see our craftspeople producing forest-based products for direct sale to the public."

Schneider says FNFP is supporting the project with $25,000, while the Skawahlook First Nation contrib-

The woodworking shop, supported by a First Nations Forestry Program project to develop forest-based products, is one step the development of future Skawahlook commercial enterprises.

utes about the same amount from a combination of cash and in-kind services.

"We have five years before the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games to get established, to see what sells best, and to develop our expertise," says Schneider. "We know that 2010 will be a big year commercially. We might even open some other new forestry businesses before then."

Schneider says that the Skawahlook First Nation is well aware that there is a potential customer base available right now to support their planned commercial development.

"Sport fishermen use the highway in great numbers," she says. "They will stop for coffee and fishing gear – and maybe tour the woodwork shop too."

She also says hunters use the area, and she has already heard from one individual suggesting there is a market for high-quality decorative horn racks. In fact, Schneider says the whole idea behind the woodworking shop, crafts, and picture-framing outlet is to offer very skilled wood products reflecting the decorative traditions of the Skawahlook First Nation.

"We have band members who can produce very fine goods from wood – high grade picture frames, tables, bookshelves, and elaborate jewellery boxes – just to name some examples," she says.

"But this project is about more than selling goods," Schneider says. "We are welcoming opportunities to support jobs that strengthen the band's social values."

Two Skawahlook men with proven woodworking skills will staff the workshop initially. Both individuals have worked in forestry, but found their employment opportunities fewer and farther between as logging dwindled.

"Eventually we plan to offer an opportunity for some young people to learn from our woodworking shop crew," Schneider says. "That will provide some employment and skills training, but it will also help to preserve traditions of Skawahlook arts and crafts in future."

Schneider says the woodworking shop will likely open for business in May, while the picture framing business could be ready by April.

"At some point, we plan to have a big, formal opening ceremony for the woodworking shops and our new businesses," she says. "We really think what we are doing now to promote sustainable forest-based businesses, with assistance from FNFP, is going to position us well to capitalize on future opportunities that will benefit the Skawahlook First Nation."

"Partnering with the First Nations Forestry Program in a project to promote sustainable forest-based businesses makes sense, because we get lots of people travelling year-round through the area."

Debra Schneider,
Lands and Natural Resources Manager
Skawahlook First Nation

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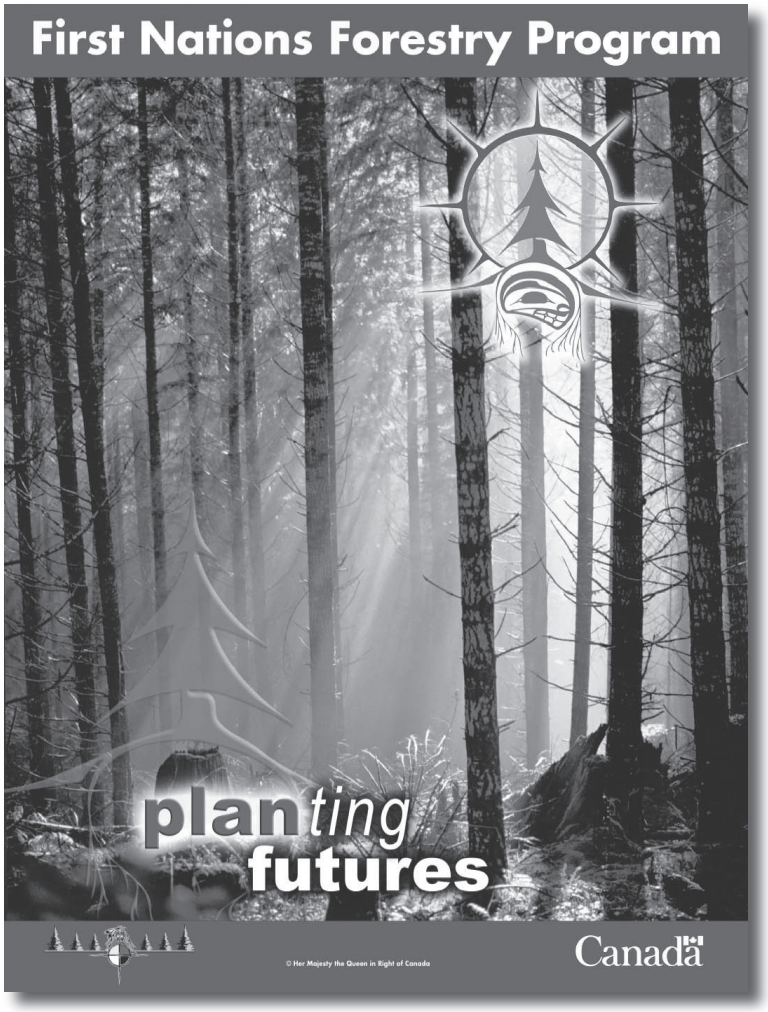

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First Nations Forestry Program Project List

(2005/06 Fiscal Year)

Proponent	Community	Project Title	Board Approved
Adams Lake Indian Band	Chase	Smallwood Forest Licence Development Plan	$25,000
Beecher Bay First Nation	Sooke	Beecher Bay First Nation 2005/06 Forestry Project	$25,000
Bridge River Indian Band	Lillooet	Reforestation of Burned-Over Reserve Lands	$25,000
Canoe Creek Indian Band	Dog Creek	Community Forest Application	$25,000
Cayoose Creek Band	Lillooet	Community Forest Initiatives Project	$25,000
Chawathil First Nation	Hope	Chawathil Forestry Strategic Planning Project	$20,000
Cheam First Nation	Rosedale	Forest Management Plan	$25,000
Cheslatta Carrier Nationt	Burns Lake	Enhancing Safety and Sustainability in the Cheslatta Community Forest	$25,000
Community Futures Development Corporation of Central Interior First Nations	Kamloops	Central Interior First Nations Wood Products Secretariat	$24,850
Douglas First Nation	Mission	Douglas First Nation 2005/06 Forestry Project	$22,800
Ehattesaht Band Council	Zeballos	Preparation of Silivculture Prescriptions for On-Reserve Lands	$25,000
Huu-ay-aht First Nation	Port Alberni	IR#9 Short Term Management Plan	$20,000
Lower Similkameen Indian Band	Keremeos	Stagnant Stands Inventory and Prescriptions for LSIB IR 13	$25,000
Namgis First Nation	Alert Bay	District Lot#6/Cheslakee IR#3 Forest Inventory and Management Plan	$25,000
Nazko Indian Band	Quesnel	Nazko On-Reserve Forest Management Plan	$24,428
Neskonlith Indian Band	Chase	A Partnership for Wood Products Highway Sales on the TransCanada Highway	$25,000
Nicola Tribal Association	Merritt	NTA Sustainable Forest Management Strategy	$25,000

First Nations Forestry Program Project List

(2005/06 Fiscal Year — continued)

Proponent	Community	Project Title	Board Approved
Qualicum First Nation	Qualicum Beach	Forest Inventory of Qualicum First Nation Reserve	$25,000
Sechelt Indian Band	Sechelt	SIB Forestry and Logging Business Plan	$21,540
Skeetchestn Indian Band	Savona	Skeetchestn Innovative Harvesting Research and Business Plan Development	$22,000
Skyway First Nation	Chilliwack	Skyway Value-Added Milling and Woodworking	$25,000
Soowahlie First Nation	Cultus Lake	Forest Management and Marketing Strategy	$24,000
Squamish Nation	North Vancouver	Economic Development of Squamish Nation Special Forest Products – Devil's Club	$25,000
Takla Development Corporation	Prince George	Review of Sawmill and Micromill Feasibility Study	$25,000
Taku River Tlingit First Nation	Atlin	TRTFN EBM Plan and Capacity Building	$25,000
Tsay Kay Dene Band	Prince George	Tsay Kay Dene 2005/06 Forestry Project	$25,000
T'Sou-ke First Nations	Sooke	T'Sou-ke First Nations 2005/06 Forestry Project	$25,000
Upper Nicola Band	Merritt	UNB Woodlot Expansion Application 2005/06	$25,000
Upper Similkameen Indian Band	Keremeos	Stand Management Surveys and Prescriptions for USIB Reserves	$25,000
Whispering Pines/Clinton Indian Band	Kamloops	Rapid Response-Initial Attack Fire Suppression and Hazard Abatement Company	$14,984

The Bridge, published by the Canadian Forest Service, is a newsletter of Natural Resources Canada's First Nations Element of the Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative, and of the British Columbia First Nations Forestry Program - a partnership between Natural Resources Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

For more information contact the Pacific Forestry Centre at 506 W. Burnside Rd. Victoria BC V8Z 1M5, (250) 363-0600, or on the web at pfc.cfs.nrcan.gc.ca

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