



Talking About a Northeast Heritage Strategy

Enhancing quality of life and economic opportunity in the Northeast

Background

The Alaska Highway Community Society (AHCS), which has led work on Historic Sites of Canada nominations along the Alaska Highway Corridor, is now working with other organizations in the Northeast to explore the value of a heritage strategy for Northeastern British Columbia. A strategy would set out a roadmap to create a viable future and sustainable foundation for community heritage in the region with links to tourism destination development, heritage infrastructure planning and Indigenous cultural employment.

The Northeast Heritage Strategy is funded by the Peace River Regional District. The Strategy Team is led by April Moi, AHCS, with consulting services by Julie Harris, Contentworks Inc., and Karen Aird, Indigenous Cultural Heritage Specialists. The Strategy Working Group includes representatives from the Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark, Muskwa-Kechika Management Area, Fort St. John Tourism, BC Heritage Branch, BC Provincial Parks and the North Peace Museum in Fort St. John. Work on the strategy is also supporting Destination BC's Destination Development Program, which will help develop and market cultural and natural tourism experiences in the Northeast, and Treaty 8's Cultural Employment Strategy.

September 2016: Community Discussion Sessions

In September 2016, the AHCS hosted a series of community discussion sessions in Dawson Creek, Fort St. John, Tumbler Ridge and Fort Nelson. Presentations were also made to the District of Taylor Council, Fort Nelson First Nation and Treaty 8 Tribal Association. The sessions served as an opportunity to discuss the purpose of a strategy, its values and limitations, and the need for communities to take ownership of the project to ensure its future success. The workshops and meetings also addressed priorities and concerns presented by participants with regard to protecting and promoting heritage in their communities.

What We Heard: Key Messages

Themes

- **Collaboration:** Connections are vital on every level. Communities must work together to ensure mutual success.
- **Recognition of Value:** Like collaboration, value applies at every level. Each community is important and plays its role in contributing to, protecting and promoting heritage in the Northeast.
- **Heritage is More than History & Archaeology:** Heritage includes the stories attached to places and identities. It is connected to community values, artistic endeavours, family events and the spirit of place. It includes trails and other recreation opportunities.

"We are getting better at working together, but we still have a long way to go..."

"We are more than the Alaska Highway..."



Strategic Priorities

- **Heritage Tourism Destination Development:** The Northeast is home to a variety of historic, natural, scenic, cultural and outdoor recreation opportunities that play a significant role in the economy and employment. The strategy will focus on identifying key gaps and opportunities to improve heritage tourism options.
- **Heritage Infrastructure:** Numerous ideas were put forward during the sessions, and in previous work by the AHCS, to improve heritage infrastructure in the Northeast. They include: an interpretation framework involving museums, trails, communities and the tourism sector; better signage about the history and heritage of the Northeast; publications; guided walks; and an Indigenous cultural centre.
- **Cultural Employment:** Treaty 8 members have exceptional cultural skills and knowledge of the land that is of value to residents, visitors and business. Partnerships and other forms of heritage investments would allow Treaty 8 members to take on larger roles in the heritage tourism economy.

“A strategy would help show us where we are scattered and divided, and direct us in how to overcome this issue...”

“We are in a heritage business, but we need to better understand the next steps...”

“We need to understand our failures and better promote our successes, so that we can learn from them...”

“Working heritage stimulates the social fabric of the community...”

Tasks

- **Communications:** Formal channels are needed to allow community groups to work with each other and add value to the products and services they offer residents and visitors.
- **Knowledge Sharing and Learning:** A better understanding among heritage champions of the resources and opportunities available to them will help ensure greater success across the heritage spectrum. Participants discussed the value of integrating heritage and culture into the employment sector through opportunities like culture camps, and developing connections with institutions like Northern Lights College.
- **Economic Feedback Loop:** Heritage is about the people, and participants felt that a strategy should be focused on developing the ‘people aspect’ of heritage. Participants agreed that there is a need to re-direct economic benefits generated by heritage and heritage champions back towards heritage groups.

Participants also shared current and planned projects, priorities and ideas, such as:

- Development and promotion of trails
- Producing more guidebooks and histories
- Promoting First Nations cultural camps
- Improving access to Tse’K’wa (Charlie Lake cave)
- Creating opportunities for heritage interpretation and learning at Old Fort Nelson
- Establishing an Indigenous cultural centre in the Northeast
- Expanding trading post options to see artistic productions



Next Tasks

The workshops and meetings helped generate a better understanding of the value of a heritage strategy, and the priorities and concerns facing communities in the Northeast. At the same time, they raised a number of important issues:

- The Northeast is a large area, with a small population, and its heritage, history and culture is unique. What will our Heritage Strategy look like?
- How do we develop a coordinated visitor experience? What is the theme of the Northeast?
- How do we balance opening up our communities, culture and heritage to the public while ensuring it is protected?
- How do we overcome the jurisdictional challenges?

Over the following months, the Strategy Team and Working Group will be working together to address these issues, and pull the various ideas, themes and priorities into a draft plan. The plan will then be brought back to the communities through presentations to municipal, regional and First Nation councils. Finally, the feedback received from these presentations will be formulated into final recommendations.

Get Involved!

All groups with an interest in the cultural and natural heritage of the Northeast have an open invitation to participate. For more information, please visit our website at www.ouralaskahighway.com.



En route to the Northeast Heritage Strategy meetings, September 2016. From left to right: Karen Aird, Indigenous Heritage Specialist; Paulina Csicsai, BC Heritage Branch; April Moi, Northern BC Tourism/AHCS; Ursula Pfahler, BC Heritage Branch; Julie Harris, Contentworks Inc.; and Natascha Morrison, Contentworks Inc.

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The AHCS has been raising awareness about the importance of the Alaska Highway for over 30 years. Formed of representatives from local governments located along or near the Alaska Highway in northeastern BC, the AHCS works to raise awareness of and protect the history and heritage of the Alaska Highway's cultural landscape and to improve the traveler's experience. Administrative support for the AHCS is provided by the Northern British Columbia Tourism Association (NBCTA). Bud Powell is the Chair of the AHCS; April Moi is the Administrator.