

The Windigo Community Development Corporation

Context

The Windigo Community Development Corporation (WCDC) is solely owned by the Windigo First Nations of Bearskin Lake, Cat Lake, North Caribou Lake, Sachigo Lake and New Slate Falls. It was incorporated as a not-for-profit in 1994 to help the communities take part in the opportunities presented by the construction of the Musselwhite Mine¹. The mine in northwestern Ontario is a fly-in, fly-out operation on the southern shore of Opapimiskan Lake, about 480 km north of Thunder Bay in northwest Ontario. An all-weather road connects the mine to the community of Pickle Lake, about 200 km to the south. The Musselwhite property is 17,548 hectares, entirely on First Nations land. Since its first commercial production in April 1997, the mine has produced more than 4 million ounces of gold. The objectives of the WCDC are to promote, initiate and provide continuing assistance and management of projects, and to assist and encourage the startup and growth of local enterprises.

Pre-Exploration	Exploration	Development	Operation	Closure	Post-Closure
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Lead: Community and industry (Ont.)

Steps of the Mineral Development Sequence: Exploration, development, operation

Key Finding: The Windigo Community Development Corporation's early involvement in opportunities for economic development from the Musselwhite Mine eventually provided for growth outside of the mine, mining industry and local area. It has created a path towards long-term business viability and economic diversification of the local communities.

Description of Measures Implemented

Musselwhite was one of the first mines in Ontario to enter into a comprehensive agreement with local First Nations communities, called the Musselwhite Agreement. In September 2001, the Musselwhite Mine, the First Nations communities of North Caribou Lake, Cat Lake, Kingfisher Lake and Wunnumin Lake, the Shibogama First Nations Council, and the Windigo First Nations Council renewed the Musselwhite Agreement originally signed in 1996. The initial agreement set targets for First Nations employment, opportunities for business development and environmental protection. When commercial mine production began in 1997, the WCDC, supported by the agreement, was responsible for providing catering and housekeeping services to the mining camp.



Windigo Catering

The renewed Musselwhite Agreement set new targets for First Nations training and employment opportunities at the mine as well as business development to benefit the area over the long term and beyond the life of the mine. It also included business agreements between the Windigo First Nations

¹ The Musslewhite Mine is now owned by Goldcorp. It was purchased in 2005 from Placer Dome Inc. from Barrick Gold Corporation.

Council and Goldcorp, which support a range of employment, skills training and economic development opportunities. Such work enabled the communities and the WCDC to continue to build capacity and consider expansion outside the mining industry.

In 2005, the not-for-profit and business activities of the WCDC were separated to form the for-profit Windigo Ventures General Partner, which manages Windigo Catering, Windigo Property, and Windigo Distributors. The profits made from these three businesses are now reinvested in future business development.

Results

By building on the initial contracts and opportunities resulting from the Musselwhite Mine, the WCDC was able to significantly expand its operations and capacity. The WCDC has established effective businesses operating in markets well beyond the communities of the Windigo First Nations Council. For example, Windigo Catering was awarded a custodial contract with the City of Thunder Bay Police (Balmoral Station) and was selected as the primary supplier by the Ministry of Natural Resources to provide camp cooking services to its Emergency Forest Fire Fighters.



Employees and clients of Windigo Catering

The WCDC currently has 61 employees, 48 percent of whom are from the Windigo communities, and another 40 percent from other First Nations communities. It was also the proud recipient of the 2013 Prospectors & Developers Association of Canada's Skookum Jim Award, which recognizes Indigenous achievements in the mineral industry. Additionally, Windigo Property currently owns four properties in Sioux Lookout and established Boreal Solutions, a cleaning supply company in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Lessons Learned

WCDC's early involvement in opportunities for economic development from the Musselwhite Mine has contributed to growth outside of the mine, mining industry and local area. It has created a path towards long-term business viability and economic diversification.

Evolving from a not-for-profit to a for-profit structure helped ensure clarity between the different economic development activities of the WCDC. This recognition of the need to be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances has helped the WCDC to work in many capacities to maximize opportunities and benefits.

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