

Mushkegowuk Environmental Research Centre

Report to the 30th Mamowihitowin Omushkegowuk

October 20-22, 2015

It has been my honour to continue to serve as President of Mushkegowuk Environmental Research Centre (MERC) throughout 2015. I look forward to leading the efforts of MERC towards developing and becoming a Centre of Excellence in taking care of *Pakwataskamik* in the upcoming years.

The 2015 term has been a series of better and better developments that continue to expand in new ways and possibilities. The future of MERC is forming and taking shape, which is a far cry from when I first started. I feel that the dedication, respect and commitment from the Board of Directors and our staff has created a foundation to create viable ways to expand on our vision and develop MERC as an active Centre of Excellence on the Environment. By laying a foundation, MERC is now developing ways to become more engaging with the communities we serve.

The first way we are shifting to engagement is through community consultation. We competed for a grant from the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs Enhanced Capacity Fund and have been funded for coastal community visits, which we will be initiating in November. The purpose of these visits is to initiate dialogue that begins on the coast and extends to all Mushkegowuk communities, for creating a Memorandum of Understanding with each First Nation on how we may work together.

In order for MERC to move forward, we have taken time to understand where we have been both historically and traditionally, and to re-structure the organization under the Members' direction so it may be more effective. Now, we would like to actively work with the communities we serve and be informed on how you would like us to work for you.

One of our projects in the early stages of planning for fundraising is an Environmental Unity Summit where we involve all communities and partners in the dialogue on how we can work together on *Taking Care of Pakwataskamik*. We will keep you posted on the development of this Summit through Wawatay and in our new bi-monthly news brief.

The second way we commit ourselves to change is through traditional indigenous values of the Mushkegowuk region. When traditional indigenous values are placed at the forefront of any indigenous organization, there in itself lays the foundation to justice, resurgence and empowerment. Through the creation of a Traditional Knowledge Advisory Council (TKAC), MERC will establish itself

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as a Centre that is original, thorough, and understanding of Omushkego Aski concerns. We are working to raise funds and set up this council of community representatives in the upcoming months of 2016.

The third way we are shifting to engagement is through a commitment to the bridging of communities. MERC will continue to participate in industry and community relationship building. By creating and honouring partnerships and relationships, MERC will strive to fill gaps in environmental services by maintaining our independence in peer reviews, and through the ability to listen, synthesize and balance thought and practice on assignments. Using all forms of knowledge and expertise available to MERC allows for a more in-depth and more encompassing approach to generating information for informed and strong decision-making by the people we serve.

The final way we are continuing our involvement is through fundraising. By developing and adopting a funding protocol for MERC, we can produce a stronger foundation that would allow us to not only complete our short and long term goals, but add value to how MERC operates for the benefit of our Mushkegowuk partners and communities. MERC Board and Staff aim to achieve our Mission through strategic commitment to our goal in becoming a Mushkegowuk Centre of Excellence that our members, partners, and allies can rely on, and by developing MERC into a Centre that provides leadership, support and a full service experience.

I am proud of the dedication, commitment to excellence and ongoing support MERC has strived towards, and received, over the last year. I am grateful that we are moving towards a deeper engagement with our communities and our membership through our projects. I know we are capable in continuing to operate and grow, but we can only do so with the support and commitment from our membership, the Chiefs of Mushkegowuk.

Ian Desjardins
President

Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit. – Aristotle