

## **Project Description**

The Blue River Community Association wishes to apply for a Community Adjustment Fund grant through Western Economic Diversification. The intention is to put the forestry industry professionals in the region back to work, implementing the already approved Eight Peaks Winter Recreation Sustainable Resource Management Plan. Work will involve surveying, layout, harvesting, and silviculture treatments over the plan area. The anticipated outcomes of this exercise include but are not limited to the following:

- Development of new heli-ski terrain (ski trails and gladed);
- Development of new commercial recreation opportunities;
- Expanded opportunities for public recreation;
- Continued development, where appropriate, for cut blocks that can be used for snowmobiling;
- Development of winter recreation activities that will not have an impact on timber availability;
- Development of innovative forestry practices;
- Partnerships between forest licensees and recreation development proponents;
- Establishment of new First Nations businesses and business partnerships;
- Increased certainty for commercial operators to conduct viable activities;
- Economic growth from winter recreation founded in a healthy environment;
- Economic and social stability of the Blue River centred region.

The goal is to improve the area's backcountry recreation attributes, strengthening the region's winter tourism industry while complementing the sustained viability of the forest industry.

## **Background**

Blue River, British Columbia is a small town of approximately 250 residents.

Traditionally, the area's economy was based on the railways and the forest industry. CN Rail has largely relocated their operations elsewhere and the forest industry has been increasingly in decline.

More recently, with the highly reliable deep snowpack, Blue River's economy has significantly benefited from the growth of winter tourism.

The primary catalyst to winter tourism in the area came in 1974, when Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing (MWHS) established their resort in Blue River. They have progressively grown over the years to the point that they are now the biggest single based heli-skiing operation in the world. MWHS employ almost 180 people, making them the largest employer in the area. They provide their guests with some of the best skiing and snowboarding on the planet. MWHS are renowned for their excellence in operations, an unparalleled safety record and distinctive customer service. At the end of a day of powder skiing, the guests are returned to luxurious accommodations, dining and

amenities in a self-contained unique Heli-Village Resort. Currently, their helicopter skiing is offered within 4,500 square kilometers of tenured Crown land in the Cariboo and Monashee mountain ranges.

In recent years, interest in other backcountry recreation pursuits has increased around Blue River. This includes snowmobiling and ski touring. The participants range from local riders to destination tourists from out of Province. This has led to a diversification in the regional tourism economy. It has also created increasing competition for the land base in the backcountry to support both the well established heli-skiing and new recreation interests. Added to this, there are the acknowledged wildlife and environmental values that are taken into account in determining appropriate land use for recreation.

Collectively, with the helicopter skiing as a main stay, the additions of snowmobiling, ski touring and other interests are proving to be important elements in providing a balanced offering to the tourism marketplace. To do this in a sustainable fashion, all parties agree that a proactive well planned and coordinated approach to growth and operations are necessary to foster a prosperous regional economy well into the future.

### **The Eight Peaks Plan**

The Eight Peaks Winter Recreation Sustainable Resource Management Plan was initiated in 2002 with the key goal of establishing and maintaining winter recreation tourism through cooperative integration with an active forest industry.

Internal to the Plan, significant effort was put into the design and development of backcountry recreation in the area. Specific to heli-skiing, permanent ski trails and gladed tree skiing terrain were planned in close proximity to Blue River. The objective of this is to improve the reliability of skiing product on skiable terrain within easy striking distance to the MWHS Heli-Village and base facilities of Blue River. Once established, this will offer very significant operational and economic benefits based on quick access and egress to and from the skiing, increasing the capacity of the resort while reducing both helicopter ferrying times as well as concerns about being unable to fly due to adverse weather.

Complementing this, areas, trails and access for snowmobiling and backcountry touring have been taken into account and incorporated into the Plan.

More importantly, the Eight Peaks plans facilitate economic diversification between the tourism industry and the struggling forest industry. By working closely together, the two industries were able to establish methodologies to harvest the trees in a fashion that created “vertical cut blocks” and access, improving the skiing, snowmobiling and backcountry touring product while facilitating the logging...a true win/win scenario. This exercise initiated noteworthy benefits to the social and economic vitality of the Town of Blue River. For the future there are additional synergies to be created between tourism

and forestry that will lead to an expanded recreational infrastructure and regeneration of the forest.

In 2004, the Eight Peaks SRMP won an award for Overall Sustainability from the Fraser Basin Council.

Since that time, logging and forestry in the region has been in decline. While the Eight Peaks Plan is in place, unfortunately its implementation was hinged on a thriving forest industry in the area. The reduced amount of logging and road building has directly impacted on improvements and expansion of the heli-skiing and other backcountry recreation pursuits in the area. MWHS has undertaken several unilateral efforts to make improvements to the skiing in Eight Peaks, paying for the planning and logging of the new glades, ski runs, heliports and brushing existing cut blocks. However, without the forest companies' involvement, this has proven to be too costly an endeavor for a single operator to take on. As such, the implementation of the Eight Peaks Plan and the growth of the proposed sustainable tourism/forest industry in the Blue River and the region is in limbo.

In turn, the lack of growth in activities and improvements has had a very direct impact on the economic and social stability in Blue River. Limited recreation opportunities have created conflicts amongst user groups deteriorating a sense of community. Limited forest industry jobs have led to families leaving. In a downward spiral, the reduced population has had a negative impact on the maintenance of infrastructure and has resulted in a reduction of the social services. The quality of life in the Blue River is suffering.

### **Western Economic Diversification Application**

Given a Community Adjustment Fund grant, the proposal would be to engage the idle local forest industry professionals (planners, surveyors, fallers, etc.) from the entire North Thompson Valley and First Nations with the goal of reestablishing the logging programs within the Eight Peaks Plan. Because the forestry plan complements the backcountry tourism attractions of the area, this will have an immediate and direct effect on the variety and quality of those facilities. So, in addition to keeping the local forest industry professionals working, the tourism product offering will improve, leading to more jobs and stability in that industry as well.

Ideally this funding from this program will bridge the gap until such a time that there is a recovery in the demand for the area's forest products and the planned cuts and improvements can continue in a sustainable fashion on their own. Complementing this, the tourism and hospitality product will improve. Collectively this will provide a positive economic and social impact to Blue River and the surrounding region. It will also build economic development capacity within the Community Association, with the goal of improving the social services and quality of life for the area's residents.

## **Forestry Projects**

As per the Eight Peaks Plan, we propose the following projects:

1. Create permanent ski trails by logging the areas already planned for this type of improvement;
2. Regenerate poorly stocked forests for future timber harvest, planting trees in the predetermined areas while maintaining backcountry recreation terrain in the interim.
3. Create gladed areas for backcountry recreation;
4. Brush alder choked cut blocks for future timber harvest while maintaining backcountry recreation terrain in the interim.
5. Improve access for heli-skiing, snowmobiling and other backcountry recreation with the development of logging roads, trails, staging areas and heliports.

Based on this, approximately \_\_\_ jobs will be created in Blue River and the surrounding region over the course of 2009, 2010 and 2011. Funding is requested for the wages, fees and expenses as they relate to the implementation of the Eight Peaks Plan. This is estimated to total \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Summary**

In summary, the benefits of a Community Adjustment Fund grant to the Blue River Community Association will be significant. Specifically, this program would provide:

- Immediate employment for forestry professionals workers in Blue River and the North Thompson Valley;
- Development of innovative forestry practices;
- Partnerships between forest licensees and recreation development proponents;
- Development of an expanded and sustainable proactive recreational and tourism infrastructure that complements the long term viability of the forest industry;
- Development of winter recreation activities that will not have an impact on timber availability;
- Development of new commercial recreation opportunities;
- Expanded opportunities for public recreation;
- Reduced conflicts amongst backcountry recreation groups;
- Local capacity building in economic development and control over local resources;
- Opportunities for new First Nations businesses and business partnerships;
- Increased certainty for commercial operators to conduct viable activities;
- Economic growth for both winter recreation and forestry founded in a healthy environment;
- Increased tax base for the region;
- Economic and social stability for Blue River with the goal of achieving balanced sustained prosperity for the residents of the area.