



Northern Alberta Métis Project Highlights

A Collaborative Project between
Natural Resources Canada, Canadian Forest Service,
and the Métis Settlements General Council

Bradley Henry and Dorothy Anderson



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Foreword

Natural resources play a pivotal role in the lives of Canadians, providing essential materials for the economies of communities across Canada, while permitting the pursuit of numerous recreational, spiritual, and cultural activities. So that we, as Canadians, may continue to enjoy, in good conscience, the many benefits derived from natural resources, it is crucial that we embrace and use best management practices when extracting them.

Managing resources sustainably demands knowledge and expertise across a wide range of disciplines. The skill set required is diverse, and very few communities or organizations possess all of the expertise to maintain a healthy balance in the development of their resources. Lacking these diverse skills elevates the importance for communities to collaborate with others who are tasked with resource management. Through collaboration, resources, experience, and expertise can be pooled, and relevant knowledge and skills can be shared and developed to achieve the broader goal of sustainable resource management.

The recently completed Northern Alberta Métis Project represents such collaboration. In a diverse partnership that included the Métis Settlements General Council, four federal departments, the province of Alberta, and two academic institutions, skills were developed within the Métis Settlements of northern Alberta. In addition, resource-based information and technology vital to the management of the Settlement's resources were shared.

The Northern Alberta Métis Project is a complex initiative, and its implementation presented many challenges. However, as indicated in the Background Report, these challenges were successfully met, largely through the strength of the partnership between the organizations and through the commitment shown by the project's participants.

There were key lessons learned during the implementation of the Northern Alberta Métis Project. By documenting the process that was followed, it is hoped that similar initiatives will benefit from the experiences gained in this undertaking.

Because the Métis Settlements and the Canadian Forest Service saw an opportunity to simultaneously address a population of unemployed or underemployed youth along with a need for sustainable resource management, the communities now possess a basic set of skills in Geographic Information and Global Positioning Systems. This is an invaluable result of the Northern Alberta Métis Project. All those who participated should share a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in its successful outcome, and in their own efforts that directly contributed to it.

Brian Emmett
*Assistant Deputy Minister
Natural Resources Canada
Canadian Forest Service*

Harold Supernault
*President
Métis Settlements General Council*

About the Authors

Bradley Henry is from the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation near Sarnia, Ontario. He started working for Natural Resources Canada, Canadian Forest Service in 1996 after completing his master's degree in forest entomology at the University of Guelph. Currently, he is a Science Policy Advisor with the Canadian Forest Service in Ottawa working with Aboriginal communities, industry, and government to develop resource management skills in Aboriginal communities and to address common forest research issues and needs. In his spare time, Bradley owns and operates a sugar bush, along with his wife, Sandra, and daughters, Ivy and Violet, at their home in St. Pascal, Ontario.

Dorothy Anderson is a member of the Gift Lake Métis Settlement near High Prairie, Alberta. She attended Grande Prairie Regional College and majored in marketing in the business program. In the spring of 1999, she moved to Edmonton and began a career with the Métis Settlements General Council in program development and project coordination. Dorothy is also the proud mom of Rayne.



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 - Fishing Lake Métis Settlement
 - Gift Lake Métis Settlement
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Thanks once again to everyone who helped make this initiative a success.

Introduction

Natural resources have the potential to play a vital role in the development of Aboriginal economies, and subsequently, self-government. Nowhere is this truer than in the Métis Settlements of northern Alberta, which have a land base the size of Prince Edward Island (about 5060 km²).

The Métis Settlements were established by the Government of Alberta through the Métis Settlements Act of 1990. They consist of eight distinct geographic areas in northern Alberta and are populated by about 6000 people, mostly Métis. The people of the Settlements are bound by a shared culture and history, but each Settlement has its own diverse economy. All Settlements have interests in resource-based sectors such as forestry, oil and gas, mining, agriculture, hunting, trapping, fishing, and tourism. Given the remote geographic location of most of the Settlements, economic development is bound to focus on natural resources management.

The main obstacles for the Métis Settlements in developing viable resource-based economies on a commercial scale are (1) limited access to relevant science and technology knowledge and (2) a shortage of people in the community who are skilled in natural resource science and management. The root cause of these difficulties is that few Aboriginal people study and train to the professional level in the resource management area. This is largely due to the technical and educational requirements necessary to develop expertise in fields relevant to natural resources.

Youth, with their familiarity with technology, may be the answer to overcoming these technical and educational barriers. By 2005, it is estimated that half of the Aboriginal population will be less than 25 years old. Unfortunately, many Aboriginal youth, like their predecessors, face difficulties in pursuing careers in resource management areas.

In 2001, the Canadian Forest Service of Natural Resources Canada and the Métis Settlements General Council embarked on an initiative that tested a model for transferring resource-based science and technology information to Aboriginal communities while developing related skills within the communities. The initiative, eventually named the Northern Alberta Métis Project,¹ targeted Métis youth and had as its objectives

- to determine the science and technology information needs of the Métis Settlements,
- to address those needs by transferring relevant information, and
- to build the capacity within the Settlements to manage their own natural resources.

A model for the initiative was presented to the Settlements and other partners for comment. It was then adapted to serve the distinctive needs of the Settlements. Six of the eight Settlements participated in the initiative, which was implemented between 2002 and 2004.

Funding for the initiative came from several sources including four federal departments, the Métis Settlements and the Métis Settlements General Council, and the Government of Alberta. For a complete list, see the Acknowledgments.

Methodology and Implementation

The objectives of the project would be achieved by methodology that included

- needs analysis workshops,
- resource science symposia,
- Geographic Information System (GIS) and Global Position System (GPS) projects, and
- fora on economic development.

After a series of planning meetings with the Settlements and the various partners, project implementation began in March 2002 with needs analysis workshops in Paddle Prairie, High Prairie, and St. Paul, Alberta. In addition to identifying the resource-based science and technology needs of the Settlements, the workshops determined the direction that the communities wished to pursue regarding their GIS and GPS projects. These technologies were chosen because the information they could provide would be relevant and of interest to the communities; resources were available to implement the GIS and GPS projects; and Settlement youth could be the principal field agents for the projects.

¹ The *Northern Alberta Métis Project: Background Report* is available from the Métis Settlements General Council, 10335-172 Street, Suite 200, Edmonton, AB, T5S 1K9.

A total of 46 individuals representing the Métis Settlements General Council, industry, government, and academia participated in the three needs analysis workshops. Attendance was lower than expected; however, the majority of participants stated the objectives of the workshops had been realized. A publication summarizing the findings of the workshops was produced and distributed to the communities.

In June 2002, 24 young men and women (average age 20.9 years) and 6 supervisors attended a one-month training course in GIS, GPS, basic forestry, and life skills at the Northern Lakes College in Grouard, Alberta. Of these, 21 of the students and 5 supervisors successfully completed the training and in July 2002 returned to their respective communities to implement the community projects identified in the needs analysis workshops. These projects included developing forest inventories, designing buffalo pastures, and preparing community emergency plans. In December 2002, 12 of the 21 young people had completed the community projects phase of the initiative. Despite several challenges related to implementation, the majority of Settlements believe that the projects will provide a valuable resource management tool for their community.

In the spring/summer of 2004, Settlement administration participated in a second round of training. It involved how to increase the likelihood that GIS and GPS technology would be used by the Settlements after the initiative was completed.

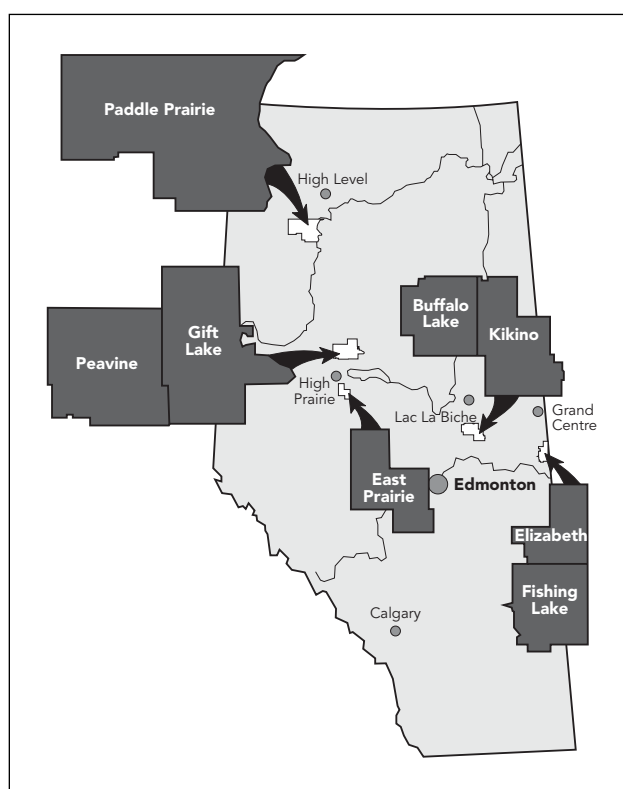


Figure 1. The eight Métis Settlements in Alberta.

The priorities identified by the Settlements in the needs analysis workshops were reflected in the resource science symposia held in October 2002 in Paddle Prairie, Grouard, and St. Paul, Alberta. The purpose of these events was to transfer relevant resource management information to the Settlements. The topics of presentations ranged from climate change to non-timber forest products to regulations pertaining to water management on the Settlements. About 155 people attended the symposia, including representatives from several communities, industry, and three levels of government. A proceedings was prepared and distributed to the participants.

In August 2003, at the request of the six Settlements participating in the Northern Alberta Métis Project, two economic development fora were held in Peace River and St. Paul, Alberta. The purpose of these events was to facilitate resource-based economic development on the Settlements. To ensure that all of the elements required for economic development were in place, invitations were issued to Settlement councils, industry, the Métis Nation of Alberta, and federal and provincial agencies that promote economic development and training. These organizations were generally well-represented and 54 people participated in the two fora. The fora featured presentations on afforestation, nontimber forest products, value-added in forestry, and Aboriginal tourism, areas identified by the Settlements as important to economic development. A summary report on the fora was produced and distributed to the communities.

The participants indicated that the fora were successful in providing relevant information to the Settlements, creating contacts for the Settlements, generating awareness regarding economic development, and most importantly, contributing directly to economic development on the Settlements.

Impacts

The Northern Alberta Métis Project had several short-term and long-term impacts. The initiative

- identified the science and technology information needs of the Settlements;
- addressed immediate and short-term information needs of the communities;
- increased visibility of the participants, and created and strengthened partnerships;
- invested in the Settlements and created short-term employment;
- created an awareness within the Settlements of the importance of science and technology information;
- made progress on national, provincial, and corporate commitments and recommendations;
- developed skills and built infrastructure;

- developed tools for improved resource management;
- promoted economic development in the Settlements; and
- influenced the career choice of some young people.

Lessons Learned

Several lessons were learned in developing and implementing the project that can benefit those embarking on similar initiatives. They include

- a champion for a project is essential;
- participants must commit to the objectives and methodology of the initiative;
- sufficient in-kind resources must be allocated at the community level;
- communities are limited in their capacity to contribute to new initiatives;
- communication and interaction between participants is crucial to success;
- flexibility in dealing with communities is an asset;
- managing expectations within communities is critical to project management;
- significant regional differences exist in implementing government programs;
- building trust within Aboriginal communities is important;
- adequate compensation of participating organizations is critical;
- the model used by the initiative can be successfully applied to a variety of resource sectors;
- it is important to know the optimal time to approach an Aboriginal community; and
- follow-up is an important part of community-based project management.

Evaluation

An overall evaluation was done to determine the effectiveness of the initiative. The key participants indicated that the initiative achieved two of its objectives, namely to determine the science and technology information needs of the Settlements and to transfer relevant information to the communities.

Within the Settlements, the critical shortage of Aboriginal people skilled in resource-based science has its roots in a host of long-term social, economic, and cultural factors. Accordingly, resolving these issues will require a long-term vision and approach. This project may be a small step in that direction.

The model advocated by the Northern Alberta Métis Project invested in Aboriginal youth. This investment often requires several years before it provides a return, a time frame that exceeds the mandate of the initiative.

To fully understand and appreciate the impact of this initiative, it is necessary to track the long-term progress of its participants. Informal, long-term tracking will be attempted for as long as possible.

In the interim, efforts are underway to implement similar pilot projects in other regions of the country to build on the work done in northern Alberta. Given the known impacts of the initiative, and the potential for further positive ones within the community, continued investment by Aboriginal communities, government, and industry into the model used by the Northern Alberta Métis Project is justified.