

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Report takes a snapshot of the state of sustainability in the Robson Valley, Prince George area and Stuart / Nechako

**PRINCE GEORGE, BC, November 18, 2008:** The Fraser Basin Council today issued a *Sustainability Snapshot* report that finds the Robson Valley, Prince George and Stuart/Nechako regions face social, economic and environmental challenges, but are also becoming more sustainable in a number of ways.

“It is natural for people to be worried by the current economic crisis, but it is important not to become overwhelmed,” said Charles Jago, Chair of the Fraser Basin Council at the release of the report in Prince George. “The changes that take place over the years are important, and so is a focus on the big picture ahead. For today’s leaders, the big picture is sustainability – how can we live and manage our communities in a way that balances social, economic and environmental considerations over time? It’s critical that we find a way if we want to meet the needs of future generations, as well as our own.”

The *Upper Fraser Sustainability Snapshot: A Picture of Our Region* summarizes data on a number of sustainability indicators, such as air and water quality, community health, forestry, consumption and waste.

According to Steve Litke, Senior Program Manager at the Council, the communities of the Upper Fraser seem to be resilient to both economic downturns and a 6% decrease in population experienced between 1996 and 2006. One reflection of this is in income levels. “Average income varies by sub-region,” he said, “but overall it is comparable to the rest of the province. In fact, there is a smaller proportion of low-income households in the communities of the Upper Fraser than in BC overall.”

Forestry, including manufacturing of forest products, remains a significant economic engine of the Upper Fraser, but one that is vulnerable to fluctuating market demand. Forest health, moreover, has been seriously damaged by mountain pine beetle and other pests. Beetle kill has offered short-term harvesting opportunities in the region, but the recovery of forests will take time.

“Resilience is important for Upper Fraser communities, and economic diversification is an important component,” said Dr. Jago. “That includes diversification into agriculture, tourism, manufacturing, retail services, transportation and other areas.”

The well-being of communities is reflected in human health indicators, and the report touches on several. The good news is that life expectancy in the region has increased 2% over the past decade, although not as much as in the rest of BC, and there remain various health risks of particular concern, including cancer, which is a leading cause of death.

The Aboriginal population in the region has grown, yet Aboriginal people face more health-related concerns than non-Aboriginals, as flagged by the Provincial Health Officer. A challenge ahead is to continue to forge stronger relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. To date, there are no ratified treaties, but there are agreements, including natural resource agreements that demonstrate progress and offer hope.

An important environmental health issue is air quality in the Prince George area, especially fine particulate matter. Energy consumption and solid waste disposal in landfills are also notable, both having increased in recent years. The Upper Fraser region boasts the best water quality in the Fraser Basin, particularly in the Robson Valley. There are, however, habitat and ecosystem concerns, and species that are facing difficulty. These include Woodland Caribou, Early and Late Stuart Sockeye, Endako Chinook and Nechako White Sturgeon.

The report warns that climate change is a critical overarching threat to social, environmental and economic well-being, and may prove one of the greatest tests of resilience in the years ahead. There are dual challenges: reducing greenhouse gas emissions to slow climate change, and adapting to climate change to limit its impacts on communities.

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*The **Fraser Basin Council** is a non-profit society that brings people together to find solutions to long-standing issues and conflicts, and to take advantage of opportunities to advance sustainability in the Fraser River Basin and beyond. The Fraser Basin Council works to ensure that the decisions made today will protect and advance the social, economic, environmental dimensions of sustainability into the future.*

*The Upper Fraser Sustainability Snapshot report is formally released today at the Fraser Basin Council's open house in Prince George: 2:00 -3:30 pm, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor 155 George Street. It is also available online at [www.fraserbasin.bc.ca](http://www.fraserbasin.bc.ca). For information on where to pick up print copies, visit the website or contact the Fraser Basin Council's Upper Fraser office in Prince George: E: [jmerrick@fraserbasin.bc.ca](mailto:jmerrick@fraserbasin.bc.ca) or T: 250 612-0252.*

*The next report of the Fraser Basin Council, Sustainability Snapshot 4, is scheduled for release at the State of the Fraser Basin Conference, February 19-20, 2009 in Vancouver. That report will canvass 18 sustainability topics on all regions of the Fraser Basin.*

**For more information, contact:**

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