

News

Neskantaga evacuates due to health centre sewage

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Neskantaga was forced to evacuate on Aug. 4 for the second time this summer due to raw sewage in the nursing station. The community had previously been forced to evacuate due to forest fires in July.

“We were informed there was a sewage spill at the clinic,” says Neskantaga Chief Gary Quisess during a phone interview on Aug. 12. “The health director called us to go and check it out. Sure enough there was a bad spill. The raw sewage went inside the nursing station.”

Quisess says they do not know when they will be going back to the community.

“It’s going to take a while for us to repatriate,” Quisess says. “There is no timeline yet for the actual construction, when it is going to start.”

Quisess says the raw sewage went inside the nursing station after a contractor hit the septic tank.

“We just had a community update about the facility,” Quisess says. “The community is pretty much depressed (about) what is happening, and it’s not a good thing for our people to live like this.”

Quisess says they are requesting to have a new clinic.

“It’s a big demand but it has to be done,” Quisess says. “After the sewage was damaged, there was more damage to the building, there was a fuel line that was hit.”

Quisess says the evacuation is concerning because of the negative impacts that the community faces in a large city.

“Our plan for the summer has been damaged, like our summer festival, our youth retreat,” Quisess says. “All of these are being damaged now because there is no plan to do anything now.”

Quisess says the Elders are also concerned about not having traditional food from the land while in Toronto.

“They cannot eat what they



Wawatay News archive photo

Neskantaga Chief Gary Quisess invited Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, pictured with him at the temporary nursing station during Neskantaga’s 2025 evacuation, and Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum to see firsthand what was happening during Neskantaga’s Aug. 4 evacuation over sewage in the nursing station.

want to eat,” Quisess says. “A lot of our members eat traditional food and they can’t do it right now. And they can’t even use their own traditional medicine that they use for their well-being.”

Quisess says he invited Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler and Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum to visit the community to see what was happening with the nursing station.

“I invited them to come and see firsthand what’s happening with the community infrastructure,” Quisess says. “They were pretty shocked (at) what’s happening. It’s good to see it in reality and there’s a lot of concerns about the situation we are in.”

Quisess says there is no time-

line for a return to the community until the engineers do the proper soil testing.

“Right now being displaced is very difficult,” Quisess says. “We can’t operate our community right now. There’s concerns about school that is going to start pretty soon.”

Quisess says they have about 28 people in the community who are taking care of a variety of tasks such as feeding the dogs and looking after the boats.

“They’re trying to do the best they can to keep the community safe,” Quisess says. “And there are a lot of extra costs already that are building up.”

Neskantaga previously had an evacuation in April 2025 after the nursing station was closed down due to severe flooding

and toxic fuel fumes.

Maryéva Métellus, a spokesperson for Indigenous Services Canada (ISC), states in an email sent by Eric Head, media relations at ISC and CIRNAC, that the health and safety of community members is their top priority, adding that this means providing timely, effective and efficient support during a declared state of emergency.

“Indigenous Services Canada officials were in immediate contact with Neskantaga leadership on the evening of Aug. 3, 2026, when the sewage leak at the health facility was identified,” Métellus states. “Health services were impacted however, nursing staff remain readily available to respond to any emergency health needs through an alter-

nate location. Ornge services are also available should any medivacs be required.”

Métellus states that the contractor involved in the damage to the septic system was hired by the First Nation through funding from ISC.

“ISC staff arrived in community on Aug. 4, 2026, to work with the First Nation’s contractor to assess the situation at the health facility and discuss next steps,” Métellus states. “Their assessment will be shared with First Nations leadership and decisions on restoring the facility will be led by the First Nation in discussion with ISC and partners.”

Métellus states that ISC will continue working closely with the First Nation.

“Through the Emergency Management Assistance Program (EMAP), eligible funding support is available to Neskantaga First Nation, should the Nation request it, in responding to and recovering from this emergency,” Métellus states. “Through EMAP, ISC can reimburse First Nations, and third-party emergency management providers for 100 percent of eligible costs. This includes expenses for accommodation, transportation, food, clothing, security protection costs, mental health and wellness supports, emergency social supports, as well as practices that support cultural continuity.”

Neskantaga has been under a boil water advisory for more than 31 years.

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Community

Matawa partners with Vets Around the Corner

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Matawa First Nations and Vets Around the Corner recently partnered to set up a field hospital to provide veterinary services for forest fire evacuees, Matawa citizens and other people in the Thunder Bay area. The field hospital is set up for the month of August in the Matawa Wellness and Training Centre at 523 Algoma St. North.

"There was a great opportunity, they didn't have any space to go after July," says Judi Cannon, Indigenous animal wellness specialist at Matawa Animal Wellness Services. "So we said, 'Hey, let's house you, let's give you somewhere to work, somewhere to sleep, and then continue on the good work they've been doing for the community.' We've opened it up to not only the fire evacuees but Matawa members and also the general public — we know there is a dramatic need for animal wellness and veterinary care in Thunder Bay and region, so we thought we'd pull this partnership together and it's been going wonderfully."

Cannon says the field hospital is only for people who do not have a vet for their pets.

"What we're really doing is providing veterinarian care for families in the region that do not have a primary vet," Cannon says. "We're asking everybody that has a primary vet (to) continue to reach out to them for veterinarian care. All those without a veterinarian, by all means come on down and we'll have a conversation of how we can help."

Justine Moore, an evacuee from Whitesand, says the field hospital was super helpful with her pet dog.

"They thoroughly looked over him, I'm pretty happy with the service I got there," Moore says, noting there were no issues with her pet. "He's good."

Moore says she received some dog food for her dog to help with his diet.

"Coming here, we had to change up his food a little bit and it kind of messed with his diet," Moore says. "So they're getting him back to healthy."

Pat Williams, a volunteer with the field hospital from Thunder Bay, says she began volunteering after bringing her cats to the field hospital.

"I was given great service here, and I asked if there was any way I could help and I've been coming back since then," Williams says. "It's great, everybody is so grateful that there is a service that will help their pets. Everybody is patient and we're all so happy that our animals are getting treatment. The vets and the vet techs are great, it's a wonderful experience."

Erin Manahan, a board member at Northern Reach Network, says she got a call at 2 a.m. the day that Armstrong and Whitesand were evacuated.

"They got to the hotel and they had dogs and they didn't know what to do with them," Manahan says. "So I ran to the hotel and put a bunch of dogs in my basement until we could figure it out in the morning. Since then we've been emergency fostering for them. We're just keeping them safe so they can go home with their owners."

Manahan says she loves working with the dogs.

"The Armstrong-Whitesand's dogs are amazing, they're very



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

TOP: A group of the Vets Around the Corner field hospital staff and volunteers pose in front of the Community Veterinarian Program ambulance in the parking lot at the Matawa Wellness and Training Centre in Thunder Bay.

ABOVE: Whitesand's Justine Moore appreciated the opportunity to access veterinarian services for her pet dog.

well taken care of,” Manahan says. “There are some getting used to being in the city, which has some challenges, they’re not used to being in homes and being tied up or on leashes. But they’re adjusting quite well.”

The Vets Around the Corner, which is based in Port Perry in southern Ontario, previously had their field hospital set up at the Grandview Arena in Thunder Bay.

"Vets Around the Corner and the Community Veterinarian Program that they run is a charity based out of Port Perry, and they retrofitted this ambu-

lance to service animals in Port Perry,” says Dr. Cliff Redford, a vet from Toronto, on July 24. “When the wildfires hit here, they drove it the very bumpy 15 hours to get up here and it’s been a lifesaver, literally. It’s been so valuable having it here. We will help out any animals and their families that are affected by the wildfire, whether it’s First Nations or not. We’ve been seeing animals here at the Grandview Arena, and also taking this ambulance to the different evacuees’ hotels and helping out animals there.”

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Commentary

Kattawapiskak Keekehwin Gathering 2026



**Xavier
Kataquapit**

UNDER THE
NORTHERN SKY

Attawapiskat First Nation wrapped up another successful Kattawapiskak Keekehwin Gathering for the community. The week-long event was held from August 2 to 8, 2026, and it brought together members, visitors and performers to celebrate, play games and provide prize-winning events for participants.

This year’s event was led by a planning committee consisting of community members including Joseph Kataquapit, Roseanne Sutherland, Xavier Rose, Christopher Kataquapit, Lydia Linklater, Anna Kebokee, Linda Kataquapit, Keilyn Linklater, Jenny Hookimaw, Flora Iahtail, Jackie Kamalatsit, Teyon-na Spence and Markeisha Sutherland.

This gathering is an important annual event for community members, as it brings everyone together for a positive get-together to celebrate, feast, and provide a fun atmosphere for everyone.

My brother Joseph Kataquapit is part of the organizing committee and he explained that community members wanted this year’s event to be about giving everyone a positive event that celebrated culture and community while also giving local youth a fun activity during the summer. There are not many opportunities for members to leave the north with their families, so Kattawapiskak Keekehwin Gathering was established as a summer gathering to bring performers and music events to the community.

This year’s event featured various Bingo events, raffle prize announcements, barbecues, DJ dances, flea markets and daily games for children and adults. Major games included a water-based Royal Rumble, where participants competed in a last-man-standing event on a floating platform on the Attawapiskat River. Adults also took part in canoe races. There were also big prize events and raffle prize drops. Events were also hosted by Attawapiskat Health Services, Attawapiskat Power Corporation, Northern Store, Youth Haven / Six Nations, Mental Health Crisis Team and Ontario Works.

A two-day mini Pow Wow event was held during the festivities, led by Rosie Koostachin and her family of traditional performers and singers. A Gospel Jamboree also took place at the end of the gathering.

The week-long event was opened with a Sunday mass led by local Elders and a closing ceremony featured a small com-

munity parade.

This year’s performers and bands included The Flint Boys, 143 Rockband, Into Overdrive, SwampRockers and Relic Kings. There were also solo artists including Shanahan & Josiah, Brayden Wesley and Ethan Wesley.

Brayden and Ethan are local youth who performed solo electric guitar routines for the crowd. Their performances electrified the crowd and encouraged other local youth to take up music and play instruments, with the hope of someday performing at future events and gatherings. At one evening dance, local youth Araton Wesley did a Michael Jackson impersonation with a dance routine that excited the evening crowd.

Organizers of the annual gathering have worked hard over the past few years and past events have featured big-name acts such as Trooper, Honey-moon Suite, Helix, Harlequin, Streetheart and Glass Tiger. The community’s own Adrian Sutherland has made several performances at the event.

This is reminiscent of when I grew up in Attawapiskat in the 1990s, when community members organized the first official Pow Wow events that brought everyone together for multi-day events. It was a special feeling for us young people back then because it gave us a sense of pride and self-confidence. In a world where we were constantly made to feel strange about our heritage, it felt good to have a major summer event dedicated to making us feel good about ourselves and our community. Unfortunately, those events didn’t happen every year and it wasn’t until the development of the Kattawapiskak Keekehwin Gathering that it became a regular annual gathering.

My brother Joseph and his planning committee shared the same feeling from those past events. They know what it feels like to be in the community in the midst of summer and wanting to have a fun event with your family and friends.

Their planning committee purposefully included several new and younger members just so that these new members can lead this annual event in the future.

The Kattawapiskak Keekehwin Gathering is a great event that brings out the best in Attawapiskat, as it encourages youth to celebrate their heritage and gives them a sense of self-confidence in who they are and where they come from. Committee members described it as a time to take away any negative energy, bring out the good in everyone and honour the name of the event ‘Keekehwin’, which means ‘healing’. Kitchi-Meegwetch misiway (‘Thanks very much to everyone’) for hosting this great event for our community.

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Patricia Ningewance receives Honorary Doctor of Letters



Former Wawatay News editor Patricia Ningewance Nadeau was conferred with an Honorary Doctor of Letters degree during Algoma University’s Brampton convocation ceremony.

The Ring Of Forest Fire



**Xavier
Kataquapit**

UNDER THE
NORTHERN SKY

Forest fires have always been a deep worry for those of us who live in the far north of Ontario. We are surrounded by endless forests and we know full well what it means when these trees start to burn in the peak heat of summer.

I remember a few hot summers in the 1980s, when I was growing up in my home community of Attawapiskat on the James Bay coast, seeing large columns of smoke rising west of our community. It is a frightful thing to know that you are isolated from the world and that fire might reach your home.

I also lived and worked as a writer for several years in Iroquois Falls, in northeastern Ontario and I learned from many of their community Elders, including my late partner Mike McGrath’s mother, Emily McGrath, about how this area was devastated by an historic fire in July 1916. Emily’s parents, Margaret and Jack Dunn, arrived in Iroquois in the 1920s and they heard direct accounts of what happened. Families passed down stories of how the fire sounded like a roar and arrived like a wall of flames that quickly took

over and caught everyone by surprise. There were no systems in place at the time to warn people or to manage such an emergency. Many families have their own personal stories about this tremendous firestorm that destroyed entire communities along a 60-kilometre stretch from Cochrane all the way down to Matheson and Ramore. The half a million acre firestorm took an estimated 223 lives.

The memory of this fire still lives on in the name of the small community of Val Gagne, east of Timmins. This area was previously known as Nushka and when this settlement was destroyed, it was rebuilt and renamed Val Gagne in memory of Wilfred ‘Little Father’ Gagne, a Catholic priest who died trying to rescue parishioners from the fire.

This deadly fire, along with other major forest fires from this era, led to the Forest Fires Prevention Act, which is meant to prevent, suppress and manage forest fires and protect people’s lives.

This past month, there was a modern repeat of the deadly history of forest fires when the community of Namaygoosis-agagun, or Collins First Nation in far northwestern Ontario, was destroyed by flames. First Nation leaders in northern Ontario were unhappy with the provincial and federal governments’ response to this disaster. In interviews, Chief Helen Paavola stated that their com-

munity didn’t receive as much help or support as they should have leading up to this event and that during the height of the disaster, their people were essentially left on their own to save their lives.

It’s disheartening to know that our provincial and federal governments are willing to prioritize finances and economic riches to develop the so-called Ring of Fire mining region and dedicate years of research, planning and organization to this development, yet spend little to no time in preparing for natural disasters that endanger the lives of the people who live in these same areas. Plenty of experts and spokes-people have pointed out that governments have not done enough over the past few years to prepare for forest fire emergencies or to properly address this danger.

In a Globe and Mail article, Noah Freedman, vice-president of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union local 703 and a ten-year veteran of the provincial wildland fire service, stated that the province’s number of fire crews is fewer than what was available decades ago. Compared with past years, fewer fire crews are dealing with forest fires across a massive area that is twice the size of France. Freedman also pointed out that the province lacks aircraft and equipment, giving the example that even though there are nine large water bomber aircraft, two were reported as being grounded for repairs.

First Nation leaders and citizens everywhere can easily see what the different levels of government prioritize in the north.

In a CBC news story, Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler of Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (NAN) commented that “In their haste to extract our resources in our territories, both Ontario and Canada are ignoring the immediate threats our communities are facing because of climate change.”

Environmental experts around the world have already pointed out that climate change and global warming will only make events like forest fires worse in the coming decades. Governments should be doing more to protect people in the north instead of spending so much time trying to figure out how to send mining developments in remote regions. Protecting the people and the land should happen first. We shouldn’t wait for another disaster to happen before governments make changes to better deal with a dangerous situation. Our province has already learned from experience what happens when forest fires are not properly managed.

Instead of prioritizing how to make more money from the north for already wealthy mining companies, the government should place greater importance on the lives of the people who call this land home.

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Community

Build you own bike event held in Minnesota Park

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

A free build your own bike event was featured at the Together for a Sizzle free family BBQ party, held July 28 at Minnesota Park and the Art Widnall Pool in Thunder Bay.

“We’re offering a free build your own bike event through the city, it’s called Pedal Forward,” says Ian Cameron, owner at Community Spokes in Thunder Bay. “We bring bikes from the landfill at Mapleward and we bring tools, we bring parts — you can come by and build a bike for free and take it home. We give all the teaching and tools and parts for free, you’ve just got to choose one out and build it up. We teach you how and you get to take it home for free.”

Cameron says the most frustrating part of fixing bikes is working on the gears.

“It gets frustrating when you’re trying to fix the gears,” Cameron says. “You get the wrenches out, you get the WD-40 out and get it fixed, and then they’re happy once it’s done.”

Cameron says they had bikes of all sizes at the build your own bike event.

“Everyone is really enjoying the free bikes, there’s no shortage of demand,” Cameron says, noting that the initiative provides affordable access to transportation. “Everyone needs a bike — it’s a really good program to have in this area, and

you can go for a swim and get a free burger too at the pool.”

Cameron says they recently moved their Community Spokes location to a bigger space at 110 Unit A Simpson St.

“We’re open five days a week, Tuesdays through Saturdays 12-7 pm,” Cameron says.

Linda Bruins, executive director at Evergreen A United Neighbourhood, says this was the second year that Together for a Sizzle was held in the area.

“We love being at Minnesota Park, this is where Evergreen first started doing all our programs and activities 18 years ago,” Bruins says. “We need to connect people and families to access support services. It’s still a post-COVID world, people need to know there are a lot of supports and fun things in our community for them.”

Bruins says the Minnesota Park area is a vibrant neighbourhood.

“It’s the oldest neighbourhood in Thunder Bay and there’s thousands of beautiful people,” Bruins says. “Every neighbourhood in the world has challenges, but I believe when you can gather and share food and information and see neighbours, I just got to play catch up with kids I haven’t seen in a few years, it’s fantastic.”

Lisa Lester, children’s wellness worker at Thunder Bay Indigenous Friendship Centre, says it was important to build community connections and spread awareness of their



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News
Community Spokes owner Ian Cameron held a free build your own bike event at the Together for a Sizzle free family BBQ party, held July 28 at Minnesota Park and the Art Widnall Pool in Thunder Bay.

programming for children and families at Together for a Sizzle.

“People come to our booth for our nice snacks and our really good swag, but also for information about culture and programs for their kids and teachings,” Lester says, noting that some of their programs include a youth council, weird art nights, archery and the Seven Grandfather Teachings. “Each week we talk about a different Grandfather Teaching and the animal that associates with it and the language part of it.”

Dana Earle, project director for customer service at the City of Thunder Bay, says they enjoy talking with the community during events such as Together for a Sizzle.

“As the city, we love coming out and participating, getting to talk to the community,” Earle says, noting they had pop up tables with all of their information. “And you’re directly talking to and communicating with members of the community, asking them what services are working for them, what else we can do for them and just letting them know what is going on specifically with the city.”

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Arts & Entertainment

Shibastik perform in Thunder Bay at the South Core Roar festival



Shibastik performed his hip hop music on both days of the South Core Roar, held Aug. 1-2 on Brodie and Miles Streets in Thunder Bay.

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SCAN ME

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Shibastik enjoyed the opportunity to perform his hip hop music on both days of the South Core Roar, held Aug. 1-2 on Brodie and Miles Streets adjacent to the Thunder Bay Courthouse.

"It was great, great energy here, lots of cool vehicles and old cars and bikes, a lot of people out, a lot of good food, just a good energy and great weather," Shibastik says. "To come out here and rock the stage, it was a great honour. It was a great sound system, I had a good time up there."

Shibastik says he performed a song from his upcoming album during his performance.

"I performed that one song, it's called Native Rap, in Moose Factory a few days ago, so this is my second time performing it live," Shibastik says.

Shibastik says he emceed a youth gathering in Constance Lake about a week before the South Core Roar.

"And I performed at the Gathering of Our People in Moose Factory, which is an annual event," Shibastik says. "It was really good, they had a lot of different stuff going on there this year and a lot of people came out — it was awesome."

Shibastik says he is scheduled to do a few workshops and a concert in North Caribou Lake at the end of the month.

"It's such a rewarding work — my main audience is the youth in the communities, and

that audience keeps changing every year," Shibastik says. "Every couple of years, it's a whole new crop of youth that come in and I get to share my message with them. I get so much thanks for the work I'm trying to do and how I'm trying to make a positive impact on our youth. I know there's a lot of negative things going on in our communities, but I try to shed light on all the beautiful things that we have up in the northern communities."

...The people in the northern communities are lucky to be living there...

Shibastik says the people in the northern communities are lucky to be living there.

"We have access to some of the best food in the world, the best lands for fishing and hunting and just beautiful land," Shibastik says. "The people are so funny up there, their sense of humour is what I miss the most when I'm away. And I get to hear the language, I speak a little bit of Cree and I swear every time I go somewhere I pick up a few more words. And I encourage that with the youth too, the ones who still speak it, to make sure they hold on to it and carry that and how important that is."

Esther Maud, creator of Wabshkaa Animkii Benesii, an after-school program for children from seven to 14-years-

old in Thunder Bay, says she enjoyed all of the different cultures and dances and songs during the South Core Roar.

"It's really beautiful," Maud says. "I enjoy meeting other people and hearing about their history and their ancestral ways — it kind of resonates with how us Indigenous people do our ceremonies too."

Maud says they had a table set up for people to make medicine pouches at the South Core Roar.

"An Elder who is very dear to me had taught me how to make cedar pouches, and it's just something to keep with us whenever we're needing protection," Maud says. "We also have dreamcatcher kits to make and we're also selling our swag to help us continue to run our program for the children."

Maud says people were very interested in what they provide for the children through their after-school program, which features a strong emphasis on land-based teachings, culture and Indigenous traditions.

"We've had a lot of people sharing how their teenagers and their high school students are looking for their co-op hours," Maud says. "So that's what we're open to too is to being able to have students come do their hours with us."

Information about the Wabshkaa Animkii Benesii program is posted online at: www.wabprogram.com/.

The South Core Roar also featured a wide range of performers, including the Sisters of Turtle Island.

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Arts & Entertainment

Jessica Mamakeesick art on display at Thunder Bay Airport

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Mamakeesick Roots owner Jessica Mamakeesick recently completed two art projects with her artwork now displayed at the Thunder Bay International Airport and the Thunder Bay Police Service building. Her artwork is displayed on the newly designed check-in counters at the Thunder Bay International Airport and above the entrance of the Thunder Bay Police Service building on Balmoral St.

“Having my artwork featured at the Thunder Bay Airport is a true honour,” says Mamakeesick, a Keewawin citizen. “I hope it offers a warm welcome and gives visitors a sense of the beauty, culture and spirit that make northwestern Ontario so special, while highlighting our local landmarks such as Mount McKay (Anemki Wajiw) and the Sleeping Giant.”

Mamakeesick says the artwork enables visitors from the area and around the world to see a piece of her culture the moment they step through the airport’s doors.

“This project is also meaningful because it shows how art can bring people together,” Mamakeesick says. “I hope it creates a sense of welcome, curiosity and pride not just for visitors but for our local Indigenous people who see themselves reflected there.”

Mamakeesick’s artwork, which includes three pieces, Guided by Seven, Spirit of the Mountain and Sacred Abundance, was unveiled at the Thunder Bay International Airport on July 15.

“Our airport is often the first and last impression visitors have of our region,” says Jackie Mac-

Donald, director of business development and revenue management at the Thunder Bay International Airports Authority. “We wanted our terminal to reflect the place we proudly call home. Jessica’s artwork beautifully captures the landscapes, stories and Indigenous culture that make northwestern Ontario unique, creating a welcoming experience that is both authentic and memorable for every traveller who passes through our doors.”

Mamakeesick’s Seven Grandfather Teachings artwork at the Thunder Bay Police Service was unveiled on June 21, National Indigenous Peoples Day.

“I’m really honoured to be a part of this and display the Seven Grandfather Teachings,” says Mamakeesick, a Keewawin citizen. “I want this to be a conversational piece between the community and police. Displaying this artwork at the police service station is a reminder that community safety is built not only through the laws and enforcement but through the values of kindness, honesty, respect and accountability. My hope is the artwork encourages reflection, conversation and shared commitment to building positive relationships.”

Mamakeesick says she began working on the Thunder Bay Police Service project in 2025.

“I just love the Seven Grandfather Teachings — all the values that we should live by in our daily lives,” Mamakeesick says.

Fort William Chief Michele Solomon says Mamakeesick’s artwork was beautiful.

“Jessica is an amazing artist and does beautiful work for sure,” Solomon says, noting that the artwork opens the door to

the opportunity for learning for the Thunder Bay Police Service and their visitors to understand what the Seven Grandfather Teachings mean and how to embody them. “This is really the opening of a door to the possibility of doing things in a different way and having a lens to view their work with community if they choose to use it that way.”

Denise Baxter, vice chair of the Thunder Bay Police Service Board and Marten Falls citizen, also highlighted the importance of the artwork.

“Thinking about what it means to come to a place where we’re really centring Indigenous teachings within the work we do in community, I really do believe that it does send a clear message in the work that the service leads but also the work of the city and all the organizations in the city, because I think we do a lot of really important things about the importance of the Indigenous cultures, values, perspectives that are respected,” Baxter says. “This is a community where people come together and should feel welcomed, should feel valued and should be able to trust those around them. So that is the work that we’re all working together on.”

Thunder Bay Police Service Chief Darcy Fleury says Mamakeesick did a fantastic job on the artwork.

“I’m very blessed that she agreed to let us use her artwork for the Seven Grandfather Teachings and represent it in our community and on our building,” Fleury says, noting that one of the recommendations they heard was for a better space for Indigenous people



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Mamakeesick Roots owner Jessica Mamakeesick is honoured to have her artwork displayed on the newly designed check-in counters at the Thunder Bay International Airport.

to come to the Thunder Bay Police Service. “We don’t really have an opportunity inside the building, so we thought

— what a better way to greet people than to have the actual Seven Grandfather Teachings there representing our commit-

ment to the community to work together, to be respectful and really do the best we can to help people.”

Lakehead Region Conservation Authority paints community bench



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

The completed Indigenous Community Medicine Garden’s wooden bench, painted by Shelby Gagon and a group of people.

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

Aroland artist Shelby Gagon and a group of Lakehead Region Conservation Authority (LRCA) staff and Thunder Bay citizens painted the Indigenous Community Medicine Garden’s wooden bench on Aug. 14 in Thunder Bay. The garden, which is located adjacent to the Hope and Memory Garden along Balmoral St., was established by the LRCA in early June to offer space for reflection and healing and for Indigenous plants to flourish and re-naturalize the location.

“We have a blue heron, like

we said in the beginning of just having that be a visitor, so we wanted to put that on,” Gagon says, noting that people had provided ideas of what to paint on the bench throughout the day. “We’ve got a blue butterfly, the butterfly is a representation of our loved ones who have passed and it kind of fits the theme of the Hope and Memory Garden beside us. We’ve got some plants that are in this area but also the fish we can’t see all the time. And we have kind of like dots just thinking about this is like the energy of life and how we’re all kind of flowing in and out of these natural worlds and elements.”

Gagon says she usually starts her murals and paintings with a circle, so they decided to start the bench painting by creating a yellow sun on the eastern side.

“We got a compass out and we figured out which direction east is, and that’s where we put the sun just to represent the eastern door and the rising of the sun,” Gagon says at the beginning of the bench painting. “We’re incorporating some nighttime scene, so having this night scene connecting to the sun and kind of the celestial and cosmos of the natural world.”

see BENCH on page 12



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Arts



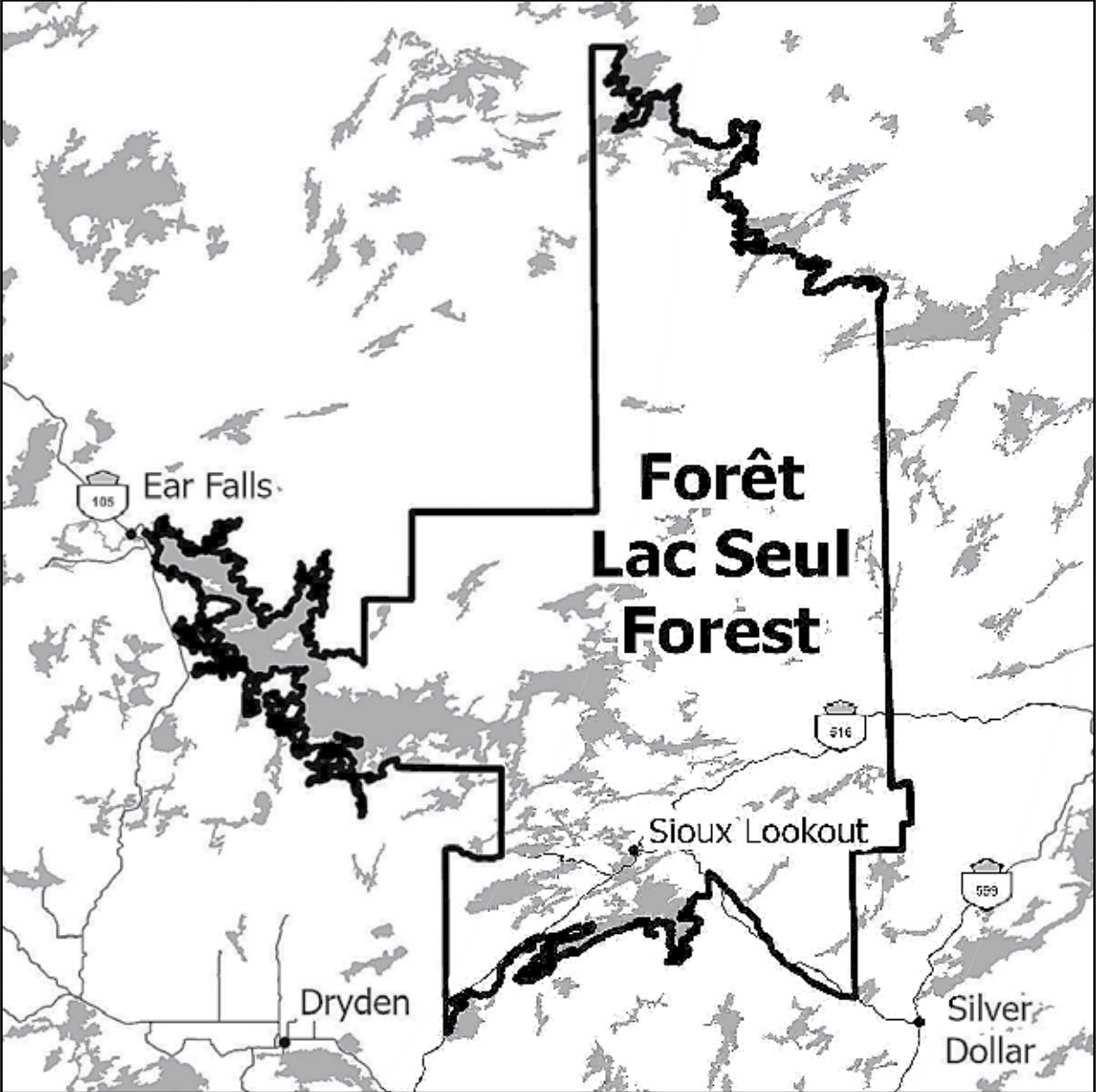
Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

The completed Indigenous Community Medicine Garden’s wooden bench, painted by Shelby Gagon and a group of people.

Inspection

Inspection of Herbicide Project for Lac Seul Forest

The Ontario **Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR)** invites you to inspect the planned herbicide project for the 2026 season. As part of ongoing efforts to regenerate and protect Ontario’s forests, selected stands on the **Lac Seul Forest** (see map) will be sprayed with herbicide to control competing vegetation, starting on or about: **September 1, 2026.**



The project description and project plan for the herbicide project is available electronically for inspection by contacting the **Obishikokaang Resources Corp.** during normal business hours and on the Natural Resources Information Portal at ontario.ca/ForestPlans beginning **July 20, 2026, until March 31, 2027**, when the Annual Work Schedule expires. Please note, the **aerial herbicide operation** will be occurring in a specific area(s) of the **Lac Seul Forest**, and not the entire management unit. Areas planned for treatment include Botsford, Star Creek, Atlantic, Moose Lake, Yett South and Stanzhikimi.

More detailed information on the location(s) of the activities within the **Lac Seul Forest** can be viewed on the Natural Resources Information Portal at ontario.ca/2cc18.

First Nation and Métis communities and interested and affected persons and organizations can arrange a virtual or in-person meeting with MNR staff to discuss the herbicide project. For more information, please contact:

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tel: 807-738-1047

e-mail: maegan.ciurko@ontario.ca

Jared Binguis, R.P.F.

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e-mail: jbinguis@obishcorp.ca

Bench to offer a
space for healing

con’t from page 11

Gagnon says she loves working collaboratively with the community.

“I feel like we all are putting our energy into this painting right now,” Gagnon says. “A lot of the people are pretty new to painting too, and I really love that because I think art is such a way to be playful and curious and experiment and explore that creative side of individuals, so I’m really happy that folks are here painting today.” Sarah McPherson, an Indigenous photographer, says she enjoyed helping with the bench painting.

“I’ve known Shelby a long time and she posted about doing this and I had the day off so it a really nice way to be a part of community,” McPherson says. “It’s like a summer wellness day that we do with my work, so I feel that’s really honouring the wellness aspect. I did the butterfly, that was my main one, and then I just kind of did some detail with the sweetgrass as well. I feel really grateful to have something like this occur on this side of town because I live really close and there’s not a lot of things like this that happen, so it’s really nice to be part of this.”

Ashley Brimmell, stewardship coordinator at LRCA, says they were grateful to have Gagnon leading them through the bench painting.

“We’re using the natural environment around us here today, all the beautiful plants that we planted here in June and also the surrounding plant community along the (Neebing-McIntyre) Floodway and the Hope and Memory Garden here to inspire our work,” Brimmell says. “It’s great to bring folks of different backgrounds and artistic experience together to bring this beautiful piece together here today.”

Lynda Bobinski, who is involved with the Thunder Bay Art Gallery’s annual Garden Tour, says she was interested in having the Indigenous Community Medicine Garden as part of next year’s Garden Tour.

“I think it’s just going to be such an inviting area so I really look forward to having it on our Garden Tour next year so people can see what’s being developed and see what the possibilities are — the peacefulness of all of this is so great,” Bobinski says, noting that this past year was the 30th anniversary of the Garden Tour. “It’s actually one of their fund raisers and it’s well liked by the people in our whole region. They had over 500 people go through the gardens, we had seven gardens and the Hope and Memory Garden beside this garden was on the tour.”



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Business

Anishnawbe Business Professional Association signs MOU

Rick Garrick
Wawatay News

The Anishnawbe Business Professional Association (ABPA) and Northern Ontario Angels (NOA) have launched a partnership to accelerate Indigenous economic sovereignty and transform private equity.

“We officially signed a historic MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) to establish a culturally safe capital match-making ecosystem,” says Jason Rasevych, president at the ABPA. “This partnership connects high potential Indigenous businesses across Treaty #3, Treaty #5, Treaty #9, Robinson Superior 1850, Robinson Huron Treaty with accredited angel investors. This partnership is necessary because the Indigenous economy in Canada is growing rapidly and it currently contributes 56 billion annually to the national GDP and it’s projected to reach \$100 billion.”

Rasevych says despite this massive expansion, Indigenous entrepreneurs and First Nations economic development corporations face systemic exclusion from mainstream finance, chronic underfunding and unbalanced equity models.

“So this partnership is designed to structurally rewire the financial landscape of northern Ontario and dismantle those barriers,” Rasevych says.

Rasevych says the NOA has a mandate across northern Ontario.

“They also secure FedNor funding so they’re very much ingrained in the region,” Rasevych says. “They’ve got a different mandate than what you see (with) Indigenous

institutions like NADF. The Northern Ontario Angels are a non-profit accredited network that serves northern Ontario, they’re a standing member of the National Angel Capital Organization and Angel Investors Ontario.”

Rasevych says the NOA was established in 2005 with support from FedNor, adding that they were created to address the regional equity gap by bridging northern Ontario entrepreneurs with accredited Angel investors who can provide early stage growth capital.

“From their inception, they’ve facilitated over \$250 million in direct investments into northern Ontario enterprises and they’ve created over 3,500 jobs through that process,” Rasevych says. “From what I understand from talking to them over the last while to build a relationship, they’ve got access to 200 Angel investors globally that are interested in investing in northern Ontario businesses. So we’re bringing the Indigenous business component to the picture, which has never been done before in Canada.”

Rasevych says Indigenous entrepreneurs have faced a stark choice between chronic underfunding or accepting aggressive equity models that dilute their community sovereignty.

“This partnership will work to change the equation,” Rasevych says. “By pioneering culturally safe deal structures like equity redemption and revenue-based financing, we are ensuring our founders can access the critical early-stage growth capital they need to scale, while retaining the ownership required to



The Anishnawbe Business Professional Association’s Jason Rasevych recently highlighted the importance of the ABPA and Northern Ontario Angels’ partnership to accelerate Indigenous economic sovereignty and transform private equity.

secure long-term prosperity and capitalize on federal and provincial procurement opportunities.”

Ian Lane, executive director at the NOA, says the Indigenous economy is one of the most dynamic, high-growth sectors in Canada.

“Through this collaboration, our accredited angel investors gain access to a curated, high-

potential pipeline of scalable Indigenous enterprises,” Lane says. “Furthermore, by integrating Indigenous rights and Free, Prior and Informed Consent into our investor-readiness education, we are equipping our network to proactively navigate material risks and build truly sustainable, profitable partnerships.”

Rasevych says they are currently setting up their terms of reference for the Indigenous Investor Protection Working Group, which is a central component of the partnership that will be co-chaired by executive delegates from both the ABPA and NOA.

“We’re doing a call out in northern Ontario for Indigenous representatives that want to be a part of our Working Group,” Rasevych says. “And then we’re going to launch the communication plan to start with events where we’re going to start to promote these gatherings and start to educate and raise awareness to Indigenous businesses on the process to be able to secure investment.”

Rasevych adds that they are creating certain goals for ABPA members and Indigenous businesses.

“We’re going to be tracking those over the course of the next year and hopefully tie it in to potential funding with FedNor or other sources to establish this as a long-term system because this is the first in Canada as far as a program like this,” Rasevych says. “So when we look at this as a pilot, it has huge potential to raise pre-seed money for all of these Indigenous entrepreneurs that have great ideas.”

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