

Best Practice

First Nation Road Access

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Project Date: June 2002 (ongoing)

THE PRACTICE

In early 2002, the Rural Municipality of Canwood decided to address the transportation, housing, health and economic challenges facing the municipality and surrounding First Nations by creating the First Nations Relations Committee.

THE PROCESS

The First Nations Relations Committee consists of the reeve and councillors of municipalities that share a border with the First Nations in the area. The committee made a request to attend the Big River First Nation, Mistawasis First Nations and Ahtahkakoop First Nation band meetings. The committee thought that these meetings would be a means to develop a working relationship to address matters of concern between our communities.

Discussions centered on issues of housing, health, economic opportunities and the access roads to the respective First Nation communities. The committee agreed to support the First Nations and that these matters needed to be addressed with the federal government. The committee and First Nations agreed that these issues were an impediment to the education, employment, health and safety of all the communities in the region.

The group examined a grid road map of the province and realized that the majority of the non-First Nation communities of similar population were located on roads which were of a much higher standard. Further discussions with the provincial government, SARM and FSIN followed, and out of these discussions, all parties agreed that the First Nation communities were looking for only one main paved access road from their communities to a provincial highway.

THE RESULTS

On November 16, 2006, a 20 year partnership agreement was signed between the Big River First Nation, the RM of Canwood and the Government of Saskatchewan for the paving of 11 kilometres of the access road to the community. The RM estimates an annual cost savings to the municipality of \$30,000 per year in road construction and maintenance. The benefit to the municipality from this project will allow for the increased maintenance of other municipal roadways and the redistribution of road gravel to other locations in the municipality.

LESSONS LEARNED

Council has learned that we must work together in solving problems. Boundaries may divide land but must not divide the people in that area. A project of this nature would not have progressed if it was not for the high level of commitment and trust that was executed by the council and First Nation leaders. The RM of Canwood and the First Nations of Big River, Ahtahkakoop and Mistawasis strongly believe that improving access to all communities will benefit the entire region.