

# Wabun Tribal Council

## Context

The Wabun Tribal Council (WTC), a non-profit regional council established in 1989 and based in Timmins, Ontario, is the regional representative body for the First Nations of Brunswick House, Chapleau Ojibwe, Flying Post, Matachewan, Mattagami, and Beaverhouse. These communities are situated within the northeastern Ontario districts of Sudbury, Timiskaming, and Cochrane, all of which lie within the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation. The WTC’s Board of Directors comprises the Chiefs of the six communities. The WTC has an Executive Director and staff that work in the fields of health, education, economic development, and resource development.

Pre-exploration	Exploration	Development	Operation	Closure	Post-closure
-----------------	-------------	-------------	-----------	---------	--------------

**Lead:** Community (Ont.)

**Steps of the Mineral Development Sequence:**  
Pre-exploration, exploration, development, operation

**Key Finding:** As a community-driven organization, the WTC has helped facilitate engagement with exploration and mining companies and enhanced community readiness by building capacity and maximizing local benefits from mineral resource development activities happening on its territory.

The WTC has played an important role in the development trajectory of the Wabun First Nations over the past decade, especially in the realm of mineral exploration and development. WTC staff are responsible for negotiating mining development agreements in collaboration with community leaders and acting as a point of contact for project proponents and as a liaison in communications between government, industry, and the communities. The WTC also provides each member community with the support of the other member First Nations.

## Description of Measures Implemented

The WTC started with the mapping of traditional territories in preparation for mining. Through the mapping process, the Chiefs established “economic boundaries,” recognizing that traditional territories overlap, but that a basis for allocating revenues from Impact and Benefit Agreements (IBA) was needed. A map of individual community territories has been kept as an internal document, while a map of the collective territory has been made available to industry. This maintains the strength of the collective voice while also making the negotiation process easier for exploration and mining companies.

The map of economic boundaries includes buffer zones between different communities’ territories. If a potential project is to take place in a buffer zone, the bordering communities commit to negotiate together and work toward a single IBA. The discussions and decisions between communities take place before any negotiations begin with the project proponent, allowing communities to agree upon their own plans for sharing before negotiating with industry, benefiting both the First Nations and the industry proponent.

Furthermore, the WTC has developed a standard Exploration Agreement (EA) that all exploration firms are expected to sign before exploring on its territory. This standard EA allows an agreement to be negotiated in less than a day. However, if the land in question requires unique kinds of protection or if the nature of the exploration activities elicits unique community concerns, the agreement can be modified and the negotiation process extended. The agreement includes a number of important elements, such as the allocation of economic benefits, requirements for consultation and engagement, considerations regarding cultural activities, a successor clause that requires the EA to be transferred to the new company if claims are sold, and a commitment to engage in and fund IBA negotiations if the exploration project develops into a mine project.

The WTC also works to maintain discipline within the community leadership. Once negotiations begin, it is made clear to all involved that the company is to communicate only with the members of the negotiation team and is not to directly contact anyone from the community. If anyone is contacted by the company, they know to redirect the company to the negotiation team.

Implementation can be the most challenging part of an agreement. The WTC has addressed this challenge by ensuring that there is a First Nations IBA Coordinator and an IBA committee for each IBA. The IBA Coordinators spend the majority of their time at the mine sites communicating with workers and managers, overseeing activities, and ensuring that the terms of the IBA are being met.

### **Results**

As a community-driven organization, the WTC has helped facilitate engagement with exploration and mining companies and enhanced community readiness by building capacity and maximizing local benefits from mineral resource development activities happening on its territory. Collectively, the Wabun First Nations have signed over 20 EAs and the WTC has negotiated three IBAs, two of which include more than one First Nation. Although the first IBA was signed just over five years ago, community members are already experiencing the positive impacts, such as increased employment, business opportunities, training, and improvements in community well-being. One of the more subtle benefits connected with the Wabun First Nations engagement with the mining industry is the strengthening of social capital. Through their collective work on mining, those involved in the WTC have helped create linkages between communities and, in doing so, increased the strength and resilience of each individual community. The WTC has also been instrumental in the sharing of important information and ideas among communities and in the development of meaningful relationships.

### **Lessons Learned**

The WTC has identified several key factors that have helped it engage with governments and industry to harness benefits from mineral development in a way that is consistent with its desire to pursue economic development while strengthening culture, investing in education, and promoting community well-being. These factors are the expertise and perseverance of WTC staff, a focus on pre-negotiation planning and preparation, the streamlining of processes where possible, a commitment to identifying and addressing challenges, and a commitment to open dialogue and sharing as enabled by trust amongst the WTC members.

### **For more information:**

Visit the Wabun Tribal Council's Web site at [wabun.on.ca](http://wabun.on.ca).