



Northern partnership focused

by Erin E. Sherry, Senior CURA Co-ordinator and Northern Aboriginal Research and Development Alliance Director, University of Northern British Columbia; and Gail Fondahl, Associate Professor, Geography Program, University of Northern British Columbia

Tl'azt'en Nation and the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) are working together to achieve the community's vision of culturally and ecologically sustainable natural resource management, and to enhance researchers' capacity to effectively contribute to First Nations' needs through collaborative research. This Community-University Research Alliance (CURA) project, called Partnering for Sustainable Resource Management, focuses on four research themes:

1. working towards the perpetuation of traditional ecological knowledge, including methods for its preservation and transmission to Tl'azt'en youth;
2. improving partnerships between Tl'azt'en Nation and UNBC, particularly around research accountability and co-management of the John Prince Research Forest;
3. making science education delivery more relevant and, thus, attractive to Tl'azt'en youth; and
4. looking into opportunities for developing ecotourism as one economic alternative to a heavy dependence on the forestry sector.

The Partnering for Sustainable Resource Management project is governed jointly by a Steering Committee comprised of Tl'azt'en and UNBC members (from L to R): Beverly Bird, Erin Sherry, Deborah Page, Beverly Leon, Christine Jackson, Amelia Stark, Vincent Joseph, Sarah Parsons, Sue Grainger, and Jane Young (missing Gail Fondahl).

To accomplish these significant goals, the partners were awarded \$1 million in funding from the federal Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The Tl'azt'en/UNBC project was one of 15 successful CURA projects nationwide chosen for funding from a pool of nearly 80 proposals. The project began in 2004 and will take place over five years, involving dozens of people. Both a Tl'azt'en and a UNBC leader direct each of the four CURA research streams. A steering committee, including researcher stream leaders, research co-ordinators, community members, and others, guides the CURA. Decisions are made by consensus and participants work continually to strengthen the partnership through informed discussion, exploration of shared values, and learning to respect differing opinions. In addition, a diverse expert resource pool comprised of Tl'azt'en and Nak'azdli Elders, academics, and other specialists provides advice on issues ranging from research methodologies to conflict resolution. "This project will go a long way to strengthening our relationship with the University of Northern B.C. as we build capacity to manage our natural resources within the context of traditional practices," says **Deborah Page**, Adult Education Co-ordinator for Tl'azt'en Nation and a member of the research team. "Our land is our teacher and we need to re-incorporate this knowledge into our children's curriculum."



Rob van Adrichem photo

Designing relevant education for young people, linking Elders with youth, and providing opportunities for UNBC students and Tl'azt'en to engage in research together are some of the project's key elements. Through the work of the partners, a wide range of outcomes is expected, including learning opportunities for diverse groups, support for Tl'azt'en social and economic development aspirations, promotion of Tl'azt'en cultural renewal efforts, and research results relevant to local



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people as well as to national and international audiences.

CURA represents a significant opportunity in terms of education and training. The project will support eight Masters students, one Doctoral student, and numerous undergraduate research assistants, and will provide various training events for its duration. During year one, researchers organized occasions for learning about plant biology and herbarium preparation, archival management, community-based research, qualitative data analysis, survey techniques, and Web design. Another major objective of the CURA is to mentor youth and students through employment. To date, CURA funding has supported 14 research assistants, seven from Tl'azt'en Nation and seven from UNBC. **Sophia Raby**, a UNBC student, spent a work term collecting information about educational models that incorporate aboriginal views and teaching methods. "As I enter UNBC's Education program, I will bring with me all that I have learned about this field," she says. "I now understand the importance of a multicultural education and have ideas on how to integrate aboriginal perspectives into the classroom." **Jennifer Pierre**, a Tl'azt'en post-secondary student, was hired for eight months to transcribe, edit, and analyse interviews concerning local perspectives on effective forest co-management. "I gained tremendous insight into what people want to see come from this partnership, and their opinions on effective co-management processes and outcomes."

As we enter Year 2 of the CURA project, we can celebrate significant progress. "The CURA project is building on a wide range of traditional information with a focus on cross-cultural learning and sharing, and the involvement of community members and key stakeholders—highlighting a new beginning and a brighter future," says **Amelia Stark**, Director of Education for Tl'azt'en Nation and Tl'azt'en CURA member-at-large. From the UNBC perspective, faculty members and students are greatly benefitting from the insight, generosity, patience, and humour of Tl'azt'en partners. While honing specific research skills, UNBC members are more importantly improving their ability to fruitfully co-operate with community members towards inter-related goals. Learning to work together is a vital achievement and a core CURA aspiration, one that will lay the groundwork for a richer future for all. 🌲

For more information on the CURA project, please visit our Web site at <http://cura.unbc.ca>



Jennifer Black photo

Members of the CURA Improved Partnerships research stream (from L to R) Sarah Parsons, Erin Sherry, Beverly Leon, Dexter Hodder, and Sue Grainger participated in the 2004 Western North American Research Forest Managers conference on the John Prince Research Forest, a co-management initiative of UNBC and Tl'azt'en Nation. They presented research focused on developing methods to ascertain local-level criteria and indicators, and on determining forest co-management outcomes and processes important to local people.



Erin Sherry photo

If you have questions, suggestions, or would like to get involved, please contact:

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CURA summer research assistants (from L to R) Sophia Raby and Jennifer Pierre, and graduate student, Sarah Parsons attended the CURA annual retreat hosted by Tl'azt'en Nation in the eastern portion of their traditional territory on the shore of Tezzeron Lake near Fort St. James.