

# ***Onwards Atikokan***

**The  
Renewal  
of an  
Ex-Single-Industry  
Town**

**May 2003**

# **Onwards Atikokan: The Renewal of an Ex-Single-Industry Town**

**May 2003**

Submitted to the Town of Atikokan and the Atikokan Economic Development Corporation.

A project of the Planning 720 Class of the University of Waterloo School of Planning, under the direction of Professor Roger Suffling.

## **Written by:**

Peter Ellis, Christy Fiddler, Ron Gill, Geoffrey Keyworth, Michelle Moretti, Jill Paske, Lana Phillips, Zeralynne Te, Dan Vandebelt, Bradley Wright

## **Edited by**

Roger Suffling

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For more information about this report please contact Professor Roger Suffling  
([rcsuffli@fes.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:rcsuffli@fes.uwaterloo.ca))

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## Executive Summary

This report proposes a framework for achieving community visions and development goals. It is intended for community members, entrepreneurs, and governments, both in Atikokan and across Northwestern Ontario. We use the Town of Atikokan as a case study to explore the challenges faced by and the strengths of resource communities, and provide concrete recommendations for improving their quality of life. This analysis is based on interviews and surveys with local residents and prominent community members, experience from visits to Atikokan, and comparative examples of other similar towns. Since they also face similar challenges and opportunities, the insights gained from this case study can be applicable to other communities across the region.

As with all places, Atikokan's history is unique. Once a thriving mining community, the closure of the mines has tested the resilience and determination of the townspeople. They face a declining local economy, decreasing population, and less capital for development. Their struggle brings to the forefront a basic question regarding small communities: Should they continue to exist or be allowed to die out peacefully? Based on the premise that these towns should continue, the report highlights a number of the challenges facing the region, and the strengths Atikokan can harness to attract growth to sustain itself.

The strategies identified in this report focus on the need for further collaboration and diversity of opportunities within Atikokan. Collaboration should be the foundation of many of the initiatives undertaken in resource towns. The spirit of collaboration is evident in many projects that Atikokan has undertaken and needs to be further encouraged in the community, together with neighbouring towns, and within the entire region.

Creating a healthy and vibrant economy in Atikokan will require many diverse activities. This may involve a multiplicity of partners to help the town be flexible and adaptable to change. Diversification in small community-oriented businesses will further provide an even distribution of jobs and allow more profits to remain locally. A coordinated plan with clearly established priorities and criteria will help both diversity and collaboration to flourish.

Resource towns in the region should survive because their existence benefits Northwestern Ontario as a whole. Towns such as Atikokan have endemic challenges but also possess unique strengths. The development framework detailed herein aims to help these communities capitalize on their strengths, to grow and prosper.

This report contains more than forty concrete recommendations in the areas of town beautification, community development, tourism, regional networking, and the establishment of broader networks. Many of these can be done immediately, while others will require more time, effort, and patience. We believe that they are not beyond Atikokan's reach. Already a remarkable example of perseverance in the face of adversity, Atikokan can demonstrate what is possible when a community achieves its vision.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Resource based towns in Northwestern Ontario are unique from other larger communities. They have different economic, social, and environmental qualities that contribute to the challenges they face and the opportunities they represent. The common predicaments which many of these resource communities find themselves in result from their relative isolation and narrow economic base; factors that simply are not present in communities that are closer to major centers, and that have more diverse economies. Key factors such as relatively low land costs, distinctive lifestyle, and proximity to natural features contribute to development potential of these areas. This report discusses these Northwestern Ontario communities focusing on the following objectives:

1. To investigate the importance of these communities from a variety of perspectives including those of provincial, regional and local decision makers, community organizations, business owners, and citizens.
2. To outline the current predicaments of these resource communities, and some of the reasons for them.
3. To outline the challenges that these communities face in comparison to larger and more economically diverse communities.
4. To discuss the strengths of these communities relative to other places.
5. To identify opportunities for these communities and the means of achieving them. This discussion will revolve around the key themes of collaboration and diversity, and will outline the potential roles of participants at the provincial, regional and local level.
6. To make short, medium and long-term recommendations to maintain and improve economic development. These recommendations range from small 'quick fixes' such as town beautification, to larger organizational changes such as prioritizing initiatives.

The Town of Atikokan serves as a case study for this report. Atikokan and its surrounding region border the northern boundary of Quetico Provincial Park in Northwestern Ontario (Figure 1). Historically, Atikokan was a prosperous small resource community. The town thrived on two open-pit iron mines until they closed in the early 1980s. Since the closures, the town and region have been supported by forestry activities, a thermal generation power plant, and tourism. In spite of the hard work and ingenuity of the local residents, the town is still in need of economic stimulus to maintain its present population and infrastructure.

This paper has been written by a research team of graduate students in the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo. This program trains students to become professionals who can work in both the public and private sector; such as municipal planning offices, provincial and national parks, public utilities, consulting firms, social planning councils, and economic development offices. Team members come from a variety of different locales throughout Canada and bring a diverse range of educational and professional backgrounds (Appendix G). This diversity results in an array of experiences and viewpoints that have been incorporated into this paper. The project has been conducted under the supervision of Professor Roger Suffling. Dr. Suffling has 27 years experience in resource management and related issues in Northwestern Ontario and elsewhere.

This paper has been produced for a variety of audiences including: the Ontario provincial government, resource and ex-resource towns including Atikokan, and larger northern municipalities like Thunder Bay. The paper includes sections that may be of interest to government decision makers, community organizations, business owners and other entrepreneurs, First Nation groups, and other local residents. It should be noted that some of the following content will be familiar to the residents of Atikokan, but is used to provide examples and the context for the wider audience.



## 2.0 PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE

The Town of Atikokan, like many other resource communities, has developed a vision for the community intended to guide growth and development into the future: “Atikokan, Canada’s Canoeing Capital, is a safe, healthy community with a diverse economy, strong ties to the wilderness, and a creative spirit”.<sup>1</sup>

This paper provides recommendations that will assist Ontario’s resource communities achieve their visions. Each community should determine the direction it wishes to follow based on its’ unique attributes and local preferences. We accept Atikokan’s vision for the future, and the challenge now is to make the vision a reality.

There are currently two options for struggling resource towns like Atikokan. The first is to let the towns die out, implying that local residents abandon their homes and find employment elsewhere. The second is to attempt to revitalize local economies. Provincial policies and financial assistance can assist resource towns to once again be self-sustaining and thriving places in Northwestern Ontario. There is a liberalist argument that “providing government financial assistance to anyone is basically misguided and results in overdependence on external funding”.<sup>2</sup> Under this line of reasoning, the case could be made that “old” resource towns should be allowed to die out naturally, and any financial support would be economically inefficient and a misuse of resources. This paper is founded on the conviction that this should not be the case, and that government assistance should be provided. These communities are important because:

- Resource communities are home to a significant number of Ontario residents. Atikokan alone has a population of over 3600 people<sup>3</sup>. Despite adversity, many of these local residents have shown resiliency and dedication to the community’s survival. Residents should have the opportunity to remain in their community.
- They offer a different lifestyle than that of larger municipalities. Many offer a quiet, peaceful and pristine living environment that simply cannot be found in large towns and cities. It is important that Ontario continue to provide such options.
- They provide opportunities for activities that are not as prominent in other parts of the province. For example, Atikokan provides some of the best canoeing opportunities in North America. Ontario residents and visitors should have the opportunity to partake in some of the unique experiences that small communities offer.
- There are economic inter-relationships between these towns and the surrounding region. Residents and local businesses in small communities significantly contribute to Thunder Bay’s economy through expenditures on goods and services. For example, building materials needed for construction projects in Atikokan may not be available locally and must be purchased in Thunder Bay.

- They have potential to significantly enhance Ontario's economy. Many of these towns have unique physical, cultural and historical features, which represent the opportunity for national and international tourism. Similarly, many of these towns could assist the provincial economy through entrepreneurial activity and niche products.
- These towns are the doorstep to many of Ontario's natural resources providing essential industries such as forestry, mining, and hydropower that contribute to the vitality of the province.
- Their death or decline could result in negative pressures on the region. The increased population would put pressure on servicing and infrastructure in other locales.

Given the significance of Northwestern Ontario resource communities, the following sections outline opportunities that can help overcome present challenges. Challenges that the communities face are identified first because it is important to understand and appreciate the complexity of the dilemmas before considering solutions. Strengths of the community follow, as they offer a foundation to build upon. Potential opportunities and recommendations are outlined last, which consider strengths and challenges facing the community. The key themes of collaboration and diversity are prominent throughout the paper.

## **3.0 BACKGROUND**

### **3.1 History of Atikokan**

The Town of Atikokan has a unique history that dates back to the times of native settlement and European fur traders. A brief look into Atikokan's past will aid in providing insight into the present situation and understanding their current economic predicament.

#### **Quetico Provincial Park**

The 4758 km<sup>2</sup> Quetico Provincial Park is located south of the town of Atikokan, neighbouring the Canada-US border. Quetico Park is a near pristine wilderness, containing many lakes and rivers, making it ideal for eco-tourism, nature enthusiasts and canoeing. This has contributed to the symbol of the canoe, which is embedded in the culture and heritage of Atikokan and serves to link the town and the park.

Quetico Provincial Park has an interesting history. The earliest evidence of human settlement in the park dates back approximately 12,500 years ago, to indigenous people. In the late 1600s, the European explorers arrived in the Atikokan area. During the early years of European settlement, fur trading became an important function for the Natives, both economically and socially. The Boundary Waters Fur Trade Route, which ran across the southern edge of the park, and a second, less prominent path, which ran through Pickerell Lake and Sturgeon Lake were the main trading routes. Both met at Lac La Croix. In 1873, Treaty 3 officially recognized the reserve on Lac La Croix, which is located on the western boundary of Quetico Park. These transportation routes were abandoned after the creation of the Canadian National Railway. Evidence of the trails is still visible today thus Native heritage and fur trading are an important part of Atikokan's past.

With the introduction of the railway and decline of fur trading, logging became the main activity in the park in 1901. Interest in the logging industry was sparked with the construction of the railway and the need for timber for continued railway expansion. Remains of logging camps are still present within the boundaries of Quetico Park. In 1909, the park was officially recognized as an area of natural significance and in 1913, the name Quetico Forest Reserve was changed to Quetico Provincial Park.

#### **The Mines**

As a result of the increased demand for iron ore in the early 1940s Atikokan was identified as a mining site. The extraction of high-grade iron ore began in 1944, with Steep Rock Iron Mines Ltd.

and by the 1960s Caland Ore Company Ltd. was also in business<sup>4</sup>. Between 1944 and 1980 over 22,000 people came and left, earning their living from the mines, either directly through mining, or indirectly through office and clerical work<sup>5</sup>. During this time, Steep Rock and Caland shipped more ore than was used in the manufacturing of all cars ever built in Canada<sup>6</sup>.

In the 1970s technological advances improved the quality of steel produced from taconite ore. As a result, the hematite ore mined in Atikokan became less economically viable<sup>7</sup>. Inland Steel, which was Caland's parent company decided to establish business in the United States. Shortly after, Steep Rock made a similar decision. In 1972 both companies announced pending closures of the mines. However the local residents remained hopeful that the mines would stay open and paid little attention to the warnings<sup>8</sup>. Around 1979 the mines closed, and the business that sustained the local economy left Atikokan. Since the closure of the mines in the early 1980s the economy has been in a state of decline, and the opportunities available to local residents have been limited.

### **After the Mines**

Despite the closure of the mines and the stagnant economy, the people of Atikokan have demonstrated immense resilience and determination to remain in their home. Atikokan led the way in establishing a municipal/provincial/federal partnership to fund a community-based economic development office<sup>9</sup>. The community decided to adopt an aggressive plan to stimulate the local economy based on forestry, electric generation, tourism, and small businesses of local entrepreneurs<sup>10</sup>. Further local employment was established when Atikokan attracted Proboard, a lumber company that relies on the local timber industry to make particleboard<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, the residents convinced the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources to establish a local office<sup>12</sup>, which has the potential to promote the eco-tourism industry, establish stronger ties with Quetico Park, and protect the fragile park environment.

In addition to attracting business to Atikokan, there have also been improvements to the physical condition of the town. Since the closure of the mines, the local hospital has been rebuilt and expanded, and improvements have been made to the local airport<sup>13</sup>. The successes of Atikokan, after the closure of the mines, reinforces the tenacity of the residents and their desire to remain in their home town, which has the potential to result in further successes and revitalize the local economy under the right conditions.

### **Atikokan Today**

Although there have been successes since the closure of the mines, the town has been in a state of economic decline. Census data from 2001 shows Atikokan's predicament in the population trends.

**Table 1: Population in 1996, 2001 and Percentage of Change in Northwestern Ontario**

Location	Population 1996	Population 2001	Percent Change (%)
Pickle Lake	544	399	-26.7
Terrace Bay	2324	1950	-16.1
Manitouwadge	3395	2949	-13.1
Red Lake	4778	4233	-11.4
<i>Atikokan</i>	<i>4043</i>	<i>3632</i>	<i>-10.2</i>
Marathon	4791	4416	-7.8
Fort Frances	8790	8315	-5.4
Ignace	1782	1709	-4.1
Kenora	16365	15838	-3.2
Rainy River	1008	981	-2.7
Dryden	8289	8198	-1.1
Sioux Lookout	5165	5336	3.3
Ontario	10753573	11410046	6.1

Source: 1996, 2001 Canadian Census

Atikokan's population fell from 4,043 in 1996 to 3632 in 2001, a change of -10.2%; this is significantly lower than the provincial average of 6.1% increase. Atikokan's population is also decreasing in comparison with the surrounding region (Table 1). However, the population of the entire region is declining, with the exception of Sioux Lookout (+3.3%). Examining the labour force, employment trends, and average and income confirms the decline (Table 2).

**Table 2: Total Labour Force, Average Income and Employment Rates of Northwestern Ontario Communities (2001).**

Location	Total Labour Force	Average Income (\$)	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate (%)
Ignace	910	28,050	720	190	20.9
Manitouwadge	1585	41,603	1360	220	13.9
Atikokan	1795	28,621	1585	215	12
Rainy River	375	26,068	325	45	12
Kenora	8315	32,162	7605	710	8.5
Fort Frances	4110	30,820	3820	290	7.1
Dryden	4420	34,263	4120	305	6.9
Red Lake	2450	36,841	2280	170	6.9
Pickle Lake	225	23,043	215	15	6.7
Marathon	2510	39,226	2360	145	5.8
Terrace Bay	1045	43,934	995	55	5.3
Sioux Lookout	2870	33,703	2765	110	3.8
Ontario	6086815	35,185	5713900	372915	6.1

\*\*Labour Force refers to the population over the age of 15

Source: 2001 Canadian Census

In 2001, the average employment income in Atikokan was \$28,621, which is significantly lower than the provincial average of \$35,185 (Table 2). The unemployment rate was 12% in 2001;

almost exactly double the provincial average. Both, "...unemployment and welfare rates are higher than the region and the provincial norms"<sup>14</sup>. Within the surrounding region, Atikokan region, Atikokan has a relatively high unemployment rate (12%). The average income in Atikokan is also significantly lower than the significantly lower than the regional average of \$33,194. Again, this emphasizes the declining trend.

Considering that Atikokan once relied heavily on a single natural resource industry to sustain the local economy, which is also common to other towns in Northwestern Ontario, it is necessary to examine employment trends in relation to dominant industries, which are determined by the break down of the total labour force.

**Table 3: Top Four Industries as Determined by the Break-Down of the 2001 Total Employed Labour Force.**

Industry	Ontario	Atikokan	Dryden	Fort Frances	Ignace	Kenora	Manitouwadge	Marathon	Pickle Lake	Rainy River	Red Lake	Sioux Lookout	Terrace Bay
% Unemployment ranking (1=high)		3	7	6	1	5	2	10	9	4	8	12	11
Manufacturing	1	1	1	1				2		4			1
Retail Trade	2	2	2	2	4	2	2	3	2	1	2	3	3
Accommodation & Food Service			4		2	3		4	4		3		2
Health Care & Social Assistance	3	3	3	3		1	4			2	4	1	
Educational Services		4							3				
Construction				4									
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting					1		3						
Transportation & Warehousing					3							2	4
Public Administration						4			1			4	
Mining, Oil & Gas Extraction							1	1			1		
Professional Scientific & Technical Services	4									3			

Source: 2001 Canadian Census

Notes: Refer to Appendix C for detailed information regarding the location and industry.

Examining the above table, it is evident that only small portions of employees in Northwestern Ontario rely on natural resources as their source of employment. This may indicate that Northwestern Ontario no longer relies on natural resources to sustain local economy. It is important to stress that resource industries typically pay larger salaries than the service based sector. It must also be noted that some of the manufacturing sector is based on natural resources. The only towns in which natural resources industries employ a significant portion of the employment sector are Ignace, Manitouwadge, Marathon, and Red Lake. According to the 2001 Canadian Census, the dominant industries are clearly manufacturing, retail trade, accommodation

and food service, and health care and social assistance. Thus, the economy is shifting from an industrial resource-based manufacturing economy to a serviced based economy.

### 3.2 Predicaments and Implications

As a result of the closure of the mines, Atikokan currently finds itself in a state of predicament. In addition to the declining, high unemployment rate, and low average income, Atikokan also faces continued economic decline, limited opportunities available to the local residents, and an aging population. Due to the lack of capital, the physical infrastructure of roads, sewers and waterlines are also in need of repair<sup>15</sup>. Limited capital and external funding sources makes it difficult to begin improvement efforts.

In addition to the internal predicaments currently faced by Atikokan, there are also external constraints, which cannot be controlled and may be quite difficult to change. Primarily, Atikokan is located in a relatively remote location in Northwestern Ontario (Figure 1). There is no access to the town from a major highway, making it difficult for tourists and ‘visitors’ to pass through the Town. While Atikokan finds itself in a predicament, there is hope for the future to overcome their constraints and once again be a self-sustaining economy providing choice and opportunity for the local residents.

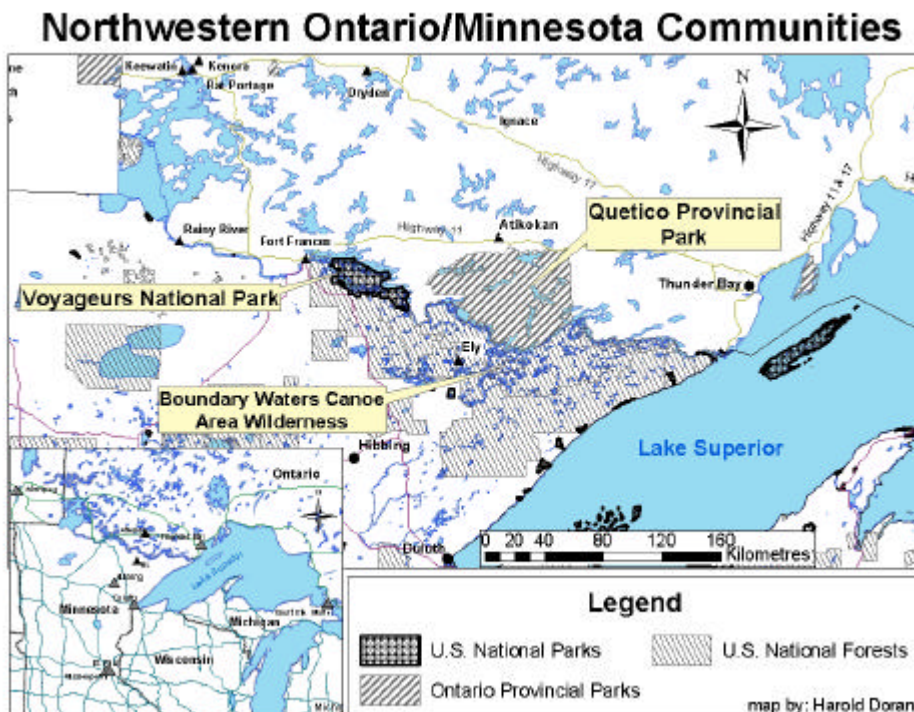


Figure 1: Map of Northwestern Ontario/Minnesota Communities.

## **4.0 CHALLENGES**

In order to provide sound recommendations regarding the future growth and development of resource communities, it is necessary to understand limitations that hinder economic initiatives. There are several general challenges that are faced by resource towns in Northwestern Ontario. These include geographic isolation, climatic factors, dependence on a single industry, and limited municipal capital. Multiple aspects of the economy, including the potential for tourism and attraction of new business ventures and residents, may be affected by these limitations.

### **4.1 General Challenges Faced by Resource Towns in Northwestern Ontario**

#### **Location**

As shown in Figure 1 and Appendix D, most towns in Northwestern Ontario are located a significant distance from each other and from major centres (e.g. Winnipeg, Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie), limiting interaction and the possibility for partnerships. For example, the nearest town to Atikokan is Fort Frances, roughly 150 km west. Geographic isolation is then compounded in those communities that are not located on major highways, such as Highways 11 and 17 of the Trans Canada network. This restricts the potential for visits by road travelers and opportunities for tourism. Furthermore, because of the isolated location of most resource towns in Northwestern Ontario, the cost of providing services (e.g. health care and telecommunications) is significantly higher relative to urban areas<sup>16</sup>. High-cost services may result in higher rates of taxation in these towns, making them less attractive for potential residents and businesses. As well, retail prices are generally inflated in small isolated towns, which may encourage businesses to relocate to larger centres (i.e. Thunder Bay).

#### **Climate**

In the winter months, most towns in Northwestern Ontario can expect an average daily temperature of -18 °C and normal annual snowfalls ranging from 200 to 450 cm<sup>17</sup>. Extremely cold winter temperatures may negatively affect the potential for outdoor tourism and activities at this time of year. Large amounts of snow may similarly impact tourism opportunities, as highway-driving conditions are often hazardous, reducing traffic flows in the winter season. A further constraint limiting the enjoyment of outdoor activity in Northwestern Ontario is the proliferation of insect populations in the early summer. Moderate temperatures and increased moisture are ideal conditions for mosquitoes and black flies, which thrive during the month of June.



### **Dependence on a Single Industry**

Many towns in Northwestern Ontario, for example Dryden, Marathon and Terrace Bay, rely on natural resource extraction or processing as their main source of employment<sup>18</sup>. However, these industries are known to be volatile because of national and global price shifts and changing requests for mining or forestry-based products. Resource-based employment in towns dependent on such industries also changes according to these conditions of supply and demand and may not be consistent over time<sup>19</sup>.

Employment in single industry communities is also affected by the renewability of the resource. For all practical purposes, ore deposits are non-renewable<sup>20</sup> so that a mine-dependent town must be prepared for an eventual loss of mining employment. Conversely, logged or burned forests can be reestablished<sup>21</sup>, but even here, the local supply of employment and raw materials may fluctuate over decades.<sup>22</sup>

Because most towns in Northwestern Ontario lack a diverse economic base, the closure of the dominant industry may result in devastating unemployment, which could ripple through the rest of the town<sup>23</sup>. Economic recovery and innovative development to compensate for such closures may be further limited by the lack of experience and willingness to engage in non-traditional employment among residents in some resource towns<sup>24</sup>.

Some towns have more difficulty adjusting to the loss of a dominant natural resource industry than others<sup>25</sup>. In Northwestern Ontario, for example, Pickle Lake suffered severe population loss within a short time after the base metal mine closed in the 1980s. On the other hand, the town of Red Lake remained fairly stable following the closure of some of the gold mines as this community had a more diverse economy and opportunities for further mining activity<sup>26</sup>.

### **Limited Capital**

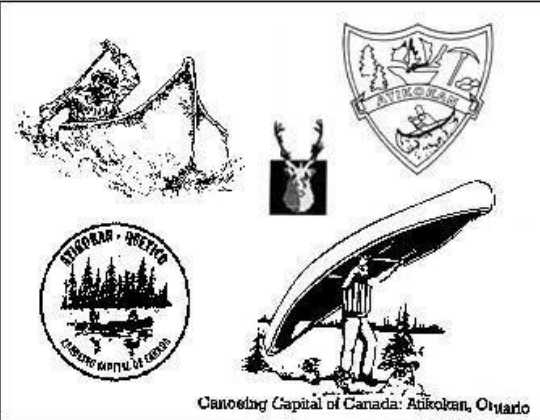
The municipal budget for most Northwestern Ontario towns is small and, like virtually all communities in Ontario, most revenue is generated through taxation<sup>27</sup>. Thus, any significant changes in the tax base, such as the closure of an industrial site or major population loss, may cause great financial strain for a town<sup>28</sup>. Many communities in this region also tend to rely heavily on federal and provincial funding to supplement their municipal revenue<sup>29</sup>. However, senior levels of government have consistently reduced transfer payments and given more responsibility to municipalities through downloading in recent years<sup>30</sup>. This reduced support is financially constraining for those towns that have traditionally been dependent on external funding sources.

## **4.2 Specific Challenges Faced by the Town of Atikokan**

The Town of Atikokan must deal with the general challenges found in other Northwestern Ontario towns, as well as specific predicaments which may limit opportunities for economic renewal. As

with most such small towns, Atikokan's case is a unique mix of common challenges that may affect the potential to attract tourists, new businesses, and residents (*Table 5*).

**Table 5: Challenges and their Potential Effects on Atikokan**

Challenges	How Atikokan may be Affected
<b>Location</b>	
Isolated from other towns, major centres in Canada and the U.S. and U.S. border crossings (Appendix D)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limits partnership potential between towns and centres and restricts opportunities for tourism and new business ventures</li> </ul>
Not on main highway, but located 3 km north of Highway 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Travelers may not stop and town misses out on tourism opportunities<sup>31</sup></li> </ul>
No scheduled flights into Municipal Airport and customs services available on on-call basis only <sup>32</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Results in uncertain and unplanned numbers of visitors and limits travel from U.S. and international destinations</li> </ul>
<b>Economic Challenges</b>	
Township has debentures to pay off, and is heavily reliant on senior government support <sup>33</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restricts town to federally or provincially approved projects; transfer payments may be uncertain and inconsistent source of revenue</li> </ul>
A variety of provincial government restrictions are in effect in the region: e.g. lack of environmental surveying on nearby lakes <sup>34</sup> ; complex licensing and permit procedures (see Appendix F); ministries with uncoordinated agendas <sup>35</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Red tape" limits opportunities for tourism, cottaging development and entrepreneurial activity</li> </ul>
Lacks a stable employment base: e.g. inconsistent natural resource employment <sup>36</sup> ; uncertain future of thermal generating station <sup>37</sup> ; seasonal tourism employment <sup>38</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes it difficult to attract new residents and restricts the development of new economic initiatives among existing residents</li> </ul>
<b>Marketing Approaches</b>	
<p>Lacks consistent visual symbol and colour scheme to associate with the town<sup>39</sup></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inconsistent marketing package may limit impact on potential tourists and entrepreneurs</li> </ul>

**Figure 2: Various Town Symbols and Logos**

Lacks collective marketing campaign where outfitters, business owners, the municipality and regional tourism associations promote town together <sup>40</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inconsistent advertisement may hinder effective promotion efforts</li> </ul>
Some advertising media (e.g. brochures, websites, signs and billboards) not maintained and updated <sup>41</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May limit opportunity to attract full range of visitors and potential residents</li> </ul>
Advertising and promotional campaigns lack wide national and international exposure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limits geographic scope of potential tourists and visitors</li> </ul>
<b>Physical Infrastructure</b>	
Street maintenance and public works (e.g. potholes, sidewalks, storm drainage systems) need further work <sup>42</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May hinder appearance and functionality of town for outside visitors and current residents</li> </ul>
Abandoned buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May create a negative visual impression, especially to outside visitors</li> </ul>
Lacks some basic beautification: e.g. lack of trees, medians and flower planters on Mackenzie Street and downtown <sup>43</sup> ; lack of visually inviting entrance to town <sup>44</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May detract from town's aesthetic appearance and atmosphere</li> </ul>
<b>Social Infrastructure</b>	
Lacks stable employment opportunities for young people <sup>45</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Results in generally aging population<sup>46</sup> and possible population loss and "brain drain"</li> <li>• Creates a mindset among the young that the only future lies beyond town.</li> </ul>
Many residents apprehensive or unwilling to change toward non-resource based employment <sup>47</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May limit opportunity for diverse economic development initiatives</li> </ul>
General lack of coordination among residents when approaching possible economic opportunities: e.g. differing opinions with regard to focus of future development <sup>48</sup> ; some businesses and organizations promote town on individual basis <sup>49</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best possible developments may not be recognized and undertaken; inconsistent promotion may limit potential impact of marketing efforts</li> </ul>

## **5.0 STRENGTHS**

There are several generalizations that can be made about the strengths of many resource towns in northwestern Ontario, which include community identity, quality of life, and economic potential. The following section will first discuss the general strengths and potential of many resource towns in northwestern Ontario, followed by a discussion of strengths specific to Atikokan.

### **5.1 Strengths possessed by Resource Towns in Northwestern Ontario**

#### **Community Identity and Life**

The location of resource towns is often perceived as a constraint, as it may contribute to the economic problems. However, there are also strengths to be found in the location of these towns. Most resource towns in northwestern Ontario are isolated from major urban centres (Figure 1), resulting in the development of unique community identities<sup>50</sup>. Community members are often satisfied with the quality of life they experience. Due to the strong community identity, many residents are reluctant to leave, even in the event of an economic crisis.<sup>51</sup>

#### **Experience**

Communities in Northwestern Ontario have a need and attitude for self-sufficiency that results from their isolation from major urban centers. These communities develop a wide range of skills and experiences relative to local circumstances, economy and resources<sup>52</sup>.

#### **Relatively Low Land Costs and Potential for Investment**

The cost of land in many resource towns in Northwestern Ontario is relatively low in comparison to major urban centers. Hence, there is potential for investment and development in the future in these lands.<sup>53</sup>



#### **Constraints of Large Metropolitan Cities**

There are inherent constraints to living in metropolitan cities that make living in small towns more attractive. Some negative consequences include loss of agricultural land, urban sprawl, safety issues, traffic congestion, and pollution.<sup>54</sup> Many also find metropolitan cities anonymous lacking a deep sense of community and kinship.

## 5.2 Specific Strengths found in the Town of Atikokan

Atikokan shares many common strengths with other Northwestern Ontario resource towns. However, Atikokan has also developed strengths that are specific to its location, climate, economic tradition, and community (Table 6).

**Table 6: Strengths of Atikokan and their Potential Benefits**

Strengths	Potential Benefit derived from Strengths
<b>Location</b>	
<p>Located adjacent to the pristine wilderness of Quetico Provincial Park and other wilderness<sup>55</sup></p>  <p><b>Figure 3: Pristine Wilderness of Quetico Provincial Park.</b></p>  <p><b>Figure 4: Vast Areas of Natural Features.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct use of Quetico Park for outdoor recreational purposes, such as hiking and nature appreciation in the summer months and snowshoeing and cross country skiing in the winter months</li> <li>• Quetico Provincial Park boasts some of the finest water courses for canoe use in North America, which strengthens the premise that Atikokan is the “Canoeing Capital of Canada”</li> <li>• Proximity to many other parks and lakes (please see Appendix D: Distances from Atikokan)</li> <li>• Indirect use of Quetico Park to build the reputation and economy of the community</li> <li>• Economic spin-offs can be developed from the reputation of the park, such as the development of arts and culture, outdoor recreation, and tourism</li> <li>• The cleanliness of the natural environment and air makes area an attractive place for people to reside</li> </ul>
<p>Located west of Thunder Bay on Highway 11</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None of the traffic congestion experienced by many larger towns</li> <li>• Isolation strengthens the spirit and sense of place of the community</li> </ul>
<b>Climate</b>	
<p>Daylight hours are long during the summer months<sup>56</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural, economic, and social benefits to long daylight hours; e.g., locals and tourists can enjoy out door recreation activities and summer festivities for a longer period of time</li> </ul>

<p>Quetico Park and Quetico Centre are located at a significant global change monitoring node. Large wilderness tracts occur here where three ecoregions meet. As a result, the Quetico district is very sensitive to climate change<sup>57</sup>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic and education benefits from the development of research centres and facilities, such as Observatory Earth at the Quetico Centre, that monitor climatic changes</li> <li>• Potential for future opportunity for other high tech environmental research industries to establish themselves in area</li> </ul>
<p><b>Economics</b></p>	
<p>Strong history in resource extraction and continues to follow this tradition; for e.g., lumber and thermal plant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Further benefit from resource extraction industries by developing entrepreneurial strategies that produce value added products</li> </ul>
<p>Potential to develop advanced communication services<sup>58</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History of innovations in communications; for e.g., first community to have cable in northwestern Ontario</li> <li>• Potential to follow in that tradition by pursuing the development of advanced communication and technology</li> </ul>
<p>Strong economic support system: Economic Development Corporation Provincial Government and Programs such as Connect Ontario: Broadband Regional Access (COBRA) Local entrepreneurs<sup>59</sup> and individuals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthens economic community</li> <li>• Stable, skilled population base</li> <li>• Potential to develop new ventures and projects</li> </ul>
<p>Strong developing tourism industry based on canoeing and other outdoor recreation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potential to benefit from this growing industry through the spin off benefits that develop out of tourism; for e.g., food and beverage, accommodations, and arts and culture</li> <li>• Potential to develop a strong eco-tourism based market</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community</b></p>	
<p>Strong survival mentality that drives vision and community spirit Community is genuinely warmhearted, generous, and has strong sense of volunteerism Strong and highly innovative local high school<sup>60</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attractive community to establish business, raise family, and retire</li> <li>• Well developed with many amenities; for e.g. golf course, swimming pool, curling club, cultural events, and so forth</li> </ul>

Source: Conducted Interviews in Atikokan, February 22nd-23<sup>rd</sup>, 2003

## **6.0 OPPORTUNITIES**

In light of the current situation in Atikokan, the following provides a framework, based on the themes of collaboration and diversity. The suggested framework should assist in stimulating the local economy.

### **6.1 Collaboration**

Collaboration implies uniting behind common goals and is based on the principles of cooperation and coordination. Collaboration amongst stakeholders improves process transparency, morale, accountability, and trust, and should be a feature of most economic development projects.

The following example from another economic context demonstrates the effectiveness of collaboration. The Open Source software development initiative<sup>61</sup> is an excellent example of a collaborative methodology. It encourages software developers to work together on projects, in the firm belief that “many eyes” studying the same program will be more likely to solve problems. Programmers from around the world have successfully used this methodology in many projects, which strives for honesty amongst the participants, high quality of the final products, and open decision-making. Outside of the Open Source world, programmers or companies work individually on their projects. The competitive environment encourages companies to make their products distinct, and programs may not work well together.

#### **The Context of Collaboration in Atikokan**

The community members of Atikokan have successfully collaborated on past projects. Examples include the town museums, the “Canoeing Capital of Canada” theme, and the White Otter Castle tourist attraction.

#### **Town Museum Amalgamation**

Prior to amalgamation, Atikokan had a town and mining history museum, each with its own mandate. Combining them into one operation enabled them to share resources, present a common history of the town, and increase efficiency.

#### **“Canoeing Capital of Canada” Theme**

Atikokan markets itself as the “Canoeing Capital of Canada”. This theme presents a unified vision to focus further development efforts around a common goal. This particular project is progressing, as signage in the town is beginning to reflect acceptance of this theme, although a total transition is not yet complete.

#### **White Otter Castle**

White Otter Castle, a local tourist attraction, is located almost halfway between Atikokan and the neighbouring Town of Ignace. A dispute over “ownership” could have delayed development of this attraction, increasing the costs to both towns. However, sharing this resource enabled both towns

to benefit. These projects prove that collaborative efforts can and do work in Atikokan, and that further collaboration should be encouraged.

### **6.1.1 Continuity in Collaboration**

Many projects require continuous collaborative work over extended periods to produce results.

#### **The Quetico Centre**

The Quetico Centre demonstrates continuity in its work. Since 1958 it has been pursuing its mandate as a non-profit retreat centre<sup>62</sup>. Recent efforts to secure funding were persistent and imaginative, resulting in a conference centre with excellent facilities which is now self-sufficient and a minor employer. The Quetico Centre clearly embodies the principles of tenacity and patience in achieving its goals.

#### **Atikokan-Minaki Waterway**

Reports generated by the Town detail how the Atikokan portion of the Atikokan-Minaki Waterway remains incomplete due to a lack of funding<sup>63</sup>. Until completion, this project is of little benefit to the town. It is clear that continuous effort required for these projects is not possible in the absence of funding. In some cases it may be better to postpone projects until adequate support is available.

### **6.1.2 Internal Opportunities**

Within the Town of Atikokan there are many tourism initiatives that have been successful as a result of collaboration between residents, businesses, and local government. However, further possibilities exist to enhance Atikokan for residents and visitors. Some examples include: town beautification and minor infrastructure improvements, continuing to shop locally, increasing the cooperation between small businesses, and maintaining a tourism coordinator.

#### **Beautification and Infrastructure Improvements**

Beautification projects evident within Atikokan include the murals that boast its heritage. However, these murals cannot compensate for the downtown's general lack of aesthetics. Planting trees, shrubbery and gardens throughout downtown areas is a relatively inexpensive and attractive way to improve town aesthetics. An example specific to Atikokan includes incorporating the canoeing-capital theme throughout its downtown by putting up decorative canoes on light posts, sidewalk benches, and in town gardens. Coordinating a common colour scheme in the downtown area would also benefit the town's aesthetics.

Physical infrastructure provides essential services for residents and businesses, and is important when accommodating visitors. The Town of Atikokan has the ability to accommodate tourists; however, many residents expressed dissatisfaction with infrastructure in "The Voice of Atikokan" mail-in survey<sup>64</sup>. The results of this survey highlighted needs of improvement to storm drainage, sidewalks, and street maintenance<sup>65</sup>. As D. Wright and B. Michels pointed out, "tourism development should start by improving the town for its residents, who will then become



ambassadors for the area”<sup>66</sup>. Enhanced town aesthetics also increase the opportunity for potential investment and attracting new business ventures. This infrastructure improvement and beautification concept is fundamental to satisfying local residents and businesses and achieving Atikokan’s tourism potential.

### **Shopping Locally**

Many residents in the Town of Atikokan loyally purchase their goods and services from local merchants and businesses. However, not all essential goods and services are available in the town. A survey of young, middle-aged, and retired Atikokan residents could identify common supply needs that are not already available in town. Several options exist for making this type of ‘wish list’ a reality, such as encouraging existing retailers and service providers to broaden their market, finding new entrepreneurs, and setting up a cooperative to buy goods and services in bulk.. Provided that this idea is desired, it would contribute to enhanced economic autonomy and stability of Atikokan’s commercial sector. Since Atikokan already has a tradition of community loyalty and consumer dedication, other Northwestern Ontario towns could look to their example of striving for healthy and autonomous consumer behaviour.

### **Tourism Operators Information Sharing**

In the Atikokan region there are several small businesses whose livelihood depends on tourism. Coordinated and cooperative effort between these businesses could capture more clients by marketing, promoting, and advertising collectively, rather than individually. Individual companies would benefit from lower promotion and advertising costs with more information reaching existing and new markets. A coordinated effort between local companies allows flexibility in booking packages, accommodating patrons, and sharing information regarding reservation availability. For example, an outfitters cooperative booking agency could be explored for the Quetico-Atikokan area.

### **Tourism Coordinator**

In the past, the Township of Atikokan has invested episodically in a tourism coordinator. This has been beneficial to the town’s tourism infrastructure, event co-ordination, and local promotion. Such a position guides tourism efforts and co-ordinates a support network that links the local businesses and residents with its visitors. As an integral part of the town’s tourism efforts, a continuing, preferably full-time tourism coordinator position would be a valuable asset to Atikokan.

## **6.1.3 Local and Regional Opportunities**

There are opportunities to enhance the appeal of the local/regional area for residents and tourists. Some examples include: creating a tourist destination and tourism network, working together to maintain youth opportunities, continuing regional linkages, and the development of the Atikokan-Quetico Park buffer zone.

### **Tourism Destination**

The idea of creating a tourism network with towns throughout Northwestern Ontario was initiated 10 years ago but has yet to develop into something substantial. One of the recommendations of the Atikokan 2000 Report and the Atikokan Community Strategic Plan (2001) was the development of a “Skiing Mecca” concept similar to the one established in Biwabik, Minnesota. This has the potential to improve winter tourism in Northwestern Ontario. “The proposal calls for the relocation of a downhill ski facility that would allow for full season operation. This plan also includes upgrading local cross country ski trails that would be managed under one marketing organization...”<sup>67</sup>. The cross-country ski trails could be networked with local outfitters and resort owners to provide winter camping facilities. However this plan has yet to come into action.

### **Tourism Network**

A second idea that has yet to be implemented is the use of ‘tourist coupons’ throughout the region. Currently small towns in Mid-western United States are successfully promoting this concept<sup>68</sup>. Coupons can be traded between towns in anticipation of increased tourism in these smaller communities. For example, Atikokan distributes a coupon for a free bucket of golf balls at a course in Rainy River. This same golf course provides a coupon for a free lunch at a restaurant in Fort Frances. The restaurant gives a coupon for a free game of pool in Dryden. It is hoped that an equivalent coupon holder would eventually spend money back in Atikokan; thereby creating a circular network of tourist destinations. Like many other projects, this idea has yet to be implemented.

A further possibility to create regional networks is coordinating airport departures and pick-up times. A bus schedule should be planned that is coordinated with the regional airports to increase accessibility. A tourism coordinator could organize and establish major drop-off and pick-up times for public vehicles from Thunder Bay, Winnipeg and the United States. The benefits could be substantial and may include accessibility at a low cost, and potential for increased tourism. This is a project that Atikokan could promote cooperatively with other small communities in the region.

### **Youth Opportunities**

In our survey in February 2003, Atikokan residents were asked if they had additional ideas for community and economic development within the Quetico-Atikokan Region. The responses included “We need to focus on keeping or attracting young, educated people here.” Another person stated “I think that the economic development of the town should hire more young people. This is a town, not a senior home. We have to attract young couples.” And finally one person said “Our young people need a reason to stay and make their lives here.” Atikokan and similar communities are in jeopardy of losing a significant portion of their youth population in the next 10-15 years as a result of limited economic opportunities and shifting demographics at a national scale. It is important for these towns to provide incentives to keep their youth in the local employment sector, as this will maintain community development for future generations. Currently, the Town of Atikokan and local businesses, provide summer employment opportunities for students<sup>69</sup>. However, concern exists that after students acquire a school certificate, college diploma or university degree; there is little employment in these towns to return to. Atikokan can

work in conjunction with other towns in the region that are experiencing similar problems to develop solutions. Examples include hosting job fairs, training programs, and regional meetings to devise solutions to this problem.

### **Atikokan-Minaki Waterway / Rendezvous Trail**

Atikokan has attempted to initiate projects with surrounding municipalities. An example is the Atikokan-Minaki waterway that includes destinations such as Rainy Lake, Lake of the Woods, and Kenora. With the help of government funding and private donations, the first section of the waterway, Fort Frances to Kenora, is complete. However, the link to Atikokan has yet to receive financial support<sup>70</sup>.

The second project of interest is the Rendezvous Trail, a trail system along Highway 11, which links Atikokan to Rainy River. Signs have already been placed to inform travelers about the trail. However, promotion has decreased dramatically in the last couple of years<sup>71</sup>, as a new initiative known as the MOMs Way has taken precedence. This plan proposes to develop highway connections between Manitoba, Ontario, and Minnesota, however requires further financial and community support to bring the plan to fruition. Combined, these two projects are the first steps that create cooperation amongst regional partners. It is imperative that such initiatives exist, and that they are pursued persistently so as to develop strong linkages between towns.

### **Buffer Zone between Atikokan and Quetico Provincial Park**

An additional opportunity at the local/regional scale is the future development of a buffer zone between Quetico Provincial Park and Atikokan. This area is currently underutilized but has the potential to create economic and community benefits while preventing park over-exploitation. The Town of Atikokan has indicated the potential development of this area for tourism facilities such as cottages and the expansion of snowmobile trails, which has the potential to increase local business. For example, if cottage lots were developed, cottagers would most likely visit Atikokan for groceries, banking, mail and other services. However, due to lack of capital, development of this area has not occurred<sup>72</sup>. The buffer zone provides an excellent opportunity for collaboration with surrounding municipalities and Quetico Provincial Park.

## **6.1.4 Opportunities for Broader Collaboration**

Last, there are key opportunities for collaboration on a broader scale. There are many examples of this type of process, such as: collaborating with Peterborough regarding canoeing capital promotion, hosting a regular resource-town workshop, and the possibility of a continental climate monitoring centre.

### **Partnership with City of Peterborough or other Cities**

Our *Onwards Atikokan* survey of town residents showed that canoe and heritage promotion is believed to have the greatest development potential, with prospective as an employment generator. Similarly, Peterborough, Ontario has been known as the Canoe Capital of Canada for more than a century and home to the Canadian Canoe Museum since 1957. Linking the canoe in

Peterborough with canoeing in Atikokan could reap great promotional benefits for the town. The connection between Peterborough and Atikokan could be formalized through a sister-city partnership. Furthermore, hosting satellite canoe exhibits from the museum, reciprocal museum-town memberships in "Friends of" programs, Wilderness Canoe Association trips in the Atikokan area, and joint website promotion, could reinforce the partnership.

While many towns have sister cities focused on cultural pairings, Atikokan and other small towns can use this type of partnership to strengthen existing tourism markets or to establish new ones. Sister-city linkages could be developed with Peterborough, or alternatively with a very different city in a foreign market such as Germany or Japan which have an interest in wilderness tourism opportunities. The Province of Ontario suggests that, "To compete in the international market and benefit from the worldwide boom in ecotourism, the province will have to develop an international profile"<sup>73</sup>. The example of Cambridge, Ontario, is instructive in the successful sports linkage they have built with Saginaw, USA around the Canamera Games<sup>74</sup>.

### **Resource Towns Workshop**

There is the possibility of hosting a Resource Towns Workshop at the Quetico Centre. Atikokan can collaborate with other resource towns across Canada and the United States to share and brainstorm problems, trends, and solutions, as well as to develop partnerships. This can provide insight into the town's issues, possible solutions and would help similar towns. This is another way to promote the town regionally, nationally, and internationally.

### **Observatory Earth**

The Integrated Eco-Observatory Monitoring Station "Observatory Earth" is another promising opportunity for Atikokan. Quetico Centre, its founding organization, is making partnerships with Quetico Park, Lakehead University and others, as well as involving scientists from abroad. The Eco-Observatory will monitor and assess regional and global climate change and attract environmental researchers and visitors from across Canada and the United States.<sup>75</sup> Related benefits could include other research facilities, associated high tech industries, or tourism opportunities catering to visiting researchers.

### **6.1.5 Means of Achievement**

A method to maximize limited resources is collaboration between people locally, regionally, and at a broader scale. A report by the Wildlands League regarding Northwestern Ontario resource towns suggested, "Working together brings results"<sup>76</sup>. In Atikokan, collaboration requires the commitment of the town council and staff, businesses, the Economic Development Corporation (AEDC), schools, the hospital, non-profit organizations, First Nations peoples, and many others. This spirit of cooperation is evident in many of the projects that have been initiated in Atikokan, however needs to be further encouraged and explored.

The provincial and federal governments can have a critical role in fostering some of these collaborative initiatives through direct funding, knowledge sharing, and promotion. Examples include facilitation of sister-city partnerships, regional outdoor activities, and environmental

centres; and promotion of inter-town tourism and wilderness parks. Some of these examples can be initiated immediately with little cost or efforts, while others are clearly long-term projects.

## **6.2 Diversity**

### **6.2.1 Context**

Resource based industries were the stimulus for development in many small towns in Northwestern Ontario, as it was common for these industries to employ a significant portion of the town's population. These towns prospered while small business ventures multiplied, reaping indirect benefits from resource activity. However, if these companies shut down or relocate, the local economy significantly weakens<sup>77</sup>.

Extraction industries rely on the existence of a natural resource<sup>78</sup>. The longevity of resource extraction industries and implications to communities must be recognized. Dependency on natural resource based industries for a community's economic well being is a phenomenon of the past. A more practical and realistic solution is to develop a number of small and diverse business ventures that may include resource extraction. Economic diversity is imperative to small resource towns for their continued survival. Local economies are less likely to decline with a diverse economic base if a resource-based company closes.

### **6.2.2 Benefits of Diversity**

The Town of Atikokan presently relies on forestry, seasonal tourism, manufacturing and a power generation facility as its main sources of employment<sup>79</sup>. A loss of one of these industries could be catastrophic due to the town's fragile economy. Many complimentary employment fields may open with diverse business ventures and small businesses can incorporate ideas and seek niche markets together. Hotels and services for tourism ventures, food suppliers for outfitters and satellite industries to high tech firms are some examples of complimentary employment opportunities. Diversity assists the local economy to be flexible and adaptable to change, thereby, creating a healthy and vibrant economy.

### **6.2.3 Limitations**

Diversification is challenging since results may not be seen quickly, may stray from the town's vision and requires significant financing and capital for implementation<sup>80</sup>. These aspects need to be considered before encouraging diversification.

### **6.2.4 Solutions to These Limitations**

The outcomes of a diverse development plan are often smaller in scale as compared to a single large initiative. In order for diversification to be successful, community members must be aware that benefits accumulate over time. Successful projects require long-term implementation,

perseverance and patience. Small-scale initiatives such as the annual Canada Day Celebration and Atikokan Bass Classic are successful events that only occur once a year, but provide annual investments and complimentary services<sup>81</sup>.

Successful diversification requires that the outcome of each initiative relate to a common goal. For the Town of Atikokan this would entail working towards their vision. In order to effectively use diverse initiatives and ensure a common focus, it is necessary to have strong communication networks between community members, businesses and organizations, and in particular, the AEDC. Although collaboration is advantageous, it will only serve to assist diversification if carried out successfully, and this depends on setting priorities. Collaboration should be integrated into each economic development decision-making step.

## **6.2.5 Diversity Opportunities**

### **Resource Towns Examples**

Numerous towns across North America have been affected by the decline of resource extraction industries. Often the process of economic revitalization for these communities includes diversification. Highlighting a number of approaches made by Canadian communities that have been successful in economic diversification may serve to motivate and guide resource communities in Northwestern Ontario.

Chemainus, British Columbia has taken a very proactive approach to economic development including a strong entrepreneurial focus. The forest industry still provides the economic base for the community but the community's location has fostered the tourism industry. Significant government funding has aided in various initiatives such as the Pacific Rim Artisan Village and dinner theatres that have served to lengthen the stay of visitors<sup>82</sup>.

The mindset of small resource town community members is one of the major constraints preventing a diversified local economy. Individuals have witnessed the success and opportunity resource extraction industries can provide and see this as a viable option for future economic development. Resource communities throughout North America are 'addicted' to resource dependence<sup>83</sup>. Conquering the constraint of small resource town mindset was a major hurdle in the diversification of Port Alberni. "Valley vision" saw the community function as a closed society dominated by the politics of labour relations<sup>84</sup>, resulting in a lack of support from both public and private businesses in initiating change. This obstacle has slowly been overcome by a collectivist approach based on development of various community organizations. Rekindling the community's spirit through hosting the 1988 Provincial summer games, along with government funding, were important steps. Projects within the community have varied considerably in size, funding, organization and economic impact. A major project that has aided the community spirit is refurbishing the McLean Mill as a historic place. Although this project does little to replace the large number of jobs lost with the decline of resource extraction it is important to the community culture and history<sup>85</sup>.

Each of these communities present a unique opportunity for development, whose success is dependent on maximizing the positive attributes of the community. Initiatives should reflect the local circumstances<sup>86</sup>. The following indicates a variety of opportunities that small resource communities often explore as part of their economic diversification<sup>87</sup>:

- Specialized health facilities
- Creation of secondary education and training centres
- Campgrounds and other related recreational activities
- Airport development
- Various forms of heritage development
- Downtown renewal
- Creation of enhancement of museums
- Upgrading of high schools
- Development of alternative resources
- Ski hill development
- Creation of Industrial parks

#### **Initiatives from Atikokan**

In addition to affirming Atikokan's own successes the following examples may serve to inspire other communities and promote diversity. Atikokan has progressed in creating a diverse economic base since the mine closures. The AEDC has taken steps to diversify the economy of Atikokan and boost employment through assisting with projects such as:<sup>88</sup>

- Upgrade/expansion of the Medical clinic
- Atikokan Energy Conservation Centre
- Snowmobile Trail System
- Restoration of the White Otter Castle
- Renovation of the Visitor Centre

In addition, Atikokan has taken steps to further enhance the diversity of its economy through a number of proposals including:

- Establishment of a Young Offenders Centre
- Promotion of Observatory Earth
- The Canoe Heritage Centre

The community may support such options but some keys to achievement may be further required to produce successful ideas.

### **6.2.6 Keys to Achievement**

#### **Prioritization**

Prioritization of development initiatives is essential for diversification of the economy. Prioritizing initiatives based on agreed criteria will maximize the use of resources available. At present

Atikokan has listed a number of priorities relating to infrastructure, tourism and strategic partnerships and limited community resources<sup>89</sup>. With prioritization, the chance of successful implementation may increase, in turn widening growth opportunities and enhancing stability. Therefore, a more diverse local economy based on prioritized initiatives will serve help to evenly distribute the benefits of success and provide a sound base of employment for the community.

Both local government and AEDC need to continue to play an active role in promoting diversity through supporting creativity and entrepreneurship. In doing so, the existing economic development plan must be updated. Decisions regarding what business ventures the town should seek need to be researched, evaluated, and discussed with the community. Criteria may include:

- Scale of the project must be considered when establishing priorities because of the amount of effort and resources needed;
- Funding needed versus funding available;
- Potential impacts and benefits of project (social, economic, and environmental impacts);
- Infrastructure requirements;
- Implications for other proposed and on-going projects. Proposed projects may have negative or positive effects on other projects.

### **Funding**

Funding projects is a major issue regarding the implementation of new initiatives. However, funding and other obstacles are not absolute barriers<sup>90</sup>. Presently the AEDC supports local businesses through the Community Investment Fund (CIF). The purpose of the CIF is to strengthen local business and create employment through loans, equity investments and loan guarantees<sup>91</sup>. Since 1988, the AEDC's Community Investment Fund (CIF) has generated a total of \$14.8 million in business in Atikokan<sup>92</sup>.

### **Moving Forward**

Community vision and consensus within the community can aid economic diversification. Examples from Ely, Minnesota and Elliot Lake, Ontario illustrate that a well developed, community supported plan to expand and diversify local economy can be successful<sup>93</sup>. The realization of these plans can be attributed to community members meeting and discussing common interests, goals, and visions. For instance, the Town of Cedarville held a meeting to discuss economic trends and directions, and as a result of collaboration of ideas and cooperation, the town has developed an eco-tourism program.

The idea of community vision, collaboration, and economic diversification is not without limitations. However, as stated earlier, towns in Northwestern Ontario do not lack potential for diversity. Determined, creative minds, surrounding natural features, advances in technology, and strong small town sense of spirit are valuable attributes and 'untapped' resources that can be used in a recipe for economic success.



Collaboration within the town and at the regional and national scale is vital for the development of a diverse local economy. For example, Atikokan will host the 2003 Raid the North Extreme, a six-day, adventure racing competition bringing sponsors, spectators, volunteers and participants from across North America and the rest of the world. This will provide a variety of opportunities and could lead to more events for Atikokan and the area in the future. This example illustrates that local and national level collaboration can assist diversification if they are consistent with the community's vision, carried out willingly and are integrated into the process through to implementation. In addition, the importance of prioritizing initiatives, a long-term outlook and the need for patience in developing diversity needs to be recognized.

## **7.0 CONCLUSIONS**

Resource-based communities in Northwestern Ontario exhibit different attributes than those of larger conurbations in the province. Relative isolation and reliance on a narrow resource-based economy are challenges inhibiting the economic and social growth in this region. However there are also strengths, such as small-town character, distinctive lifestyle and proximity to natural features, which these communities can build upon in future. Coordinated vision and cooperation at the local, regional and provincial level, have potential to turn common economic, social, and environmental challenges into realistic opportunities for growth and an improved quality of life in Northwestern Ontario communities. This report discussed the general importance, the current predicaments, the strengths and weaknesses, and the means for capitalizing on reasonable opportunities that are common to these communities.

Atikokan, our case study, has a rich history of which its residents are justly proud. Despite many predicaments and obstacles faced since the closure of both open-pit iron mines, the town remains resilient and important within Northwestern Ontario. The concepts of collaboration and cooperation are the foundation for realistic economic, social, and environmental opportunities within Atikokan and its surrounding regions. In addition, by augmenting the resource industry with diverse economic means such as tourism, Atikokan can capitalize on its numerous strengths, some of which are virtually untapped. Properly implemented, these concepts and suggestions should incrementally enhance the opportunities available, provide a more secure, flexible, and attractive economy, and assist in raising the quality of life in this community in the long term. This research team is confident that Atikokan can move 'onwards', transforming its community while continuing to invent and to fulfill its vision.

## 8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations can be implemented to help Atikokan realize its aspirations within short (1-2 years), intermediate (2-5 years) and long (5-10 years) time frames. The five areas reviewed are town beautification projects, community development, tourism development, regional networks, and national/international relations. Some recommendations are capital intensive while the majority can be initiated with relatively low cost (highlighted with an asterisk). Atikokan and other resource communities may use these recommendations to assist in achieving their community vision.

### 8.1 Town Beautification Projects

Most of the following are short-term solutions that should help to upgrade the overall aesthetic appeal of the town, for residents and visitors.

#### Short Term

- Straighten the two lamp poles at the entrance into town (Mackenzie St. near the Railway Tracks). \*
- Refurbish Information Notice Boards at the town entrance. \*
- Promote the canoeing theme by using old canoes as planters or benches along Main St. \*
- Encourage businesses to support the theme by using a canoe paddle as part of their storefront signage. \*
- Continue the mural program, based on the canoe and mining activities, already in place to beautify the blank walls within the downtown core areas. \*
- Plant trees, shrubs and flowers within the downtown to enhance its visual appeal and make it more inviting. Specifically, put large box planters along Main St. and get a local horticulture group to plant and maintain flowers in these. \*
- Upgrade the bus depot and yard to make it more attractive with improved signage and plantings. \*
- Install signs that are larger and easy to see regarding the main attractions in Atikokan (e.g. Museum, Library, and Curling Rink). \*
- Agree on a town colour scheme to create and promote a dominant image within the town. Choose a range of colours that will not date quickly and are pleasing to the eye. \*
- Encourage businesses and home owners to utilize the town colours by providing a range of specific paint colours at an attractive price. The Township may subsidize local retailers who offer such specific coloured paint at a reduced cost. \*

- Develop a strategy to remove or conceal objects detracting from the visual appeal of the town (e.g. abandoned structures and unused automobiles). Once problem areas have been identified, land owners could be approached about improving their property. Co-operative arrangements are needed to encourage improvements (e.g. The town provides a machine, volunteers do the labour and the property owner buys the materials). \*
- Upgrade and maintain the entrance into Atikokan along Mackenzie Street. This can be achieved through incorporating the canoe theme and planting flowers, shrubs and trees, to shield unkempt and industrial properties from view. \*
- Landscape the T-Junction at Highway 11 to suggest that the side road is the town entrance. \*

#### **Intermediate Term**

- Establish an incentive program for stores to beautify their building / storefront. This can be achieved through summer job programs, where students aid in the redecorating process by painting and repairing buildings. Such a program could be organized and implemented by the AEDC, with assistance from external funding sources, especially summer student and training programs for unemployed residents.

## **8.2 Community Development**

The projects recommended in this section are intended to complement efforts under town beautification, above. This strategy improves upon initiatives already undertaken, as well as to suggest new ideas to enhance community development within Atikokan.

#### **Short Term**

- Rework the town map brochure to improve layout and format, and usefulness. Such a project could be incorporated in an assignment in a high school, college or university course. Business advertisements would help to defray costs. \*
- Update and revise the town web site at least every three months. Again, this can be part of a training or education program. \*
- Coordinate with other local web sites such as Quetico Centre and Quetico Provincial Park. An improved network among local interests could accommodate and attract further tourist activity. \*
- Further advance high-speed telecommunications development with the help of the COBRA (Connect Ontario: Broadband Regional Access) program offered by Ontario's Superbuild fund.
- Involve the community in the Observatory Earth program at Quetico Centre. Completed and ongoing projects could be summarized regularly in the Atikokan Progress or in a newsletter distributed by the Centre. \* e.g. Local residents could

help with regular observations (e.g. of lake ice duration and depths, and this could double as a safety program for snowmobile riders).

- Use the advanced technologies at the distance Education Facility in Atikokan High School to host conferences. This facility could be marketed as a venue for local tourism industry workshops and seminars.

#### **Intermediate Term**

- Encourage residents to re-evaluate community development initiatives every five years using Quetico Centre as a meeting site. Questions to be addressed could include:
  1. Is the town of Atikokan meeting its community vision as outlined in the Community Strategic Plan 2001? Why? or Why not?
  2. Are the people of Atikokan satisfied with the state of their town?
  3. If not what needs to be changed and why?
  4. Who can undertake the initiatives that are suggested, and how?
- The Township should prioritize development plans. For example, proposed street repairs should coincide with sewer replacement. \*
- Create a deliberately focused marketing campaign to advertise the town and promote a consistent town image. Local businesses, the municipality and outfitters should collaborate on such an initiative. \*
- Update brochures, signs and billboards on a regular basis. \*

#### **Long Term**

- Establish clear goals to achieve the visions that Atikokan has created for the future. For example, steps to develop tours of the mine sites, the “Northworld” marketing strategy and the “Skiing Mecca” concept should be outlined and undertaken incrementally, and reviewed regularly to maintain focus.

### **8.3 Tourism Development**

Atikokan has strong potential to exploit niche tourism markets at a local, national and international level. Tourism development can also benefit other economic sectors such as retail, hospitality and construction. This section explores novel solutions related to tourism opportunities in the Atikokan region.

#### **Short Term**

- Tourism businesses should market, promote and advertise cooperatively in addition to capturing more clients individually. \*
- Continue to work with Quetico Provincial Park in coordinating tourism networks. \*
- Develop a brochure and website that provides contact information for all local tourism coordinators and outfitters. \*

- Improve White Otter Hotel façade and car park aesthetics.
- Regularly contact CAA and AAA to update hotel accommodation and garage listings throughout the area. \*

#### **Intermediate Term**

- Raise funds to establish a permanent Tourism Coordinator position. Local tourism businesses could be a potential source of funding. For example, a mutually agreed fee based on the number of patron-nights could help pay for the position
- Organize an annual Labour Day tourism event to complement the Canada Day Canoe parade.
- Establish a guided tour based at French Lake campground, highlighting areas of interest, such as the mine sites, canoe manufacturers, the fish hatchery and Museums and Main Street in Atikokan.
- Organize an annual winter tourism event.

### **8.4 Regional Networks**

Many Northwestern Ontario communities are facing the challenges of decreasing population and a declining economic base. Thus, it is important for these regional communities to work together to share information, solve problems and help each other achieve their individual visions.

#### **Short Term**

- Develop a Northwestern Ontario coupon system to increase connections between neighbouring towns.
- Coordinate regional bus service with airport departure and arrival times from Thunder Bay, Winnipeg, and Midwestern United States cities. This will allow greater accessibility for tourists coming in and out of the area. \*

#### **Intermediate Term**

- Northwestern Ontario towns should meet and discuss possible solutions that could help create opportunities for youth in upcoming years. \*
- Start a fish derby with a tagged prize fish. Make the entrance forms for the derby available only in Atikokan-area shops to get people to come to the town from surrounding municipalities. \*
- Contact the Legacy Forest initiative to ensure that residents of Atikokan will benefit from employment opportunities.

## **8.5 National and International Relations**

Creating national and international relationships is a key component in expanding Atikokan's economic future. Many initiatives may be undertaken to enhance the partnerships between neighbouring regions and countries.

### **Short Term**

- Continue to attract national and international venues such the “Raid the North Extreme” adventure race.

### **Intermediate Term**

- Establish sister city in a country with a strong tourist network, such as Germany or Japan. Peterborough may also be a beneficial sister city as it is known as the canoeing capital of Canada.
- Promote and endorse partnerships with the Quetico Centre in the Observatory Earth venture across Canada and other countries as it is an international endeavour.
- Encourage national and international outdoor and nature writers and photographers to experience and document the Quetico-Atikokan region.
- Commission a study on how to attract international tourism markets to the area.

### **Long Term**

- Create a regular Resource Towns Workshop hosted at the Quetico Centre. The workshop could be used as an information-sharing symposium, a learning facility and networking program between communities facing common challenges.

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## **10.0 APPENDICES**

**Appendix A: Atikokan Opportunities Study Survey**

**Appendix B: Atikokan Opportunities Study Survey Results**

**Appendix C: Largest Industries in Northwestern Ontario Towns**

**Appendix D: Other Communities Distance from Atikokan**

**Appendix E: Previous Efforts of Atikokan to Stimulate the Local Economy**

**Appendix F: Resource Based Tourism Establishment License Process**

**Appendix G: Onwards Atikokan Working Group Experience**

**Appendix H: Atikokan Maps**



**8. Where do you think Atikokan should focus its tourism efforts?** (1 is the most important and 7 is the least important)

\_\_\_\_\_ Ontario \_\_\_\_\_ Rest of Canada \_\_\_\_\_ Outside Midwest USA \_\_\_\_\_ Asia  
\_\_\_\_\_ Manitoba \_\_\_\_\_ Midwest USA \_\_\_\_\_ Europe

**9. How do you picture your dream Atikokan? (check one)**

- Major tourist destination (e.g. Banff, Niagara Falls)
- A thriving industrial centre
- A quiet resort community
- It's fine as it is
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**10. What sort of cottage development would you like to see in the Quetico-Atikokan Region?** (1 is the most desirable and 4 is the least desirable)

\_\_\_\_\_ high-end resorts \_\_\_\_\_ family resorts  
\_\_\_\_\_ private cottages / camps \_\_\_\_\_ fishing / hunting cabins

**11. Would you be interested in seeing any of these options developed in the Atikokan area?** (check all that apply)

- retreat centre for people with special health needs
- corporate de-stress retreats
- retirement community
- recreation at the mines (e.g. paintball, mountain biking)
- other \_\_\_\_\_
- soap stone quarry
- star gazing centre
- wildlife photography
- golf improvements

**12. In what ways do you or would you volunteer your time to make Atikokan a better place?** (check all that apply)

*I Do Volunteer with*

- recreational activities
- town beautification
- cultural activities
- youth related activities
- education / employment
- marketing the town
- other \_\_\_\_\_

*I Would Volunteer with*

- recreational activities
- town beautification
- cultural activities
- youth related activities
- education / employment
- marketing the town
- other

**13. Do you have any other additional comments or ideas for the community and economic development in the Quetico – Atikokan Region?**

## Appendix B: Atikokan Opportunities Study Survey Results

The Quetico-Atikokan Opportunities Study was a survey developed to evaluate resident opinions towards various types of economic and related activities which are considered potentially beneficial to the Quetico-Atikokan region. The study was reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. The survey was conducted from February 21 23/2003. Representatives from the research team set up a table at the Voyageur Mall in Atikokan. Community members were invited to take part in the survey at that time. Surveys were also delivered to various public locations throughout the town of Atikokan where community members could fill them out at their discretion. Some of these locations included the Royal Bank, Foodland, White Otter Inn, Atikokan Public Library and the Atikokan Economic Development Corporation (AEDC) office. The survey generated a total of 60 responses. The following tables summarize the data received.

### 1. Gender?

	# of respondents
Male	27
Female	31

### 2. Age?

	# of respondents
18-19	3
20-29	9
30-39	11
40-49	15
50-59	12
60 and over	8

### 3. Occupation?

	# of respondents
student	3
working part-time	9
working full-time	33
unemployed	3
homemaker	10
retired	9

### 4. How long have you lived in Atikokan?

	# of respondents
under 1 year	5
1-5years	8
6-10 years	1
more than 10 years	45

**5. Rank the importance of the following activities according to their potential ability to develop new employment opportunities in Atikokan. (1 is the most beneficial and 5 is the least beneficial)**

	# of responses					*Total Score	Total Score Ranking (1 <sup>st</sup> = most beneficial)
	1 (most beneficial)	2	3	4	5 (least beneficial)		
resources extraction (mining, forestry, etc)	12	9	11	11	10	157	3 <sup>rd</sup>
industry (mills, manufacturing, etc)	15	20	9	8	1	119	1 <sup>st</sup>
tourism related services (accommodation, outfitting, etc)	23	10	8	4	8	123	2 <sup>nd</sup>
institutional (government, educational facilities, etc)	6	13	15	8	11	164	4 <sup>th</sup>
information technology (telecommunications, web-based business, call centres etc.)	4	4	11	16	18	199	5 <sup>th</sup>

\* Total score is a weighting based on the number of people choosing each score (e.g.119 = 15 x 1 + 20 x 2 +..etc.). The lowest total score indicates that people thought this activity was most beneficial, so it is ranked "1<sup>st</sup>".

**6. Rank the importance of the following potential future development initiatives for the Quetico-Atikokan Region. (1 is the most valuable and 5 is the least valuable).**

	# of responses					*Total Score	Total Score Ranking (1 <sup>st</sup> = most valuable)
	1 (most valuable)	2	3	4	5 (least valuable)		
canoe & heritage promotion (e.g. canoe heritage centre)	23	8	12	6	3	114	1 <sup>st</sup>
ecotourism (e.g. bird watching, photography)	5	11	10	11	15	176	4 <sup>th</sup>
cottaging (e.g. development of lake front property)	10	6	5	9	22	183	5 <sup>th</sup>
outdoor adventure activities (e.g. dog sledding, hiking, biking)	10	20	11	9	2	129	2 <sup>nd</sup>
hunting / fishing	14	10	12	11	5	139	3 <sup>rd</sup>

\* Total score is a weighting based on the number of people choosing each score (e.g.114 = 23 x 1 + 8 x 2 +..etc.). The lowest total score indicates that people thought this activity was most valuable, so it is ranked "1<sup>st</sup>".



**7. Of the above choices, which do you see as the most valuable to generate employment within the Quetico-Atikokan Region? (1 is the most valuable and 5 is the least valuable)**

	# of responses					*Total Score	Total Score Ranking (1 <sup>st</sup> = most valuable)
	1 (most valuable)	2	3	4	5 (least valuable)		
canoe & heritage promotion (e.g. canoe heritage centre)	21	11	9	6	3	109	1 <sup>st</sup>
ecotourism (e.g. bird watching, photography)	6	8	9	13	14	171	4 <sup>th</sup>
cottaging (e.g. development of lake front property)	8	5	11	10	16	171	4 <sup>th</sup>
outdoor adventure activities (e.g. dog sledding, hiking, biking)	14	10	10	11	5	133	3 <sup>rd</sup>
hunting / fishing	12	14	12	5	7	131	2 <sup>nd</sup>

\* Total score is a weighting based on the number of people choosing each score (e.g. 109 = 21 x 1 + 11 x 2 +...etc.). The lowest total score indicates that people thought this activity was most valuable, so it is ranked "1<sup>st</sup>".

**8. Where do you think Atikokan should focus its tourism efforts? (1 is the most important and 7 is the least important)**

	# of responses							*Total Score	Total Score Ranking (1 <sup>st</sup> = most important)
	1 (most important)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (least important)		
Ontario	16	5	4	4	4	2	7	135	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Rest of Canada	7	8	9	4	11	3	0	139	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Outside Midwest USA	6	11	4	8	9	2	2	143	4 <sup>th</sup>
Manitoba	2	11	4	4	8	9	4	174	5 <sup>th</sup>
Midwest USA	16	2	10	6	5	2	1	118	1 <sup>st</sup>
Europe	7	4	5	4	2	18	2	178	6 <sup>th</sup>
Asia	4	3	2	8	2	1	22	218	7 <sup>th</sup>

\* Total score is a weighting based on the number of people choosing each score (e.g. 118 = 16 x 1 + 2 x 2 +...etc.). The lowest total score indicates that people thought this location was most important, so it is ranked "1<sup>st</sup>".

**9. How do you picture your dream Atikokan? (check one)**

	# of responses	Ranking
Major tourist destination (e.g. Banff, Niagara Falls)	16	1 <sup>st</sup>
A thriving industrial centre	13	2 <sup>nd</sup>
A quiet resort community	12	3 <sup>rd</sup>
It's fine as it is	2	5 <sup>th</sup>
Other	11	4 <sup>th</sup>

**10. What sort of cottage development would you like to see in the Quetico-Atikokan Region? (1 is the most desirable and 4 is the least desirable)**

	# of responses				*Total Score	Total Score Ranking (1 <sup>st</sup> = most desirable)
	1 (most desirable)	2	3	4 (least desirable)		
high-end resorts	10	8	8	16	114	3 <sup>rd</sup>
family resorts	22	13	5	2	71	1 <sup>st</sup>
private cottages / camps	15	6	9	12	102	2 <sup>nd</sup>
fishing / hunting cabins	5	10	15	12	118	4 <sup>th</sup>

\* Total score is a weighting based on the number of people choosing each score (e.g. 71 = 22 x 1 + 13 x 2 + ..etc.). The lowest total score indicates that people thought this type of development was most desirable, so it is ranked "1<sup>st</sup>".

**11. Would you be interested in seeing any of these options developed in the Atikokan area? (check all that apply)**

	# of responses	Ranking
<i>retreat centre for people with special health needs</i>	33	2 <sup>nd</sup>
<i>soap stone quarry</i>	14	8 <sup>th</sup>
<i>corporate de-stress retreats</i>	22	5 <sup>th</sup>
<i>star gazing centre</i>	23	4 <sup>th</sup>
<i>retirement community</i>	19	6 <sup>th</sup>
<i>wildlife photography</i>	30	3 <sup>rd</sup>
<i>recreation at the mines (e.g. paintball, mountain biking)</i>	35	1 <sup>st</sup>
<i>golf improvements</i>	16	7 <sup>th</sup>
<i>other</i>	5	9 <sup>th</sup>

**12. In what ways do you or would you volunteer your time to make Atikokan a better place? (check all that apply)**

I Do Volunteer with

	# of responses	Ranking
recreational activities	19	1 <sup>st</sup>
town beautification	9	6 <sup>th</sup>
cultural activities	11	5 <sup>th</sup>
youth related activities	19	1 <sup>st</sup>
education / employment	15	2 <sup>nd</sup>
marketing the town	15	2 <sup>nd</sup>
other	4	7 <sup>th</sup>

I Would Volunteer with

	# of responses	Ranking
recreational activities	23	1 <sup>st</sup>
town beautification	17	2 <sup>nd</sup>
cultural activities	12	4 <sup>th</sup>
youth related activities	16	3 <sup>rd</sup>
education / employment	11	5 <sup>th</sup>
marketing the town	11	5 <sup>th</sup>
other	1	7 <sup>th</sup>

**13. Do you have any other additional comments or ideas for the community and economic development in the Quetico – Atikokan Region?**

**Summary of written responses:**

“Need industry to promote employment here. The above (tourism) are great but are short term”.

(I want to) “see the town act on the people that are brought in by the events like the car club, drag races, 4X4, Motor cross, a lot of volunteers for these events and a lot of out of town money”.

“I believe if the town had some major road repair/ beautification it would help a lot. First impressions! Or just keep people in the bush where it's always beautiful”.

“We need to make Atikokan alive again. Our young people need a reason to stay and make their lives here. We need the jobs and good wage options, entertainment, safety, a wider variety of options for making our lives more interesting and for more growth”.

“We need to get another industry here. Our young people are leaving which is turning the community into a retirement community. We need to focus on keeping on attracting young, educated people here”.

“The conditions of the roads need improvement, as well as the entrance way to Atikokan. Laws allowing people to use their private property as a dumping/storage area to the extent that it becomes an eyesore need to be changed. Until this is done, nothing can change”.

“The first impression of the town when you drive in on the 11B highway is horrible. The town looks like a ghost town especially in summer; we need more trees and flowers or signs on the telephone poles. I think that the economic development of the town should hire more young people for their opinions. This is a town, not a senior’s home. We have to attract young couples”.

“Market area for canoeing/fishing/outdoor adventure but don't commercialize the town. Limit the development in Quetico Park. Keep Park as it is as much as possible”.

“Bureaucracies in congested areas should be moved to less congested areas therefore easing a burden and providing industry to dying communities. The upcoming growth in Thunder Bay academia will make Atikokan an attractive playground”.

“We need land sales for homes and cottages. We don't need a canoe centre”.

“Forget tourism. Not enough money for workers. Low end pay scale”.

“Make a road directly from the south (U.S.) to Atikokan. Less government red tape restrictions. Highway bypasses Atikokan = Bad”.

“Any development providing full time work for young families will be an asset to the town and community”.

“Government must survey lakes in areas to allow cottage development (less red tape). Promote as place for retirement”.

“More aggressive EDO system. Lower taxes”.

“The rivers and lakes north, east and west of Atikokan are beautiful and quiet to enjoy, as is Quetico region”.

“Resorts, and tourists do not make jobs that a working man can make a living on. Jobs that pay \$6.85 per hour are no good, you cannot live on it.

Threats to forest industry and Atikokan Thermal Generating Station must be eliminated, they have no scientific basis and severely threaten the economy and place us at risk of 3rd world status”.

“Part of the challenge is in getting the community to think of itself in terms other than a mining town and look at new community definitions”.

## Appendix C: Largest Industries in Northwestern Ontario Towns

Largest industries are determined by the breakdown of the Total Employed Labour Force from the 2001 Census data.

**Table C-1: Province of Ontario**

Industry	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	5713900	N/a
Manufacturing	984325	17%
Retail Trade	671870	12%
Health Care & Social Assistance	531795	9%
Professional Scientific and Technical Services	429100	8%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-2: Town of Atikokan**

Industry	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	1585	N/a
Manufacturing	440	28%
Retail Trade	220	14%
Health Care & Social Assistance	215	14%
Educational Services	155	10%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-3: Town of Dryden**

Industry	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	4120	N/a
Manufacturing	985	24%
Retail Trade	610	15%
Health Care & Social Assistance	560	14%
Accommodation & Food Service	455	11%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-4: Town of Fort Frances**

Industry	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	3820	N/a
Manufacturing	705	18%
Retail Trade	645	17%
Health Care & Social Assistance	590	15%
Construction	270	7%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-5: Town of Ignace**

Industry	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	720	N/a
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	150	20%
Accommodation & Food Service	135	18%
Transportation and Warehousing	110	15%
Retail Trade	85	12%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-6: Town of Kenora**

Industry	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	7605	N/a
Health Care & Social Assistance	1280	17%
Retail Trade	1220	16%
Accommodation & Food Service	880	12%
Public Administration	785	10%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-7: Town of Manitowadge**

Industry	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	1360	N/a
Mining, Oil & Gas Extraction	550	40%
Retail Trade	150	11%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	115	8%
Health Care & Social Assistance	115	8%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-8: Town of Marathon**

Industry	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	2360	N/a
Mining, Oil & Gas Extraction	655	28%
Manufacturing	330	14%
Retail Trade	315	13%
Accommodation & Food Services	220	9%
Educational Services	220	9%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-9: Town of Pickle Lake**

Industry	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	215	N/a
Public Administration	50	23%
Retail Trade	35	16%
Educational Services	30	14%
Accommodation & Food Services	30	14%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-10: Town of Rainy River**

Industry	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	325	N/a
Retail Trade	70	22%
Health Care & Social Assistance	55	17%
Professional Scientific & Technical Services	55	17%
Manufacturing	35	11%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-11: Town of Red Lake**

Industry	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	2280	N/a
Mining, Oil & Gas Extraction	580	25%
Retail Trade	275	12%
Accommodation & Food Services	225	10%
Health Care & Social Assistance	220	10%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-12: Town of Sioux Lookout**

Sector	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	2765	N/a
Health Care & Social Assistance	665	24%
Transportation & Warehousing	320	12%
Retail Trade	305	11%
Public Administration	265	10%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-13: Town of Terrace Bay**

Sector	Number of Employees	Percentage of the total Employed Labour Force
Total Employed Labour Force	995	N/a
Manufacturing	480	48%
Accommodation & Food Services	100	10%
Retail Trade	70	7%
Transportation & Warehousing	65	7%

Source: 2001 Canadian Census, Statistics Canada

**Table C-14: Four Largest Industries for selected Northwestern Ontario towns determined by the Break down of the Total Employed Labour Force.**

	<i>manufacturing</i>	<i>retail trade</i>	<i>accommodation and food service</i>	<i>health care and social assistance</i>	<i>educational services</i>	<i>construction</i>	<i>agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting</i>	<i>transportation and warehousing</i>	<i>public administration</i>	<i>mining, oil and gas extraction</i>	<i>professional scientific and technical services</i>	<i>total employed labour force</i>
Ontario	17%	12%		9%						8%		5713900
Atikokan	28%	14%		14%	10%							1585
Dryden	24%	15%	11%	14%								4120
Fort Frances	18%	17%		15%		7%						3820
Ignace		12%	18%				20%	15%				720
Kenora		16%	12%	17%					10%			7605
Manitouwadge		11%		8%			8%			40%		1360
Marathon	14%	13%	9%		9%					28%		2360
Pickle Lake		16%	14%		14%				23%			215
Rainy River	11%	22%		17%							17%	325
Red Lake		12%	10%	10%						25%		2280
Sioux Lookout		11%		24%				12%	10%			2765
Terrace Bay	48%	7%	10%					7%				995

Source: 2001 Canadian Census



**Appendix D: Other Communities Distance from Atikokan**

<b>Destination</b>	<b>Distance</b>
<b>Towns</b>	
Dryden	280 km
Fort Frances	150 km
Ignace	169 km
Kenora	365 km
Rainy River	240 km
<b>Major Centres</b>	
Minneapolis	630 km
Thunder Bay	190 km
Winnipeg	570 km
<b>U.S. Border Crossings</b>	
Fort Frances route	150 km
Thunder Bay route	240 km

Source: Ministry of Transportation, 1999

## **Appendix E: Previous Efforts of Atikokan to Stimulate the Local Economy**

- The town has applied to the Ontario Ministry of Safety and Security to establish a youth correctional facility in Atikokan, as one is designated for Northwestern Ontario. Atikokan is still waiting for a response. It is anticipated that this facility will provide employment opportunities for the local residents.
- The two museums in Town were merged into one. This has aided in coordination efforts and increased efficiency.
- Atikokan submitted a proposal to the woods Industry to establish a Mill in the area. However Kenora was successful with their bid, as Atikokan lacks sufficient unallocated wood supply.
- Atikokan successfully attracted Proboard to the area, which is a particleboard manufacturing company. Proboard provides employment opportunities for local residents.
- Atikokan successfully attracted an Ontario Hydro (now Hydro One) power generating station. There is speculation about a second phase.
- Town beautification projects undertaken by community volunteers. This has aided to promote and market Atikokan as the 'Canoeing Capital of Canada'
- Current proposal for a Canoe Heritage Centre, again aiding to promote and strengthen the Town as the Canoeing Capital of Canada.
- A collective marketing campaign was adopted by the Chamber, the AEDC, and the outfitters using brochures, websites and videos to promote Atikokan as a tourist destination.
- The Chamber and the AEDC are active in regional tourist associations in order to establish Atikokan as a tourist destination.
- The local outfitters have formed an organization association and are working together to attract tourists to the region.
- The town has recently taken active measures to promote Atikokan as a 'Ski Mecca'

## Appendix F: Resource Based Tourism Establishment License Process



Ministry of  
Northern  
Development,  
and Mines

Ministère du  
Développement  
du Nord et des  
Mines

Suite 332, 435 S. James St.  
Thunder Bay ON P7E 6S7  
Tel: (807) 475-1483

Bureau 332, 435 rue James S  
Thunder Bay ON P7E 6S7  
Tél: (807) 475-1483

Fax: (807) 475-1589  
Internet: paul.pepe@ndm.gov.on.ca

Télé: (807) 475-1589

September 06, 2001

Dear Tourism Establishment Operator:

I understand that you are considering the development of a Tourism Accommodation Establishment.

Please be advised that if you propose to operate one or more units of accommodation, available to the travelling public, that will be making use of Crown Resources such as land, fish, wildlife and promote access to these resources as the main reason for the travelling public to visit your establishment - you will require a Resources Based Tourism Establishment License.

To build or to convert some existing building for such accommodation, you will require a Permit to Establish. Please see the attached Tourism Act and Regulations for further detail.

To initiate the process, complete and return the attached Application for a Permit to Establish with;

- A map indicating the location of the property;
- If the property is in a subdivision, or has adjoining lots, a plan of survey;
- Legally acceptable documentation proving you are the owner of the property;
- A site plan on a scale of not more than 50' to 1" showing the size and the orientation of the property, the location of existing or proposed buildings and any landscape altering existing or proposed development, i.e. septic fields, roads, walkways, parking lots, gardens etc.;
- Floor plans and elevations on a scale of 1' to 1/4" of all buildings or proposed buildings;
- A materials furnishings and fixtures list for each building;
- A copy of permit or other documentation from M.O.E.E. or other applicable authority indicating approval of the proposed water supply and sewage disposal facilities;
- If the property is under municipal jurisdiction, a letter from appropriate authority, indicating the development is acceptable under local zoning and building codes;
- If it proposed that alcoholic beverages will be sold, please provide proof of consultation with L.L.B.O.;
- A business plan providing applicable information as outlined in the attached, Components of a Business Plan;
- Documentation sufficient to confirm that you have the resources necessary to complete the project as per submitted plans;
- Copy of your business name registration from the Ministry of Consumer and Commercial Relations.

With the above information and documentation in hand I can start processing your Permit to Establish.

Assuming your application submission and supporting documentation is satisfactory, I would issue a Permit to Establish. On completion of the building and a satisfactory inspection, a license may be applied for.

Please call me at (807) 475-1483 if you have any questions.

Yours truly,

Northern Development Advisor – Tourism

Enclosures

## COMPONENTS OF A BUSINESS PLAN

Page 1

## COMPONENTS OF A BUSINESS PLAN

Introduction

A business plan describes, in detail:

- a) the business in general
- b) the rationale for the business
- c) the product or services offered
- d) the target market
- e) competition
- f) ownership and management
- g) staffing
- h) financing of the business
- i) earnings and cash flow projections
- j) land, buildings, equipment, etc.
- k) special risks, problems, opportunities
- l) other items relevant to the business plan

In evaluating a business plan all of these components should be examined in detail to ensure accuracy, reasonableness and a full understanding of the proposed business. These areas should be examined with a critical eye by someone who is prepared to ask searching in-depth questions and who will evaluate the plan and responses in an impartial manner without regard to favouritism or personal relationships.

Business Proposal in General

- 1) What kind of business is this (American plan lodge, housekeeping-resort, campground, outpost, hotel, motel marina, etc.).
- 2) Where will the business be located (geographic/physical location; proximity to markets).
- 3) How big is the business (i.e. number of cottages, rooms, seats, etc.)
- 4) What products and services will be offered.
- 5) Estimated total cost of the project.
- 6) Time frame for building the facilities and getting into operation.

Rationale for the Business

- 1) Why is the business being undertaken at this time in this place.
- 2) What is the goal of the business (i.e. financial returns, life-style, etc.).

Products/Services

- 1) What main products and services will be offered.
- 2) How will these products or services be packaged.
- 3) Are there any unique aspects about these products or services.
- 4) Are these products or services resource consumptive or nonconsumptive.
- 5) Will a narrow range of products and services be offered or will a full line of products and services be offered.
- 6) Are these products and services complimentary to each other.
- 7) Do these products and services make sense in this location at this time.
- 8) How will these services be priced (i.e. based on a reasonable return on investment, based on prices charged by competition, based on a guess, etc.)
- 9) How do these services compare with those offered by the competition (competition in general, local competition, national competition, international competition).

COMPONENTS OF A BUSINESS PLAN

Page 2

Products/Services (cont'd)

- 10) Will these services address the needs of the target market.
- 11) Are the services fully competitive (as to price, promotion, location, quality, packaging, etc.)
- 12) Will these products or services stand the test of time (i.e. are major changes likely with a few years).
- 13) Are the proposed location, land, buildings, equipment suitable for provision of the proposed products and services.

Target Market

- 1) Identify the specific markets to be targeted (i.e. customer characteristics, customer life-style, customer location, age, sex, income range, etc.).
- 2) Have specific target markets been identified or have they simply been identified as some vague geographic area such as Midwestern United States.
- 3) Has the market been well researched and are facts and figures available to show the market size and probable market share.
- 4) Are the products and services sufficiently unique or competitively strong enough to enable the business to successfully penetrate the market.
- 5) Will different markets be targeted at different times of the year.
- 6) Do the various target markets compliment each other or could conflicts arise between client groups.
- 7) Are the proposed products and services appropriate for the proposed target markets.
- 8) Are the proposed target markets familiar with the proposed products and services or must an awareness campaign be developed.
- 9) Does proposed management have in-depth experience in working with these target markets.

Promotion

- 1) What are traditional methods of promoting to the proposed target market.
- 2) Are traditional methods of marketing fully suitable, effective and efficient, or should new methods be considered.
- 3) What new methods of marketing have been identified and what is the basis for these methods.
- 4) How much experience does management have in these types of promotional activities.
- 5) What promotional channels will be used.
- 6) What promotional methods does the competition use.
- 7) What is the size of the proposed marketing budget and is adequate financing available to undertake this marketing program.
- 8) How many customers will be attracted to the business by this marketing plan in each of the next five years.
- 9) What is the anticipated revenue per customer (how does it compare with the competition).
- 10) Is the promotional plan appropriate for the target market and for the proposed property, products and services.

**COMPONENTS OF A BUSINESS PLAN**

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**Competition**

- 1) What is the competition for the target market (Note: this does not mean just those competitors located physically close to the proposed business – it could include competitors or areas of competition many thousands of miles away).
- 2) Are competitors generally larger than, smaller than, or about the same size as the proposed business in terms of sales, size of facilities, product line, etc. If there is a significant difference between competition and the proposed business, what effect will this have on the proposed business.
- 3) Do competitors spend much more, much less, or about the same amount of money on marketing as the proposed business. If there is a significant difference between competition and the proposed business, what effect will this have on the proposed business.
- 4) What are the main strengths and weaknesses of competition (i.e. marketing ability, financial strength, location, management, products and services, etc.).
- 5) What are the trends in the marketplace in regard to competition (increasing/decreasing number of competitors, increasing/decreasing size of competitors, packaging, pricing, changing products/services, management sophistication, financial stability, etc.).
- 6) Are competitors in the same market segment generating a reasonable rate of return (if not, the rationale for the business venture should be questioned and competitive trends should be closely examined).

**Ownership and Management**

- 1) Who will own the business (names, percentage ownership).
- 2) Who are the main management figures within the business (name, area of responsibility).
- 3) What is management's background (experience, education) - (verified or unverified).
- 4) Are all areas of management expertise covered in the management team (i.e. operations, personnel, marketing, finance, administration).
- 5) Are all management figures experienced in this type of business or in a clearly related type of business.

**Staffing**

- 1) How many people will the business employ.
- 2) What jobs will these people perform (i.e. guides, cabin girls, waitresses, cooks, etc.).
- 3) What are proposed wage rates.
- 4) Is sufficient labour of the required type readily available.

**Financing of Business**

- 1) How much money is required for capital expenditures on the project.
- 2) When will this money be needed.
- 3) Precisely where will this money come from and on what terms (each source detailed separately).
- 4) Have sources of financing been verified.
- 5) If overruns occur how will they be financed.
- 6) How much money is required for operations and working capital.

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**COMPONENTS OF A BUSINESS PLAN**

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**Financing of Business** (cont'd)

- 7) What is the source of working capital funds.
- 8) When will the peak working capital requirement occur (month, amount).
- 9) What are the financing terms for working capital funds.
- 10) Detailed monthly earnings and cash flow projections should be provided for the first year and annual projections for the second and third years.
- 11) Each item in the projections should be footnoted and explained in detail (i.e. if revenues are projected at a certain amount precisely how was this figure determined and is it reasonable).

**Land, Buildings, Equipment**

- 1) What is the location, size, layout and general characteristics of the land to be acquired and of the land currently owned.
- 2) Description of proposed buildings (i.e. how many, what type, what quality, what size, purpose, etc.).
- 3) Building drawings.
- 4) What equipment, furniture and fixtures etc. will be purchased.
- 5) What is the proposed construction schedule.
- 6) Will equipment be available when buildings are completed.
- 7) Are buildings, equipment, furniture, fixtures and land suitable for the proposed target – market and products and services to be offered.
- 8) Detailed cost estimates.
- 9) Probability of cost overruns.

**Special Risks, Problems, Opportunities**

- 1) Are there any special risks involved in this project.
- 2) Are there any special problems associated with this project.
- 3) Are there any unusual opportunities presented by this project.

**Other Relevant Items**

This section should include anything not included in any of the previous sections. This could mean air service contracts for a fly-in camp, resource management proposals, special needs such as radio communications, etc.

## **Appendix G: Onwards Atikokan Working Group Experience**

The following is a listing of expertise of those research students involved in this project:

*Peter Ellis*

B.E.S. (Joint major in Environment & Resource Studies & Geography, with a Parks option), University of Waterloo.

Team -building, environmental assessment, transportation planning and waste management policy experience.

Christy Fiddler

B.E.S. (Environment and Resource Studies), University of Waterloo.

Previously worked with the City of Cambridge Planning Department.

Safety Audits, survey research.

Ron Gill

B.A. (Geography with Economics minor), Simon Fraser University.

Previously with the City of Vancouver Parks and Recreation Department.

Recreational planning and management.

Geoffrey Keyworth

B.A.Sc. (Systems Design Engineering), University of Waterloo.

Systems design, computer modeling, numerical methods.

Michelle Moretti

B.E.S. (Double major in Environmental Studies and Urban Studies), York University.

Certificate in GIS and environmental remote sensing.

Previously a planning assistant with the Ontario Municipal Board.

Public consultation processes, working with stakeholders, Ontario planning process, policy analysis, survey research.

Jill Paske

H.B.A. (Geography and B.A. in Anthropology), Lakehead University.

Survey research.

Lana Phillips

B.Sc. (Geography with concentration in GIS), University of Lethbridge.

Previously a GIS technician for an online mapping company.

GIS, remote sensing, computer mapping.

Zeralynne Te

B.A. (Double major in Geography and History), University of British Columbia.

Computing, GIS, statistics, waste management.

Dan Vandebelt

B.E.S. (Environmental Studies), University of Waterloo.

Social planning and community development, community information management.

Bradley Wright

B.Sc. (Environmental Science, major in Earth and Atmospheric Science), University of Guelph.

Previously a planning technician with the Grand River Conservation Authority.

Environmental issues (especially water quality), rural landowner communication skills.



## Appendix H: Atikokan Map

### Town of Atikokan Street Map

