
GRANDE CACHE BUSINESS VISITATION STUDY

Update – One Year Later (Winter 2015/2016)

WINTER 2015/2016
COMMUNITY FUTURES WEST YELLOWHEAD
www.westyellowhead.albertacf.com

Grande Cache Business Visitation Program – Events of the last 12 months since the study

In the year since the Business Visitation Program, Grande Cache has experienced a number of changes to vital industries in the communities.

Coal and Mining Industry

Of primary importance in the past year was the sale of Grande Cache Coal to a Chinese firm in late 2014. Shortly after that sale, metallurgical coal experienced a decrease in price prompting Grande Cache Coal to lay off 175 employees on February 3, 2015.¹ Most recently, Grande Cache Coal announced it would end mine production on December 24, 2015 and approximately 220 employees at the mine have received layoff notices.² This closure is considered temporary and will mean no mining will take place from six months to two years, depending on how long it takes for coal prices to rebound and the length of time it will take to receive approval for proposed underground mines on the mine site. At the time of the Business Visitation Study, Grande Cache Coal was the largest employer in the community with approximately 450 people employed.³ Unfortunately, the 2014 Business Visitation Study does not capture the changes to Grande Cache Coal as they occurred after the end of the study. It is highly recommended that future studies on the business community in Grande Cache attempt to capture the community's dependence upon the coal industry as an employer and economic driver in the community.

Coal Power Changes

The HR Milner Generating Station just outside Grande Cache continues to employ approximately 60 people in its operations. Changes to the provincial and federal governments in the past six months have focused attention on coal power and the effects on the environment. The Climate Change Advisory Panel for the province of Alberta has recommended that the province phase out coal fired power in Alberta by 2030.⁴ In response, the Town of Grande Cache added its voice to 29 other Alberta municipalities in publishing an open letter to Premier Notley on their concerns on the province's new plan to phase out coal fired power plants such as the one in Grande Cache.⁵ The Coal Association of Canada, now led by former Yellowhead MLA Robin Campbell, has also voiced its concerns over the provincial plan to phase out coal fire power in the province.⁶ It is not clear at the time of this update how this will effect operations in the future for HR Milner in Grande Cache or what long term impact that will have on the community.

¹ "Layoff notices coming to 175 works at Grande Cache Coal" CBC News January 7, 2015.

² "Grande Cache Coal closes mine, lays off 220 employees" CBC News November 3, 2015

³ Grande Cache Business Visitation Study page 8

⁴ For more information on the Advisory Panel's recommendations, see <http://alberta.ca/climate/leadership-discussion.cfm>

⁵ "30 Alberta municipalities sound alarm over NDP plan to phase out coal power" Global News November 18, 2015

⁶ "Coal industry warns of mine closures, blasts NDP government's climate plan" Calgary Herald November 23, 2015

Oil and Gas Industry

As with all the communities in the West Yellowhead region, the downturn in the oil and gas industry has effected Grande Cache over the past year. The fluctuations in the price of oil has impacted the industry throughout the province; however, Grande Cache's business community was largely dependent upon this industry in the summer of 2014 as it was the only industry experiencing growth at the time.⁷ The decrease in the price of oil in partnership with other industries previously mentioned is contributing to the overall health of the business community in Grande Cache.

The Forestry Industry

Foothills Forest Products continues to employ a significant number of people in Grande Cache and is a major contributor to the forestry industry in the West Yellowhead region. Like all forestry related corporations in the region, both the caribou recovery strategy and the pine beetle are posing significant challenges to the operation in Grande Cache. Grande Cache is physically located between the A La Peche and Little Smoky Caribou Ranges and is considered a priority area for caribou habitat restoration. The Mountain Pine Beetle continues to expand into Alberta and the region south of Grande Prairie is designated as "moderate to high for beetle survival with a static to increasing population."⁸ Both factors contribute to both a declining accessibility to the resource that will impact forest product production in the upcoming years.

Grande Cache Business Visitation Program Action items – one year later

The Grande Cache Business Visitation Program offered a number of recommendations in the summer of 2014 based on key findings and themes discovered through interviews with businesses. It is not the intention of Community Futures West Yellowhead to act on all of these recommendations; instead, these are potential goals and recommendations based on the discussion held with the businesses.

Goal 1: Market and enhance local tourism opportunities

- Conduct a market survey of tourists over a one year season
- Complete a directed community marketing plan, focusing on consistent branding and targeted demographics
- Promote Grande Cache as a place to live work and play through various multimedia sources

Grande Cache Tourism Marketing Consortium was re-started by the Town of Grande Cache in November 2015 to work together with tourism operators and local businesses to market Grande Cache together. Cooperative funding was successfully attained to work towards common goals such as brochures, Facebook advertising and a trails and adventure map around Grande Cache.

⁷ Page 21 Grande Cache Business Visitation Program

⁸ "Beetle survival success varies within, across regions." Press release June 2014 Environment and Sustainable Resource Development, Government of Alberta

The Alberta Northern Rockies Tourism Alliance (ANRTA) is a non-profit organization currently working on a Destination Management Plan (DMP) for the Alberta Northern Rockies, of which Grande Cache is a part. Members from Grande Cache are active in this organization and are working to include both Grande Cache and the Willmore Wilderness area as part of the DMP.

The Tour of Alberta was active in the West Yellowhead region this year and Grande Cache hosted a start to the race. Highway 40 from Grande Cache to the top of the Miette Hot Springs Road in Jasper National Park was Stage 3 of the tour. This event helped highlight all Grande Cache can offer tourists on the international stage and fostered community pride in Grande Cache with over 100 volunteers participating.

The dinosaur tracks located on the Grande Cache Coal site continue to generate interest from many players in the province as a potential product to develop in the future in the tourism industry in Grande Cache. Public access continues to be restricted but there is interest from the new Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum in Grande Prairie.

Goal 2: Review Home Based Business (HBB) Bylaws

- Review current pricing structure for Home-Based Business
- Provide resources for starting a business and growing a home based business into a store front operations
- Include home based businesses in online business directory

The Town of Grande Cache approved a change to the Home Based Business licensing fee in March 2015. Home Based Business licenses have decreased to \$100 a year. Currently, there are 58 home based businesses with licenses in Grande Cache.

There is an opportunity for business coaching and business training for home based businesses in Grande Cache to expand their operations. CFWY has not had any requests for this kind of coaching or training in the past year since the BVS study. There is a strong network for home based businesses in existence in Grande Cache through the weekly Farmer's Market.

The Town of Grande Cache has a business directory on its webpage that now includes home based businesses within the town site.

Goal 3: Community Signage (Communication)

- Re-evaluate current community signage
- Examine downtown core for ease and transition into the community
- Look at community way finding and signage to key tourism priorities

CFWY is unable to provide any updates with regards to community signage.

Goal 4: Coordinate events for business to business mentoring

- Establish mini seminars and community open forums for businesses on key topics
- Encourage dialogue between key stakeholders and the business community
- Provide networking events and information fairs to inform Grande Cache residents of local opportunities and resources

The Grande Cache Chamber of Commerce continues to strengthen their organization and work with businesses in the community. There was a restructuring of the Chamber in the past 12 months and they continue to build their organization to serve businesses in Grande Cache.

In other communities in the West Yellowhead, a Business Support Network is successful in bringing businesses and business support organizations together once a month to discuss current issues and highlight guest speakers who may be of interest to the community. Currently, only the Grande Cache Chamber offers monthly meetings.

Events and Information fairs are very well organized by the Town of Grande Cache and continue to help business support organizations such as Community Futures West Yellowhead reach clients in the community.

Goal 5: Shop Local Initiatives

- Develop and distribute a shop local program
- Create an up to date online business directory
- Create a distinctive shop local brand for Grande Cache and create awareness and community buy in

Community Futures West Yellowhead in partnership with the Rural Alberta Business Center (Grande Cache) completed an updated shop local campaign and online business directory on the Town of Grande Cache website.⁹

Community Futures West Yellowhead does not have a mandate to design and implement shop local campaigns. Shop Local campaigns tend to be more successful in communities when they are led by a local chamber and involve active participation by the business community. As there is still the trend for shoppers to travel the 1 ½ hours to Grande Prairie to shop, a shop local campaign would be greatly welcomed in the community.

⁹ To view the business directory, see <https://grandecache.ca/index.php/doing-business/business-directory>; for the online shop local campaign, see the homepage for the shop local button <https://grandecache.ca/>

Goal 6: Oil and Gas Impact on the Community

- Create opportunities for more community involvement and relationship building
- Review bylaws on parking large vehicles within the town boundaries
- Encourage local businesses to accommodate oil and gas workers

As previously mentioned, the oil and gas industry has experienced a downturn in the past year. This decrease is felt in the business community. Again, given the downturn in the current economy in the province, a shop local campaign would help turn the focus of those workers still employed in the industry on local businesses and not the retail market in Grande Prairie.

There is no change to the bylaw at the present time regarding parking large vehicles within the town boundaries.

Goal 7: Create a 0.5 Economic Development Position

- Create a 0.5 position within town administration to directly supervise community economic development
- Define and formalize a local economic development process
- Create a resource for local business owners assisting with communications
- Create downtown revitalization and beautification initiatives

The Town of Grande Cache approved a new Business Incentive for new and existing businesses in Grande Cache. Existing businesses that invest a minimum of \$25,000 in upgrading and improving their businesses will be eligible for reduced property taxes over a three year period. New businesses locating in the Town of Grande Cache will also be eligible for tax benefits over a three year period.¹⁰

¹⁰ For more information on new business incentive program, contact the Department of Development through the Town of Grande Cache website <https://grandecache.ca/index.php/municipal-government/town-departments/development>