

## SUMMARY

A group of opinion leaders from North-Western BC were invited by the MP for the Skeena-Bulkley Valley riding, Nathan Cullen, to attend a weekend retreat in September, 2009 to flesh out viable alternatives to current economic development thinking. They were challenged to create a community-oriented vision for the future and to devise ways to evaluate whether future development activities would be consistent with this vision. Funding for the retreat was provided by the Driftwood Foundation.

Visioning exercises, case studies, story-telling, and appreciative inquiry were used to help build deeper understanding amongst participants and a common vision about the future. The status quo vision of the future included concerns about lack of local control of local resources, failure to recognize and capture the full potential of human and natural capital in the region, and worsening environmental conditions leading to longer and deeper economic downturns, environmental degradation, an exodus of human resources, and fewer cultural opportunities. The positive vision of the future was characterized by political and business leaders who had a well developed lens on sustainability, an influx of skilled workers and new perspectives, economic, ecological, and cultural diversity, innovative community leaders, a sense of pride and self-determination at the community level, abundant economic and social opportunities and services, and the use of a comprehensive array of indices to measure prosperity and well being.

It was suggested that an agency might need to be formed to help development proponents and other organizations determine whether proposed initiatives were likely to be sustainable and consistent with the broader vision for the region. There was considerable discourse about whether such an agency would act in an advisory capacity or as a certification body, what relationship it would have to existing agencies, appropriate governance structure, funding mechanisms, etc. There was a sense that the model was a good one and that there were enough skilled individuals in the region to offer credible and valuable service.

Looking forward, the group concluded that the work they began at the retreat needed to be continued. Some of the tasks they identified included:

- potentially expanding the group to obtain broader representation.
- developing a mission statement, governance structure, and roles for members.
- working with related initiatives to identify synergies.
- developing an initial evaluation protocol on sustainability.
- meeting with communities in the region to provide information about the initiative and to seek their input and support.
- evaluating a project proposal to test the evaluation protocol, find ways to add value to the process for development proponents and regulatory agencies, and to help focus the group's work.
- hosting a regional forum to launch the agency and engage a broader audience.

During closing comments, it was evident that there was a sense of optimism about the future of Northwest B.C. There was common understanding and intent, significant strides were made towards developing a credible set of metrics about sustainability, and substantial progress was made in answering the question "what future do we want to create".