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Business

Mamakeesick Roots a success in 2023

Rick Garrick  
Wawatay News

Jessica Mamakeesick (Robinson)’s business Mamakeesick Roots has been a success since she opened it up in the Goods and Co. urban market in June 2023.

“(It’s) great, I use the space as my own studio so if it’s a slow day with selling I’m still creating artwork,” says Mamakeesick, a citizen. “It works out fine for me, I’m constantly working and painting and creating in my little space in there.”

Mamakeesick says she began doing her art after having a dream two years ago.

“I had a random dream that I was painting Indigenous art,” Mamakeesick says. “I didn’t have any experience with painting before that, I used to just doodle and sketch when I was growing up but ran out of time as I became a young parent. I woke up from that dream and just decided to try the next day and I haven’t stopped painting since.”

Mamakeesick says she first started to sell her work online and to friends and family.

“I got opportunity after opportunity which has led me to owning my own business and still creating connections everywhere,” Mamakeesick says. “I paint original art, it’s like I would say a Woodland style mixed with modern mixed with my own style, like dot art. There’s just so many different styles incorporated into it.”

Mamakeesick says the dots on her artwork reminds her of beadwork.

“That’s just why I like doing it,” Mamakeesick says. “I know there are a lot of different nationalities out there that do the dot art too.”

Mamakeesick says she also has her artwork on clothing, mugs, planter pots, keychains, greeting cards and prints.

“(There’s been) a lot of positive reactions, like it’s very unique, they haven’t seen anything like it before,” Mama-

keesick says. “It’s been a very positive experience, which has led to people approaching me for opportunities like designing logos for multiple organizations and partnering up with big companies to put my logo on their merchandise.”

Mamakeesick says she is a sole proprietor and does not have any staff for her business.

“Goods and Co. is great because it’s a touristy spot,” Mamakeesick says. “They have the cruise ships coming in, it’s a great location for people to shop for gifts that are made by local companies. I get a whole assortment of people coming in.”

Mamakeesick says she had some good sales from a group of people from Germany.

“They loved the Native artwork so I did get a lot of sales from that one,” Mamakeesick says.

Mamakeesick says she paints the mugs and planter pots herself and then coats the painting with a sealer so it will be waterproof and dishwasher friendly.

“I work with Engaged Creative Productions, they do all of my printing so they help me with my journals, all of my prints, my stickers, my cards,” Mamakeesick says, noting that she is a marketplace artist with Engaged. “If it wasn’t for that relationship between us, I probably wouldn’t have come this far as I have now.”

Mamakeesick says she recently collaborated with XSPEX, which produces eyewear for people with active lifestyles such as goggles and sunglasses.

“The owner came into my store and just got inspired to use one of my designs for their new ski goggles this year,” Mamakeesick says. “I sent him a copy of one of my images and it’s being produced and it will sell across Canada. So that’s a new connection I’ve made so we’ll be working together in the future too.”

Mamakeesick adds that one of her images, of a wolf, will be



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Jessica Mamakeesick (Robinson) shows one of her artworks in her Mamakeesick Roots business, which she opened in June 2023 in the Goods and Co. urban market in Thunder Bay.

featured on a Lakehead University Thunderwolves team jersey. “They have an Indigenous

appreciation night coming up in January so all of the hockey players will be wearing a jer-

sey with my logo on it for that night,” Mamakeesick says. “They invited me to that game

so I’m excited for that just to see my artwork on there.”

Thank You, Airlines!

Your fast, courteous delivery of Wawatay News to our northern communities is appreciated.





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Commentary

New Year Resolution  
For Peace



Xavier  
Kataquapit

UNDER THE  
NORTHERN SKY

I recall being at home as a boy in our small three bedroom house in Attawapiskat in the 1980s. We were a huge family of nine children and two parents and at one point we lived with our Mooshoom (our grandfather) James Kataquapit. We lived a relatively quiet life in the north and every night dad would turn on the television to watch the nightly news. We seldom understood what was happening in the world because we felt we were far removed from everyone and everything in our small remote community in the wilderness.

Mom and dad were always so amazed and confused as to how and why parts of the world still fought and killed one another in major wars and conflicts. It confused us all that one group of people could be brought to the point of wanting to kill many others they disliked or disagreed with. Over the years I have gained some knowledge about war and much of it from reading history but also from those who fought in war.

My grandfather James Kataquapit was a First World War veteran and he excited our family with stories of cities to the south, travelling over great oceans, seeing far away lands and witnessing the destruction of the First World War. At least my Mooshoom James came back. My great grandfather John Chookomolin also left for this war but he was less fortunate as he succumbed to the Spanish Flu in the United Kingdom where he died in 1917. His loss left his wife Maggie and daughter Louise who is my grandmother alone in the wilderness.

Maggie died soon after which left my grandmother orphaned during a time and place in the north when it meant life or death for a small child. John's death in the First World War changed the course of my family's history.

Twenty other young Indigenous men left for this war from Attawapiskat and the histories of their families was severely altered because of a world conflict they did not understand on the other side of planet.

My partner Mike's family was affected by the Second World War and he lost his uncle and his dad was injured. It is sad to think that even after so many years, the news stories of war

still look the same to me now as they did when I was a child up north. None of it really makes sense.

One thing I have learned is that modern war is promoted in a way that doesn't really tell the truth. Academics and researchers have put forward time and again that war is not the answer to the differences we face with one another.

Academics like the reknowned Noam Chomsky have pointed out we conveniently ignore the fact that our world spends trillions of dollars towards military answers to conflicts while we issue only a fraction of that amount towards peace and negotiation. War is all about money and people get rich on it.

I believe it is up to all of us to find the courage and strength to demand from all our leaders that peaceful means are found to negotiate problems. Thousands of people are being killed now in Gaza and hundreds of thousands have lost their lives in the Ukraine/Russian war. What is wrong with us? Can't we find the source of the problems that lead to these wars and negotiate a solution that benefits everyone.

The wealthy who benefit financially from war rarely experience the pain of war but young men and women are pushed into conflicts where they are terrorized, maimed and killed. We fund the governments that go to war so we have the right to tell them they can not use these funds to kill.

When I turn on my modern digital video news feed it amazes me that I am still confused and I feel helpless in the same way I did when I was a boy in the northern wilderness. The only thing that gives me hope is that people have started to protest in the streets to form anti war movements. I hope that in this New Year 2024, we can find a new way forward and that peace will become a mantra for our future.

I feel so much sadness and pain when I see the devastation of war in the media and I believe that has to do with the first hand personal experience I have had in losing my great-grandfather and witnessing the affects on my grandfather who went to war.

Maybe, just maybe we can all rise up through organizing protests in the streets, running a letter writing campaign to our members of parliament and urging our media to provide deep coverage of war. This would be a New Year's resolution I could support.

www.underthenorthernsky.com

Wawatay Archive Photo



Thunder Bay-Superior North MP Patty Hajdu says the taking away of Indigenous children and the loss of their languages was part of a process to strip Indigenous people of their power during Thunder Bay's Residential School Survivor Ceremony on at Hillcrest Park.

Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Half-Way Point of Winter



Graham  
Saunders

WEATHER

Last month I talked about the different ways to define when winter begins. Part of the reason I did this is because the December issue of Wawatay News was first available on the day after the Winter Solstice, which signals the beginning of winter.

This month one of the topics is when is winter half over. Of course, if we were to define winter as half over when half the snow had fallen or we had used up half of our winter firewood we would actually have to wait until the "end of winter".

The famous Ground Hog Day is considered to be a mid-point of winter. Maybe the following will connect some dots and dates. The Winter Solstice happened on December 21. The Spring Equinox happens March 20, 90 days later. Ground Hog Day is in the middle of what is known as astronomical winter, 45 days from the Winter Solstice. Of course, if the furry forecaster sees its shadow, it means winter persists for six more weeks. In this part of the world some kind of version of winter is likely in those weeks to astronomical spring, shadow or no shadow.

Another way of defining winter is to keep track of the three coldest months, December through February. Meteorologists and climatologists start winter on the first day of

December and end it at midnight on the final day of February. Hmmm, 2024 is a Leap year. We have an extra day of winter on February 29, 2024.

This puts January 15 or 16 at the halfway point and happens to fit with the usual format of this column, a summary of the previous six weeks and a weather outlook for the next six weeks.

December the warmest on record

December was the warmest on record across Northern Ontario and exceptionally warm throughout the province of Ontario. Thunder Bay was 10°C warmer than average. Most days featured melting temperatures and snow on the ground was absent until New Year's Eve. A broad area from Kenora to Moosonee and Kapuskasing had average temperatures of 9°C and 7°C warmer than average.

Unusually warm temperatures took place in the first week of December, mid-month and from around Dec. 21 to Dec. 29. Also unusual, was an extended period when temperatures remained about 0°C. This spanned a week (Dec. 21 to Dec. 28) in Thunder Bay and two or three days in other locations.

Another approach to check how warm it was in December is to look at how many locations in the region experienced cold temperatures. I was surprised only 3 of 72 locations had temperatures of -25°C or colder, Weagamow Lake, Muskrat Dam and Sandy Lake. I then was curious how this compared to the previous December (2022) which was a relatively average

temperature December. Almost all places in Northern Ontario recorded minimum temperatures at or colder than -25°C at some point in the month. Only locations very close to Lake Superior and Lake Huron, or islands in these lakes (and Lake Nipigon) were "warmer" than this threshold.

December 2023 in the region was more like a typical November.

December Precipitation

Total precipitation amounts were lower than normal in most of the region, for example Sioux Lookout was 50% of average, Sudbury 24% and Timmins 27%. The ratio between rain and snow was very unusual, much more rain than snow rather than the opposite. Both snowfall and snowcover amounts were both well below average. Many locations received much of their monthly precipitation on or around Christmas Day as substantial and record rainfall. Thunder Bay for example received 16 mm.

Much of Northern Ontario was snow free on Christmas morning. An "official white Christmas" has at least two cm/one inch of snow on the ground on Christmas morning. Back in the 20th Century in Thunder Bay (and most of the region) the odds of this happening were 100%.

If not a "white Christmas" on Dec. 25 it has to be "brown" right? Brown was the colour of the landscape, but a week of relatively warm temperatures plus substantial rainfalls on December 25 and 26 resulted in some "green up" in late December.

Lake effect snow was experi-

enced east of Lake Superior on Dec. 13. Heavy snow, about 16 cm, fell from Sault Ste Marie to Wawa. Short durations of freezing rain occurred at many locations in the region in December.

Weather in early 2024.

As readers likely recall, the weather flipped from balmy and minor snow amounts to something like winter in the final day or two of last year. Close to seasonal temperatures were in place for the first two weeks of January. Week three featured a colder air mass that was stalled over western Canada and had flowed east. However, this cold air modified and the extreme cold was not experienced in Northern Ontario.

Outlook for January and February

Most medium-range forecasts are suggesting a fairly abrupt switch back to above seasonal temperatures in the final week of January. There are some predictions that relatively dry conditions will continue.

I have mentioned El Niño in recent months. The water temperatures in the tropical Pacific continue to be well above average. A strong El Niño results in milder temperatures and less snowfall than average in Northern Ontario. Usually, as has happened this year, the Northwest tends to be warmer and dryer than the Northeast.

Often in the past the El Nino effect breaks down occasionally, (or takes a holiday?) for a week or two. Another cold snap may arrive.

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# Community

## Builder's Challenge competition a hit at FN Housing Conference

Rick Garrick  
Wawatay News

Former grand chief Harvey Yesno enjoyed learning more about tools during the Builder's Challenge at the First Nations Housing Conference, held at the Valhalla Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay. The Builder's Challenge featured demonstrations on measuring and marking, drills and drivers, jig saws and reciprocating saws by former Mr. Chips TV host Jon Eakes.

"It's the different blades, like wood and the cutting of that leather," Yesno says. "I've used the jig saw before but it's basically a jig saw with one blade to do everything. Now you've got (blades) for metal like aluminum, linoleum or leather, this is great."

Eakes says they focused on tools this year because many people are not sure of all the potential uses of the different tools.

"For instance there are many ways of using a tape measure to find something like the centre of a board without measuring," Eakes says. "I love that because every time you measure, particularly in fractions in inches, the math becomes impossible — divide 13 and five-eighths by three."

Eakes says one of the jig saw or reciprocating saw blades they demonstrated was a blade with no teeth with a knife edge.

"So it doesn't get caught if you want to cut canvas, leather, foam," Eakes says. "If you ever try to cut foam rubber with a saw the dust is terrible but if you use a toothless blade or a knife edge blade on either a reciprocating saw or a jig saw, you can cut through styrofoam and all the insulation foams with no sweat."

Yesno says he also networked with some of the people in attendance from across the north at the conference and picked up some information at the trade show and during the workshops, noting that the housing plans featured in the Community-Led Designs for Specialized Housing in the North Project presentation by Mike McKay, infrastructure and housing director at Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Shelagh McCartney, associate professor at Toronto Metropolitan University, and Simon Jones included a "lot of community input."

"There's innovation there (with the housing plans),



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

**ABOVE:** A participant cuts some material with a knife edge jig saw blade.

**RIGHT:** Former grand chief Harvey Yesno cuts a post.



## INSPECTION

### MNRF-Approved Forest Management Plan Inspection Lac Seul 2024-2034 Forest Management Plan

The Ontario **Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF)**, **Ondaadiziwin Forest Management Inc. (OFMI)** and the **Sioux Lookout Local Citizens' Committee (LCC)** would like to advise you that the 2024 – 2034 Forest Management Plan (FMP) for the **Lac Seul Forest** has been approved by the MNRF Regional Director and is available for inspection.

#### The Planning Process

The FMP takes approximately three years to complete. During this time, five formal opportunities for public and First Nation and Métis community involvement are provided. The fourth opportunity (Stage Four) for this FMP occurred on July 12, 2023 when the public was invited to review and comment on the draft FMP.

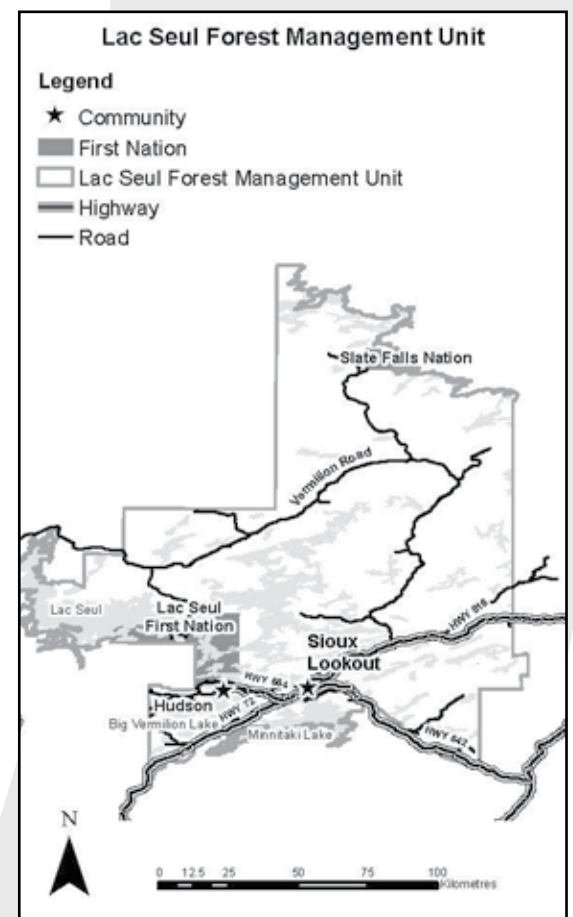
This **'Stage Five'** notice is to advise you that the MNRF-approved FMP, including the supplementary documentation, and FMP summary are available for inspection for the 10-year duration of the FMP through the office of the sustainable forest licensee and on the Natural Resources Information Portal at <https://nrip.mnr.gov.on.ca/s/fmp-online>.

Interested and affected persons and organizations can arrange a virtual or in-person meeting with MNRF staff with the MNRF Sioux Lookout District or Area Office to discuss the approved FMP.

For further information, please contact:

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Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry  
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The approved FMP will be available for the 10-year period of the FMP at the same locations listed above.

#### Stay Involved

Further information on how to get involved in forest management planning and to better understand the stages of public consultation please visit:

<https://ontario.ca/forestmanagement>

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) is collecting your personal information and comments under the authority provided by the Forest Management Planning Manual, 2020 approved by regulation under Section 68 of the *Crown Forest Sustainability Act*, 1994. Any personal information you provide (home and/or email address, name, telephone number, etc.) may be used and shared between MNRF and/or the sustainable forest licensee to contact you regarding comments submitted. Your comments will become part of the public consultation process and may be shared with the general public. Your personal information may also be used by the MNRF to send you further information related to this forest management planning exercise. If you have questions about the use of your personal information, please contact Seanna Landry, District Business Co-ordinator, MNRF, at 807-738-5461 or [seanna.landry@ontario.ca](mailto:seanna.landry@ontario.ca).

Renseignements en français : Sébastien Niemi, Stagiaire en Foresterie au 807 728-2278; [sebastien.niemi@ontario.ca](mailto:sebastien.niemi@ontario.ca).



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Community

Ink Singer-songwriter Susan Aglukark makes two appearances in Thunder Bay

Rick Garrick  
Wawatay News

Inuk singer-songwriter Susan Aglukark recently shared the importance of writing about one's feelings during the Ontario Native Women's Association 8th Annual Strong Hands Stop Violence Poetry Night and Wequedong Lodge's 2nd Annual BBQ.

"I am grateful to be here this evening to be given some time on this stage to share with some incredible courageous women, thank you for sharing your space with me," says Aglukark, who won three Juno Awards, including two for her Arctic Rose album from 1992 and one

for her Big Feeling album from 2003, during Poetry Night on Nov. 25. "I always start simply with one story, one journey, and I can relate to what one of our earlier poets said, accidental artist, discovering discovery, and very fortunate that discovery throughout has been my healer."

Aglukark says she heard a common thread in the poetry that was shared during Poetry Night, noting that she started doing morning pages in 2004 after having already released four albums.

"I was finally ready to take a step and I didn't know what the step was going to be but there was this restlessness," Aglukark

says. "Whatever needed to happen next at that point in my life, as it turns out, was taking that step from healing to belonging to my life, which was still healing, but truly making that part of my life."

Aglukark also stressed the courage it takes to start writing morning pages.

"The courage it takes to put pen to paper, because at that point is when we are the most vulnerable, when we're saying whatever is going on here in my body, my soul and my mind, and all of this I'm going to put it to paper, and the vulnerability being we can write it for ourselves but then sometimes we need to share it and we share it

in different forms of art," Aglukark says. "This is about expression, and expression healing, whether we share it or not, but we're sharing that vulnerability and this seems to be the theme this evening, so thank you, thank you for sharing that space and your words and this part of your journey. Whatever part of the journey you're on, it's all healing, it doesn't always feel that way, it's all healing."

Aglukark also spoke about how she began her career with a short video documentary about living away from home to complete her high school studies during her presentation at Wequedong Lodge's 2nd Annual BBQ on Sept. 14.

"This becomes a music video that gets on Much Music, and that's how the music and singing and that part of expressing started," Aglukark says. "Around that same time I ended up in a studio at Chateau Laurier with CBC Radio Northern Services and they want to record some more music and I say I don't sing, I'm not a songwriter, I write short poetry in my language, I play three chords on the guitar, let me see what I can put together and submitted a cassette tape."

Aglukark says the songs were recorded in 1990, and the producer on the project encouraged her to continue songwriting.

"When he invited me to song write with him, my response to him was that's fine, I'm not a singer, I'm not a songwriter, and if we're going to do this I will write about what I know, and I know loss, I know anger, I know fear, I know grief," Aglukark says. "I will write about that, if you can't write about that I can't be a songwriter, I can't write this album with you, and not realizing at that time that that step, being truly honest about where you're at at the time you're at that place was a beginning, and that was a beginning for me."

REVIEW

Review of Proposed Operations for the Major Amendment: Hearst Forest 2019-2029 Forest Management Plan

The Ontario **Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF)**, **Hearst Forest Management Inc.** and the **Hearst Local Citizens' Committee (LCC)**, invite you to participate in the review of proposed operations for the major amendment to the 2019-2029 FMP for the **Hearst Forest**.

This amendment provides for adjustments to planned harvest areas, and road decommissioning.

How to Get Involved

During preparation of a major amendment to a FMP, two formal opportunities for public consultation and First Nation and Métis community involvement and consultation are provided. This '**Stage One**' notice is:

- to invite you to review and comment on proposed operations for the major amendment; and
- to request additional contributions to the background information to be used in planning.

To assist in your review, an information forum will be held at the following time and locations:

**Monday February 19, 2024**      **Inovo Centre**      **4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.**  
**523 Hwy 11 Hearst,**  
**ON PoL 1N0**

Information available as described in the 2020 *Forest Management Planning Manual (FMPM) (Part A, Section 2.3.3.3)* <https://files.ontario.ca/mnrf-forest-management-planning-manual-en-2021-04-09.pdf> with whatever modifications MNRF considers necessary in the circumstances can be obtained at the information forum and on the Natural Resources Information Portal at <https://nrip.mnr.gov.on.ca/s/fmp-online>.

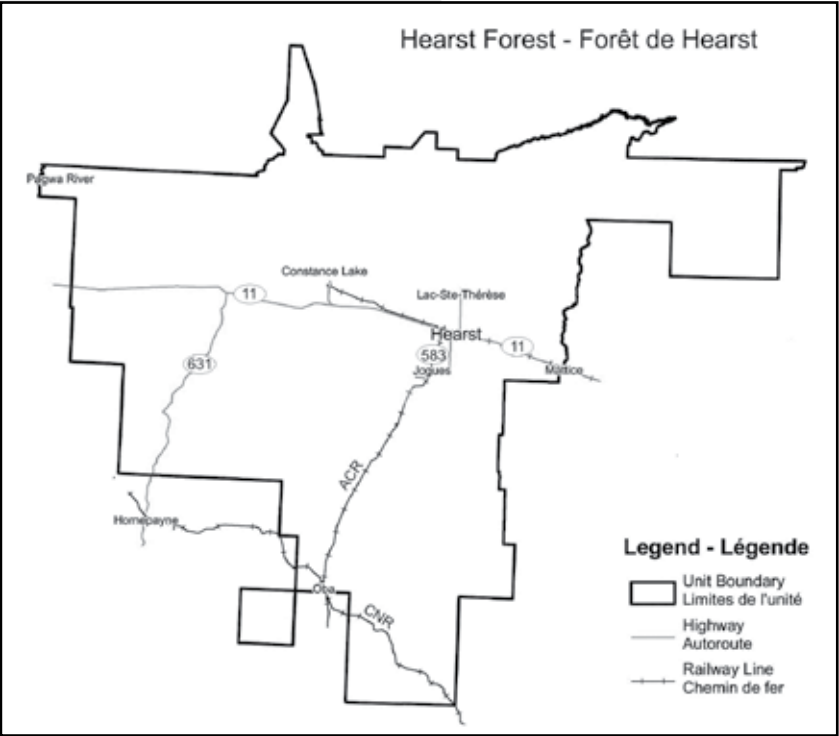
The information described in this notice can also be made available for review upon request during normal business hours, for a 15-day period **February 19, 2024 to March 5, 2024** by contacting Hearst Forest Management Inc. or Asad Choudry listed below. Comments on the proposed operations for the major amendment to the Hearst FMP must be received by Asad Choudry of the planning team at the MNRF Hearst-Cochrane-Kapuskasing District by **March 5, 2024**.

Virtual/in-person meetings with representatives of the planning team and the LCC can be also requested at any time during the planning process. Reasonable opportunities to meet planning team members during non-business hours will be provided upon request. If you require more information or wish to discuss your interests with a planning team member, please contact one of the individuals listed below:

**Asad Choudhry, R.P.F.**  
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You may make a written request to initiate a formal issue resolution process, following the process described in the *Forest Management Planning Manual (2020) (Part C, Section 6.1.5)*.

Stay Involved

An opportunity to inspect the approved major amendment (Stage Two) is tentatively scheduled for **April 2024**.

If you would like to be added to our mailing list and be notified of these consultation opportunities, please contact Asad Choudhry at 705-960-3826.

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) is collecting your personal information and comments under the authority provided by the Forest Management Planning Manual, 2020 approved by regulation under Section 68 of the *Crown Forest Sustainability Act*, 1994. Any personal information you provide (home and/or email address, name, telephone number, etc.) may be used and shared between MNRF and/or the sustainable forest licensee to contact you regarding comments submitted. Your comments will become part of the public consultation process and may be shared with the general public. Your personal information may also be used by the MNRF to send you further information related to this forest management planning exercise. If you have questions about the use of your personal information, please contact Josée Tourville, Business Co-ordinator, MNRF, at 705-960-2649.

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Community



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News  
Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler is supporting calls for answers about the Dec. 30 death of the late Jenna Ostberg at a residence in Thunder Bay.

SIU investigating 911 call

Rick Garrick  
Wawatay News

The provincial government's Special Investigation Unit (SIU) is investigating the circumstances surrounding the death of Bearskin Lake's Jenna Ostberg on Dec. 30 after three 911 calls were received by the Thunder Bay Police.

The SIU's preliminary information released in a Jan. 3 press release states that: At about 2 a.m., on Dec. 30 Thunder Bay Police Service received a 911 call about a domestic disturbance at a residence on Ray Boulevard; officers did not respond to the scene; officers received a second 911 call to "cancel" the call for service; officers did not respond to the scene; a third 911 call was made from the residence to indicate the woman was found deceased in the home; officers responded and located the woman deceased.

A Jan. 11 SIU press release clarified that the 911 call initially received by the Thunder Bay Police was not in relation to violence in the home involving Ostberg.

The SIU states that the caller had contacted police to report that the woman was an unwanted visitor at her home as there were court conditions that she and her son, also present in the home, were not supposed to be around each other. The caller was concerned that her son could be arrested for breach of the conditions and she asked that the police remove the woman from the home. The same caller subsequently contacted police to cancel the call for service, reporting that the woman had left the residence.

The SIU has assigned two investigators and one forensic investigator to the case and one

subject official has been designated.

The SIU is also urging anyone who may have information about the investigation, including video or photos, to contact the lead investigator at 1-800-787-8529 or online at: <https://siu.on.ca/en/appeals.php>.

The SIU states in a Jan. 6 press release that the autopsy was conducted on Jan. 4 and police records, including communications recordings, have been received and are being reviewed.

Witness interviews have also been scheduled.

The SIU states that they will work expeditiously to conclude a thorough investigation in which the public can have confidence.

Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler says that funeral services for Ostberg, 21, were held on Jan. 11 in a press release.

"Today our hearts hurt for Jenna's family and friends, her community, and everyone touched in many ways throughout her brief but beautiful life," Fiddler says in the Jan. 11 press release. "Jenna was a vibrant young woman, with hopes and dreams in front of her. I encourage everyone to remember her in the most positive and loving way possible."

"We are all grieving, and that is a necessary process. But people across Nishnawbe Aski Nation and other nations are also angry. There is a rising demand for answers around Jenna's tragic passing and the actions of the Thunder Bay Police Service, and we fully support those calls."

Fiddler says their focus has been, and continues to be, on supporting Jenna's family and helping her community cope with "this terrible loss."

"But this tragedy once again

raises serious questions about the Thunder Bay Police Service and its interactions with First Nations peoples," Fiddler says. "I am gravely concerned over what we are hearing about the circumstances around her death. Like her family, we are anxiously waiting for the results of a coroner's report and investigation by the Special Investigations Unit into the actions of the Thunder Bay Police Service. However, we share the fear that their daughter was the latest victim of inadequate and unjust policing received by First Nations peoples in this city."

Fiddler says they have suffered through too many reports and investigations into the loss of Nishnawbe Aski Nation citizens in Thunder Bay.

"But we must have faith that the truth about Jenna's passing will eventually be established," Fiddler says. "Once we have facts that we can respond to, we will focus on honouring her in the best way possible with the information that is revealed."

Thunder Bay Mayor Ken Boshcoff also issued a statement about Ostberg's death and the SIU's investigation in a Jan. 9 press release.

"We offer our deepest sympathies and heartfelt condolences to the loved ones and those impacted by this tragic death," Boshcoff says. "The Thunder Bay Police Service is co-operating with the Special Investigations Unit as it conducts an investigation. As a result of the SIU's involvement, the City cannot provide any further comment. Once the investigation is over, Chief Darcy Fleury will provide a media brief and address the matter publicly."



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# Community



Kiiwetinoong MPP Sol Mamakwa, pictured at a Nishnawbe Aski Nation event, spoke about how First Nations are in perpetual crisis without time to grieve after two deaths were announced by Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug early in the New Year.

# Tragedy and grieving in Kitch- enuhmaykoosib Inninuwig

**Rick Garrick**  
Wawatay News

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) announced the deaths of two people after an incident near the community, which was investigated by the Ontario Provincial Police.

“On January 1, 2024, just after 3:00 p.m., members of the KI OPP Detachment responded to an incident in the community where one individual was located deceased,” says a media release from the OPP Sioux Lookout Detachment. “OPP members later located a second individual deceased. The investigation has determined that there are no public safety concerns and police are not looking for any suspects.”

The media release states that the investigation by the OPP North West Region Crime Unit, Forensic Identification Services, Regional Support Team, and Major Case Investigation Team is continuing under the direction of the OPP Criminal Investigation Branch, in conjunction with the Ontario Centre of Forensic Sciences. It also states that no further details with respect to the investigation will be released.

KI also announced the deaths of seven other people, Baby Childforever, Matthew Sainnawap, Sophie Cromarty, Debra McKay, Rebecca Saka-keep, Adam McKay and Clayton Nesh, between Dec. 1 and Jan. 1.

“Our community is grieving with the loss of so many of our members in such a short period of time,” says KI Chief Donny Morris in a Jan. 2 press release. “While some of these deaths were expected, many were not. Our community as a whole is shaken by this tremendous loss and our ability to provide services over the holidays has been greatly impacted. We ask that everyone respect the families’ privacy during this difficult time.”

Kiiwetinoong MPP Sol Mamakwa says there is a lack of services in First Nation communities.

“First Nations are put in this place where they are in perpetual crisis and they do not have time to grieve, they do not have time to be able to address the issues they are facing in the loss of their loved ones,” Mamakwa says. “And we see it continue to happen. What you see there right now is the lack of services to be able to address these issues that they are faced with, whether it’s mental health services, whether it’s the opioid crisis that’s happening in these communities.”

Mamakwa says he has reached out to the First Nations that are impacted, the families and the leadership, about what help they can provide.

"In the case of KI, I reached out to the leadership a couple of times," Mamakwa says. "There is just not enough services to address the crisis, whether it's mental health services, clinical services."

Mamakwa says he raised the mental health crisis in the provincial Legislative Assembly a few months ago.

"I was very clear that there is a crisis happening in the north and it's not being addressed," Mamakwa says. "We need to bring in people to be able to try to address it and I think sometimes when we are in these crises, we need to come together and come to a common ground. Sometimes we just need people on the ground to be there, not necessarily counsellors but just to be there to support people, whether it's getting water, whether it's cooking, whether it's driving, we need to be there."

Mamakwa says he was asked to attend the funeral services for the two people who were found deceased on Jan. 1.

“We need to be able to support each other in the north,” Mamakwa says. “During the suicide crisis days in the 1990s, we used to support each other, next door neighbours and neighbouring communities — I think we need to be able to do that.”

"It's All in The Name"

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# Culture



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

The Anakay Meekwewin Passing of Gifts gathering was held this past fall at the Best Western Plus NorWester Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay.

## Elders passing of gifts gathering

Rick Garrick  
Wawatay News

A visit by students was one of the highlights at the Anakay Meekwewin Passing of Gifts gathering this past fall in Thunder Bay. The gathering, held at the Best Western Plus NorWester Hotel and Conference Centre, featured the teachings of a group of Elders, knowledge keepers and language speakers from across northern Ontario.

“It was good to see, I’m glad they made the effort to come out here and it felt really good to see them out there,” says Marten Falls Elder Sam Achneepineskum about the students. “They don’t learn too much in school about their culture, their history. I hope that with the sharing of the stories, they learned there’s a lot more to being Anishinabe than what they learned in the history books.”

Achneepineskum says this was the third Anakay Meekwewin Passing of Gifts gathering, noting that the first gathering was held through an online platform.

“We get a little bit more people each time we do this and hopefully that will continue,” Achneepineskum says. “The intention of this gathering was to get people interested so they could do those things in their own communities and other places.”

Ginoogaming Elder Victor Chapais says he spoke during the gathering about his hope that the effects of residential school are slowly going away.

“I’m second generation that went to residential school and I see hope in my great grandchildren that the effects are not visible as much as it is on myself or my children or my grandchildren,” Chapais says. “Those effects are slowly going away and (they’re) being proud of who they are and being able to be who they are.”

Chapais says they are bringing back the culture as they celebrate ceremonies.

“We’re not looking over our shoulders because someone is telling us it’s wrong,” Chapais says. “We’re celebrating our culture, we’re celebrating our freedom and being who we are, who the Creator meant us to be.”

Chapais says he could see the interest from those in attendance as the Elders spoke during the gathering.

“You could hear a pin drop,” Chapais says. “They’re interested, they want to know and they want to learn about what the Elders have to say.”

Marten Falls’ Bob Baxter says the gathering went very well for him.

“There were some things that were brought forth that gives me that incentive to keep on going with my life as an Anishinabe to try and learn about our lost culture and how to bring back our culture, our way of life,” Baxter says.

Fort William Elder Sheila DeCorte says it was a great opportunity to listen to the Elders during the gathering.

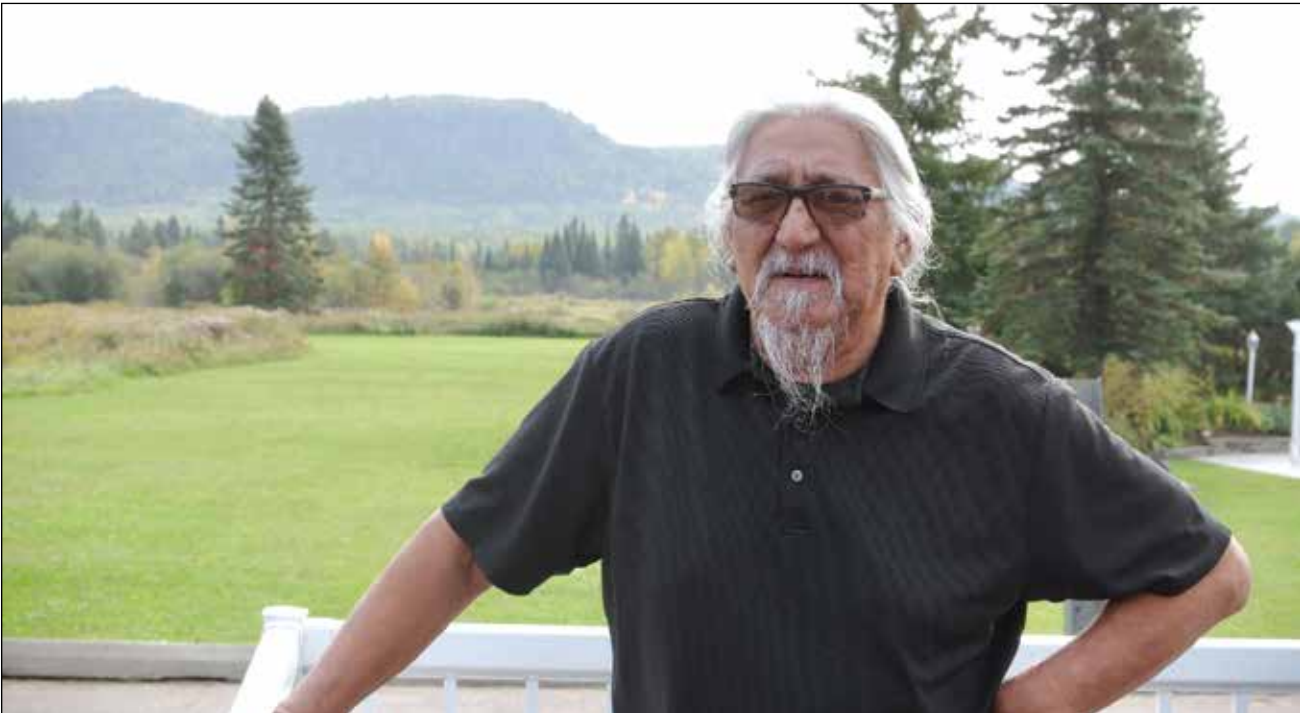
“We had an opportunity to listen to these very knowledgeable Elders/knowledge keepers from different communities,” DeCorte says. “They’re starting to get up there in their age so we’ve got to take this all in while they’re still here.”

Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg’s Beverly Sabourin says it is always inspiring to listen to the Elders.

“I came last year and I really enjoyed just sitting and listening to the Elders talk and speak about their life journey and experiences,” Sabourin says, noting that she brought her mother to the gathering as well. “I find it very soothing, very helpful, it sort of helps one to get grounded, get back to realizing what the Elders are saying — always remember who you are, where you came from, where you’re going, pretty much my grandfather’s teachings as well.”

Moose Cree’s Stephanie Feletto, one of the co-event coordinators at the gathering, says the gathering has grown exponentially since the first year with many guests this year from Alberta, Wiikwemkoong, Ottawa and northeastern Ontario.

“It was a vision and led by Elder Sam Achneepineskum,” Feletto says. “He wanted to provide a space where he could bring Elders to have conversations about teachings and knowledge and invite the community to participate and listen, and all are welcome.”



Rick Garrick/Wawatay News

Marten Falls Elder Sam Achneepineskum led the Anakay Meekwewin Passing of Gifts gathering this past fall.

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# Health

## Matawa Education Centre holds world AIDS day

Rick Garrick  
Wawatay News

Indigenous and LGBTQ2S+ advocates Dr. James Makokis and Anthony Johnson highlighted the importance of supporting youth to pursue their dreams during Matawa Education Centre's World AIDS Day gathering on Dec. 1 in Thunder Bay. Makokis and Johnson were the first two-spirit team on *Amazing Race Canada*.

"Indigenous youth can do anything they want to do if they put their minds to it, they put in the effort and they are supported by adults and mentors and Elders in finding out who they are, connecting them to that, staying grounded in our culture and having access to that, making it easy for them to learn our songs and ceremonies and language and medicines and all of those things," Makokis says. "They want to participate and we have to make it easy for them to participate and come to their level because they are the next generation."

Makokis says there may sometimes be barriers in the way, noting that he failed his first exam in medical school.

"We have to realize that we have to adjust our strategies but that failure is a normal part of life," Makokis says. "It helps us learn and we can always get past that if we have support and a plan to move forward."

Johnson says the key point of his presentation was that a person's dreams are possible regardless of the background they come from.



Dr. James Makokis encouraged youth to pursue their dreams.

"Everyone has a dream that they want to achieve and in order to do that you have to believe in yourself, you have to put the hours in, you have to have a good attitude about it and you have to have the effort, like exerting yourself to achieve that goal," Johnson says. "Sometimes in the process of chasing your dreams, there will be people put in the way who doubt you, who naysay you, who don't believe in you and what you do is you let them go away and find the people who do support you. And most importantly in this process, you have to take care of your health, you have to make good choices, strong healthy choices that support the process of following your dream."

Johnson says many of the youth were surprised to see the energy and passion they had and were inspired to pursue their dreams.

"Multiple (youth) came up to me and said: 'Hey, thank you so much, I feel inspired,'" Johnson says. "When you speak to youth in a way that they relate, it's possible to move the needle so I'm hopeful that many of them will take what we shared today and go off into their life and chase their dreams."

Leola Bouchard-Penagin, public health nurse lead at Matawa Health Co-operative, says she enjoyed Makokis and Johnson's presentation.

"I appreciate them telling their stories and sharing their journey with the youth," Bouchard-Penagin says. "They were really engaging, they were engaging with the youth, they were getting them to participate, so it was really good and we got some good positive feedback from witnessing this presentation and how the students were engaged in it."

Bouchard-Penagin says they



Dr. James Makokis and Anthony Johnson met with a group of Matawa staff.

held the gathering to provide students with information about services available in the community.

"Our public health team does provide health promotion and public health education, so we do the STDIs (sexually transmitted diseases/infections), we do education on HIV, we like to encourage our people for testing and just provide that supportive education and help them navigate the health services," Bouchard-Penagin says. "This is our very first event that we are holding this year so we are pretty happy to have a good turnout and have a lot of support from our community partners today like Elevate (NWO), the Thunder Bay District Health Unit."

Sarah Pugh, a nurse at Elevate NWO, says they provide services, opportunities and programs for people who are living with, affected by or at risk of

HIV, AIDS and Hepatitis C in Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario.

"HIV is a virus that attacks your immune system, your body's built-in defence against disease and illness, resulting in a chronic progressive illness that leaves people vulnerable to other infections," Pugh says. "Anyone can be infected with HIV, you can have HIV without knowing it. You may not look or feel sick for years but you can still pass the virus on to other people."

Pugh says there is no vaccine to prevent HIV and there is no cure for HIV, but there is treatment.

"HIV is not AIDS, AIDS is what happens when the immune system is so weakened by HIV that the body cannot fight off certain infections," Pugh says. "HIV may lead to AIDS, a person with HIV may never develop AIDS and a per-

son who has developed AIDS may recover from it with treatment."

Pugh says anyone can get HIV no matter their age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnic origin.

"HIV can be passed by only these five body fluids: blood, semen, rectal fluid, vaginal fluid and breast milk," Pugh says. "HIV is a fragile virus that cannot live outside the body for more than a few seconds. Most of the time it dies upon exiting the body, the only exception seems to be if it's held in a stable vacuum-sealed environment such as inside a syringe it can survive much longer, up to a week in these conditions."

Pugh says the Thunder Bay District Health Unit declared an HIV outbreak in 2019, which has continued since then.





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Education

Teach for Canada holds enrichment training

Rick Garrick  
Wawatay News

Teach for Canada-Gakinaamaage recently completed another Enrichment Program for teachers who will be teaching in First Nation communities across northern Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan at Lakehead University's Thunder Bay campus. The program featured a variety of sessions including Language Lessons and opportunities for the teachers to meet representatives from their matched community and Teach for Canada alumni who have taught or are teaching in their matched community.

"This is our first year back after doing virtual sessions," says Nikki Martin, growth and partnerships manager at Teach for Canada-Gakinaamaage. "This is our first attempt at a hybrid program delivery so lots of learning curves, but really exciting to see everyone in person. There's a quality of connection you can't get when you're doing these sessions virtually, just to be able to greet people, to do the smudges, open ceremonies with a hugging circle and really just have that time to connect."

Martin says the Trauma-Informed Classrooms and Land-Based Learning sessions were among the highlights during the Teach for Canada-Gaki-

naamaage program. "(We're) just making sure teachers are equipped with good pedagogy, making sure to have a well-rounded understanding of the context that they're going into and how to best support students," Martin says. "We had our Land-Based Learning session highlighting the importance of creativity when you're teaching Indigenous students in the north and finding ways to get out and learn from the land as opposed to just the traditional classroom setting in the west."

Greg Meconse, an Indigenous teacher who has family in Eabametoong and Lac Seul, is looking forward to teaching

in Lac Seul at Obishikokaang Elementary School.

"My family was really happy that I'm going back there and making a connection again with my home community," Meconse says. "This week was good for if you had any questions about how it might work being a teacher in a First Nations community, a lot of trying to explain to the teachers what the community might be like while you're there and some of the differences in culture between the city and the rez. I felt pretty comfortable already but there's just a couple of little missing pieces of the puzzle and I think Teach for Canada really helped me fill in those little

gaps."

Meconse says Patricia Ninge-wance, a Lac Seul citizen who was appointed as a Member of the Order of Canada in December 2022 for her contributions to the vitality of Indigenous languages as an Anishinabemowin teacher, author and publisher, taught Anishinabemowin to the teachers who will be working in communities that speak Anishinabemowin during the Teach for Canada-Gakinaamaage program.

"She supported us in some learning and I think everybody got some basics down, nothing too complex but we definitely got some basics down for Anishinabemowin," Meconse

says. "We just learned how to say hi, I'm a teacher and just the kind of basics, where you are from and such."

Meconse also highlighted the connections he made with other teachers and community representatives during the Teach for Canada-Gakinaamaage program.

"I connected with another teacher going to Lac Seul," Meconse says. "As we kind of get to know each other better and then you see people that are going to the same community as you, so you get more comfortable. We made plans to go fishing already, we're going to go fishing when we meet up at Lac Seul."

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## Commentary

# Mother Earth Needs Us Now



**Xavier  
Kataquapit**

UNDER THE  
NORTHERN SKY

Welcome to 2024. This is one of the warmest starts to winter I can recall in almost five decades. Most of my life I remember growing up with four distinct seasons and winter was always freezing with lots of snow. Winter came in November up north on the James Bay coast and left at the end of April and even stayed at times into May.

If anyone doubts that climate change is a real thing then you should give your head a shake because we have so much proof at this point that it is becoming scary. The world is experiencing flooding, droughts and temperature changes that are turning the world upside down and all of this is affecting everything on earth.

At the start of the warnings from scientists and people like the politician Al Gore there was a big push back from the oil producers and corporations that did not want to deal with reality because it would affect their bottom line. Many people fell for some of this push back propaganda but most people did believe that climate change was real. I have long been one of them and at times I was ridiculed for it.

My parents and many Elders up the coast and in my home community of Attawapiskat have been warning about changes in our climate for many years. They had spent most of their lives on the land and the waters where they were at home.

They knew very well all the signs to look for from the animals, birds, plants and the stars. They could read Mother Earth like a good book and they knew how to listen to her.

My family has been connected to winter road construction and ice roads for many years and in that time we have seen the change in terms of when the road work would start and how long these ice highways could last. A few decades ago the work on the roads would start in late November and early December but lately that has moved to January. It was at one point a reality that these ice roads would last and be in place until mid April at least but recently we now see melting taking place in a big way in March.

Let's face the facts, temperatures are rising world wide, the glaciers and ice sheets are melting and retreating, oceans are warming up, there is less snow being recorded, the levels of the oceans and seas are rising and there are more extreme weather events.

This all translates to situations that are killing thousands of people in storms and floods. It is also being held responsible for the cause of some life

becoming extinct or rare. Entire regions of the world are also experiencing droughts which affect our food supply. At this point things are happening right in our own back yards that are forcing all of us to realize how serious climate change is.

This past summer we experienced some of the hottest days in northern Ontario in history and there were terrible forest fires all across Canada. For the first time in my life I had to deal with taking care in being outdoors because of toxic smoke from so many fires in Northern Ontario and Quebec. That is impossible to deny or argue with.

The problem is that huge corporations, the money people who run this world and all of the oil and resource extractors keep fighting and doing what they can to push back on meaningful efforts to reduce pollution and causes of climate change.

This year's big annual event to address climate change was the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference or commonly known as COP 28. This year it was held in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This event was headed by the president who was appointed by the host state of the UAE, Sultan Al Jaber. That was like putting the fox in charge of the hen house as he runs the UAE state owned oil company.

“...more than 2,400 participants with ties to the big oil, gas and coal companies were on hand to lobby as push back to any big moves to fight climate change.”

As a matter of fact this year more than 2,400 participants with ties to the big oil, gas and coal companies were on hand to lobby as push back to any big moves to fight climate change. How on earth could this happen? That is a good question and it should make us all very concerned about how things are developing and how the very wealthy and big time polluters are controlling our world.

It is our responsibility to be aware of what is happening with climate change in our world and to realize what a drastic situation we are in.

We need to make sure to elect democratic fair minded governments that will represent all of us and not just the wealthy and corporate world. We need to become involved in supporting organizations that are trying to make our world a safer cleaner place for our future generations.

If we don't care about issues as important as climate change we are in fact dooming our future generations. Mother Earth needs us now.

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# In The Spirit Of Those Who Have Gone Before Us



**Xavier  
Kataquapit**

UNDER THE  
NORTHERN SKY

I am so tired of losing people I am only in my late 40s but it seems as though most of the people I grew up with my age and even younger are passing away far too often. A generation older than me including my parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents are gone. The whole landscape of my life has changed in what seems like a very short time.

For some reason this past couple of weeks was very sad and surprising in that myself and my partner realized that several people we knew of and were connected to passed away. Jason Batisse, Chief of Matachewan First Nation passed after an illness.

I am sad to see this very traditional man leave us too soon. He was the son of past Chief and Elder Mario and the late Ann Batisse who myself and my partner have known for many years. I wish his children and the entire family a healing in time for this great loss.

Also recently we lost James Babin of Wahgoshig FN and David Chookomolin, a friend and relative I grew up with in Attawapiskat FN.

Both these individuals were middle aged.

I think I am a little more affected these days by so many passing as I am living and experiencing difficult days in dealing with the serious illness my partner is struggling with.

He is suffering from pulmonary fibrosis which is a scarring of the lungs.

This disease is a progressive condition that is fatal. It makes life difficult due to one's ability to breathe and it is hard to have a normal life. Although he has been to see specialists there is a consensus that no treatment exists for this disease although there are some drugs that might slow the progression.

Mike is my best friend and mentor and through him I was introduced to a life of sobriety, we have travelled to 35 countries together and he has provided me with a learning in journalism.

Mike was doing OK until he was stricken with COVID 12 months ago. This really knocked him down and he has been fighting for many months just to be able to enjoy life and get back to some form of normal.

I have been with him through all of this ordeal and I really got to understand just how difficult it is for doctors and nurses and all health practitioners to deal with trying their best to help someone who is dealt with a fatal disease.

I have come to understand that these professionals have to deal with sick people and sad situations every day and that can not be easy. I think just how terrible it must be dealing with the past few years of COVID and how that made the lives of health professionals even

more challenging. To add to these difficulties on our medical professionals, the government is bending to big corporations and introducing private health care into our province.

We need to remember that our doctors and all our health professionals need our help to push back on these private health care promoters who care only about making money.

One thing I have also found in dealing with losing so many people over the past recent years is that I am realizing more and more how precious life is. I see my partner having to isolate because of his disease and he is slowly seeing life diminish before his eyes.

He reminds me every day how wonderful the world is and how lucky we are to be in it at this moment.

I am noticing how beautiful all the wild flowers are in the fields, how bright and sunny and complex dandelions are and how magical the stars are in the night sky.

This summer we also wit-

“...In losing so many that we love we will take the time to be more kind, more open and more understanding of others.”

nessed one of the most amazing northern lights show ever over a lake with Mike's neice's boy Jack and that was a night to remember.

I know people will continue to leave us and that makes me very sad but at the same time I am understanding more and more that this realization should make us more aware of our own lives and the opportunities we might have to make the world a better place.

Maybe in losing so many that we love we will take the time to be more kind, more open and more understanding of others. Maybe we will become more interested in becoming aware

of those critical things that are threatening our planet and sit up to do something to help out.

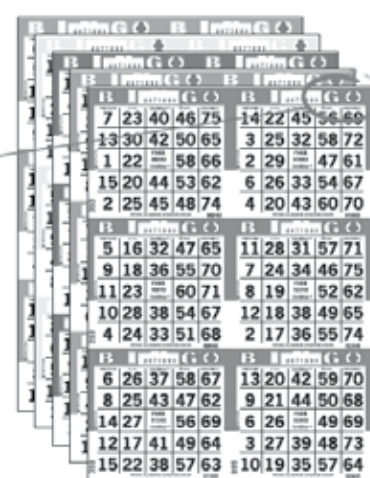
We have proxy wars going on between huge countries who are willing to sacrifice lives so that money can be made on the war machine, we have anti democratic fascist type movements that are trying to oppress our health care workers, privatize our health care and education and turn back protections on the environment and conservation.

Perhaps we will become brave and aware enough to stand up against these movements.

All of those loved ones we are losing have fought in one way or the other to help and make our world as good as it is today and we owe it to them keep up the good fight. We need to stand with Mother Earth and for fairness and democracy in the spirit of those who have passed on.

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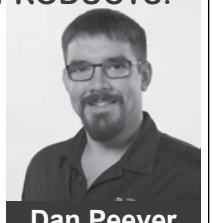


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