

# FIRST NATIONS ECONOMIC RESILIENCE: FIRST NATIONS LEADING THE WAY

PRESENTATION BY CONSEIL DES  
ATIKAMEKW DE WEMOTACI  
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# Opening remarks and acknowledgements

- First of all, I would like to thank the Conference organizers for this opportunity to present the great progress made by the Wemotaci community since the enactment of its Financial Administration Law.
- My regards to all the participants attending this Conference, including Chiefs, leaders and officials from First Nations communities and organizations across Canada.
- Thank you for being able to make my presentation in French and a special thank you to Nathalie Huntley who provided the translation of the presentation.
- As indicated in my biography, I have been the Executive Director of the Conseil des Atikamekw de Wemotaci for over 4 years and have been working with the community since 2001.



# Wemotaci community



Source: CAW Website

# Overview of Wemotaci community

- ▶ Community which is part of the Atikamekw Nation, led by the Conseil des Atikamekw de Wemotaci (CAW)
- ▶ Isolated, about 5 hours drive north of Montreal and Quebec City
- ▶ Nearly 1,900 registered members with more than 1,500 members living in the community
- ▶ Very young population: 73% are less than 40 years old
- ▶ First language is Atikamekw, taught in schools, very lively traditional culture
- ▶ Important housing issue: about 140 people and families are waiting for housing
- ▶ Economic development and local entrepreneurship have been booming in recent years
- ▶ The Conseil des Atikamekw de Wemotaci is composed of 7 elected officials, Chief and Councillors, elected every 4 years



## Overview of Wemotaci community employment and entrepreneurship

- ▶ The Council is the largest employer: more than 200 people work in different sectors such as the administration, social development, education, health, land management, capital assets and housing, and public safety
- ▶ Also owns businesses within the community: grocery store, gas station, silviculture company, lodge
- ▶ Private contractors in the community: 2 general contractors (roads and construction), forestry contractors, convenience store, craftswoman who makes moccasins, building maintenance, etc.



# Before enacting a Financial Administration Law

- ▶ Management action plan imposed by Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada since 2012
- ▶ Debt of more than \$10 million to manage, generated mainly by the deficit of the income assistance program and unpaid housing
- ▶ Restrictive financial measures with significant impacts on community development, organizational stability, and capital and housing projects



## WEMOTACI FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION LAW (FAL) ACCESSING ISC 10-YEAR GRANT

- Wemotaci elected officials decided to enact a FAL in November 2018. Our FAL was approved by the FMB in December 2018.
- By enacting a FAL and meeting other criteria (e.g., financial ratios), the CAW received a favorable recommendation from the FMB regarding the eligibility for ISC 10-year grant funding. Funded programs under the grant are: band support, education, health, income assistance, capital assets
- Elected officials decided to join ISC 10-year grant February 2019, which became effective April 1, 2019
- Joining this new type of funding allows the CAW to move out of the Management action plan which has been in effect since 2012
- The funding has not increased, but allows for greater flexibility in its use to better meet the needs of the community
- The other benefit is reduced reporting to the federal government, with more focus on accountability to community members



## SINCE THE ENACTMENT OF WEMOTACI'S FAL

- Greater flexibility in the management of the CAW programs, allowing funding to be used according to community needs:
  - Housing Projects
  - Professional training and employment readiness programs to promote the employment of our members
  - Investments in economic projects, always with the objective of putting community members to work and creating wealth
  - Education and Health at the center of our priorities
- For the past 2 years, working in collaboration with the FMB towards obtaining financial management system certification, which include: revising and approving new policies that meet the FMB financial management system standards
- Implementing improved governance and management practices = demanding, but essential work
- An important foundation towards self-government, a process that is in its beginning stages and led by the elected members of the CAW





## LOAN FROM THE FIRST NATIONS FINANCE AUTHORITY

- ▶ Loan contracted in June 2020, \$9 million over 30 years, historical interest rate of 2.15%, fixed for 10 years
- ▶ Opportunity that the CAW couldn't miss
- ▶ First step: repayment of a \$2 million mortgage for the Administrative Centre, 5% interest rate
- ▶ CAW is currently evaluating investment and capital outlay opportunities for various economic development projects :
  - ▶ Establishment of an economic revitalization committee with experts from the community and external consultants
  - ▶ Projects under development totaling more than \$171 million
  - ▶ There is no lack of opportunities!
- ▶ The objective is to maximize the funds obtained by borrowing from the FNFA by combining other sources of financing to raise the projects: Mictekw Coria Trust, government funding agencies, private financial partners.



## Socio-economic projects in development

- ▶ Desjardins Nikanik Business Center (operational within a few weeks)
- ▶ Mini-hydropower station, in partnership with La Tuque City and Kruger
- ▶ 18-room Inn for business and tourism clients
- ▶ Oversized lumbermill (20 jobs)
- ▶ Nursing home for elders
- ▶ Business opportunities in La Tuque City (purchase of land, purchase of existing businesses)
- ▶ Development of lots and housing constructions in the community
- ▶ Professional training center
- ▶ Social Pediatrics Centre



## Wemotaci community looking forward!

- ▶ After several difficult years from a financial and economic point of view, the focus of elected officials, leaders and the population is definitively turned towards a future that is full of hope
- ▶ An essential challenge to meet for our members and especially for our youth
- ▶ Balance to be maintained between the multiple economic investment opportunities and the sound financial and administrative management of the community
- ▶ A challenge that the elected officials, leaders and people of Wemotaci are now ready to meet, thanks to the opportunities provided by Wemotaci's Financial Administration Law and the loan from the FNFA

**Thank you for listening. Enjoy the rest of the Conference!**

