

Understanding the Métis Nation within Alberta and the Otipemisiwak Métis Government



KEY TAKE AWAYS

- The Métis Nation—as a distinct Indigenous People—emerged in the North-West before Canada became a country and Alberta was created. In response to Canada’s failure to recognize Métis rights and the failings of the Métis Scrip System, a distinct group of Métis—the Métis Nation within Alberta—came together to represent Métis and Métis communities in Alberta.
- Today, the Métis Nation within Alberta includes: (1) over 72,000 individuals who meet the National Definition of Métis and have registered as citizens through an objectively verifiable registry (“Citizens”), and (2) Métis communities located throughout Alberta that are comprised of Citizens.
- Through two self-government agreements signed in 2019 and 2023, Canada has recognized the Métis Nation within Alberta is a rights-bearing Métis collectivity that holds an inherent right to self-government. Canada is also negotiating a Treaty with the Métis Nation within Alberta.
- Following the largest ratification vote ever conducted by an Indigenous Nation in Canada, the Métis Nation within Alberta adopted a Constitution in November 2022 with 96.9% voter approval.
- On September 29, 2023, the Constitution came into effect establishing the Otipemisiwak Métis Government as the successor to the Métis Nation of Alberta. The government has four branches:

1

Citizens’ Gatherings bring Citizens together to share in Métis social and cultural activities, and serve as a forum for reports, updates, and Citizen proposals.

2

District Councils are the community-level governance structures of the Nation that span Alberta and are recognized and established through the Constitution.

3

Citizens’ Council is the Nation’s legislative body. It also oversees the provincial, national, and international affairs of the Métis Nation with Alberta as a whole, as all other matters that are not within the mandate of District Councils.

4

Judicial Branch is comprised of impartial bodies that resolve disputes in the Nation.

- Based on its unique history and evolution, the Otipemisiwak Métis Government is the oldest continuous Métis government in the Métis Nation. The Métis Nation within Alberta is the largest federally recognized Indigenous Nation in Canada.

The Métis Nation and Métis Nation Collectivities

THE MÉTIS NATION: A DISTINCT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN THE NORTH-WEST

- As a part of the development and evolution of the fur trade in the historic North-West, the Métis—as a distinct Indigenous People—emerged. As a people, the Métis Nation shares an identity, history, language, culture, a special relationship to the land, and relationships with other Indigenous Peoples.
- The Métis Nation also shares a territory, known as the Métis Nation Homeland. This Homeland includes what is now the three Prairie provinces and extends into parts of northern Ontario, northeastern British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and the northern United States.
- The Supreme Court—as the “authoritative interpreter” of s. 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 (“**Section 35**”)—has recognized the Métis as one of the “Indigenous peoples who were living in the western territories” prior to Canada’s westward expansion following Confederation in 1867.

THE BASIS FOR MÉTIS RIGHTS AND CLAIMS IN THE MÉTIS NATION HOMELAND

- The Métis have inherent rights, recognized in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, because they existed as a distinct Indigenous People in the North-West before Canada became a country. This pre-existence also grounds the “existing” rights, interests, and claims of the Métis that are protected by Section 35.
- Based on the honour of the Crown and Section 35, the Crown (federal and provincial) is obligated to determine, recognize, and respect Métis rights, interests, and claims.
- In 2003, in *R. v. Powley*, the Supreme Court confirmed “the status of Métis people as full-fledged rights-bearers” and urged negotiations because the “inclusion of the Métis in s. 35 is based on a commitment to recognizing the Métis and enhancing their survival as distinctive communities.”

MÉTIS NATION COLLECTIVITIES WITHIN THE HOMELAND

What Is an Indigenous Collectivity?

- The Métis Nation has always been more than just a site-specific settlement or a single Métis community. Like many other Indigenous Peoples (e.g., the Cree, Dene, Anishnaabe, etc.), the Métis Nation has an expansive territory and is made up of multiple Métis collectivities and communities.
- An Indigenous “collectivity” is larger than a single settlement or community; however, it may not be the entire Indigenous People. For example, while “Indian Bands” are now called “First Nations”, they are often a part of a larger Indigenous People or Nation. The Métis are similar in this respect.
- The idea of Indigenous collectivities as self-governing Nations, which may be a part of a larger Indigenous People, was explained by the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* this way:

We have concluded that the right of self-government cannot reasonably be exercised by small, separate communities, whether First Nations, Inuit or Métis. It should be exercised by groups of a certain size – groups with a claim to the term ‘nation’. The problem is that the historical Aboriginal nations were undermined by disease, relocations and the full array of assimilationist government policies. They were fragmented into bands, reserves and small settlements. Only some operate as collectivities now. They will have to reconstruct themselves as nations.

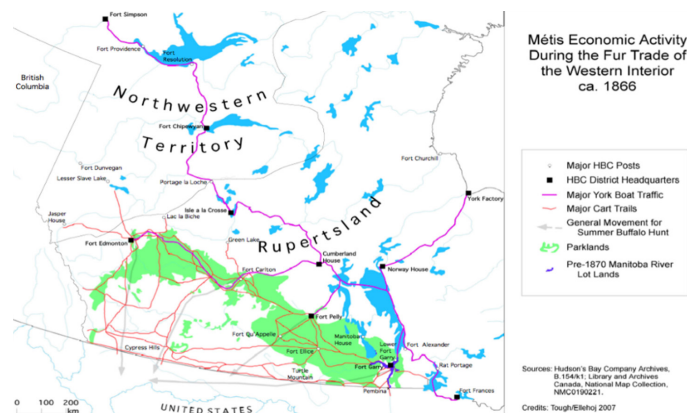
- Due to externally imposed pressures such as the Métis Scrip System, Canada’s historical refusal to recognize Métis collective rights, and the imposition of provincial boundaries upon the Métis Nation, distinct Métis collectivities have reorganized (or reconstructed) themselves within the Prairie Provinces.
- To date, every Métis self-government agreement and treaty signed with Canada uses the word ‘collectivity’ because no single Métis government represents the entire Métis Nation or all Métis communities.

Métis Scrip System means the system established by Canada under its constitutional jurisdiction, responsibilities, and obligations as set out in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the Constitution Act, 1867, and the Rupert’s Land and North-Western Territory Order, 1870, including the legislative authorities and grants in the Dominion Lands Act “[t]o satisfy any claims existing in connection with the extinguishment of the Indian title, preferred by half-breeds resident in the North-West Territories outside of the limits of Manitoba” and to “grant lands in satisfaction of claims of half-breeds arising out of the extinguishment of Indian title” and other related policies or Federal Law enacted and implemented to address Métis land related interests in the Historic Métis Nation Homeland.

What Are Métis Nation Collectivities?

- Throughout the Métis Nation Homeland, distinct Métis communities and populations developed along strategic trade, travel, kinship, and water systems in the North-West. The Métis Nation has never been limited to a single location or region in the North-West.
- Distinct Métis communities—outside of the Red River Valley—existed long before the *Manitoba Act, 1870* was passed and the postage stamp Province of Manitoba was created. The *Manitoba Act, 1870* only dealt with Métis interests inside Manitoba. It did not deal with Métis interests outside of Manitoba or there would have been no need for the 1885 Métis Resistance or the Métis Scrip System.

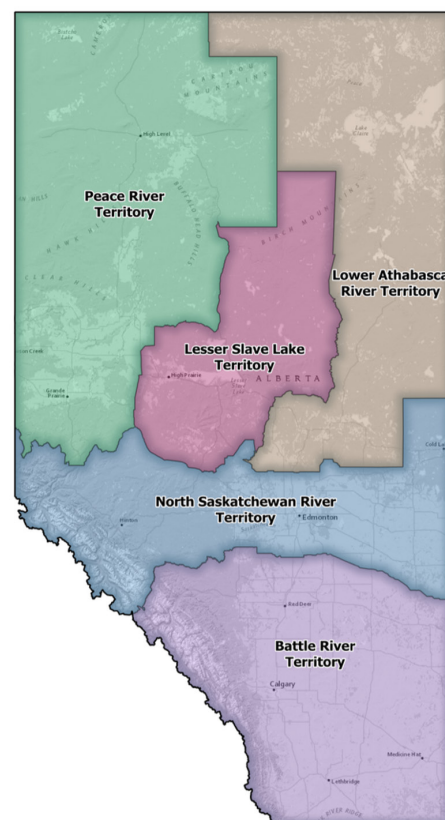
- The Supreme Court has recognized that “[a]round the time of the negotiations [for the Manitoba Act, 1870], the Métis population of the Red River Colony numbered roughly 9,000. The Métis population in the territories outside the Colony, though smaller, was still significant ... The Métis communities outside the Colony [Red River] included Lac-la-Biche, Peace River, Saint-Albert and Slave Lake, which were well-established and dynamic.”
- The Court has also recognized that “given the vast territory of what is now Canada, we should not be surprised to find that different groups of Métis exhibit their own distinctive traits and traditions.”
- Some of the oldest settlements in western Canada were established by Métis in what is now Alberta. For example, the Métis communities in Fort Vermillion and Fort Chipewyan Districts trace back to settlements established in 1788. In addition, many other Métis communities in Alberta are older than the Province of Alberta itself, which was created by an act of Parliament in 1905.
- The collapse of the buffalo hunts, the devastating effects of the Métis Scrip System, and the imposition provincial boundaries led to distinct Métis Nation collectivities coming together to organize, protect of Métis rights and interests, and establish democratic representative institutions.
- Currently, Canada has signed self-government agreements or treaties with various Métis collectivities, including the Métis Nation within Alberta, the Métis Nation within Saskatchewan, the Red River Métis, and the Métis communities represented by the Métis Nation of Ontario.



The Métis Nation Within Alberta: A Rights-Bearing Métis Collectivity

- Within what is now Alberta, the “Métis Nation within Alberta” is one of the successors to the historic Métis Nation, and is one of the rights-bearing Métis collectivities that makes up the Métis Nation.
- For over a century, the Métis Nation within Alberta has developed and evolved as a distinct Métis collectivity. Since at least 1928, it has been organizing and bringing like-minded Alberta Métis together through L'Association des Métis d'Alberta et les Territoires du Nord-Ouest, the Métis Association of Alberta, the Métis Nation of Alberta, and the Otipemisiwak Métis Government.
- Today, the Métis Nation within Alberta is recognized by Canada as possessing the inherent right of self-government as recognized and protected by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and Section 35. In 2019 and 2023, Canada signed legally binding Self-Government Agreements with the Métis Nation within Alberta that recognize it is a rights-bearing Métis collectivity.
- As set out in its Constitution and Self-Government Agreements, the Métis Nation within Alberta is a rights-bearing Métis collectivity that is comprised of: (1) its Citizens (i.e., over 72,000 Citizens as of June 2025); and (2) Métis communities located throughout Alberta made up of its Citizens.
- The Métis Nation within Alberta spans five “Territories” that are interconnected and inter-dependent regional Métis communities. These include:
 - Peace River Territory;
 - Lower Athabasca River Territory;
 - Lesser Slave Lake Territory;
 - North Saskatchewan River Territory; and
 - Battle River Territory.

MÉTIS NATION WITHIN ALBERTA TERRITORIES



The Métis Nation within Alberta Constitution

- For generations, a Constitution had been a missing piece in the Métis Nation within Alberta's self-government. Citizens had consistently called for a constitution to be developed in order to further unite the Métis Nation within Alberta and to advance Métis rights and self-government in Alberta.
- In November 2022, after over three years of citizen engagement, a Constitution was ratified through a province-wide vote with 96.9% voter approval. This ratification vote was the largest ever undertaken by an Indigenous Nation in Canada. Following the province-wide elections for a Citizens' Council being held in September 2023, the Constitution came into effect on September 29, 2023.
- The Constitution formally established the Otipemisiwak Métis Government as the government of the Métis Nation within Alberta. It is the successor to the Métis Nation of Alberta and its predecessors, which date back to the 1920s. Based on its unique history, the Otipemisiwak Métis Government is the oldest continuous Métis Nation government in Canada.
- The Constitution sets out the Métis Nation within Alberta's vision for self-government, the rights of the Nation and its Citizens as well as the governance structures of the Nation. It also mandates the Otipemisiwak Métis Government to negotiate and formalize a nation-to-nation, government-to-government relationship with the Crown through a modern-day treaty.

The Otipemisiwak Métis Government

BRANCHES OF THE OTIPEMISIWAK MÉTIS GOVERNMENT

The Otipemisiwak Métis Government operates under a Constitution that establishes the four branches of the government:

CITIZENS' GATHERINGS

Citizens' Gatherings bring Citizens together for cultural, social, political, and spiritual activities. One is held each year in the summer and is a forum where reports are provided to Citizens and where Citizens can ask questions, provide feedback, and make proposals, consistent with Chapter 14 of the Constitution. Special Citizens' Gatherings may also be called as required.

DISTRICT COUNCILS

District Councils are the community-level "governance structures" of the Métis Nation within Alberta recognized in Chapter 15 of the Constitution. They represent all Citizens living in a District based on the "authority and responsibility" set out in Chapter 15. There are 22 Districts.

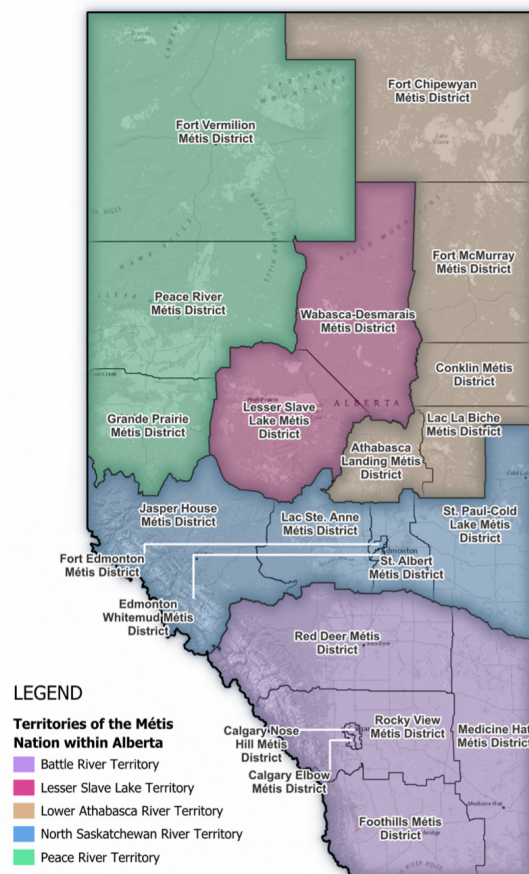
Each District Council is also authorized to represent the Métis communities made up of Citizens in their District based on the terms set out in the Constitution as well as their own District Council bylaws.

Each District Council is elected by Citizens over the age of sixteen (16) who reside in that District. Every Council includes a District Captain and other councillors, all of whom must be Citizens and ordinarily resident in the relevant District.

District Council responsibilities include managing the operations and finances of the District, holding community meetings, reporting to Citizens, and delivering District-specific programs and services. They are also responsible for Crown consultation and accommodation on behalf of the Métis community in a given District. In addition, District Councils may own and manage lands, assets, and businesses held by the District for the benefit of Citizens and Métis communities in the District.

Pursuant to the Constitution, each District Council has its own legal status and capacity as recognized by Métis law. Until a Self-Government Treaty is concluded with Canada where each District Council will receive its legal status and capacity through the treaty, they rely on Alberta's Societies Act to provide them with legal and administrative arm in Canadian law.

22 MÉTIS DISTRICT COUNCILS



CITIZENS' COUNCIL

Citizens' Council is a 25-member body that is democratically elected every four years through a province-wide election. The following representatives comprise the Citizens' Council:

- a President (elected by all Citizens);
- a Women's Representative (elected by all Citizens);
- a Youth Representative (elected by all Citizens); and
- 22 Citizens' Representatives (elected by all Citizens living in the relevant District).

Citizens' Council is the Nation's legislative body with the power to enact Métis Law. It also oversees the Nation's provincial, national, and international affairs, including being mandated to negotiate a modern day treaty with Canada and deal with outstanding Métis claims (i.e., Métis Scrip), being responsible to oversee the delivery of programs and services for the benefit of all Citizens, repatriating, owning, and managing land for the use and benefit of the Nation, approving an annual budget, and ensuring financial accountability to Citizens. The Constitution also assigns it with responsibility for all other matters of the Nation that do not fall within the mandates of District Councils.

The Constitution requires the President to appoint a Cabinet of Provincial Secretaries from amongst Citizens' Council. Each Secretary receives a mandate letter from the President that sets out their responsibilities. The Cabinet holds all executive authority required to oversee the operations of Nation that Citizens' Council is responsible for and to implement Métis Laws, including exercising regulatory powers under those laws.

Pursuant to the Constitution, Citizens' Council has its own legal status and capacity as recognized by Métis law. Until a Self-Government Treaty is concluded with Canada, the Nation relies on the Métis Nation of Alberta Association, which is incorporated as an entity under Alberta's Societies Act, to act as its legal and administrative arm in Canadian law.

JUDICIAL BRANCH

Consistent with Chapter 17 of the Constitution, this branch is comprised of a Judicial Tribunal to resolve disputes within the Government and the Nation as a whole.

OFFICERS OF THE OTIPEMISIWAK MÉTIS GOVERNMENT

The Otipeemisiwak Métis Government has various arms-length and impartial Officers, including:

- a Chair who presides over all meetings of the Citizens' Council and the Citizens' Gathering based on Chapter 22 of the Constitution and the Self-Government Act;
- an Ombudsman with authority to investigate complaints, mediate disputes, and make recommendations based on Chapter 23 of the Constitution and the Ombudsman Act;
- an Auditor General responsible to prepare audited financial statements for the Government based on Chapter 24 of the Constitution and the Financial Management Act;
- a Chief Electoral Officer responsible for supervising the management and conduct of elections and referenda based the Elections and Referenda Act that was adopted pursuant to Chapter 18 of the Constitution;

INSTITUTIONS OF THE OTIPEMISIWAK MÉTIS GOVERNMENT

Various Institutions that are accountable to or owned by the Nation have been established, including:

- **Education & Training:** Rupertsland Institute; Métis Education Foundation
- **Business Development:** Apeetogosan Development; Pinnacle Business Services
- **Culture & Tourism:** Métis Crossing
- **Housing:** Métis Urban Housing Corporation; Métis Capital Housing Corporation
- **Government Real Estate:** Métis Nation Holdings



THE ADMINISTRATION AND DEPARTMENTS OF THE OTIPEMISIWAK MÉTIS GOVERNMENT

- The Administration of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, excluding the operations of District Councils, is overseen by a Senior Executive Officer (“SEO”) who is responsible for managing the day-to-day operations and finances of the Nation. The SEO and the Administration operate in accordance with the Constitution as well as the laws, policies, and procedures of the government.
- The Administration includes various Departments that are each led by Directors who report to the SEO and support the Cabinet in their work. Currently, the Departments of the government include:
 - [Métis Identification & Registry](#)
 - [Self-Government](#)
 - [Intergovernmental Relations](#)
 - [Children & Family Services](#)
 - [Health](#)
 - [Justice](#)
 - [Communications & Citizen Engagement](#)
 - [Youth Programs & Services](#)
 - [Environment and Climate Change](#)
 - [Consultation & Accommodation](#)
 - Finance
 - Facilities & Building Operations
 - Human Resources
- In addition, each District Council may have its own administration to conduct the affairs of the District and the Métis community the District represents.

Contact Information

CITIZENS’ COUNCIL, CABINET AND DISTRICT COUNCILS

Contact information for Citizens’ Council and Cabinet is available [here](#).

Contact information for District Councils is available [here](#).

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