

Economic Development Activities:

RRFDC ACTIVITY REPORT

December 2020

The RRFDC continued to move forward with the enhanced economic development project and “The Path Forward” action plan.

- Supported the Fort Frances Economic Development Office (FFEDO) with Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) meetings and numerous projects.

General

The RRFDC is leverages funds to support economic development working with NOHFC, FedNor and other government agencies.

Forestry

As discussed at last Council meeting the Boundary Waters Forest Management Corp. (BWPMC) now has the license to manage the local forest.

This will provide the Town and other stakeholders with greater transparency in determining available wood fibre supply. As Mike Willick described the first identified availability is tips and tops.

The RRFDC will execute an RFP in early 2021 to work with BWPMC to identify possible other unused supplies and create a plan to utilize that asset to grow jobs.

Boundary Waters Forest Management Corp.:

The Forest:

Crossroute and Sapawe Forests were amalgamated into the Boundary Waters Forest on April 1, 2020. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has transferred the Sustainable Forest Licence to BWPMC. The SFL is currently being amended and updated to reflect the BWPMC business plan.

The Company:

- BWPMC was incorporated in December of 2019 with 17 shareholders.
- A Board of Directors of 12 has been created:
 - 2 representing independent loggers: Don McCool, Blaine Degagne.
 - 1 representing Rainy Lake Tribal Resource Management Inc.: Gary Both.
 - 3 First Nation Representatives: Chief Brian Perrault (Couchiching), Glen Smith (Northwest Bay), Chief Will Windego (Red Gut).
 - 1 representing the Metis Nation: Brian Gouliquer.
 - 1 representing the white pine mills: Dale Kaemingh (Manitou Forest Products).
 - 2 representing the large consuming mills: Martin Kaiser (Resolute), Rick Ksiezopolski (Norbord).
 - 2 representing regional economic development agencies: Garry Mckinnon (AEDC), Mike Willick (RRFDC).
- M. Willick is the President and Chair
- All Board members have equal voting rights, except if there is a disagreement regarding financial matters, then the consuming mills (i.e. those who pay the bills) decide.
- Scot Rubin was hired in May as General Manager.
- BWPMC is now fully responsible for the management of the Boundary Waters Forest.

Boundary Waters Forest Management Corp. Cont...

Service Contracts:

- It is envisioned that BWPMC will eventually have a small staff of about 3 people, largely to provide oversight and management. Most work will be done through a series of contracts. 2020 is a transition year.
- BWPMC has entered into a service contract with Resolute whereby Resolute will provide forest management and road administrative services to BWPMC.
- BWPMC has entered into a service contract with RLTRMI whereby RLTRMI will provide basic field monitoring work on the Forest.
- BDO Canada in Fort Frances has been hired as the accounting firm.
- Clare Brunetta has been retained as legal counsel.
- The Fort Frances Royal Bank has been selected as the bank.
- Boundary Waters Financial Services has been contracted to provide bookkeeping services.

New Manufacturing/Wood Supply Inquiries

We have three inquiries in 2020 regarding small manufacturing opportunities tied to forest product development. We continue to work with any interested party as we endeavour to grow and diversify our economy.

Mining – Supply and Services

We continue to work closely with New Gold's material procurement manager in order to identify potential companies for locating in the District.

Planning

Fort Frances Shevlin Yard and Entry Planning Study

The RRFDC will work with the Town to find a tenant on the attraction designated lands and the appropriate commercial entity.

Mill Property Planning Project

In June 2020, Aazhogan Renewal and the Town of Fort Frances have agreed to work together to address anticipated planning and development requirements associated with the mill properties, most notably with amendments that may be required with the Town of Fort Frances Official Plan and the ambitions of Aazhogan Renewal.

The Town of Fort Frances and Aazhogan Renewal agreed to work together through a newly formed Fort Frances/ Aazhogan Renewal Planning Committee.

The Committee has applied via the RRFDC for funds to undertake a planning study that will help both the Aazhogan Renewal group and the Town agree on best usage of the properties.

December 2020

Tourism

MAT

www.FishingRainyLake.ca Promotion Summer 2020



Campaign AD Results:

Impressions: 754,930

Clicks: 4,113

Clickthrough rate: .54%

We hired BigClic a digital engagement agency with specific expertise in Northern Ontario and the fishing marketplace. The ads targeted “near Northwest” – Thunder Bay to Dryden and Kenora as well as the City of Winnipeg and near by rural markets. Specific targeting was used connect with visitors to larger fishing and hunting retailers.

Big Clic tracked mobile device IDs of our video/ AD audiences if they visit the attached conversion zones – all hotels, motels, marinas, boat launches in Fort Frances. The project concluded in October to good results and no in community transmission.



Winter 2020/21

A similar program excluding Manitoba will roll out in January 2021 to encourage a snowmobile “staycation” and building a stronger alliance between the accommodation and hospitality industry and the snowmobile club. The MAT committee will carefully work with the Province and local health authorities.

Signage

Replacement signage will be erected in this winter at the border, and to replace distressed signs to the east and west of our community.

Destination Fort Frances Website

A new website will launch in 2021 that will promote tourism activities.

Rainy Lake Market

The Rainy Lake Market in 2020 was certainly unlike any other in previous years. The RRFDC worked with the Northwestern Health Unit to create a “safe opening” for the market.

We gated the market to manage traffic within the square, set up a hand sanitizing station, and encouraged vendors and visitors to wear masks and remain 6 ft apart. Although the pandemic originally proved as a deterrent for many locals to visit the market, eventually, trust in our regulation succeeded to ease concerns and introduce more shoppers. Many shoppers commended the establishment of the market as it provided a sense of return to normalcy and a safe occasion to shop, interact with vendors, and enjoy live outdoor music.

Our diverse selection of vendors ranged from established farmers and growers, artisans, musicians, charity fundraisers, and children's stands. One positive result of the ongoing pandemic was being able to draw businesses and vendors from places such as Kenora and Thunder Bay. The Rainy Lake Market provided a safe locale for these vendors to sell when they were unable to do so in other areas.

Initially, our market opened modestly with three vendors and concluded with 16. However, during our peak we were hosting up to 20 vendors and occasionally needing to turn people away due to overcapacity and lack of tables. It is conceivable that we will be able to retain the partnerships we have developed with our newer vendors for future markets. The growth in popularity among vendors and customers is evident and the potential for further development is foreseeable.

Thankfully, due to our eager vendors and the support from locals it has been a phenomenally successful summer regardless.



Our 2020 vendors range from children's lemonade stands to seasoned growers and talented artists. Conceivably, the relationships we have established with them will continue on into future years, increasing the scale and diversity of our market. . Annie Van Rozen of AG's Produce, a vendor who has been involved since the inception of the Rainy Lake Market boasted that 2020 has been her most successful year thus far.

The potential for future markets once restrictions have lifted appears even greater as vendors noted their volume of customers and product turnover has drastically increased this year. One fortunate vendor even managed to sell his entire seasons inventory in a single day.

Shared Space

The Rainy Lake Square also became a shared space for local restaurants to use during a mid stage of COVID recovery.

December 2020

Go Local

In 2020 Go Local continued to expand and promote our membership program to residents of the Rainy River District.

This year we utilized our Facebook platform to broadcast live videos centered on safe shopping at Go Local affiliated businesses during COVID-19. Go Local merchants described the steps and measures they have taken to ensure customer safety as well as new requirements needed in order to shop at their locations. Our ad insights show that our reach for our posts and live videos exceed 2,300 viewers.

To encourage citizens to follow COVID-19 guidelines while shopping and thank loyal Go Local customers we created a \$5 gift card. These gift cards were handed to customers who followed all COVID-19 guidelines at Go Local locations.

This initiative was conducted in August, October and December.

The total Go Local points issued by merchants to date is 3,947,387. Go Local currently has 8,976 active card holders members and 1,396 Facebook followers.



Project Petunia

Thank you for those that have sponsored Project Petunia in 2020. New baskets were purchased to replace the 15-year-old ones originally bought by the Chamber of Commerce. An AD thanking all donors was put in the Fort Frances Times this Spring.

Reminder to anyone who wishes to purchase a basket for 2021 can contact us at the office and we will process that donation.

Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Support COVID

The RRFDC continues to support small and medium sized businesses in the District and report of those activities is outlined in our annual report which can be found at www.rrfdc.on.ca. This support includes one on one counselling and a loans fund to help existing and start-up ventures.

Loans

The last quarter of 2019/2020 saw the Covid-19 pandemic arrive. The RRFDC responded immediately once it was known that the government would be locking down area businesses. initiated Covid-19 loans of up to \$20,000 with repayments and interest suspended.

In May FedNor supported the region with \$882,373 in Regional Relief and Recovery Funding (RRRF) for loans up to \$40,000 interest free until December 31, 2022 with 25% forgiveness if repaid by that date.

The RRFDC has approved 49 loans related to the Covid-19 crisis, 23 at \$20,000 from our Investment Fund and 26 at \$40,000 from the RRRF.

In total 88 loans are in progress. 53 of these loans were to Fort Frances business owners. 38 businesses are tourism related, 62 are women led, 5 indigenous and 19 youth.

Programs

During this period the RRFDC also maintained (and maintains) a list of programs and services available to small and medium sized businesses to assist with COVID recovery.

Branding/Digital Marketing

The RRFDC continued the social media work to present the Town of Fort Frances on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. This was particularly important this Spring as we assisted in pushing out messages related to public safety measures.

Social and Digital Media Training

As we work internally to improve the digital and social footprint of our community, we have provided a number of training sessions for local small businesses to gain skills and develop their marketing on various social platforms. During COVID the RRFDC has worked with numerous small businesses assisting them in finding resources to move online.

Industrial Lot Sales

The RRFDC continues to work with administration assisting with lot sales. We had little activity on lots in the last two quarters and remind those interested in growing a business in Fort Frances that we have a limited amount of properties available to develop.

We did have a surprising number of inquiries for other industrial and commercial properties a number of which transferred for future development.

Agriculture

Land Clearing and Tile Drainage Projects

The RRFDC has facilitated the following tile drainage and land clearing projects with area producers and the NOHFC. These projects represent significant financial investments by the producers and the NOHFC.

- Land Clearing #1 - \$1,800,000 (100% Complete)
- Land Clearing #2 - \$1,700,000 (Ongoing)
- Tile Drainage #1 - \$1,971,300 (Completed)
- Tile Drainage #2 - \$1,971,310 (Completed)
- Tile Drainage #3 - \$1,971,880 (Completed)
- Tile Drainage #4 - \$1,962,000 (Complete)
- Tile Drainage #5 - \$1,962,000 (Approved)
- Tile Drainage #6 - \$1,962,000 (Approved)
- Tile Drainage #7 – In the application process

Land Clearing

The land clearing projects are a direct benefit to the District as all producer and NOHFC investment dollars will go to local contractors who undertake the land clearing. These contractors hire employees, maintain and purchase much of their equipment locally.

Tile Drainage

Once all the tile projects have been completed the District will have approximately 11,618 acres of tiled cropland. The projects have significantly diversified the area's agricultural economy through the growing of canola, soybeans, wheat, and oats which has dramatically increased the economic benefits of the sector to Fort Frances and the District.

- Total investment in tiling:
- $11,618 \times \$1,300/\text{acre cost Average} = \$15,103,400$
- NOHFC Investment $11,618 \times \$500/\text{acre} = \$5,908,000$
- **Producer** investment = \$9,195,400
- Plus additional **producer** investments in buildings, storage bins, machinery and employees. (Estimated Investment of \$5,000,000)