

Winnipeg Free Press

Local News

Aboriginal delegation woos Chinese investors

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Updated: Saturday, October 4, 2008 at 02:50 AM CDT

PEGUIS Chief Glenn Hudson heads to China next month looking for \$280 million to build a hardwood plant that would create 800 new jobs.

Roseau River's Terry Nelson and Berens River's George Kemp will join him searching for millions more for similar economic development.

They're part of a delegation of around 100 Canadian native leaders flying to China for the largest ever international aboriginal investment and trade mission.

"It's an exploratory trade mission and hopefully we can engage the Chinese to invest their money into these areas," Hudson said. "Whether it's to China or whether it's (travelling) to the south end of the reserve -- the bottom line is it's meant for bettering our communities and bettering our people."

Native leaders will meet top Chinese business leaders in November during the Canadian Aboriginal Business Opportunity trade mission. They will try to hammer out business deals with China, a country with an abundant cash supply and the desire to invest, said Calvin Helin, a native lawyer helping to organize the trip.

"I think it's a historic opportunity and it's particularly important in light of the meltdown that's happening in the U.S. Sources of finance are going to be hard to come by and China is cashed up and looking for opportunities in a stable environment," Helin said. "The Chinese are looking for an opportunity to access natural resources, so I think this represents an opportunity to unleash enormous amounts of wealth in Canada."

The goal of the trade mission is to help improve the standard of life for people living on First Nation reserves. Foreign investment could help local businesses grow and reduce dependency on the federal government.

"What this represents is an opportunity to do that without costing the taxpayer anything and also bringing huge investment into Canada for the benefit of everyone," Helin said. "What I think we need to do is focus on creating our own source of revenue and this would give us an opportunity to do that. We also need to focus on education and training."

The Chinese will also benefit from the business deal, said RCI Capital Group Inc. president John Park. RCI is co-ordinating private one-on-one meetings for native leaders with Chinese businessmen during their trip.

"The Chinese would be interested not only in direct equity investment into those projects, but also have the ability with that investment to assume, acquire those raw resources," Park said. "They would have to set aside a certain volume for their Chinese partner before they do to the open market."

Native leaders are scheduled to fly into Beijing at the beginning of November.

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