

Summary of:

Socio-economic Baseline Survey of Montreal Lake Cree Nation;
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SUMMARY

Sustainable development and use of forest resources must fully integrate all three dimensions - social, economic and environmental - of the social environment. The Prince Albert Model Forest (PAMF), in order to implement such a concept in its integrated resource management plan, must secure information on socio-economic conditions facing people within the Model Forest. The Montreal Lake Cree Nation (MLCN) people are the main inhabitants of the Model Forest region, although the Town of Waskesiu Lake has a community consisting of public servants and seasonal visitors to the Prince Albert National Park. The MLCN people live at the Montreal Lake reserve, and at three other communities - Little Red Reserve, Timber Bay, and Weyakwin. This study was undertaken to collect information on the selected socio-economic conditions of the MLCN people.

The study is based on a sample of 153 households in the four communities, of which 146 respondents were useable for analysis. Almost half of these were at the Montreal Lake reserve, while the other three communities had a smaller sample size, but proportionally the same to the total as for the main community. The average family had 4.09 people, of which 2.2 were adults, 1.17 children, and 0.72 were infants. The family was slightly larger at the Montreal Lake reserve, at 4.58 people, and smaller at Timber Bay (only 3 people). Among the adults, a slightly higher proportion of females was noted, and this proportion was highest for the Montreal Lake reserve. There were more younger people in these communities than older adults. The older dependency ratio was only 0.105, and the younger dependency ratio was estimated at 0.95, making a total dependency status of these families at slightly over one. In contrast, in Saskatchewan, for an average family, the dependency ratio is only 0.615. Many of the MLCN families had members who lived outside the reserve. In fact, one out of three MLCN families had members living outside their community. This proportion was smallest for the Montreal Lake reserve, and highest for Timber Bay and Weyakwin.

Most adults in the four communities had attained the education level of a junior high school. However, the proportion of these adults varied from community to community. For example, 86% of adults at Weyakwin had Grade 8 or higher education, in contrast to only 62% at Timber Bay. For the MLCN as a whole, almost one out of four adults did not have a junior high school education. On the other end of the scale, one out of five adults in the MLCN had at least high school education; however, some of these adults had proceeded to acquire other skills.

The participation rate in the labour force was slightly lower for the MLCN, relative to all adults in Saskatchewan. Only 53% of adults participated in the labour force, compared to 67% for Saskatchewan as a whole. In spite of the lower participation rate, unemployment particularly of a seasonal nature was very prevalent. Almost three out of four adults in the four communities were unemployed at least part of the year. It is possible that the higher unemployment rate may retard the adults from looking for employment and thus reducing the participation rate for the MLCN.

Almost half of the families in the sample used the forest for some type of traditional activity. Such activities included: hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering of berries and mushrooms, and collection of medicinal and craft material. The proportion of such families was highest for the Little Red Reserve (at 61%) and lowest for the community

of Timber Bay (at 54%). The average family spent about 54 days employed in such activities. Gathering of berries and mushrooms was carried out by a higher proportion of families and trapping by the lowest proportion of families. In most cases these activities were carried out by single members of the family, except in the case of gathering of berries and mushrooms, where most adults in the family participated.

Most of the traditional uses of the forest were for personal use including sharing with other members of the community. For example, only 25% of the total produce from trapping was sold. Hunting was exclusively for personal use, leading to an average imputed value of \$144 per participating family. Fishing was carried out on a non-subsistence basis, as indicated by the fact that 59% of the fish caught were sold, for an average family income of \$386 per participating family.

A majority of the MLCN families depended on non-traditional employment. Only 13% of the total families in the four communities were involved in employment in only traditional activities; the remaining ones either had non-traditional employment or both traditional and non-traditional employment activities. However, only one out of three employed adults in the MLCN was employed on a full-time basis. Almost one out of four adults could only secure one to three months of employment, while the rest of the adults had employment ranging from four to eleven months. The numbers for non-traditional employment only are even lower, as only 31% of the all adults employed in non-traditional employment were employed full-time, while another quarter were barely able to get employment between one to three months.

The result of the low employment levels was that 44% of all families had no earners and had to depend upon transfer payments and other sources of incomes to support themselves. The average income in the community was estimated at \$16,992 per family, or \$4,155 per capita.

The lower income levels were reflected in some of the crude measures of standard of living that were observed. The average house in the community was 11 years old, of 1110 square feet, with three bedrooms and one bathroom. With the exception of Timber Bay, almost all the houses were fitted with indoor plumbing, electric power, and running water. A similar pattern was evident for the ownership of basic appliances and television sets.

The lower income for the MLCN families resulted in very low levels of savings. In fact only 3 out of 139 families indicated having invested any savings at all during 1994. A much larger proportion of families indicated they had loans, taken primarily for purchasing a personal vehicle or a major appliance. Food and transportation were the two major items of expenditures. These two items constituted about half of the total expenditures. Expenditures on meat and tobacco products were the major items of food expenditures. Another major item of expenditures was bingo, which constituted 3.3% of the total family expenditure, or roughly \$637 per family per year. Most of the goods and services by the MLCN people were purchased from the city of Prince Albert.