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A new eco-industrial park hopes to kick-start a thriving, state-of-the-art wood products business to take advantage of the region's forests

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JOHNSTOWN -- Some six weeks after they were first announced, plans for a "world-scale, multi-corporate, value-added wood products processing, marketing and exporting complex" in an industrial park here are going gangbusters.

The Ontario East Wood Centre & Eco-Industrial Park now has an official name; it has a new logo; and there's an artist's drawing showing what its hub, the Wood Science Innovation Centre, might look like.

Evoking in part the international bridge to New York State a short distance away, the innovation centre would serve for administration, education, as a process "test drive" facility, and as a product development showcase.

DRUM UP SUPPORT

An implementation team has been launched to take the concept door-to-door to drum up support from various government agencies and the private sector, said Sandra Lawn, project leader under the auspices of the Eastern Ontario Model Forest group (EOMF).

Back in December, the wood centre received a \$130,000 federal grant to help complete concept and marketing plans.

Host municipality Edwardsburgh-Cardinal is on board and is investigating providing the eco-industrial park with water -- likely to be piped in from nearby Prescott -- electricity, and other services.

SPEEDY START

While she has no idea how much it will cost to get the centre going and when that might occur, Lawn referred to the speed with which the \$185-million GreenField Ethanol plant - - also located in the 370-acre Edwardsburgh-Cardinal industrial park -- began construction after it was first announced in 2006. The plant is scheduled for completion later this year.

A former Prescott mayor, Lawn sees close ties between GreenField, processing corn, and the 50-acre eco park, processing wood, along with other organic material-based companies which may also settle here.

Leading up to the park proposal, the EOMF assembled a technical advisory group to offer insight on economics, science and technology, marketing, wood chemistry, climate change, government policy, research, business practice and eco-industrial development.

The experts were aware of the area's natural advantages such as nearby Forest Stewardship Council certified sustainable forests; its forest-based industries; and the network of highways providing ready access to the municipally owned deep sea Port of Prescott across from the industrial park.

'BIO-ECONOMY'

The main idea of the eco park -- an Ontario prototype -- is to develop a regional "bioeconomy" in which biological resources like forests, agriculture, and aquatic ecosystems provide not just food, feed and fiber, but also energy, chemicals and other materials along with environmental benefits such as greenhouse gas emission reductions.

It's expected that companies locating in the eco park will have reduced operating costs through shared support system and service costs. Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design construction standards will be encouraged for all buildings erected on site.

With a growing public interest in all things green, the project could even generate retail, education, convention and tourism opportunities, said EOMF general manager Brian Barkley.