

THE FREE PRESS UP FRONT

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PHONE 564-0005

Mayors look for recovery

By MICHELLE LANG

Free Press staff writer

Eight northern municipal leaders, including Prince George's Mayor Colin Kinsley, have developed an economic strategy to boost their ailing communities.

The seven mayors and chair of the Fraser-Fort George Regional District met for three hours on December 16 in response "to the 18 per cent unemployment rates and the attendant economic difficulties of the region."

Delivered to Prince George MLAs Lois Boone and Paul Ramsey on Friday, their plan identified several areas for immediate action:

- Establish a mayor's task force on forest issues
- Save Fraser Lake's Endako Mine by supporting the Job Protection Commissioner
- Ask the province to fast track the PGRH expansion for construction in 1999
- Request the allocation of planning money for the Wood Technology Institute be allocated in 1999
- Encourage the government to award a 150,000 cubic metre value-added license in Fort St. James
- Fast track the construction of a multi-level care facility in Vanderhoof for 1999
- Ask for a provincial commitment to expand UNBC

The mayors say they hope to act as a catalyst to see these provincially governed projects through. Acknowledging that most of the proposed steps are out of municipal hands, Mr. Kinsley says they will need support from the province.

"We hope that collectively we can make a difference. We couldn't just sit by and not do anything. That would be a disservice. We hope that all these mayors together will bring a sense of urgency to these projects," says Mr. Kinsley.

The Mayors' task force, to be established in mid-January, will act as a go between for industry and government, meeting with the forest sector and the province on issues related to forestry: fibre costs, regulatory costs, the LRMP process and land claims.

All projects they will be discussing are in keeping with the education and health needs of the region, they say.

The seven mayors are from Valemount, McBride, Mackenzie, Fort St. James, Vanderhoof, Fraser Lake and Prince George.

In mid-January they will meet again to discuss progress on their plan and to develop further strategies to "correct the current high unemployment."

The group will also meet with Liberal MLA Paul Nettleton, Prince George-Omineca.

Santas/Hit the Heights



RCMP members and their families toured lower College Heights Thursday night in festive costumes collecting donations and singing carols on a horse-drawn wagon. JOHN MCKENZIE/FREE PRESS

Ice jam puts Miworth residents on move

By MICHELLE LANG

Free Press staff writer

The Nechako River ice jam of 1996/1997 will likely require four to five Miworth residents to relocate their homes.

A Ministry of Environment study of 10 properties - on Bergman Road, Island Park Drive and Aspen Lane - indicates the ice jam and high water have eroded the slope below the residences to the point of potential bank failure.

While the engineer's report says there is not immediate cause for concern, Glen Davidson of the environment ministry says the bank where they are

located couldn't withstand another event like the ice jam.

But because bank protection, such as concrete mat or "rip rap rock" protection, would cost five to 10 times as much, the ministry is recommending relocating the residences as "by far the cheapest option."

"Relocating is the more realistic cost. It's less extreme than watching the houses go sailing down the river," says Gord Simons, a planner with the Regional District of Fraser Fort George which is working with the residents.

About five of the 10

properties have been identified as higher risk and may be relocated further away from the crest of the bank on the owner's property. This will cost an estimated \$30,000 to \$50,000 per house.

In addition to the costly nature of bank protection, Mr. Davidson says the ministry does not favour it as an option because the work is not a guaranteed solution.

Even with bank protection failures can still occur, especially on a river like the Nechako which often has high flows and ice. As well reinforcing the bank could create habitat protection issues on the

Nechako.

"Relocation is the cheapest and by far the most guaranteed solution. That's why we are pursuing it," says Mr. Davidson.

The residents are currently working with the regional district which will apply on their behalf to the provincial Flood Protection Assistance Fund. The fund may pay up to 75 per cent of the cost of relocating the residences.

Area residents are gathering estimates for their individual relocation and will go before the regional district board in February to request a formal application to the fund by April.

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