



on the GO

Spring 2004



A visitor to the Nk'Mip Desert and Heritage Centre stops to smell some sage.

NK'MIP DESERT AND HERITAGE CENTRE

First Nations people across Canada have unique spiritual connections with the land, waters and forest. The cultures that interpret this land in myth, legend, song and dance are passed down from generation to generation. Oral traditions and archaeological evidence reflect how skilled First Nation people in the interior of BC were at harvesting the land's diverse resources.

Nk'Mip is the name of the place in which the Osoyoos people traditionally lived. They traveled in spring, summer and fall to long-known hunting and gathering areas where they lived in portable tule-mat lodges—teepees covered with rush mats. Men hunted and fished and women dug roots and picked berries.

In the winter, the Osoyoos people lived in underground pit-house villages. During this quieter season, the people ate dried fish, venison, roots and berries prepared for winter consumption. They also hunted big game and trapped small animals. Winter was the season for telling stories and making clothes, baskets, mats, tools and equipment needed for the next year.

The Nk'Mip Desert and Heritage Centre, owned and operated by the Osoyoos Indian Band,

celebrates this history. The Nk'Mip Desert and Heritage Centre acknowledges the relationship the Osoyoos people share with the natural world through on-site cultural programs and guided desert tours. Through its research program, it provides a unique perspective on the area's rattlesnake population. The centre is a celebration of the history and contemporary life of the Osoyoos people. Visitors to the centre can enjoy interactive programs, displays, guided tours and three kilometres of desert trails.

The Nk'Mip Desert and Heritage Centre, is only one component of the larger Nk'Mip project. The project also includes trail rides, an RV park/campground and North America's only Aboriginal owned and operated winery. In the spring of 2004, the site will also include an executive style golf course and Spirit Ridge Lodge, a boutique hotel and spa.

The existence of such a centre not only reminds the visitor that the Osoyoos Indian Band is dedicated to maintaining their relationships with their natural surroundings, but that the Nk'Mip people are dedicated to sharing such teachings.

For information on the Nk'Mip Desert and Heritage Centre, visit www.nkmipdesert.com

Last year, over 8,000 people visited the Nk'Mip Desert and Heritage Centre.

The centre employs seven full-time staff year around and 13 full-time seasonal staff.

The centre has helped to create a number of spin-off businesses. These include a community arts and crafts market, a landscaping business, an indigenous-plant greenhouse and a website development business.

Seabird First Nation Building a Sustainable Future



An artist's rendering of the sustainable community demonstration project.

Just north of Agassiz, the First Nation community of Seabird Island is demonstrating what can be achieved when you combine cutting edge and innovative housing technologies with green energy generation.

In partnership with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Broadway Architects, as well as a number of suppliers and manufacturers, Seabird

Island First Nation has developed a unique housing project that is affordable, energy-efficient, environmentally-friendly and durable.

The homes, which are scheduled to open in the spring, incorporate traditional and community design elements, and are powered and heated by harnessing wind, solar and earth energy. There are no furnaces, and homes employ energy recycling and water conservation measures—reducing energy consumption by up to 75 percent. Homes are inexpensive to operate and produce almost as much energy as they consume. By employing low-tech systems and using local materials that are durable, homes are easy to maintain and most repairs can be done by owners.

To ensure that the technologies and design concepts can be shared, one of the homes will serve as a demonstration home and remain open for two years for tours and public education.

For more detailed information on the Seabird Island First Nation Sustainable Community project visit www.broadwayarchitects.com

Questions?

For information on Government of Canada programs and services
1 800 O-Canada.
(1 800 622-6232)

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

To learn more about sustainable communities in British Columbia, including stories on education, governance, the environment and economic partnerships, visit www.inac.gc.ca/bc/sc-cd

St. Mary's Indian Band proves native plants are good business

In recent years, gardeners and landscapers have started to discover the benefits of indigenous plants that are hardier than introduced species and provide better habitat for birds and other wildlife.

The Ktunaxa Nation saw the trend coming. One of its member bands, the St. Mary's Indian Band in the Kootenays, has started growing native plants for sale.

It all started when the Columbia Power Corporation announced plans for a right-of-way in Ktunaxa traditional territory. Often, after clearing vegetation, power companies replant with introduced grass species, not native ones.

The Ktunaxa suggested an alternative—replant with native species. It's easier on the soil, better for local wildlife and means fewer weeds and less costly upkeep. The company agreed and the band started the Aqam Native Plant Nursery.

Ethno-botanist Mike Keefer oversees the operation and recalls how they started from scratch. "We had no greenhouse. We had no grower. All we had was a business concept."

Today they have a full-fledged greenhouse operation, a major contract with Aquila Power,



Soopolallie berry (top right) and Wolf Willow (bottom left) are two of the plants grown at Aqam Nursery.

and plans to expand beyond their current large-scale industrial focus.

"There is a real public appeal to this," says Keefer, pointing out that certain native grasses grow more slowly and need less water, making them an excellent alternative for urban lawns.

Besides the benefit to the environment, this operation is providing revenue and meaningful employment opportunities for First Nation members.