

# Rationale for a Non-Timber Forest Product Development Fund



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**by Keith Hunter, First Nations Wildcrafters, BC (July 22, 2011)**

**Abstract**

**Recognition and funding support of Non-Timber Forest Products as a legitimate resource industry sector requires development of a Non-Timber Forest Product Development Fund and Implementation Task Force.**

Industry funding support from the government of British Columbia (BC) for timber, agriculture, energy, mining, aquaculture, fisheries, and eco-tourism has assisted in enabling those resource sector industries to remain viable and competitive in today's market and economic environment. The BC government recognizes that support of these industries supports BC families. Formally legitimizing the Non-timber Forest Product (NTFP) in BC requires similar government support that can be accomplished by creating a NTFP Development Fund and Implementation Task Force. BC government support of the BC NTFP sector is needed to support BC families within the NTFP sector.

A three year core funding investment for an NTFP industry sector led Task Force should be immediately provided by government. There are culturally and managerially competent collaborative networks established that possess the operational level experience within the forestry sector, the NTFP sector, various ministries (acting in a technical support and advisory roles), and First Nations organizations that are fully capable of forming an "up to speed" Task Force that is capable of providing the organizational structure, fiscal accountability and synergies awareness needed for the initial stages of the NTFP Development Fund and the Implementation Task Force.

Core seed funding from the government for this industry-led Task Force would include as an objective the creation of a long term industry-based organizational structure that would work towards realizing a practical, industry-based approach equitable to the support given to other resource and economic sectors in BC. Long term funding of the NTFP Development Fund would be from government revenues collected from extractive resource industry activities. This source of revenues for the NTFP Development Fund would recognize the impacts upon the NTFP industry sector due to the loss of harvestable lands bases that support the NTFP industry sector due to other extractive resource industries activities such as timber harvesting, energy, mining and hydro development operations. This revenue source would provide NTFP sector long term stability and the ability to leverage investments and create synergies with other government initiatives for longer term industry sector needs and viability.

The Task Force and NTFP Development Fund initiative would insure that decision making roles are provided to First Nations entities to provide higher level planning avoidance of potential infringements, conflicts and recognition of the legal rights of First Nations aboriginal rights and title interests.

Collaborative NTFP industry-sector relationships are existing that are competent to provide enterprise relevant bridge building relationships between regional and provincial economic development activities (and associated NTFP research). The cultural competency of Task Force leadership is absolutely essential due to the intersect of potential commercialization (and mapping) of NTFP with the cultural heritage resource utilizations and management that have been undertaken in the past without the free, full and prior informed consent of impacted First Nations populations within BC. The Task Force will insure that the pathways to success are addressed in a manner that is consistent with domestic and international obligations of Canada and BC and local First Nations consultations. This will provide a solid footing for the long term viability of the NTFP sector and not repeat the patterns and trends of polarization that has occurred.

The reality that the NTFP sector is so diverse, as are the vast differences in community capacities, geographical expanses within BC, and unique First Nations and rural communities values and priorities, is exactly why such a Task Force and NTFP Development Fund is needed and will succeed. NTFP management strategies and potential NTFP development designed to suite the unique needs, aspirations and unique capacity challenges and opportunities amidst the immense diversity of options is precisely what will allow the development of true niche market products. The sector-based Task Force will avoid repeating the previous temptations of taking the path towards non-industry developed standardizations based upon objectives of achieving administrative efficiencies rather than upon embracing the realities of the unique complexities of NTFP development and real world NTFP market factors.

The time has arrived for the NTFP sector to take its rightful and respected place among the resource sectors that BC government provides funding support for. The time has also arrived to de-institutionalize and abandon previous approaches that simply have not worked. Entrepreneurship and innovation, adaptive resource management, business investment support, market development support, job training and skills development, and research gaps and research needs identified by the NTFP sector that clearly and responsibly incorporate the potential impacts upon First Nations interests are needed for competitiveness, stability and social cohesion. All of these enterprise development and ground level industry led activities are in need to be supported by government just as are provided support by government in other resource industry sectors.

Establishing the NTFP Development Fund and Task Force of NTFP industry sector practitioners is a clear departure from the current state and direction of the NTFP sector that has been largely driven by influences that are not part of the NTFP business community or practitioner sector in BC. The past approach taken has not demonstrated ecological or socio-economic benefits and cannot do so because the markets and resource management scenarios are simply too diverse and dynamic for the NTFP models of the past to work in the environment in BC and the current and emerging trends in the global trade markets. With support provided by BC government the capacity needed to produce world class products by the BC NTFP sector for local, domestic and international markets in an ethical, socially and environmentally responsible manner can be accomplished.