

# Ganawenjigejik Niibi Bemaadiziwin

“Caretaker, Water, Life”

**Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation**

**Department of Consultation and Accommodation**



## Water Quality: An Aboriginal Knowledge Perspective

Volume 2 Issue 2

March 1, 2018

Deborah McGregor and Steve Whitaker in a paper, *Water Quality in the Province of Ontario: An Aboriginal Perspective, prepared for the Chiefs of Ontario in 2001*, interviewed a number of Indigenous Knowledge Holders in order to gain an appreciation of the role of water in the lives of First Nations people. Below were some of their findings excerpted from their report:

“Water is, and always has been, viewed as precious by indigenous people. Concern for water is not new in our communities. It hasn’t just come about because of the pollution we face today. Water has always been, and continues to be recognized as a fundamental life-giving force.”

“Water in our traditions has cleansing and purifying powers. It is the giver of life with which babies are born. It is imperative in

our traditions to keep the water clean so it can continue to fulfil its purpose. Imperative also is the paying of respect to water. This is frequently done by offering tobacco to the water. Such intimate and spiritual ties to water and the rest of the environment are reflected in our languages.”

“In addition to people, water supports the lives of other beings or aspects of Creation that are important to the whole web of life. Again indigenous people benefit from this life-giving support. For example, there medicines under and around the water. Water is the basis of life; we cannot live without it. We have a responsibility to look after it.”

(to read the complete report see: <http://www.abpages.ca/sites/default/files/files/TEKwaterCOOpaperWORD.pdf> )

It takes about 45.42494 Liters of water per day to sustain a person (this figure takes into account all uses for water, like drinking, sanitation and food production).



## Waterfront Toronto Meeting

On Friday December 21, 2017, the MNCFN Treaty and Aboriginal Rights Committee (TARC) and the Niibi Bemadiziwin Committee met with representatives of Waterfront Toronto in Brantford to discuss plans regarding the revitalization of Toronto's Waterfront.

Waterfront Toronto is the organization created by the Federal government, Province of Ontario, and the City of Toronto tasked with revitalizing the Toronto waterfront by "creating extraordinary new places in which to live, work, learn, and play." It is expected that the project will result in the construction of 40000 new residences and the equivalent number of new jobs. It is further expected that the project will include some 90 parks and public spaces and will improve and protect the natural environment along the waterfront. The project is to be completed in an environmen-

tally sustainable manner that will bring economic, social, and environment benefits to the city of Toronto. It is estimated the project will take 25 years to complete at a cost of \$5 billion in public funds with an additional \$7 billion in private investment.

In light of the MNCFN Aboriginal title claim to all waters within its traditional lands, the TARC Committee met with Waterfront Toronto to examine the project, its ramifications for the First Nation, and practical opportunities for reconciliation. Waterfront Toronto CEO, Will Fleissig presented an overview of the Waterfront projects and strategic objectives. The Chief Project Officer of the revitalization project, David Kusturin, reviewed the Port Lands Flood Protection portion of the project. The MNCFN delegation provided an overview of MNCFN history as well as concerns regarding the project's potential to

impact its waters and the environment in general. Also presented was the newly adopted strategic plan of the First Nation and how the MNCFN is currently exploring with the federal government how it will exercise its rights, obligations and responsibilities for governance within its Treaty Lands and Territory.

A question and answer session was held in which concrete on-the-ground opportunities for reconciliation were explored. Although largely an introductory meeting, the MNCFN and Waterfront Toronto agreed to meet early in 2018 to further explore their relationship and how both parties might be of mutual benefit to each other. MNCFN Chief Stacey LaForme saw opportunities to being awareness of the idea of reconciliation through Waterfront Toronto's mandate.



Agriculture accounts for 70% of global freshwater withdrawals (up to 90% in some fast-growing economies).

## Aboriginal Title Claim to Water

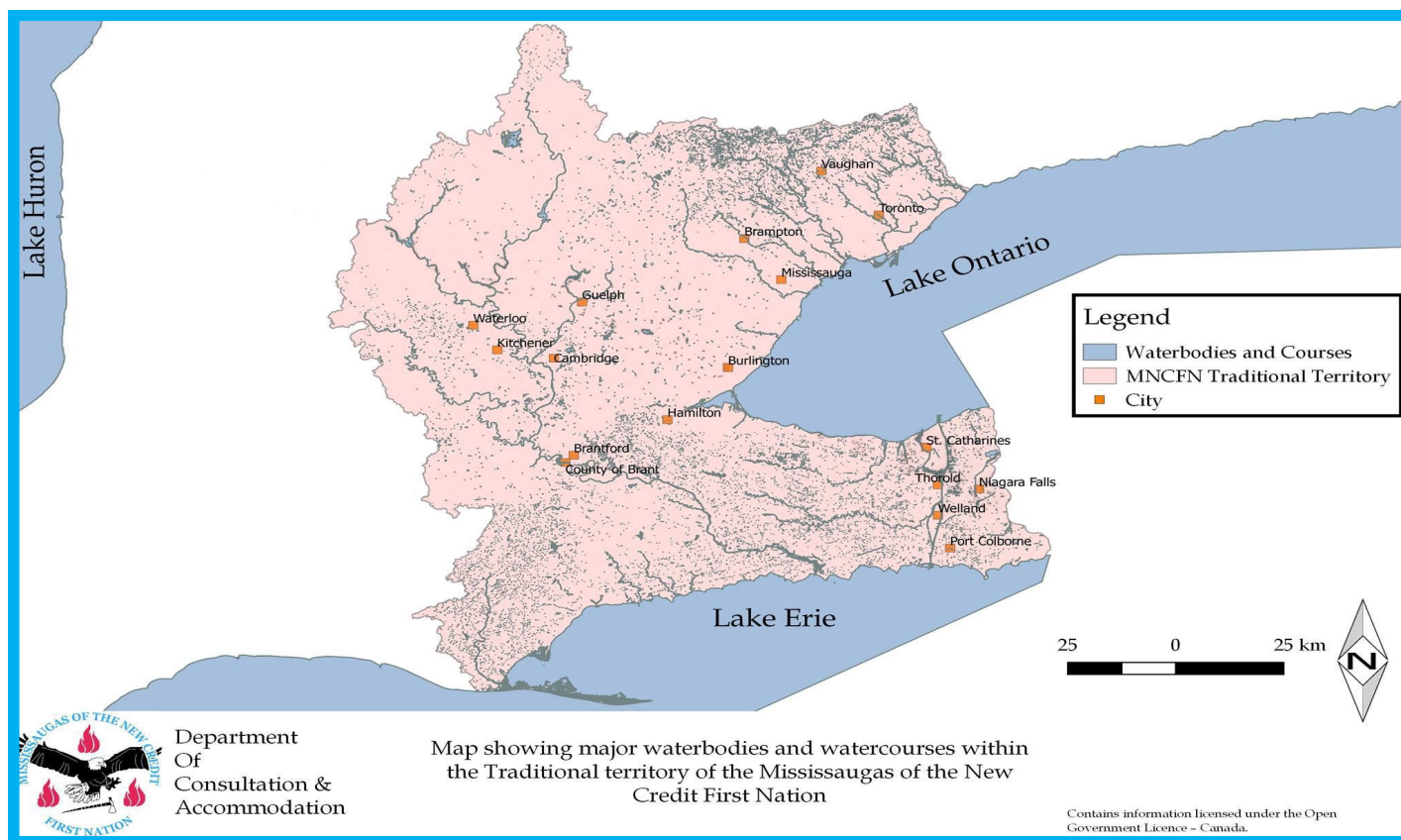
When the ancestors of the Mississaugas of the Credit arrived in Southern Ontario in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century they occupied, controlled, and exercised stewardship over some 3.9 million acres of territory. The arrival of loyalists and other immigrants to Upper Canada in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries placed pressure on the British Crown to acquire land for their settlement. Recognizing that the much needed lands were possessed by the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Crown, between 1781 and 1820, entered a series of treaties with MNCFN ancestors that opened up much of their territory to settlers.

Today the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit are among the most heavily industrialized and densely populated regions in Canada and include major cities such as Toronto, Hamilton, St. Catharines, and Kitchener-Waterloo. Within those lands apart from Treaty No. 23 in 1820, no waters within the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit were ceded to the Crown. Petitions to the Crown, and other documents written by the Mississaugas in the late 1820s, categorically state that they had reserved to themselves all

their fishing grounds in their treaties. In fact, Crown agents repeatedly assured the Mississaugas that the Crown “did not want their water”.

As neither the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, nor their ancestors, have lawfully surrendered the waters within their territory, the MNCFN asserts that it has unextinguished aboriginal title to all water, beds of water, and floodplains contained therein. An Aboriginal Title Claim by the MNCFN was submitted to the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario on September 21, 2016. The claim is currently under legal review by both governments and the MNCFN looks forward to negotiating a settlement with Canada and Ontario that could take the form of a modern-day treaty.

The Mississaugas of the Credit remained committed, as they have been for generations, to utilizing, protecting and treating the waters in a holistic way that promotes continued sustainability.



## Renee LeRoux-Goretsky Research Up-Date

Visitors to the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Mississaugas of the Credit Historical Gathering would have noticed University of Guelph Ph. D student, Renee Le Roux- Goretsky manning an information table for the Ganawenjigejik Niibi Bemadiziwin Committee. Renee and other Committee members were on hand to explain the MNCFN water claim to people attending the conference.

The last few months have been busy ones for Renee as she has thrown herself into her research activities. Renee's research is focused on how First Nations and their rights can be incorporated into water governance in Canada. The information gathered by Renee will inform discussions surrounding the MNCFN Title Claim to Water and will assist in the development of a water code through which proposed projects in our Treaty Lands and Traditional Territory will be examined. With the help of the Water Committee, Renee has conducted

one-on-one interviews with a number of MNCFN members and has also met the men's group, women's group, and Chief and Council. In the near future, she hopes to meet with the LSK school children, MNCFN staff, and community elders.

Renee's interviews and group meetings seek to answer five main questions:

How important is water to you and why?

What does the Water claim mean to you?

What does ownership of water within your Treaty Lands and Territory mean to you?

What do you want to see in a Water Framework?

How are (can) your water values and rights (be) centrally included in water decision making processes?

Later on this year, Renee and the Water Committee will distribute a survey to MNCFN membership that will cover the same five questions.

### Water Committee :

**Margaret Sault**

*Dir. Lands, Research & Membership*

**Cathie Jamieson**

*Band Council*

**Fawn Sault**

*Consultation Manager-DOCA*

**Caron Smith**

*Environmental & Regulatory Advisor*

**Kim Fullerton**

*Legal Counsel*

**Darin P. Wybenga**

*Committee Chair*

Help our little fish friend make it thru the maze to the clean water.

