



## News Release

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*For immediate release*

### **COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP KEY TO HELPING COMMUNITIES DEAL WITH MOUNTAIN PINE BEETLE**

*Edson, June 19th, 2007* – The Grande Alberta Economic Region (GAER) is calling for increased resources, collaboration and partnerships with government and industry to help its communities meet the challenges presented by the spread of the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) in Alberta’s pine forests.

In its report *The Economic, Social and Environmental Costs of the Mountain Pine Beetle in the Grande Alberta Economic Region: Towards Transformation* ([www.grandealberta.com/mountain-pine/reports.htm](http://www.grandealberta.com/mountain-pine/reports.htm)), GAER says the MPB poses both serious risks and great opportunities for its forest-dependant communities. It says collaborative planning, capacity building and skills and resource development must take place now if these communities are to be able to adapt and meet the beetle challenge head on. “The key is to create the collaborations, partnerships and capacity needed to adapt to the preferred future chosen by citizens in GAER communities.”

GAER has concluded Phase Two of its Mountain Pine Beetle Initiative. With financial support from Community Future’s Rural Community Economic Development (RCED) Fund, the Grande Alberta Economic Region asked Cambridge Strategies Inc. (CSI) to help develop a strategy to ensure its constituent communities can respond effectively to the arrival of the Mountain Pine Beetle in Alberta. This document is a part of that process and represents work completed in the second phase of this initiative.

The initiative is focused upon developing community resilience, economic diversity and sustainable, vibrant futures in the face of MPB infestation. GAER Chairperson Glenn Taylor, the Mayor of Hinton, says this long-term sustainability hinges upon cooperation between communities, citizens, governments and the private sector. “Without proper planning, a number of forest-dependant communities in this region could be hit hard. In the long-term, traditional forestry jobs could be lost and there could be economic slowdowns. The government and industry are focusing well on environmental and economic concerns related to the beetle. We want to make sure the socio-economic concerns of communities and citizens are included as well.”

The report details three recommendations. The first is to build capacity with GAER; to make sure the region has enough people, enough money and the right technology to help it diversify and prosper.

The second recommendation is to ensure communities have enough of the resources necessary to adapt on a timely and effective basis. This includes the creation of a “Pine Beetle Community Sustainability Fund”, to make sure communities can access money towards projects and programs which would help their community adapt and diversify in the wake of beetle impacts on their communities. It also includes a call for “immediate and significant funding”, out of the Alberta Sustainability Fund, for on-going projects to mitigate short- and medium-term MPB related concerns. “This fund should supplement emergency funding already in place for the pine beetle”.

The third recommendation is to ensure communities have appropriate emergency fire protection. The threat of forest fires to communities grows as beetles leave dead and dying pine in their wake. The report says the province must “ensure the forested lands surrounding GAER communities are managed in such a way as to reduce the chances that fires in pine-beetle infested wood will threaten communities.” And it says emergency response plans must be reviewed and updated to ensure appropriate measures, such as local evacuation plans, are in place.

The Mountain Pine Beetle is going to transform Alberta’s forests, but, GAER’s report says there is time for forest-dependant communities to adapt and prepare for the impacts the beetle will have on their economies and related social infrastructures. This adaptation, it says, will depend upon “community input into the design, development and deployment of plans for a preferred future. And it depends upon cooperation and collaboration between communities, the governments that serve them, individual citizens, and the private sector.”

The full text of the report and executive summary can be viewed on GAER’s MPB webpage (<http://www.grandealberta.com/mountain-pine>).

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## *Backgrounder*

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The Grande Alberta Economic Region (GAER) is an economic development partnership of thirteen communities and one associate member in west central Alberta with a mission to “work collaboratively to promote and enhance our region’s unique and diverse opportunities.” The region extends from Onoway in the east to Grande Cache, the municipality of Jasper and Jasper National Park in the west. The southern boundaries include Brazeau County, Drayton Valley, and Yellowhead County. Central municipalities include Edson, Hinton, Sangudo, Mayerthorpe and Whitecourt, while its northern counterparts include Fox Creek, and Woodlands County. The region extends 90 kilometers south of the Yellowhead Highway (Hwy 16) and 75 km north of the Alaska Highway (Hwy 43). The population of the region is over 68,000.

In the past two years, GAER has completed extensive research that provides the platform necessary to action its 2005-2009 business plan. A regional business directory, regional economic profile, a website and marketing materials have been completed. As well, research has been undertaken in the areas of tourism development, value-added forestry, value-added agriculture and energy. GAER has engaged in a very successful process of board and organizational development, which includes the establishment of performance measures which are tracked monthly and annually.

GAER is currently developing an implementation plan to action the ‘Regional Tourism Development Strategy’. This strategy will assist in increasing the region’s tourism capacity and address GAER’s core business of economic diversification. Also, just recently completed is the ‘Investment Opportunity Identification Study’ for the Energy Sector which explores the possibility of regional diversification in oil, gas, coalbed methane and coal. GAER is also determining its role in addressing the skilled and unskilled labour challenges facing our communities.

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