

OTIPEMISIWAK

(Oh-teh-pim-swak) – The people who own themselves

Issue 1 / 2020

Self-Governance: The Road to Nationhood

The Métis Nation of Alberta
drafts a constitution that
will lay the foundation for
future generations

Also inside:

- ∞ Event Recaps
- ∞ Youth Council
- ∞ COVID-19 Support
- ∞ Flood Relief

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On the Cover: The Métis Nation of Alberta's journey on the road to self-governance has been long and challenging, but a constitution is on the horizon.

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The year is 2020. It has taken the Métis Nation generations of perseverance, patience, and strength to uphold and exercise our right to self-governance in the absence of recognition and respect.

In 1870, Canada first recognized our distinct identity and way of life when it signed the Manitoba Act, which our ancestors had fought for, in order to protect our rights to exist freely as Métis. For a time, we governed ourselves as we always had, with peace, and our Nation flourished. Sadly, that time was brief and ever since, the Métis have endured a long and painful struggle back to self-determination.

But we have never given up hope to govern ourselves and be free once again.

In this issue of Otipemisiwak Magazine, we will take you on our most recent journey to self-governance, its history, and its importance to our identity. We have signed historic agreements with Canada recognizing our right to self-government, a place that has taken over 90 years to get to.

Due to unimaginable circumstances these last few months, our journey has been paused, but we continue to pave the path that will guide our Nation forward for generations.

As we patiently wait for restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic to lift and our lives to resume as best as they can, we eagerly look forward to the time when we can gather again. A Constitution Commission will be travelling across Alberta to meet with you, our citizens, and listen to what you value most in a strong Nation and what you want to see in an MNA constitution.

Your voice will shape the future of the Métis Nation and your voice is at the heart of our efforts. The Métis Nation of Alberta is your Métis government working for you.

Wishing you health and happiness,

Audrey Poitras
President,
Métis Nation of Alberta



Greetings, the past few months have been a struggle for many of us dealing with the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic as we faced financial challenges, ill loved ones, and worries about both our own and our children’s futures.

Although there is much uncertainty ahead of us, we, the Métis, are a resilient people. We have had our homes taken from us, our children stolen, our identities hidden, but we remain strong and united today.

We have always known we have a place, and this is why we continue to fight for recognition from the federal government for our right to govern ourselves, so we may live our lives as we have always done.

We have many things to look forward to and our Self-Government issue of Otipemisiwak Magazine covers the important milestones we have achieved on this path to recognition, the hard work of our Youth Council, and the importance of making room for our young people on a political level.

The Métis Nation of Alberta reminds all citizens that we are listening, and we encourage you to share your wisdom and experience on making the Métis Nation a place of Métis pride and independence for everyone.

Go to albertametisgov.com to learn more about self-government and join us, when it is safe to do so, as our Constitution Commission makes its way around the province to get your guidance in developing the MNA constitution.

Stay safe and be proud. We are Métis – we are Otipemisiwak.

Sincerely,

Dan Cardinal
Vice President,
Métis Nation of Alberta

EVENT RECAPS

BY AMY DILLON, LEANNE MILLER, AND OLIVIA BAKO



Health Forum

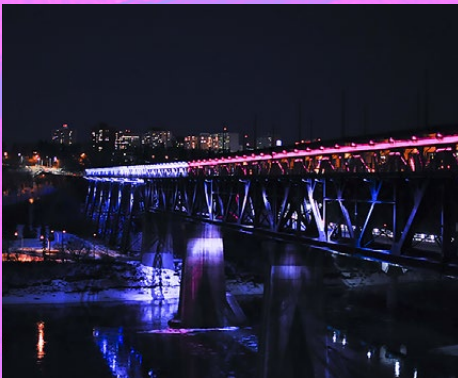
The second annual Health Forum on November 30, 2019 was focused on building a Métis-specific health plan, which included group discussions on MNA regional health needs, a presentation on Métis Kinscapes in Lac Ste. Anne, and a banquet dinner. Attendees were encouraged to tour the Health Services Fair with their “health passport” to receive and document the many free health services offered throughout.





Métis Week

The frigid temperatures during Métis Week 2019 didn't stop Alberta's Métis from celebrating! The week began on November 10 with the Louis Riel Walk, a 6-km trek to St. Margaret's Church, in memory of Riel's funeral procession. Citizens also honoured him at the Edmonton City Hall Métis Week Declaration and Louis Riel commemoration at the Alberta Legislature. Proud citizens also gathered for the Métis Veteran's Tea and Author Night with Métis NHLer Theo Fleury. This year marked the first-ever Métis Discovery Day, when thousands of students of all ages packed the Edmonton Expo Centre to experience and learn about Métis culture.





Festive Fun!

Spirits were merry and bright at the Community Christmas Party on December 7, 2019. Guests enjoyed a turkey dinner, jigging performance by Métis Child and Family Jiggers, songs by the Métis Children's Choir, and music by Last Minute Band. As for the next one, all we want for Christmas is for you to come celebrate the season with us!



Christmas at Métis Crossing

The sun glistened off the freshly fallen snow to ring in the holiday season at Métis Crossing on December 14, 2019. The new Métis Crossing Cultural Gathering Centre opened its doors for the first time to celebrate the annual Christmas party for kids. Visitors enjoyed the day with sleigh rides, snowshoes, crafts, and a little visit from Santa Claus!



Headstrong

Close to 80 Métis youth from across Alberta travelled to Grande Prairie January 11, 2020 for the second annual Headstrong Mental Health Summit. Métis author of "From the Ashes" Jesse Thistle, musician Charlie Kerr from the band Hotel Mira, and Métis youth shared their battles with (and solutions to) mental health. For many Indigenous youth, shame and lack of resources are barriers to seeking help. Headstrong's goal is to end stigma — Be brave, reach out, and speak up!



Tales from the Trapline

A group from the Indigenous tourism industry got a sneak peek at Métis Crossing's latest adventure, Tales from the Trapline, in February 2020. The snow-covered day included a snowshoe trek from the old Cromarty House down into the woods as Knowledge Keeper Lilyrose shared her wisdom on native plants and trapping along the way. The group learned to build shelters with tree branches and finished the day with a blanket stitch activity and laughs around the stone fireplace.





Youth & Seniors Gathering

Telling stories of the past and sharing visions of the future was the heart of this year's Youth & Seniors Gathering held February 7-9, 2020. Youth, seniors, and citizens of all ages were entertained by Métis storytelling and open mic at the Meet & Greet on day one. On day two, attendees joined in on cultural activities like fish scale art, jigging, moose calling, and Michif lessons. It was an action-packed day topped off with fiddling, jigging, and music by Rockin' Fiddle Band. The last day saw presentations, a discussion panel, and prizes!

Connecting with Culture, Virtually—2nd Annual Alberta Métis Fest goes online

On June 13, computer, phone, and tablet screens were lit up with dancing feet as the sounds of the Red River Jig flowed through the air. No, this wasn't a Métis TikTok video—it was the Métis Nation of Alberta's (MNA) 2nd annual Alberta Métis Fest.

At a time when music and conversation should have been filling halls and venues across the province, the coronavirus pandemic forced the MNA to take the party online.

The virtual event reached thousands of people throughout the day with 2,500 tuning in on the Alberta Métis Fest app and hundreds more joining the Facebook livestream. Viewers enjoyed Métis entertainers, checked out Métis artisans at the virtual tradeshow, connected with their community via chatrooms, and won

many awesome door prizes. The livestream brought in 2,080 likes, more than 500 comments, and was shared 220 times.

The MNA decided to go virtual with Alberta Métis Fest as a way to support Métis artists and musicians whose livelihoods have been impacted by the pandemic.

"Our shared culture is something we are proud to celebrate, and the vibrance of our culture, from music, to dance, to singing, is something we will showcase at our second annual Alberta Métis Fest," said Audrey Poitras, President of the MNA. "Even in a global pandemic, it is important to find moments of joy and celebrate the diversity of Canada's and Alberta's populations."

Emcees Brianna Lizotte, a talented Métis fiddler, and Luc Gauthier, a quick-footed Métis jigger and musician, charmed viewers and kept the party going throughout the day. Each of the MNA's six regions showcased local Métis talent to the world, with close to 40 entertainers taking the stage from their own homes.

Alongside the professional talent on screen, Métis citizens with a spring in their step also sent in video entries for the virtual jigging contest. The jigging contest received around 60 entries, which were shortlisted to first, second, and third place, and



a people's choice. Young and young at heart jiggers from age 5 up to 80 plus showed off their steps and changes, with first place winners taking home as much as \$500.

Of course, Alberta Métis Fest was all about celebrating Métis culture, but Métis Albertans also shared their pride through video submissions about what it means to be Métis. The videos can be found at albertametis.com and on the Métis Nation of Alberta's Facebook page (@abmetis). Viewers can relive the magic or experience it for the first time through the livestream by heading to albertametis.com/alberta-metis-fest-2020.

Jigging Competition Finalists

| Age Category | First Place | Second Place | Third Place | People's Choice |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| 0 – 6 | Gage Lavallee-Lewis | Eli Aikins | Evan Nugent Jr. | Ava Lee |
| 7 – 12 | Mason Griffiths | Kash Randle | Julianna Houle | Natalia Lavallee-Lewis |
| 13 – 17 | Jaityn LaBelle | Ethan Lavallee | Kevyna Randalel | Julia Greenhalgh |
| 18 – 59 | Marlee L'Hirondelle | Jocelyn Ladouceur | Brent L'Hirondelle | Laurie Thompson |
| 60+ | Eddie Poitras | Lorraine Savard | Doreen Bergum | Rob Genaille |

The Road to a Constitution

BY OLIVIA BAKO

The Métis were born a free people. When the Canadian government stripped the Métis of their land and homes more than a century ago, their inherent freedoms were trampled.

Today, as the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) drafts a constitution that will lay the foundation for future generations, the Métis begin to take back their power.

What is self-government?

The Métis are known as *Otipemisiwak*, translated into “the people who own themselves,” or “the people who are free.”

That very principle — the power of the Métis to freely make decisions for themselves, based on what the citizens and Nation need — is the foundation of self-government, says Tyler Fetch, Intergovernmental Relations Advisor for the MNA.

The Métis Nation has always governed itself, but the difference today is the MNA can’t operate the way most governments can. The MNA is an association under the *Alberta Societies Act*, which allows it to receive government funding for programs and services. But this limits what the MNA can do for its citizens because of federal or provincial funding requirements.

“Whatever government feels is important to them or they feel is important to Aboriginal people, they’ll make a funding program, and then you have to jump through hoops, ridiculous reporting requirements, serious constraints on your ability to fund what you need,” Tyler says.

But self-government recognition changes this dynamic.

“You get to really do what you need to do to address the needs of your people, based on what they need, not what some guy in Ottawa says you need — huge difference.”

Over the last several years, the road to self-government has been fast tracked by three major victories in Canada’s legal system: the 2003 Powley

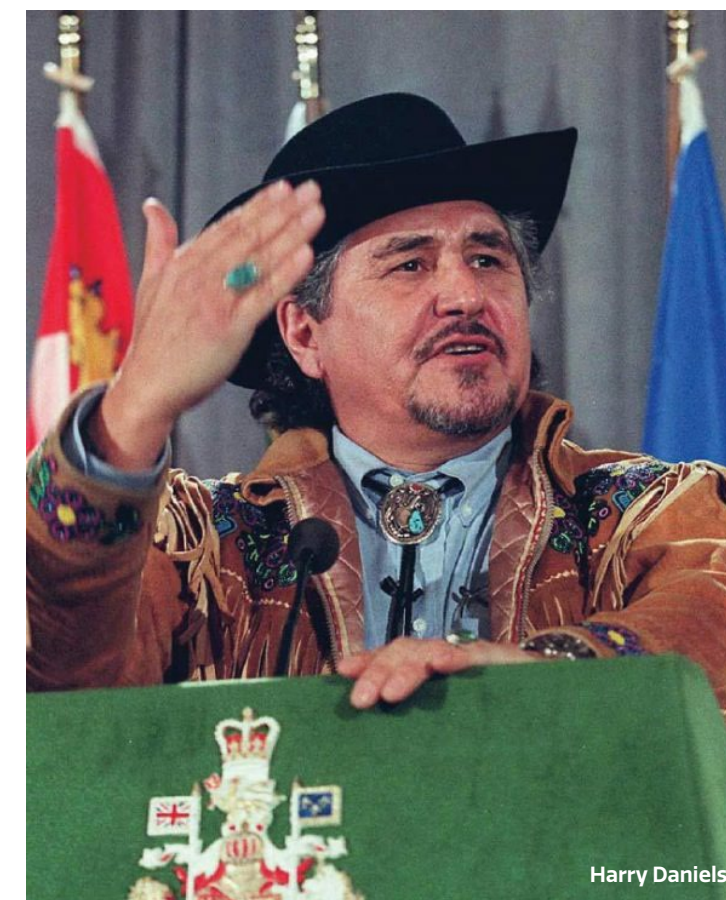
decision, which clarified Métis rights and proved the Métis were different from other Indigenous people under the Constitution; the 2013 Manitoba Métis Federation decision that showed Métis scrip was a fraudulent system and that the Government of Canada failed to uphold its honour in dealing with scrip— in other words, Tyler says it was basically a system to rob the Métis of their land; and the 2016 Daniels deci-

sion, which clearly made the federal government responsible for dealing with the Métis.

The Daniels decision especially triggered rounds of self-government discussions with the Trudeau government.

“When you get a government that comes in, that is touting itself as an Indigenous-friendly government, on a platform of reconciliation, you’re going to see more activity around figuring out how to resolve these issues,” Tyler explains.

With that in mind, the clock is ticking as the MNA works with Trudeau’s minority government to create and legalize a constitution before a federal election is called.



Harry Daniels



The Métis Nation as a government

Louis Riel once said, “When the Government of Canada presented itself at our doors, it found us at peace.”

Born of the fur trade from the fusion of the European and First Nation worlds, the Métis grew into a distinct people with their own language, culture, laws, and history. Democracy always played an important part, from selecting captains for buffalo hunts, to passing laws through general assemblies, and electing officials to run provisional governments.

“From that, these people arose with a unique identity and they called themselves Métis. When that happened, you see First Nations people giving names to these people to identify them within their worldview, so that’s where you get *Otipemisiwak*,” Tyler explains. “That’s where you had recognition

from other nations that there were these unique people. The Métis people themselves knew that, and that’s what Riel was talking about. They found us at peace, they found us living on the land, in harmony with the land, and each other and other nations. We governed ourselves, we had laws; we had all of these things.”

The problem, he says, is the Government of Canada doesn’t have anything in its laws, legislation, or policies identifying the Métis inherent right to govern themselves. For this to happen, the House of Commons must pass legislation recognizing the MNA as a nation, but that is the final step.

Back in November 2017, the MNA and Canada’s Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations signed the Framework Agreement for Advancing Reconciliation. This agreement set out the process to resolve issues standing in the way of reconciliation, including self-government, land-based rights, the nation-to-nation relationship, and health and prosperity of Métis citizens.

Then in June 2019, the two signed the Métis Government Recognition and Self-government Agreement (MGRSA), a historic document officially recognizing the MNA as the government of the Métis within Alberta. It also laid out a number of pieces that must be in place before the right to self-government becomes protected by law.

Tyler says once that happens, “We’re governing ourselves freely. We’re back to *Otipemisiwak*.”

Where are we now?

The MGRSA agreement sets the roadmap, and now the MNA must answer several questions about funding,

inter-governmental relations, and jurisdictions. What this means is the MNA must decide where the money will come from to pay for programs and services, how it will deal with neighbouring governments at all levels, and who is responsible for what.

Although the MNA can look to First Nation governments as examples, the Métis are different because they don’t have a central land base for citizens. The Métis are regional by nature, because families followed the buffalo and settled across the prairies and into parts of British Columbia, Ontario, Northwest Territories, and North Dakota—what’s known as the Métis homeland.

What’s more, Métis citizens are spread out across cities, towns, and villages, so certain infrastructure that is usually managed by a government, like



water treatment plants, couldn’t be by the MNA because those already exist.

But first comes a constitution. The constitution is a guide that shapes all MNA decisions, laws, values, structure of government, and more.

“It’s about building something that’s going to last a long time, relevant to Métis people, and is going to provide the type of government that Métis people want and need,” Tyler says.



What’s next?

The constitution itself will have to answer three questions: who creates the laws, who implements the laws, and how to resolve disputes.

Tyler says there are certain structures already in place, like who citizens are and how leaders are elected. Local and regional elections also exist, so the constitution will have to consider if that should stay or change.

These questions will be put to MNA citizens in the next few months at engagement sessions across the province. A Constitution Commission, made up of a chair and four commissioners, are responsible for leading the sessions.

“That will do a lot to help us understand what structure we need to look at,” Tyler says. “They’re going to come with some models and say, ‘these are some ideas we could look like’ and have a conversation with the community whether or not that resonates, makes sense or anything like that. That’s where we are today.”

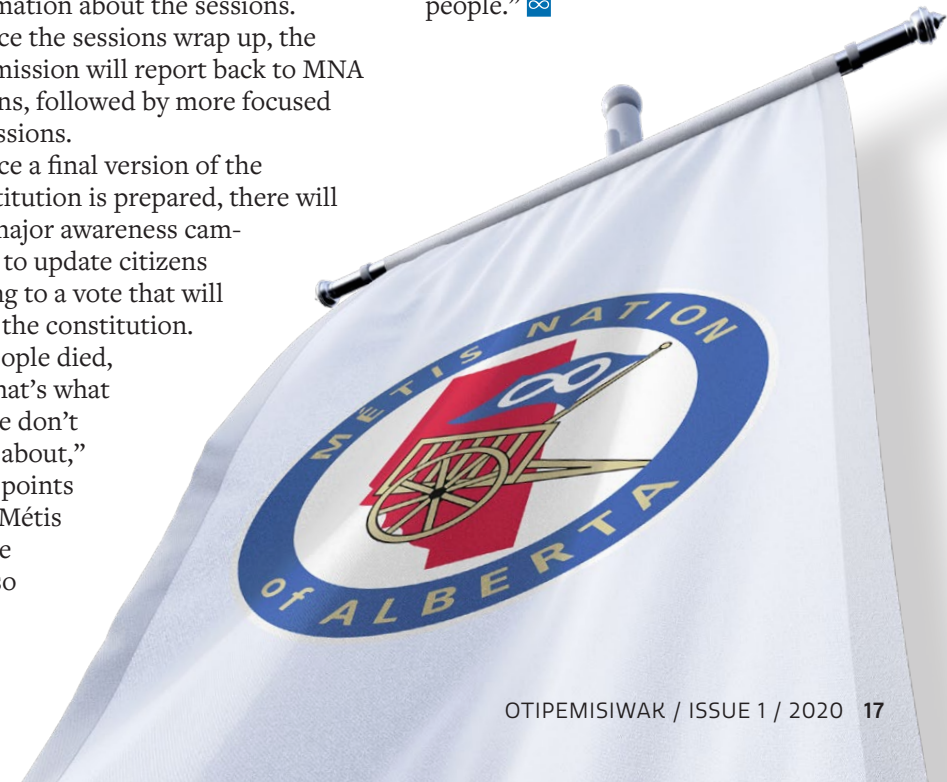
The Commission is arms-length and commissioners were selected based on their applications, background knowledge, and expertise. The Commission has not been publicly announced, but that is expected soon, along with information about the sessions.

Once the sessions wrap up, the Commission will report back to MNA citizens, followed by more focused discussions.

Once a final version of the Constitution is prepared, there will be a major awareness campaign to update citizens leading to a vote that will ratify the constitution.

“People died, and that’s what people don’t think about,” Tyler points out. “Métis people died so they

could continue to govern themselves... That’s the history: people constantly fighting for Métis people and making sure they’re not forgotten, and there’s somebody there to try and take on the role of government for Métis people.”



Paving the Road to Nationhood:
A Recap of MNA Agreements

BY OLIVIA BAKO

For over 90 years, the Métis Nation of Alberta has been fighting for recognition as the representative government of the Métis within Alberta. The last three years have laid the groundwork for official recognition at the federal level of our inherent right to govern ourselves. Here is a recap of what we have accomplished in that time, as we journey to nationhood.



November 16, 2017

MNA-Canada Framework Agreement

This day signalled the beginning of a new relationship with the Government of Canada. President Audrey Poirtras and Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, signed the *Framework Agreement for Advancing Reconciliation*. This agreement sets the steps both governments must follow for the MNA to achieve federally recognized Métis self-government—the ability to govern ourselves. The day of the signing was especially significant—the Canadian government executed Louis Riel for treason on Nov. 16, 1885. Now this day is a turning point for reconciliation between the two governments and a renewal of nation-to-nation communication and understanding.

June 15, 2018

Skills and Employment Training Accord

Métis National Council (MNC) and the federal government signed the *Métis Nation Skills and Employment Sub-Accord* with the goal to improve the economic well-being of all Métis citizens. This sub-accord guides how Canada and MNC will implement the Métis National Labour Market Strategy, which focuses on improving employment services, skills development, and job training. The signing was part of Canada’s \$625 million commitment over 10 years for the Métis Nation portion of the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training program. Over the next decade, Rupertsland Institute (RLI), the MNA’s education, training, and research affiliate, will increase programming, including a Michif retention and revitalization program, expand into high schools, and develop early learning programs.



July 19, 2018

MNA-Canada Consultation Agreement

Building upon their strengthening relationship, Canada and the MNA signed the *Consultation Agreement*. This agreement outlines each of their roles and responsibilities, explains a consultation process for decisions that could affect the MNA, and what is expected of both nations to ensure all of our citizens are represented.



July 31, 2018

Indigenous Peoples Open Doors Program

Amid the trapper’s tents at the Rocky Mountain House National Historic Site, the MNA and Parks Canada officials signed the *Indigenous Peoples Open Doors Program*. This program allows MNA citizens free access to national parks and national historic sites in Alberta, acknowledging the Métis connection to the land. The MNA and Parks Canada are also working on special edition parks passes for MNA citizens, due for release later this year.

July 19, 2018

Métis National Housing Accord

MNC and the Government of Canada signed the *Métis National Housing Sub-Accord* in Saskatoon. This sub-accord outlines Canada’s 10-year, \$500 million commitment to support a Métis Nation housing strategy. As a result, in October 2019, the MNA’s housing branch, Métis Capital Housing Corporation, launched four new housing programs to support Métis families and students including rental supports, home repairs, and down payment assistance.

March 13, 2019

Métis Harvesting in Alberta Policy

Following decades of negotiations in the provincial legislature and courtrooms, the Government of Alberta finally recognized the Métis people’s connection to the land and our inherent right to fish, hunt, and trap. This came about with the signing of the *Métis Harvesting in Alberta Policy*, which replaces a 2010 policy with expanded harvesting areas in northern and central Alberta. It also allows harvesting applications and identification to be managed by the MNA. The agreement also requires Alberta to continue toward a solution for harvesting rights in southern Alberta. The MNA has and always will assert our history as harvesters south of Red Deer.



June 27, 2019

MNA Self-Government Agreement

It was a long and hard-fought battle, but after more than 90 years, the MNA reached a landmark agreement with the Government of Canada. The *Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement (MGRSA)* officially recognizes the Métis Nation of Alberta as a legitimate government with inherent rights to govern ourselves. The MGRSA clearly gives the MNA the power and lawmaking ability to decide our citizenship, select our leaders, and operate as a government. It also outlines steps to claim our rights to our language, culture, heritage, education, housing, and environment.





Métis Leadership from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario Gather for a Historic *Meeting of the Governments*

BY LEANNE MILLER

As the mercury dipped to -40 degrees Celsius, the frigid air hung still and heavy at Métis Crossing on January 14, 2020. It was a decidedly 'Alberta' welcome for visitors attending the first-ever meeting of the three Métis governments: Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA), Métis Nation – Saskatchewan (MN-S), and Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO). Greetings were warm and the spirit of collaboration was high despite the cold snap. The three-day meeting kicked off at the recently opened Métis Crossing Cultural Gathering Centre, where attendees had an opportunity to share visions of self-governance. The three governments also signed a joint declaration highlighting their continued collaboration and passed a resolution seeking more transparency and accountability from the Métis National Council (MNC).

Self-determination and self-government have always been top priority for the Métis and it was front of mind for all at the meeting table. The joint declaration signed by the presidents of all three governments, emphasized that signing the Métis Government Recognition and Self-Government Agreement (MGRSA) in June 2019 has given the Métis Nation a clear path forward to create a Métis-driven community constitution.

The declaration also stated, “the processes set out in the MGRSAs do not limit, compromise, change, or affect Métis rights, interests, or claims in any way or undermine the position of the Métis governments, that we are already self-governing Indigenous governments based on Métis law and traditions and our inherent right of self-government.”

The declaration is a formal agreement by the three governments to continue working together at the national level.

The declaration is a formal agreement by the three governments to continue working together at the national level.



In a separate resolution, the three Métis Governments outlined their commitment to reform and seek greater accountability from MNC.

The three governments signed the resolution stating they are “the modern day manifestations of Métis self-government grounded on and recognized in:

- The will and determination of our ancestors and citizens who have painstakingly built and continue to mandate the Métis Governments over generations;
- Our democratic elections that allow all of our citizens to vote for their leadership at the local, regional, and provincial levels.”

The resolution goes on to state how in 1983, the MNC was established to act as a national voice for the Métis governments based on the following principles:

- The MNC’s sole authority flows from the mandates provided to it by the democratically elected Métis governments that are a part of it;
- The MNC cannot interfere with the jurisdictions of the Métis governments that mandate it;
- The MNC is not a Métis government, but a representative body that is mandated by democratically elected Métis governments.

But in recent years, “the MNC has become increasingly dysfunctional and unaccountable to its Governing Members and the Métis citizens who elect these Métis governments,” including failing to hold a Board of Governors meeting for at least 14 months.

The MNA, MN-S, and MNO will continue to work through the MNC, but will be “seeking to reform, improve, or change the structure of the Permanent Bilateral Mechanism in the future.” After laying the foundation in January, the three governments met again in March 2020 in Gatineau, Quebec, along with Métis citizens from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario and various members of Métis



WHAT DOES A CONSTITUTION LOOK LIKE AND WHAT CAN IT DO?

A constitution can articulate the essential components needed to establish and govern a Nation. These components can include:

- National values and principles
- Requirements for citizenship
- Rights and freedoms of citizens
- Framework for governance
- Powers and authority of the levels of government
- The process for making laws
- The adjudication of disputes

A constitution gives Métis governments the legitimacy and legal tools it needs to provide appropriate health, educational, and social services to its citizens. With the benefits of a constitution, the government can better position its citizens towards a great future with even greater opportunities.

governments, to learn and discuss the sorry legacy of scrip, the trials and triumphs of self-governance, and the strides made in recent years. Attendees heard from different First Nations on their journeys toward self-government, a youth panel on their visions for the future, and employees from the Government of Canada discussing their role and aims going forward with Métis Nation governments.

It is a very exciting time looking at the future of Métis self-government, and as MNA president Audrey Poitras has said, “our goal remains self-determination for the Métis Nation within Alberta based on a Constitution that is developed by and approved through a province-wide referendum of our citizens. By working together and staying united, we can achieve the MNA’s long-standing goal: building a strong Métis Nation based on Métis rights.”

What do next steps toward building a constitution look like?

MN-S will be hosting the next meeting of the three governments in Saskatchewan to discuss the finer details of its drafting.

Closer to home, the MNA has appointed a constitution commission to solely focus on developing a strategy for the Métis Nation within Alberta,



where everyone will have a voice toward its development. Over the next few months, the commission will be travelling throughout the province to meet and gather input from MNA citizens.

And the most important point of all? The constitution will enshrine the Métis inherent right to govern themselves, the responsibilities as Métis citizens, and protect Métis people for generations to come.

For more information about the MNA government and constitution, please visit albertametisgov.com



Making a constitution

A constitution is the guide that shapes all MNA decisions, laws, values, government structure, and more.

Métis Nation Government in Alberta

Laws & Policies



Programs & Services

Youth Council

The voice of MNA youth

BY OLIVIA BAKO

The political world may seem like an intimidating place for Métis youth, but the Métis Nation of Alberta’s (MNA) Youth Council aims to bridge that gap.

“It’s important for me, because youth issues have to be represented by the youth,” says Youth Council chair Brett Chernow. “I think the youth should have a voice in what decisions are being made about them. I think they should have a say in that.”

The Youth Council consists of a youth representative from each of the six MNA regions, plus a council chair, who meet once a month to discuss the issues facing young Métis people today. Youth Council is also the voice of young Métis citizens at Provincial Council meetings.

The MNA considers youth to be anyone between the ages of 12 and 29. That representation is important because of what some youth feel is a disconnect between what they care about and the programs they receive. Previous youth councils sought to address these issues over the years but limited resources made lasting change difficult.

Brett, who has been on the current council since its establishment, says he and a Métis youth from Region 6, Dusty Gauthier, discussed the idea of a new youth council at the 2015 MNA Annual General Assembly (AGA). Following a budget discussion, Brett and Dusty were surprised to learn how much support could be directed towards youth initiatives.

“So, then we were talking like, ‘Why isn’t there a youth council?’ ‘Why is there no way that youth are able to express their interests?’” Brett recalls.

So they could start having input

on the issues affecting them, the two put forward a resolution to create a Provisional Youth Council. This passed and ever since, Brett has made it his personal focus to create a permanent youth council with elected members. Currently, each representative is appointed to the volunteer position by the president of their region.

“Because we are appointed, I’m the only person from when we first started.” Positions are now two-year appointments, instead of one.

Since the MNA is in the middle of self-government negotiations with the Canadian government and plans to draft a constitution in the coming months, how the Youth Council fits into that picture has been a major point of discussion at the council table.

“We talk a lot about how our youth are the next generation, and if we don’t get them involved with the MNA, then the MNA doesn’t really have a future,” says Region Six representative Tutchone

Dunfield. Tutchone started out as the Youth Representative for the Métis Local in Grande Prairie before taking on the regional representative role.

“That’s why I’m so passionate about getting youth involved and that’s why I’m on the board: to encourage more Métis youth to come to these events. We are the future and if we don’t get them involved, and we don’t encourage them to be the best they can be, and be out there in their community, there’s nothing really for the Métis Nation of Alberta. We need those youth, we need those ideas, we need to grow together as a community, as a Métis Nation.”

Brett adds that building up a youth base will expose them to the political process and make it an easier transition once youth representatives are elected.

“When it comes to voting, it’s not a big surprise and there’s already people who have a base knowledge of what’s happening,” he says.

At the latest meetings, the council has



“We need those youth, we need those ideas, we need to grow together as a community, as a Métis Nation.”

been exploring its options and working with the youth council from Métis Nation British Columbia (MNBC), who have openly shared their experiences existing within a constitutional framework.

Brett says based on discussions they’ve had with MNBC, “I think our Youth Council would be stronger if we do go through the constitution.”

Although Youth and Provincial Council meetings take up much of the young leaders’ time, many are also heavily involved in their communities. Some youth representatives have been advocating for more mental health supports in their regions, while others for more cultural supports.

Tutchone works closely with the Regional Youth Coordinator in Region Six, a paid position created in each

region after the Youth Council put forward a special resolution that passed at the 2018 AGA.

Each region holds weekly youth groups for young Métis citizens to hang out, try cultural activities, and connect with a community where they have a sense of belonging.

“I feel like it’s really important to get an idea of who they are and where they’re from, especially because Métis people in general are pushed to the side,” Tutchone says. “We only have ourselves, and I feel like it’s really important for youth to get involved so they don’t feel like they’re alone.”

Both Brett and Tutchone encourage youth to get involved, either by reaching out to their Youth Council representative or their regional youth coordinator at the region offices. ☎

WHO IS YOUR YOUTH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE?

Chair: Brett Chernow

Region 1: Mary Ludwig

Region 2: Megan Claude

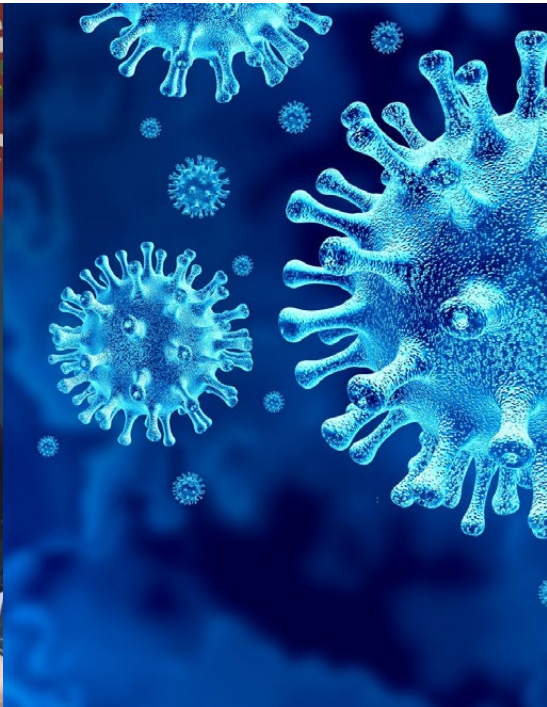
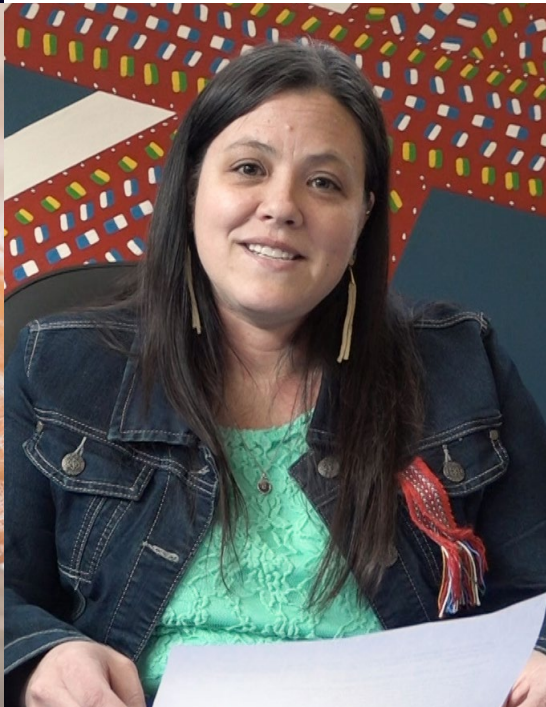
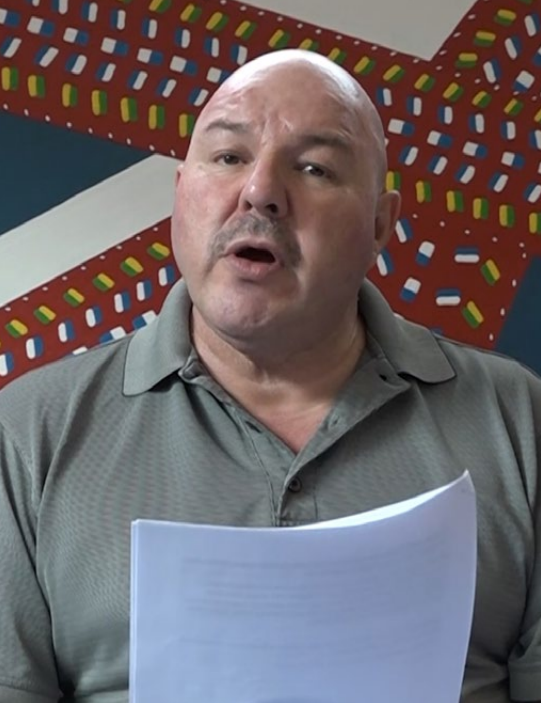
Region 3: Victoria Pimlott

Region 4: Hannah Nash

Region 5: Neika Courtorielle

Region 6: Tutchone Dunfield





COVID-19

Assisting Alberta Métis during the pandemic

BY OLIVIA BAKO

The COVID-19 pandemic swept the world unlike anything we've seen in our lifetimes. While many navigated a new reality with the uncertainty of paying bills, homeschooling children, and staying healthy, the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) stepped in to provide millions in relief to Métis citizens and their families throughout the province. "This is an unprecedented time and many Métis Nation citizens and families, like so many all over the world, have been impacted by loss of income, home insecurity, school and daycare closures, mental stress and isolation, and other life-changing situations," said Audrey Poitras, President of the Métis Nation of Alberta. "The MNA is taking action to ease some of the stresses Métis Nation citizens and families are experiencing so that we can all wait out this pandemic in safety and security."



Phase 1 – April 6

With recently announced funding from Canada's Indigenous Community Support Fund yet to arrive, the MNA put forward initial supports to regions, families, and renters to get money to Métis citizens as quickly as possible. These funds were distributed through the Citizens, Families, and Seniors Direct Support Program, the Emergency Child Wellness Benefit, the Emergency Rent Supplement, and the Benevolent Fund Top Up to support registered MNA citizens, their families, and self-identifying Métis in Alberta.

In little more than a month, Phase 1 MNA funding benefited many Métis citizens within Alberta. The Citizens, Families, and Seniors Direct Support Program assisted more than 2,000 Métis Albertans through various forms of financial relief, including grocery gift cards and utility payments. The Child Wellness Benefit saw more than 3,400 applications, and over \$2.8 million in payments approved. This benefit is projected to provide more than \$5.6 million to Métis families. The Emergency Rent Supplement Program

approved \$867,000 in payments. MNA affiliate, Rupertsland Institute (RLI) has also addressed several community needs, including 2,176 Chromebooks to Métis students with limited access to online learning tools and \$450,000 to the MNA regions to hire temporary workers and increase aid to citizens.

Phase 2 – May 11

The interim funding of Phase 1 helped many Métis Albertans, but there was a clear need for more support. This second wave of funding included a \$1.8-million top up to the Citizens, Families, and Seniors Direct Support Program, translating to an additional \$300,000 for each of the MNA's six regions. The program also included the hiring of a support liaison within each region, on a six-month contract term, to help field inquiries, applications, and identify local needs. These contract positions and the funding top up were made possible after the MNA received its share (\$7.5 million) of the federally-funded Indigenous Community Support Fund.

...the MNA put forward initial supports to regions, families, and renters to get money to Métis citizens as quickly as possible.

Affiliate Métis Crossing received \$500,000 to ensure job security for their staff, overhead costs are met, and progress continues with the grand opening strategic plan.

Steps were also taken to protect Métis-owned businesses with the MNA and RLI providing their affiliated lending institution Apeetogosan (Métis) Development Inc. (AMDI) \$500,000 and \$750,000, respectively. AMDI matched this funding for a total injection of \$2.5 million, allowing hundreds of Métis business owners to keep their doors open. With this funding, AMDI was able to offer the Métis Business Emergency Loan and Subsidy Program.



In addition to these new financial supports, the MNA procured 150,000 masks and gloves for the protection of Métis citizens and MNA staff across the province.

“Through this pandemic, our goal has been clear: to ensure no Métis Nation citizen or family is left behind,” said Vice-President Dan Cardinal. “We’re continuing to ensure the security and wellness of all Métis in Alberta. If Métis citizens have any concerns, MNA leadership is here to help and I am only a phone call away.”

“Métis citizens within Alberta have been severely impacted by the pandemic,” said President Poitras. “The MNA will continue to support Métis citizens in Alberta while we all do our part to battle this pandemic. We offer thanks to the heroic frontline workers who have spent their days and nights keeping everyone safe, and we will continue to support our citizens with their varied and unique needs during these uncertain times.”

MNA Support Programs: Citizens, Families, and Seniors Direct Support Program

- Phase 1: \$200,000
- Phase 2: \$300,000

MNA has assisted thousands of Métis Albertans through the Citizens, Families, and Seniors Direct Support program. Each of the six MNA Regions received \$500,000 and collaborated with Regional Councils and Locals to directly provide citizens, families, and seniors with what is most needed in their communities, such as grocery gift cards and utility bill payments.

Emergency Child Wellness Benefit Program

The Child Wellness Benefit offered financial relief of \$500 per eligible child for a maximum of \$2,500 over three months to families with children up to age 12 who were impacted by daycare and school closures.

Emergency Rent Supplement Program

Identifying a gap in supports for home renters impacted by the pandemic, the MNA and Métis Capital Housing Corporation offered \$1,000 per month for three months to Métis Nation citizens to assist them with rent payments.

Benevolent Fund Top Up

The loss of a loved one can be devastating in any scenario but was intensified at a time when physical distancing prevented families from mourning and comforting each other in person. For families who lost a relative to COVID-19, the MNA increased its existing Benevolent Fund to \$500 per applicant.

Youth Emergency Benefit Program

After initial supports were rolled out, a gap in financial assistance for individuals between the ages of 13-18 was identified. The Department of Youth Programs and Services worked to address the gap through the Youth Emergency Benefit Program. This program was made available to Métis Albertans who are the parent/guardian of a youth between the ages of 13-18 living in their household. Youth between the ages of 16-18 and living on their own could claim the benefit for themselves. Eligible youth received \$250 per month for a three-month period (May, June, and July) to a maximum amount of \$1,500 (two youths).

MNA provides \$140,000 in flood relief to Regions 1 and 6

BY OLIVIA BAKO

The late April, ice-jammed waters of the Athabasca, Clearwater, and Peace Rivers rushed through Fort McMurray and Fort Vermilion, bringing with it destruction and devastation, leaving residents to salvage the pieces of their flooded communities.



LEFT: Four pallets of water were delivered to Fort Vermilion. The relief was made possible thanks to Henry from Mackenzie County for delivering the pallets, Brent Rostad from Freson Bros for his service, and Dwayne Thomas from Thomas Homes for his forklift.



An aerial photo of Fort McMurray taken April 28 shows neighbourhoods overwhelmed by floodwaters

These floods and the subsequent evacuations and boil water notices affected many Métis citizens. In response, the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA) provided \$140,000 from its Emergency Housing Fund to the MNA Region One and Region Six offices. In coordination with Fort McMurray Local 1935 and Fort Vermilion Local 74, the regional offices supported Métis citizens affected by the disaster.

“These have been called once-in-a-lifetime floods and many Métis people in the Fort McMurray and Fort Vermilion areas are being impacted,” said Audrey Poitras, President of the MNA. “The MNA is here to help all Métis citizens within Alberta in this time of need. We send our thoughts to everyone who has lost a home or suffered property damage, and we thank all of the first responders and everyone involved in ensuring the safety of all Albertans.”

Métis citizens unable to return home because of the natural disaster received emergency funding to cover essential expenses, such as temporary living arrangements, food, clothing, and other necessities.

Additionally, the MNA, Rupertsland Institute (RLI), and Métis Urban/Capital Housing delivered 6,000 bottles of water for the Métis community in Fort McMurray, who were impacted by a boil water advisory.

“These unprecedented floods have added stress in a time of great uncertainty for Métis and all Albertans,” said MNA Vice-President Dan Cardinal. “The MNA is dedicated to ensuring Métis Nation citizens impacted by these floods, get the support they need.”

Support local and explore your province this summer with a pit stop at Métis Crossing!

This premiere Métis cultural experience is just a 1.5-hour drive northeast of Edmonton, located on the beautiful banks of the North Saskatchewan River!

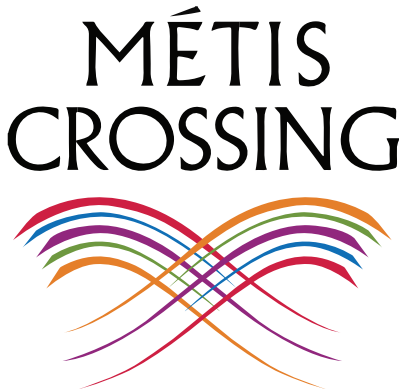
Take part in your own guided interpretive tour as part of the *Meet the Métis* experience. All tours are private and run every 30 minutes.

What's in it for you?

- Local Knowledge Holder provides insights into Métis connections to the land
- Explore historic homes and the ole Cromarty barn
- Play traditional games
- Learn cultural dances and artistic skills

Explore the magnificent Métis-designed Cultural Gathering Centre, enjoy a land-to-table inspired lunch, and a visit to their unique gift shop.

To book your experience, head to metiscrossing.com or phone 780-656-2229 today!





ALBERTA MétisWorks

Forging Futures for Métis Business



Alberta MétisWorks is an online business directory of Métis-owned businesses developed by the Métis Nation of Alberta, in partnership with Apeetogosan (Métis) Development Inc.

Why Sign Up?

- Connect with other Métis businesses across the province
- Increased procurement opportunities
- Enhanced visibility of your Métis business throughout Alberta
- Build relationships in the Alberta Métis business community
- Learn about new and exciting business opportunities



Visit **AlbertaMetisWorks.ca** to register your Métis-owned business and start taking advantage of the opportunities waiting for you and your business!

Métis Nation of Alberta: 780-455-2200 • Apeetogosan: 780-452-7951
metisworks@metis.org

A photograph of a man and a woman in a forest setting. The man, on the right, is wearing a brown cowboy hat, a blue Wrangler shirt, a colorful striped sash, and a large silver belt buckle. He is smiling and looking towards the woman. The woman, on the left, has long dark hair and is wearing a black shirt. She is looking at the man. In the foreground, a dead animal, possibly a beaver, lies on a wooden table. A blue plastic tub is visible to the right. The background is a dense forest with trees and sunlight filtering through. The text "SHARE YOUR STORY" is overlaid in large white letters.

SHARE YOUR STORY

Over the years we've had many inspiring, talented, and interesting citizens share their stories with us for Otipemisiwak Magazine. We want to hear from you. Help us make this publication even better by sharing your stories, poetry, recipes, photography, and more. Email us at mna@metis.org to learn how you can contribute.



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