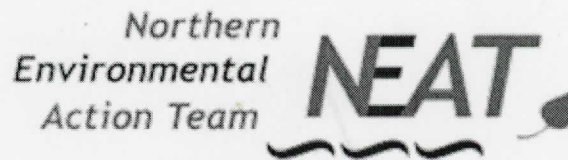


**Building NEAT's Future:  
The Environmental Education Centre**



*Thinking globally by acting locally,  
building on sustainable living in Northeastern BC*

By Rachel Harris

*April 2006*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>Creating a Unique Environmental Showcase and Centre of Learning</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Dedicated to Healthy, Vibrant and Sustainable Communities</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Offering Choices for Healthy, Vibrant and Sustainable Communities</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Remarkable Partnerships – A “Made In The North” Success Story</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Remarkable Achievements – A “Made in The North” Success Story</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Why Build an Environmental Education Centre Now?</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Meeting the Demand: An Environmental Showcase and Centre of Learning</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>A Unique Concept</b>	<b>482</b>
<b>The Far-Reaching Benefits</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Our Goal: \$3.5 million</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>An Opportunity To Contribute To a Healthy, Vibrant and Sustainable Community</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Appendix A: Regional Map</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Appendix B: Staff Biographies</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Appendix C: Board Biographies</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Appendix D: History of NEAT Partners</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>Appendix E: Reference From Mayor of City of Fort St. John</b>	<b>vii</b>

# CREATING A UNIQUE ENVIRONMENTAL SHOWCASE AND CENTRE OF LEARNING

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With burgeoning landfill sites, high energy prices, Canada's greenhouse-gas emissions and climate change a serious concern, people are making environmentally- friendly choices in the way they live.

Northern Environmental Action Team (NEAT) is a community leader in environmental education for sustainable living. NEAT serves seven municipalities in Northeastern British Columbia covering an area of 12 million hectares, which is home to 60,000 residents. Since it began as a grassroots organization in 1989, it has had tremendous success in the North Peace region, empowering all members of the community by offering green, simple and practical choices in the way we live. Its extensive repertoire of outreach programs are broad in scope, comprehensive and yet easily transferable into daily living. Now it is time to build on that success and to meet the demands of our stakeholders. Our partners (corporate, institutional and government) and community residents are expecting us to become Northern Canada's leader in environmental education. The City of Fort St. John has donated land in the centre of the city, worth an estimated \$100,000, for us to build a unique Environmental Education Centre (EEC). We now have an opportunity to build a leading-edge environmental showcase and inspirational centre of learning, which will allow us to expand our programs and offer our local communities the choices they need to create healthy, vibrant and sustainable communities. The Environmental Education Centre will be a catalyst for positive change.

The EEC will be a "green" LEED -certified building that demonstrates sustainable design and construction through the use of healthy materials, environmental stewardship, green products, appropriate technology, resource conservation and renewable energy. It will house the office of NEAT and all waste reduction and resource conservation programs. It will be a unique tool for the community and beyond to utilize.

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design is an international rating system that recognizes leading edge buildings utilizing design, construction and operational practices

It will:

- Meet public demand for more hands-on demonstrations and workshops;
- Emphasize NEAT as Northern Canada's leader in environmental education through its extensive programs and as a facilitator for other experts to talk on a wide range of environmental issues;

- Meet the need of our government partners for expansion of our educational activities and programs;
- Meet the need of our industry partners for expansion of our educational activities and programs, such as waste reduction and the establishment of recycling initiatives at work;
- Meet children and young peoples' need for more sophisticated interactive presentations and demonstrations;
- Utilize leading-edge environmental choices of building materials, furnishings, energy systems, and demonstrate their impact;
- Offer continued learning and professional development in a unique and healthy environment;
- House the organization of NEAT which, due to the popularity of programs, has grown too big for its current, very modest location;
- Offer other local organizations and our community partners the opportunity to use this unique facility for training, professional development, educational initiatives and community events; and
- Allow NEAT to deliver on its vision and mission.

A walk through the grounds of the Environmental Education Centre will be a simple introduction to natural gardening practices and conservation activities.

Construction is anticipated to begin in spring 2007 and take eight months. Landscaping of the grounds is due to start spring 2008.

## DEDICATED TO HEALTHY, VIBRANT AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

People are becoming more aware of the state of their surroundings. The economic and environmental costs of our past choices, along with natural disasters, are forcing people to make changes to their lives. Burgeoning landfills, increased health risks due to polluted air and water, unprecedented weather patterns and rising fuel costs are just some examples. The good news is that we now have more choices than ever to do something about it.

Northern Environmental Action Team (NEAT) helps local people make a difference. NEAT demonstrates how people can make simple changes in their daily lives that will advance their health, improve the natural environment, and benefit the social and economic fabric of communities. Formed in 1989, NEAT is an award-winning not-for-profit environmental

registered charity committed to increasing awareness of waste reduction and resource conservation through educational programming, practical workshops, demonstrations, public relations and community events in the Fort St. John and Peace River area. Local government, schools, industry, institutions, professional affiliations, First Nations' communities, families and residents in the Peace River region benefit from our work. Our Executive Director, Sally Emory, was awarded the BC Minister's Environmental Award for Environmental Education Award 2000.

## NEAT'S VISION

Our vision is for a healthy, vibrant community, whose members adopt conservation, recycling and other sustainable actions in their daily lives.

## NEAT'S MISSION

Our mission is motivating individuals, businesses and institutions to adopt sustainable practices. We lead by example, creating awareness and demonstrating solutions.

## OFFERING CHOICES FOR HEALTHY, VIBRANT AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

NEAT offers the following programs and activities to help people make better choices for a healthy and vibrant community.

### WASTE REDUCTION PROMOTION AND EDUCATION PROGRAM

Peace River Regional District (PRRD) awarded NEAT the service contract in 1998 to provide sustainable programs including recycling, composting and waste reduction to residents, schools, government, First Nations and businesses in the PRRD. This contract was the first of its kind in the region and the B.C. Ministry of the Environment uses the contract as a case study for other regional districts. Since 1998 the amount of material recycled regionally has increased by 262 per cent. Our highly acclaimed and successful programs and activities include the following:

- Provincially recognized and innovative curriculum-based school presentations. NEAT has given presentations to children at every school in Peace River Regional District. In 2004, more than 2,000 children (nearly half of the entire elementary student population) received one of 20 presentations that NEAT offers.
- Workshops and demonstrations on composting and gardening, household hazardous products and shopping choices. We understand the importance of personal contact and are active in our local communities with an extensive repertoire of outreach

programs. These activities ensure that the message of sustainability empowers all members of the community.

- *Waste Reduction Assistance Program* with *pRRRdy (WRAPP)* includes our popular *Waste Reduction 101*; *Waste Assessment* and *Green Event Planning* programs. Offering industry and institutions easy, practical solutions for a greener workplace, such as setting up a recycling program and examples of environmental purchasing policies.
- *pRRRdy Says* recycling newsletter. Now in its tenth year, this popular, quarterly newsletter is distributed to 20,000 homes and available on the *pRRRdy* and NEAT websites; [www.neat.bc.ca](http://www.neat.bc.ca).
- *Green Line* toll-free phone and email service offering expert advice on recycling, composting and waste disposal. NEAT receives up to 200 calls per month.
- Website, [www.prrrdy.com](http://www.prrrdy.com), offering, up to date, on-line advice and information.
- *Waste Reduction Directory* is regularly updated, including local suppliers of environmentally friendly products and services. It is available at any one of our workshops or displays and will soon be on our website.
- Trade shows/fairs and mall displays. NEAT has effective face-to-face community presence, encouraging individuals to adopt lifestyle changes. We usually attend at least five per year.

## WATER QUALITY AND CONSERVATION AWARENESS

This practical program emphasizes simple ways to reduce water consumption and promote awareness of drinking water as a valuable resource. In 1999, the City of Fort St. John endorsed NEAT's initiative to implement the City's first voluntary compliance water conservation program. Provincially recognized and innovative curriculum-based school presentations and worksheets on how to reduce water consumption and not 'pour it down the drain'. In 2005 alone, we presented to more than 200 Grade 4 students at every elementary school in Fort St. John. In addition, we provide:

- An outreach program for young people offering fun activities on how to conserve water and view drinking water as a valuable resource. Since 1999, we have visited more than 20 organizations for young people such as Sparks, Cubs, Brownies, Scouts, Guides, Sunday Schools and after school clubs.
- A dedicated toll-free hot-line answering queries on water conservation. On average, NEAT receives 225 calls per month on water conservation and waste reduction.
- A popular annual brochure offering residents reasons to conserve water and practical choices and tips on water conservation.

- Rivers Day Photo Contest - an annual competition focusing on regional awareness of the importance of our local water source. At the same time, it highlights the beauty of the Peace River Valley.

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

We, at NEAT, always remember what the A stands for in our name: ACTION! We believe in leading by example and we use our remarkable partnerships with our community to organize many activities that people of all ages can get involved with. Here are a few key local events:

- Arbour Day is an annual event in Fort St. John in which a variety of trees are planted by volunteers in a designated city park. Since 1998, almost 500 trees and shrubs have been planted in city parks helping to beautify and broaden the diversity of species in the area.
- Clean Air Day was created when NEAT teamed up with the City of Fort St. John to celebrate one day a year during National Environment Week. Residents are encouraged to lessen their environmental impact and are challenged to limit their single occupant vehicle use and try alternative transport. The City even waives bus fares.
- NEAT is an active participant in Communities in Bloom and Winter Lights Programs working with the City of Fort St. John in providing the environmental aspect to these initiatives. The City has won the provincial and national Communities in Bloom contest and is now competing in the international contest.
- As part of its Green Christmas program, NEAT co-ordinates the collection of Christmas trees to be recycled into compost. It is a known fact that, in North America, more garbage is collected after Christmas than any other time of the year. NEAT provides residents with choices about how to reduce waste through recycling gift wrapping, eco-entertaining, house decoration, choosing environmentally friendly gifts, and recipes to make edible tree decorations for birds.
- NEAT combines education with a practical program of garden debris composting every spring. Residents can drop-off garden debris to be composted and have the opportunity to talk to one of our team members about sustainable living choices.

## REMARKABLE PARTNERSHIPS – A “MADE IN THE NORTH” SUCCESS STORY

NEAT plays an integral role in building healthy, vibrant and sustainable communities for the people in the Peace River area. NEAT is a “made in the north” success story. Our success thus far is due to us leading by example and establishing unique, remarkable and sustainable

relationships with several key groups. This approach allows NEAT to reach wider audiences throughout the region.

## SCHOOLS, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

NEAT is a leader in environmental education. Our goal is to give children the knowledge they need in order to make choices for a greener future. Children are also agents of change at home, possessing effective influences on their parents. We know our future depends on informed decisions.

- NEAT has given curriculum-linked presentations to **every** school in Peace River Regional District. In 2004, more than 2,000 students received at least one of 20 different presentations that NEAT offers. The total enrollment in both school districts is 10,442.
- Peace River Regional District (PRRD) awarded NEAT the service contract to deliver environmental education to schools in the region.
- We have delivered more than 300 *Waste Reduction* and *Water Conservation* presentations to organizations for young people since 1998. NEAT's programs are customized for a variety of young audiences such as Sparks, Cubs, Brownies, Guides, Scouts, Sunday Schools and after-school clubs.

*"One of the highlights of our study on "Environmental Stewardship" was having Sally Emory from N.E.A.T. share with us her knowledge, passion, and dedication to this cause. The most important idea my students came away with was that they can truly make a difference in protecting our community's resources through their "actions" at home, school and out in the community. Our class motto is T.E.A.M. up for Success in Room 14 and Sally showed us practical ways to do just that for the environment. Well done!"*

-Karen Gonzales, Grade 5/6 Teacher

*"Mrs. Emory came to our class and talked about many ways to help the environment. Her presentation was very interesting and fun! We learned what we can and cannot recycle and that together we can help change the world."*

-Shaleen Unger, Room 14, Grade 5 student

## GOVERNMENT AND MUNICIPALITIES

Peace River Regional District (PRRD) in Northeastern B.C. covers 15 per cent of the province (almost four times the size of Vancouver Island) and is home to 60,000 residents. It is committed



to a goal of 50 per cent waste reduction. The region looks to the best organization in the area to help them achieve that goal: NEAT. Government recognizes NEAT as a community leader in environmental education, which is why PRRD awarded NEAT a second contract for delivering its waste reduction program. In addition, municipalities across the region ask us for advice on the best policies and bylaws that support waste reduction.

- In 1998, Peace River Regional District awarded NEAT the service contract to provide waste reduction and promotion programs to residents and schools of the District. Impressed by NEAT's impact on creating a healthier, more vibrant and sustainable community, it renewed the contract until the end of 2007.
- In 1998, the City of Fort St. John requested NEAT to co-ordinate the first annual Arbour Day celebration.
- In 1999, the City of Fort St. John awarded NEAT the service contract for its water conservation awareness program.
- In 2005, the City of Fort St. John donated prime real estate, a central city lot, to NEAT for the development of the Education Environmental Centre.
- Since Oct 2003, *Waste Reduction 101* has been presented to Peace River Regional District and five of the seven member municipalities: Dawson Creek, Chetwynd, Tumbler Ridge, Taylor and Hudson's Hope. *Waste Reduction 101* is a presentation highlighting waste management issues and provides recommendations to improve the environmental performance of organizations and businesses.
- Since January 2004, all the organizations who received *Waste Reduction 101* followed up with requests for *Waste Assessments*. Our *Waste Assessment* program consists of an on-site visit where NEAT's staff review an organization's current waste management practices. We make recommendations on simple solutions that are more environmentally friendly.

## INDUSTRY AND BUSINESS

Companies cannot afford to ignore their impact on their environment. Economically it makes sense to take care of their environment and raise awareness of their positive activities in their local communities. Not only will 'green' employers attract the best calibre of employee but they will retain the ones they have. Companies turn to NEAT to help them with practical solutions and advice on how to be more environmentally productive.

- When regional landfill fees tripled in 2002 the number of companies using cardboard recycling bins doubled in a week. NEAT has been inundated with requests from local businesses for more information on recycling and waste reduction.

- Due to the large increase in requests, *Waste Reduction 101* is now tailored specifically for companies and has been introduced as part of the WRAPP (Waste Reduction Assistance Program with *pRRRdy*) expansion in 2006.
- Since we started *Waste Assessments* for industry in 2005, we have provided five company assessments with more booked for 2006. We provide an on-site assessment of the workplace and recommend easy practical solutions, which also saves money by reducing costs.
- All local businesses offering environmentally friendly products or services are listed in our *Waste Reduction Directory*.

### FIRST NATIONS' COMMUNITIES

In May 2002, NEAT was contacted by the First Nations Emergency Services Society to assist with the design and delivery of recycling workshops for the elders of the Saulteau First Nations. NEAT has a track record of supporting First Nations' communities with their recycling policies.

- Workshop has been delivered to Saulteau First Nation (Treaty 8 First Nations in Moberly Lake).
- Four other communities have requested NEAT's input in creating their own recycling programs and putting them in action.
- NEAT is an active participant in the West Moberly First Nations annual Health and Environment Fair held every spring.

### HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Northern Lights College followed NEAT's recommendation to form a waste reduction committee after our *Waste Assessment* report was presented to the assistant principal of the Fort St. John campus. NEAT plays an advisory role on the committee as well as continuing to make presentations to students and staff.
- The Recycling Council of BC frequently invites NEAT to present to its members. We initiated environmental education workshops on how best to design programs for members of the community, empowering them to change habits. NEAT's Executive Director, Sally Emory, was elected to the Board of Directors and became a member of the Communications Committee.
- The Recycling Council of Alberta invited Sally Emory to lead environmental education workshops.

## REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENTS – A "MADE IN THE NORTH" SUCCESS STORY

NEAT's remarkable achievements testify to its continued success since it began more than 17 years ago. Today, NEAT remains essentially a grassroots membership organization committed to leading by example and action so that Fort St. John and the Peace River area is a desirable, healthy, vibrant and sustainable community in which to live. Here are some of our remarkable achievements over the years:

- Environmental awareness of residents has increased considerably since NEAT's arrival in 1989. We gave, and continue to give, the community the main focal point for choices on sustainable living.
- NEAT's first project (September 1990) was the construction of a Share Shed (Re-use Centre) at the local landfill. Due to the high level of support, all the materials and services were donated and volunteers provided the labour.
- Conducted the region's first-ever recycling pilot project in October 1990. The week-long project was designed to gather data for our partner, Peace River Regional District, which had just been given responsibility by the province to manage solid waste in the region.
- From this pilot, demand for continued recycling programs was so great that NEAT held a series of recycling weekends from 1990 -1993.
- In 1993, NEAT was awarded a federal Environmental Partners Fund (EPF) grant that matched federal funding to grants, donations and volunteer labour raised by NEAT. EPF reviewers said that it was the best example of a community supported application that they ever received.
- NEAT's first corporate partner, Esso Resources (now known as Imperial Resources), from the Oil and Gas sector donated an old fuel bulk station building for NEAT's recycling depot and offices. Due to outstanding support for our services, volunteers renovated the building and we operated the low-cost recycling program from this location from 1990 to 1997.
- Province of BC and Shell Environment Fund awarded NEAT grants for essential equipment for the recycling program run at the bulk station.
- 1993, NEAT opens **first** permanent recycling depot in Fort St. John. At the time, the most northerly permanent depot in Canada.
- Community leader in environmental education. Our curriculum-based schools program is used as a benchmark for other eco-educators throughout BC. NEAT's Executive Director, Sally Emory, was awarded the prestigious B.C. Minister's

Environmental Award for Environmental Education 2000. With more than 16 years at NEAT, Sally is recognized as a committed leader in environmental education.

- NEAT is committed to maintaining standards of excellence. In 2002, the Recycling Council of BC awarded us with the Non-Profit Organization Recognition Award.
- Fort St. John and District Chamber of Commerce recognized NEAT as the most Environmentally Friendly business (1995).
- NEAT's outstanding leadership is well recognized. Our diverse board and staff in Fort St. John, Dawson Creek and Tumbler Ridge is a prominent group of people all dedicated to ensuring we have a healthy, vibrant and sustainable community. We have an impressive collection of experience, skills and awards including our Executive Director's B.C. Minister of Environment Award for Environmental Education 2000.
- Our programs work. The amount of material that is recycled regionally has increased from 1,342 tonnes in 1998 to 4,852 tonnes in 2004; a 262 per cent increase.
- Our compost programs work. More than 2,500 subsidized composters have been sold in the region since 1995. *Compost Happens* is NEAT's most popular brochure. We have printed and re-printed 6,000 copies. Our composting workshop is the most popular one and is well attended throughout all the communities in which we operate.
- Our backyard compost programs have created a demand for larger-scale garden debris composting programs and now the City of Dawson Creek and Districts of Taylor and Tumbler Ridge have community composting programs.
- Increase in the number of drop-off recycling locations. In 1997, there were four community depots and drop-off locations in all municipalities. Now, there are five community depots and 28 drop-off bins across the region.
- Arbour Day – a successful community event initiated by NEAT. Over the past eight years, almost 500 trees and shrubs have been planted in six community parks and at the City's Slo-Pitch park. Every tree has been sponsored by local organizations or residents.
- BC Environment is using NEAT as a case study (Peace River Regional District – contracting out public education services to a local non-profit group) in its Regional Solid Waste Management Plan Revision Workshop.
- NEAT is the only organization in the province with such in-depth and expansive environmental education contracts with local governments.

## WHY BUILD AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTRE NOW?

NEAT needs a home where it can fulfill its potential as Northern Canada's leader in Environmental Education. The City of Fort St. John, community residents and our partners are demanding we make the next step now. With burgeoning landfill sites, high energy prices and Canada's greenhouse-gas emissions a serious concern, now is the time for action.

Many of the questions that NEAT responds to come from residents with urgent questions about recycling, composting and household hazardous waste disposal. Often homeowners and business people want to know how to build a sustainable home or workplace, how to set up a solar or wind power system or how to carry out environmentally sensitive renovations, but don't have the time or resources to find the answers to their questions. They need answers now. NEAT's Environmental Education Centre will be a tool for demonstrating the answers to those questions in a unique and exciting way.

Natural resources are rapidly being depleted, creating an urgency to reduce consumption and implement alternatives to current practices now. At what point do we decide to act – when the supply of fossil fuel does not meet the demand? Or when another child is diagnosed with respiratory illness due to polluted air? When there isn't enough clean water left? Can we watch another year of catastrophic natural disasters and really think climate change has nothing to do with it? Rather, the question is this: "Can we afford *not* to do anything?"

The good news is that we can. People are making choices to confront these environmental issues. The Environmental Education Centre will be a tool to empower more people to make choices at a local level which in turn will have a positive global effect. It will act as a catalyst for positive change through knowledge that will spread over time as people share information and success-stories with others in the community and further afield.

In 2005, more than 2,900 tonnes of paper and cardboard was recycled from our region. Considering only this material, PRRD residents and businesses saved:

- 55,100 trees
- 8,700 cubic metres of landfill space
- 11.6 million kilowatt hours of energy
- 84.1 million litres of water
- 87,000 kg of air pollution emissions

**The EEC will allow us to save even more.**