

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **MATAWA FIRST NATIONS MANAGEMENT WELCOME INDIGENOUS SERVICES CANADA INVESTMENTS ON CONTINUATION OF ANIMAL SERVICES PILOT-PROJECT**

**THUNDER BAY, ON:** Matawa First Nations Management (MFNM) welcomed investments announced today by The Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) to extend the Matawa Animal Services Pilot-Project from two years to four years to improve animal wellness, provide education, control animal populations, and create healthier, safer communities for both people and animals.

Unlike municipalities across Canada, First Nations do not have animal services in their communities nor are they in the immediate vicinity of a veterinary hospital (the closest is +300 kms). The lack of services has resulted in poor animal health and dog overpopulation which negatively impacts community public health through dog bites, pack aggression, dog mauling deaths, and increased potential for zoonotic disease transmission.

The investments made are unprecedented for the region and, for the first time, acknowledges the public health connection between people and pets in First Nations. It also acknowledges that Indigenous Peoples need to be part of the solution and that they need the resources to drive the plans. Additionally, they are in-line with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action 18 and 22 calling for recognizing the value of Indigenous healing practices and to use them where requested. In 2019 the Canadian government began [funding sled dog revitalization](#) for the Inuit and apologized for the colonial history of culling sled dogs to dismantle their culture, language and mobility.

With the launch of the [Matawa Animal Services Pilot-Project](#) on February 5, 2024—MFNM has been able to make progress in relation to gaps and inequities faced by First Nations when it comes to accessing veterinary services, supplies and resources. These transformative achievements have not been seen in the region before. The pilot-project played a role in offering spay/neuter animal wellness clinics to First Nations in Matawa who have not seen them, on average, for 8-10 years. It has also worked with the First Nations in Matawa on animal population surveys and general education/awareness of animal population management and has been able to participate in policy and curriculum discussions with both government and universities along with build strong partnerships with the Matawa member First Nations, other animal-related organizations, charities and groups.

Currently, as part of the pilot-project's sustainability plan, the Matawa Chiefs Council are developing a business plan to potentially continue and expand the project to serve other First Nations in northern Ontario who lack access to veterinary services, animal supplies and resources.

## QUOTES

“Matawa First Nations Management is proud to be a trailblazer in Canada on the long-ignored issue of connecting the health of animals—to the health of the people in First Nations. Access to animal services is critical in ensuring our communities are safe places. Also, our relationship to dogs has been disrupted by colonization and we need to fix that in a sustainable way. We are grateful for the support and responsibility taken by the federal government and look forward to the same with the provincial government.”

— David Paul Achneepineskum, CEO of Matawa First Nations Management

“For generations colonialism has disrupted the deep relationship Indigenous People have with their dogs. This is changing. The Animal Guardians program enhances education on animal wellness, fostering safer and healthier environments for everyone. Heartfelt congratulations to Matawa First Nations Management and all their partners for the successful launch of their pilot project to advance animal wellness in communities.”

—The Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services Canada

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