



RCE
SASKATCHEWAN

**REGIONAL CENTRE
OF EXPERTISE
ON EDUCATION
FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT**

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ACKNOWLEDGED BY



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www.saskrce.ca

July 4, 2013

Dear Friends of the Torch River Forest, Nipawin and Region Sustainability Stakeholders, and To Whom it May Concern:

Re. RCE Saskatchewan Support for the Torch River Forest as a Living Laboratory for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the Nipawin Region

This letter is a follow-up to the successful meeting held on July 3, 2013, with RCE Saskatchewan, representatives of Friends of the Torch River Forest, and other stakeholders from the Nipawin region interested in advancing ESD in North East Saskatchewan. The meeting mediated electronically between Cumberland College in Nipawin and Luther College at the University of Regina was an important opportunity to share information about the distinctive features of the Torch River Forest that make it an excellent vehicle for advancing education for sustainable development in the province of Saskatchewan, in turn contributing to the *UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development* (2005-2014). As an officially acknowledged RCE of the United Nations University's RCE initiative, RCE Saskatchewan was pleased to be able to help coordinate this meeting with local representatives from the Torch River Forest and Nipawin region and Higher Education partners of RCE Saskatchewan including representatives from the University of Regina, SIAST, and Luther College.

The meeting identified a number of distinctive if not unique features of this old growth forest in the areas of the natural environment, culture, the economy, and local livelihoods. These included:

- the harvesting of mushrooms with substantial economic benefits to the region, the traditional harvesting of berries, and a history of selective logging practices by local residents
- traditional recreation in the area (including quadding, snowmobiling, hiking, bird watching, skiing, canoeing, fishing, hunting, and rafting), opportunities for new forms of eco-tourism, and the associated economic benefits to those in the region in associated industries (hotel accommodation, restaurants, and real estate)
- a rich history and cultural diversity associated with First Nations, Métis, and European settlements and associated heritage sites in the area including First Nations artifacts, original homesteads, and wagon trails
- educational opportunities in the forest for improving forest management practices including innovation in sustainable logging practices and fire prevention
- the role of the forest in promoting opportunities for psychological and community healing especially for

- war veterans (as demonstrated by the Wounded Warriors Weekend being held in the North East)
- distinctive biological elements in the forest including opportunities for the study of mushrooms (mycology) and other rare species in the forest (such as plasmodial slimes)
 - the range of traditional medicines and other ceremonial plants found by elders in the forest and the potential use of plants in the forest in developing new medicines

We are pleased with your demonstrated willingness to work with a diversity of local stakeholders in putting together a living laboratory for Education for Sustainable Development using an eco-museum model that builds on the region's natural and cultural heritage. Given the distinctive features of the Torch River Forest, having the forest as a central element or anchor of such a living laboratory (thereby making it a "teaching forest" or "educational forest") is worthwhile. As noted in the meeting, RCE Saskatchewan's Higher Education partners have many educational resources that would work well in advancing the educational opportunities the forest and Nipawin region provide (including student and faculty participation through courses in the University of Regina's Faculty of Education, Luther College's interdisciplinary studies program, and SIAST's programs in ecotourism and natural resource management through its Prince Albert Woodland Campus). Your local actions would be of tremendous benefit to the RCE's eight Higher Education partners in advancing their own missions related to ESD, teaching, research, and community service. We also see great potential through your working with Dr. Glenn Sutter, our RCE's working group coordinator for *Adapting Cultures for Sustainability*, in developing an eco-museum pilot project in your region and your using the recently prepared Saskatchewan *Eco-museum Planning Framework* in doing so.

In the future we hope to officially designate your ESD living laboratory/eco-museum project incorporating the Torch River Forest as an official *RCE Saskatchewan Flagship Project*. We invite you to begin documentation of your local processes and steps in becoming a "living laboratory for ESD" and encourage your development of an action plan which could then be presented at our next *RCE SK ESD Recognition Event* to be held on May 7, 2014, in Regina tentatively at Government House. This would be an opportunity to inform our Higher Education and other RCE stakeholders about the forest and your good work along with other local, provincial, national, and international participants in the event. We also would like to report on your initiative's progress to the 116 other RCEs at the UN University's *8th Global RCE Conference* being held at the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, from November 26-29, 2013. Please keep us informed of your activities and best wishes in your endeavours. Feel free to contact us at any time.

Sincerely,

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