



Comité de formation du Nord Supérieur

# Socio-Economic Trends and Training Needs in the District of Thunder Bay: Environmental Scan Summary 2002

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# **Socio-Economic Trends and Training Needs in the District of Thunder Bay: Environmental Scan Summary 2002**

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENT**

In 1999 the North Superior Training Board (Local Board Area 24<sup>1</sup>) conducted an extensive review of economic trends and training needs in Northwestern Ontario. This report is intended to serve as an update of that document. It follows similar updates done in September 2000 and 2001. This years report highlights new information and issues that have arisen since both the 1999 Environmental Scan and the 2000 and 2001 Environmental Scan Summaries were completed.

As concerns the labour force, the main events of this past year are a decline in population from 1996 to 2001, a lowering of unemployment rates, a decrease in the number of jobs in Thunder Bay and an increase in jobs in Northwestern Ontario, a loss of full-time employment, and a gain in part-time employment. As concerns the skills and occupation profile, the main events have been an increase in transportation and warehousing jobs, an increase in professional, scientific, and technical support jobs and public administration jobs, and a decline in forestry and mining, and construction jobs.

The main skill shortages continue to be in literacy and life skills, computer and information technology skills, trade skills and trade apprenticeships, and healthcare professional skills. There appears to be increasing shortages of nurses, teachers, and information technology specialists. Most of this year's important training issues are similar to those listed in last year's Environmental Scan Summary. The important new issues are concern about the access to broadband communications technology, the re-training and information technology specialists associated with this technology, concern about the educational inequalities faced by the region's Francophone population, the need for a youth training strategy, and concern about skills development for women.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The updated information was gathered using the following methods:

- 1) an analysis of labour market data and information supplied primarily from Human Resources and Development Canada (HRDC)
- 2) an analysis of documentation supplied by labour market partner groups
- 3) a review and analysis of local media reports over the past year
- 4) a series of open-ended questionnaire interviews with key informants
- 5) validation of the findings by community partners through: i. a review of the draft report by the major community partners, ii. a public validation meeting held with community partners on June 7, 2002.

## **CHANGES IN THE LABOUR FORCE**

### **Demographic Profile:**

#### **1. Decline in Population**

In the Environmental Scan done in 1999 we saw that the demographic profile of Board Area 24 was characterized by the slowing of growth relative to Ontario as a whole, the decline of Blue Collar industrial jobs and the rise of the Service Sector, the increasing presence of women in the paid workforce, the aging of the non-Native population, youth out-migration, and the absence of new immigrants. It also noted that levels of education continue to lag behind provincial averages. The recently released populations data from the 2001 Census shows that not only has growth slowed in the Board 24 area but that the population actually declined from 1996 to 2001 by 4.4%.

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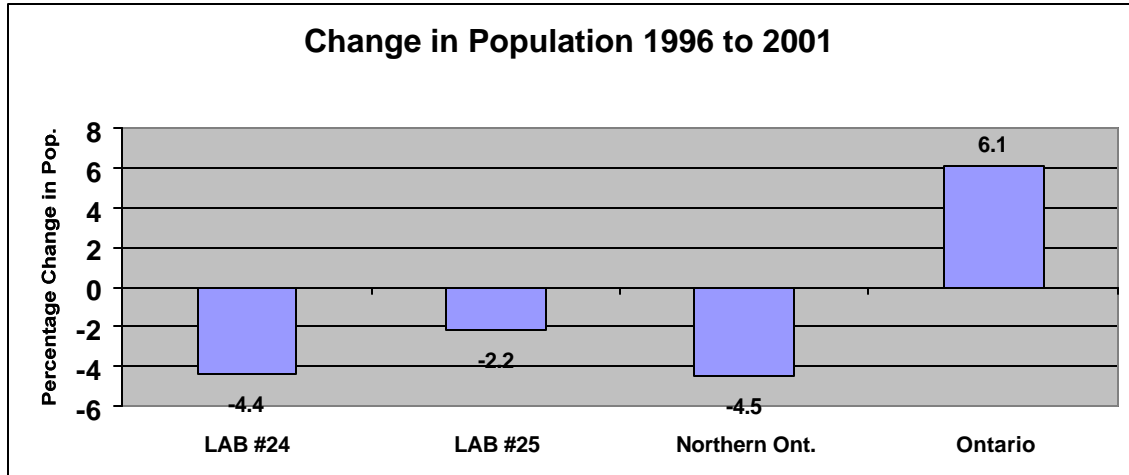


Figure 1 (Source: Statistics Canada: 2001 Census)

Other than for population, there has been no new 2001 Census data released by the time of the writing of this report. This data will be analyzed in next year's Environmental Scan. In terms of the actual labour force, the Labour Force Survey, conducted monthly by Statistics Canada, gives us the most reliable information on year to year changes in the labour force in Northwestern Ontario.<sup>ii</sup> Data from this survey is available for all of Northwestern Ontario and for the Census Metropolitan Area of Thunder Bay.<sup>iii</sup>

## 2. Lowering of Unemployment Rates

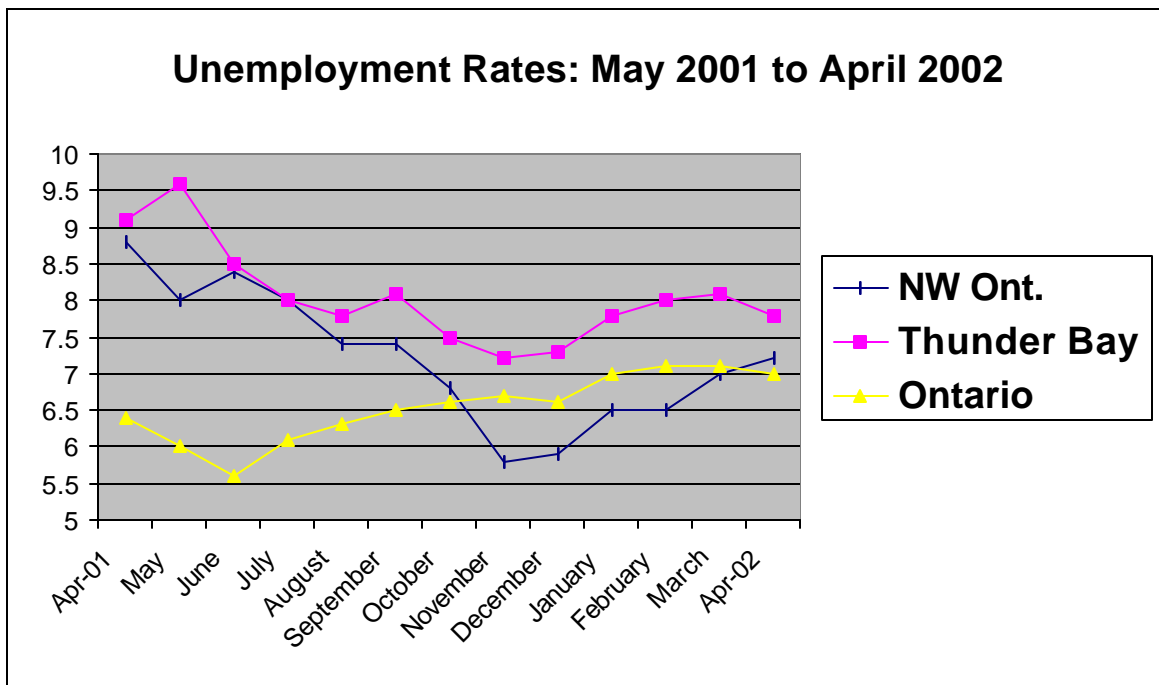


Figure 2 (Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, April 2001 to April 2002)

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As is shown in Figure 2, the unemployment rates for Northwestern Ontario were significantly lower this year than is normally the case. In fact, from November 2001 to March 2002, rates for the Northwest were lower than the provincial average. As has been pointed out in earlier Environmental Scans, rates for the Northwest are usually significantly higher than provincial averages. Trends in recent months seem to indicate a return to the normal situation. Figure 2 also indicates that unemployment rates were lower in the areas of Northwestern Ontario outside the Census Metropolitan Area of Thunder Bay.

### 3. Loss of Jobs in Thunder Bay, Gains in Northwestern Ontario

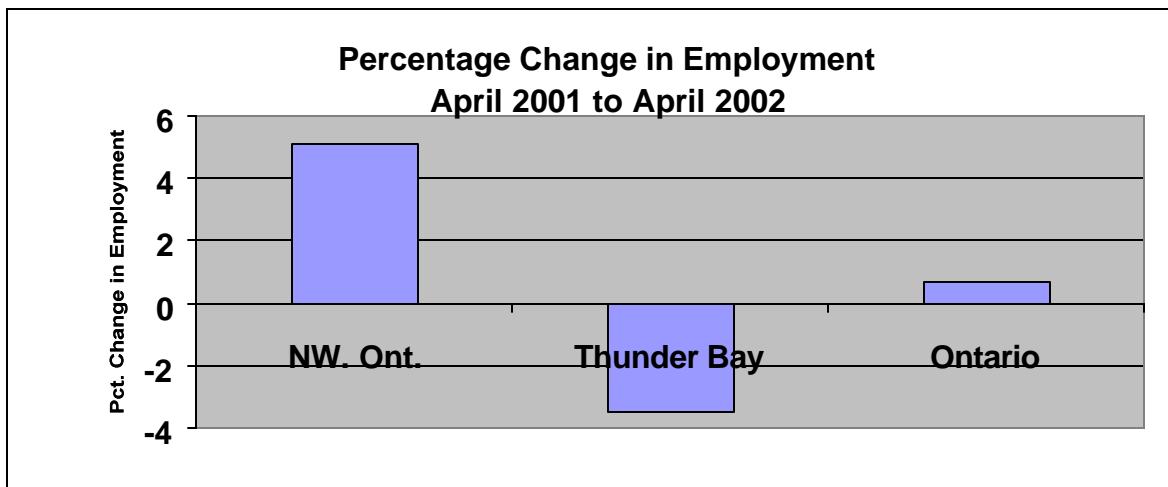


Figure 3 (Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, April 2001 to April 2002)

Not only did the percentage of unemployment decrease over the year, but the number of jobs also increased by 5.1%. Figure 3 shows that this job growth occurred outside the city of Thunder Bay, which experienced a decline of 3.5% in the number of employed. This is a reversal of trends seen last year in which Thunder Bay showed growth and Northwestern Ontario declined.

### 4. Loss in Full-time Employment, Gain in Part-time Employment

Evaluation of employment trends becomes less optimistic when one realizes that most employment growth occurred in part-time positions. In Northwestern Ontario part-time jobs increased by 23.6% while full-time positions decreased by 0.5%. In Thunder Bay full-time positions decreased by 4.1% while part-time jobs decreased by 2%.

### Skills/Occupational profile:

The Environmental Scan of 1999 and the Environmental Scan Summaries of 2000 and 2001 all pointed out the major differences in the occupational profile of Northwestern Ontario as compared to Ontario as a whole. As was the case last year, the latest Labour Force Survey data shows that little has changed over the past year. Northwestern Ontario still has a lower percentage of manufacturing jobs despite the importance of the pulp and

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paper and sawmill industries. As well, Northwestern Ontario has a lower percentage of jobs in finance-related industries, professional services and management services. The region has a higher percentage of jobs in primary forestry and mining and in government-related services such as education, health and social assistance, and public administration. It also has a higher percentage of people employed in accommodation and food services.

**Table 1**

Industry	April2002	April2001	Year/Year	
			Absolute	%
Total	111800	106400	5400	5.1
Goods-Producing Sector	27400	29900	-2500	-8.4
Agriculture	...	...		
Forestry, Fishing, Mining, Oil and Gas	8200	10000	-1800	-18.0
Utilities	...	...		
Construction	4500	5400	-900	-16.7
Manufacturing	13700	13400	300	2.2
Services-Producing Sector	84400	76500	7900	10.3
Trade	16600	15900	700	4.4
Transportation and Warehousing	9000	4700	4300	91.5
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Leasing	3200	3600	-400	-11.1
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	3300	2200	1100	50.0
Management, Administrative and Other Support	3300	3300		0.0
Educational Services	9500	8800	700	8.0
Health Care and Social Assistance	15000	16000	-1000	-6.3
Information, Culture and Recreation	3400	3300	100	3.0
Accommodation and Food Services	10300	8600	1700	19.8
Other Services	4100	5100	-1000	-19.6
Public Administration	6700	5100	1600	31.4

(Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, April 2001 to April 2002)

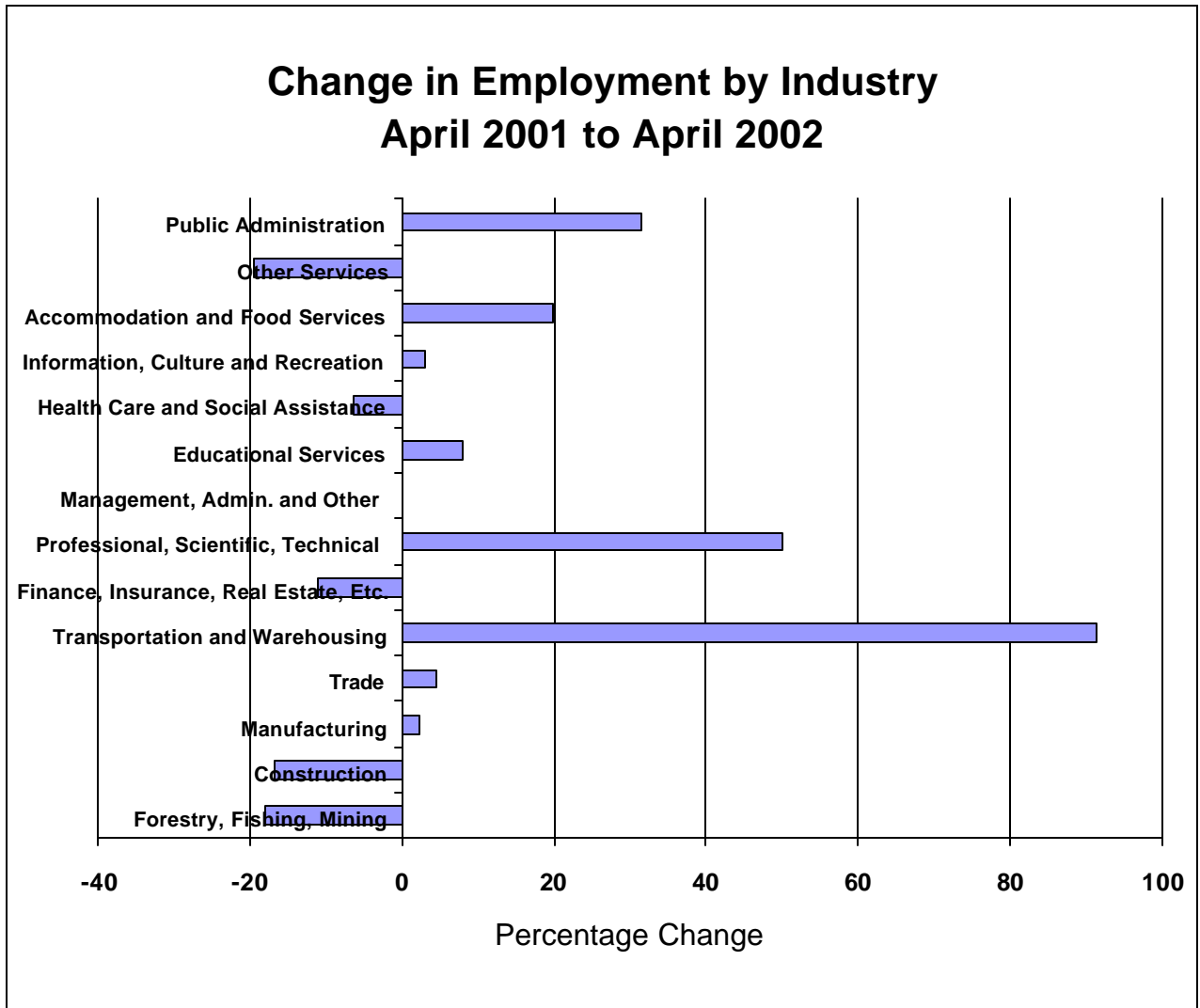


Figure 4 (Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, April 2001 to April 2002)

### 1. Increase in Transportation and Warehousing Jobs

The most surprising trend in this year's Labour Force Survey data is a dramatic increase in the number of jobs in Transportation and Warehousing. Last year this sector had been one of the sectors that had shown the biggest declines. Table 1 shows that this year this sector increased by 4,300 jobs, or by 91.5%. This trend had been indicated in last year's Environmental Scan summary for the Board 24 area that pointed out there were a large number of job advertisements for truck drivers. Still, it is difficult to understand where so many jobs could have been created. Once again readers must be cautioned that the small numbers of people interviewed in Northwestern Ontario for the Labour Force Survey means that much of this increase could be due to sampling error.

## **2. Increase in Professional, Scientific, and Technical Support Jobs and Public Administration Jobs**

Another surprising trend in this year's job growth is the increase in professional, scientific, and technical support jobs and public administration jobs. Both these sectors experienced substantial decreases last year. The professional, scientific and technical support jobs sector increased by 1,100 jobs, or 50% after losing 2,500 jobs last year. It appears that at least some of the new jobs in this sector are related to the establishment of call centres in the area in the past several years.

An increase in employment in the public administration sector represents a reversal of a long-term decline in this sector since the early 1990s. Jobs in public administration increased by 1,600, or 31percent.

## **3. Decline in Forestry and Mining, and Construction Jobs**

The sector that lost the most jobs over the past year was the forestry and mining sector. The number of jobs declined by 1,800, or 18%. The two previous years had seen an increase in this sector. From 1999 to 2000 jobs increased in this sector by 1000 followed by a 3,600 increase in jobs from 2000 to 2001. It is possible that the uncertainty surrounding the softwood lumber trade dispute with the United States was partially responsible for this decline. Construction jobs also declined this past year. After increasing by over 2,000 jobs last year, jobs in this sector declined by 900, or 16.7%.

## ***CHANGES IN DEMAND***

### **Industry Changes in the Region<sup>iv</sup>**

#### **Forest Industry**

The forest industry is the major industrial employer in the Board 24 area. The Environmental Scan Summary for 2000 generally portrayed demand in this sector as either stable or expanding, especially in engineered wood product industries and sawmills. Last year saw a change in this outlook. The economic slowdown in the United States had a serious effect on the forest industry. Many mills were looking at temporary shutdowns and layoffs. While the economic slowdown is less of an issue for the forest industry this year, the inability of the Canadian government to reach a satisfactory agreement with the United States continues to be responsible for a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the forestry sector.

Despite this uncertainty, the forestry sector in the Board 24 area has been fairly stable over the past year. On the negative side, Longlac Wood Industries shut down indefinitely in November 2001 but re-opened again in January 2002 with a limited production. Both

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the Weyerhaeuser plywood mill in Nipigon and the James River Marathon paper mill had temporary shutdowns over the course of the year.

While there is uncertainty, there is also a good deal of optimism about the future of the forest industry in the region. Even the sawmill industry in the region appears optimistic. Bowaters is continuing the construction of its new sawmill on the Fort William First Nation and will soon open the re-vamped sawmill in Ignace. There have been few layoffs as of yet as a result of the recently imposed American tariffs.

*Outlook: Employment opportunities will likely remain stable throughout the year. The sawmills could be facing layoffs due to the recently imposed American softwood lumber tariffs.*

### **Mining**

Over the past year mining has shown a potential for growth in Board 24 area. As was indicated last year, interest in new minerals such as the Platinum Group Metals has meant the possible development of new mining operations in the region. The Lac des Iles mine had its official opening in August 2001 and shortly thereafter came the announcement that another major find had been made near the present mine. While the world prices for Platinum Group Metals has declined substantially over the past year, the increase in the price of gold has a positive effect on the exploration efforts

A serious problem that continues to face the communities of Marathon and Manitowadge is the probable depletion of gold reserves in the Hemlo gold field. Battle Mountain's Golden Giant mine is scheduled for closure in 2005 with the loss of 330 jobs. The recent increase in gold prices has intensified the search for more deposits in the area.

Diamond mining is also increasingly a possibility in the area. De Beers has entered into an exploration partnership for possible diamond mining operations near Attawapiskat.

*Outlook: Employment opportunities in will likely increase slightly throughout the year. Much of this growth is likely to be due to Platinum Group Metals and gold exploration. More closures can be expected over the next 10 years on the Hemlo goldfields.*

### **Tourism**

As was pointed out in last year's summary, tourism in the region has been on the increase for the past several years.<sup>v</sup> Economic growth in the United States accompanied by a decline in the Canadian dollar has translated into an increase in the number of American tourists in the region. The low Canadian dollar has also meant that more and more Canadians are deciding to stay in Canada for their vacations. There are indications that the growth in tourism may be slowing. From April to August last year, the number of tourists coming through the Fort Frances area decreased by 7%.<sup>vi</sup> Despite this, tourism increased by about 2% in Thunder Bay last year and Tourism Thunder Bay is expecting another increase this year.<sup>vii</sup> The slowing of the American economy last year may have

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played a part in this decrease. Recent increases in the value of the Canadian dollar may also have a negative impact on tourism. The impact of September 11 is uncertain. Some feel that people will tend to want to stay home rather than travel for their vacations. Others feel that the area might get an increase in the number of Americans from the Mid-West who would rather drive than take a plane.

Increasingly the demands of the tourists visiting the region are changing. Traditionally the region's tourism industry has depended heavily upon hunting and fishing. In the past few years the demand for "eco-tourism" has been increasing. Tourists are more likely to want to hike, canoe, and kayak. This could indicate a new training need as some outfitters seem unable to decrease their dependence on traditional hunting and fishing tourism.

*Outlook: Employment is likely to be stable with slower growth than in previous years. The industry should also face an increasing demand for tourist activities other than hunting and fishing.*

### **Public Sector**

Demand for jobs in this sector may finally be on the increase. Over the past decade the Labour Force Survey has shown that public sector employment in Northwestern Ontario has been hard hit. This past year has seen growth in this sector. Approximately 1,600 new jobs have been added to the public administration sector over the course of the year. The impact of retirements will soon increase demand in this sector.

*Outlook: Employment will most likely remain stable or with a slight increase in the short-term. Growth is seen over the next five years.*

### **Administrative Services**

Growth in this sector has continued this past year. Hundreds of new employees were hired over the course of the year in Thunder Bay. As was pointed out last year, some communities would like call centre operations but find it difficult to attract them either because of the lack of an adequate telecommunications infrastructure or because of differing telephone rates and costs.

*Outlook: Employment opportunities will likely increase in the short to medium term especially in smaller communities as they start to acquire the necessary communications infrastructure to host these types of businesses.*

### **Health Services**

A review of the media in Northwestern Ontario shows that, as was the case last year, the most worrying labour shortage for the region continues to be that of health care professionals. Northwestern Ontario currently, and historically, has had a shortage of physicians. Now the shortage has extended to nurses. Both St. Joseph's Hospital in

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Thunder Bay and the Marathon Hospital had to close wards this past year due to a shortage of nurses. A shortage of paramedics was also noted in the press.

There is a great deal of hope that the recently announced medical school at Lakehead University will help solve the long-term physician shortage. Attention is now being turned to other health care professionals. The completion of the Northwestern Ontario District Health Council's Health Human Resource Study is scheduled this summer. The study will provide an inventory of the regional health labour market and will identify strategic planning directions to address future needs.

*Outlook: Employment opportunities will increase. The region will continue to have difficulty training and/or attracting health care professionals to meet demand.*

### **Construction**

There are several major construction projects that continued in the Board 24 area in the past year. The largest is the new \$180 million regional hospital in Thunder Bay. Others were the construction of the new Canadian Tire complex on Fort William Road, and the \$32 million Advanced Technology and Academic Centre at Lakehead University. The hospital is scheduled for completion in the summer of 2003 while the Advanced Technology and Academic Centre should be completed by early 2003.

A new project announced over the past year is an \$8 million addition to the hospital in Marathon. Announcements are still pending on the construction of several new "big box" retail stores in the intercity area of Thunder Bay.

A special mention should be made of a new major energy project for the city of Thunder Bay that was announced in March. A consortium is looking at building a major new power generating plant on the Fort William First Nation which would use petroleum coke to generate power that would be sold in the United States. The first phase of the project would be the building of a \$1.4 billion US plant. Long-term plans see a \$9 billion investment with more than 2,000 new jobs created.

Despite this activity, housing starts in the region have remained slow. Last year there were only 163 new housing starts, less than half of the normal number.<sup>viii</sup> This has meant that demand for skilled construction trades workers in the region is less than the extremely high demand for them in other areas of the province.

*Outlook: Employment opportunities will remain stable primarily due to industrial and institutional construction.*

### **Education**

As was mentioned last year, the need to keep costs down and a lack of growth in the population has meant that many school boards have had to look at closing schools down. At the same time there is an increase in the number of full time teaching positions being

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advertised in the local newspapers of the region. With retirements, the situation in the future will become worse. Indeed, many schools in the rural areas of Northern Ontario are now having great difficulties filling positions. The Lakehead Public School Board recently announced that 75% of its current principals will be retiring by 2010.

*Outlook: Employment opportunities will increase due to a large number of retirements. Many smaller communities will have problems attracting new teachers.*

### **Skill Shortages**

The Environmental Scan Summary of 2000 included the results of a survey designed to determine skill shortages in the Board 24 area. It concluded that the 4 skill areas most in need were literacy and life skills, computer and new information technology skills, trades skills and trade apprenticeships, and healthcare professional skills. There has been no new research done to indicate that these skill shortages have changed over the two years.

Another indicator of skill shortages are advertised employment opportunities.<sup>ix</sup> In looking at the advertised employment opportunities, as collected by the HRCC in Board Area 24, we see that, throughout the past year, as was the case with the year before, the most advertised occupations are retail salespersons and sales clerks, food and beverage servers, and cooks. As was mentioned last year, a new occupation that has been advertised for lately are “Other Elemental Sales Occupations”. This is the category used to classify most of the new call centre jobs. Registered nurses were also among the most sought after occupations. Employment opportunities for Truck Drivers are also frequently advertised in the region but the number of opportunities decreased this past year when compared to previous years.

### **Skilled Trades**

Interviews with regional experts indicated that these 4 skill areas are still the dominant areas where there appears to be shortages. It should be noted that while a shortage of “trades skills” was mentioned last year and this year, most of the evidence for these shortages seems to be anecdotal. In fact, most evidence that exist seems to indicate that there is no shortage of trade skills.<sup>x</sup> People believe there is a shortage of trade skills yet empirical evidence seems to indicate that there is a surplus of trades skills.

This being said, while there may or may not be a shortage of skilled trades presently, the aging workforce of the region seems to indicate that there will be shortages in the future.<sup>xi</sup> This clearly is an issue needing further research.

### **Healthcare Workers**

As was the case last year, analysis of media reports and information supplied by community partners over this past year shows that skill shortages in the health care sector have increased - especially for nurses.

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### **Teachers and Principals**

Skill shortages in the education sector continue to be a problem as it becomes harder for rural schools to recruit teachers. This is especially the case for certain subjects such as French and the Physical Sciences. As was mentioned above, the Lakehead Public School Board recently announced that 75% of its current principals will be retiring by 2010. The Board is concerned that it may not be able to replace them all.

### **Information Technology Specialists**

Interviews with regional experts noted the increasing reliance on information technology to conduct business.<sup>xii</sup> These workers are required in all services and industries of the region. This year, as was the case in previous years, organizations pointed to problems attracting these specialists.

## **ISSUES**

Many of the issues mentioned in the full Environmental Scan conducted in 1999 continue to be important in the Board 24 area.

**Lack of Access due to Remote Geography and the Promotion of More Flexible and Creative Delivery Methods for Training Programs.** This continues to be mentioned in the press and by community partners as an issue that needs to be addressed. Major training providers such as Confederation College, Contact North, and the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board are working on innovative new delivery methods but they still point to problems stemming from the costs of programs and the inability of many in the region to use computers.

**Lack of Funding for Training and Increasing Limitations Placed on Access to Subsidies for Training Services.** Last year Statistics Canada released a major study on adult education and training in Canada.<sup>xiii</sup> It found that those people who benefit most from training programs are white collar workers who already have high levels of education. The authors of the report note an increasing gap in training between the most skilled/educated workers and least skilled/educated workers. Since Northwestern Ontario has a lower skilled/educated workforce, the gap is having a serious effect on the region. Many trainers also points to this gap being the result of decreasing public subsidies for training. Those with less education tend to make less money and are therefore less able to pay for training. Companies seem willing to invest more in training white collar workers than blue collar workers. In the Board 24 area employers continue to claim they can not afford to subsidize training of their employees. Training providers claim that individuals in the region are unable to pay for training programs.

**The Need to Improve Trades and Apprenticeship Training and the Promotion of Universal, Portable Apprenticeships and their Flexible Delivery** As was pointed out above, it is extremely difficult to provide proof that there is a current shortage of trades skills and apprenticeships in the Board 24 area. Despite this problem it can be assumed that an aging trades workforce will mean an increasing demand due to retirements. As

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was mentioned in last year's Environmental Scan Summary, more research needs to be done to determine where these shortages will arise.

Confederation College has recently received funding from Human Resources Development Canada for a new project, "Practice Firm", to study an innovative business simulation model involving apprenticeship training within businesses. These types of projects should be fully supported by the regional training community.

**Need for Economic Development and an Economic Vision for Northwestern Ontario.** Unlike other areas of Ontario, there is little indication of economic growth in the Board 24 area. Demand for training and for skills is not as great here because there are few new jobs created. This was mentioned in the 1999 Environmental Scan and it continues to be mentioned by community partners. It is interesting to note that there is now an attempt by some community partners to develop an economic vision for the region. The Great Rendezvous Conference, organized last year by NODN, NOMA and NOACC with the support of both Local Boards, is an important step in developing this vision.

**The Promotion of Entrepreneurial and Small Business Skills.** Trends in self-employment indicate that whether it be due to contracting out or restructuring, an increasing number of workers of all ages are becoming self-employed.<sup>xiv</sup> Last year's Environmental Scan Summary referred to the absence of young entrepreneurs to replace the more senior business people in the resource dependent communities of the Board 24 Area. Confederation College has responded to the issue by developing a new entrepreneurial education and training program. There is an increasing need for such skills in the Aboriginal communities of the region.

**Need for Literacy and Life Skills and the Continued Promotion of Adult Literacy Programs to Increase the Number of High School Graduates.** Northwestern Ontario is at a disadvantage in terms of its ability to adapt to changing market conditions in that its adult population has lower levels of educational achievement than for Ontario as a whole. New employers are looking for people with higher levels of education as changes in technology requires employees who have "soft skills" such as being "trainable" and having an "ability to learn". Joint projects undertaken between the Training Boards and providers such as Literacy Northwest are aimed towards increasing the awareness of literacy services in the region in an attempt to improve the situation.

There continues to be concern about the high number of individuals in the region who do not have a high school diploma. Most contracting companies are requiring that people they hire have as a minimum a high school completion diploma. Companies considering investing in the region often look at the percentage of the population with a high school diploma as an indicator of the skills level of the population.<sup>xv</sup>

**The Special Difficulties Faced by Persons with Disabilities.** Persons with disabilities experience a variety of barriers to equal access to opportunities for education and training. While some face physical barriers others face visible and hidden economic, social, and cultural barriers. Specific measures to allow the full integration of these

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individuals in training programs need to be put in place in both the larger urban centres and the smaller resource-dependent communities of the region. Information about barriers and the means to overcome them needs to be made increasingly available to the public.

Two new difficulties were mentioned this year. The first is the inability of persons with disabilities to seek out training due to a lack of adequate financial supports. The second difficulty relates to obstacles to entrepreneurial activity. There are few people available to mentor persons with disabilities who would like to start their own business. To this is added the difficulty for someone who is disabled to secure a business loan due to the lack of collateral.

### **A Need for Computer, High Tech, and Information Technology Training.**

With the new economy depending more and more upon the information technology sector for jobs and with the increasing need for computer literacy in all sectors of employment, many respondents have noted the need for a strategy to address these issues. The need is especially important in the Board 24 region which still depends heavily on the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs provided by resource industries. These resource industries themselves are increasingly adapting new information technology to their needs and they now have problems attracting high tech and information technology professionals to work in the region.

It should also be pointed out that many communities in the region lack the infrastructure for the efficient use of current information technology. Until this infrastructure is in place training will be of secondary importance.

**The Need for More Healthcare Professionals.** Even a cursory review of news reports during the past year show that the most visible skill shortages in the Board 24 area continues to be physicians and nurses. The shortage of nurses has become greater this past year with several hospitals in Northwestern Ontario having to close wards due to a shortage of nurses. Concern is still being expressed that the requirement that all new nurses have university degrees by 2005 will mean even more shortages in the future.

The May 2002 promise of a full medical school at Lakehead University has meant that this issue mentioned in last year's Environmental Scan Summary is no longer a concern for the region. At the same time, regional training organizations need to continue to work with the university to ensure that the new medical school adequately addresses the needs of the regional communities and especially Aboriginal communities.<sup>xvi</sup> Attention is now being directed at getting programs for other health care professionals located in the region.

**The Promotion of Closer Relations between Board 24 and Aboriginal Training Authorities.** The communities with the highest rates of growth in Northwestern Ontario are Aboriginal communities. The importance of the Aboriginal population for economic growth is one of the defining characteristics of Board 24. This issue of closer relations was mentioned in the 1999 Environmental Scan but not in the 2000 Environmental Scan

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Summary. In the past, representatives of First Nation organizations were hesitant about the Training Boards in their areas becoming involved in Aboriginal training issues. The Training Boards respected, and continue to respect, the desire of Aboriginal organizations to take responsibility for research, planning, and delivery of training programs in their communities. Feedback this year indicated more of an interest on the part of Aboriginal organizations in working more closely with Board 24 on training issues in the region.

All training organizations need to look at promoting programs such as the large pre-employment training that occurred in many First Nations in preparation for the Trus Joist plant opening. There were a significant number of people who received their GED, thereby increasing their educational standards.<sup>xvii</sup>

### NEW ISSUES

**Broadband Information Technology Strategy** A new issue was highlighted this year which had been mentioned in previous years; the need for enhanced information technology infrastructure in the region, the training to use it, and the professionals to run it. The recent announcement of the federal government to delay implementation of its projects for the installation of broadband capacity in the rural areas of Canada has been a serious concern for many in the Board 24 Area.

This makes it very difficult to either promote the businesses that require this technology, or provide the flexible training delivery mechanisms so badly needed by the region. There needs to be a concerted effort to support the efforts of the 807 Northwest Network to ensure that affordable high-speed bandwidth is available in all the communities of the Board 24 Area as quickly as possible.<sup>xviii</sup>

In addition to the actual infrastructure, the area will also need the professionals to run the networks and economic initiatives. As previous Environmental Scan Summaries have pointed out, the region often has difficulties attracting these professionals. More must be done to both attract these professionals from outside the region and train them in the region.

A third point in any broadband information technology strategy is to ensure that the professionals who help manage the technology have access to constant re-training in new technologies.<sup>xix</sup> In an area that is constantly undergoing changes, it is imperative that the information technology specialists have access to re-training. This is often difficult to ensure in this region. If re-training is not available, information technology specialists will not stay in the region.

**Francophone Educational and Training Inequalities** This past year also saw a report released by the Association des Francophones du Nord-Ouest de l'Ontario which outlined a wide range of educational and training inequalities that exist in Northwestern Ontario between Francophones and Non-Francophones.<sup>xx</sup> The report points to the need for key

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partners to work closely with the regional francophone community to find ways of reducing these inequalities.

**Need for a Youth Training Strategy** Last year a significant research project was undertaken by YES Employment Services in Thunder Bay.<sup>xxi</sup> This research indicated several training and employment issues that need to be addressed in order to improve the employability of youth in Thunder Bay. These include a labour market needs analysis, more school to work transition programs, and greater exposure to life skills training.

**Skills Development for Women** Another significant research project that was undertaken this past year was a feasibility study to investigate and analyze skills development for women in Northwestern Ontario. This study was organized by PARO in partnership with the North Superior Training Board and funded by Human Resources and Development Canada.<sup>xxii</sup> It recommends that skills development opportunities for women in the region be enhanced through research and by developing an innovative approach encompassing existing educational facilities fostering skills, knowledge and training. It also recommends that women “partner with a loan fund to build an environment of learning and accessible funding that will strengthen the skills of the women in our community.”

## CONCLUSIONS

As concerns the labour force, the main events of this past year are a decline in population from 1996 to 2001, a lowering of unemployment rates, a decrease in the number of jobs in Thunder Bay and an increase in jobs in Northwestern Ontario, a loss of full-time employment, and a gain in part-time employment. As concerns the skills and occupation profile, the main events have been an increase in transportation and warehousing jobs, an increase in professional, scientific, and technical support jobs and public administration jobs, and a decline in forestry and mining, and construction jobs.

The main skill shortages continue to be in literacy and life skills, computer and information technology skills, trade skills and trade apprenticeships, and healthcare professional skills. There appears to be increasing shortages of nurses, teachers, and information technology specialists. Most of this year’s important training issues are similar to those listed in last year’s Environmental Scan Summary. The important new issues are concern about the access to broadband communications technology and the re-training and information technology specialists associated with this technology, concern about the educational inequalities faced by the region’s Francophone population, the need for a youth training strategy, and concern about skills development for women.

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<sup>i</sup> Board Area 24 can be roughly described as being comprised of the District of Thunder Bay.

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<sup>ii</sup> Labour Force Survey data can be found in Thunder Bay HRCC Labour Market Bulletins. It should be noted that the Labour Force Survey data for Northwestern Ontario should be treated with caution. It represents a random sampling of under 500 people. The potential for error is very high. The data for the region is less reliable than for Ontario.

<sup>iii</sup> The figures for Northwestern Ontario include the Thunder Bay CMA (Census Metropolitan Area).

<sup>iv</sup> More elaborate descriptions of these events can be found in Thunder Bay HRCC Labour Market Bulletins, May, 2001 to April, 2002.

<sup>v</sup> In 2000, visits to Tourism offices in the region increased by 25%. See Kenora/Dryden/Fort Frances Human Resource Centre, *Labour Market Review and Profile - 2000*, April, 2001.

<sup>vi</sup> Kenora/Dryden/Fort Frances Labour Market Bulletin, Human Resources Development Canada, September, 2001, p.6.

<sup>vii</sup> Northwest 2002, A special supplement to the Thunder Bay Chronicle Journal, April 2002, p.11.

<sup>viii</sup> Northwest 2002, A special supplement to the Thunder Bay Chronicle Journal, April 2002, p.10.

<sup>ix</sup> There are problems with the use of employment opportunity advertisements as an indicator of changes in the occupational profile. As an example, if a particular type of position is advertised a lot it may not be because there is a shortage of skilled people to fill that position. It may be because the job is not very attractive and they must constantly advertize to find employees. The data used here was obtained in Thunder Bay HRC Labour Market Bulletins, June 2001 to April, 2002 (<http://thunder-bay.hrhc-drhc.gc.ca/rpts>)

<sup>x</sup> See Board 25 2002 Environmental Scan Summary, p.12.

<sup>xi</sup> See Robson, William B.P. *Aging Populations and the Workforce: Challenge for Employers*, A report of the British-North American Committee, October, 2001.

<sup>xii</sup> Communication from Garry McKinnon, Economic Development Officer, Atikokan April 30, 2002.

<sup>xiii</sup> Statistics Canada, *A Report on Adult Education and Training in Canada*, Ottawa, May, 2001.

<sup>xiv</sup> Communication from Garry McKinnon, Economic Development Officer, Atikokan April 30, 2002.

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<sup>xv</sup> See Paragon Decision Resources Inc. *Economic Development Assessment of the Rainy River District* A Report Prepared for the Rainy River Futures Development Corporation, May, 2000.

<sup>xvi</sup> Communication from Debbie Lipscombe, Treaty 3, June 13, 2002.

<sup>xvii</sup> Communication from Debbie Lipscombe, Treaty 3, June 13, 2002.

<sup>xviii</sup> Article by Cathe Hoszowski, Thunder Bay Chronicle Journal, May 2, 2002.

<sup>xix</sup> Communication from Jules Carlisle, Program Director, Northwestern Ontario Technology Centre, April 6, 2002.

<sup>xx</sup> Southcott, C. Ce que nous sommes ... Un profil socio\_économique de la communauté francophone du Nord-Ouest de l'Ontario , Un rapport écrit pour l'Association des Francophones du Nord-Ouest de l'Ontario, Thunder Bay, Mai, 2002.

<sup>xxi</sup> Bester, Karen Youth Employment Supports and Solutions: Final Report, for YES Employment Services, Thunder Bay, 2001.

<sup>xxii</sup> PARO, FINAL REPORT, Women's Community Training Loan Fund, Draft 4, Thunder Bay, May, 2002.