

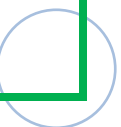
**MUNICIPAL DISTRICT
OF
BIG LAKES**

**PRELIMINARY GROWTH
PLAN**



**PREPARED BY MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF BIG LAKES
WITH ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY**

NORTH STAR PLANNING & ASSOCIATES



GROWTH STUDY DISCLAIMER

It is important to note that the population data provided within the Municipal District of Big Lakes Growth Study is not as accurate as it could be. The reason for this is that Statistics Canada does not distinguish between Metis Settlements and the Municipal District as a whole.

The Statistics Canada census also does not provide information related to on-settlement and off-settlement residency. This makes the simple practice that may have been taken to subtract the Metis population from the overall Statistics Canada population as a means to determine the Municipal District population subject to error. For example, to merely subtract Metis population from the total population would exclude a Metis person that is living within Big Lakes and outside of the Metis Settlement.

In addition, the official Municipal Affairs data and that of the Metis Settlements Commission are not similar. No descriptions are provided on the methodology within these two census counts that can be applied to determine the reason of the discrepancy.

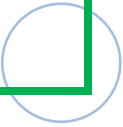
For the purpose of this preliminary Growth Study, the approach taken is to apply the population from the source that is "closest to home". Therefore, the Alberta Municipal Affairs population was used for the Municipal District. The Metis Settlement Commission data was used instead of Alberta Municipal Affairs data for the population of the three Metis communities. It is acknowledged that these two numbers combined will not be exactly the same as the official numbers provided by Municipal Affairs and Statistics Canada.

The discrepancy between the various population counts, the issue of combining Metis data with the Municipal District and others warrant additional study, however, that is outside of the scope of this review and would not likely be of significant impact to the land use planning framework that would be adopted by the Municipal District.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1) Preamble

The following is a big picture growth study prepared as a supporting document to the Municipal District of Big Lakes Municipal Development Plan and Land Use Bylaw. Data presented is primarily based upon the following three sources:

- Interviews with Council and Administration for the M.D. of Big Lakes,
- Open House information from open houses held in Kinuso, Jousard and High Prairie during the month of February, 2010,
- Infrastructure strengths and weaknesses, and
- Information from Statistics Canada and the Métis Settlement Commission.

The first portion of this report highlights community feedback from Council and Administration discussions and the open houses that were held.

The second part of this report provides information taken from the latest Statistics Canada census, dated 2006.

An important component of this growth study will be a generalized review of infrastructure strengths and weaknesses that are part of the fabric of the Municipal District of Big Lakes.

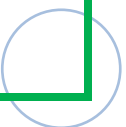
The final portion of this report provides some

opinions and conclusions that can be made from the data collected.

1.2) Reporting Role

The role of this report is to provide background information for the formulation of future policy and regulation that will form the future Municipal Development Plan and Land Use Bylaw.

It is intended that the data presented in this report will identify current trends in land use and development as well as the desire of the community with respect to future development, growth and stability.



COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

2.1) Introduction This part of the Municipal District of Big Lakes Growth Study provides a summary of the feedback received from Council, Administration and the general public as it pertains to growth within the Municipal District of Big Lakes.

2.2) Hamlets The Municipal District of Big Lakes features five (5) hamlets: Enilda, Grouard, Jousard, Faust and Kinuso. Of these, each Hamlet has an approved or soon to be approved area structure plan with the exception of Enilda and Kinuso. Enilda to date has not been scheduled for a future area structure plan and the Hamlet of Kinuso only became a hamlet recently. Kinuso is still subject to the former Village of Kinuso Land Use Bylaw and will remain so until the date of third reading of the bylaw to adopt the new land use documents by the M.D. of Big Lakes.

Each Hamlet has a varying degree of servicing, with water being provided by both truck haul and water line. An off-site levy bylaw is being prepared to address future extensions of the water line service.

Piped waste water service is provided within all Hamlets to a varying degree.

(Enilda) Enilda has the advantage of adjoining Highway #2 and featuring railway access. To date a land use plan has not been prepared for Enilda.

A large portion of the undeveloped land in Enilda features higher water tables which may make it undevelopable for most industrial uses that would feature foundations with heavy loads or have potential for adverse impacts on the local

water table.

Residential opportunities do exist in Enilda. The level of servicing is dependent on the location within the Hamlet.

In-fill opportunities are limited primarily to re-development of existing developed lots.

(Grouard) The Hamlet of Grouard is the most distant from Highway #2, but offers what may be the greatest potential in terms of views and aesthetics.

The Hamlet has the potential to increase its importance as a local service centre as it is a full half hour from the nearest larger centre, the Town of High Prairie.

Increased coordination with the Kapawe'no First Nation would assist with future growth opportunities. The First Nation in a practical sense shares roadways, educational and utility systems within Grouard and is an important contributor to the commercial business sector there.

A land use plan has been prepared which will provide a guide to future developers. Redevelopment opportunities exist as well.

Tourism and the scenic view aspect has been the cited as the primary strengths to bring new visitors and/or residents to Grouard.

(Faust) The Hamlet of Faust is located on the shore of Lesser Slave Lake and is in close proximity to Highway No. 2. The Driftpile First Nation Reserve is nearby, separated from Faust by a single quarter-section.

A significant amount of the shoreline on Lesser Slave Lake near Faust is Crown Land. This differs from Jousard where much of the

lakeshore is privately owned. This fact could be a measure that could be used to differentiate Faust from Jousard. Where Jousard provides lakeshore living opportunities, Faust can provide living in proximity to the lakeshore with the wildlife and fishery opportunities that are provided from a natural lakeshore setting.

A major feature of Faust is a marina that is located near the northwest portion of the center of the Hamlet.

The general understanding is that there is significant tourism potential in Faust with the Lake being the most important attraction.

There are currently a large amount of undeveloped parcels in Faust.

(Jousard) Similar to Faust, the Hamlet of Jousard is located between the shores of Lesser Slave Lake and Highway #2.

Jousard is the Hamlet experiencing the greatest growth pressures of late, principally in the area of recreational living. Recreational vehicle condominiums are very popular.

In-fill for additional commercial services in Jousard is a priority with local residents.

(Kinuso) Kinuso was a Village until it reverted to Hamlet status in the fall of 2009. To date, an area structure plan or perhaps more importantly, an area re-development plan has not been provided for the community.

Kinuso has a unique situation where the Hamlet is completely encircled by a First Nation community. The only growth opportunity available for Kinuso is to re-develop existing lands. In this case, a community re-development

plan may be more appropriate than an area structure plan.

Some opportunities may exist for joint projects with the Swan River First Nation.

Full piped water and sewer services are provided within the Hamlet of Kinuso.

2.3) Rural Residential

Generally, the land that is under the most development pressure within the Municipal District of Big Lakes is the land in proximity to the Lake Shore, in particularly the Jousard and the Spruce Point area.

Very little development pressure exists within the rural area surrounding the Town of High Prairie. Residents of that area also desire future development to be of low impact and density.

It is expected by most residents that the greatest pressure will continue to be on the lands north of Highway 2 and east of the Grouard Highway.

The community in general was of the opinion that lands south of Highway 2 in the east portion of the M.D. and in the High Prairie area remain essentially as agricultural lands.

2.4) Rural Commercial

The Municipal District of Big Lakes, like most rural municipalities, features a variety of owner operator and small business operations within the rural area. To date no commercial or industrial parks have been identified within the MD.

Unless there is a great deal of demand for rural industrial parks, it is likely better to let the market decide where they may be located, provided sufficient guidelines are provided for location and development criteria.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

3.1) Introduction

This part of the Municipal District of Big Lakes Growth Study provides a statistical summary of trends and current positions from a census perspective¹.

3.2) Population

The M.D.'s recorded census in 2006 was 5805 persons, a -0.7% reduction from the previous census performed in 2001. This number represents the full time permanent population including Métis Settlement population. Statistics Canada does not separate Métis Settlement population from that of the whole of the M.D.

Another factor that is missed in the Canadian Census data is the number of residents within the MD that would be classed as seasonal.

Finally, the census does not reflect the population of Kinuso, which was a village in 2006. Statistics Canada's 2006 population count for Kinuso in 2006 was 219, a 5.2% drop from its 2001 population.

Municipal Affairs is providing a combined population of 4,030 for the Municipal District of Big Lakes, not including Metis Settlements.

3.3) First Nation Population

Within or adjoining the M.D. of Big Lakes are the following First Nation communities:

- Kapawe'no,
- Sucker Creek,
- Driftpile, and
- Swan River.

¹ Statistics Canada 2006 Census Data.

It should be noted that data from First Nations is not noted for accuracy. This is often due to difficulties experienced in data collection, privacy concerns on the part of the First Nation and the transitory nature of some of the population.

- (Kapawe'no) The Kapawe'no First Nation is located north of Grouard and is in several unconnected parts. Unfortunately, Census Canada has no data on this community. However, information obtained directly from the First Nation shows a 2009 population of 108 when not including off-reserve members.
- (Swan River) The Swan River First Nation is located in and around the Kinuso Area. The population features a slight growing trend with 300 persons listed as aboriginal residents. 15 additional persons are listed as non-aboriginal residents within the community.
- (Sucker Creek) The Sucker Creek First Nation is located in the vicinity of Jousard, approximately 5.7 km. (3.5 miles) west of the Hamlet. Sucker Creek's population is also experiencing moderate a growth trend with an aboriginal population of 590 and a non-aboriginal residential population of 25.
- (Driftpile) With the possible exception of Kapawe'no First Nation, the Driftpile First Nation is by far the largest in the municipal service area. The 2006 Census count was 720 persons with an additional 25 non-aboriginal resident population. As with their First Nations in the area, a slight upward trend is identified.

The combined First Nation Population on reserve in the Big Lakes Area is approximately 1,783 persons.

**3.4) Métis
Settlement
Population**

Within or adjoining the M.D. of Big Lakes are the following Métis Settlement communities:

- Gift Lake,
- East Prairie
- Peavine

All census data provided for the above Métis Settlements is provided from the Alberta Métis Settlements Commission. Unfortunately, the date that the census was taken is not provided.

(Gift Lake) The Gift Lake Métis Settlement is reported to have a population of approximately 1,300. The settlement is located approximately 40 km southeast of the Town of High Prairie.

(East Prairie) The East Prairie Métis Settlement is reported to have a population of approximately 812. The settlement is located approximately 40 km south of the Town of High Prairie.

(Peavine) The Peavine Métis Settlement is reported to have a population of approximately 993. The settlement is located approximately 56 km north of the Town of High Prairie.

Combined, the Métis Population in the M.D. of Big Lakes area is approximately 3,105 persons. Please note that the Métis Settlement Commission data differs from that of Alberta Municipal Affairs.

**3.5) Area
Population**

Many of the people within the M.D. of Big Lakes utilize services from the Town of High Prairie. Similarly, the M.D. of Big Lakes provides a substantial amount of services to High Prairie Residents, especially in the form of recreation opportunities.

In a similar vein the First Nations and Métis Settlements within the M.D. of Big Lakes also utilize a variety of services from the M.D. including roads, commercial services, cost-sharing services, recreation opportunities and so forth.

It is true that the trading area for much of the M.D. of Big Lakes would extend well beyond the outer borders of Big Lakes, however, in an effort to keep this report's focus on land use rather than a comprehensive economic growth model, external growth impacts are not included in this report.

Finally, due to its unique position in the M.D., the Town of Swan Hills was not included in this report. This decision is based upon the fact that all transportation routes to Swan Hills are on provincial highways and the community is surrounded by a very large buffer of green zone forested lands which in turn results in the Swan Hills community having very little impact on the land use patterns of the M.D. as a whole.

Based upon the above, the growth patterns within the M.D. are based upon a direct and indirect impact population of approximately 11,000 (not including High Prairie which has a population of 2,750).

3.6) Housing

As part of the 2006 Census, the M.D. of Big Lakes featured an estimated 2215 with an additional 102 dwellings within what was then the Village of Kinuso.

The dwelling total in 2010 would be approximately 2317 homes. Occupied dwellings are substantially less in number, likely due to the large component of seasonal dwellings in the M.D. and the fact that census

data is often taken outside of the summer holiday season. The occupied adjusted figure for dwellings is 2069 homes.

Compared to population counts, this would average to approximately 2.9 persons/dwelling. This number is higher than a typical rural average of 2.7 persons per dwelling. Kinuso has an average population of 2.3 persons/dwelling.

One factor to make note of is the difference between occupied and non occupied dwellings in Kinuso. According to the 2006 Census, there are 12 unoccupied dwellings within the community. In other words, 13% of the housing stock is unoccupied.

It is not known from the census data whether or not the occupied vs. non occupied dwelling statistics from Kinuso translates in general to other Hamlets in the M.D. The large number of recreational vehicles and cabins on a seasonal basis within the municipality makes it impossible to determine this with any certainty solely based upon census data.

Finally, the data within this section also assumes that Métis Settlements have similar dwelling characteristics as the Municipal District. This assumption is likely incorrect as Aboriginal dwellings often have younger and larger families than non-aboriginal residents.

3.7) Labour Force

People within the M.D. of Big Lakes are employed a variety of industries without a single dominant employer.

(Kinuso) In Kinuso, the 2006 census reveals that the highest level of employment by a single player is "other services", construction and retail trade being the next largest employers. In

total, residents of Kinuso are employed in significant numbers in virtually every economic sector other than finance and real estate.

Kinuso is also a very young community with 27% of the population at school age level and less than 15% at retirement level.

(Greater MD) Differing from Kinuso, which may be representative of hamlets within the M.D., agriculture is a major player, though not the largest sector of the economy in the municipality. "Other services" accounts for 22% of the labour force while agriculture and other resource based industries employs a further 21.7%.

Other sectors of the economy are also well represented, however, it should be noted that this census data pre-dates some of the job losses that were a result of a downturn in the forest economy in recent years.

The population of the M.D. is also quite healthy with an average population age of 34 years and less than 10% of the population being of retirement age.

AGRICULTURAL REVIEW

4.1) Introduction

This part of the study highlights the state of the agricultural industry within the Municipal District of Big Lakes. Most information provided in this report concerning agriculture is from the 2006 Census of Agriculture, part of Statistics Canada's overall census.

4.2) General Trends

Province wide, the size of farms is increasing while farm populations continue to shrink in size. This has serious implications for the health of rural communities since the farming community and its supporting urban areas depend on each other for health.

Generally, cattle ranching is the single largest operation within the Municipal District of Big Lakes, though almost all of it would be considered extensive agriculture.

Grain farming features less farms than in the past, though the farms are getting larger in size. The following is a snapshot of farm size within the M.D.:

Farm Size (ac.)	# of Farms
<10	440
10 – 129	22
130-239	78
240-559	103
560-1119	98
1120-2239	80
2240-3520	51

The majority of farms are less than 10 acres in area. Unfortunately, farm receipts by farm size data is not readily available to determine if agriculture is the primary source of income

on those farms.

Bonifide agriculture accounts for a total of 436 farms in the Municipal District. Of these, most land is cropped with most of the remaining lands being pastured.

The age groups of the farming population is normally a serious concern in rural Alberta and the M.D. is no exception. Fully half of the single operator farming population in the M.D. is more than 55 years of age. Only 7% of this population is less than 35 years of age.

**4.3) Agro-forestry &
Woodlots**

Competition for land amongst competing land use. One use that is regarded as Agriculture by the Province of Alberta is Agro-Forestry and Woodlots.

No data is publicly available on this topic at this time, however, it is a matter of interest for landowners and communities as a whole.

INFRASTRUCTURE

5.1) Introduction As part of the statistical summary provided in this preliminary growth study, a short form accounting of the state of infrastructure within the Municipal District of Big Lakes is appropriate.

5.2) Roadways Through the public process and consultations that have taken place, to date there have not been any requests for a general conversion of rural gravel roads to a hard-surfaced status. The largest concern with roads appears to be setbacks from roadways. Secondary concerns are applying a one-size fits all road width to all roads regardless of future growth patterns.

5.3) Water supply Water supply from groundwater sources is very limited in the areas that are subject to the most growth pressure. A variety of municipal and co-operative suppliers are available. This can lead to problems in coordinating water supplies for new developments where the historical focus of the supplier has been to agriculture and not residential uses.

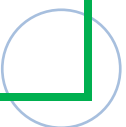
5.4) Waste-water Generally, lots larger than 0.42 acres in area can provide an on-site waste-water collection, treatment and disposal system. The latest trends in development are for lots smaller than 0.42 acres in area.

This issue sets up a policy issue for the Municipal District.

- Should the Municipal District be the primary source of treatment and disposal for trucked in (“honey wagon”) waste water?

- Should piped systems be encouraged or required in higher density subdivisions?
- Should on-site treatment and disposal through communal systems be encouraged?

It is recommended that this important issue be examined carefully. Based upon experience in other communities, it is only a matter of time until the public will demand piped sewerage on lakeshore area lots as a means to mitigate contamination of lakeshore environments with untreated waste-water.



CONCLUSIONS

6.1) INTRODUCTION

Based upon the information presented in this Preliminary Growth Study, a number of conclusions may be made for future consideration by decision makers.

6.2) POPULATION

Overall, the population of the Municipal District of Big Lakes would be regarded as stable. Over time, the corporate boundary of the Municipal District has changed more than once so it is not possible to get an accurate trend line much prior to the last decade.

First Nation and Métis community populations are in a slight growth mode. This does not impact population trends within the Municipal District, however, it will have an impact on community services and the commercial service economy.

On a rural-urban breakdown, the rural area is generally stable with a slight drop in population over time. Using Kinuso as a guide, the urban areas of the M.D. do appear to be in decline.

Based upon the above, the Municipal District may have two (2) tasks to complete. First, to stabilize the rural and urban population. Second, to put into place policy that maintains the rural and urban lifestyle that is enjoyed by existing residents while encouraging further growth.

Finally, it is acknowledged that funding opportunities for the Municipal District are often related to population counts. Having

the Métis Settlements combined with the population of the M.D. as a whole does not provide accurate data. A municipal census may be required as the Statistics Canada and Alberta Municipal Affairs data is highly variable.

6.3) AGRICULTURE

Agriculture has historically been a focus for the health of rural municipalities within the Province of Alberta. Generally, the focus of agricultural policy has been to focus on the preservation of agricultural land and to limit the fragmentation of the agricultural land base to non-agricultural land uses.

Cattle ranching is the single largest agricultural land use within the Municipal District of Big Lakes, with crops and forage areas being the largest use of land. Farm sizes are varied, but it is noted that the majority of farms are more than a half section (320 acres) in area.

Similar to other areas of the Province, the age of farm families is a very serious concern in the Municipal District of Big Lakes. With current trends, the farm family will continue to decline in number.

Clearly, the policies put into place by many rural communities to support the agricultural community have been proven to be ineffective. Maintaining the same approach will do little if anything to slow or reverse the decline of the agricultural community.

**6.4) RURAL
COMMUNITY**

As highlighted in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 which describe the current state of population and agriculture in the Municipal District, the current generally accepted approach is ineffective in slowing the decline of rural Alberta.

The focus of rural community planning to date has been to preserve greater agricultural land at all costs. The result appears to be:

- larger and fewer farms,
- family farms replaced with corporate farms,
- less people using urban services,
- less people available for community organizations and community events, and
- fewer people in the education system,

to name a few.

It is recommended that a new approach be undertaken which will encourage greater settlement in the rural areas of the Municipal District in addition to the existing policy of preserving agricultural land.

6.5) SEASONAL USE

The primary land use growth option in the Municipal District has been seasonal resort development. Typically, these developments result in seasonal residents who don't use postal services or the school system, however, there are opportunities to incorporate the seasonal residents into the overall community framework.

These may include:

- Ensuring that Developers of seasonal resorts establish community bulletin boards and are brought up to date on the range of summer activities that are available for people in the nearby Hamlet areas,
- Encouraging local businesses to establish links with seasonal residents in much the

same manner that is enjoyed by permanent residents,

- Provide linkages such as trail systems to make it easier for resort residents to access the commercial areas within the Hamlets and Hamlet residents to access recreational areas.
- Encourage the maintenance of the commercial core and downtown “hubs” in the Hamlets through:
 - carefully evaluating proposals for commercial enterprises that are in proximity to Hamlets where the same service is provided,
 - ensuring that development near Hamlets has a wider range of safe transportation options from the site to the downtown areas, and
 - encouraging through land use policies the revitalization of downtown areas.

6.6) INFRASTRUCTURE The focus of the Municipal District with respect to infrastructure may be the provision of effective water and sewer service rather than roadways. Piped water and waste-water will be the primary infrastructure issues in the future.