



Revitalizing First Nations forest policy



Tina Antoine, Splatstin First Nation photo

Jeff Eustache

First Nations forest policy was the focus of a recent conference examining progress since the release of the 1996 Royal Commission report on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP).

Hosted by the Ottawa-based National Aboriginal Forestry Association (NAFA), the conference addressed the forestry-related recommendations in the RCAP. **Jeff Eustache**, Forestry Co-ordinator for the Splatstin First Nation, attended the Conference on behalf of FORREX.

Participants generally agreed that implementation of the forestry recommendations has lagged behind other areas of the RCAP. Topics such as re-allocation of forest tenures, co-management arrangements, resource-based economic development, benefit sharing, and capacity building were discussed during the two-day conference. Participants also discussed the Aboriginal forestry implications of recent court decisions, the treaty process, and intellectual property rights.

Conference presenters came from as far away as Washington (DC), the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, and Atlantic Canada to present

on panels and in workshops. Former RCAP Commissioner **Viola Robinson** delivered the keynote address to delegates and offered insight into the Commission's recommendations and their original hopes for the Report. Other speakers addressed roles for Aboriginal peoples in National Parks, devolution of natural resources to lower levels of government, and NAFA's relationship to the RCAP.

First Nations forestry tenures provided a lively topic for discussion. Many of the tenures granted have been uneconomically small, overly restrictive, or operationally difficult. Conference participants felt there was a "disconnect" between the higher-levels of tenure-related decision making, and the operational realities of forestry on the ground. Other British Columbia conference attendees included **Garry Merkel**, RFP; **Mickey Werstuik**, councillor of the Westbank First Nation; **Dave Nordquist** of the Adams Lake Band and Chair of NAFA; and **Ron Matthew** of the First Nations Forestry Association. 🌲

For a Conference summary, go to <http://www.nafaforestry.org> and follow the link to the proceedings.