



BACKGROUND

Aboriginal Communities in Forest Regions in Canada: Disparities in Socio-Economic Conditions

Forests in Canada provide critically important benefits to the nation including economic contributions via the forest products industry, recreational opportunities, and life-sustaining ecosystem services. Canadian forests represent one-tenth of the world's forested area, including one-fifth of the world's temperate rainforests and more than one-third of the world's boreal (northern conifer-dominated) forests. The Canadian forest industry generated \$74 billion in sales, contributed \$34 billion toward the trade surplus, employed an estimated 353,000 Canadians and contributed approximately \$29 billion to the national Gross Domestic Product in 2001 (see <http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/statistics/forestry/>). Almost 80% of Aboriginal communities in Canada are in the boreal and temperate forest regions.

The new Global Forest Watch Canada (GFWC) report, *Aboriginal Communities in Forest Regions in Canada: Disparities in Socio-Economic Conditions*, raises the question of whether Aboriginal communities are benefiting from living in proximity to these forest resources. GFWC carried out statistical analyses on five key socio-economic indicators (education, average income, employment rate, percent of the population under 15 years of age, number of people per room). Aboriginal communities were separated out for comparison based on geographical boundaries (e.g. within the commercial forest zone, outside of the commercial forest zone, historic treaty area or modern land claim settlement area). Census 1996 data was used, as the 2001 data was not available at the time the analyses were carried out.

The results of the analyses indicated that Aboriginal communities within forest regions in Canada experience poorer socio-economic conditions than the nation as a whole. The results also show that there are significant socio-economic differences among the Aboriginal communities themselves, based on various geographical differences. Some key findings in this regard are:

- Aboriginal communities within forest regions were shown to have significantly lower average incomes and employment rates than Aboriginal communities outside of the forest regions;
- Aboriginal communities within the commercial forest zone were shown to have significantly lower average incomes than Aboriginal communities within forest regions but outside of the commercial forest zone;
- For Aboriginal communities within forest regions, those communities within historical treaties showed higher disparity than those outside of historical treaties for all of the socio-economic indicators that were investigated.
- For Aboriginal communities within forest regions, those within Modern Settled Land Claims were shown to have significantly higher employment rates and average incomes than those located outside of Modern Settled Land Claims.
- There are significant differences between Aboriginal communities within forest regions based on the provinces in which they are located, with the Prairie and Atlantic Maritime Provinces showing the poorest averages over all.

Using ArcView/ArcMap GIS software, GFWC created maps to visually depict some of the key results. Some interesting patterns emerged when the communities were mapped according to the various geographical categories, such as the concentration of below socio-economic average Aboriginal communities in the Prairie and Atlantic commercial forest regions.

In accordance with Global Forest Watch policy, the methods and results of this project have been reviewed by number of experts, representing government, academia, Aboriginal groups, and non-governmental organizations.

Previous studies that have investigated the socio-economic well-being of Aboriginal communities include:

- *Geographical patterns of socio-economic well-being of First Nation communities*, a Statistics Canada report by Robin Armstrong (2001), which looked at how geography affects the socio-economic status of First Nations communities using a number of specified indicators;
- *Socio-economic indicators in Indian Reserves and comparable communities, 1971-1991*, a 1997 INAC/DIAND report by Darrell Buffalo, which compared reserves with comparable communities and determined that certain characteristics of many Aboriginal reserve communities (such as their remoteness and small community size) only partially explain the disparity that is to be seen between Aboriginal communities and Canada as a whole.
- A more recent Statistics Canada study, which found that while the new census data shows some improvement for a number of socio-economic indicators, the health of Aboriginal people as a whole is far below the national standard, while other problems, such as crowded housing conditions and lower educational achievement, also persist.

The GFWC study shows similar results and addresses the GFWC goal of providing information to groups and individuals involved in forest development in Canada by specifically focusing on Aboriginal communities in forest regions.

The combined results of these studies indicate a need for further analyses, particularly one based on Census 2001 data, in order to provide even more current information. Comparing the results across Census years could also be valuable. More in-depth statistical analyses could begin to address the question of why the disparities identified in this report exist. There is also a need to find ways to collect culturally relevant data that can help us better round out the picture of Aboriginal well being in forested and non-forested areas. We encourage the Canadian government, industry, and public to join us in these efforts.

Global Forest Watch Canada is the independent national affiliate of the Global Forest Watch network, a project of the World Resources Institute. The Global Forest Watch network was formed to provide access to better information about the world's forests and the environmental impact of their development.

Aboriginal Communities in Forest Regions in Canada: Disparities in Socio-Economic Conditions, including maps and data, as well as media briefing materials, is available for download in English and French at: <http://www.globalforestwatch.ca>

Maps from the Report:



