



Northern Ontario Sustainable Communities Partnership

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PRESS RELEASE

The Northern Ontario Sustainable Communities Partnership's (NOSCP) workshop, "Community Forests: A Tenure Reform Option for Community Sustainability in Northern Ontario" was judged a resounding success. The two-day workshop (March 4-5th) involved an unprecedented number of First Nations communities and may have been the first time that so many First Nations have met with other northern residents in the same room to talk about the common forest land that we share. About 120 delegates participated, representing 21 First Nations communities, local municipalities, Local Citizens Committees, students and academics, environmental non-governmental organizations, the forest industry and unions. The workshop was also web-streamed on KNET. The purpose was to discuss how local communities might gain more control over decision-making about the stewardship of our northern Ontario forests.

Speakers shared experiences about models of community forestry and relationship-building from across Ontario and Quebec. Delegates learned about Quebec's recent establishment of Regional Commissions to decentralize decision-making about forest management; the Town of Kenora and Grand Council Treaty #3's Common Ground Initiative involving joint management of a historic site near Kenora; Parry Sound's Westwind Forest and how it has built a structure to promote community involvement; and an initiative by Chiefs in the northeast to change the management of the Chapleau Game Preserve based on traditional teachings. Delegates also learned from the community forest pilot project which ran in Ontario from 1991-1995 from the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and experiences with the Geraldton Community Forest, Wikwemikong First Nation on Manitoulin Island and the Elk Lake Community Forest in northeastern Ontario.

On the final day of the workshop all participants broke into discussion groups based on the treaty area in which they live. The concept arose out of sentiments at the workshop that "we are all treaty people" who need to revive the spirit and intent of treaties to share lands and resources. Many delegates, from both First Nations and municipalities, acknowledged that the exercise to embrace the treaties as the basis of a working partnership was inspirational and affirming.

NOSCP will develop a discussion paper reflecting the outcomes of the workshop as the next step to coming up with concrete proposals for how to diversify forest tenure in northern Ontario through community forests. All presentations and the discussion paper, once developed, will be uploaded to NOSCP's website at <http://www.gcf-on.ca/noscp>.

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