



For Immediate Release

MINISTER BILOUS HIGHLIGHTS BIG LAKES ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUCCESS TO STANDING COMMITTEE

High Prairie, April 24, 2018: Deron Bilous, Minister of Alberta Economic Development and Trade, mentioned Big Lakes County as a successful partner in the Community and Regional Economic Development Support (CARES) program on April 12th as part of the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. Big Lakes County was the first municipality that he referenced. He also mentioned Cochrane.

"In fact, there are a number of communities, especially in rural Alberta, where we see this money, I think, leveraged the most. What I love about the program and the reason that we've reprofiled money for this program is because of its success, and really the success of the program is founded on the fact that it's local leaders – community leaders, municipal leaders – who identify their potential projects or ideas on how to diversify their economy and grow their economy. It really is local leadership that then comes to government and says: we need a partner. And, you know, we've been able to do that.

Now, I have a few different examples of some of the CARES stories. One of them, you know, is Big Lakes County proceeding with phase 2 of their diversification initiative. They received a significant amount of money. There are a number of indigenous communities that have received significant CARES dollars, and again the Chinese Benevolent Association for marketing and development. The town of Cochrane created a Cochrane dollar to help promote shop local, buy local."

Big Lakes County's Economic Development Authority (EDA) has received \$170,265 of matching funds from the Community and Regional Economic Support (CARES) program, for phase II of its award-winning Diversification & Small Medium Sized Enterprises (SME) Support Initiative. Big Lakes received the third largest grant of all 62 projects that received support during CARES Intake 3. Big Lakes also received CARES funding in 2016 for phase 1 of the project. In phase I, the EDA worked closely with local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and sector experts to identify specific opportunities for economic diversification and growth at the industry and company levels.



BIG LAKES COUNTY

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Robert Nygaard, Big Lakes County Councillor and Chair of the EDA said: *"The CARES program has been very important for our progress. It's more than funding; it's an investment and it's a partnership. CARES has opened doors for us to expertise within government and industry. It's a big deal that we received more support. It shows that we are on the right track."*

In phase I, the EDA brought together local companies and municipal partners with external sector experts through its tours and follow-up sector strategy sessions. Nearly 30 new people have become ambassadors, resources, and supports for the county's local economic development efforts. Big Lakes County's project won a national marketing award for its sector profiles and appeared in a dozen positive news stories. Local companies are responding positively to the county's renewed efforts and municipal partners are keen to work with BLC as a result.

Donald Charrois, Big Lakes County Councillor and EDA committee member said: *"Lisa, Jordan and the team are doing a great job. We have a broadband project, we're looking into hemp, and we have these CARES projects that allow us to gather information and make better decisions. When we started economic development we wanted to stand out and be on the radar. We are now."*

In phase II, the EDA will: (1) address phase I gaps, (2) realize the opportunities for diversification and growth that emerged as high-potential priorities during phase I, and (3) improve overall SME supports based on lessons learned after one year of project implementation.

Expected outcomes include increasing investments and job creation in emerging sectors such as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Tourism, and in traditional sectors such as Agriculture and Energy; improving economic development understanding and capacity; improving collaboration; increasing local SME investments; and attracting new investments in energy, agriculture, ICT, and tourism. Stakeholders determined these priorities together in phase I.

Ken Matthews, Big Lakes County Reeve and EDA committee member said: *"Government and Industry representatives tell us that they are impressed and to keep up the good work. They are using us as a best practice example. This is good for the region. As was said in a recent presentation about our projects, we may have 6,000 ratepayers, but when it comes to economic development we see 18,000 residents. We partner with local businesses and neighbours in these projects."*



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The EDA has received funds to engage a research analyst and subject matter experts to join action groups (or task forces) that the EDA has created for each priority identified in phase 1. Each group, supported by the research analyst and the EDA, will consist of the EDA executive director, one BLC staff lead, one BLC Councillor, local SMEs, subject matter experts, and, in some cases, representatives from neighboring municipalities and other partners. The proposed action-group model will build capacity and create a stronger culture of economic development within Big Lakes County and region.

For more information on our sector tours or to download a copy, please visit our website: www.biglakescounty.ca or visit the Big Lakes County Administration Building 5305-56 Street, High Prairie, Alberta.

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