

# Federal Authority Advice Record Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire Area

## Indigenous Services Canada

November 10, 2023

<b>Department/Agency</b>	Indigenous Services Canada (ISC)
<b>Lead RA Contact(s)</b>	Robert Bellizzi
<b>Full Address</b>	10 Wellington Street, Gatineau, Quebec K1A 0H4
<b>Email</b>	Robert.Bellizzi2@sac-isc.gc.ca
<b>Telephone</b>	819-712-7340
<b>Alternate Departmental Contact</b>	ISC- Lands and Economic Development Sector: Jan Triska <a href="mailto:Jan.Triska2@sac-isc.gc.ca">Jan.Triska2@sac-isc.gc.ca</a>  ISC-First Nations and Inuit Health Branch: Constantine Tikhonov <a href="mailto:constantine.tikhonov@sac-isc.gc.ca">constantine.tikhonov@sac-isc.gc.ca</a>

**PART 1 – In providing your responses to the items below, please include any relevant information on associated Indigenous, public or other consultation or engagement activities and identify any partners or collaborations.**

### 1. MANDATE AND AREA(S) OF EXPERTISE

**Clearly outline the mandate of your department or agency and detail your area(s) of responsibility or expertise that may be related to the regional assessment.**

#### **Departmental Mandate:**

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) works collaboratively with partners to improve access to high quality services for First Nations, Inuit and Métis. Our vision is to support and empower Indigenous peoples to independently deliver services and address the socio-economic conditions in their communities.

ISC has statutory and fiduciary obligations to manage reserve land under the *Indian Act* for First Nations that are not operating under the *First Nation Land Management Act* or a self-government agreement.

ISC's Communities and the Environment Program works with First Nation communities to increase the reserve land base and support sustainable management of land, environment and natural resources

through the development of innovative policies as well as process and system improvements. In doing so, activities in this program area provides the foundation for community and economic development and facilitates greater First Nation independence and self-sufficiency in managing their lands and resources

The mandate of the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch at ISC is to provide effective, sustainable and culturally appropriate health programs and services that contribute to the reduction of gaps in health status between First Nations and Inuit and other Canadians.

The First Nations and Inuit Health Branch has specialist or expert knowledge pertaining to First Nations and Inuit health in Canada. Areas of expertise include, but are not limited to: the provision of health services; community health and wellness programs; drinking water quality on First Nations reserves; and the social determinants of health (e.g., mental health and addictions, language, diet, chemical contamination of traditional foods, the perception of contamination).

Within this mandate, ISC could provide the Agency with guidance in regards to what health, social and economic components the regional assessment should be focusing on, as well as support to describe baseline conditions of communities located in the area of the regional assessment.

## **2. REGULATORY AUTHORITIES**

**List and summarize the nature of the regulatory authorities of your department or agency in relation to physical works or activities in the Ring of Fire area.**

### ***Indian Act***

Projects and activities on reserve lands are under the authority of the federal government (the Crown). ISC has statutory and fiduciary obligations to manage reserve land pursuant to the *Indian Act*, including administering, issuing, and authorizing lands instruments such as leases and permits to third parties. Lands Instruments are used to enable economic development by granting interests and rights in parcels of land on reserve. Depending on the type of project or activity, federal regulations may also be applicable including the *Indian Mining Regulations*, *Indian Timber Regulations*, *Indian Reserve Waste Disposal Regulations* and *Indian Referendum Regulations*, amongst others.

### ***First Nations Commercial and Industrial Development Act***

The *First Nations Commercial and Industrial Development Act* allows the federal government, at the request of a First Nation, to produce regulations for complex commercial and industrial development projects on reserve. These regulations are project-specific, developed in cooperation with the First Nation and the relevant province and limited to the lands described in the project. The Act allows for the adoption of regulations on reserve that are compatible with existing provincial regulations, and allows the government to delegate monitoring and enforcement of the new regulatory regime to the province by way of an agreement between the federal government, the First Nation, and the relevant provincial government. It could be possible that a proposed commercial or industrial development project located on-reserve lands, in the area of this regional assessment, trigger the development of regulations under this Act while the regional assessment is underway.

### ***First Nations Land Management Framework Agreement and First Nation Land Management Act***

First Nation Land Management was initiated in 1991 by 14 First Nations chiefs; the Framework Agreement on First Nation Land Management was signed in 1996 by the First Nations and Canada, and recognized in Canadian legislation by the *First Nations Land Management Act* in 1999. Together the Framework Agreement and the Act form First Nation Land Management and enable First Nations to opt-out of 44 sections of the *Indian Act* relating to land and environment management. First Nations enact a community-approved land code, through which they can develop their own laws about land use, the environment and natural resources in line with community values and priorities. This includes the authority for First Nations to develop and implement their own laws and process for environmental assessment, which apply on their reserve lands. Through a shared delivery model, ISC and CIRNAC work collaboratively to advance initiatives related to First Nation Land Management. CIRNAC has taken the lead on legislative aspects while ISC provides operational and programmatic support to the First Nation Land Management Resource Centre and First Nations. Currently, Long Lake 58 First Nation is the only community in the Ring of Fire area operating under a land code.

### ***Impact Assessment Act***

Under the Sections 81-91 of the *Impact Assessment Act*, ISC is responsible for ensuring that smaller, non-designated projects located on reserve lands do not result in adverse effects. This is done by conducting environmental reviews of these projects. It is possible that some non-designated projects located in First Nations communities within the area of the Ring of Fire regional assessment undergo an environmental review.

### **3. EXPERT INFORMATION OR KNOWLEDGE**

**List and summarize the specialists or expert information or knowledge that your department or agency has that may be relevant to the regional assessment. Include all research, reports and data sets in this response inventory.**

ISC has some general information on First Nations communities that are accessible to general public and could potentially inform the regional assessment. This information can be accessed via the First Nations Profiles and the Community Well-being Index or by engaging with personnel in ISC regional offices.

#### **First Nations Community Profiles**

The First Nation Profiles is a collection of information that describes individual First Nation communities across Canada. The profiles include general information on a First Nation along with more detailed information about its reserve(s), governance, federal funding, geography, registered population statistics and various Census statistics. This information can be accessed here: <https://fnp-ppn.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Index.aspx?lasng=eng>.

#### **Community Well-being Index**

ISC maintains the Community Well-being Index (CWB). This index measures socio-economic well-being for individual Indigenous communities across Canada. It has 4 components: education, labour force activity, income, and housing. It is compatible with other community-level data to facilitate a wide variety of research on the factors associated with well-being, and allows for cross-comparison with

other Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. The Community Well-being Index can be accessed through the following website: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1100100016579/1557319653695>.

Also, through the Strategic Research and Data Innovation Branch, ISC could contribute information related to population data, population projections and socioeconomic information about communities in the Ring of Fire area, so long as the data is not owned by the community. The Strategic Research and Data Innovation Branch can be contacted at this email address: [aadnc.instat.aandc@canada.ca](mailto:aadnc.instat.aandc@canada.ca)

ISC has numerous programs and services for on-reserve First Nations, which provide similar functions as a province or municipality does off-reserve. These programs include health, social, education, economic development, lands and environment, governance and infrastructure services. Although ISC maintains inventories of data related to each of these programs, often this data belongs to the participating community.

It should be noted that while some of this data may be useful in the context of the regional assessment for the Ring of Fire area, in instances where the data belongs to the community ISC would not be able to share this information with the Agency. The Agency would need to approach the community directly.

#### Short-term Drinking Water Advisories

ISC maintains a list of short-term drinking water advisories in First Nation communities south of 60°N. A short-term drinking water advisory means there is a temporary water quality issue on a specific water system (e.g., boil water advisory, do not consume advisory, do not use advisory).

#### Long-term Drinking Water Advisories

ISC maintains a map of long-term drinking water advisories on public systems on reserves. ISC funds public water systems that serve 5 or more household connections. ISC also funds public water systems serving public facilities that are funded by the department. These water systems are managed and operated by the band, a band-owned utility or a qualified third party under contract.

## **4. POLICIES, PROGRAMS OR INITIATIVES**

**List and summarize the past, current and planned policies, programs or initiatives of your department or agency that may be relevant to the regional assessment. Include an outline of related funding initiatives in this response and provide information on geographic locations, next steps and timing for the program/initiative.**

In addition to services provided to communities, ISC has a wide variety of funding programs related, but not exclusive, to health, education, economic development, infrastructure, and reserve land and environment management that would be available for communities located in the Ring of Fire area. Below are short descriptions of these funding programs for which ISC could coordinate information collection to inform the regional assessment. It is important to note that ISC may not be able to share some data from these programs, as data could be owned by communities.

### **Education**

ISC has programs that support First Nations elementary and secondary education, and distinctions-based strategies for First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation post-secondary students. The programs listed below could be relevant for communities located in the Ring of Fire area.

- Education Partnership Program – a proposal-based program designed to advance First Nations student achievement in First Nations and provincial schools.
- Elementary and Secondary Education Program – provides eligible students ordinarily living on reserve with elementary and secondary education programs comparable to those in provincial schools.
- First Nation and Inuit Skills Link Program – supports initiatives that help First Nations and Inuit youth acquire essential employability and job-related skills, and to learn about job and career options.
- First Nations and Inuit Summer Work Experience Program – supports initiatives to help First Nations and Inuit youth acquire skills, prepare for full-time employment and earn income to support post-secondary education.
- Post-Secondary Student Support Program - department provides financial assistance to First Nations students who are enrolled in eligible post-secondary programs.
- High-Cost Special Education Program – to assist eligible First Nations students with high-cost special needs to access quality programs and services that are culturally sensitive and reflective of generally accepted provincial or territorial standards.
- University and College Entrance Preparation Program – to enable First Nations students to attain the academic level required for entrance into degree and diploma credit programs, as prioritized and directed by First Nations.

### **Emergency Management**

The Emergency Management Assistance Program provides funding to First Nations communities in order to build resiliency, prepare for natural hazards and respond to them using the 4 pillars of emergency management (mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery). This program is jointly implemented with provincial and non-governmental organizations.

### **Health**

The First Nations and Inuit Health Branch provides health care services and programming for First Nations and Inuit in Canada. The following health care services and programs may be applicable to the First Nations in the Ring of Fire area:

- Jordan's Principle. Jordan's Principle makes sure all First Nations children living in Canada can access the products, services and supports they need, when they need them. Funding can help with a wide range of health, social and educational needs, including the unique needs that First Nations Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA children and youth and those with disabilities may have.
- Non-Insured Health Benefits Program. This program provides eligible First Nations and Inuit clients with coverage for a range of health benefits that are not covered through other social programs, private insurance plans, and provincial or territorial health insurance. The program provides coverage for the following medically necessary goods and services: vision care, dental care, mental health counselling, medical supplies and equipment, prescription and over-the-counter medication, and medical transportation.

- Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program. This program provides cultural and emotional support, and mental health counselling services to Survivors of Indian Residential Schools and the families of former students.
- Federal Indian Day School Health and Cultural Support Program. This program provides health support services for individuals affected by the trauma associated with their attendance at an historic Federal Indian Day School.
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Health and Cultural Support Program. This program provides mental health counselling, emotional support, community-based cultural support services and some assistance with transportation costs for survivors, family members and those affected by the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.
- Health Facilities Program. This program provides funding to support the planning, construction, expansion, renovation, maintenance and management of community health facilities. The types of health infrastructure supported under this program include health services buildings, addictions treatment centres, Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve spaces and residences for healthcare professionals.

The First Nations and Inuit Health Branch also manages the following funding programs which are available to Tribal Councils and First Nations communities and organizations in the Ring of Fire area:

- First Nations Environmental Contaminants Program. This program supports First Nations communities in identifying, investigating and characterizing the impact of exposure to environmental hazards through research, monitoring, risk assessment, risk communication and knowledge integration activities.
- Climate Change and Health Adaptation Program for First Nations South of 60°N. This program supports First Nations to identify, assess and respond to the health impacts of climate change.
- First Nations Baseline Assessment Program on Health and the Environment. This program supports First Nations in assessing the baseline status of human health and the environment in their communities prior to the implementation of large scale industrial projects on their traditional territories.

#### First Nations Food, Nutrition & Environment Study

The First Nations Food, Nutrition & Environment Study was implemented across Canada over a 10-year period (2008-2018). Data collection was conducted in 18 First Nations communities in Ontario during the fall of 2011 and 2012. The Results from Ontario 2011-2012 report presents the aggregated results from these 18 First Nations communities in Ontario. The FNFNES included five components:

- 1) Household interviews to collect information on dietary patterns, lifestyle and general health status, environmental concerns and food security;
- 2) Drinking water sampling for trace metals;
- 3) Hair sampling for exposure to mercury;
- 4) Surface water sampling for pharmaceuticals; and
- 5) Traditional food sampling for chemical contaminant content.

#### Environmental Public Health Services in First Nations Communities

The Environmental Public Health Services team in the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch works with First Nations communities to identify and prevent environmental public health risks. These risks could

negatively impact the health of people in both the natural and built environment. Most of these services are provided by Environmental Public Health Officers, who are certified public health inspectors employed either by the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch or First Nations. Environmental Public Health Officers deliver environmental public health services to support First Nations communities in identifying and recommending corrective action on potential public health risks that could adversely impact the health of community residents on reserve. The services are provided in the eight core program areas of:

- 1) Drinking water;
- 2) Health and housing;
- 3) Food safety;
- 4) Wastewater;
- 5) Solid waste disposal;
- 6) Facilities inspections;
- 7) Communicable disease control; and
- 8) Emergency planning, response and recovery.

The Environmental Public Health Services team may have inspection reports of relevance for the First Nations in the Ring of Fire area.

### **Housing**

The First Nation On-Reserve Housing Program helps to improve on-reserve housing. While it does not cover the full cost of housing, this program can be accessed by First Nations to build and renovate houses, as well as contribute towards maintenance costs, insurance, debt servicing, and the planning and management of a housing portfolio.

### **Infrastructure**

ISC works with First Nations governments and communities to support adequate and sustainable housing, clean drinking water and community infrastructure such as schools, roads and wastewater systems, which are essential to healthy, safe and prosperous communities.

In the context of this regional assessment, the Capital Facilities and Maintenance Program and the First Nation Infrastructure Fund are relevant for First Nation communities. Additionally, ISC, in partnership with the Province of Ontario, cost-shares the annual construction and operations of the winter road network that services the remote fly-in communities of the Ring of Fire area.

The First Nations Waste Management Initiative, launched in 2016, supports First Nations in developing sustainable solid waste management systems through modern infrastructure, operations, training and partnerships. It is a complementary source of funding to the First Nation Infrastructure Fund. As part of this, ISC works with First Nation communities across northern Ontario to deliver various waste management projects.

### **Lands, Environment and Economic Development**

Since 2011, through whole-of-government efforts led by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario (FedNor), the Government of Canada has made major investments in First Nations communities in the region. This includes over \$190M of programming investments to improve socio-economic conditions and support informed decision-making

for natural resource development. In addition, \$51M in direct investments have been made via the federal Strategic Partnerships Initiative (SPI) to support First Nations participation in the mining sector and improve socio-economic conditions. Other programs at ISC and other government departments have also supported the region through investments in infrastructure (e.g., broadband and clean energy), mineral research (e.g., Canadian Chromite R&D Initiative), and capacity support for data collection, wildlife surveys, mapping, etc.

More specifically, environmental monitoring activities included support for review of environmental assessment/impact work, baseline and environmental monitoring studies, as well as training and capacity development to prepare communities for environmental assessment and projects related to mineral development in their traditional territory. Other notable projects included research to collect data from land users and Elders on traditional ecological knowledge (TK) as it relates to boundaries extending into the Ring of Fire region on environmental impacts from upstream and up muskeg development.

In addition, ISC prioritized approximately \$25M in community-level investments (e.g., housing, governance, health, etc.) through the Community Wellbeing Pilot project with Neskantaga, Webequie, and Marten Falls First Nations. ISC also provides a suite of community economic development programming, as well as programming to support Comprehensive Community Planning and Professional and Institutional Development.

In the Northern Ontario region, one new approach that ISC has introduced is the Community Development Wrap-Around initiative (CDWAI); it represents a wrap-around approach to community development that is changing the way First Nation communities and government do business. CDWAI communities lead their process by identifying their community priorities, capacity development opportunities they wish to access, and the external partners they want to work with during implementation. Each CDWAI community will create a CDWAI Support Team made up of community members and their partners to facilitate the implementation of their community development activities.

ISC is active in fostering conditions for economic development in Indigenous communities through the Community Opportunity Readiness program, Indigenous Business Development, the Lands and Economic Development Services Program and Land Use Planning.

In addition, ISC manages the Contaminated Sites On Reserve program which works to identify and remediate environmental contamination on reserve lands. Since 1992, this program has provided financial assistance to assess and remediate environmentally contaminated sites on reserve lands and other lands under its custodial responsibility; sites deemed to pose human health risk are a priority. Over the last decade, projects to remediate contaminated sites on Marten Falls and Webequie First Nations lands were supported. Also potentially relevant to First Nations in this region is the department's Reserve Lands and Environmental Management Program which provides funding to First Nations to develop the capacity needed to manage and exercise increased responsibility over their reserve land, resources and environment.

## **Social**

The Indigenous communities in the Ring of Fire area can access the below listed ISC programs.



- Assisted Living Program - provides funds to identified service providers to help provide non-medical, social support services to people living on-reserve with chronic illness or disability.
- First Nations Child and Family Services Program – funding for prevention and protection services to support the safety and well-being of First Nation children and families (on reserve).
- On-reserve Income Assistance Program – to support greater labour market participation in First Nation communities. It is intended to cover the costs of their daily living and provides funding to access employment supports; it has been recently boosted to respond to increased demand from First Nations individuals and families affected by COVID-19.

## **Water**

Circuit Rider Training Program provides First Nation operators with direct training on how to operate, service and maintain the water and wastewater systems in their communities. ISC regional offices hire a roster of qualified experts who are available to train First Nation water and wastewater system operators.

## **5. Outline any additional responsibilities, information or knowledge and any partners or collaborations that have not been specified, above.**

### **Health Canada**

Through the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, ISC collaborates with Health Canada to inform assessments of health impacts on First Nations from resource and infrastructure development projects, including their cumulative effects.

### **Indigenous Centre for Cumulative Effects**

In 2018, in collaboration with Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners, ISC led the co-development of an Indigenous Centre for Cumulative Effects. This not-for-profit organization is housed outside of government and will help to build the scientific and technical capacity of Inuit, Métis and First Nation communities to undertake the assessment, monitoring and management of cumulative effects of projects on their lands and waters. The Centre will also aim to provide support and resources for Indigenous communities across Canada which may include providing access to expertise, funding, training and tools that could help inform regional assessments.

## **PART 2 – To contribute to the design of the regional assessment process and development of the terms of reference, please provide information or advice in relation to the items below.**

### **1. Potential outcomes of the regional assessment**

ISC works to increase the well-being in Indigenous communities, primarily from a service-oriented perspective. As such, ISC is interested in attaining a comprehensive understanding of how the cumulative effects of industrial development and road connections with the rest of Ontario would affect the well-being in Indigenous communities, and affect the availability and quality of services to such communities.

Identification of capacity development and learning needs for community members to help them take advantage of economic opportunities is a desired outcome. This would allow affected Indigenous communities to better participate in the regional assessment and in potential development

opportunities in the area. In order for communities to be able to take full advantage of these economic opportunities, a better understanding of potential jobs and the associated training is required.

The First Nations and Inuit Health Branch is interested in understanding how the anticipated development in the Ring of Fire area could impact the human health of Indigenous peoples and the regional healthcare system. For example, the positive and adverse impacts to:

- Accessing primary, secondary and tertiary care, preventative care and emergency services.
- Accessing traditional and store-bought foods.
- Accessing traditional lands and waters and participation in cultural and spiritual practices.
- Accessing traditional plants and medicines.
- Vulnerable populations, such as Indigenous women, children and youth.
- Drug trafficking (e.g., access to illegal substances, substance use, mental health and addiction services).

The First Nations and Inuit Health Branch is also interested in the baseline data on the human health of Indigenous peoples and the environmental conditions of the First Nations communities that will be gathered through the Regional Assessment.

## **2. Relevant geographic and temporal boundaries**

A large section of the Ring of Fire area falls within Treaty 9 territory. The northernmost sections of Treaty 9 lands would likely fall outside of the geographic boundaries of the Regional Assessment.

## **3. Factors to be considered in the regional assessment and the scope of those factors**

As the regional assessment is proposing to model and evaluate the cumulative effects of potential mining and other developments over a large section of northern Ontario, ISC can expect to see some emphasis on determining how the bio-physical impacts potentially influence the human health, culture, and social and economic conditions in Indigenous communities.

For example, rivers and lakes are important to the Indigenous peoples of the area, as waterways, in food fishery and smaller-scale commercial fishing, and in having cultural value. Another example is the relationship between increased road access through the region and the potential access to and/or availability of health care services.

Community readiness to take advantage of opportunities associated with the pre-development and development of potential mining sites is also of importance. Information regarding types of job opportunities and the skills needed to obtain those jobs is of great importance, especially if skill training is only available outside of the communities.

Changes associated with the potential increased accessibility to communities and/or traditional territories are expected to be analyzed and communicated, as changes in lifestyle for directly affected and indirectly affected communities needs to be understood.

ISC suggests that the following factors be considered in the Regional Assessment:

- Human health of Indigenous peoples (e.g., self-reported health status, chronic diseases, communicable diseases, mental health disorders, substance use)
- Health services (e.g., family physicians, medical specialists, nurses, chiropractors and physiotherapists, laboratory services, pharmaceuticals, hospital care)
- Social services (e.g., social housing, seniors care, child welfare, disability support, domestic and family violence services)
- Accessibility and availability of traditional foods (e.g., food security, contaminants, foodborne illnesses, diseases, parasites)
- Traditional plants and medicines (e.g., food security, contaminants, foodborne illnesses, access to traditional medicines)
- Social determinants of health (e.g., income and social status, employment and working conditions, education and literacy, childhood experiences, physical environments, social supports and coping skills, healthy behaviours, access to health services, biology and genetic endowment, gender, culture, race/racism)
- Cultural continuity (e.g., ability to practice culture, ability to transfer culture and traditions to subsequent generations)
- Safety (e.g., gender-based violence, human trafficking, police reported crime, perceptions of safety)
- Environmental conditions (e.g., air quality, soil quality, water quality, list of waterbodies used as drinking water sources)

#### **4. Means of communication and engagement that would best facilitate participation of your department or agency in the regional assessment**

Communication with ISC should be through the Lands and Economic Development Sector, Senior Director of Environment Robert Bellizzi ([Robert.bellizzi2@sac-isc.gc.ca](mailto:Robert.bellizzi2@sac-isc.gc.ca)) and Anna Kessler ([anna.Kessler@sac-isc.gc.ca](mailto:anna.Kessler@sac-isc.gc.ca)), Manager, Impact Assessment. The Lands and Economic Development Sector will coordinate with other sectors within ISC, including the Regional Operations Sector, and Education and Social Development Programs and Partnerships Sector which are expected to have information that may be useful to the regional assessment.

For specific communication on health related items, Jennifer Mercer, the Director of the Environmental Public Health Division ([jennifer.mercer@sac-isc.gc.ca](mailto:jennifer.mercer@sac-isc.gc.ca)), and Constantine Tikhonov, the Section Head of the Impact Assessment and Health Program ([constantine.tikhonov@sac-isc.gc.ca](mailto:constantine.tikhonov@sac-isc.gc.ca)) may also be contacted directly.

As with other expert departments, all communications flowing towards ISC can be done through the single departmental email box ([sac.evaluationimpacts-impactsassessment.isc@sac-isc.gc.ca](mailto:sac.evaluationimpacts-impactsassessment.isc@sac-isc.gc.ca)), which is accessible by all sectors of the department engaged in the Impact Assessment work and acts as a single-window access point.

In terms of outward facing communication, ISC has some experience in participating in the individual project impact assessments in the Ring of Fire area (e.g. Webequie and Marten Falls access roads proposal). While not the same process, ISC expects that the regional assessment would employ similar methods to gather information; from electronic communication to phone calls, the use of in-person and virtual meetings (with communities), to organizing working groups around selected topics of interest.

## **5. Input or advice on any other aspect of the regional assessment**

The desire for a regional assessment has been a long-standing goal of the First Nations in the area, particularly the Matawa First Nations. Environmental Assessment and Monitoring was a key pillar in the Regional Framework Agreement negotiated with the Province of Ontario. It will be important to engage Indigenous communities early in the process on how they want to be involved in developing and undertaking this regional assessment (e.g. individually vs. collectively, etc.). Equally important will be the timing of the regional assessment, as this needs to take into consideration the capacity of indigenous communities to participate given other competing community priorities.