



Mushkegowuk Council

Attawapiskat First Nation | Kashechewan First Nation | Fort Albany First Nation | Moose Cree First Nation | Taykwa Tagamou Nation | Chapleau Cree First Nation | Missanabie Cree First Nation

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Massive New Investment Announced to Support Indigenous-led Conservation and On-going Stewardship in Territory

MONTREAL- As COP15, an international biodiversity conference, kicks off in Montreal, Mushkegowuk Council welcomes a new transformational investment by the Government of Canada and international and national philanthropic donors to support Indigenous-led conservation in the Territory.

Catalyzed by the *Project Finance for Permanence*, the investment will support the design and implementation of four large-scale, Indigenous-led initiatives across the country including the Omushkego Conservation Project along the western shores of James Bay.

“We are pleased that our on-going stewardship of our globally significant lands and waters is being recognized by Canada and international and Canadian philanthropic partners of Project Finance for Permanence,” says Mushkegowuk Council Grand Chief Linklater, the first woman to be elected to the position.

Mushkegowuk Council represents 7 communities, the Missanabie Cree First Nation, Chapleau Cree First Nation, Taykwa Tagamou Nation, Moose Cree First Nation, Kashechewan First Nation, Ft. Albany First Nation, and Attawapiskat First Nation. Mushkegowuk Council often works with Weenusk (Peawanuck) First Nation. In the marine conservation initiative, the council is working closely with Fort Severn First Nation.

The Omushkego, who have lived for millennia on the shores of James Bay and inland, welcome the new investment. It is seen as an important step forward in achieving the long-term vision of its Elders to re-establish a relationship with the land and waters, and to create a network of Indigenous Protected Areas and guardians to monitor its lands and waters in perpetuity.

“It finally gives us the opportunity to realize our vision for our Territory,” Grand Chief Linklater added. “Unlike boom-and-bust resource extraction projects, this investment will sustain us forever,” Linklater added.

In 2020, the Mushkegowuk Council unanimously passed a motion to initiate Nation to Nation talks between Mushkegowuk First Nations and Canada with the goal of creating a National Marine Conservation Area (NMCA) on the Western Side of James Bay and southwestern Hudson Bay. Last August, Canada and the First Nations of the Mushkegowuk Council signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#)

(MOU) launching a feasibility assessment of a NMCA in Western James Bay and southwestern Hudson Bay. This is a vital next step in the process to safeguard the ocean.

Today's announcement sets the stage for transformational conservation and reconciliation outcomes across the whole Territory (almost a third of Ontario). The Territory includes magnificent rivers, the ocean, boreal forests and ancient peatlands that store billions of tonnes of carbon. These wetlands have been cooling the planet for thousands of years. Elders refer to these as the "Breathing Lands".

"We've never seen an investment like this before in our Territory, this will make a world of difference to our people, all our grandkids and their grand kids," Linklater said. "We know it will make a world of difference to the Earth too because without conservation of the peatlands we cannot achieve a safe, liveable climate," Linklater said.

The Hudson Bay Lowlands is the second largest peatland complex in the world and is estimated to store more than 30 billion tonnes of carbon.

"The Mushkegowuk Council and communities have for many years shown strong conservation leadership, grounded in community support," says Hilu Tagoona, Senior Arctic Advisor at Oceans North, an environmental charity focused on conservation in partnership with Indigenous and coastal communities. "We are committed to supporting the Council and its partners to help realize their critically important vision for the long-term health of their territory."

"Innovative investing in Indigenous people directly to secure globally significant ecosystems makes a whole a lot of sense to me," says Janet Sumner, Executive Director of Wildlands League, a conservation charity that has worked with the Omushkego for more than two decades.

"We've seen mines come and go and local people saddled with disrupted and fragmented ecosystems with few long-term benefits. Securing the peatlands here, part of the second largest peatland complex in the world, is vital to a securing liveable planet including a safe climate. There are immense biodiversity values that as Canadians we can all be grateful to the leadership of the Omushkego in safeguarding," Sumner added.

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