

MATAWA MESSENGER

ᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ



SPRING 2025
Vol. 13 No. 1

Anishinaabe Bimosewin: **Matawa Education's 2025 Conference**

Matawa Waka Tere
Indigenous Language
Program's uncertain
future

**Matawa Animal
Wellness Services**
responds to Webequie
parvovirus outbreak

Matawa
FIRST NATIONS
new Chief
Executive
Officer



Wildlife in the
Matawa Homelands



CONTENTS

- 5 Matawa members receive Coronation Medal**
David Paul Achneepineskum, Nora Atlookan and Roberta Wesley are recipients
- 6 Ginoogaming's Elders and youth conference**
Building community
- 7 Creating a positive learning environment**
Classroom management with Rita Mannella
- 8 Wildlife in the homelands**
A glimpse into the boreal forest
- 10 Matawa First Nation Management's new CEO**
Dr. Sharon L. Nate replaces David Paul Achneepineskum
- 12 Matawa Waka Tere program's uncertain future**
The Indigenous language program's funding set to run out in June
- 14 Preventing parvovirus in Webequie**
Matawa Animal Wellness Services' rapid response
- 17 Ring of Fire ceremony**
Honouring a milestone in the regional assessment process
- 18 Working together to adapt to climate change**
Four Rivers' partnership with Laurentian University
- 19 Increasing access to veterinary care**
Matawa Chiefs resolution will help dogs on reserve
- 20 Creating cultural support for students**
Agreement with Lakehead to develop culturally supportive services
- 21 Matawa's Membership Services**
Plus, meet Matawa's new Membership Clerk
- 22 Matawa's Education Conference**
Walking the Indigenous path
- 26 Matawa Health Co-operative promoting wellness**
With it's Health Promotion and Cultural Land-Based teams
- 28 Bigfoot: A short story**
By Eabametoong student Kenley Meeseetawageesic
- 30 New Matawa staff**
Meet Matawa's latest hires

Questions or comments?
Email us at comms@matawa.on.ca



233 S. Court Street
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 2X9

Telephone: 807-344-4575 | Fax: 807-344-2977 | Toll Free: 1-800-463-2249

© 2025 Matawa First Nations Management. All rights reserved.



Indigenous Services Minister Patty Hajdu presents Nora Atlookan (left) and David Paul Achneepineskum (right) with coronation medals. (Credit: Vivian Ann Ledger)

Matawa members receive King Charles III Coronation Medal at award ceremony

David Paul Achneepineskum, Nora Atlookan and Roberta Wesley recognized for their contributions to Indigenous Peoples, preservation of Indigenous language and culture, and restorative justice

By: Charnel Anderson

Former Matawa First Nations Management Chief Executive Officer David Paul Achneepineskum and Aroland First Nation Elder Nora Atlookan received the King Charles III Coronation Award, presented by Indigenous Services Canada Minister Patty Hajdu at a ceremony at Lakehead University on March 8, 2025. Constance Lake Anishnawbe Quek Roberta Wesley, a Community Legal Worker with Nishnawbe Aski Nation Legal Services, also received the medal at a later ceremony on March 27, 2025.

David Paul, who has worked in a variety of management and executive positions for Matawa, Constance Lake and Rainy River First Nations, as well as Chiefs of Ontario and Nishnawbe Aski Nation, was recognized for his 50 years

of service to Indigenous Peoples.

“Over that past five decades, David Paul has been an example of how a culturally-based approach to developing organizational leadership and business acumen can thrive and be of benefit. He is very deserving of this Coronation Medal,” said Matawa’s board of directors president Rosemary Moonias.

Nora, an Elder and language speaker who graduated from Lakehead University’s Native Language Teaching Certification Program in 1988, has dedicated herself to preserving and passing on Indigenous culture through teaching and ceremony for more than 40 years. Nora has had an enduring influence on generations of Indigenous youth through her role at Johnny Therriault School in Aroland First

Nation, where she’s worked for over 15 years sharing Anishnawbe knowledge and cultural traditions.

“We commend Nora for her devotion to the preservation of Indigenous knowledge and tradition, and for the many years she has spent empowering Indigenous youth with this gift. She’s a good representative for Aroland First Nation,” said David Paul. “On behalf of everyone at Matawa First Nations Management, I would like to say congratulations, Nora. You deserve it.”

The medal commemorates the coronation of His Majesty King Charles III as King of Canada and honours those who have made a significant contribution to Canada.



Walking Bear performed the opening song at Ginoogaming First Nation's youth and elders gathering. (Credit: Ethan Bell)

Reuniting our roots: Ginoogaming First Nation's Youth and Elders Conference

The conference, held April 8 to 10, brought together generations of Ginoogaming First Nation members to share knowledge, develop skills, and build community.

In early April, dozens of Ginoogaming First Nation members gathered for a Youth and Elders Conference at the Norwester Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay.

The three-day gathering opened on April 8 with a prayer by Elders Victor Chapais and Bruce Mendowegan, as well as remarks from Chief Sheri Taylor and Patty Hajdu.

A variety of workshops were on offer, including presentations by the Matawa Health Co-operative on self care and mental health, a traditional flute demonstration, plus an appearance by former NHL player Theo Fleury. Comedian and actor Conway Kootenay offered a presentation on healing through

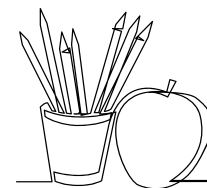
laughter, and Nishnawbe Aski Legal Services Corporation provided information on Community Legal Workers, who provide legal information for community members.

The conference had Elder-focused workshops, such as a presentation on wills and estates. Youth-focused workshops included a presentation from NAN's Youth Council and Scott Wabano, a Cree Two-Spirit social media influencer who hosted a fashion show. The youth and elder gathering came to a close with a round dance on the evening on April 10.



The conference offered a variety of presentations geared towards both youth and elders. (Credit: Ethan Bell)

Helping educators create a positive learning environment



By: Rita Mannella



Matawa Education's annual conference offers a variety of professional development workshops on subjects like classroom management, land-based learning, language revitalization and literacy. (Credit: Chad Kirvan)

Whether you're fresh out of teacher's college on your first teaching assignment, or a seasoned educator who's been teaching for many years, it's a fact that classroom management issues often require integrating different instruction strategies to help facilitate learning.

This vision was the backdrop for two workshops I presented at Matawa Education's annual conference on March 4 and 5, 2025. My goal for the workshops was to make the time together relevant while facilitating engagement and feedback from attendees.

Over 80 participants attended my workshops, including educational assistants, teachers and principals from our northern schools and surrounding communities. As we journeyed through the presentations together, it became evident that the use of differentiated instruction strategies not only made learning more successful for students, but also made teaching foundational learning skills more effective and helped to minimize classroom management issues.

As I led the participants through key components of each workshop—which included asking educators to

identify their teaching style, sharing student behaviour challenges, and designing a lesson plan that uses differentiated instruction strategies provided—I found their input gave me a clearer picture of what it was truly like to be a part of their classrooms. It was amazing to say the least!

“I was honoured to hear educator's stories, relate to their challenges, and to feel the genuine desire they have for each student in their classroom to love to learn and be successful lifelong learners.”

At the end of each workshop, participants left with a sense and satisfaction that the daily classroom management issues they face, and the design of lessons using differentiated instruction strategies were real, but more importantly, they were relatable and current.

As speaker and presenter, I found myself left with a sense that it was important for me to facilitate the open

discussions that occurred. It supported the need I knew existed to continue to find opportunities as a member of the Pathways to Achieve Student Success (PASS) team and to share these workshops with more of the teachers, administrators, and school support staff who make a difference in the daily lives of the students in our northern schools. This surely will become one of my key long-term goals as each of us as educators move forward in this new school year.

I was honoured to hear educator's stories, relate to their challenges, and to feel the genuine desire they have for each student in their classroom to love to learn and be successful lifelong learners. Should any of you reading my story today like to learn more about these workshops, do not hesitate to contact me at rmannella@matawaeducation.ca.



Rita Mannella is the Student Academic Lead with Matawa Education's Pathways to Achieve Student Success (PASS) team



◁.Δ↗ℳ↻^b bCαρ.◁^ℓ ρCρΓα^a

Submitted by: Laura Prior
Photos courtesy of Four Rivers

Trail cameras, like the one pictured here, take photos when triggered by motion or heat changes in the environment

the winter months, using snow machines to access areas visited by wildlife of interest like caribou, wolves, wolverines and more. The cameras capture and store photos throughout the year, until they're gathered the following winter. The pictures are then processed to provide valuable information on wildlife in the area, such as data on population health, diet, and number of offspring. This information can be compared year

Do you have wildlife photos you'd like to share with Four Rivers? Scan the QR code to submit



A herd of boreal caribou. Caribou are considered a “threatened” species in Ontario because of habitat loss from things like forestry, mining, and roads.

MATAWA MESSENGER — 9



Dr. Sharon L. Nate took over as Matawa First Nations Management's Chief Executive Officer in April. (Credit: Chad Kirvan)

Matawa First Nations Management's new Chief Executive Officer

Dr. Sharon L. Nate, former Executive Director of Matawa Education, takes on role of Matawa's Chief Executive Officer as David Paul Achneepineskum enters "semi-retirement"

By: Charnel Anderson

April 1, 2025, marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one for Matawa First Nations Management as long time Chief Executive Officer David Paul Achneepineskum stepped back from his role and Dr. Sharon L. Nate, former Executive Director of Matawa Education, took the reins.

"We welcome Dr. Nate to this new role, we are confident that she will lead the organization with

vision, humility and dedication," said Rosemary Moonias, President of the MFNM Board of Directors. Sharon brings over 20 years of experience in education, leadership, teaching and advocacy for Indigenous youth and communities.

As Executive Director of Matawa Education, Sharon led major initiatives including the construction of the Matawa Education and Care Centre, a wholistic high school for

Matawa students on Lillie Street in Thunder Bay, and the establishment of the Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization program. In 2024, Sharon was awarded an honorary doctorate by the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium in recognition of her leadership in the fields of Indigenous education and language revitalization. Sharon also holds an Honours Bachelor of Education from Lakehead University.

"My beginnings in Eabametoong First Nation working closely with the community helped me understand the unique needs of our youth and families," said Sharon. "That foundation guided my path in Education and has given me the insight to now apply this knowledge across all departments within Matawa. While there's always room to grow, there is so much to celebrate, and I look forward to building on our successes together."

On April 4, 2025, Matawa held a retirement luncheon for David Paul at its Court Street office where a number of Matawa's directors remarked on the now-former CEO's leadership, including how it's impacted them personally, and allowed Matawa to

flourish as an organization. Matawa Education and Care Centre principal Brad Battiston announced the Gichi Siipii Rising Leader Award, named in recognition of David Paul's roots in the Gichi Siipii and Kenogami River basins, which will honour a Matawa youth who "draws strength from their land, culture, and community to lead with wisdom and integrity." The award will be presented by Matawa Education's Achieving the Dream Through Education charity, which supports Matawa youth, beginning next year.

David Paul has served as CEO for nearly 20 years, during which time Matawa has grown rapidly. Under David Paul's leadership—and with direction from the Matawa

Chiefs—Matawa launched the Matawa Health Cooperative, Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Employment and Training Services, RapidLynx Telecommunications, Four Rivers Environmental Services Group, Matawa Animal Wellness Services, and refurbished what is now called the Matawa Training and Wellness Centre – plus numerous other First Nations-led projects designed to serve members of Matawa First Nations.

Though David Paul has stepped back, he will continue to use his leadership and experience to support Matawa First Nations as he enters "semi-retirement."



David Paul Achneepineskum led Matawa First Nations Management as CEO since 2006. (Credit: Chad Kirvan)



The Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization program celebrated 90 graduates at its Oshki Maachita graduation ceremony on July 18, 2024. (Credit: Damien Gilbert)

The sacred languages of our ancestors: Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization program at risk

It’s trained dozens of Ojibwe, Cree, and Oji-Cree language speakers across Matawa First Nations and recently earned international accreditation. Despite it’s success, the Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization program’s funding is set to expire in June, and it’s future is uncertain

By: Dr. Mike Graham and Dr. Aroha Watene March 27, 2025

Indigenous languages have a deep connection to the land and its resources, and they’re immensely important to the wellbeing of people and their aptitude to maintain their traditional ways of life. These sacred languages are a pivotal element of transferring knowledge—often passed down through oral tradition—about the natural world, including traditional ecological knowledge, medicinal practices, and more.

The federal *Indigenous Languages Act* recognizes the value of reclaiming, revitalizing, maintaining, and strengthening beautiful Indigenous languages like Ojibwe/Ojibway, Oji-Cree, and Cree, recognizing them as

fundamental to Canadian culture and society. Preservation of these languages should be high on the government’s priority list, and perhaps even on par with English in French languages in terms of government support and financial assistance, right?

Yet, the Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization program—which employs dozens of language speakers who teach Ojibwe/Ojibway, Oji-Cree, and Cree within the nine Matawa communities and in Thunder Bay—faces an urgent financial crisis, with funding set to expire in June, and no commitment for continued support from either level of government. For some reason, our languages continue

to be seen as “inferior.”

“To lose your native language is to silence your ancestors voices, forever.”

—Dr. Mike Graham

Indigenous languages like Ojibwe/Ojibway, Oji-Cree and Cree, are at risk of being lost, and there is no more urgent time than now to revitalize and preserve these languages before it’s too late. Currently, it’s the government’s role to help fund Indigenous language programs. Indeed, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action #14 states

that “the Federal Government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation.”

Funding for the Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization program was set to expire at the end of March 2025, denying students the opportunity to complete their Year One Certificate program, and leaving roughly 20 staff to confront the prospect of job loss. Thankfully, Matawa has been able to find funds to keep the program going until the end of June, enabling students to complete their studies, and giving tutors, assistants, and other staff an extra three months of employment.

Matawa will continue to fight for the funding and support needed to keep the Matawa Waka Tere program operational within the Matawa First Nations, and we encourage and appreciate the support of Matawa communities’ as one united voice. “When we stand alone, we are vulnerable. When we stand together, we are unbreakable,” goes the whakataukī, or Māori proverb. Therefore, we ask you to please support Matawa when the call comes.

This is about ensuring Matawa First Nations can continue delivering a quality language revitalization experience that will breathe life and instill energy back into communities by speaking our sacred languages. Ojibwe/Ojibway, Oji-Cree, and Cree deserve to take back their rightful place on these lands amongst the nations who resided here first. “We all have an obligation to ensure the survival of our sacred languages live on for generations to come, as these are the sacred languages of our ancestors,” said Sharon Nate, Matawa First Nations Management’s new Chief Executive Officer and former Executive Director of Matawa Education.



Aroha Watene is an Indigenous Language Revitalization Specialist with the Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization Program



Mike Graham is an Indigenous Language Revitalization Specialist with the Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization Program



Year Two Ojibwe students in Gordon Yellowhead’s class in Eabametoong First Nation. Matawa Waka Tere supports language classes in all Matawa First Nations and Thunder Bay. (Supplied by: Mike Graham)

Matawa Waka Tere program timeline

2015

- » Matawa Chiefs Council pass Resolution #11-30-07-15 Language as a Nation Building Tool, highlighting that the responsibility for maintaining our languages rests in our homes and communities with parents, local institutions, Matawa citizens and leadership

2018-2020

- » The Matawa Waka Tere Indigenous Language Revitalization Project acquires funding emerges as the ‘waka’, ‘Chiimaan’ or vehicle that would pilot its first successful Ojibwe certificate program in 2019-2020 by trained grassroots language carriers

2022-2023

- » Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Matawa Waka Tere Anishinaabemowin Certificate and Diploma programs receive funding to launch in nine Matawa First Nations and Thunder Bay

2024

- » Matawa Education sought and received World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) accreditation recognizing that it’s on par with mainstream post-secondary operations and standards
- » First Graduation held in Thunder Bay to celebrate the achievements of 90 graduates



Emily Weaver, a Registered Veterinary Technician, flew to Webequie First Nation this spring to administer parvovirus vaccines to prevent the spread of the potentially deadly virus. (Credit: Judi Cannon)

Matawa Animal Wellness Services tackles parvovirus in Webequie First Nation

Judi Cannon explains how a four person team battled restrictive regulations, wonky Wi-Fi, and winter weather to stop the spread of potentially deadly parvovirus among dogs in Webequie—and why she says there has to be a better way

By: Judi Cannon

In December 2024, residents of a remote community 540 kilometres north of Thunder Bay sounded the alarm: three puppies had died from a suspected parvovirus outbreak that was threatening the rest of the community's dogs, and they needed help fast. Just a year earlier, 35 dogs in Webequie succumbed to parvovirus, or parvo, a preventable but highly contagious disease that causes lethargy, decreased appetite, vomiting and diarrhea, and can be fatal without treatment.

I'm the lead coordinator for

Matawa Animal Wellness Services, which is working to increase access to veterinary care in Matawa's nine First Nation communities. The first week of December, I received a call from a concerned Webequie First Nation community member who shared the news of the potential parvo outbreak. I decided to send some testing kits to the community, which confirmed the outbreak. Then, we faced a critical decision: let the disease spread unchecked with visible suffering throughout the community to both the



The rapid response team, from left to right: Emily Weaver, Judi Cannon and Jackie Halverson. (Submitted by: Judi Cannon)

peoples and pets, or mobilize a medical response? The choice was a simple, do our very best to limit the spread and suffering.

“Dogs in rural and remote communities lack access to regular veterinary care, leaving them susceptible to parvovirus and other potentially deadly viruses.”

Fortunately, we were able to draw on relationships and available resources to stop the spread of the potentially deadly virus. It was costly and logistically challenging, and burdened by strict veterinary regulations that need to be eased in order to prevent outbreaks like the one in Webequie, and prioritize the health and safety of pets and people in remote First Nations communities.

After consulting veterinary professionals, we decided to assemble a team. That team included Bertha Ashpanaquestcum, a lifelong animal advocate and local Webequie member, Emily Weaver, a registered veterinary technician (RVT), Jackie Halverson, who helped with administrative duties, and myself.

Ontario law requires veterinarians to authorize care before it's provided to animals. The problem for us was that we were unable to find a vet with the proper credentials who was available to travel to a remote community on

short notice. Instead, we decided we would access telemedicine, which allows us to connect with a vet who can assess and treat animals remotely, over the phone or the internet.

Before flying into Webequie, we assembled supplies including parvo vaccines, first aid supplies, medication and special food for puppies suffering from parvo, as well as crates, leashes, and a sled to cart the supplies between houses. In total, the supplies, travel, and other costs came close to \$20,000.

When we arrived in Webequie on December 8, it was -25 degrees Celsius. We spent two days travelling between homes and throughout the community to find and vaccinate dogs—59 dogs in total—to ensure they're protected from the highly-contagious parvovirus. Puppies typically receive vaccines that protect against parvo and other diseases like rabies and distemper during routine visits to the vet, but dogs in rural and remote communities lack



access to regular veterinary care, leaving them susceptible to parvovirus and other potentially deadly viruses.

Ultimately, our swift response was effective in stopping the spread of parvo, with only five dogs contracting the virus. But it was a difficult process. Spotty Wi-Fi in the community meant telemedicine was at times unreliable and our virtual consultations with vets were regularly disrupted. Plus, it was time-consuming to track down owners and dogs, and such a small team – with only one RVT – limited our efficiency.

Further complicating matters



Providing veterinary care in remote First Nation communities has its challenges. (Credit: Judi Cannon)



the need for a VCPR: late last year, they passed a resolution that allows Matawa Animal Wellness Services to act as the “client” in the veterinarian-client-patient-relationship for all animals within the Matawa region, which supports the Chiefs’ inherent right to manage their herd of dogs, and will help streamline the future delivery of animal care in Matawa First Nations. The resolution demonstrates Matawa First Nations Chiefs commitment to the Peoples and pets in their communities by supporting avenues which work best for their communities and their unique and individual needs.

This event shines a light on the challenges facing remote Indigenous communities

are the provincial regulations that require what’s called a “veterinarian-client-patient relationship,” or VCPR. A VCPR is an agreement between a vet and a pet owner, where the vet assumes responsibility for the medical care of an animal, and the owner agrees to follow the vet’s directions. A VCPR must be in place before a vet can recommend or provide care, but this poses a barrier for dogs to receive care in First Nations communities, as some dogs are strays, or cared for by the community, and don’t have an owner in the traditional sense. In urban areas, these dogs would be taken to local animal control, but such institutions don’t exist in most remote First Nations communities.

However, the Matawa Chiefs Council – made up of leadership from the nine Matawa First Nations – went forward with a solution to address

Thankfully, our response spared Webequie further heartache, but it came at a high cost.

Despite the challenges, the Webequie clinic proves innovation and collaboration can deliver results, even under pressure. It’s a call to action for rethinking colonial veterinary models to increase access to underserved regions, so both pets and their people thrive. The team at Matawa Animal Wellness Services is committed to bridging these gaps, and we’ll continue to strongly advocate for all pet families in Matawa First Nations.



Judi Cannon is Matawa’s Animal Wellness Services Lead Coordinator



Some dogs in Webequie had to be tracked down, while others were eager to meet the team and find out what they were up to. (Credit: Judi Cannon)



Scan to see the Terms of Reference for the Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire Area

Ceremony held in honour of Ring of Fire Regional Assessment milestone

Written by: Laura Prior; Photos courtesy of Four Rivers

On March 18, 2025, dozens of people gathered at the outdoor Anwebiiwining space on the grounds of Confederation College in Thunder Bay for the first ceremony held in honour of the development of the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Ring of Fire area’s Regional Assessment. The ceremony was conducted by Bruce Mendowegon and Phyllis Saugabay, as well as fire keeper Cecil Mendowegon, with a Christian prayer offered by Harry Papah, and singing and drumming provided by the Matawa Education drum group.

Fifteen First Nation partners – including all nine Matawa First Nations – and the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada worked together to develop the TOR for the conduct of the Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire area, which was released earlier this year. The Regional Assessment is a planning tool used to assess the potential effects of multiple existing and potential future developments and activities in a specific geographic region to help

inform decision-making. The process leading to this milestone reflects a new way of doing things—a co-led process that respects and integrates community processes and community protocols.

Matawa First Nations Chiefs asked the Ring of Fire’s Regional Assessment Working Group (RAWG) to

include Ceremony as part of the TOR finalization process, and thus the first Ceremony for the Terms of Reference was held in Thunder Bay. Additional Ceremonies and processes may take place to incorporate the diverse processes and protocols within the RAWG member communities.



The ceremony was held at Confederation College’s Anwebiiwining space.

Working together to adapt to climate change

For nearly a decade Matawa has been working with Laurentian University on climate change adaptation

By: Laura Prior

Over the past eight years, Matawa First Nations Management has worked with Laurentian University's Up North On Climate group – consisting of staff and students from LU's School of Natural Sciences and northern Ontario First Nations and tribal councils – on a number of climate change-related projects, including an online hub with resources to help Indigenous communities adapt to our changing climate.

The Partnership for Indigenous Climate Change Adaptation (PICCA) is a specific collaboration lead by Up North On Climate in partnership with Matawa First Nations Management and other Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, with the goal of addressing climate change challenges faced by Indigenous communities. PICCA partners strive to weave together Indigenous and western knowledge to support the development of climate



Jasmine Baxter, Four River's Guardians Navigator and Matawa's Climate Change Specialist on the PICCA project, at the project's funding announcement in Sudbury in February 2025. (Credit: Four Rivers)

resilient Indigenous communities in their traditional territories.

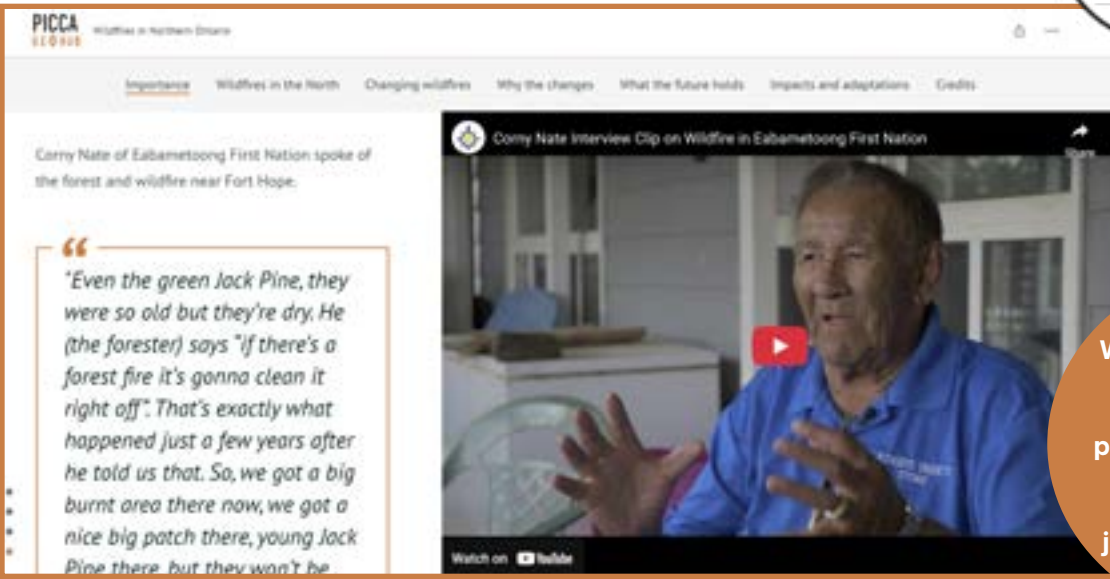
Matawa is collaborating with PICCA on an online hub that visualizes useful climate change adaptation information, climate stories, and other resources hosted on ArcGIS, an online mapping platform. Users of the GeoHub are guided through series of interactive StoryMaps featuring photos, videos,

interactive dashboards, Maptours, and interactive graphic Quick Guides. The PICCA Climate Action GeoHub is currently under development.



Check out the ArcGIS GeoHub for information on climate change tailored for First Nations

We're seeking Indigenous voices to include in the Geohub. If you'd like to participate in an interview, please contact Jasmine Baxter by email at jbaxter@fourrivers.group



A screenshot from the PICCA Climate Action GeoHub's wildfire section, featuring a story about wildfires by the late Corny Nate, an Eabametoong First Nation Elder.

Matawa Chiefs resolution increases access to animal wellness on reserve

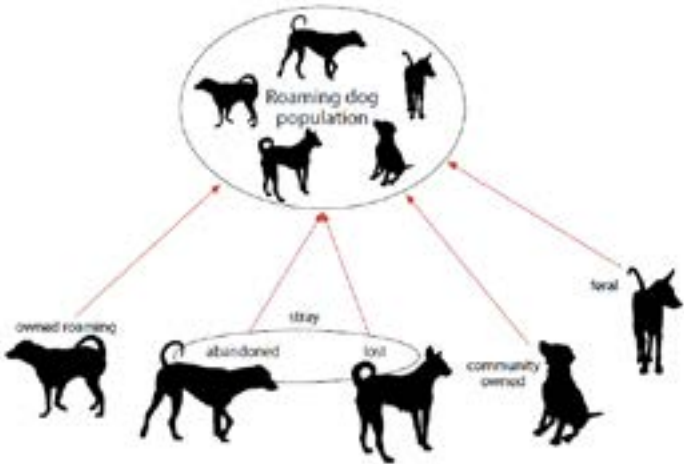
The resolution passed in December aims to address barriers for First Nations created by provincial veterinary regulations

By: Carol Audet

On December 11, 2024, the Matawa Chiefs Council passed a resolution that affects all residents in Matawa communities with roaming dog populations. The resolution implements a blanket "Veterinarian-Client Patient Relationship" (VCPR) in all Matawa communities that have a "herd" or what's more commonly known as a pack of dogs.

It was passed following a recommendation by Matawa Animal Wellness Services to make it easier for Matawa communities to access veterinary services on reserve, and is vital for the health of Peoples and dogs.

Roaming dogs – which are dogs that are allowed to roam freely – may be owned, community-owned, stray abandoned (forgotten ones) and feral or wild dogs, but they're a thread in the fabric of our daily existence. At night, we hear them bark, and during the day we might see them at the doors of our community events. However they take their place in our communities, residents understand that we need to gain control of how dogs share space with us in our communities. Of course, we know that, however that is done, it will be done in a way that works for us and considers our long history with dogs in our communities and families.



Roaming dogs can be defined by ownership status, as outlined in this graphic from The Community Dog Book published by the University of Saskatchewan. (Used with permission)

What is a VCPR?

A VCPR is an agreement between a vet and a pet owner, where the vet assumes responsibility for the medical care of an animal, and the owner agrees to follow the vet's directions. Provincial law requires that a VCPR is in place before a vet can recommend or provide care. However, this requirement often poses a barrier for dogs in First Nation communities to receive care because some dogs are strays, or cared for by the community, and don't have an owner in the mainstream sense.

Why a blanket VCPR?

A blanket VCPR will allow Matawa Animal Wellness Services to provide veterinarian care to all animals in Matawa communities.

What is a herd?

A herd is "a social group of certain animals of the same species, either wild or domestic that form collective behaviour."



A pack—or a herd—of dogs in Eabametoong First Nation. (Credit: Judi Cannon)

Stay tuned for more information on the herd health and One Health models and how they resonates with our traditional ways by following **Matawa First Nations Management** and **Matawa Pets and People** on Facebook.



Agreement enhances opportunities for Matawa students

Matawa First Nation Education Authority signs Memorandum of Understanding with Lakehead District School Board that will increase access to culturally supportive programs

Submitted by: Shelby Ch'ng

On March 17, 2025, representatives from the Matawa First Nation Education Authority (MFNEA) and Lakehead District School Board (LDSB) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing a landmark partnership aimed at increasing Matawa students' access to culturally supportive education programs that equip them with the skills to achieve their personal and educational goals.

The agreement was signed in Eabametoong First Nation by Stephanie Hogan, Education Coordinator with Matawa Education, and Sherri-Lynne Pharand, Director of Education with the LDSB. Witnesses included Eabametoong First Nation Education Authority staff Nancy Waswa and Elizabeth Atlookan, as well as Eabametoong First Nation councillors John Louie Oskineegish and Michael Slipperjack, represents a commitment to work collaboratively to achieve education equity for Matawa First Nation students comparable to Ontario's general



Sherri-Lynne Pharand, Director of Education with the Lakehead District School Board (left) and Stephanie Hogan, Education Coordinator with Matawa Education (right) sign the Memorandum of Understanding. (Submitted by: Shelby Ch'ng)

student population. The partnership aims to develop culturally supportive student services with a focus on safety, social and emotional health, transition and orientation programs, career planning, student retention, and more. Other priority areas outlined in the MOU include special education support, professional development and cross-cultural training, improved communication between provincially funded and First Nations schools, human resources and parental participation.

As part of the MOU's aim to increase cultural integration, the LDSB and MFNEA will develop curriculum modules that embed First Nation history, culture, perspectives and language, and increase the number of First Nation staff and Elders at schools within the LDSB.

The agreement reflects the LDSB's Indigenous Education Framework and both parties' commitment to reconciliation by improving opportunities and access for Indigenous students across Matawa First Nations and will be led by a steering committee that includes senior executives from both parties to oversee the MOU's implementation.



The agreement will develop culturally supportive services in an effort to achieve education equity for Matawa students. (Submitted by: Shelby Ch'ng)

Program spotlight: Matawa's Membership Services

Matawa's Membership Services can help members with status card applications, as well as birth registrations, birth certificates, health cards, and more.

What is Membership Services?

Matawa's Membership Services helps band members apply for Indian Status and status cards, as well as other vital records such as birth registrations, birth certificates, and health cards.

Matawa's Membership Coordinator also helps maintain the "Indian Registry" – the official record of people registered under Section 6 of the Indian Act– by reporting births, deaths, marriages and divorces. This information is used by Indigenous Services Canada to deliver programs and services to First Nation communities.

How can Matawa's Membership Services help?

Membership Services can help Matawa members from Aroland, Eabametoong, Marten Falls, Neskantaga, Nibinamik and Webequie apply for Indian status and get their status cards. Membership Services can also assist with other records like birth certificates and health cards.

How do Matawa members access these services?

You can make an appointment with Matawa's new Membership Coordinator, Allen Ledger, by contacting him via email at aledger@matawa.on.ca, or by calling Matawa reception at (807) 344-4575.



Are you or someone you know having a baby?

It's important to register a child's birth with the Government of Ontario as soon as possible. A birth registration, also known as a Statement of Live Birth, is needed to register a child for Indian Status, and to access other government program's and services including Non-Insured Health Benefits and the Canada Child Benefit.

Meet Matawa's new Membership Coordinator



Boozhoo, my name is Allen Ledger and I am very honoured and excited to join Matawa First Nations Management as the new Membership Coordinator. I am a proud member of Seine River First Nation but have spent most of my life living here in Thunder Bay. Since I began working as a teenager, I have always enjoyed working with and helping people, so I look forward to bringing that experience to our community members. Outside of work I really enjoy sports, hiking and walks in nature, and most of all, spending time with friends and family, including our beloved dog Zeus. I'm really looking forward to being part of the team here at Matawa, learning more about the position, and meeting with and helping our community members.



M.C. Janine Desmoulin speaks at the 17th annual Matawa Education Conference at the Valhalla Hotel in Conference Centre in Thunder Bay in early March. (Credit: Chad Kirvan)

Anishinaabe Bimosewin: Matawa Education's 2025 Conference

This year's theme—walking the Indigenous path—reflects the responsibility educators have to impart Indigenous knowledge, language, and culture to their students.

By: Charnel Anderson

Educators from the Matawa region took on the role of learners at this year's Matawa Education conference – held March 4 to 6, 2025 at the Valhalla Hotel and Conference Centre in Thunder Bay – which featured over 60 presenters speaking on a variety of subjects from Indigenous knowledge to robotics. “This year we focused on

creating meaningful opportunities for professional growth by offering a wide range of transformative sessions,” said Annamarie Majiskon, president of the Matawa First Nation Education Authority.

The 2025 conference's theme, Anishinaabe Bimosewin: Walking the Indigenous path, reflects the responsibility that Matawa First Nation

teachers, principals, and education assistants have to impart Indigenous knowledge, language, and culture to their students. The conference presented dozens of workshops to support this effort, including sessions on integrating Indigenous knowledge in education and strengthening Anishinaabemowin to jig and pow-wow dancing.

Other seminars provided lessons for educators to engage students in science through robotics, plus practical tips for classroom management, regulating emotions, reducing aggression and bullying, and re-engaging disengaged students. Facilitators also provided teachers with the knowledge to navigate and utilize digital tools like Google Drive and Microsoft Excel in their classrooms.

The 17th annual Matawa Education conference featured keynote speaker James Vukelich Kaagegaabaw, an author and former educator who shared knowledge about the seven generations and seven grandfather teachings. Entertainers came from across the region, including the Ivan Flett Memorial Dancers from Winnipeg who performed a hip hop jig, singer and songwriter Natasha Fisher from Long Lake #58 First Nation, Noah Mendowegan, a Matawa Education and Care Centre student and ragtime-influenced piano



Educators from across all nine Matawa communities attend the annual conference. (Credit: Chad Kirvan)

player from Aroland First Nation, and Meegwun Sakanee, a Neskantaga First Nation student in the eighth grade at Henry Coaster Memorial School who

performed on the piano.

The conference is one of the largest in the region and brings in educators from all nine Matawa communities. It's an opportunity for teachers, principals, educational assistants and staff to network while learning new tools and skills to serve them both inside and outside of the classroom. Sharon Nate, former Executive Director of Matawa Education, expressed her gratitude for attendees. “Miigwetch for your unwavering dedication to the students and families of Matawa First Nations. Your hard work ensures that every child has the opportunity to succeed in ways that honour their identity and traditions.”



Matawa Education's Carly Perras, Pathways to Achieve Student Success (PASS) school success lead, and Katie Hughdie, PASS program manager. The conference was organized by Perras and Shelby Ch'ng, education partnership liaison officer (not pictured). (Credit: Chad Kirvan)

Matawa Education Conference 2025



From top left clockwise: Mini birch bark canoe workshop, lots of laughs shared by conference attendees, Long Lake #58 First Nation songwriter Natasha Fisher, keynote speaker James Vukelich Kaagegaabaw, Neskantaga First Nation Grade 8 student Meegwun Sakanee, a science workshop, Ivan Flett Memorial Dancers, and Matawa Education and Care Centre student Noah Mendowegan. Middle: Kiiwetinoong MPP Sol Mamakwa. (Credit: Chad Kirvan)

Promoting health and wellness with the Matawa Health Cooperative

By: Ethan Alatyppo

Throughout the last few months, the Matawa Health Cooperative's Health Promotions and Cultural Land-Based teams have been working to provide a variety of cultural and health-related programming for Matawa members, both in town and in community.



During March break, the **Health Promotions** team – which promotes wellness among Matawa members through health education – offered activities focused on physical, mental, and nutritional health all week long, including activities like swimming, bowling, and traditional snowshoeing.



The **Health Promotions** team works with other MHC departments to host the MHC's monthly Elders Event, meant to honour our Elders while delivering health education in a fun and informative way. Elders Events include bingo, presentations on topics related to elder care and wellbeing, a home cooked meal, and musical performances like traditional flute playing.



So far this year, the **Cultural Land-Based** team – which is dedicated to preserving and revitalizing traditional practices and cultural knowledge – has traveled to Constance Lake, Aroland, Marten Falls, Ginoogaming and Long Lake #58 First Nations. They've offered a variety of programming and teachings like drum making, land-based teachings, cultural outings and drum and flute teachings. The team also recently completed a rabbit snaring course, with the intention of teaching sustainable hunting techniques.



Starting in April, the **Health Promotions** team will be coordinating pop-up events to take place in a different Matawa community each month. These events, organized by different MHC teams, will offer fun, informative activities and education focused on wholistic healthcare and wellness. Plus, they're an opportunity for MHC staff to build relationships with community members.



MHC teams are eagerly planning and preparing for spring programming that will continue to reflect our commitment to wholistic healthcare and the well-being of our Matawa members. For more information, be sure to follow **Matawa Health Cooperative** on Facebook.



Bigfoot: A short story

Story and illustration by Kenley Meeseetawageesic

Once upon a time, my mom, dad and I went to the bush to camp at my dad's cabin for a week. As we were driving there, I noticed a broken tree. After a few minutes went by, we finally arrived at the cabin, and we got out of the van.

My mom and I went inside. We saw that it was cold. My mom and I went to the bush to get some sticks, and my dad chopped some logs for the fire. When I was getting some sticks, I saw a big footprint on the ground, and I freaked out because it was bigger than the size of a table. So, I ran back to the cabin and told my dad about the big footprint on the ground. When I showed him the footprint, he was in shock because he had never seen a footprint bigger than his normal foot. So, he had an idea to set up a GoPro camera, tied around a tree, to catch footage of this strange animal in the night.

When I was sleeping, I heard a strange noise coming from outside, so I peeked out through the window, and saw a strange hairy man with red glowing eyes. I was very scared because it was taller than the van. I snuck to my dad's room and woke him up and told him about the thing I saw outside. So, he got up, got his gun, and checked

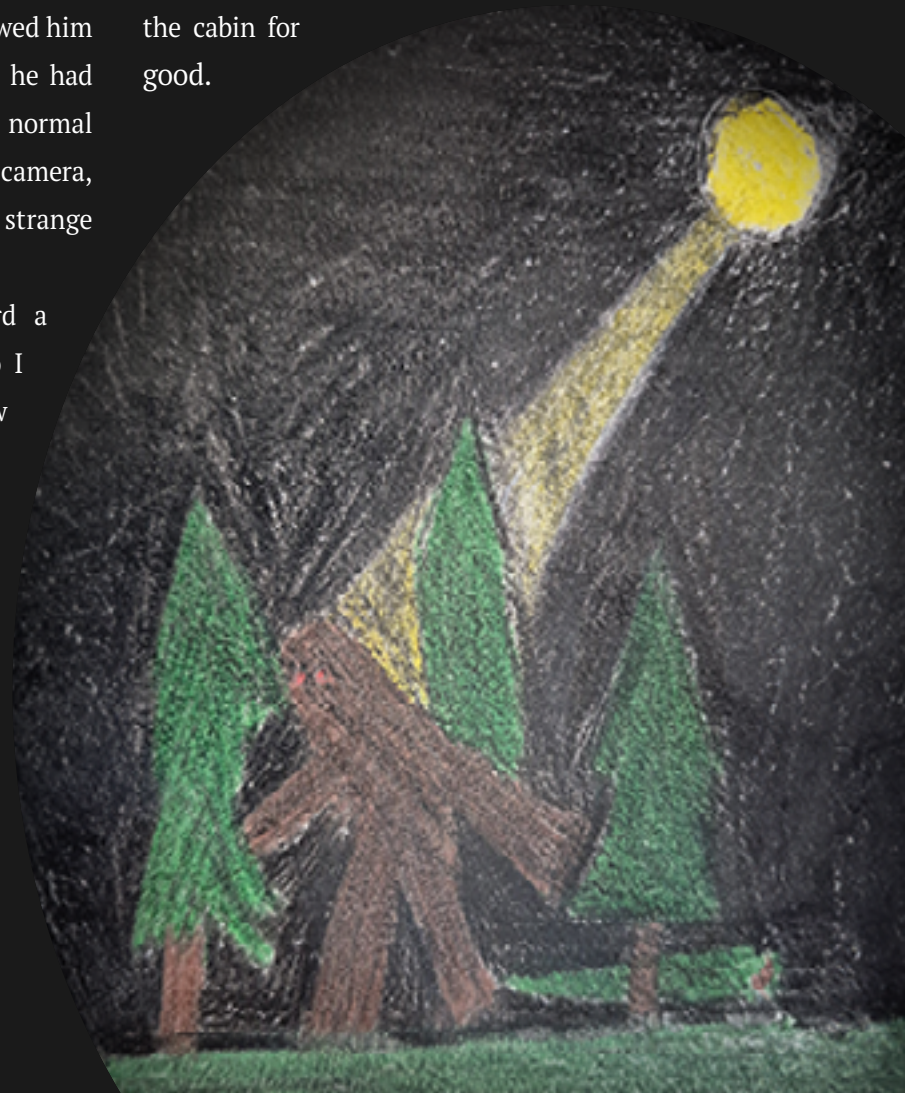
outside and saw nothing. He came inside and went back to bed.

In the morning, my dad woke me up to go check the GoPro to see what the thing was that I saw last night. Before we left, we gave my mom a walkie talkie in case something happened. When we were walking in the bush to check the GoPro, we saw another big footprint on the ground. We took the GoPro, ran back to the cabin, and checked what the GoPro caught last night.

As we were sleeping, we saw a big hairy man with red glowing eyes, and we freaked out. We packed up and left the cabin for good.



Kenley is a Grade 6 student at John C. Yesno Education Centre in Eabametoong First Nation



APPLY NOW



SCAN HERE

2024-2025

Achieving the Dream Through Education

SCHOLARSHIPS & BURSARIES

Apply by
April 30, 2025

WHO IS ELIGIBLE:

- Matawa students in Kindergarten to Grade 12 and Post-Secondary students

AWARDS AVAILABLE:

- A total of ten scholarships, bursaries and awards
- Worth a combined \$24,000



Welcome new Matawa staff

Matawa’s most recent hires introduce themselves in their own words



Terri Zoccole is an Anishinaabe Kwe from Migisi Sahgaigan (Eagle Lake) First Nation and recently joined Matawa First Nation Management as the **Restorative Justice Community Coordinator**. With over 15 years of experience on the front line, she has a wealth of experience collaborating with clients. Terri works in collaboration with Indigenous leadership, community organizations, and the Ontario Court of Justice to fast track clients through the court process and identify their needs—including referrals for counselling, housing, employment, mental health, addiction, family services, as well as indigenous healing and wellness. Terri has an office at the Thunder Bay Courthouse, and can be reached at (807) 621-2494.



Hello, my name is **Cheryl Suggashie**, and I’m the new **Transitions to Care Coordinator** for Matawa First Nations Management. I work with Indigenous Primary Health Care Council, Alliance for Healthier Communities, Ministry of the Solicitor General, Matawa Health Cooperative, Community Health Navigators, and most importantly Matawa community members, connecting them with appropriate health services, cultural programming, and housing for their well-being. I am from Pikangikum First Nation, and I have my Masters in Social Justice, and a Bachelor of Arts in Law & Justice and Political Science.



Hi everyone! I’m **Adam Daniele**, born and raised in Thunder Bay, I joined Four Rivers in January as an **Environmental Technician**. I received my diploma from confederation College in 2018 and have worked a variety of jobs in mining, consulting, and government. I’m very glad to have gotten into the Environmental sector because I love being outdoors and being the best steward and protector of the environment for future generations. While not at work I enjoy hiking, biking, swimming, playing card and boardgames, traveling, cooking and baking with my Nona, playing video games, and collecting vintage Pokémon. I’m beyond excited to be a part of the team, and I look forward to working with you all!



Hello! My name is **Shannon Costigan** and I’m excited to have joined Four Rivers in early 2025 as a **Project Manager**. I have over 10 years experience in community development roles in the non-profit and public sector, designing and coordinating workforce development, community sustainability and environmental education programs. I am a certified Environmental Professional with a specialization in education and training and have an Honours Bachelor of Science in Environmental Toxicology and Master of Science in Biology, both from the University of Guelph. I’ve spent over 10 years as a part-time faculty member at Confederation College, teaching courses in the Environmental Technician and Civil Engineering Technology programs. Outside of work, I love to spend time in my garden and explore local food options in Northwestern Ontario. As a Project Manger with Four Rivers, I look forward to working with Matawa communities to help build capacity and advance their environmental programs and projects.



NOW ACCEPTING NEW PATIENTS



Scan the QR code with your cellphone camera to fill out an application



807-346-2370



Matawa Health Co-operative



Matawa

FIRST NATIONS MANAGEMENT

37th Annual General Meeting July 29-31, 2025 Aroland First Nation



FOOT CARE



The Matawa Health Co-operative offers basic, advanced, and diabetic foot care. Ensure your feet are healthy and comfortable with professional foot care services offered by an experienced team who provide comprehensive treatments to address any foot concerns, from routine maintenance to specialized care.

Take the first step toward healthier feet and schedule an appointment today!



807-346-2370



aorr@matawa.on.ca



Matawa

FIRST NATIONS MANAGEMENT

