

Minister Thibeault Remarks | Wataynikaneyap: Grid Connection of Remote First Nations
Valhalla Inn, Thunder Bay—Atikokan | Thursday, March 22, 2018
Word Count:

- Thanks for that kind introduction **First name** [*Last name, position, organization*].
- Good **afternoon** everyone.
- I'd like to first thank **Margaret Kenequanash and Scott Hawkes** for inviting me to take part in today's significant announcement.
- Of course, I'd also like to thank the **Honourable Jane Philpott** [*Federal Minister of Indigenous Services*] for joining us.
- As Minister Philpott mentioned, the Ontario government and the Government of Canada are partnering with **Wataynikaneyap** Power and FortisOntario to connect **16** remote First Nations communities to our province's clean, reliable and affordable electricity grid.
- **[Pause]**
- I want to start by highlighting the tremendous amount of effort contributed from all sides that has brought us to this exciting day.

Commented [GC(1)]: This could be revised based on who will be speaking at the event. Note that Margaret is the CEO of Watay Power and would be expected to speak and likely be the person who has extended the invitation to speak.

Commented [CR2]: Margaret has asked that we refer to the partnership as Wataynikaneyap. Watay is ok for internal docs, but we should use the full name in public facing material. All subsequent references have been replaced.

- For Ontario, we made Wataynikaneyap a priority as part of our 2013 Long-Term Energy Plan.
- In my 2016 mandate letter, Premier Wynne prioritized the need to continue negotiations with the federal government to secure an arrangement in support of this project.
- And we re-affirmed this project's importance in our 2017 Long-Term Energy Plan.
- It has also been a top priority for David Zimmer, Ontario's Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation...
- And every member of our Ontario Liberal Caucus, including Thunder Bay MPPs Michael Gravelle and Bill Mauro.
- As a result of the work by many in this room, we are able to make this extremely important breakthrough and celebrate the significance of today's announcement.
- By moving forward, the completed project will connect over **10 thousand people** to clean, reliable and affordable electricity for the first time.
- Families and businesses will begin benefiting from an electricity grid that was **96-per cent free** of harmful greenhouse gas emissions last year.

- A grid that is no longer powered in part by dirty coal, because of the nearly \$70 billion Ontario has invested in transmission and distribution infrastructure.
- Connecting remote First Nations communities to the electricity grid is part of our government's plan to create fairness and opportunity for all Ontarians.
- ***[Pause]***
- On the way to Thunder Bay **this morning**, I tried to picture in my mind a more meaningful example of fairness and opportunity than today's announcement.
- But I couldn't.
- Providing access to clean, reliable and affordable energy is key in our government's commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.
- The cost of diesel generation in remote communities is expensive – approximately 10 times more than the average cost of power in our province.
- Over the next 40 years, connecting remote communities through the project, is estimated to save money when compared to burning diesel.

- Grid connection will provide the electricity needed for communities to grow and to support infrastructure investments.
- By having reliable electricity delivered to these communities, further action can be taken to improve housing, education and health services, local water treatment systems and other essential services.
- And, in the process, greatly improve the quality of life in these 16 remote communities.
- We are also working actively to promote Indigenous participation in development of energy initiatives and to ensure that Indigenous communities have more opportunities to participate in Ontario's strong, growing economy.
- In terms of economic development, the Wataynikaneyap project will provide a big boost to the region's economy by creating new jobs...
- Wataynikaneyap estimates that about 770 jobs will be created during the project's construction phase.
- And I know Wataynikaneyap has already begun planning how to provide training to First Nation community members so they can take advantage of the range of employment opportunities the construction of this project will provide.

- The First Nation ownership and these local opportunities will improve the employment prospects for today's and future generations of First Nation communities.
- Added to this, the Wataynikaneyap project will help reduce Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions – a key objective of the province's Climate Change Action Plan.
- In fact, through this project, Wataynikaneyap estimates that over 6.6 million tonnes of GHG emissions will be avoided over the next 40 years.
- That's the equivalent of removing 35,000 cars from Ontario's roads.
- For this reason – and the reasons I've just highlighted....
- This project – that was years in the making – is a testament to the importance of collaborative partnerships.
- Wataynikaneyap Power is an unprecedented partnership between 22 First Nations and FortisOntario.
- The First Nations in the Wataynikaneyap partnership have been driving this project for over a decade, and Fortis has joined them to make this project a reality that will truly benefit the communities.

Commented [IP(3)]: Policy: is this car-specific data available?
Note: MO requested this info in an email.....

Commented [GC(4R4)]:
<https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator>
Note that the EPA converts tonnes to cars driven for one year. So I divided the number by 40 years to get 35,000

- I also know Wataynikaneyap's long-term vision is 100 per cent First Nation ownership.
- This is a tremendous model that I hope will be explored for other energy projects.
- And I believe the agreement that has been reached will allow for this vision to be realized.
- The Wataynikaneyap project has also required a collaborative relationship between the governments of Ontario and Canada.
- We know the Wataynikaneyap project is the most cost-effective approach to accessing clean, reliable and affordable electricity over the long term.
- I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the significant effort and commitment made by the Federal Government in developing the Memorandum of Understanding we are signing today.
- And as we celebrate a project to connect 16 remote First Nations communities today...
- It's crucial that we continue to push forward and focus on the reduction of diesel use in other remote First Nation communities...

- Where clean energy solutions are balanced between the needs of communities and the possibility offered by the province's electricity grid.
- ***[Pause]***
- This is why I welcomed the news from earlier this week...
- That saw Gull Bay First Nation and Ontario Power Generation announce **[information from ministry]**
- ***[Pause]***
- What is front and center in my mind is that grid-connection cannot come soon enough.
- Communities need reliable and adequate power today.
- And it is this sense of urgency that will guide our efforts to see the grid connection completed.
- On that note, I'd like to thank you all for inviting me to speak today...
- I'd now like to introduce our next speaker, **First Name** ***[last name, position, organization]***.
- Thank you.