

FINAL REPORT

UPPER SAINT JOHN RIVER VALLEY Community Asset Mapping

January 7, 2008 – April 5, 2008

Submitted by:

FALLS BROOK CENTRE

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PROJECT SUMMARY

The rural issues being addressed by this project included:

- 1) the impact of globalization of the forest industry on forestry markets, which threatens the ability of local industry to compete effectively;
- 2) the threat to forest ecosystems by current industrial demands, leading to resource depletion and the socioeconomic collapse of forest-dependent communities;
- 3) the loss of employment in the traditional industry, resulting in population depletion by out migration and low incomes in rural communities;
- 4) the lack of knowledge about other options for forest utilization and the inability to access diverse markets for non-traditional and non-timber forest products;
- 5) the conventional mindset of communities that have relied for generations on one resource and one industry;
- 6) unemployed or underemployed youth;
- 7) the need to begin a process towards economic renewal and community sustainability;
- 8) the need to recognize the impact of environmental health on day-to-day life; and
- 9) the importance of forward-thinking and planning for the future of rural communities.

The overarching vision of this project was to help facilitate the successful transition of the communities in the Upper St. John River Valley region from dependence on a single forest industry to innovative socioeconomic development based on diverse utilization of community forest resources.

SUMMARY OF REACH

- The Upper St. John River Valley covers an area which extends from Perth-Andover to Nackawic, along the Upper St. John River Valley in New Brunswick (20 communities);
- This initiative will engage approximately 20 supporting organizations, including academics, business agencies, woodlot owners, governments, non-profit community groups, and First Nations as well as 50 innovative entrepreneurs seeking diverse business opportunities;
- Knowledge will be transferred via newsletter, website E-bulletins, workshops and seminars, print media (articles to journals), public focus groups and meetings, and progress reports;

Deliverable & outcomes

The project was successful in meeting the stated objectives. The shortened time line did not allow for the depth and breadth of contact and follow up that was desired. However, the communities who participated in the Asset mapping exercise have indicated a desire to move further with the process and to build upon the results of the initial planning sessions.

Quantifiable results are difficult so quickly after the project completion. However, the initiative reached a large cross section of residents in the communities. With the addition of a student survey the project also engaged the youth (high school) population. Communiqués and the January and March Editions of the County Bridge (community newsletter) also brought the project to a wider community and increased dissemination of the overall objectives. The presence of project resources on the web has also expanded the reach of the initiative and will allow for more access to information.

Meeting the objectives (as outlined in the proposal) was a major indicator of successful project completion. However, having the communities move forward and taking action on the recommendations determined through the asset mapping exercises will be the ultimate test of success. This project was a stimulus and as such helped to initiate community engagement and supply tools and resources for future efforts.

- Interest amongst community leaders is high and there is a thirst for more efforts in the areas of planning and connecting the River Valley communities. As a stimulus the project was a success and it did serve to help communities move forward.
- Participation is always a challenge in community projects... When a new project or initiative comes into play it is difficult to engage a large number of community members. Over time, when community ownership is in place this will likely change but as an initial step it was a challenge to get large numbers out to the community sessions. We also learned that communities are resilient and react to crisis in a much different way. When a threat is posed then concern is higher. This project was more focused on the “positive” role of asset mapping and how it can help to prepare communities for the future not only to react but to plan...
- The third obstacle would be the defined geographic area. The Upper St John River Valley takes in over 20 communities, three counties, two education districts, hospital districts, local service districts and three economic planning commissions. The asset mapping exercise clearly identified similarities and common interests but the reality of multiple jurisdictions and planning groups made the challenge greater.

We are satisfied with the results of this project. There is an increased awareness in the St John River Valley of their tremendous assets and a thirst for planning a better future. Communities want to dialogue and work together.

At the wrap up session in Falls Brook (April 4th) there was a recognition that we have started a process and there is much more work to be done. You will see in the recommendations from this session that more asset mapping and identification of opportunities is being sought by communities.

Expected Outcomes	Performance Indicators	Measurement Strategy / Data Source	Results (as per Indicators)
<p>Increased understanding of diverse community assets and values</p> <p>Strengthened grounding for planning</p> <p>Increased awareness of the need for sustainability</p> <p>Increased interest and involvement in planning for sustainability</p>	<p>Number of community members inquiring about the project</p> <p>Number of community meetings about asset mapping</p> <p>Number of community members involved in the planning process</p> <p>Number of community members participating in meetings and workshops</p>	<p>Count of interviews with stakeholders and community members</p> <p>Count of public opinion forums to gain information about project acceptance with the communities</p>	<p><i>There were a total of five community planning sessions. Over 70 community leaders engaged.</i></p> <p><i>As well, we had five high schools participate in the community survey and distributed over 500 copies of the County Bridge</i></p>
<p>Increased understanding of the sustainability of the forest resource</p> <p>Strengthened interest in the asset diversity of the Upper St. John River Valley</p> <p>Creation of basis for planning and developing diverse utilization of the resource</p>	<p>Extent to which community members believe we need to manage our forests in a more sustainable way</p> <p>Ratio of community members begin to branch out in entrepreneurial business ventures such as non-timber forest products.</p> <p>Ratio of community members taking part in the development of diverse forest resource use and planning for sustainable business development</p>	<p>Interviews with stakeholders and community members</p> <p>Count of public opinion forums to gain information about project acceptance within the communities</p>	<p><i>There were many discussions around forest sustainability as part of the Asset mapping sessions.</i></p> <p><i>Project acceptance amongst participants was very high. The next phase will be a wider community response.</i></p>
<p>Increase knowledge on planning for sustainability through public meetings</p> <p>Creation of a new perspective on tracking and reporting based on environmental indicators</p> <p>An attitude shift towards ecologically-based planning</p> <p>Gain useful information for outreach</p> <p>Greater involvement by stakeholders and communities</p>	<p>Number of community members participating in public meetings related to the project.</p> <p>Effective system used for tracking and reporting project progress</p> <p>Number of new community members supportive of ecologically-based planning and the project process</p> <p>Number of inquiries for information regarding the project</p> <p>Level of interest in project planning and activities</p>	<p>Interviews with stakeholders and community members</p> <p>Count of public opinion forums to gain information about project acceptance within the communities</p> <p>Tracking of inquiries</p>	<p><i>There is an increased knowledge concerning planning for sustainability.</i></p> <p><i>Most important there is a feeling of capacity to take initiative and leadership on these issues.</i></p> <p><i>There is an attitude shift toward ecologically based planning and a deepening concern for stewardship</i></p> <p><i>Community leaders recognize the need to move agendas and to stimulate community involvement at all levels. Whether this be through formal or informal structures (governance models)</i></p>

Creation of a vision of the future (what it could be)	Number of community members participating in workshops and meetings	Count of participants	<i>Total numbers of participants (as indicated above) would be 70 in the sessions. Over 200 students and a reach of many more through invitations and distribution of the County Bridge</i>
Mobilization around the plan	Number of new working groups and planning sessions	Count of new working groups and planning sessions	<i>We have three working groups established in Perth, Hartland and Nackawick. We will monitor their developments over the next 12 months.</i>
Increase knowledge of the current built, social, and natural assets in the region	Extent to which it created potential as a building block towards future economic and ecological decision-making	Interviews with stakeholders and community members	<i>Feedback from participants indicated a better understanding of asset mapping and models for community governance</i>
Creation of comprehensive reporting	Extent of dissemination of information and resulting inquiries	Interviews with stakeholders and community members	<i>Dissemination includes a web presence, distribution of workshop results to participants, distribution of resources and a final report</i>
Growing interest in tools and practices	Level of interest in and/or active engagement in project activities	Interviews with stakeholders and community members	<i>There is interest in tools and resources. As the communities move forward they will access the Falls brook web site to determine which would be most helpful</i>
Widely accessible information	Number of inquires for information	Count of inquires	<i>Although we have not tracked the exact numbers there have been inquiries to Falls Brook for additional information, resources and tools.</i>

Impacts

It is likely to early to tell the long term benefits but in the short term there has been visible benefit to the communities and their leaders involved in the project. Giving citizens the opportunity to use an asset mapping process allows them a way to vision a better future and to build from what they have (asserts) as opposed to what they do not (deficits).

Dissemination of Results

The project has created a web presence for all files that were created. The web site is part of the Fall Brook site and has been promoted to the public as the place to gain additional information, archives, tools and resources as well as updates on current and future activities.

Our section on the Falls Brook Centre website:

www.fallsbrookcentre.ca/community/futureplanning.htm

Every region we visited will have its own section. These sections will contain a copy of the report of their workshop, the results from the student survey applying to their region (the data tables (excel doc) and the overall results for the school responses (word doc)).

Student surveys:

Participants from the champion meeting of Dec 14th asked us to gather youth inputs on their community assets which we did by carrying a survey targeting 12 grade students in five high schools from district 14 that includes. The district accepted the survey and we sent them out. There were 47 respondents at the Southern Victoria High in Perth-Andover, 30 respondents from Hartland Community School of Hartland, 70 respondents from Woodstock High in Woodstock, 142 surveys were sent to Carleton North Senior High of Bristol and 75 surveys were sent to Nackawic High, we are still waiting these results. This year had a tight timeframe because of all the canceled school days due to snow storms. The school district is more then willing to do a follow up and to join our project with some of what they are doing. We will be meeting with them in the near future to discuss the possibilities.

Processing information:

The following outlines the process we used for inviting participants to the community sessions.

Champion meeting:

There were 45 invitations sent out 31 by e-mail, 13 by post and 1 by fax. A follow up by telephone was made with each one of them. 15 of them said they would come and 14 actually came.

Participants from the initial champion meeting they provided us with a list of 64 champions for their home community from Nackawic to Perth-Andover. We have tried to make contact with all of them for the regional workshops. For some of them, we couldn't verify the contact information.

Nackawic:

Contact was made with some of the participants from previous Nackawic Community Sessions. It was decided that the meeting would include only 16 people. Each of the participants was chosen based on area, interest, background and potential to act. Their was representatives from Millville, Dumfries, Maple Ridge, Hawkins Corner, Upper Southampton, Rossville, Bear Island and Temperance Vale. 11 of them were invited by e-mail, 5 by telephone and a follow up by phone was made to confirm their participation. 12 people came to the meeting.

Hartland:

The Harland workshop was scheduled for March 5th, but due to a snow storm we moved it to March 19th. In the mean time Enterprise Carleton gave us some contact information for their region from their data base. They provided us with 105 names, telephone numbers and postal addresses for different municipalities, organizations and groups from which half of them were church related. We immediately sent out an additional 26 invitations with short notice. In overall, we have invited a total of 63 people, 36 by e-mail, 27 by post, one by fax and 3 by phone only; a follow up by phone was made to all invitees. Out of the 63, 15 of them said they would come to the March 19th workshop and 10 people actually attended the Hartland workshop.

Perth-Andover:

We have worked with Justine Waldeck from the Village of Perth-Andover to provide us with an additional 61 businesses and organization addresses. It was hard to get the telephone number to follow up and reach the right contact person. We invited 40 people from which 13 were by e-mail, 20 by post, 6 by telephone and one by fax. 20 confirmed their registration and 8 people participated to the workshop. Another meeting targeting business owners and operators was hosted at the same time in Perth-Andover.

Forest Festival: A celebration of assets in our region from people who are adding value to the forest resources, an Open House Day, attracted over 90 visitors and 12 presenters. Showcasing canoe builders, musical instruments, wild harvesters, arborists, green wood carvers, knife handle maker, and an Outdoor Survival instructor all turned up, food was served and the people came to visit and talk. Generally it was the first warm day of Spring and families came out and spent some hours talking, sharing and learning.

*****Getting in touch with potential participants is the most challenging part of the work. To assure participation a contact person and a number are needed to do telephonic follow up.***

The telephonic follow up is crucial because:

- -Most of the time the letter or e-mail doesn't get to the right contact person for an organization and we have to redirect the invitation to a different person.
- -People don't respond if they don't want to come.
- -If the person who receives the invitation can't come, they don't have the reflex of asking someone else from their organization to come.
- It is really hard to get the invitation to the person who will take time to look at it and that will have the initiative of taking it forward at a meeting for discussion and to delegate a representative from their organization.

General conclusion: the keystone issue in building sustainability is empowerment of communities to take responsibility for their own development and building the capacity for action. It is crisis (or the threat of crisis) which galvanizes action. This was laying a building block for the future. The wrap-up session identified the following direction for movement.

1. **Asset-mapping.** This project was just the beginning. There are many more assets to be identified and mapped. Only 4 asset mapping sessions were held in this time frame, as well as the extensive student surveys. Other communities in the region should be contacted. There was an agreement that this is a thrust that should continue.

2. **Tools/resources/role of FBC.** People seemed to want an inventory or a resource list based on asset-mapping of everything - businesses, organizations, locations of things...and it was suggested doing this by a map approach (eg grouping everything geographically by community instead of by function.) This could be developed by and through FBC.

Some made the point that the emergency preparedness/resilience approach was the "hook" to engage people in asset mapping because it is very specific and it directly touches peoples' lives. Some felt strongly that this would open the door to the larger issue of communities which are sustainable in every respect. The session participants understood that doing something that everyone recognizes as valuable is the way to build civic engagement. Strategic planning and visioning sessions have their place but they do not retain participants after the initial experience. Projects do.

3. **Forest Festivals:** People requested Forest Festivals in their area. "We need to be more resilient with what we have in our own region", "We must get back to learning some of the old skills" A group of University students from St. Thomas came out for the day and they were very excited to be doing hands on activities, learning to carve, how to build a canoe, or a birch bark lamp, it was clear that many young people have not been exposed to manual craftsman's skills and were thrilled by the exposure to actually creating something.

What are the chief lessons you have learned from the project?

In general, that there is a huge need to engage citizens and communities in planning for the future. The asset mapping opens the door to possibilities and it helps focus communities on a positive vision for the future. Too often we focus on deficits and this can lead to a sense of defeat and social melancholy.