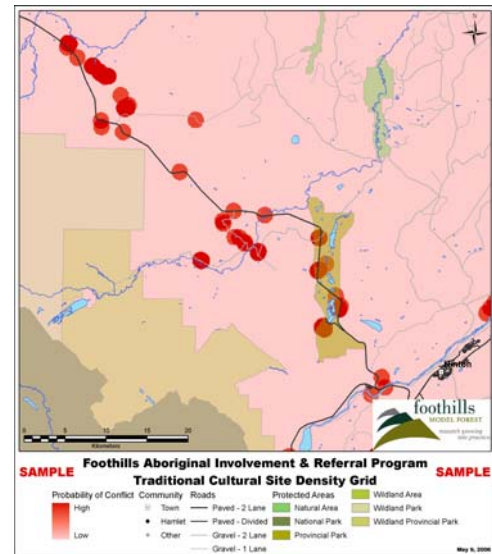


Piloting a Way to Shared Sustainability

In a recent Edmonton Sun editorial, complex issues pertaining to the social license of resource development companies and activities was reported on.¹ Surprisingly, despite the economic good times in Alberta, Cambridge Strategies Inc. reported that the general public retains a high level of perceptive incongruence with this development and the institutions which regulate it. On the tail end of this, Aboriginal communities and people have generally been relegated to the furthest regions of underdevelopment amidst all the activities on the shared land base. Andrew Popoko, Encana's Vice President of Aboriginal Relations, says of this situation, "There needs to be a more streamlined way of doing business with Aboriginal communities...a single template – with provisions for local needs – would be better for everyone."² Speaking to this, the Government of Alberta is breathing life into a consultation framework that reaches into the complex environment of the legal, political, social and economic considerations undergirding resource development in Alberta. Two of its key planks are to build capacity in Aboriginal communities to engage in land use consultation and to also maintain the shared benefits of continued economic activities therein.³

Since 2002, the Foothills Model Forest,⁴ in partnership with five Aboriginal communities⁵ and numerous industrial and government partners, has been developing a 'one window' cultural study database and land base development referral process. While the primary aim of these efforts are to protect sensitive Aboriginal cultural sites, broader relationships between all parties have ensued, even into the economic sphere. Hopefully, into the future, the more expansive vision espoused by innovative thinkers, such as Andrew Popoko, can be regulated by government and embraced by the general public as evidence of a more respectful and responsive resource development regime.

Importantly, now with over 700 sites documented, another crucial link for sustainable resource development – protecting Indigenous cultural sites, is being realized. However, in order to ensure that this happens, the partnership base for the Aboriginal Involvement Program (AIP) must grow. To this end, three options for involvement with the AIP are now available for the first time: 1) Full Project Partnership 2) Associate Membership and 3) Referral Process Client. Now depending on the size, capacity, and vision of a given organization, access to the positive relationships, growing cultural site database, and expanding opportunities emanating from the AIP are being offered. As one industry partner puts it, "The way things are now, you will be forced by either legal or political circumstances to consult and partner with Aboriginal people. However, in the Foothills Model Forest we are committed to being responsible neighbors and this way of conducting business is the right thing to do."⁶



¹ Mike Johnson, Editor. "House Not in Good Order". Edmonton Sun. May 28, 2006. Pg. 15.

² David Finlayson, Business Writer. "Firms Urged to Hire More Staff from Aboriginal Communities". Edmonton Journal. May 10, 2006. Pg. G1.

³ Brian McGuigan, Alberta Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, "Alberta's Approach to Consultation." Conference presentation. Pacific Business and Law Institute. May 31, 2006.

⁴ The Foothills Model Forest is comprised of 2.75 million hectares on the Northeast Slopes of Alberta, encompassing the West Fraser Mills Ltd. Hinton Forest Management Area, Jasper National Park, Wilmore Wilderness Park and William A. Switzer Provincial Park.

⁵ Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, Aseniwuche Winewak Nation, Foothills Ojibway Society, Nackowinewak Nation, Sunchild First Nation

⁶ Dave Kmet, Land Use and Aboriginal Affairs Coordinator. West Fraser Mills Ltd. July 5, 2006. Phone Conversation.