



TSILHQOT'IN
PEOPLE OF XENI



CULTURAL TOURISM PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Newsletter for Aug 2013



Update #1 - Xeni Gwetin Apiculture Demonstration Project

In 2010 an Agriculture Opportunities Assessment for the Xeni Gwet'in Caretaker Area was completed, and looked at the different land-based opportunities that could help to improve economic opportunities in the area. The report took into consideration the unique characteristics of the land and Xeni Gwet'in culture, and kept in mind realistic challenges presented by market conditions, distance to markets, labor and infrastructure inputs, as well as environmental implications. Several opportunities were identified as potentially feasible and worthy of further investigation, including Direct Marketing of Natural Beef Products, Non-Timber Forest Products (such as mushroom, berry and medicinal products), and Apiculture (AKA BeeKeeping).

The latter of the three leading opportunities was identified as the highest priority for further investigation for several reasons. Preliminary market research showed that there was a high demand for Honey and Bee Products in the region, and because the products made by bees were very storable, the distance to markets was not as much of a concern as it had been for more perishable products. Secondly, the management schedule for bee hives was compatible to traditional harvesting patterns of other cultural products, with seasonal visits to the hives required for a few days per month only, and this kind of schedule could be adapted easily as part-time work for community members. Finally, the climate and pristine nature of the Xeni Gwet'in Caretaker Area offered an unparalleled opportunity to develop a brand and market for chemical free natural honey (which is difficult to claim in most other honey producing regions that rely on neighboring farms or forests that are contaminated by sprays or gmo crops), and it

could potentially compliment the existing hay fields and ranching traditions of the community, as alfalfa can be a great source of nectar for bees. It is also worthy to mention that bee populations across North American have been facing significant challenges, with reported die-offs of bee colonies increasing steadily over the past few decades. As such, any effort to provide habitat and husbandry for them is a noble and appreciated pass-time.

In order to test this opportunity and expand interest, funding for implementing a pilot project was sought, and successfully obtained by the Cultural Tourism Department, with support from Enterprises to help maintain the project. Funding for a 2 year Apiculture Demonstration Project was provided by the Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia (www.iafbc.ca) through their Emerging Sectors Initiative program. The program is focused on enabling innovation, collaboration and strategic approaches in emerging sectors to identify opportunities, challenges and priorities. An Apiculture Demonstration Project would serve to help raise the profile of Beekeeping as a viable opportunity for all people in the region, and to facilitate workshops on basic beekeeping techniques and practices.

With all the pieces in place to experiment with beekeeping, it was now necessary to find suitable mentors that would help guide the project and host workshops each season. Several willing mentors were contacted, and the first workshop was hosted in the Nemiah Valley in 2012 by Kevin and Janelle Dunn, expert beekeepers and owners of Okanagan Wildbrush Honey. Kevin and Janelle have a reputation throughout the Okanagan as keen promoters of beekeeping, and they are experts at maintaining hives with minimal chemical treatments, and finding alternative ways of keeping hives healthy and happy. The first workshop of 2012 (Beekeeping 101) was well attended, with over 15 participants from throughout the Nemiah Valley. Basics of Beekeeping were covered, highlighting the flow of a typical beekeeping season, reasons for beekeeping, and basic tools and techniques of the trade. In next months newsletter, we will review some of the highlights of this first workshop, and talk about the demonstration site construction and location.