



June 2012



The International Bioenergy Conference & Exhibition was held in Prince George from June 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, and attracted participants from across the globe. The conference was attended by 360 delegates and 58 exhibitors, with more than 50 delegates attending from 15 countries outside of Canada.

The 2012 event was the fifth installment of the conference, which is Canada's longest-running conference devoted to the global bioenergy sector. Attendance at the event has grown considerably since the first conference was held eight years ago; the 2004 conference attracted 100 delegates and 12 exhibitors.

As the conference has grown, the economic impact associated with hosting the event has also increased considerably. It is estimated that the 2012 conference had an economic impact of \$480,000 on the Prince George economy,<sup>1</sup> a 9.4% increase from the previous conference held in 2010.

The conference brought together experts in bioenergy, along with established bioenergy companies & organizations and those new to the industry to explore leading-edge concepts and current applications in the global bioenergy sector. Topics included: issues facing the bioenergy industry; environmental sustainability; an outlook on the bioeconomy and; advancements in municipal and community energy.

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The bioenergy conference is well-suited to Prince George, as the city is located in the centre of Canada's forest-based bioenergy industry. Northern BC is home to a significant number of businesses and institutions engaged in manufacturing, engineering, research and development for the sector, which is fueled by growing demand for renewable energy in British Columbia and internationally.

The Prince George region is the largest pellet-producing region in the world, accounting for approximately 85.9% of the province's wood pellet production capacity and nearly all of the value of BC's pellet exports. New technologies and applications are also emerging which will further augment the bioenergy production capacity and the value of the bioenergy sector in the region. Alterna Biocarbon is developing a facility near Prince George which will produce a renewable replacement for coal which has the special ability to be utilized in a variety of applications beyond simple power generation.

The City of Prince George's recently commissioned District Energy System is an excellent model for sustainability and renewable energy use at the municipal level. The system is currently providing heat and

hot water to four municipal buildings, with three more expected to be online by the end of 2012. The City constructed the system to conserve energy, support community-based energy production, meet growing demands for a secure supply of energy, and address environmental concerns such as air quality and climate change.

The University of Northern BC (UNBC) has formed strong partnerships within the bioenergy industry, and is committed to being a leader in renewable energy. The university's bioenergy projects, comprised of a wood pellet system and biomass gasification system, are creating an array of educational and interdisciplinary research opportunities of great value to forest-based communities. UNBC's ability to integrate teaching, research, and operational activities in the use of bioenergy resulted in being honoured with the top campus sustainability award in North America in 2010.

The diversity of bioenergy sector activities occurring in the region is positioning Prince George, alongside its businesses and institutions, to be a continued leader in renewable energy.

The Northern Bioenergy Partnership (NBP) is an industry-led coalition of businesses, academic institutions, government and First Nations organizations involved in the bioenergy industry in Northern British Columbia. For more information about the sector, visit: <http://www.bioenergypartnership.ca/>.

<sup>1</sup> Combined economic impact of visitor expenditures and expenses associated with putting on the event.

# ECONOMIC UPDATE

## Economic Statistics

### Employment

49,500 persons were employed in Prince George in May, up 0.8% from the previous month. The labour force also increased, but to a lesser extent (0.6%), leading the number of unemployed persons to decline by 5.3% and the unemployment rate to decrease by 0.4% (to 6.8%). In BC, the number of persons employed was relatively unchanged and those in the labour force increased by 1.2%. Subsequently, the number of unemployed persons increased by 19.9% and the unemployment rate increased 1.2% (to 7.4%). Across Canada, the number of employed persons was also relatively unchanged while the labour force increased by 0.1%; the number of unemployed persons increased by 0.6% and the unemployment rate was unchanged at 7.3%. Prince George's working age population was unchanged last month, and the employment rate increased 0.5% (to 69.6%); employment rates were unchanged in BC and across Canada, at 60.9% and 61.9%, respectively.

*(Source: Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey)*

### Real Estate

92 single family homes were sold in the city in May, 5 fewer than in the same month in 2011, with an average price of \$260,866. Year-to-date, the average house price was up 1.2% compared to the first five months of 2011; unit sales were up 13.1%, reflecting a much higher level of activity compared to last year. Comparatively, the year-to-date average house price in BC was



down 8.3%; unit sales were down 7.9%. In Canada, the average price was up 0.6% and units were up 7.0%.

*(Source: BC Northern Real Estate Board; Canadian Real Estate Association)*

### Housing Construction

There were 47 housing starts in Prince George last month, 28 more than in May 2011. Year-to-date starts were up 16.4%, compared to the same period in 2011. Comparatively, starts were up 4.8% and 18.6%, in BC and Canada, respectively, at the end of May. There were 11 residential units completed in the city (all single family dwellings), 4 more than in the same month last year. 156 housing units were under construction last month (116 single family and 40 multiple dwelling units); 14.3% fewer than in the same month in 2011.

*(Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation)*



### Building Permits

The City of Prince George issued 56 building permits valued at \$9.4M in May. The number of permits issued was up 5.7% compared to the same month last year; the value of permits issued was down 33.8%. Residential building permits accounted for 53.0% of the total value of permits issued in the city last month, with permits for 15 new townhouse units and 10 new single family dwellings making up 82.6% of the category. Commercial permits made up 24.8% of the value of permits issued; projects include tenant improvements for Lakewood Dental, Husky (Central St) and CIBC's Spruceland location. These projects accounted for

59.0%, 19.4% and 10.8% of the total value of Commercial permits issued. Industrial permits made up the remainder of permits issued last month, with a permit for the Harris Rebar building making up the entirety of the category. Year-to-date, the value of permits issued by the City was up 89.9% at the end of May, and the number of permits issued was up 30.4%. Comparatively, permits were up 18.9% in BC and 11.4% across Canada at the end of April.

*(Source: City of Prince George; Statistics Canada)*

### Business Licenses

The City of Prince George issued 122 business licenses in May (46 new licenses<sup>2</sup> and 76 renewals). 8 of the new licenses issued were a result of businesses changing location.

*(Source: City of Prince George)*

### Airport Passenger Volumes

35,047 passengers passed through the Prince George airport in May, 4.3% more than in May 2011. Year-to-date passenger traffic through the airport was up 6.6% compared to the first five months of last year. Comparatively, traffic through the Vancouver airport was up 5.0% at the end of April.

*(Source: Prince George Airport Authority; Vancouver Airport Authority)*



<sup>2</sup> New business licenses are issued when a new business is established, when a business is re-established after not operating for a period of time and when a business changes ownership or relocates.