

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Northern College Partners to Take Action on Porcupine Lake

TIMMINS ON: Northern College and the City of Timmins have met to create a new partnership with a dynamic community group, The Friends of the Porcupine River Watershed, to improve conditions in and around Porcupine Lake.

On October 22, 2020, the three partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding to move the partnership forward.

“Northern College sees an increase annually in students from outside the area attending Northern in part to connect to the natural environment around us as part of their post-secondary or apprenticeship experience with us,” stated Northern College President & CEO Dr. Audrey J. Penner of the project partnership. “Students are looking to experience the North and we want to help them achieve it.”

“Our proximity to Porcupine Lake and the activities and wildlife there can be something we may take for granted since it’s right here in our backyard. We would like to build upon local knowledge and help them connect with the environment, so this partnership is a great fit for doing just that,” she added.

The five-year project would see an increase in community-based workshops to inform the public and encourage residents to help make the changes needed for the watershed to recover.

Some of the potential activities may include conducting fish and wildlife counts, planting indigenous plants to help repair the ecosystem, measuring contamination in local snow dumps, and creating outdoor spaces like a memorial garden and an Indigenous sacred garden.

This memorial garden will allow for residents of the area to celebrate the memory of a loved one and visit in remembrance while the sacred garden will consist of traditional and local Indigenous plants that are essential to the teachings and healings of Indigenous peoples of the area as well as a place to gather.

“Our watershed has experienced over a hundred years of industrial and residential activity,” says Mayor Pirie. “I am excited that this partnership will see us engage the scientific community along with the residents in education and progressively reclaiming the natural environment so deserving of it.”

The College had been looking for an opportunity to improve the connection of the Timmins Campus to the natural environment that surrounds it and began outreach to the community, including consulting with the City to look for possible solutions.

The City was already working with the Friends, a not-for-profit group, with whom they have been collecting data as well as advocating for the lake.

The Friends of the Porcupine River Watershed are community-based. They have hosted events like yellow fish painting near storm drains, environmental clean-up days, and public information sessions about the watershed and its importance to the community.

The new partnership will see a defined plan over a five-year period to take the expertise the Friends

have about the watershed and bring it to the next level. This plan will be supported with project management support from Northern College and the planning expertise of the City of Timmins.

Friends of the Porcupine River Watershed member, Brenda Torresan, shared her optimism for the future of the watershed.

“There are plans to conduct further studies on the watershed to seek out sources of pollution and discuss next steps,” she stated. Torresan also commented on the recent update on fish contamination in Porcupine Lake by stating, “It is important for people to educate themselves.”

The Porcupine River Watershed covers nearly half of the City of Timmins. It is a natural habitat for several different species of fish, birds, and animals, as well as a variety of plants. The watershed flows from Big Water to Nighthawk Lake. A century of mining and residential pollution have left the watershed with many challenges.

“We are all interconnected, and it is being realized now, more than ever,” stated Lillian Trapper, Chair of the Northern College Indigenous Council on Education (NCICE) and member of the Northern College Board of Governors. “Our environment and ways of knowing are no different. Seeing the ways in which we can work together with the teachings of those both here now and before us to improve the circumstances of this lake and the watershed it feeds will be intrinsic to continued wellness being sought in all that we do here at Northern as well as within the other communities impacted by the activity we undertake.”

“This project will be part of that new future we are embracing together,” added Trapper.

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[Northern College COVID-19 Update]

The College is now open on a limited basis and is following all protocols for preventing the spread of Covid-19. Masks are required and movement on campus is restricted. More details can be found on our website at [northerncollege.ca](http://www.northerncollege.ca)<<http://www.northerncollege.ca/covid-19-coronavirus/>> and through Blackboard<<http://www.mynorthern.ca/>>.