

Editor's Introduction

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The State of the Aboriginal Economy is a section of this journal that examines different aspects of the environment that may contribute to the economic well-being of Aboriginal communities and individuals. It is not intended to provide an assessment of how well or poorly Aboriginals across Canada are doing economically. If such an examination was provided, we would likely find that there is an extremely broad range of results being achieved. Some communities are doing very well, many are struggling and others are getting by.

This section includes four papers that address issues relating to the economic well-being of Aboriginals. A common theme among these four papers is the opportunities for enhancing Aboriginal economies.

Seaman, Robertson and Ford discuss, in broad terms, investment opportunities for Aboriginal communities. This is presented in ways that are consistent with Indigenous laws and traditions, while recognizing constraints imposed by the federal government. Four potential areas that provide investment opportunities for those communities in a position to do so are reviewed. These include the gaming industry, with a focus on Saskatchewan, energy generation, with a focus on Ontario, carbon offset projects, which is still evolving and commercial real estate.

Bailie, Parungao, Ouellette and Russell report on opportunities within the forestry sector. This includes the finding that Aboriginal communities have increased the amount of forestry under their management. Further, there has been a significant increase in the total median income for off-reserve Aboriginal men working in forestry.

This has resulted in the closing of the income gap between them and non-Aboriginal men. Those working in forestry, on average, are older and better educated than they had been. However, employment in forestry for both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals has declined, based upon the 1996, 2001 and 2006 census data.

White discusses the First Nations Land Management Act (FNLMA), which is a Canadian law enacted in 1999 and the opportunities provided for land management. The paper argues that First Nations which achieve the five requirements under the Nation Building Model, which are explained, should experience greater success in their land management and obtain greater social and economic prosperity. The paper encourages taking advantage of the legislative tools that allow Aboriginals to exert self-governing jurisdiction over specific subject matters such as land management as well as education and family services, rather than taking an all or nothing approach to self-government.

Oppenheimer analyzes the employment patterns of Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in 2009 and 2010. When examining this by age, gender, province and territories there are very few areas where Aboriginals have achieved an increase in employment. Overall the employment comparisons between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals are not encouraging. Yet the picture changes dramatically when employment is assessed by level of education. What we see is that as the level of educational increases so does employment. This is the case for Aboriginals as well as for non-Aboriginals. Education may be seen as an opportunity for levelling the playing field as there is almost no difference in employment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals when examined by educational level. This may be seen as extremely encouraging as education appears to be a means for employment and economic advancement.