



## Conversation and Collaboration

Building the future Canadian forest products sector  
with Aboriginal talent





FPSC-CSPF undertook its Advancing Aboriginal Inclusion Project in conjunction with, and support from the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC), Natural Resources Canada (NRCan – Canadian Forest Service), and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC).



Forest Products Association of Canada  
Association des produits forestiers du Canada  
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# Introduction



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There is a common understanding Aboriginal peoples may be a key human resource in helping the Canadian forest products sector address future labour force requirements.

Concurrently, there is a strong desire on the part of First Nations and Aboriginal groups to expand entrepreneurial opportunities within the forest products sector and to continue to work and live in rural areas of Canada.

To build upon this, the Board of Directors of the Forest Products Sector Council (FPSC-CSPF) initiated the **Advancing Aboriginal Inclusion Project** to conduct research, and develop and disseminate tools and strategies to assist in increasing present and future Aboriginal employment and participation in the forest products sector. The two year project was participatory in nature and incorporated traditional knowledge gathering as an integral aspect of the project. Work on this project began in early 2010 and culminates with this report.

## Forest Products Sector Council

The Forest Products Sector Council (FPSC-CSPF) was created in 2008 as an independent, not-for-profit organization to identify and support the sector's key human resource priorities, develop strategies to ensure the sector has the skilled workforce needed to meet current and future demands, and adapt to changing social and economic conditions. FPSC-CSPF works with and on behalf of a wide variety of partners including industry employers, unions, Aboriginal peoples, and education and training institutions. FPSC-CSPF is funded under the Government of Canada's Sector Council Program.



## Using Open Space Technology

FPSC-CSPF employs a facilitation process called Open Space Technology to engage in dialogue and conversation in a respectful way.

In Open Space meetings, participants create and manage their own agenda of parallel working sessions around a central theme or question of strategic importance. Open Space can be used for brainstorming and knowledge sharing, consensus building, and organizational and community learning.

Typically, during an open space session:

- every issue of concern to anybody is on the table, if a participant chooses to put it there.
- all issues receive as full a discussion as participants choose to give them.
- the identification of potential working groups and next steps may occur immediately, alliances can be formed and work can begin.

The result is a powerful and effective connecting and strengthening of what is happening in the present coupled with planning and learning strategies for future action and participation.

## Methodology

The **Advancing Aboriginal Inclusion Project** included a number of different streams of inquiry.

Between March and December 2010 FPSC-CSPF, with the support of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC), Natural Resources Canada (NRCan – Canadian Forest Service), and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC); held six regional engagement workshops across Canada.

FPSC-CSPF contracted Harvest Moon Consultants, an Aboriginal-led facilitation firm, to facilitate each session using innovative processes such as Open Space Technology and World Café. Conversations were held in Nanaimo and Prince George, British Columbia; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Thunder Bay, Ontario; Montreal, Quebec; and Oromocto, New Brunswick.

The objective of these engagement sessions was to identify and document current successes and discuss challenges and opportunities to greater involvement by Aboriginal people in the forest products sector. Participants included leaders from Aboriginal communities, industry, unions, academia, regional forestry associations and governments.

Between December 2010 and March 2011, FPSC-CSPF contracted Stonecircle Consulting, an Ottawa-based Aboriginal research firm, to undertake demographic and statistical research on Aboriginal people working in the forest products sector; an assessment of critical success factors and conditions needed to advance Aboriginal participation in the sector; identification of key barriers; an inventory of best practices, and six case studies.

In March 2011, FPSC-CSPF held a national symposium in Ottawa entitled *Bridging the River—how do we meet future labour demand in the Canadian forest products sector with Aboriginal talent?* More than 50 representatives from industry, unions, Aboriginal organizations, First Nations and businesses from across Canada gathered to further discuss opportunities and challenges to Aboriginal inclusion in the sector. The group outlined a number of effective strategies and recommendations for moving forward.

The objective of all these activities was to get a clear picture of the realities in the forest products sector in order to develop strategies and generate recommendations which could be supported by FPSC-CSPF and the Canadian forest products sector.

In total, more than 300 persons were contacted and provided input into this project. This strategy report includes a synthesis of the research and information gathered to date and considerations and recommendations for the future.

# The Forest Products Sector in Canada



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The forest products sector has undergone unprecedented change since 2001. A stronger Canadian dollar, changes in the global economy, the collapse of the U.S. housing market and recession has seen the number of Canadians working in the forest products sector drop by nearly 35 percent, from a high of more than 250,000 workers in 2003, to approximately 150,000 today. Nearly 400 mills closed in this same period.

Previous FPSC-CSPF research indicates the sector has experienced the worst of this cyclical downturn and now needs to look to the future with new eyes and determine how to develop and maintain workforce necessary to maintain existing operations and expand into new markets with innovative new products.

In May 2011, FPSC-CSPF released *Renewing Canada's Greenest Workforce: A Labour Market Intelligence Report* which examined the key economic and social drivers expected to affect employment; national and regional labour demand occupational trends; and key HR issues and trends.

## The Canadian forest products sector

- The Canadian forest products industry generates 1.7 per cent of the national GDP.
- Canada is the largest exporter of forest products in the world.
- Canada's forest products industry presently employs more than 153,000 men and women in more than 8,900 enterprises.

## Workforce characteristics

- A higher than average unionized workforce.
- An older than average, and predominantly male, workforce.
- Less than average educational attainment.
- Aboriginal people represent six percent of the forest products sector labour force.



## Labour demand and trends

FPSC-CSPF's 2010-2020 labour demand projections suggest there is potential for substantive gains in employment if favourable economic conditions, new product development and emerging new markets continue their upward rise. However, overall sector employment is not expected to return to its previous peak in 2003.

Even in the most pessimistic projection (projecting a double-dip US economic recession, slow housing starts, little new technology implementation and minimal growth in new markets) the sector will not lose jobs and simply maintain the status-quo.

In the traditional forest products sub-sectors and within regions most will see increases in, or status-quo maintenance of, the labour market with the exception of the pulp, paper and paperboard sub-sector which has the weakest employment outlook.

When expected future retirement rates are added in FPSC-CSPF estimates the sector will need to recruit between 40,000 to 120,000 new workers during the next 10 years.

In the next decade, FPSC has determined a number of key occupations are expected to be in high demand:

- Process operators in sawmills and pulp and paper mills
- Harvesting and logging machinery operators
- Skilled trades people such as millwrights, stationary engineers, sawfilers and electricians
- Professional foresters and engineers
- Technologists and technicians
- Supervisors and managers
- Silviculture and forestry workers

## Key HR issues

In the future it will become harder for the forest product sector to recruit new workers due to the competition for qualified workers, lack of essential skills and a declining rural population. As well, the lingering public perceptions about forest products being a viable industry and continuing environmental concerns make it difficult to attract new workers and young people to the sector.

Skills development is a critical element for the sector. Already employers are looking for new workers with skills in management, equipment maintenance, forest management, specific and certified technical areas. Essential skills, technology training, and knowledge transfer from older to younger workers are of increasing importance – for health and safety benefits, increased efficiency and longevity of equipment and productivity gains.

Training is an issue in the forest products sector. Only about 30 percent of industry employers have formal succession plans in place (mentorships, training, cross-training). There is limited support for apprenticeship training among employers and disagreement among stakeholders as to whether the cost and time for apprenticeship training is worth the benefits of higher productivity and increased safety. More needs to be done to develop essential skills among workers in the sector.

An overwhelming majority of employers cited the negative perception of the forestry as a key HR issue and major barrier to recruitment. This is also apparent in the lower enrolment numbers at post-secondary institutions. Forestry is no longer seen as a family tradition or a viable career option.



# The Aboriginal Population and Workforce



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According to the 2006 Census, there were nearly 1.2 million people who identified as First Nation, Métis or Inuit. This represents 3.8 percent of the population of Canada. Of this, more than 60 percent are classified as First Nation or “North American Indian.” The largest Aboriginal populations can be found in Ontario and Saskatchewan, but the Territories have the highest proportion of Aboriginal people, followed by Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

The Aboriginal population increased by 45 percent between 1996 and 2006, which is nearly six times faster than the non-Aboriginal growth rate, and projections indicate Aboriginal people could represent more than four percent of the entire Canadian population by 2017.

The Aboriginal population is also much younger than the overall Canadian population. The Aboriginal median age is 27, while the rest of the Canadian population is 40, with the largest gap seen in the 0-14 and 15-24 age groups.

More Aboriginal people can be found in urban settings (53 percent) compared to rural (21 percent) or on-reserve (26 percent). Of course, Métis and Inuit do not live on reserves, so looking at just the First Nation population, 40 percent live on reserve, while 60 percent live off reserve.

There are 2,675 reserves in Canada, comprising 13 percent of Canada’s total land mass. This number is increasing steadily with the settlement of land claims and treaty land entitlement processes. For example, in a recent Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada audit, more than 227,000 acres of land was converted to reserve status between 2005 and 2009 in Manitoba alone, and even more in Saskatchewan.

Looking at labour market statistics, in 2009, the unemployment rate in Canada was 8.3 percent, the highest it has ever been, while the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people was 14.8 percent. Between the 2001 and 2006 census, there was very little change in the Aboriginal participation rate (65 percent) and the employment rate (between 55 and 57 percent) while the unemployment rate dropped three percent.



While education attainment has improved for Aboriginal people, they still fall behind the rest of the Canadian population.

There is no disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups for college and trade certification, but whereas 23 percent of the non-Aboriginal population had completed a university degree, only eight percent of the Aboriginal population had done the same. Conversely, only 15 percent of the Canadian population have no high school diploma, compared to 34 percent of Aboriginal people.

A lot of the jobs in the forestry sector are in need of a more advanced level of education, Manual labour jobs are disappearing at an alarming rate. People need better skills to get in there.

— Key informant interview, Atlantic Canada

## Aboriginal People in the Forest Products Sector

Aboriginal people may represent an untapped resource for the Canadian forest products sector. But where are Aboriginal people currently working in this sector?

Using the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) and the National Occupational Classification for Statistics (NOCS) from 2006, a picture emerges.

The forest products sector represents between 0 and 7.2 percent of the total industries in which Aboriginal people are employed across Canada. The greatest concentrations of Aboriginal workers are found in British Columbia, followed by New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario.

Aboriginal people are working in all areas of the sector but are dominant in only a few. The top industries in the forest products sector in which Aboriginal people are working are logging (as high as 47.7 percent in New Brunswick), followed by support activities for forestry (70.6 percent in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon), then sawmills and wood preservation (more than 25 percent in both Alberta and Ontario).

Drilling down even further, the specific occupations Aboriginal people are also more likely to be in are silviculture and forestry workers and chain-saw and skid operators. While the information varies among and within provinces, Aboriginal people make up a large portion of labourers (including those in processing as well as those in logging).

One indication of the potential availability of a future Aboriginal labour market for the forest products sector is the fields of study Aboriginal people are choosing. Forestry is not a listed area of study. There were Aboriginal people studying in the areas of architecture, engineering and related technologies, as well as health, parks, recreation and fitness. There is no indication students in these fields will choose forestry as a career.

A coordinated, continuous support system and network would help retain individuals in programs and employment. The unique challenges faced by many in the Aboriginal community, especially in remote communities, makes it difficult to commit to and continue in the opportunities which are offered, without the special supports needed to meet those challenges. These supports need to be in place from the beginning (preparation for training) right through the training period and into the employment period.

— Winnipeg engagement session report

# Engaging Aboriginal People in Forestry



## Current Promising Practices and Successes

Engagement sessions, research and consultation highlighted more than 60 known initiatives or programs which can be considered promising practices in Aboriginal engagement. A number of these projects are no longer in existence, but are still considered projects worth noting.

The term “promising practice” refers to initiatives which meet the following criteria:

- legitimate – recognized and supported by a variety of stakeholders;
- relevant – meets a known need;
- results-oriented – outcomes identified and observable;
- collaborative – a working partnership;
- innovative – new and reaching; and,
- transferable – potential for the practice to be transferable or modified in other contexts.

## Industry initiatives

Several forest companies such as Tembec, NewPage Corporation, Weyerhaeuser and Alberta Pacific Forest Industries have developed Aboriginal-specific initiatives.

Tembec has a full-time Manager of Aboriginal Relations and an Aboriginal policy which guides the various operations across the country on how to work with Aboriginal people. This has led to funding and support to First Nations who want to work with Tembec and provide jobs for community members within Tembec operations.

While the mill was operational the corporation partnered with the Unama’ki Economic Benefits office to develop tailor-made, industry specific and in-demand course for neighbouring First Nation members to match available jobs at NewPage. Unama’ki helped find and support the interested candidates and NewPage provided training, support and job opportunities for community members.



Weyerhaeuser recently signed a unique and historic shareholder-managed Sustainable Forest Licence for the Kenora Forest in north-west Ontario. Under this new licence, First Nations and industry shareholders take over management of forestry operations of the 1.2 million-hectare forest through a limited partnership.

Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries boasts a 10 percent Aboriginal workforce (excluding contractors). Al-Pac has been recognized for its progressive Aboriginal policies including consultation and input opportunities for First Nations impacted by Al-Pac operations, joint venture and partnership agreements with First Nation companies, student support and hiring community liaisons in sub-offices in order to build relationships with Aboriginal communities.

### Union involvement

In order for industry partnerships and initiatives to be successful regarding Aboriginal engagement, there is a need for union support. All the large, and some smaller, forestry operations are unionized and if Aboriginal-specific initiatives are introduced, they must often be agreed to by the unions.

Highlighting the “family” or “community” nature of unions could be another way unions can attract more Aboriginal people to the sector. Approximately 50 per cent of all Aboriginal people reside in their community for just that reason – it is their community and their home. Unions could position themselves as an extension of that community which could make working in the sector more desirable to Aboriginal people.

— Oromocto engagement session report

The United Steelworkers (USW) is an example of a union which has worked to broker partnerships and collective agreements that provide benefits and support to Aboriginal people working in the forest products sector. In the mining sector the USW developed a collective agreement with Placer Dome which contained a number of clauses and stipulations clearly supporting First Nations cultural practices and traditional values.

USW has also advocated on behalf of First Nations communities for increased Aboriginal employment in forest product sector industries and passed union resolutions encouraging members to explore more cooperative agreements with Aboriginal people and communities.

### Association, government and NGO work

A number of regional and national associations and non-profit organizations in forestry have also developed successful Aboriginal initiatives. The Forest Products Association of Canada (FPAC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to foster greater cooperation between First Nations and forest products companies.

The Canadian Model Forest Network (CMFN) represents 15 non-profit organizations and provides a space for diverse forestry groups to meet and discuss issues related to forest-dependent communities. Many Aboriginal groups and communities across the country have benefited from the work CMFN has accomplished since 1992. One of its current members is the Cree Research and Development Institute, an Aboriginal-run model forest, which strives to bring a Cree voice to forest products issues.



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## Education and training initiatives

A number of post-secondary education institutions offer Aboriginal-specific initiatives which increase the number of First Nation and Métis students receiving forestry specific training.

North Island College in B.C. offers a log scaling and lumber grading program, Lakehead University offers a Natural Resource Management Forestry program, and the University of British Columbia recently created a First Nations initiative within the Faculty of Forestry to increase the number of Aboriginal professionals entering forestry.

Many other training programs are being offered on-the-job and are developed as partnerships between First Nations or First Nation organizations, local industry and educational institutions. The partnership between Resolute Forest Products (formerly AbitibiBowater), Fort William First Nation and Confederation College is an example. Resolute Forest Products' sawmill is in an industrial park within the First Nation and, as part of the partnership agreement, the two parties developed a training and employment plan. This included an agreement with Confederation College in Thunder Bay to develop a pre-employment training curriculum.

Bottom line is the foundation needs to be established early in the youth's educational path and supported all the way through – maybe employers need to start targeting youth and mentoring them well before they leave the school with exposure to the business, summer jobs, educational support.

— Prince George engagement participant

A similar partnership was struck between Wood Tech Group and three First Nations in north-western Ontario. A value-added lumber facility is being built and, with funding from the federal government, and an extensive training component is currently being rolled out, with Confederation College as a training partner.

There are also a number of youth-specific programs targeting Aboriginal youth considering forestry as a career. The Manitoba Model Forest's Aboriginal Junior Forest Ranger program is a well-known example, providing a seven-week introduction to forestry, natural resources management and earth sciences along with practical skills and certification for young high school Aboriginals.

The First Nations Natural Resources Youth Employment Program is another successful initiative, based in north-western Ontario for regional youth to attend a summer camp program providing Aboriginal youth with workplace training, life skills and access to information about forestry careers. There have been a number of Aboriginal teams who have competed in Envirothon, a high school student environmental competition.

While there are only a limited number of forest-specific jobs requiring journey people certificates, there are some education initiatives which are developing Aboriginal apprentices, who can then work in many industries, including forestry. Regional initiatives such as the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario and the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Initiative program in the prairie provinces are working to increase the number of Aboriginal people in the trades by providing information and support.

## Aboriginal organizations and First Nations

The issue of forest tenure dominates the discussion about Aboriginal peoples' involvement in the forest products sector. Much of this centres on discussions of, or agreements made through, land claim settlements or treaty entitlements. While not a focus of this study, it is noted many First Nations and First Nation organizations are working at a political and advocacy level to increase community capacity and meet community-driven forestry management goals, which can sometimes be opposed to the needs and priorities of forest product sector industries.

In B.C., a number of First Nations harvest wood and sell it across Canada and abroad. Companies like Coast Tsimshian Resources and the Ch-ihl-kway-uhk Forestry Limited have tree harvesting licenses and the ability to provide jobs and economic development opportunities for First Nation individuals and companies, working outside the major forest products companies.







National and regional Aboriginal forestry associations have built partnerships and developed research and resources to assist Aboriginal people working in forestry. The National Aboriginal Forestry Association (NAFA) promotes and supports increased Aboriginal involvement in forest management and related commercial opportunities.

The B.C. First Nations Forestry Council provides support to all B.C. First Nations with respect to forestry related matters. And organizations such as the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Sustainable Development Institute and the Aboriginal Forest Industries Council organize workshops and supports for First Nation forestry managers.

Regional Aboriginal organizations such as the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq, tribal councils such as the Meadow Lake Tribal Council and various individual First Nations have developed forest management strategies to facilitate the management of traditional lands and territories. These organizations set priorities, develop land use plans, pool resources, provide training and other supports for First Nation forestry workers and communities along with local forestry companies.

According to NAFA, there are approximately 1,200 to 1,400 Aboriginal forest companies operating in the forest sector, the vast majority as third-party timber harvest contractors but many new companies are expanding into value-added wood products, non-timber forest products or bio products. Companies like Two Feathers Forest Products, Duz Cho logging, Awazibi Pure Maple Syrup, JHL Forestry Inc., and many others are taking advantage of the diversification of the Canadian forest-based economy.

## Other sectors

There are a number of promising practices involving sector councils, industry and Aboriginal people across a number of different sectors aside from forest products. These could be adapted or considered for the forest products sector.

The Mining Industry Human Resource Council (MiHR) recently launched a national work readiness program called **Mining Essentials: A Work Readiness Training Program for Aboriginal Peoples**. Like the forest products sector, the mining sector has forecasted a number of labour market shortages in the coming years. MiHR has also determined Aboriginal people are a potential key source of future workers, yet there is a need for more skills development. MiHR, in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations, developed a 12-week training program addressing essential skills and industry-specific skills, in a culturally-sensitive and relevant context and framework.

The mining industry has a number of other initiatives which are progressive and could be adapted or considered in a forestry context, including the Aboriginal Mine Works program, Mastering Aboriginal Inclusion in Mining, and the British Columbia Aboriginal Mine Training Association.

Partnerships in other sectors are also developing mutually beneficial agreements to get more Aboriginal people working in these sectors. The Ocean Spray partnership is an example. Ocean Spray is establishing a cranberry farm in New Brunswick on traditional Mi'kmaq territory. The company signed an MOU with eight First Nations as well as an Aboriginal Rights Impact Agreement and a Joint Venture agreement. The goal is to have 30 percent Aboriginal employment within the company plus support community economic development.

# Challenges and Opportunities



Perception that forestry is a dying industry – how do we overcome the impression – the biggest mentor are the parents but if they are negative on the future – hard to overcome – do we need to educate both the youth and their parents on the viability of the industry?

— Prince George engagement session participant

## Challenges

Throughout the process, stakeholder interviews and research, a number of key challenges and realities relevant to Aboriginal engagement have emerged.

### Image

The image of the forest products sector among Aboriginal people and communities mirrors the perceptions held in the general population. The sector is seen as a “sunset” industry, unstable and risky for people to build a career or invest in. Unique to Aboriginal people, the industry is still seen as a place where there is discrimination and a place filled with older, “white” men.

Aboriginal youth are particularly difficult to reach as they often have other options open to them. The forest products sector has not been able to entice, either through marketing or outreach, Aboriginal people into the sector. This negative image of the sector also extends to unions. A number of key informants highlighted the suspicion and antagonism some Aboriginal communities and individuals have with local forest product sector industry unions.

### Training

As indicated earlier, educational attainment by Aboriginal people in Canada is much lower than the average Canadian population. And with the growing need for increased technological skills, this means Aboriginal people are less likely to be prepared to take advantage of available jobs in the forest products sector.

### Cultural awareness

The forest industry in Canada has long been seen as a male-dominated sector, primarily a mainstream or “white” industry, with little representation from women, visible minorities or Aboriginal people. This is beginning to change, yet, in many cases; the workplace is not yet ready for an influx of new workers who do not fit into the conventional and historical view of the “typical” forest products sector worker. If the workplace is uninviting, or the environment is awkward, even hostile, it will be difficult to retain the workers needed for the future.



### **Aboriginal self-determination and rights**

Aboriginal communities and organizations are becoming more adamant about participating in decision-making processes surrounding their traditional territories. Court cases, the legal duty to consult and accommodate First Nations, land claims settlements, and treaty processes may compel forest companies to work more cooperatively with Aboriginal people to seek mutually beneficial engagement. As an example, the recent legislation in B.C. that allows the Haida Gwaii Management Council to set timber quotas on Haida Gwaii is a significant precedent.

### **Non-traditional forestry opportunities**

There is a growing awareness among many First Nation communities that bio-economy, conservation and non-timber forest products are areas more closely aligned with traditional Aboriginal values than is harvesting wood or working in a sawmill or pulp and paper mill. As well, land claim settlement and treaty issues encourage more self-sufficiency and independence. The on-going shift towards reclaiming a position of “forest land stewardship” will be a challenge for forest product sector companies to successfully recruit and retain Aboriginal workers.

### **Competition**

The downturn in the forest products industry has meant many workers, including skilled Aboriginal workers, leaving the sector for what are more lucrative and supportive sectors, such as oil and gas and mining. And, for various reasons, other sectors (particularly mining) have been more persuasive and proactive in reaching out to potential Aboriginal workers.

### **Conflicting needs and requirements**

Aboriginal workers may want and need more flexible work arrangements, while a union may require strict adherence to a collective agreement and a forest company has health and safety requirements. It can be a challenge to reconcile all the different needs and requirements of each party working toward Aboriginal engagement in the sector.







## Opportunities

The challenges listed above were also perceived, as is often the case, as opportunities by some stakeholders. Additional opportunities (and some barriers) participants identified revolved around location, expertise, access to capital and new business and product development.

### Location

The forest products sector and related industries are well-positioned to offer secure long-term employment for those community members who wish to remain in or close to their First Nation. Eighty percent of all First Nations in Canada are located in forested areas. As well, reserve populations have remained steady (a rising birth rate and in-migration continues to offset out-migration from these leaving communities),

Many small communities, located near forestry operations, are also shrinking. According to Statscan, there is in-migration to small towns, but most of them are located near large cities. Most forest product sector industries are located in more remote regions, particularly northern regions, which have seen greater out-migration. This makes the pool of potential employees smaller, and points again to neighbouring First Nations as a viable human resource option.

Each community needs someone responsible for long-term forest stewardship and development. Need consistency and stability. Have to be on good terms with banks, governments. Need to build credibility, accountability and good reputation. Need a champion. Need support from Chief and Council. Need a support system. Maybe need a regional focus and then branch out from there.

— Thunder Bay engagement session participant



### Expertise and experience

The forest products sector has enormous expertise and experience in establishing and maintaining forest companies and mills. Many First Nation communities or regional organizations do not yet have this level of experience or expertise yet there is growing interest in developing or building facilities.

### Economic development and partnerships

First Nations are taking control of their local economies and finding new and innovative ways to provide or support employment for community members, often with the support of funding from various Federal and provincial/territorial governments. For First Nations in rural and remote regions, the forest products sector industries provide an obvious opportunity for partnerships.

### Access to capital

While First Nation communities and economic development organizations are keen to promote entrepreneurial opportunities and support Aboriginal businesses, a lack of capital and resources is a barrier. The integrated forest products companies are in an excellent position to negotiate partnership agreements including joint ventures, long-term supply arrangements or co-operative agreements with Aboriginal groups or communities which can benefit all.

All stakeholders need to commit to a culture of investment over a significant period of time. Not just dollars, but attitudes, resources, opportunities and to develop relationships through teamwork.

— Nanaimo engagement session participant

### Bio-economy

FPAC recently released a study on how to best position the next generation forest products industry to take advantage of new opportunities in bio-economy. This holds enormous promise for engaging Aboriginal people because the new areas of bio-materials and bio-energy are seen as more environmentally sensitive and aligned with Aboriginal principles of sustainability.

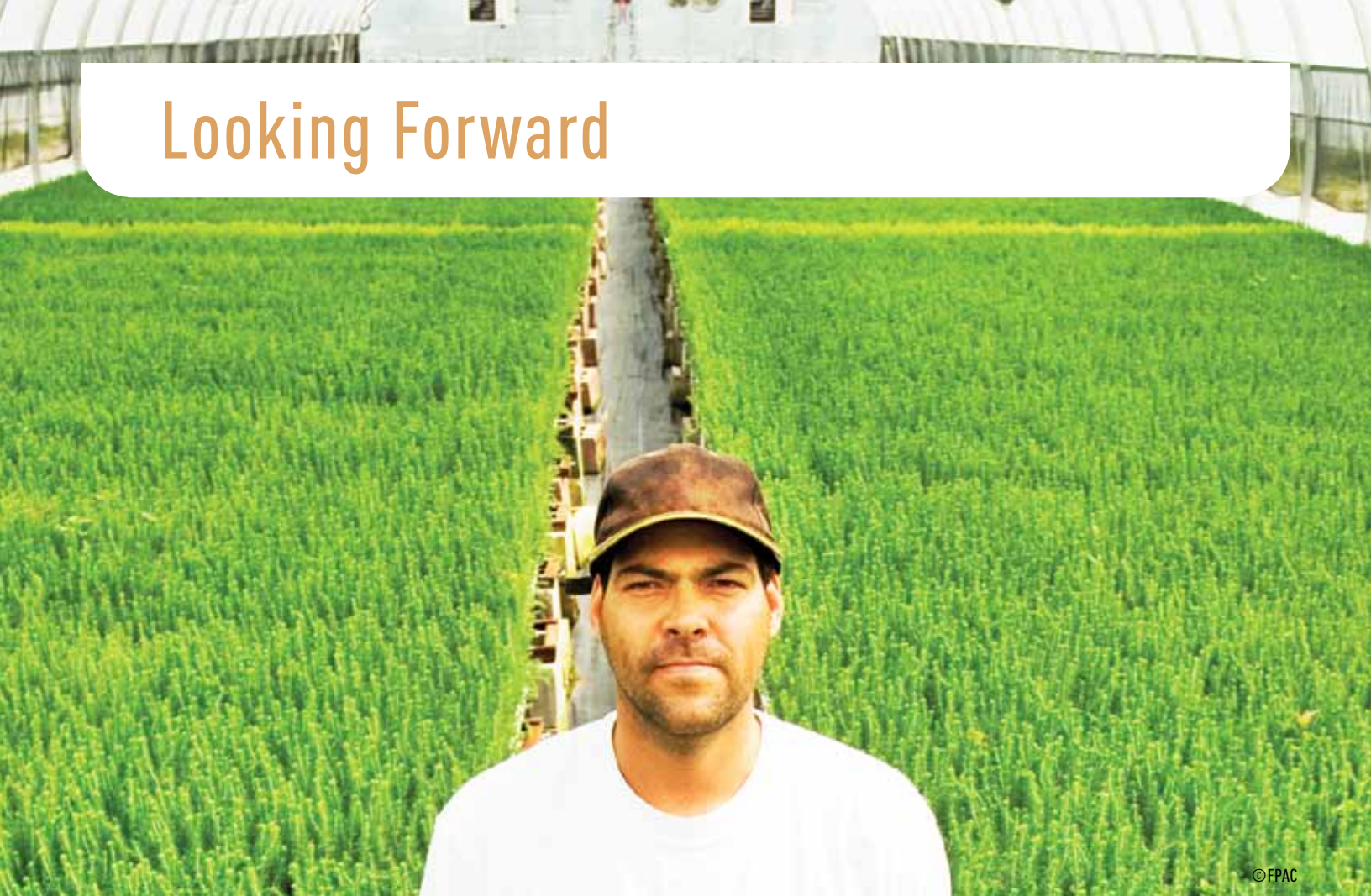
Biomass is a step down and potentially dangerous thinking. We shouldn't be figuring out how to take lots of wood to make little out of it. The thinking should be the reverse — how to take a little bit of wood and make a lot out of it.

— Thunder Bay engagement session participant





# Looking Forward



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## General conclusions and critical success factors

Even with modest growth in the sector during the next 10 years, tens of thousands of new workers will need to be hired. These workers will need to have higher technological and essential skills and educational competencies to replace an aging workforce.

The forest products sector needs to look to Aboriginal populations as a source of future labour. At the same time, Aboriginal communities and people can look to the forest products sector as source of future employment. Improving Aboriginal employment rates may contribute to improved socio-economic conditions of First Nations communities.

Aboriginal people are younger than average and the population is growing fast. An overwhelming number of First Nations communities and people are located in forested areas and near forest industries. It offers community members an opportunity to maintain a decent paying job and remain close to their community and traditional lands.

There are Aboriginal people currently working in the sector, but they are not representative of the geography and demographics surrounding forestry operations. Aboriginal people are not working in highly technical or management jobs, but more likely in logging and silviculture or working for Aboriginal-owned businesses providing services to forestry companies.

There are a number of challenges and issues which will impede the ability of the forest products sector to match supply and demand with Aboriginal workers. These challenges range from an overhaul of the image and perception of the sector, a need for cultural awareness training, flexibility and willingness to partner with Aboriginal communities, to assisting with upgrading skills of Aboriginal workers.



There needs to be a clear understanding of the roles, responsibilities, obligations, risks and rewards of all parties. That process begins with trust. All participants have a responsibility and an obligation to work together in a mature, respectful relationship where everyone has a commitment to ensuring the success of others.

— Winnipeg engagement session report

## Critical success factors

There are some critical success factors which, if taken into account, will enable the forest products sector to recruit and retain a strong and vibrant Aboriginal workforce. These include:

### Respect and flexibility

Aboriginal communities must understand the realities of the forest products industry and, in turn, industry must become more aware of the differing worldviews, cultural values and alternative approaches which Aboriginal people take towards training, employment, partnerships and consultation.

This flexibility also extends to the way Aboriginal groups and communities work with industry. For example, Henvey Inlet is a small First Nation in northern Ontario which by-passed all government funders and went straight to industry to set up and secure financing to build a \$1 billion wind farm.

### Looking with new eyes

Partnerships may need to look at existing challenges with new eyes and “think outside the box” of standard industry or union practices and funder restrictions, in order to advance Aboriginal inclusion in forest products. Ideas like co-operatives, community based job sharing, or unique and individualized collective agreements could be developed.

### Commitment

New relationships and ways of doing cannot be built over the course of a year or two, or through the life of one funding or training agreement. It will take long-term strategies and meaningful relationship-building in order to be successful. This includes a commitment to Aboriginal employees, but also commitment to Aboriginal communities; and other stakeholders and neighbours located adjacent to forest products operations.

## Multi-stakeholder partnerships

The most successful initiatives have a wide variety of partners including funders, industry, Aboriginal groups, educational institutions and unions. This ensures Aboriginal workers are appropriately trained and supported and industry and union standards can be accommodated. Partnerships are scalable and need to happen at the national, provincial, regional and local levels.

## An inclusive workplace

Companies that have prepared their workplaces for an influx of Aboriginal workers have higher rates of retention. This could mean cultural awareness training for all employees, mentorship and in-house supports for Aboriginal workers.



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## Bridging the Gap

The FPSC-CSPF National engagement session, held in Ottawa in March 2011, identified five thematic areas for further work and consideration. These were:

**Ongoing Sectoral Relations** – Sector groups, Aboriginal groups, business, union and governments working together in a group to decide how to move forward. This collective should start at the national level and then migrate work to regional clusters which build on common objectives.

**Employment and Business** – Examine Aboriginal business ventures for lessons, develop strategic planning assistance programs, provide infrastructure and access for First Nations business development and capital funding.

**Reaching and Supporting Youth** – increase the engagement of Aboriginal youth with the forest sector by exposing them to forest products careers, training opportunities and job placements.

**Education, Training and Mentorship** – raise awareness and modify educational systems to embrace Aboriginal connection to the land and expand the Aboriginal junior forest ranger program nationally.

**Traditional Knowledge** – Encourage establishment of an organization that promotes more traditional knowledge through conversations between knowledge holders and industry and workers.

## Local level partnerships

It is clear from this research there are numerous local level initiatives underway across Canada which may provide inspiration and insight in developing new and exciting partnerships. However, it is also clear no “one size fits all” solution exists. What works in Quebec may not work in British Columbia.

Effective partnerships work best at the local level, with the involvement of all relevant players who are committed to a common vision and purpose. The solutions these partnerships create work best when there is an understanding of the specific attributes and local conditions which define the uniqueness of a community or region.

For those in the Canadian forest products sector who wish to encourage and engage more Aboriginal peoples to work in the mills and on the land; and for those Aboriginal communities and individuals who wish to create better economic opportunities for their people – finding ways to work together that produce solutions which solve local level challenges is clearly the go forward strategy.

## Importance of collaboration

The key component to advancing Aboriginal inclusion in the forest products sector can be summed up in one word: **collaboration**.

In a culture of collaboration:

- There is a common vision, mission, and guiding principles which are understood and agreed to by all.
- Leaders engage respectfully, honestly and openly. They remain flexible and adaptable to new methods and ideas as the process evolves and unfolds.
- All parties make decisions which are aligned with a common purpose and congruent with the values of their community.



# Recommendations



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All stakeholders in the Canadian forest products sector need to come together to support the development of a “cradle to grave” strategy for finding and keeping Aboriginal employees in the Canadian forest product sector. Here are some ways the sector can move forward in engaging with Canada’s Aboriginal populations.

## Target youth, recruitment and retention

An effective youth education program is a strong first step. It must include strategies to keep Aboriginal youth in school, provide students with compelling reasons to consider forestry and forest products as a viable career choice, streamline the process of obtaining training and employment, and support Aboriginal employees as they advance in their careers.

- Aboriginal-specific resources for high school guidance counsellors which promote careers in the forest products sector should be developed.
- Guidelines outlining how to set up a local engagement program which provides speaking opportunities for Aboriginal people currently employed in the forest products sector at local schools and career fairs can be developed.

Another first step would be to focus on how to recruit more Aboriginal women into the forest products sector. Training resources or tools must demonstrate how the forest products industry provides opportunities for Aboriginal women.

Cultural awareness training programs can be developed and deployed to company HR managers, senior management and staff. This would incorporate the participation of local Elders who can speak to the importance of the forest and traditional knowledge. The Aboriginal Human Resource Council has developed a set of modules called *Mastering Aboriginal Inclusion* which could be adapted and promoted by the sector.

Unions can develop and share amongst themselves toolkits or resources used when negotiating agreements with industry and Aboriginal people. The USW has collective agreements which incorporate Aboriginal-specific elements. The Labourers International Union of North America signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Assembly of First Nations to work more closely with Aboriginal people and communities when negotiating agreements.

Companies should explore and develop creative, non-conventional working arrangements with Aboriginal employees which take into account local circumstances (part-time, job sharing, hiring pool, job shadowing, formal mentorship, flex time, time off for cultural practices).

## Undertake Aboriginal-specific labour market research

Research needs to continue on the Aboriginal labour market for the forest products sector. The release of the 2011 Census data offers a chance for a re-assessment of this report's conclusions.

The future development of a forest products-specific labour market intelligence model could include the unique conditions of Aboriginal employment in the labour market. Work could also be undertaken with First Nations and other partners to develop skills inventories to connect Aboriginal people with employment and training opportunities.

As well, industry and Aboriginal communities need to continue, and increase, their communications efforts in honest and open forums. Companies can share knowledge about career and employment opportunities and skills and education requirements while Aboriginal communities can speak to their issues and concerns.

## Training

The most successful training programs are those tied directly to needs and demands of industry. Inclusive partnerships between industry, Aboriginal communities and local or regional post-secondary institutions provide the best training for Aboriginal people and meets industry requirements.

Programs such as Confederation College's First Nations Natural Resources Youth Employment Program (FNNRYEP); Manitoba Model Forest's Junior Forest Ranger program; the BEAHR initiative (Building Environmental Aboriginal Human Resources) from ECO Canada are successful because they involve all key stakeholders, are supported by the Aboriginal community and involve Aboriginal trainers.

Also, a national forestry skills training program, similar to the Mining Industry Sector Council's *Mining Essentials*, could be developed as an Aboriginal-specific initiative which is culturally relevant and meets industry needs. Strategies and tools which focus on increasing Aboriginal apprentices and mentoring opportunities should be explored.

## Image and perception of the forest products sector

Finally, the Canadian forest products sector suffers from an "image deficit" amongst the general population, and youth and Aboriginals in particular. A sector-wide effort will be needed to reverse these perceptions.

More than ever, all stakeholders need to be forthright in highlighting the sector's sustainability practices to encourage Aboriginal people to work in the sector.

The sector needs to continue to encourage dialogue on how traditional knowledge can be valued and incorporated into forestry practices, making it more appealing to Aboriginal workers, with benefits to communities, businesses and the land.

The Arts may be one way to show the power and grandeur of the forests, the importance of traditional knowledge, the role sustainable wood products play in society. This could be through art exhibits, film festivals or other approaches focussed on Aboriginal audiences.

An Aboriginal-specific communications and marketing strategy could be developed to highlight the value and opportunities in the forest products sector. A "road show" informational display booth which visits Aboriginal communities and events could highlight the opportunities for Aboriginals in the forest products sector. As well, tying the industry to programs such as Envirothon may encourage Aboriginal students to learn about forestry, and spark their interest in a possible career in the sector.

The Forest Products Sector Council would like to thank all those individuals from Aboriginal organizations and communities, the forest products companies and unions, governments, educational institutions and sector organizations who participated and contributed to the development of this report.