

Contributed by the BVLDAMP

BVLD Airshed Management Plan
"If you can breathe, you can
make a difference."
Article #8 of 8



Clean Air 2010: Made in the BVLD

For volunteers who have been working on local air quality issues, the Bulkley Valley-Lakes District Airshed Management Plan (BVLDAMP) has become much more than words on a page. The BVLD Airshed Management Plan not only points the direction for clean air initiatives for the next five years, it is a story about life in our region. Because of how we do things now, a smoky chimney, a dusty spring day, beehive burners and slash piles are everyday realities. These practices contribute to poor air quality, which affects our health, local economy and quality of life in very real ways. Fortunately, the BVLDAMP is also a story about how local knowledge, and a commitment to finding solutions by working with what we've got, can move our region forward to clearer skies ahead.

For the past year and a half, members of the Morice, Bulkley and Lakes Community Working Groups (CWG) have been learning about what influences our local air quality. From listening to presentations on local weather patterns and the operation of beehive burners, to reading health reports, to attending workshops on how to correctly operate a woodstove, the learning curve has been steep. The result of this hard work is that each Community Working Group is a collective of local, self-taught, specialists on air quality. The members of the CWGs have taken all of their knowledge and are drafting the BVLDAMP, which will be the document that will guide how we will work towards clean air over the next five years.

Writing the Plan

Like the rest of the planning process, the writing of the plan is being done by a co-operative, consensus-based approach. The writing team is made up of about 20 writers composed of technical, medical and operational experts as well as community level representatives. The team is committed to writing a Plan that is scientifically accurate and relevant to all communities in our airshed. Most of the writers are local residents, and include members of the Regional Working Group and Subcommittees, Community Working Groups, the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, the Facilitation team, and outside experts as required.

The plan will be divided into stand-alone chapters on each of the emission sources: Large Industrial Sources; Forest Harvest Burning; Agricultural, Land Development and Small Sawmill Burning; Domestic Wood heating, Backyard Burning, and Road Dust.

Additional sections include climate change implications and impacts of fine particulates on human health, the environment and local economies.

This user-friendly format will make it easy for anyone, whether it be a fall and burn contractor or someone who burns garbage in their backyard, to find the information they need to make a positive contribution to clean air. Each chapter contains a set of goals and indicators for reducing emissions from that source, in addition to a set of strategies created by the CWGs to meet these goals.

When asked about her perspective on the plan, Sally Bardossy, a director on the Kitwanga Community Association and CWG member stated that, "The teams who have worked on this Airshed Plan for the last year have ensured that educational tools will be available for individual

households and industries to make significant improvements to long-term air quality. I believe the plan's success is dependent on increasing the overall awareness of effective methods to reducing emissions. I hope people will read the plan with an open mind as to whether they can assist their own and neighbouring communities in avoiding poor air quality.”

Presenting the Plan

After the plan is written, there will be presentations and open houses in each of the communities in March and April. These presentations will introduce community members to the contents of the plan, as well as outline how they can become involved.

Each community working group has come up with different priorities for their communities and different ideas for how to improve clean air, and the community presentations and open houses will allow community members and municipal leaders to ask questions and give feedback on the plan. Open houses are also an excellent opportunity for new people to get involved.

Monitoring and Implementation

Implementation of the plan is already well on its way, as many initiatives and recommendations have already been started. Some of the outreach and education efforts to date include ‘Burn it Smart’ workshops on techniques for using wood burning appliances efficiently, and a forum for public works operators and contractors on best practices for road dust suppression. The Resource Management Burning subcommittee has been working hard to increase coordination and communication between burn operators to reduce the number of poor air quality episodes that are attributed to open burning. Community Working Groups have written letters to MLAs and worked with their local governments on municipal air quality issues.

Mark LeRuez of the Lakes CWG says, “Given the diversity of representation from the various participants within our group in the Lakes District, I’ve been very impressed how everyone’s genuine concern for the health and welfare of residents living in the BVLD airshed has been a common thread that consistently leads to agreement regarding reasonable solutions to air quality concerns.”

Even with these initiatives started, there is much more work to do. A monitoring committee will be set up and the community working groups and subcommittees will continue to meet and work on accomplishing the goals set out in the plan.

The airshed management planning process has brought the importance of air quality to the forefront of people’s minds. Through the public support of this process and plan, other initiatives that support clean air goals will be more likely to succeed. The Bulkley Valley-Lakes District Airshed Management Plan also adds momentum to the clean air movement in our region. BVLD residents have been concerned about air quality for many years, and the Plan builds on all the hard work before us and gives others a direction for the future. Hazy, smoky days are a result of our collective activities, and the only way to improve the situation is to work collectively on solutions.

If you can breathe, you can make a difference.

For more information about the BVLDAMP, contact the facilitators at Footprint Environmental Consultants, at 847-1672, drop by the office at 102-3423 Fulton Avenue in Smithers, or visit our website www.bvldamp.ca .