

Industry-Aboriginal Community Referral Process: An International First

Since time immemorial many different Aboriginal communities used the Foothills Model Forest land base for travel or habitation. In an effort to understand the significance of this on-going heritage to the land base, the Foothills Model Forest is working with five (5) local communities¹, industry and government to standardize and operationalize a Multi-community Traditional Culture Study (TCS). Initiated in 2002, the purpose of the TCS is to document sites, located within the Foothills Model Forest, that are of social, cultural and spiritual importance to these Aboriginal communities.

Now with four years of research completed, over seven hundred (700) proprietary community cultural sites have been documented, with many more being identified daily. Stored in a central, protected Foothills Model Forest database, these sites can now be vetted for land base development purposes. The process of utilizing this database has been called a Referral Process and is designed to connect industry partners and Aboriginal communities to facilitate positive and constructive relationships.

One of our industry partners, Hinton Wood Products, a division of West Fraser Mills Ltd. is the first industrial proponent to use the Referral Process. Their 2006-7 Annual Operating Plan has been interfaced with the TCS database. So far, four potential cultural sites have been identified for potential disturbance mitigation. This will be arranged through the strong relationships enjoyed by our partners. Powered by the world-class GIS technology, this and any subsequent referrals will be automated, providing instantaneous feedback and referral information.



The Foothills Model Forest land base is 2.75 million hectares, comprised of the West Fraser Mills Ltd. Hinton Forest Management Area, Jasper National Park, Willmore Wilderness Park and William A. Switzer Provincial Park. With five communities conducting studies in a standardized format, central (but protected) database management, and a single map representing all communities' interests, 'one-stop shopping' for potential partners has evolved.

With the completion of two community (Aseniwuche Winewak Nation, Foothills Ojibway Society,) studies scheduled for Fall 2006

and the near completion (Fall 2007) of three additional community (Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Nakcowinewak Nation, Sunchild First Nation) studies, *a regional approach to land base decision making processes involving Aboriginal communities is materializing*. Where will this take us? Hopefully as a society towards improved relations between land base users and Aboriginal communities. On a program level - Towards the first, but hopefully not the only, regional land based decision making mechanism/process involving Aboriginal Communities, Industry, and Government.

¹ Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Aseniwuche Winewak Nation, Foothills Ojibway Society, Nakcowinewak Nation, Sunchild First Nation