

SUMMARY ACHIEVEMENTS REPORT:
SIBAC MPB ASSESSMENT &
MITIGATION PLAN



ADVANCING RURAL DEVELOPMENT

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide a summary report of SIBAC's major activities and initiatives from 2010 to 2015 as they relate to the recommendations made by SIBAC in its 2009 MPB Assessment & Mitigation Plan that was submitted to the provincial government.

Since its inception, SIBAC has continually completed and circulated a number of Progress Reports. These various reports were circulated to the SIBAC member organizations and then posted on the SIBAC website, where they are still available (please see the SIBAC Accomplishment & Progress Reports tab at www.sibacs.com/sibac-reports).

With the adoption of a new SIBAC Strategic Plan for 2016-2018, the SIBAC Board felt it was timely to prepare a final summary report that outlined SIBAC's achievements against the original recommendation made in SIBAC's MPB Assessment & Mitigation Report.

BACKGROUND

In 2006, a small group of concerned local government and First Nations leaders gathered in Merritt to discuss the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic and its potential impacts on BC Southern Interior communities. These initial discussions ultimately led to the creation of the Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition (SIBAC).

The Southern Interior Beetle Action Coalition is a member based, incorporated non-profit society. The SIBAC Board is comprised of one representative from each of its founding member organizations:

- Central Okanagan Regional District
- CFDC of Central Interior First Nations (CFDC-CIFN)
- Lillooet Tribal Council
- North Okanagan Regional District
- Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District
- Regional District of East Kootenay
- Shuswap Nation Tribal Council
- Ktunaxa Nation Council
- Columbia Shuswap Regional District
- Kootenay Boundary Regional District
- Nicola Tribal Association
- Okanagan Nation Alliance
- Regional District of Central Kootenay
- Squamish Lillooet Regional District
- Thompson Nicola Regional District
- Nlaka'pamux Nation Tribal Council

From 2006 to 2009, SIBAC received funding from the federal and provincial governments to research the potential forest sector, environmental, economic, and social impacts of the mountain pine beetle epidemic, and to develop recommendations for the provincial government on ways to mitigate these impacts.

SIBAC used this funding to complete research and prepare a number of detailed studies that examined the forest sector, projected MPB timber supply impacts, and provided socio-economic trend analysis for the southern interior. SIBAC also completed an extensive public consultation process with residents and organizations in the Southern Interior.

SIBAC's research demonstrated the impacts of the MPB epidemic would be inherently complex and would play out over an extended period of time, over many decades. The research indicated the MPB

epidemic would not only cause changes in the forest sector, but would also create challenges for other users of the land base. For First Nations, concerns about the impacts of the epidemic on their traditional uses within their territories were particularly acute.

In terms of predicting the economic impacts of the MPB epidemic, SIBAC's research recognized these impacts would occur within the larger context of longer-term economic trends in the Southern Interior. While many of the larger communities were growing and diversifying economically, others were not. What became clear was that many of the much smaller rural communities in the Southern Interior had been struggling economically for years, and the MPB epidemic simply created additional challenges.

The final result of this extensive research and public consultation process was the SIBAC MPB Assessment & Mitigation Plan report completed and submitted to the Provincial Government in October 2009.

In response to SIBAC's Mitigation Plan report submission, the Provincial Government provided \$3 million in funding to SIBAC. The Province provided the funding on the understanding it would last at least three years, and would be directed toward developing and funding projects that addressed the priority recommendations in the SIBAC MPB Assessment & Mitigation Plan.

From 2010 to 2015, SIBAC worked diligently to develop and/or fund projects and initiatives that addressed the issues and recommendations outlined in the SIBAC MPB Mitigation Plan. In some instances, SIBAC provided the funding and external partners managed the projects. In other cases, SIBAC designed, funded, and led initiatives and projects itself. Since its inception, SIBAC has provided over \$2 million in funding to over 100 rural development projects.

ACTIONS & ACHIEVEMENTS ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN SIBAC'S MPB ASSESSMENT & MITIGATION PLAN

The final SIBAC MPB Assessment & Mitigation Plan made 24 specific recommendations grouped under six major theme areas.

This Report provides a summary description of the major activities, initiatives and projects SIBAC led, supported, or funded to address these 24 major recommendations. The Report is structured to provide a summary discussion of the major issues under each of the theme areas to provide the reader some context for the original recommendations; the original recommendations themselves; and brief summaries of SIBAC's major activities and projects in response to these recommendations.

Some of SIBAC's MPB Plan recommendations called for direct provincial government action that was beyond SIBAC's ability to control. In these cases, we have simply provided a summary discussion if we are aware of any government action to date on these recommendations.

Theme One: Environmental Impacts and Recommendations

During its public consultations, SIBAC heard a variety of concerns over the potential environmental impacts of the MPB epidemic. The major environmental concerns that were consistently raised by the general public in the community forums included:

- The potential for increased flooding.
- The potential for lower groundwater recharging rates than historically observed.
- The potential for negative impacts on water quality.
- The implications for existing drinking water infrastructure and flood control infrastructures maintained by local and First Nation governments.
- The potential impacts on wildlife and fish as a result of changes to local aquatic and forested ecosystems.
- The impacts of increased levels of MPB salvage and clear-cut harvesting and road construction on ecosystems and wildlife health and tourism and recreation values.
- The aesthetic and visual quality impacts of both the MPB epidemic itself (i.e. large tracks of dead pine trees), and of increased MPB salvage harvesting.

As a result, SIBAC made four recommendations under this theme area.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 1 – That the Province work with communities and First Nations to assess and mitigate watersheds at high risk for water quality problems due to the MPB epidemic.

It was recommended that the Ministry of Environment work with the UBCM, Interior Health, local governments and First Nations to identify consumptive watersheds at high risk for water quality problems, erosion, or flooding as a result of the MPB epidemic. There is a need to assess numerous watersheds that are used for consumptive purposes. Once high-risk watersheds are identified, the Province and Federal Government will need to provide funding for the completion of mitigation plans for major MPB at-risk community watershed areas.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC’s major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Kettle River Watershed Management Plan (2010)** The Kettle River had been experiencing increasingly significant pressures — in 2009, the River was ranked #2 on the BC Endangered Rivers list by the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC. In addition to then-current pressures, there was significant uncertainty about the impacts climate change, the mountain pine beetle epidemic, and other environmental factors might have on the Kettle River drainage and those that rely on it. This project was intended to design a strategic framework and action plan for the completion of a comprehensive watershed management plan for the entire Kettle River Drainage.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Similkameen Watershed Water Quantity and Quality Sustainability Plan (2012)** The main goal of this project was to develop and implement a Sustainable Resource Management Plan for the Similkameen Valley Watershed. The project included production of a valley-wide management program. SIBAC funding was used

specifically for the completion of Phase 1, a study examining the forest cover of the catchment, and impact to the watershed.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 2 –That the Province should complete an MPB management and salvage strategy for each TSA in the Southern Interior.

Given the complex nature and importance of MPB related issues, SIBAC believed a strategic and integrated management response was essential. SIBAC believed that an MPB management and salvage strategy for each of the 11 TSAs in the Southern Interior was a key mitigation tool. Strategies would require stakeholder and public input, and needed to be developed through multi-agency collaboration to ensure that plans were implemented effectively and captured all key values. At a minimum, SIBAC believed these strategies should identify MPB- and TSA-specific management issues and strategies that addressed biodiversity, critical habitat maintenance, wildlife, fauna, hydrology, visual impact management, wildfire hazard reduction, access management, silviculture, timber supply and salvage development objectives.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC’s major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Secwepemc Cultural Use in MPB Stands Pilot Project Pilot Project (2009)** This project provided information and inventory use within MPB stands within the Secwepemc territory. The project enhanced the cultural information necessary in the administrative/operational decision-making process by the Secwepemc communities in determining strategic objectives for effective management of the MPB within their territory.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the SIBAC Salvage Strategy Viewer Tool Pilot Project (2010)** This pilot project featured a practical application of the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) viewer tool developed for the Cascades Forest District as a result of a previous Mountain Pine Beetle Division initiative. In this project, the viewer tool was used to develop a salvage strategy for the Merritt TSA, using the latest resource data (e.g., harvest plans, retention areas, and archaeological information) from the Nicola Similkameen Innovative Forestry Society to better understand fibre availability and strategic location.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Coldwater River Watershed Eco Health and Ecosystem Restoration Workshop (2011)** The Coldwater River watershed has been subjected to a number of impacts from various developments, accelerated by the Mountain Pine Beetle epidemic. This workshop created awareness and understanding and served as a call to action to consider water and natural resources in all actions. The two-day workshop was coordinated by the Coldwater Indian Band and Fraser Basin Council, and was held in Merritt October 19 and 20, 2011.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Non-Timber Forest Resource Forum (2012)** Splotsin First Nation coordinated a two-day workshop bringing together all interested Non-Timber Forest Resource (NTFR) practitioners, business owners, industry, First Nations, and federal and provincial representatives in the Southern Interior. The purpose of the workshop was to build awareness to NTFR economic, cultural, regulatory opportunities and challenges with respect to current and future policy and practises. The proposed workshop outcome was to develop the Terms of Reference for a province-wide policy working group on NTFR.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Comprehensive Forestry Plan for the Northern St’at’imc Territory (2015)** SIBAC provided funding to the Lillooet Tribal Council for the creation of a comprehensive forestry plan for the northern St’at’imc territory.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 3 – That the Provincial and Federal Governments should examine potential flooding risks in communities.

There was a fear the MPB epidemic could change the timing and volume of water during the freshet period, and increase the generation of debris torrents over historical levels, leading to increased flooding risks in some communities. In communities in which these flooding risks existed, new investments may be needed to prevent flooding.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC’s major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Mountain Pine Beetle and Water Management Workshop (2009)**
In response to growing concern regarding the potential impacts on water resources in the Southern Interior due to the MPB infestation, SIBAC participated in the delivery of a MPB and Water Management Workshop held in Kelowna June 2, 2009. There were 79 participants.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the City of Kimberley Watershed Assessment (2010)**
This project involved a study of the hydrologic flows from Kimberley and Lois Creeks, the combined flows below their confluence (Mark Creek), and developed mitigation options to address potential flooding.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 4 – That the Ministry of Environment regularly update communities on major actions the Ministry is undertaking in response to the MPB epidemic.

The Ministry of Environment should produce and circulate an annual update to communities and First Nations on the major actions the Ministry is undertaking in response to the MPB epidemic. SIBAC recognized that the specific units of the Ministry of Environment were undertaking various initiatives in response to the MPB epidemic. However, SIBAC did not believe the public was well informed regarding those activities. Since the environmental impacts of the MPB epidemic were a significant public concern in the Southern Interior, SIBAC suggested that enhanced communication from the Ministry of Environment was required.

This recommendation required direct provincial government action.

SIBAC notes that the Provincial Government did produce a series of reports and documents describing provincial government action on the MPB epidemic including: the [Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan 2006-2011 \(PDF, 1.5MB\)](#); [Progress Report on Mountain Pine Beetle Action Plan, 2008 \(PDF, 1.5MB\)](#); the Final Report from the [Special Committee on Timber Supply](#); and the Government’s response: [Beyond the Beetle: A Mid-Term Timber Supply Action Plan \(PDF\)](#).

Theme Two: Forest Sector Impacts and Recommendations

SIBAC member organizations, stakeholder groups, and the general public expressed numerous concerns about provincial forest policy generally, and about potential forest-sector impacts from the MPB epidemic. The forestry related concerns most consistently raised included:

- Entrepreneurs often have difficulty acquiring tenure to timber and logging, and as a result they lack the security required to leverage the capital necessary for expansion or new business formations.
- Removal of appurtenances had impacted rural communities.
- Understanding the relationship of land use and tenure issues with respect to MPB salvage and timber supply.
- The need for improved understanding and definition of emerging opportunities for the utilization of biomass – specifically, the determining of thresholds associated with volume over time, cost of acquisition and processing, potential end product applications, and financing.
- Need for silviculture investments targeting rehabilitation of MPB-affected stands and second-growth stands in order to address potential mid-term timber supply issues.
- Need for other land base investments targeting rehabilitation of non-timber values (i.e. watersheds, wildlife) and species diversity in reforestation, including the use of deciduous timber.
- Understanding the mid-term timber supply impacts associated with harvesting and not harvesting MPB impacted stands.
- The impact that the ACC uplifts in northern BC and the associated MPB-related reduced stumpage rates for the North were having on the stumpage rates in southern BC and the associated Southern Interior forest sector.

As a result, SIBAC made five recommendations under this theme area.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 5 – That the Province should continue to seek methods that maximize value from the timber supply through Innovation, partnering and access to fibre.

It was recommended the Province continue to investigate any and all opportunities for use of dead and dying pine within the SIBAC TSAs, including undertaking inventory assessments, fibre cost analyses and economic potential assessment, and the development of a proposed means of access or tenure. Also, SIBAC recommended the Province support access to fibre for new business entries, and promote collaboration amongst licensees and those looking to access fibre. SIBAC also urged the Province to examine the impact of the MPB timber pricing on the stumpage “waterbed” to ensure the Southern Interior forest sector was not negatively impacted.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC’s major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Princeton Bioenergy and Residual Fibre Use Pilot Project (2008)**
This project established a business case for forest bioenergy and other bio-product commercial and semi-commercial facilities in Princeton, BC, and where feasible integrated with the existing forest industry. Through the project, linkages and partnerships were developed that facilitated additional investment in existing facilities.

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Lillooet Pellet Plant Business Plan Pilot Project (2009)** SIBAC provided funding to the Lillooet Tribal Council for the completion of a feasibility and business plan report on a wood pellet plant in Lillooet.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Bridges I Project** This project had two major objectives; (i) to develop information and tools that would facilitate movement of fibre from community forests to the value-added sector, and (ii) to identify potential supply chain business opportunities that would benefit community forests, value-added producers, and/or rural communities in BC.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Green Heat Initiative (2010)** SIBAC partnered with the Cariboo-Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition to contribute funding to explore biomass energy opportunities. Specifically, the projects major objectives were to expand knowledge of the potential for biomass energy development, and to provide direct free assistance to communities and organizations to assist them in completing feasibility analysis of biomass energy heating projects.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Log & Timber Frame Building Sector Expansion Study (2010)** This project completed research and a series of studies and documents to help identify new and expanding market opportunities for BC's log home and timber frame building sector. The project also completed some new and unique insulation and wind penetration testing on log walls; that was extremely useful to the industry in proving their abilities to meet new international and domestic building code requirements.
- ❖ **Providing funding for a Bio-energy feasibility study – Cranbrook (2010)** This project the identified socio-economic benefits including jobs and tax revenue, as well as carbon impact associated with bio-energy opportunities in the Cranbrook TSA.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the St. Mary's Band Biomass District Heating Project (2012)** The St. Mary's Band installed the first phase of a biomass thermal district heating system in conjunction with the construction of a new school facility. The system will be scalable to allow for the next stage of capital expenditures and retrofits for the community's existing public administration buildings.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Wood Waste to Heat in Rural Communities Project** This multi-BAC project had three primary objectives: (i) to work with small tenure holders in nine areas of the province to help them understand the financial opportunities of supplying bio-energy fuels to regional bio-energy users; (ii) to actively assist with the business planning and development of at least nine wood biomass heating systems in the interior of BC; and (iii) to work with CFDCs and other lending and funding organizations to help them better understand the regional business development opportunities of the bio-energy sector in their regions.
- ❖ **Providing the funding for a Lardeau Valley forestry inventory - investors package and template (2012)** This project aimed to provide an investors package, including a forest resources and amenities inventory, in order to attract investment to the Lardeau Valley in the North Kootenay, a region that had lost a local sawmill in the previous year. This investors package could serve as a template for other small, rural communities facing similar challenges due to forest industry decline.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Bridges II Project (2012)** Building on the success of the Bridges I Project, the Bridges II Project featured intensive work in three sub-regions of the MPB epidemic zone, with the intention of creating greater collaboration between small tenure holders, with the

goal of deriving enhanced value from regional fibre supply as encouraged in the *Bridges* regional consultations.

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Dutch Lake Community Centre Biomass Heating System (2014)**
SIBAC provided funding support to assist the District of Clearwater to install a chip fuelled biomass heating system at the recently acquired Dutch Lake School (now known as the Dutch Lake Community Centre). Expected net savings in energy costs are \$20,000.00 per year based upon the Business Plan completed by David Dubois through the Wood Waste 2 Rural Heat Project

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 6 – That the Province should ensure land-based investments (silviculture) continue and cover the entire land base.

Opportunities for MPB timber supply mitigation were implemented throughout the province through the Forests For Tomorrow (FFT) program. The program emphasized surveying, site preparation, and planting. These treatments were guided by strategic level program planning, seed supply planning, silviculture strategies, and timber supply analyses. It was important that the province ensure areas not covered by industry obligations were fully addressed at the TSA level throughout the SIBAC region.

This recommendation required direct provincial government action.

SIBAC is pleased that the Provincial Government has continued to provide additional funding for forest inventory and silvicultural work.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 7 – That the Province should undertake changes to forest policy which support community and First Nation priorities for economic development.

SIBAC believed the Province needed to work with communities and First Nations in pursuing regional goals that would foster economic growth. There were several forest policy changes which would assist communities and First Nations in pursuing regional goals that would foster economic growth, including:

- Encourage the streamlining of regulatory requirements specific to scaling, waste and residue measurements in an effort to encourage access to residual fibre opportunities.
- Promote the pricing of residual fibre that is effective in encouraging fibre utilization.
- Ensure allocation of more fibre to Community Forest tenures and First Nation tenures.
- Review stumpage rates that are applied for community safety or alternative fibre use.
- Incorporate community and First Nation values such as traditional burning, cultural values, and ecological values.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC's major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Completing and making several formal Submissions to Government Consultation Processes** including: [SIBAC January 2011 Handout to Minister Flaherty](#); [SIBAC's Submission to Mid-term Timber Supply Committee July 2012](#); [SIBAC's Submission to Area Based Tenure Consultation May 2014](#).
- ❖ **Commissioning completion of the *Growing the BC Interior Value-Added Sector Study and Report (2013)*** Recognizing the incredible importance and opportunity of the value-added wood

sector to maximize the economic and employment benefits from the use of BC's publically owned forests; SIBAC commissioned this major study. With a focus on the solid wood value-added sector, the purpose of this project was to create a practical roadmap for collaboration between governments, industry, and communities to help create a vibrant and expanded value-added sector in BC. Once the report was completed SIBAC met with numerous Cabinet Ministers to present the Report's findings and encourage Government action on the report's recommendations.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 8 – That the Provincial and Federal governments support transition and training of forest workers and related displaced workers so that they are able to remain in their current communities.

Assistance for displaced forest workers was put in place by the Provincial and Federal Governments. These workers represented an important component of the local labour force of smaller rural communities and First Nations. SIBAC recommended the Provincial and Federal Governments commit to retraining that supports workers who chose to stay in their communities. In addition, training needed to focus on young workers and the spinoff workforce in rural communities that was and would be impacted. Training, SIBAC suggested, should focus on training that would emphasize new rural opportunities.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC's major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Providing funding for the St'át'imc Comprehensive Silviculture Training Program (2012)**
Sponsored by the Lillooet Tribal Council, the program promoted the success of new entrants to the silviculture sector.
- ❖ **Providing funding for Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development: Mobilizing Informed Decision-Making in the Boundary Region (2014)**
SIBAC provided partnership funding to the Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute to expand on the findings from the Kootenay Workforce Table completed in 2013, to include more job training options.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Hire Learning Shuswap, Chase (2015)**
This project provided assistance for a work experience program through an event organized by the Adams River Salmon Society and the Little Shuswap Indian Band.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 9 – That the SIBAC Committee will support Provincial Government initiatives to generate new activities and address MPB issues.

The provincial government had begun implementation of a strategy that highlighted "Quick-Wins" in numerous forest districts in the province. These were projects intended to lead to new business activity and foster innovation in forestry activities. SIBAC committed to participate in this initiative where it could provide support and value.

This recommendation was made in response to a Government announcement of a new initiative as SIBAC was completing its final report. While the "Quick Wins" initiative was quickly replaced by other government initiatives, SIBAC has always strived to provide a Southern Interior rural perspective through continual meetings with government officials and staff.

Theme Three: Economic Sector Recommendations

In meetings with stakeholder groups and in community consultation sessions, the most commonly stated MPB issues and concerns included:

- Negative impacts to the tourism sector from deterioration of viewsapes, alteration of biodiversity and habitat, and from MPB salvage logging operations during the tourist season.
- Negative impacts on and public enjoyment of provincial parks and recreation facilities.
- Negative impacts to the ranching sector, including loss of natural barriers, dead/hazard tree removal, access to water, impact on non-timber forest products, effects of soil erosion on the encroachment of noxious weeds, and the residual damage to agricultural products due to an increase in wildfires.

As a result, SIBAC made five recommendations under this theme area.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 10 – That the Provincial and Federal Governments work with communities and First Nations to develop tourism infrastructure in Southern Interior communities.

New infrastructure was seen as critical to encouraging, stimulating, and complementing private sector efforts to diversify tourism. Improvements to multimodal transportation access (e.g. highways and airports), visitor services and gateway visitor centres, and expanded aboriginal tourism products were all seen as important. In addition, existing assets like provincial campsites in the SIBAC region also needed to be kept safe from danger trees and other hazards created by MPB. SIBAC believed that both senior levels of government had a responsibility to assist in supporting the agriculture and range sector through the transition on the Crown land base.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC’s major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Thompson Rivers University Tourism Project (2008)** This project contributed to community capacity building and economic diversification at the regional level by building capacity for tourism product development and producing tangible outcomes through student engagement.
- ❖ **Providing funding for Gold Country Communities – geotourism (2010)** This project provided assistance to the Gold Country Communities Society (Gold Country) to complete the next phase of their geotourism program. The project included the identification of key sites of significance within the region, and researching and writing interpretive site pages on each location, utilizing geotourism to preserve the region’s heritage, educate its youth, and attract visitors to support local businesses and economic development.
- ❖ **Providing funding for mapping visitors to the Columbia Valley area (2012)** Economic gardening is a service that uses technology-based research tools to gather detailed market information for businesses and communities. This project provided targeted marketing intelligence to communities in the Columbia Valley, allowing businesses to more effectively market to key client groups in order to maintain and grow their businesses. It also identified entrepreneurial opportunities for services not then being provided in the valley.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Secwepemc Tourism Conference (2012)** SIBAC provided support to the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council to coordinate and host a two-day invitational conference to

foster tourism opportunities and marketing strategies within the region. The conference aimed to include all southern Secwepemc communities and municipal/regional/provincial organizations in the region.

- ❖ **Providing funding for a place-based cultural tourism strategy for the Upper Columbia Valley (2012)** This project aimed to develop the Upper Columbia Valley as a destination for place-based cultural tourism through a comprehensive six-step planning process.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Christina Lake Preparing to Go Mobile Project (2013)** This project was aimed at increasing the capacity of community businesses and organizations to benefit from inbound marketing and to benefit from increased regional partnership development. To achieve the desired result, it was necessary to increase the community's ability to market effectively using the internet. Youth were hired through the project to work with 50 businesses to assess their current proficiencies in technology and provide upgrade instruction.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the West Kootenay Route (2014)** SIBAC funding was provided for the development of a marketing plan to support tourism development in the West Kootenay.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Bralorne Integrated Recreation Strategy (2015)** SIBAC provided partnership funding to the Bridge River Valley Community Association to develop a strategic land use and recreational plan for the BBRCA that established and ranked land and recreation priorities, created a model for land use conflict resolution, and provided strategic directives for the region's recreational amenities going forward.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 11 – That the Provincial and Federal Governments continue to fund the barrier replacement program and range improvements.

SIBAC believed fencing was needed to control livestock and protect sensitive sites (i.e., riparian zones). It was important to both the industry and to the environment that fencing be further developed for the ranching industry.

This recommendation required direct government action.

It is SIBAC's understanding that the Provincial Government has addressed this issue through a variety of actions.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 12 – That the Provincial and Federal Governments should undertake hazard/dead tree removal along critical corridors.

Standing dead MPB trees posed a risk of blowing down and impeding livestock movement and distribution. Livestock distribution is a key factor in proper range management, and could be hindered by trails that were blocked by trees which had blown down. In addition, road access can often be impeded by blown down trees, and ranch workers in MPB stands faced increased hazards from falling dead trees. SIBAC suggested preventive removal of hazard trees along fence lines, access roads, and trails should be considered.

This recommendation required direct government action.

It is SIBAC's understanding that the Provincial Government has addressed this issue through a variety of actions.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 13 – That the Provincial and Federal Governments should work to address limited water supplies for livestock.

The potential for limited water supplies for livestock and irrigation purposes was a growing concern among the ranching industry. There needed to be consideration for the development of alternate or additional water sources for livestock to mitigate the drier conditions and achieve proper herd distribution in developed pastures/range units.

This recommendation required direct government action.

The MPB epidemic is partly the result of larger climate change. Climate change will have a wide variety of implications, including changes in precipitation amounts and patterns. The Provincial Government has certainly recognized the serious implications of climate change and has undertaken a number of initiatives to address the larger issue.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 14 – That the Province should undertake comprehensive and Integrated range management planning.

The implementation of Forest Stewardship Plans appeared to have reduced engagement between the forest industry and the ranching sector. As MPB impacts progressed and other land-use challenges appeared for the ranching sector, SIBAC felt greater consideration and collaboration was required to ensure that viable business plans were put in place and that various land users did not unnecessarily impair other activities. In addition, SIBAC suggested further consideration needed to be given in all plans to ensure ecological considerations were incorporated as a core value of all forest and range licences.

This recommendation required direct government action.

In light of the implications of continued climate change and extensive areas of MPB timber salvage harvesting activity, SIBAC believes this recommendation is still very relevant.

Theme Four: Community Safety Issues

MPB-related community safety issues and concerns were frequently noted in discussions at the SIBAC Board, community meetings, and other forums and included:

- Increased community risk from wildfires.
- The apparent lack of political will and/or capacity in many communities to address fire-hazard issues and to implement fire-hazard reduction initiatives.
- Lack of local and municipal 'champions' for community wildfire protection plans.
- The impact of the MPB epidemic on hydrological cycles, drinking water, and local government infrastructure.

SIBAC recognized and applauded the Provincial and Federal Governments for providing resources to local governments and First Nations for wildfire management and hazard reduction activities. However, despite the existence of those resources, SIBAC was concerned that several areas and communities in the Southern Interior remained at significant risk from wildfire

As a result, SIBAC made three recommendations under this theme area.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 15 – That the Province work with communities and First Nations to create “wildfire reduction unit crews.”

These crews would work at the sub-regional level and specialize in reducing fuel loads around multiple municipal and First Nations communities by undertaking prescription burning and tree removal. SIBAC believed many smaller communities, unincorporated areas, and First Nations had difficulty organizing the processes and approvals necessary to implement fire-hazard reduction work. The creation of these crews would help address this capacity issue by ensuring more cost-effective delivery, a more efficient and co-ordinated approval process, and longer-term employment for unit workers. The First Nations Emergency Society was already supporting the development of these crews, and the Columbia Lake Band’s pilot project further highlighted the value of such crews. Additional collaboration between First Nations and surrounding rural communities would expand efficiencies and the sustainability of wildfire reduction initiatives.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC’s major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Fuel Management — MPB Impacted First Nations Pilot Project (2009)** This project documented a case study outlining actions taken to implement a comprehensive fuel management plan that included an identified need for a long-term fuel management maintenance regime, and information detailing how to coordinate with municipalities, regional districts, private land owners, crown land tenure holders, and First Nation community partners to implement complementary landscape-level treatments that increase the effectiveness of fuel reduction treatments and the value derived from dollars spent.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Enhancement of Wildland Fire Suppression Services, Safety, and Leadership Project (2010)** This project provided emergency management, forest fuel management, employment, and entrepreneurial skills to First Nations individuals in communities affiliated with the Lillooet Tribal Council.
- ❖ **Providing funding for wildfire protection training enhancement (2011)** This project trained individuals in transferable skills that focused on emergency management, forest fuel management, employment, and entrepreneurial skills for members of the ten Shuswap Nation Tribal Council Bands. The program enhanced local capacity and economic opportunities for current and future Shuswap First Nations emergency service providers, assisted the employability of the participants, and prepared qualified individuals to provide community wildfire protection on and off reserve.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the St’át’imc Comprehensive Silviculture Training Program (2012)** This program was intended to promote the success of new entrants to the silviculture sector. The training/mentorship program provided participants with necessary on-the-job training in the technical aspects of tree-planting, general issues around workplace health and safety (specifically as it relates to forest work), and issues around camp life, health, and nutrition.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 16 – That the Ministry of Forests & Range implement policy and/or regulation changes that would facilitate increased wildfire hazard treatments in the Southern Interior.

SIBAC believed that policy and regulation changes were needed to facilitate increased First Nations and rural communities' wildfire hazard reduction treatments, including reduced stumpage, and encouraging alternative reforestation requirements. In SIBAC's view, federal policy and stumpage also needed to be reviewed to encourage and streamline wildfire hazard reduction work on First Nation reserve lands.

This recommendation required direct government action.

SIBAC recognizes and applauds the Provincial Government for consistently providing additional funding for wildfire hazard treatment work. However, given the on-going need for treatments and limited financial resources, SIBAC would like to see the Provincial Government expand the Community Forest and First Nations Woodland license programs and tenures so that communities can be more directly and continually involved in fuel reduction on the landscapes surrounding their communities.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 17 – That the Province, Municipalities, Regional Districts and First Nations commit to working more collaboratively on wildfire hazard reduction.

SIBAC believed there was a need for more local leadership in encouraging increased regional and community collaboration in wildfire hazard reduction planning and treatment.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC's major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Nupqu Fuel Management Project (2010)** SIBAC partnered with the Ktunaxa Nation Council to document the collaborative wildfire hazard reduction planning and treatment program led by First Nations in the Cranbrook and Columbia Basin areas.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Invasive Plant Partnership Delivery Project in the Okanagan-Similkameen (2011)** The South Okanagan-Similkameen Invasive Plant Society proposed through this multi-stakeholder project to improve habitat quality and reduction of wildfire risk by inventorying and removing invasive plants, and restoring important rangeland and forested habitats in the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS). The (former) Ministry of Forests and Range estimated that over 20 million hectares of Crown land were susceptible to invasive plants, partially due to the Mountain Pine Beetle and accelerated timber harvesting.

Theme Five: Government Revenue Issues

As rural communities go through current and future economic transitions they will increasingly find their municipal tax bases under pressure. For many municipalities the industrial tax base associated with the forest sector has long been the cornerstone of their municipal economies. As the forest sector reduces the number of mills they operate – and seeks to lower industrial tax rates for the remaining mills – many communities will experience substantial reductions to their tax base. In addition, mill closures are also accompanied by the loss of other commercial and industrial businesses, further impacting the municipal

tax base. For rapidly growing communities, there is the potential to help offset revenue reductions from the industrial component of the tax base by increasing revenues gained from other municipal tax categories. However, this opportunity is much more limited for smaller rural communities experiencing slow or negative rates of population and economic growth.

Historically, for First Nation communities, the issue has been the lack of participation in the revenue generated from economic activity on Crown lands within their traditional territories – much of which has come from forest sector activity. In recent years, First Nations have made positive strides in being involved in the revenue that has been, and is being, generated from economic activity on Crown lands. However, these recently achieved gains are now threatened as potential government revenue from the forest sector is impacted by reduced mid-term forest harvest levels as a result of the MPB epidemic.

SIBAC believes First Nations and rural government revenue from the forest sector is likely to decline both as a result of the MPB epidemic and other factors. This could result in rural governments placing an increasing burden on the remaining business community, which could impair its competitiveness, and further stress future efforts to grow and diversify rural communities. SIBAC acknowledges other government advisory panels – including the BC Progress Board and the Task Force on Community Opportunities – have also examined the issue of rural communities and resource taxation revenues – and recommended new forms of revenue sharing with communities.

As a result, SIBAC made two recommendations under this theme area.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 18 – That the Provincial Government develop new methods of regional resource revenue sharing with local governments and First Nations.

As a result of a fundamental shift in the BC economy, SIBAC believed communities and First Nations needed to establish sustainable sources of local government income. This funding needed to move away from the inherent challenges of relying on industrial and commercial property taxation and senior government program transfers. The Provincial Government needed to review how resource revenues collected from the regions are shared with local governments and First Nation governments, and how these could be used to grow and diversify local economies moving forward. This recommendation was consistent with recommendations made by other organizations such as the BC Progress Board and the Task Force on Community Opportunities. It also followed on the Province’s own action with the establishment of the Fair Share Agreement in Northeastern BC, and funding organizations such as Columbia Basin Trust. At the same time, local governments needed to review how they tax industry and businesses in their communities, and what the implications of a declining tax base may mean for community services.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC’s major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Creating, managing and providing funding for the Green Energy & Rural Development Project (2010)** This multi-BAC project had three major objectives: (i) to identify rural business development and labour force opportunities associated with green clean energy development in the Interior, and; (ii) to assist at least three small MPB “at-risk” communities to develop a full business plan to implement a green clean energy project in their region; and (iii) to promote Green Energy projects as one tool that First Nations and rural communities could use to generate additional revenue for their communities.

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Ferguson Creek Run-of-River Hydropower Project (2011)** The Squamish-Lillooet Regional District was interested in developing a run-of-river hydropower project on Ferguson Creek (near Gold Bridge), likely to generate between 2-5 MW of power, intended to be owned in whole or in part by the SLRD. The full development of the project was estimated at \$10-15 million in capital cost.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Columbia Headwaters Community Forest (2011)** The ultimate objective here was to establish and manage a community forest which has the potential to support an annual rate of harvest of approximately 40,000 cubic metres of timber. SIBAC funding was used to conduct a timber valuation, and develop a business plan for the proposed community forest in the Invermere TSA which includes the municipalities of Radium Hot Springs, Invermere, and Canal Flats, as well as the Regional District East Kootenay (Areas F and G), including Fairmont, Windermere, Wilmer, Edgewater, and Panorama.
- ❖ **Developing and managing an Economic Impact Study of Community Forests in BC (2015)** SIBAC in partnership with the BC Community Forests Association, completed a study to examine the economic contributions of Community Forests to rural BC communities.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 19 –That the Provincial and Federal Governments explore government incentives to foster business investment in rural communities.

SIBAC believed the Provincial and Federal Governments should investigate policy and regulatory tools that could be used to create a more attractive business climate in rural communities and on the Crown land base.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC’s major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Invest Kootenay Partnership initiative (2012)** In partnership with Community Futures Central Kootenay (CFCK), ten local governments, and Columbia Basin Trust, SIBAC provided funding to CFCK to complete a strategic plan for the Initiative.
- ❖ **Organizing and providing funding for the Mobilizing Rural Investment Capital Workshops (2014)** SIBAC organized, funded and hosted two workshops (and several meetings with interested organizations) that featured speakers from the two most successful rural investment programs in Canada - Nova Scotia’s Economic Development Investment Funds program and Alberta’s Unleashing Local Capital initiative.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Kootenay Boundary Business Advisory Pilot Program (2015)** This pilot program provided funding support to Community Futures Boundary to develop and manage a business advisory pilot program for West and East Boundary communities.
- ❖ **Providing support and funding for the Christina Lake Venture Capital Fund** SIBAC funding support was provided to assist with the launch of a community-based Venture Capital Corporation (VCC) in Christina Lake, and to document the Christina Lake experience for other communities.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Shuswap Agriculture Marketing Strategy (2015)** SIBAC provided significant funding for the development of a common identity or brand to identify and differentiate agricultural products grown or produced in the Shuswap. The Columbia Shuswap

Regional District – Shuswap Economic Development department worked with a committee comprised of representatives from the Salmon Arm Economic Development Society, Community Futures Shuswap, and agriculture producers in the Shuswap region. The project was complementary to existing Shuswap Tourism branding and marketing products.

Theme Six: Rural Development Issues

Throughout SIBAC’s planning process, board discussions, and public consultations, the topic of rural development in BC was constantly raised. The Southern Interior as a region varies significantly in terms of population, economic growth, economic diversification, and labour force growth rates. This diversity has highlighted the difficulty of attempting to separate MPB-related impacts from the underlying rural economic trends affecting Southern Interior communities.

The most commonly raised issues by the general public at SIBAC’s community consultation sessions included:

- A sense of an increasingly growing gap between communities doing well and those that are struggling.
- Frustration with government policies that have led to increasing consolidation and centralization of services, to the detriment of smaller rural communities.
- Further mill closures in the Southern Interior that will create significant challenges for impacted communities.
- Concern that for a variety of reasons, the cost of living is increasingly significantly in many Southern Interior rural areas.
- A sense that senior government economic development and funding was focused on larger communities and for rural BC communities to become more sustainable, new funding and program assistance from senior government is necessary.
- Smaller rural communities and First Nations have limited capacity to apply for grants, deliver programs, and manage change in their communities.

To remain vibrant, SIBAC believed that southern interior rural communities that were still heavily dependent on the forest economy needed to rapidly increase their rates of economic growth and diversification. SIBAC also felt that for MPB economic mitigation efforts to be truly successful, the provincial and federal governments needed to provide new and dedicated resources for rural and regional economic development.

As a result, SIBAC made four recommendations under this theme area.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 20 – That the Provincial Government create a Rural Strategy for BC.

Several other Canadian jurisdictions, including Alberta, have provincial Rural Strategies. SIBAC believed such strategies are important in demonstrating provincial government commitment to rural issues, and that a rural strategy for BC would need to include the participation of communities and First Nations in the Southern Interior. In addition, a successful rural strategy should identify specific economic

sectors that hold promise for rural communities and First Nations, and should be accompanied with specific actions to achieve rural economic development.

The SIBAC Board felt strongly that BC required a provincial rural strategy. Therefore SIBAC partnered with the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition and the Cariboo-Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition to develop, lead, and fund the *Rural BC Project*. The intent of the project was to increase public awareness of the issues facing rural BC in a constructive and politically non-partisan manner, and to present a convincing case for the resources rural BC needs to meet these challenges. As part of this two-and-a-half-year project, the three BACs undertook extensive research; prepared numerous background and research reports; organized and hosted several workshops; and met several times with provincial Cabinet Ministers. Upon completion, the Rural BC Project made six summary recommendations:

- (i) Designation of a senior Cabinet Minister for rural development;
- (ii) Creation of a rural strategy for BC;
- (iii) New rural economic development programming;
- (iv) Creation of a rural dividend program to create a new revenue source for rural communities and First Nations;
- (v) Creation of a non-government rural economic development catalyst/advocacy organization(s) for BC;
- (vi) Creation of a rural BC venture capital program.

After presenting the Provincial Government with the Rural BC Project recommendations, and meeting with the Premier, the BACs agreed to establish a joint Government/BAC staff working group to identify some priority areas and recommendations for Ms. Donna Barnett, then Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development. The joint Government/BAC staff work culminated in the following four strategic level recommendations to Parliamentary Secretary Barnett:

1. That the Province create a BC Community Economic Development Investment Fund (CEDIF) program, modeled on the Nova Scotia CEDIF program.
2. That the Province engage and consult with rural communities and First Nations on the development of a rural dividend to assist rural communities with economic development and diversification utilizing a share of natural resources revenues.
3. That the Province create a Rural Advisory Council to (i) provide a rural lens on government policy and (ii) to make recommendations to government that will help develop new ideas, opportunities, actions, policies, and legislation that will further rural development and sustainability.
4. That the Province work with the recommended Rural Advisory Council to develop an overarching rural strategy that would apply a rural lens to government decision-making and programming, and facilitate coordination and strategic direction to agencies on advancing rural development.

The SIBAC Board is very pleased that to date the Provincial Government has acted on three of the Rural BC Project and follow-up recommendations:

- (i) The designation of Minister Steve Thomson as the Minister responsible for Rural Development, and the more recent promotion of Ms. Donna Barnett to Minister of State for Rural Development;
- (ii) The creation of a provincial rural advisory council;

- (iii) The creation of some new rural development program funding through the recent Rural Dividend Program.

The Provincial Government's formal response to the Rural BC Project is a document titled [*Supporting Rural Development: Creating a Voice for Rural British Columbia*](#), which indicates the Government will continue to examine the issue of enhancing rural investment capital. SIBAC and the other BACs remain hopeful that Government will ultimately act on the remaining Rural BC Project recommendations.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 21 – That the Provincial and Federal Governments dedicate funding for rural economic development in BC.

This funding would focus specifically on the engagement and participation of smaller communities, rural areas, and First Nations to actively participate in economic development. SIBAC believed new rural economic development funding and programs should be designed to assist smaller and economically challenged rural communities and unincorporated areas. In addition, SIBAC believed the Provincial and Federal Governments needed to make funding readily available, unlike past programming that came with considerable external priorities, and focused funding in small allotments at minor components of the total economic development initiative.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC's major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Providing funding to Community-led WED-CEDI Projects (2007/2008)** When the WED-CEDI program was announced, it became clear that some communities and organizations would have difficulty raising their portion of the required proponent project contribution. As a result, SIBAC agreed to provide funding support to southern interior applicants for the Western Economic Diversification (WED) – Community Economic Diversification Initiative Funding (CEDI). In the end SIBAC provided approximately \$100,000 to 18 WED-CEDI projects in the southern interior.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Split Rock Sekw'el'was Wild Plant Nursery (2011)** A joint project between the Cayoose Creek Band and the Lillooet Naturalist Society, the Split Rock Sekw'el'was Wild Plant Nursery was interested in testing the viability of using invasive weeds and bark from Mountain Pine Beetle-killed trees to create an alternative potting soil mix to peat moss.
- ❖ **Providing funding for Thompson Shuswap Food Connections (2011)** This project explored opportunities to lessen carbon emissions associated with food supplies to three major public institutional buyers in Kamloops, and examined opportunities for growth and expansion of the sector. In addition, the project aimed to complete a feasibility analysis to determine the viability, design, function, and implementation of a commercial food processing facility to expand value-added agricultural production and perhaps provide agri-tourism opportunities.
- ❖ **Providing funding for an organic field crop production program (2011)** The Organic Farming Institute of BC project created and implement an educational program through an on-line learning platform and practical learning field excursions to prospective farmers. The course provided the knowledge and skill set for someone to take two to three acres of non-viable land currently devastated by the pine beetle anywhere in BC, and make the land viable through ground crop production.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the A New Direction for Okanagan Falls Project (2011)** The purpose of this project was to create a long term, cohesive, viable economic and tourism development

plan and prospectus for Okanagan Falls and the nearby communities of Kaleden, East Skaha, Vaseux Lake, Twin Lakes, and Apex. The project included the establishment of a local business improvement committee, improved communication within and between the area and its communities, including brochures, Facebook and Twitter accounts, newsletters, a questionnaire, and regular updates on the Okanagan Falls website.

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Grass-fed Beef Marketing Plan and materials (2012)** Building on the Field to Plate: Grass-Fed Beef Value Chain Analysis Report completed in 2011, this First Nations Agricultural Association's (FNAA) project was to conduct a thorough grass-fed beef marketing research study involving three First Nations regions: i) Nicola Tribal Association; ii) Okanagan Nation Territory; and iii) Shuswap Nations Tribal Council area. The results formed the basis of business plan and marketing materials.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 22 – That the Provincial Government create and support a new economic development program/initiative which encourages and facilitates regional collaboration on economic development in the Southern Interior.

The intent of this recommendation was to encourage, facilitate, and support regional economic development collaboration in sub-regions of the province. Best practices in rural economic revitalization in other jurisdictions have clearly indicated rural communities and areas must collaborate at the regional level to be successful. Successes in other jurisdictions have also shown regional-scale economic development is important to develop processes that integrate the economic development initiatives of various levels of government and between larger and smaller communities in a region. Experience from other jurisdictions also indicates the facilitation and assistance of external expertise is often critical to achieving rural regional development success.

In response to this recommendation, SIBAC's major activities & achievements include:

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Boundary Communities Regional Chamber of Commerce (2011)** SIBAC worked in partnership with the City of Grand Forks, Greenwood, Village of Midway, and Areas C, D and E to establish a Regional Chamber of Commerce, promoting collaboration among some of the communities in the Southern Interior most at risk of MPB-related impacts. The expectation was the Regional Chamber would provide the small business community with an opportunity to diversify, moving away from the resource industry dependency of the past. Potential roles for the Regional Chamber included increasing business attraction, serving as a business/community advocate, improving access to funding & marketing of the region, and strengthening regional coordination and collaboration.
- ❖ **Providing funding for a regional community economic development assessment, plan, and implementation strategy for Kicking Horse Country (2011)** SIBAC provided support for a project managed by Golden Area Initiatives (GAI) to develop a regional economic development assessment plan and implementation strategy for Kicking Horse Country. In consultation with CED stakeholders, the assessment plan identified areas of service overlap and service gaps in the region. The plan also identified short-term, medium-term, and long-term actionable priorities over a period of 5 years to enable the communities and CED stakeholders of Kicking Horse Country (including the town of Golden and Columbia Shuswap Regional District Area A) to work collectively toward a common vision for the region.

- ❖ **Providing funding for the Southeast BC Employment Lands Inventory (2011)** An issue facing many communities in SE BC is access to land for existing business expansion and future investment and economic growth. Several studies in southeast BC have confirmed this, and the need for a comprehensive inventory. This project produced an inventory of employment lands and associated infrastructure and economic assets in a universal GIS platform, and undertook an assessment of employment lands for key stakeholders, allowing them to discuss and identify collaborative regional solutions to inform future planning and economic growth.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Invest Kootenay Partnership (2011)** The Invest Kootenay Partnership (IK) was a joint initiative of Community Futures Central Kootenay (CFCK), municipalities, chambers of commerce, and economic development associations in Nelson, Castlegar, Creston, Revelstoke, Kaslo, Kootenay Boundary Regional District, Area A of the Central Kootenay Regional District, Radium, Fernie, Sparwood, and Elkford. The project aimed to develop and implement a strategic plan to encourage investment to the Kootenay region.
- ❖ **Providing funding for the Moving Forward Together Series (2012)** Funding was provided by SIBAC to assist the Eagle Valley Community Support Society host a workshop series funded by LIRNBC. Workshops were facilitated by Fraser Basin Council, Social Planning and Research Council of BC, and the Columbia Shuswap Regional District Economic Development office.
- ❖ **Providing funding for a Boundary Business Retention and Expansion Survey (2012)** SIBAC provided support to help Community Futures Boundary complete a business retention and expansion study and report, to enhance the information available to decision makers regarding the needs and concerns of the Boundary business community, and make available best practises and tools in business retention and expansion to the region.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 23 – That the Provincial Government work with Rural Communities to protect community services and assets.

Rural communities faced a period of distress in which key community services would likely play an important role in community transition and long-term community sustainability. SIBAC believed the Provincial Government needed to work with communities on sustaining key existing assets such as schools, hospitals, recreational facilities, and regional offices so that communities might work toward revitalizing their local economies without the additional implications of incremental degradation of the quality of the communities' amenities.

This recommendation required direct Government action.

SIBAC believes this recommendation remains extremely important and relevant. SIBAC applauds the recent provincial government action to provide additional funding and initiatives to protect rural schools and rural health care delivery.

SIBAC RECOMMENDATION 24 – That the Provincial Government provide implementation resources to MPB At-Risk Communities and Tribal Councils.

SIBAC believed it was imperative that the Provincial and Federal Governments provide additional resources to the most-at-risk MPB communities and all Southern Interior Tribal Councils so they could proactively begin to prepare for MPB impacts and implement appropriate MPB mitigation and transition actions.

This recommendation required direct Government action.

SIBAC believes there are still additional sawmill closures on the horizon as a result of the reduced timber supply from the MPB epidemic – and the increases in total mill capacity in the Southern Interior. To that end, SIBAC still believes this recommendation is very relevant, as small, forest dependent, rural communities deal with sawmill and related closures.

For its part, over the past five years SIBAC did try and ensure that its funding, projects, and initiatives assisted the communities and sub-regions that were most vulnerable to MPB impacts, while maintaining regional equity across the Southern Interior.

SIBAC also recognized the MPB epidemic would have culturally unique impacts on the First Nation communities in the Southern Interior over and above those issues already noted above. SIBAC was also aware the Provincial Government was working directly with First Nations at the provincial level to examine MPB issues and impacts – and to create a First Nations MPB Action Plan.

In recognition of the unique impacts on First Nations, SIBAC provided funding so that each SIBAC member Tribal Council could prepare an individual MPB report. In addition, the Community Futures Development Corporation of the Central Interior First Nations was provided funding to prepare a similar report for those First Nations Bands not currently members of a Tribal Council. The recommendations from these individual Tribal Council reports were used to inform the final recommendations of both the SIBAC MPB Assessment & Mitigation Plan and the First Nations MPB Action Plan.

CONCLUSION

The SIBAC Board is proud of the work completed by the organization over the past decade. The Board believes SIBAC has led and supported some extremely important local, regional, and provincial rural development projects and initiatives.

As outlined in this report, SIBAC has led or supported projects and initiatives to address all of the original SIBAC MPB Assessment & Mitigation Plan recommendations that were not contingent on direct provincial government action/responsibility. SIBAC prioritized its efforts and project funding to those projects and initiatives it felt would assist the largest number of rural communities and/or assist those rural communities “most-in-need”.

The SIBAC Board is particularly proud of the research and work completed by the Rural BC project. The Provincial Government acknowledged the work of the three Beetle Action Coalitions and the Rural BC Project when announcing the designation of Minister Thomson as the Cabinet Minister responsible for rural development; the appointment of Ms Donna Barnett as Parliamentary Secretary (now Minister of State) for Rural Development; and the creation of the provincial Rural Advisory Council. SIBAC believes that these initiatives as well as many of the projects detailed in this report will continue to assist rural communities and facilitate rural development well into the future.

SIBAC is a unique organization in several respects. First, the creation of SIBAC and its governance structure is unique in terms of being founded and governed by First Nations and local governments from across the Southern Interior. Second the organization focuses most of its effort on looking for ways to collectively assist smaller rural communities, First Nations and unincorporated rural areas in the Southern

Interior. Finally, SIBAC strives to identify and promote rural development initiatives and policies that will help *all* rural communities.

As a result, in late 2015 the SIBAC Board approved a new three-year Strategic Plan (2016-2018) for the organization. This Strategic Plan focusses the organization's remaining limited resources on a smaller number of key initiatives that SIBAC believes can have the biggest impact on rural development in the province.