



“OUR FORESTS: A FOUNDATION FOR SHARED PROSPERITY”

# Aboriginal Forestry Forum

February 28th & 29th, 2012 | The Sutton Place Hotel | Toronto, ON

## BACKGROUND

The global forest sector is in a process of transformation. Harvesters, producers and forest managers are faced with dynamic challenges posed by rapidly changing markets, climate change, and new understandings about complex ecosystems. The emergence of new forestry trends presents great opportunities for Aboriginal communities to become leaders in forest resource sectors. The forests have long influenced the cultures, aspirations and values of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and will continue to play a paramount role in the future development of new, strong, self-sufficient economies.

International dialogue about the role of indigenous peoples in society and the future economy has also undergone significant advances. Since the adoption of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples*, people around the world have taken note that indigenous peoples play an important role in economic development and natural resources management. International recognition of indigenous rights has revitalized the efforts of indigenous Canadians to build their visions and assert priorities for their nations while raising the bar for industry and government to build meaningful partnerships through early, frequent and respectful engagement. More than ever, businesses and government recognize the need to work with indigenous peoples to achieve mutually beneficial economic goals that promote the long-term sustainability of resources, cultures, and communities.

As the forest sector adapts to the new global paradigm, it is important for the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada to pursue forest-based development, and for Aboriginals to cultivate relationships between each other in order to identify opportunities based on rights, title, and fundamental interests. Strong partnerships and alliances between Aboriginals can lead to a more strengthened position to overcome conventional barriers, and assume a greater presence in the sector. New forums, institutions, and mechanisms are necessary to help link Aboriginals with one another and provide the needed knowledge base and policy support that is necessary for sustainable growth. It is only when engaged in mutually beneficial partnerships that Aboriginals can share best practices, and can effectively address policy and program issues to create conditions conducive to environmentally responsible development.

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) recognizes the potential for excellence in forestry, and has undertaken efforts to support Canada’s indigenous peoples in identifying new opportunities and growing the Forest Sector. Guided by the mandates of the Chiefs-in-Assembly (Resolution #37/2010), the AFN co-hosted the 2011 Forestry Forum with the National Aboriginal Forestry Association (NAFA), entitled “**Our Forests, Our Future: Advancing Our Stewardship Role.**” The forum was attended by regional Community leaders, forestry technicians, and professional staff from forest sector organizations and enterprises. Discussions focused on natural resource

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management topics including forestry and land use planning, and participants considered an enhanced role for Aboriginals in those fields.

Following the spirit of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the *Convention on Biological Diversity*, the Chiefs-in-Assembly directed the AFN to collaborate with a broad base of partners “to advance sustainable growth and development in various natural resource sectors through research, policy, education, capacity development, advocacy and support” (Resolution #27/2011). Recognizing the necessity to build strong networks to support indigenous forest-based initiatives, the AFN supports forums for Aboriginals as a means to build the foundations for collaborative success.

Building on the success of the 2011 Forestry Forum and the direction from the Chiefs-in-Assembly, the Assembly of First Nations is proud to host the 2012 Aboriginal Forestry Forum, themed “**Our Forests: A Foundation for Shared Prosperity.**” The 2012 Aboriginal Forestry Forum is a unique opportunity for Aboriginal forestry practitioners to discuss preeminent opportunities, trends, and issues relating to local, national, and international forest-based development. Over the course of two days, participants will be given an opportunity to discuss and understand the changes occurring in the forest sector. This important meeting will allow Aboriginal Peoples to interact with one another, government, and industry professionals to begin to implement the plans set forth by Community leaders across Canada.

The 2012 Aboriginal Forestry Forum will touch on a variety of topics central to the forest industry. Indigenous participants will be given an opportunity to interact with those at the forefront of bio-energy, international and domestic marketing, program development, youth engagement, partnership building, ecosystem approaches, land use planning, and sustainable management. Speakers will consider pressing issues like climate change challenges, capacity building, funding assistance, and the tools necessary for success in all aspects of forestry and its connections to mining, fisheries, environmental health and protection, food security, and community vitality. Speakers and participants will address the underlying issues that are the key to the success of the Aboriginal Forest Sector and will be given an opportunity to identify strategies to overcome the funding, capacity, and technological gaps faced by communities.

The AFN looks forward to the opportunity to foster a new dialogue amongst Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, as we seek responsible development that complements our culture, heritage, rights, and values. The 2012 Aboriginal Forestry Forum is a key step in that dialogue. Together, we look forward to setting a foundation for shared prosperity.