

JULY - AUGUST 2026

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 (NWP) – to discuss shared interests in 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 (MTO) 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 embarking on a similar journey concerning Phase 2 of the project. To read the Phase 1 HIA or find more information, please visit: niiwinwendaanimok.com

Niiwin Wendaanimok in Action

Par 3 Charity Challenge

July brought some clear skies and fun times on the golf course as NWP joined the Lake of the Woods District Hospital Foundation's Par 3 Charity Challenge. Our tournament crew showed off their best swings on the course. It was wonderful connecting with the community, sharing laughter, and hosting some friendly cornhole matchups for extra prizes.

A huge miigwetch to every team that stopped by to say hello, sign up for our newsletter, and enter the draw for our DeWalt prize pack! Huge appreciation goes out to the Foundation organizers and local supporters who made this celebration of community and partnership and gave such a memorable highlight of our summer!

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Niiwin Wendaanimok in Action



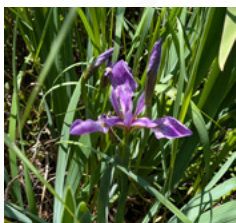
Funding Announcement: Ontario Skills Development Fund

The Ontario government has announced nearly \$8 million in funding through the sixth round of the Skills Development Fund Training Stream, aimed at driving economic growth and supporting workers' training.

This province-wide investment will help more than 7,300 people across Northern Ontario gain access to specialized training for high-demand careers in critical sectors like mining and the skilled trades.

Niiwin Wendaanimok is proud to be selected as a recipient of SDF funding, which will support the training of 100 Indigenous participants from four Treaty #3 communities. Through this initiative, trainees will gain technical skills focused on the Highway 17 construction project, paired with essential guidance in financial literacy, leadership development, and job readiness to help build long-term career success.

Manito Aki Inakonigaawin



Our Teachings, Our Protocol

Each newsletter, we highlight the teachings of Manito Aki Inakonigaawin. For this newsletter, we would like to focus once more on the Visioning Phase of the MAI. The Visioning Phase is an important part of our internal engagement process.

It allows us to have a clear vision of where we are going, and how our land is being used.

As Anishinaabe People we know very clearly who we are, and why we take on new major initiatives. Our Anishinaabe People are experts in environmental scanning and seek a clear vision before any new undertakings. We make sacred offerings. We fast. We meditate. We conduct extensive ceremonies. We prepare with the greatest care and are guided by the Seven Laws of Creation. We do this together. We carefully consider our mission, our vision, and are guided by our values and principles.

A clear vision is critical to a clear position at the negotiation table. In times of critical challenges or conflict, we can act quickly and decisively, because we have a clear knowledge of our purpose and our priorities. Our Visioning Phase is key to informing us what we do. As part of the Twinning of the Highway process, we follow these key principles on visioning going forward.

- Elder George Kakeway, Protocol Advisor

Traditional Teaching – Namewag (Sturgeon)



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 process. In this issue, we would like to focus on Namewag (lake sturgeon).

Found across Mikinaak Minis (Turtle Island), Namewag's Canadian range stretch from Alberta to the west, St. Lawrence River estuary to the east, the Hudson Bay to the north, and the boundary waters to the south. They inhabit freshwater lakes and rivers with soft bottoms of mud, gravel, or sand, devoid of aquatic vegetation at a depth of 5 to 20 m. Their habitat selection shifts naturally based on food availability, spawning conditions and environmental factors. They are distinct in that they have ancestral ties to related species dating back 200 million years and are a very long-lived species, with the oldest recorded found to be 155 years old.

The Anishinaabe relationship with Namewag holistically integrates cultural, spiritual, social, economic, and health dimensions. Namewag play a role in Anishinaabe tradition through the odoidaymiwan (the clan system). Odoidaymiwan was developed by Kizhe Manitou (the Creator) to give strength and order to Aki's (Earth's) people and help them govern themselves. Each animal was given wisdom in the form of a character trait which would instruct and benefit the Anishinaabeg in the future and Namewag represented depth and strength. They have been depicted through pictographs on rocks at sacred sites around Lake of the Woods.

Anishinaabe fisheries sustainably managed Namewag for **over 2,000 years as a vital food source**. Transitional mixed fisheries between 1750 and 1890 served to sustain the Anishinaabeg as a food source in addition to serving as an object of trade. Today, overfishing, dams, habitat fragmentation, and declining water quality have severely depleted stocks, causing long-term impacts from which some populations have yet to recover.

Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag – Program Update



The Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag program continued a period of renewal and growth in field capacity through July and August 2026. Training remains ongoing across the team and following a further round of interviews at the end of July, two new Shkabewisag have been hired and have started in their positions at the beginning of August 2026. The program is also looking to recruit a dedicated Director of Operations to further establish itself as an environmental monitor in the territory.

To ensure all field activities remain deeply rooted in community governance, the Shkabewisag are preparing for an upcoming meeting with the Elders Council on September 4, 2026, following up on direct input from the July 22 Knowledge Keepers Council session.

The Shkabewisag provided a comprehensive update on active programs and projects, and Council members offered direction on the Monitoring the Lands and Skies. Following that direction, Shkabewisag undertook training in the monitoring of the Skies in July, the Shkabewisag successfully deployed two Autonomous Recording Units (ARUs) in the areas identified, programmed to record bird calls as well as the calls of amphibians, harmonizing the knowledge of the communities with modern science-based technology. Upon retrieval of data from the ARU's, Shkabewisag will learn to use an analysis software to identify what has been recorded. Building on their established foundation in the monitoring of lands, soils, and waters, the Shkabewisag are also advancing another round of water quality monitoring through the summer of 2026, targeting areas of importance near the highway twinning corridor.

The program continues to work toward long-term operational sustainability. The Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) First Nations Guardians funding application for the 2026–27 and 2027–28 fiscal years has now been drafted and will be submitted ahead of the August 21, 2026, deadline. Backed by stable provincial funding and expanding revenue streams, the program remains on solid footing as it advances toward the long-term independence and organizational growth set out in its strategic plan. Some photos of what they have observed in this work can be seen in this newsletter!

Team Member Spotlight: Diane-Lee McLeod

We are excited to introduce our new **Lead Guardian** of the Niiwin Wendaanimok Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag Team: **Diane-Lee McLeod**.



Boozhoo, my name is Diane-Lee McLeod, and my spirit name is Megwunekwe - Featherwoman. I am an Anishinaabekwe from Animakee Wa Zhing #37 First Nation in Treaty 3 Territory and a member of the Makwa Doodem – Bear Clan.

I recently completed a Master of Arts in Expressive Arts Coaching and Consulting, and I bring experience in community and land-based work, supporting youth and families, workshop facilitation,

documentation, map reading, GPS and field safety. I also previously worked as an S-200 Crew Boss Firefighter and S-100 Firefighter.

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to serve as an Anishinaabe Aki Shkabewisag with the Niiwin Wendaanimok Partnership. I look forward to learning from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, youth, community members and the team as we work together to monitor and protect the lands, waters, plants, animals and culturally important places within the territory. I am naturally curious about new technologies, and I am excited to learn how tools like GPS, digital mapping, trail cameras and drone operations can support land monitoring and help youth and communities strengthen their relationships with Aki. Above all, I am honoured to contribute to work guided by Manito Aki Inakonigaawin for our communities and generations to come.

In The News: Niiwin Wendaanimok Training Updates

The NWP Training Program continues to serve as a core pillar for long-term capacity building and economic participation in the territory.

The program recently celebrated major milestones, including the completion of the 8-week Modular Construction Training in July 2026, where paid trainees earned \$18 per hour while constructing a single-storey modular home using Structural Insulated Panels, from structural assembly through to interior finishes. Additionally, the Introduction to Trades course wrapped up after bridging classroom learning with hands-on site visits to regional partners including Devlin Timber, Pioneer Construction, Neniska Repair, and Lunam's Quarry.

Building on this momentum, the Youth Carpentry Summer Program launched on July 27, 2026, and runs through August 28, 2026. Following an introduction and orientation session at our new Training Office in the Bannister Centre in July, we brought together a full cohort of motivated area youth who have been diving into hands-on learning. Trainees are paid \$18 per hour to build picnic tables and floating docks while acquiring industry safety certifications, ensuring they walk away equipped with solid, practical carpentry skills for the future.



Looking at ongoing and upcoming initiatives, Round 1 of the Heavy-Duty Equipment Operator (Surface Miner) training launched on July 6, 2026, and continues through August 28, 2026, equipping students with Surface Miner Common Core Certification, heavy machinery operation experience, and safety credentials, with Round 2 running from September 7 to October 30, 2026. The team is also finalizing dates for Construction Craft Training and Carpentry Pre-Apprenticeship courses and is in discussion with New Age Metals regarding further training and employment opportunities.

While expanding immediate course offerings remains a key focus, securing a permanent, dedicated Niiwin Wendaanimok Training Centre continues to be a top long-term priority for the Task Force.

If you have any training-related questions, please reach out at training@niiwinwendaanimok.com

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