

**TELECONFERENCE NOTES:  
MÉTIS FORESTRY WORKING GROUP  
OF THE NATIONAL FOREST STRATEGY THEMATIC TEAM 3**

August 3, 2006, 2:00 – 3:30 pm (EDT)

hosted by the Métis Settlements General Council

**Participants:**

Dan Benoit, Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF)  
Don Sharp, Métis National Council (MNC)  
Garry Parenteau, Métis Settlements General Council (MSGC)  
(Facilitator) Mark Kepkay, National Aboriginal Forestry Association (NAFA)

**Teleconference objectives**

The objectives of the meeting were:

- to provide feedback on the compiled responses to the Métis Forestry questionnaire circulated in June-July.
- to identify next steps for developing a proposal for a Métis Forestry Program.
- to generate ideas for the Métis-specific content of the Forest Home website (to be launched by end of August 2006)

**Feedback on the questionnaire**

Following up on decisions from the June 8 teleconference of this Working Group, a questionnaire was circulated to Métis organizations on the status and trends of Métis forestry across Canada. Mark compiled a synthesis and summary of the responses to this questionnaire, supplemented also with information extracted from a few available reports and data sources. The document shows a lot of big gaps – for example, there were no responses from Métis groups in Saskatchewan, Québec, and Atlantic Canada.

It was agreed that further efforts should be made to fill the gaps in the document, including direct contact of missing Métis groups and expanding the request for responses to timber companies.

Essentially, this document is the beginning of the report on status and trends of Métis forestry that Team 3 needs to submit to the National Forest Strategy (NFS) Coalition on the occasion of the next Coalition progress report. This issue is discussed below.

**Next steps to develop proposal for Métis Forestry Program**

How should the information we are compiling be used to advance the cause of a Métis Forestry Program? The group had trouble identifying whom to address a proposal to.

The federal Interlocutor's office has a small budget, so Métis groups are forced to prioritize issues for funding – and forestry is never anywhere near the top of the list. Without a landbase or

a responsible agency identified by statute, the idea of a Métis Forestry Program seems to have no leverage at the federal level. In contrast, the First Nations Forestry Program (FNFP) has both a landbase (Indian Reserves) and statutory responsible agency (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada) to drive it.

Possibly there would be some potential for Human Resources and Social Development Canada to fund some employment and training-related work. However, this would address only a very small piece of the puzzle, building *individual* capacity without any context or opportunity to convert that into *community* capacity.

Furthermore, recently it has become clear that many signatories to the NFS do not feel obligated to drive for progress on the Action Items. It is often said that the “Canadian commitment” in the title of the NFS document is in fact, at the bottom line, a commitment only to *report* on any progress that occurs relative to the action items, rather than to *make* progress. Therefore, the call for a Métis Forestry Program in Action Item 3.4 does not seem to have the policy significance that many of us had previously expected.

Perhaps the conclusion about a federal Métis Forestry Program is the same now as it was in an earlier report by Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) in 1998-99: The time is not right.

Might the provincial and territorial governments be a more appropriate audience for a proposal? As the questionnaire responses show, relations between Métis and the various provincial governments vary widely. Overall, there are almost no formal agreements, no tenures, and no programming for Métis people in the forest sector. (The Métis Settlements in Alberta are an obvious exception to this observation.) A few provinces, like Saskatchewan and Manitoba, seem more willing to be progressive in recent years. However, it seems to be the rule that the word “rights” is not to be used. Coordinating a national-scale initiative among the jurisdictions, without federal participation, seems highly unlikely to happen.

There was some discussion that perhaps timber companies would be a source of support for a Métis Forestry Program. They are expecting major shortfalls in their labour force in the near future. Recently industry joined forces with forestry schools and other parties on a national initiative to increase enrolments in forestry education. NAFA is on this committee, and there is some recognition generally that for various unique reasons Aboriginal people, including Métis, could be a major component of the future labour force in the forest sector. Might this be an incentive for industry to support a Métis Forestry Program? In the end, it seems certain that any support from industry would only be a minor component of a truly useful program.

Given the lack of any obvious destination for a Métis Forestry Program proposal, the Working Group decided that our very scant resources should be focused on building from the preliminary questionnaire to develop a status and trends report for the Métis relative to the action items of NFS Theme 3. This report can be submitted to the NFS Coalition for incorporation in progress reports and the final evaluation of the NFS in 2008. If, as has been experienced in the past, the Coalition Secretariat proves reluctant to accept the main components of our submission, then we can also look at options for independent publication of the report. In any case, the report should be well-documented and referenced, in order to be as credible as possible.

By ensuring that the general public and the international community are made aware of the lack of action on Métis issues under the NFS, we may hope to find some leverage to pry open a window of opportunity for the Métis Forestry Program proposal over the course of a few years.

Additionally, the Working Group should consider developing a jointly authored discussion paper for a more general readership. This will be discussed in the future.

### **Forest Home website**

Mark aims to launch the new “Forest Home” website by the end of August. This will be an resource centre for information, tools, and news about Aboriginal rights and participation in the forest sector. As a project, it emerged from discussions in the Learning Forum Working Group of NFS Team 3.

This website will have a page for highlighting Métis-specific issues and information. For example, relatively complete drafts of the status and trends report discussed above could be posted to this page. Links to Métis organizations’ websites could be posted, as well as interesting reports and news. Mark invited the Working Group members to submit items, news, links, and other suggestions for inclusion on the webpage – they can be included at any time.

### **Next steps**

- Since we had so few people involved in this teleconference, Mark will write up the notes from this meeting and try to get a sense of other Working Group members’ level of support for the decisions taken.
- Mark will circulate the questionnaire to industry and other contacts, and he will also contact directly the Métis groups that have not yet provided responses.
- As part of the general work that it does in coordinating reporting on Theme 3, NAFA will serve as secretariat for developing the questionnaire responses and additional data sources into a report on status and trends relative to Métis components of the Action Items of Theme 3. This will also require the support and input from all members of the Working Group!
- The proposal for a Métis Forestry Program will be put on hold indefinitely. For the remainder of the term of the current NFS (through spring 2008), the focus will be on ensuring high-quality reporting as discussed in the previous point.
- The Working Group will flag for future consideration the question of developing a jointly authored discussion paper for a general forest sector readership.
- As they are able, the Working Group members will provide suggestions and materials for Mark to post to the Forest Home website.
- No date was set for the next Working Group teleconference.