

## **A new start for Pimicikamak and Manitoba Hydro**

### **Northern Manitoba Indigenous nation seeks to heal the land, the people and the nation**

**Winnipeg, September 20, 2017** - Leaders of the Pimicikamak nation are working with Manitoba Hydro executives to build a new relationship in place of one that has been troubled for more than 50 years.

“We have gone through a lot since Manitoba Hydro built its first dam in our traditional territory,” said David Muswaggon, the member of the Executive Council of the Pimicikamak traditional government responsible for its relations with the Crown utility. “We can not ignore the past, but we are looking forward to a better future. We are working with Manitoba Hydro in many practical ways. These steps are leading us to a positive place where Hydro and Pimicikamak can co-exist harmoniously in our territory.”

Pimicikamak traditional territory is roughly the local watershed of the Upper Nelson River, which is now host to key works that store and control water for hydroelectric power generation. Those works and Manitoba Hydro’s operations in the region have caused environmental and cultural damage to Pimicikamak – the land, the people and the nation. Both parties signed the Northern Flood Agreement in 1977, in which Manitoba Hydro promised to remedy all damage caused by its activities.

“We are looking beyond agreements to build a relationship based on common interests. Manitoba Hydro has a treaty right to be in our territory, but we insist it operates as good guest should – with respect to our land and our people,” said Muswaggon. “I want to thank Kelvin Shepherd and the board of Manitoba Hydro for their willingness to see the old ways weren’t working. We are finding new ways to work together and build trust.”

One of the key bases for building that trust lies with the Pimicikamak government’s Transparency Project, in which it publishes its financial documents, meeting notes and other records online for all to see. The project makes Pimicikamak perhaps the most transparent government in North America. Its four governing councils mandated the Transparency Project as an essential part of modern governance.

“We have nothing to hide,” said Muswaggon. “Our people - or anyone else - can see exactly how every penny is spent.”

The Transparency Project enabled Manitoba Hydro to accept a Pimicikamak proposal to shift to a grant-funding model to pay for work the nation does to remedy problems. In years past, Manitoba Hydro tightly administered financing in ways that restricted Pimicikamak’s ability to operate as an effective government and to be accountable to its citizens.

Pimicikamak is implementing community planning based on the Northern Flood Agreement. The planning timeline under the new grant-funding model is currently short term and program-oriented but could become longer term and more comprehensive as capacity grows.

“We are pleased to be moving forward with Pimicikamak in the development of a grant funding model as a new approach to NFA implementation,” said Kelvin Shepherd, President and CEO of Manitoba Hydro. “This represents a positive step in building our relationship. The model provides Pimicikamak with significantly more flexibility and the ability to prioritize and manage its delivery of important programs.”

Pimicikamak and Manitoba Hydro collaborate on selecting programs from those that Pimicikamak plans and proposes. These programs aim to address issues of most concern as effectively as possible. Each program plan outlines what is to be done, who will do it, and an estimated budget. Pimicikamak reviews and may revise estimated budgets for its involvement from time to time. Pimicikamak consults with

Manitoba Hydro about budgets and Manitoba Hydro asks questions, makes suggestions, raises concerns or offers help; but it does not determine Pimicikamak's budgets.

The first projects under this new grant-funding model got off the ground this summer. Pimicikamak upgraded the community's softball facilities with ground improvements, lights and fencing. Softball is a source of pride in the Pimicikamak community of Cross Lake, which saw its local team represent Manitoba at the Canada Games in Winnipeg this year.

Other programs include wellness initiatives, mental health programming, supporting Treaty Days, women's programming and community clean up. The Pimicikamak government is also targeting better educational, training and communications resources for Pimicikamak communities.

"This is only a start. We are bound to make mistakes, but we are moving forward," said Muswaggon. "It will take time and a lot of work for everyone to build trust, and likely even longer for these investments to help us heal the land, the people and the nation."

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