

## **Community Consultations on the Interim Métis Harvesting Agreement**

A team of Métis leaders and multilateral technicians are visiting regional communities holding open forum discussions about the contents and application of the Interim Métis Harvesting Agreement. The discussions are a means of gathering information from Métis harvesters and may form the basis of ongoing negotiations toward a final harvesting agreement with Alberta.

A questionnaire is being distributed to Métis members to better determine who is harvesting, where they're harvesting and what they're harvesting for. At the same time, the MNA is distributing the 2004 Fall Harvesters Guide, a pocket-sized publication describing the state of harvesting negotiations in other provincial jurisdictions. To date, the MNA is the only governing member of the Métis National Council to have a signed harvesting agreement with a provincial government.

So far, consultations have taken place in Fort McMurray, Bonnyville, Medicine Hat, Calgary, Edmonton, and Edson.

The following meetings are scheduled: (Contact the regional office for meeting details).

January 21, 2005 – Peace River (Contact Region 6: 780-624-4219)

January 29, 2005 – Lethbridge (Contact Region 3: 403-569-8800)

February 17, 2005 – Lloydminster Contact Region 2: 780-826-7483)

February 19, 2005 – Lac La Biche Contact Region 1: 780-623-3039)

The most apparent affect of the harvesting agreement is in the fact that Alberta Métis are no longer required to buy hunting licenses, nor are they limited to hunting within government specified seasons. The community discussions generate numerous questions pertaining to who can harvest, where, and for what.

The agreement applies only to members of the Métis Nation of Alberta or persons eligible to be members, not to Métis who, live in other provinces or territories. The right to harvest is a collective right exercised by the individual and is not transferable to non-Métis spouses, relatives or friends. Métis can go hunting with non-Aboriginal people who may require a hunting license, depending on their intention.

The agreement applies to harvesting lands within the province of Alberta, which includes occupied provincial crown lands, unoccupied crown lands, private property (with the permission of the owner or occupant), and on leased land (with permission from the leaseholder.) Métis are responsible to ensure the land they are harvesting on falls within these categories and that they are not harvesting in areas closed for conservation reasons.

Regional SRD offices will have information about land specifications within each Wildlife Management Unit.

A key principle within the harvesting agreement is that Métis rights are on par with other Aboriginal peoples, no more and no less. Aboriginal harvesters receive a priority allocation of the harvesting resources. Therefore, applying that principle to the question, "what species can Métis hunt?" part of the answer is in this fact: if First Nations can hunt it, then so can Métis. Protected species are off limits to all Albertans, including Métis. Alberta Métis are not required to enter hunting draws or lotteries. If a species is available for harvest for a limited period to non-Aboriginal hunters, then that species is available year round to Métis harvesters.

Métis are responsible to find out from the Regional Offices of Sustainable Resource Development (SRD) if conservation related restrictions are in effect on certain species. For example, a reasonable restriction may apply to calving seasons. SRD's information centre is available weekdays by telephone at: 1 877 944 0313 (toll free)

A great deal of discussion is generated around the topic of whether or not the harvesting agreement applies to fishing using a rod and reel and whether or not Métis have to purchase a sport fishing license. Métis who are fishing for subsistence are not fishing for sport. If the intention is to use a rod and reel to catch a fish and eat it, then Métis do not have to buy a sport-fishing license. However, if the intention is to enter a fishing derby, then Métis are required to buy a sport-fishing license and abide by the set guidelines. Métis who are fishing using a net must first get a Domestic Fishing License from SRD at no cost.

The community meetings are providing the MNA with an opportunity to gather valuable information to assist in developing future policy options pertaining to Métis Rights. The current harvesting management regime in Alberta is one example where policy must be developed with Métis Rights in mind. The MNA wants to hear what Métis harvesters have to say in that regard.

The consultations include an information presentation explaining changes that have occurred in the MNA membership registry, in particular the definition of Métis, which was accepted at the Annual General Assembly in 2003 and is in line with the national definition.

A consultation coordinator, has come on board with the MNA to oversee the coordination and facilitation of the process. Métis who are driving some distance to attend the nearest community consultation session will receive a small payment to help cover the cost of gas and lunch is on the Métis Nation of Alberta.

Please contact your Regional Office of the MNA for dates and locations of the meeting nearest you or call 1-800-252-7553.