



# Ontario Native Women's Association

## Fact Sheet: Lac Seul Water Use and Protection

In July of 2011, the governments of Canada and Ontario announced the Canada–Ontario First Nations Initiative to Improve Drinking Water Quality, a joint three-year initiative focused upon developing 'innovative and alternative drinking water systems to improve water quality in Ontario First Nation communities.'<sup>1</sup>

In March of 2012, it was announced that the First Nation community of Lac Seul, which is made up of three communities: Kejick Bay, Whitefish Bay, and Frenchman's Head was selected to participate in the Canada-Ontario First Nations Pilot Initiative to Improve Drinking Water Quality. Lac Seul has a population of 3,103 members, of which 827 live on reserve. It is located approximately 38 km northwest of Sioux Lookout. Other communities selected were: Alderville First Nation, Munsee-Delaware First Nation, Lac Seul and Zhiibaahaasing First Nation. These communities were selected because they had water systems assessed at either a high design risk in the National Assessment of Water and Wastewater Systems in First Nations communities or lacked a communal drinking water system.

The Government of Ontario and the Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation will be providing technical support and training to the First Nation communities participating in the initiative. Depending on proposals received from industry, the design and technology solutions may include options such as:

- installation of new point-of-entry treatment systems in a heated enclosure outside of homes.
- improvements to existing infrastructure.
- purchase of new water delivery truck(s).
- installation of pre-fabricated water treatment plant(s)
- other approaches deemed appropriate through the Request for Proposals processes.<sup>2</sup>

The community of Lac Seul continues to take steps towards implementing the Canada-Ontario First Nations Pilot to Improve Drinking Water Systems, including:

- selecting the appropriate design and technology solutions for the community through a request for proposals (RFP) process;
- working collaboratively with the Ministry of Environment of Ontario and the AANDC to implement drinking-water solutions;
- continuing to operate, maintain and monitor water treatment systems.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. "Backgrounder: Canada-Ontario First Nations Pilot to Improve Drinking Water Quality."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



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Historically, the cost of building a water treatment plant in Ontario First Nations averages between 60-80K per connection, under this initiative the maximum capital cost is 25K per connection.<sup>4</sup>

Upon completion of the initiative, Lac Seul's drinking water will be monitored and tested to ensure that it meets the province of Ontario's drinking water regulations and guidelines. It is expected that the "knowledge gained through this initiative [will inform] over 600 First Nations Communities in Canada and the Governments of Canada and Ontario about options to ensure sustainable and cost-effective solutions for drinking water systems."<sup>5</sup> This is important considering 39 per cent of water and wastewater systems in First Nations communities are currently categorized as high risk, and another 34 per cent are categorized as medium risk<sup>6</sup> (National Assessment of Water and Wastewater Systems in First Nation Communities – 2009-2011).

In addition to the First Nations Pilot to improve Drinking Water, the Lac Seul First Nation water levels are also monitored by the Lake of the Woods Control Board which is "a Canadian board which regulates the water levels of Lake of the Woods and Lac Seul, and the flows in the Winnipeg and English Rivers downstream of these lakes to their junction, for the benefit of all users and interests."<sup>7</sup> The Lake of the Woods Board consults with the First Nation community through regulation meetings (held three times a year). The Lake of the Woods Board facilitates the assessment of watershed conditions and authorizes discharges from Lac Seul and Lake of the Woods. The Board states that it encourages the participation of First Nations advisors (appointed by Grand Council Treaty # 3/individual First nations) at its regulation meetings. To date, no First Nation Advisors have been appointed by Grand Council or individual First Nations.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Canada Ontario First Nations Drinking Water Improvement Initiative - Zhiibaahaasing First Nation. Retrieved from: <http://www.merx.com>.

<sup>6</sup> Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. "National Assessment of Water and Wastewater Systems in First Nation Communities – 2009-2011"

<sup>7</sup> Lake of the Woods Control Board. Retrieved from: <http://www.lwcb.ca/>