

Saskatchewan First Nations ranked in Aboriginal Governance Index

By Kerry Benjoe, Leader-Post June 11, 2009

REGINA — The Frontier Centre for Public Policy (FCPP) released its third annual Aboriginal Governance Index on Thursday, which ranked First Nations in the three Prairie provinces.

Joseph Quesnel, policy analyst with the FCPP, said this year's survey included Alberta which had an impact on the this year's outcomes.

"Last year, to our interest, Saskatchewan did very well. They represented a lot of the top ten bands," said Quesnel. "This year Alberta took that place for a lot of the top ten scores, but Saskatchewan definitely is still represented in the top ten reserves.

The index ranked 29 First Nations in Saskatchewan, 23 in Manitoba and 16 in Alberta. FCPP ranked the reserves by concentrating on five areas such as elections, administration, human rights, transparency and economy.

The FCPP gathered data directly from surveys of people living on the reserves who were not connected to band administration.

There are 74 First Nations in Saskatchewan but only about a third participated in this year's index. Beardy's and Okemasis First Nation, Muskoday First Nation and Ochapowace First Nation made the top ten. However, Thunderchild, Kinistin, Sturgeon Lake, Poundmaker, and Key First Nations placed in the bottom 10 of the index.

Quesnel said there was a decrease in First Nation participation.

"Some First Nations declined to participate (or) we weren't able to get a hold of them," said Quesnel. "We also had to drop First Nations that were only able to provide 20 surveys or less from a community."

He hopes next year things will be different by engaging First Nations more directly.

"We try to do it respectfully and non-intrusively as possible," said Quesnel. "The purpose of the survey is to be a gauge for First Nations so that they can improve governance."

This year FCPP created the Chief Big Bear Award to acknowledge and support the community that scores the highest in the index. This year O'Chiese First Nation from Alberta received the award.

"We want all the First Nations to be in the running for that," said Quesnel.

He said another thing different with this year's survey was the introduction of a shorter survey that consisted of six questions as opposed to the six-page survey that it administered previously.

"We had over 5,000 surveys filled out this year, which was a big improvement in participation," said Quesnel.

The aboriginal governance index is available on the FCPP website

(www.fcpp.org).

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