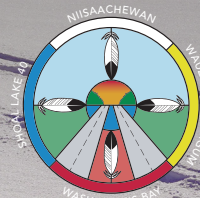


NIIWIN WENDAANIMOK NEWSLETTER



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Recap

In October 2018, a **Unity Agreement** was signed between the four Anishinaabe Nations of Wauzhushk Onigum, Washagamis Bay, Shoal Lake 40, and Niisaachewan (collectively the “Niiwin Wendaanimok Partnership”) to discuss shared interests on the twinning of the TransCanada Highway through their territories. This project is proposed to occur over three phases between the Manitoba border and Kenora. In February 2020, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** with the Anishinaabe governments committing

to a respectful, collaborative working relationship and engagement process under **Manito Aki Inakonigaawin (MAI)**. One of the outcomes of Phase 1 was the Partnership developing their own **Harmonized Impact Assessment (HIA)**, which brings together western science and Anishinaabe knowledge to understand the impacts of the project in a holistic and comprehensive way. Today, the Partnership is on a similar journey for Phase 2 of the project. To read the Phase 1 HIA or find more information, please visit: niiwinwendaanimok.com



Niiwin Wendaanimok – Annual General Meeting

On Wednesday, December 3, 2025, Niiwin Wendaanimok held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Niisaachewan. In attendance were the Task Force members, community members, along with the Chiefs, or their designated Council representatives.

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Niiwin Wendaanimok – Annual General Meeting

The AGM was opened in protocol with songs from a drum, in accordance with the Manito Aki Inakonigaawin. During the AGM, each department within Niiwin Wendaanimok presented a detailed update from the past year. This included updates from the Niiwin Wendaanimok Training program, including progress updates on the many training initiatives undertaken in the past year, and future plans for the program. This training update included an overview of specific program offerings, and training outcomes, as well as outlined next steps in pursuit of the funding for the construction of the Niiwin Wendaanimok Training Centre.

Next on the agenda was an update on the Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag, specifically, an update on the implementation of Year 1 of the Strategic Plan by the Lead Shkabewis and the Implementation Protocol Director. This included updates on the Year 1 Priorities, such as Governance Priorities, Financial Priorities, Priorities in the Role of the Shkabewisag, and Priorities for Skills & Training. There was then an accounting/financial update by the Partnership, which included a high-level overview of the latest financial audit by MNP.

Process Coordinator Natalie Daniels then delivered a thorough update on matters related to process, as the Niiwin Wendaanimok partnership continues to lead high-level strategic planning, political coordination, and relationship-building between First Nations, government, and industry partners. Niiwin Wendaanimok construction then shared updates on projects completed in the past year, and projects upcoming for the company; including rock crushing contracts in the territory. The Niiwin Wendaanimok Partnership will continue to move forward in its groundbreaking work across these many fronts, and will reconvene for the next AGM in July of 2026. In the meantime, see these bi-monthly newsletters for regular updates on Partnership initiatives and activities.



Manito Aki Inakonigaawin – Mino Bimaadiziwin

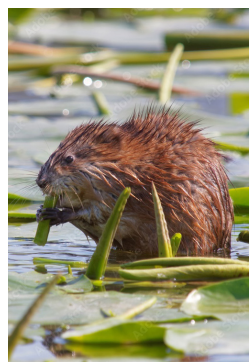
Within the *Manito Aki Inakonigaawin* a foundational Anishinaabe law and a core Treaty #3 right is reflected as Mino Bimaadiziwin, meaning living life in a good way. This principle has been passed down by Anishinaabe ancestors and spirits, and reflects the Anishinaabe understanding of living in harmony and in balance with all of creation.

Minw means “good”, or “well” and the term *bimaadizi* means “to live”. Treaty #3 affirms several rights connected to living life in a good way, including:

- Anishinaabe right to access and harvest for spiritual, cultural, livelihood, and economic purposes,
- Right to take care of the land and waters according to Anishinaabe teachings protected by Treaty #3
- Right to unrestricted access to the lands and waters to pursue traditional or other activities
- Right to sustain a livelihood from the land

Together, these rights uphold the ongoing relationship between Anishinaabe people and their territories and affirm that Mino Bimaadiziwin is not only a teaching, but a living Treaty responsibility.

Traditional Teaching – Wauzhushk (Muskrat, *Ondatra zibethicus*)



The Anishinaabe Aki Kakendamowin (“AAK”) provides a valuable opportunity to safeguard traditional knowledge for future generations. With education as a key principle of the MAI, these newsletters include traditional teachings shared by community members during the AAK. This month, we would like to share some teachings on Wauzhushk (Muskrat).

To the Anishinaabeg, wauzhushkwag (muskrats) were given the power of endurance, which they remain a symbol of today. With Original Man, a wauzhushk (muskrat) played a particularly important role in the creation of Aki (Earth). After the Great Flood, a wauzhushk (muskrat) swam to the bottom of the waters and retrieved a piece of earth for Original Man to create a new land with. Today, wauzhushkwag (muskrats) continue to make their nests in the water to honour their history.

Wauzhushkwag (muskrats) are a territorial species, especially during the breeding season. Fights between wauzhushkwag (muskrats) often break out within populations because of multiple breeding partners. Noozhezhashkoog (female muskrats) and naabezhashkoog (male muskrats) breed between October and June and will have up to three litters per year, with each litter consisting of three to seven kits.

Wauzhushk (muskrat) was one of many species that were trapped and was frequently mentioned in the context of “Hunting”, along with other species such as “Deer”, “Beaver”, and “Moose”. Hunting and trapping locations often overlapped, making changes to the landscape even more damaging to the Anishinaabe way of life. For many, wauzhushkwag (muskrats) served as an educational tool within families, emphasizing the important role the species played in connecting families and with the land. Parents and grandparents would often teach children how to trap, skin, and prepare wauzhushkwag (muskrats).

Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag – Program Update

In November, the Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag have continued their regular land-based monitoring efforts, carrying forward the vision of the program guided by the principles of the Manito Aki Inakonigaawin. Their work remains focused on monitoring the lands and soils within the area of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Highway 17 Twinning Project. Specifically, they have been tracking wildlife using trail cameras, observing changes on the land with boots on the ground, and conducting surveys for plants of importance at key sites identified through the Anishinaabe Aki Kakendamowin (AAK). In addition to their weekly monitoring activities, the Shkabewisag have been working on relocating the trail cameras to support ongoing site monitoring, and hope to expand these efforts with more cameras in 2026.

In November, Shkabewisag supported the coordination of Ceremonial Protocol, and preliminary site inspections in Feist Lake and Beaver Lake prior to NWP crushing contracts. These preliminary site inspections involved walking the sites, and documenting site conditions related to the lands, soils, skies and waters. They will return to these sites once crushing operations have concluded as part of follow-up site visits.



On November 14, 2025, Shkabewisag supported the Ceremony to Initiate the Niiwin Wendaanimok Traditional Land Relations Study for the MB Twinning Project, under the guidance of the Implementation Protocol Director George Kakeway. In December, as part of the same project, the Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag have been supporting the Community Workshops in each of the Niiwin Communities. The Shkabewisag have been building skills in map-based facilitation in these workshops, and have been supporting the process of documenting the Anishinaabe Aki Kakendamowin (“AAK”). During these sessions, they have also been supporting the work by taking photographs, recording notes, and supporting session logistics, including set-up and takedown.

In accordance with Governance protocols of the program, the Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag continue to share regular program updates, and seek direction on program next steps from the Knowledge Keepers Council. They will once again be meeting with the council in January 2026.

Share Your Wildlife Sightings with the Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag

As part of their ongoing monitoring efforts, the Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag are tracking locations along Highway 17, between Kenora and the Manitoba/Ontario border, where wildlife may be crossing frequently. This information helps inform future mitigation strategies as part of the Harmonized Impact Assessment, and supports the safety of both animals and people travelling through the highway corridor.

If you see wildlife along Highway 17 between the Manitoba/Ontario border and Kenora, please report your sighting to the Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag by emailing: dcherry@niiwinwendaanimok.com.

Community members are asked to share wildlife sightings only when it is safe to do so. Please do not stop along the highway, approach wildlife, or place yourself at risk to gather information. Sightings can be shared based on what you observe while travelling, and can be shared via email once you have reached your destination.

Miigwetch for your continued care, awareness, and respect for the land and all living beings.

Traditional Land Relations Study – MB Twinning Project

Back in August 2025, the Niiwin Wendaanimok Partnership and the Government of Manitoba signed an MOU in sacred ceremony in accordance with the MAI, honouring a shared commitment to a respectful, collaborative working relationship between governments, in respect of Anishinaabe laws.

On Friday, November 14, 2025, the Niiwin Wendaanimok Partnership held an Opening Ceremony at the Manitouabee Site (Bannock Point Petroforms) in the Whiteshell Provincial Park, Manitoba, to initiate the Traditional Land Relations Study for the Manitoba Twinning Project. The Traditional Land Relations Study will be a community-led study to understand the Anishinaabe relations with the lands, soils, skies and waters within the project area, within Treaty #3, and will be guided by the principles of the Manito Aki Inakonigaawin. The Knowledge Keepers Council from the four communities, the Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag, Drum, and Task Force Members, along with members of the MTI project team were in attendance at the ceremony to initiate this work in a good way.

As part of this Traditional Land Relations Study, Niiwin Wendaanimok conducted four community workshops, to continue to document the Anishinaabe Aki Kakendamowin (AAK). These workshops were held in Washagamis Bay, Shoal Lake 40, Niisachewan, and Waushushk Onigum through the month of December. Community members shared stories, experiences, and knowledge about the lands, soils, skies, waters, and their relationships to and between these components. The workshops were centered around mapping, where community members collaborated and shared stories on the maps. Furthering this work, In January of 2026, the Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag will undertake a site reconnaissance expedition, to document key sites identified within the AAK, and to seek answers to key questions from the communities with boots on the ground. The hard work by the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in each of the partner communities will be carried forward by the Partnership in this work as part of the conceptual design phase of the project.



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