

# Innovative Housing Project Will Benefit First Nations Communities Across Canada

*July 2004*

Faced with a fast-growing elder and young population and a growing need for quality, affordable housing for Aboriginals on-reserve, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the Seabird Island First Nation have developed an innovative sustainable community demonstration project in British Columbia. The [Seabird Island First Nation](#) Sustainable Community Demonstration Project is the first of its kind to be located on-reserve in Canada.



This unique multi-family development combines some of the latest concepts in housing construction and design, including renewable energy sources (wind, solar and geo-thermal heating), CMHC's Healthy Housing™ and FlexHousing™ concepts, rainscreen technology, and sustainable community planning. The project also honours and reflects Aboriginal social values and design. All seven units were funded under the guidelines of CMHC's On-Reserve Housing Program, which is designed to provide quality, affordable rental housing on-reserve.

Expected to last for 100 years, the homes will offer residents and the Seabird Island community a lifetime of reduced maintenance and significant savings in heating and operating costs. The high performance building envelope, combined with renewable energy systems, is expected to reduce energy use by 75% when compared to a typical home. The three wind generators (of which one is receiving its world premiere at the site) provide about 15% of the total energy required for the homes.

A member of the Sto'lo Nation, Seabird Island is one of the largest First Nation communities in BC's Fraser Valley. The community has seen their registered membership more than double since 1975 to 720 members.



"We have - like many other First Nation communities - experienced numerous challenges to providing healthy, affordable and durable housing for our members," explains Marcie Peters of the Seabird Island First Nation Council Housing Portfolio.

"This project has provided us with a unique opportunity to incorporate our traditions, but in a modern way. For example, the flexibility of the design reflects the traditional way we live, it allows for our families to remain unified within one structure yet provides independence and private living space. The earth tubes and radiant floor heating and cooling system provide a comfortable living environment. Our ancestors knew this and built their pit homes in-ground where it was cool in the summer and warm in the winter," she added.

Together, CMHC and INAC will contribute more than \$1.1 million towards the development of the project, with CMHC contributing \$667,175 in lifetime subsidies over the project's 25 year mortgage through the On-Reserve Housing Program, and an additional \$200,000 in funding for the demonstration component. There has also been strong industry support from over 20 companies, including the Platinum Sponsors: BC Hydro, Canex Building Supplies Ltd., Dupont Canada Inc., EMCO Corporation, Renewable Energy Sources and VicWest Corporation.



On April 16, 2004, the grand opening of The Seabird Island First Nation Sustainable Community Demonstration Project was celebrated. One of the homes will be open for tours for two years.

"By keeping one of the homes open for the next two years for tours and public education, we hope that First Nation communities, and others with an interest in sustainable development, will take home those ideas that best address their communities' housing needs," said Jeff Loucks, Regional Manager, CMHC's BC and Yukon Assisted Housing Centre. "The many housing ideas and new products featured in the Seabird Island demonstration project will benefit both First Nation communities as well as any organization interested in building quality, affordable housing," he added.

### **VISIT THE PROJECT or TAKE A WORKSHOP**

One of the best ways to learn about the Seabird Island First Nation Sustainable Community Demonstration Project is to take a free on-site tour. Tours will be scheduled once a month at the demonstration home located at the Seabird Island Reserve in Agassiz, BC (additional tours may be arranged to accommodate out-of-town visitors or special requests). Pre-registration is required for all tours, please call 1-800-668-2642.

CMHC also offers a one-day Sustainable Community, Housing Design Workshop, which covers the main features used in the project and is ideal for housing and construction managers, community planners and others seeking more detailed or technical information on the project. To book a workshop in your community, contact: Allan Dobie, Senior Research Consultant, CMHC's BC and Yukon Regional Business Centre, Tel: 604-737-4074 or [adobie@cmhc-schl.gc.ca](mailto:adobie@cmhc-schl.gc.ca)



### **ORDER OUR PUBLICATIONS OR WATCH A VIDEO**

You can also find out more about the project's many innovative products and technologies, by ordering our free tour booklet, Building a Sustainable Future, Seabird Island First Nation Sustainable Community Demonstration Project (63553). To order, call 1-800-668-2642 or visit our website at [www.cmhc.ca](http://www.cmhc.ca). Omni-Film Productions is also producing a documentary on this project to be complete by the fall of 2004.