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EAST SIDE LAKE WINNIPEG PLANNING INITIATIVE CONTINUES

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First Nation Elders and Community Residents Share their Views on the Future of the Region

Elders of 14 First Nation communities and residents from 34 communities on the East Side of Lake Winnipeg have added their views in the ongoing effort to develop a broad area plan for the region.

"This area has some of the last beautiful stands of boreal forest in North America and a scattered, isolated population that is beginning to feel the effects of climate change that reduces the viability of winter roads which bring in vital supplies," said Conservation Minister Stan Struthers. "Through the East Side Planning Initiative we are working with residents to put together a plan that recognizes the need for community development and protection for many sacred and natural areas."

A recent series of meetings in Winnipeg brought together 27 elders from 14 communities to share their ideas and traditional knowledge with the province's East Side planning initiative through the East Side Lake Winnipeg Round Table and the First Nations Council. A series of meetings has also been held in the communities along the East Side of Lake Winnipeg with additional meetings scheduled in the New Year.

"We are meeting with residents of the East Side to hear their views on community development which include environmental, social, health, cultural and economic needs," said East Side Round Table associate chair Ed Wood. "By working together, we can find a way to build a Broad Area Plan that respects different communities today and into the future."

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The East Side of Lake Winnipeg is relatively undeveloped and has a vast expanse of boreal forest. The province has prevented new logging operations from beginning work in the area until the plan is completed. The plan is expected to develop a vision for land resource use that meets the needs of local communities and respects the ecological integrity of the boreal forest and other sacred and natural treasures.

"The advice and ideas we have received from community members has identified several issues such as transportation, the community benefits of sustainable resource development and the need to protect the environment," said Struthers. "The input from residents will continue to be an integral part of our effort to develop a plan that acknowledges their needs and helps protect the environment that sustains these communities."

The planning effort is being guided by the East Side Round Table, made up of 21 appointed members, and the First Nations Advisory Council comprising representatives of the 16 First Nations communities on the East Side of Lake Winnipeg. A Broad Area Plan is expected to be completed in mid-2004.