

A Proposal to Create a Regional 'Beetle Action Coalition' for the Southern Interior of BC

What is a Beetle Action Coalition?

A Beetle Action Coalition (BAC) is a regional coalition of communities and organizations that have banded together in order to develop regional mitigation strategies in response to the MPB epidemic.

Why a Beetle Action Coalition for the Southern Interior Region?

Many communities in southern interior of B.C. have expressed concern about the impacts the MPB epidemic will have on their communities. As a result, leaders from several southern interior communities felt that the southern interior should form a regional BAC similar to the two existing Beetle Action Coalitions in the province - the Cariboo–Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition (CCBAC) and the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC). These BACs have received federal and provincial MPB funding to develop regional MPB mitigation strategies for their respective regions.

The creation of the Southern Interior Communities MPB Working Group

In the spring of 2006, a small group of mayors, regional district directors and First Nations' leaders began meeting in Merritt to discuss how to initiate the formation of a Southern Interior Mountain Pine Beetle Communities "Beetle Action Coalition". The group recognized that the southern interior region was a large and diverse geographical area. The group also recognized that not enough information was available to determine which individual communities within the southern interior might be most impacted by the MPB epidemic.

As a result, the group agreed that all the Regional Districts and Tribal Councils in the southern interior region (a region extending from Princeton and Lillooet; to the northern portions of the TNRD and everything south of Highway 1 to the Alberta border) should be invited to participate in a Working Group that would guide the establishment of a more permanent BAC for the region. Given the southern interior context it was also agreed that the group would need to complete some initial research and analysis to support the preparation of a full formal proposal to the Provincial Government seeking endorsement and funding for a southern interior BAC.

Invitations to join the Working Group were circulated during the summer and early fall of 2006. Each of the nine southern interior Regional Districts was asked to contribute \$5000 to help finance the work of the Working Group. These funds subsequently leveraged a \$50,000 initial contribution from the provincial and federal governments to assist the Working Group in preparing a full BAC funding proposal.

SICMPBWG Member Organizations & Steering Committee

- **Central Okanagan Regional District** (*Patty Hanson*);
- **Columbia Shuswap Regional District** (*Rhona Martin*);
- **Community Futures Development Corp. of Central Interior First Nations** (*Geri Collins*);
- **Kootenay Boundary Regional District** (*Bill Baird*);
- **Lillooet Tribal Council**;
- **Nicola Tribal Association** (*Arnold Lampreau*);
- **North Okanagan Regional District** (*Eric Foster*);
- **Okanagan Nation Alliance** (*Mickey Werstuik*);
- **Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District** (*Randy Mclean*);
- **Regional District of Central Kootenay** (*Marc Septav*);
- **Regional District of East Kootenay** (*Rob Gay*);
- **Squamish Lillooet Regional District** (*Christ'l Roshard*);
- **Shuswap Tribal Council** (*Keith Matthew*); and
- **Thompson Nicola Regional District** (*Sally Watson*).

The SICMPBWG continues to seek representation from the remaining First Nations within the southern interior. The interim Chair of the Steering Committee is Mr. David Laird, Mayor of Merritt.

The Recommendations of the Southern Interior Communities MPB Working Group

The SICMPB Working Group has been working for the past six months to scope out the need and potential role of a southern interior BAC. The Working Group prepared a Request for Proposals and selected and commissioned a consulting company to complete some initial research and analysis work. The results of this analysis and recommendations are contained in a report titled “Phase 1 Report” written by a team of consultants led by Cirque Resources Consulting. The report conducted a preliminary analysis of the potential impacts of the MPB epidemic on the southern interior region. The major conclusions and recommendations of the report included:

- There is general support for the creation of a regional Beetle Action Coalition for the southern interior region.
- The range of knowledge and concern about the potential impacts of the MPB epidemic vary considerably across the southern interior. A southern interior BAC should consider MPB related communications and education as part of its mandate.
- Among the major MPB related issues/concerns identified were potential decreases in future mid-term timber supply; subsequent closure of mills and loss of jobs and industrial tax base; impacts of the MPB epidemic on other economic sectors (e.g. tourism and agriculture); impacts of the MPB epidemic on habitat, recreation and wildlife; and hydrological changes and impacts. In addition to these concerns, First Nations are extremely concerned about the cultural and ecosystem impacts of the MPB epidemic on their traditional territories.
- The consultants have recommended more research and analysis to determine potential MPB impacts on future mid-term timber supply. Generally, however, the greatest potential timber supply impacts will be felt in those Timber Supply Areas (TSAs) with the highest percentage of pine forests – namely the Lillooet, Merritt, Cranbrook, Invermere and Kamloops TSAs.
- From a purely forestry economic perspective, communities in the above TSAs are likely to experience the most direct economic impact. However other communities may also experience other impacts related to the MPB epidemic. Further socio-economic analysis research and work is required.
- It must be recognized that the MPB epidemic is perceived quite differently by First Nations. First Nations are concerned about the overall impacts the MPB epidemic will have on the capacity of MPB impacted territories to sustain social & cultural traditions in addition to the economic impacts.
- A recommendation that the SICMPB Working Group design and complete a much broader public consultation process to allow for extensive stakeholder and public input into the focus and work of a permanent southern BAC.

Next Steps

Based on the work completed to date the SICMPB Working Group feels that the need and support for the creation of a regional Southern Interior BAC has been confirmed. More research and public discussion is required to refine the ongoing activities of the BAC but the Working Group needs additional financial resources to conduct this work. As a result the Working Group is preparing an application to the Provincial Government seeking establishment and funding of a Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition (SIBAC). It is proposed that once it is approved the SIBAC will focus on completing three major activities during the first six months of its operation:

1. Complete two major background research reports for the southern interior – a Forest Sector Analysis Report and a MPB Socio-Economic Analysis Study.
2. Undertake a series of discussion forums in communities throughout the southern interior region in order to gain stakeholder and community input on issues of concern regarding the MPB epidemic.
3. Use the information obtained from the two above steps to develop a detailed operational workplan for the Southern Interior BAC.

More Information If you would like more information please contact one of the Steering Committee members or the Interim Chair, David Laird at 250-378-4224.