

# PATHS FORWARD

Celebrating Indigenous Businesses  
in Canadian Hydropower

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2022 EDITION





## PATHS FORWARD

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## Letter from the President & CEO: Carolina Rinfret, WaterPower Canada

Canada's relationship with Indigenous Peoples and communities presents both profound opportunities and challenges as we journey deeper into the 21st century. The atrocities caused by the residential school system continue to be discovered. I offer my thoughts and prayers to the children and families who have suffered. I acknowledge the importance of learning and understanding Indigenous history, and to participating in reconciliation.



In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Call to Action 92 that “call(s) upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources,” WaterPower Canada developed a “[Statement of Reconciliation and Commitment to Indigenous Communities and Peoples](#)” with the endorsement of our Board of Directors and the support of an Indigenous Relations Advisory Council.

Implementing the Statement involves many themes, such as celebrating collaboration with Indigenous businesses. Since the first Paths Forward was published in [2015](#), and the second in [2018](#), hydropower development, construction and operation have advanced many new sustainable long-term business relationships. This publication showcases a small number of such stories prepared by our members in consultation with their Indigenous partners. Fittingly, I also wish to thank Spruce Creative and Nations Translation Group, Indigenous-owned marketing and translation companies involved in the production of this publication.

I hope these stories are valuable and informative for you, and I invite you to share them with others. Please reach out to speak with our association about our reconciliation journey. By initiating these important dialogues, we can advance along the paths forward together.

Sincerely,

Carl R. R.

**Carolina Rinfret**  
President & CEO  
WaterPower Canada

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# Celebrating Partnerships: Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke and Hydro-Québec

“The Champlain Hudson Power Express is a game changer,” says Mohawk Council Grand Chief Kahsennenhawe Sky-Deer. “We will continue our responsibility as stewards of the environment to always protect our Mother Earth, especially from the dangers of climate change and global warming. But we are also ensuring Indigenous people have a seat at the table as business partners and have a voice in the overall economy moving forward.”



The Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke will become joint owners of a new transmission line with Hydro-Québec, securing economic benefits for the community over a 40-year term.

The “Hertel-New York interconnection project” involves the construction of an approximately 60-km-long, 400-KV underground direct-current (DC) line between Hertel substation in La Prairie and the Canada-United States border. The new line will connect to the Champlain Hudson Power Express (CHPE), an underground and underwater DC line between the Canada-U.S. border and New York City, which is roughly 545 km long. The CHPE will deliver 1,250 MW of clean, renewable hydropower yearly into the heart of New York City, where over 90 per cent of electricity generation comes from burning fossil fuels. Hydro-Québec is proud of the historic step taken with this community.

Find out more about this partnership: Hydro-Québec (April 14, 2022) [“Final approval obtained in the U.S. — Hydro-Québec’s export project to New York City: Green light from the Public Service Commission”](#)





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# Celebrating Partnerships: Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership (THELP) and Yukon Energy

“Purchasing power from the Atlin Hydro Expansion Project is an excellent near-term opportunity for Yukon Energy to make more renewable electricity available to Yukoners and to reduce our reliance on diesel generators each winter,” says Andrew Hall, President & CEO of Yukon Energy. “As demand for electricity continues to grow in the Yukon, projects like this one are critical to helping us reduce our carbon footprint and build the clean energy future that Yukoners want.”



THELP is a company 100 per cent owned by Taku River Tlingit First Nation citizens. The Electricity Purchase Agreement confirms THELP’s plans to build, own and operate the Atlin Hydro Expansion Project. The project includes the expansion of infrastructure and power production capacity adjacent to a hydropower project that has operated in Atlin, in northern British Columbia since 2009, from 2.1 MW to approximately 10 MW.

Find out more about this partnership: Yukon Energy (February 4, 2022) [“Yukon Energy signs agreement to purchase renewable electricity from Atlin”](#)





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# Ontario Power Generation: A committed partner in reconciliation

**ONTARIOPOWER**  
GENERATION

For more than a century, Ontario Power Generation (OPG) and its predecessor companies have produced essential electricity for the province, while operating on the Treaty lands and traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples.

Hydro development, in particular, has had significant impacts on many Indigenous communities across Ontario through much of the 20th century.

As Canadians continue to come to terms with the painful truth of the residential school system and the intergenerational impacts to Indigenous communities, Ontario's largest clean energy generator is getting to work on its role as a corporate leader in reconciliation.



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OPG has released its first [Reconciliation Action Plan](#) (RAP) which builds on 30 years of past grievance work and the formation of equity partnerships in recent years. The document, released in October 2021, provides a roadmap for how the company intends on working in partnership with Indigenous communities, businesses and organizations to advance reconciliation.

***“This is about building our business in the right ways,” says Ian Jacobsen, Director of OPG Indigenous Relations. “This includes enhancing Indigenous procurement, increasing Indigenous representation across the company, strengthening environmental stewardship and improving awareness of Indigenous perspectives at every level in our organization.”***

The RAP outlines clear objectives which will guide OPG’s growth as a learning organization into the future.

They include:

- Growing its economic impact for Indigenous communities and businesses to \$1 billion over the next 10 years through ongoing operations, projects and initiatives.
- Increasing the representation of Indigenous employees across all levels and businesses of OPG.
- Working with the Indigenous Opportunities Network (ION) to grow the Indigenous skilled talent pool within OPG and the broader energy industry.
- And, across OPG, enhancing employee knowledge and understanding through the development of an online Reconciliation Knowledge Hub.

Building an Indigenous presence in OPG’s Supply Chain program is just one of many ways this publicly owned company is seeking to create economic empowerment for Indigenous people. Ramco FN Ltd., a Sudbury-based electrical contracting company, recently became OPG’s first Indigenous pre-qualified vendor under its supplier program.

Ramco FN Ltd. operates across Ontario with its majority shareholder from Wahnapiatae First Nation, an Ojibway community in the province’s northern region. Like OPG, Ramco FN Ltd. has its own plan guiding its reconciliation efforts into the future. Being a pre-qualified vendor creates new opportunities for Ramco FN Ltd. to pursue additional OPG contracts for electrical work.

Increasing Indigenous representation across OPG’s supplier base will help companies, like Ramco FN Ltd.,

become increasingly competitive within a more diversified procurement space. This is especially important as OPG looks to invest not only in its current assets, but in new technologies that support its [Climate Change Plan](#) — things like electrification, small modular reactors, energy storage and micro grids.

“We take pride in the quality of our supplier network and our relationships,” says Jacobsen. “Promoting Indigenous inclusion in procurement processes is the right way to do business and requires us to consider more than just technical or commercial requirements of a job as we explore new growth.”

In 2021, Ramco EMI Construction — a subsidiary of Ramco FN Ltd. — supported the electrical work required during a sluice gate improvement project at Chenaux Generating Station on the Ontario-Quebec border. Upon learning the company had relationships with various First Nations communities, OPG worked with Ramco EMI and its own Indigenous Opportunities Network to develop apprenticeship opportunities for local First Nations members. Ramco FN Ltd. now works with multiple IBEW unions to provide electrical apprenticeships for Indigenous peoples throughout the province.

***“We hope to grow the program in the coming years,” says Aaron Roque, Ramco FN Ltd. President and member of Wahnapiatae First Nation. “It’s important we continue finding ways to offer skills training and encourage economic growth among Indigenous youth and trades professionals.”***

Backed by a [Supplier Code of Conduct](#), OPG’s procurement framework works hand-in-hand with the new RAP. The framework ensures that Request for Proposals for jobs across the province are fair, transparent, accessible to qualified suppliers and, most importantly, inclusive of Indigenous communities near OPG’s fleet of hydroelectric, nuclear, thermal and solar assets.

While its RAP is a good and necessary step forward, Jacobsen acknowledges that OPG’s journey as a learning organization has only just begun. “There are a lot of meaningful things we can accomplish as a business when it comes to Indigenous inclusion,” he says. “We’re eager to grow and committed to working together for a prosperous future that benefits us all.”

Please visit [www.opg.com](http://www.opg.com) to learn more.



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# CreeQuest Corp. and Ontario Power Generation: Building things that matter

**ONTARIOPOWER**  
GENERATION

In March 2017, [Ontario Power Generation](#) (OPG) and partner Coral Rapids Power, a wholly owned subsidiary of Taykwa Tagamou Nation (TTN), completed construction of the Peter Sutherland Sr. Generating Station (GS) in northeast Ontario.

The hydroelectric facility, located on the Abitibi River, is about 75 km north of Smooth Rock Falls and powers up to 28,000 homes and businesses with clean, renewable electricity.

Peter Sutherland Sr. GS is one of several OPG equity partnerships supporting long-term investment in northern Ontario, and the growth of mutually beneficial relationships across the province. The 28-MW station is more than just a source of electricity, however. It was, quite literally, built from the ground up as a symbol of shared ownership and economic empowerment for the local TTN community.

Behind the scenes of this \$300-million investment, CreeQuest Corp. — an Indigenous-owned and -operated camp services company — fueled hundreds of project workers with high-quality catering and kept them well-rested with warm beds and a clean, comfortable atmosphere. CreeQuest was established in 2010 by Tina Sheridan — a tenacious and forward-thinking entrepreneur from the TTN community.





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***“I grew up hungry and poor,” says Sheridan. “Despite not having a role model to guide me, I was motivated to learn all that I could, to make something from nothing and to change the trajectory of my life for my children.”***

Sheridan’s ambition set her on a course of personal growth and business success that she could have only imagined in those early years of struggle.

Back in 2014 when sub-contracting bids were being taken for the Peter Sutherland Sr. GS project, CreeQuest was still a relatively new catering company and one of the smallest vendors in the running. True to her naturally gifted skill as a problem solver and relationship builder, Sheridan teamed up with Aramark, an international food and facilities provider, to bid on the camp service job for this three-year project. Not surprisingly, she succeeded.

***“Leveraging an industry leader like Aramark was a key decision that made Peter Sutherland Sr. a vital stepping stone in my journey as a businesswoman,” says Sheridan. “They had all the equipment, experience and financial resources for the project and they inspired me to grow the CreeQuest business model into something larger.”***

When shovels hit the ground in 2015, it was full steam ahead for CreeQuest both in the kitchen and throughout the housing units. Delivering a suite of services for more than 100 construction workers, engineers and project leaders was demanding, around-the-clock work. But Sheridan and her on-site partner thrived in this environment and often received well-deserved praise from staff for the service quality and care they brought to the site.

Looking back, Sheridan describes how the Peter Sutherland Sr. project proved to be an important jumping-off point for the business as a ‘go-to’ camp service provider for industry in northern Ontario.

***“I built so many skills and important relationships on this OPG project,” she reflects. “The experience not only helped me create long-term revenue for my business, but equipped me with skills to expand into recruitment, retention and business management.”***

Now in its twelfth year of operation, CreeQuest has become a leading supplier for services in Ontario’s growing mining sector and has diversified its offerings to include industrial laundry services. Sheridan is looking to expand the company nationwide next year.

“I feel like we’re just getting started,” she says. “This business is a means to help projects excel and create new possibilities for those living in our traditional homelands.”

At its core, CreeQuest is a company focused on Indigenous empowerment. Managed by a growing team of community-minded entrepreneurs from Moose Cree First Nation, Wahgoshig First Nation and TTN, this award-winning company continues to grow in areas beyond its own revenue stream. CreeQuest & Partners now proudly employs more than 100 professionals on development projects across northern Ontario. Many of these individuals are Indigenous and a high percentage are women.

CreeQuest has also launched an entrepreneurial mentorship program to encourage small startups and teach the next generation how to build a sustainable income. Their community investment fund, which supports infrastructure upgrades, athletic fields and cultural programs for Indigenous youth and seniors, is anticipated to reach the \$1 million mark by 2023.



***“I’m proud of what our company stands for,” says Sheridan. “We’re now a recognized leader in mining and camp services but our areas of influence and impact go beyond business.”***

When asked what advice she would give other Indigenous business owners, or those dreaming of an entrepreneurial career, she says: “Know that you have value to bring to every table. Even if you’re afraid, use your voice and believe in your abilities. It’s never too late to start, and if one door closes, another will open — one that was meant for you.”

Although the days of camp life and construction activity at Peter Sutherland Sr. GS are over, the impact of CreeQuest continues. For the next 90 years or so, the station will remain a source of income through ownership for the TTN community. It’s also a lasting symbol of opportunity for individuals like Sheridan who are endeavouring — and succeeding — to build something special of their own.



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# TC Energy: Local expertise and collaboration key to TC Energy's pumped storage project



TC Energy is proud to partner with Makwa-Cahill LP on a constructability and fabrication review of the inlet-outlet structures at TC Energy's [pumped storage project](#) in Meaford, Ont.

[Makwa-Cahill](#), whose motto is Maawanji'idiwag = Come Together, is a partnership between the Cahill Group, one of Canada's largest multi-disciplinary construction and fabrication companies, and the Makwa Development Corporation, owned by Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation members Scott Lee and Shane Chegahno. Makwa-Cahill's offices and fabrication facility are located in Owen Sound within the traditional territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation.





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The design collaboration on the pumped storage project demonstrates TC Energy's commitment to environmental protection and community involvement. The work will also benefit from Makwa-Cahill's early contractor engagement which draws on technical expertise and fabrication best practices and supports construction and fabrication efforts throughout the project's life cycle.

***"Makwa-Cahill is uniquely positioned to support the early design and planning of this important clean energy project," says Mike Benham, Makwa-Cahill President and Board Director. "As part of our long-term community resource and development plans, we will look to identify opportunities to develop local capacity through transfer of knowledge and training to grow the local capabilities within Makwa-Cahill to support the project."***

In addition to the design collaboration with Makwa-Cahill, TC Energy has also selected Makwa Development to provide Indigenous community engagement support for the project's upcoming Regional Economic and Employment Survey.

***"As an independent, privately owned business made up of people who live in the area and use Georgian Bay, this work is especially important to us, and we are confident that this collaboration and design process will result in minimizing impacts to Georgian Bay's aquatic environment," says Scott Lee, President of Makwa Development Corporation.***

TC Energy's Project Director John Mikkelsen understands the need to leverage local expertise and knowledge on an infrastructure project of this size.

***"This partnership is representative of our plan to activate local employment and suppliers," he says. "We are committed to working and partnering with those, like Makwa-Cahill, who possess in-depth knowledge of the region and communities, and we will continue to seek opportunities to do so throughout this project."***

With operations from eastern Newfoundland to northern Alberta, Cahill is building the future of oil and gas, mining, hydro and social infrastructure on some of the largest construction and fabrication project sites in the country. Through strategic partnerships with global industry leaders, progressive thinking and a passionate, dedicated workforce, they deliver best-in-class solutions to the world. Cahill is committed to reconciliation and to long-term benefits for Indigenous communities.





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# BC Hydro and Squamish Nation working together on Capilano Substation



BC Hydro seeks to build long-lasting and meaningful relationships with Indigenous Nations impacted by its construction and operations.

That's why a replacement project in North Vancouver, British Columbia for an aging substation presented an opportunity to deepen the relationship between BC Hydro and Squamish Nation.



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The project incorporates Squamish Nation's interests in multiple aspects of the project, including planning and procurement to support reconciliation through participation in economic opportunities and cultural recognition on BC Hydro projects. The construction is ongoing, though with all major construction packages being issued this will be the first BC Hydro substation built almost entirely by Squamish-designated businesses and their partners.

Capilano Substation is located in North Vancouver on the traditional territory of Squamish Nation and within a few kilometers of one of their primary reserves. The substation is located adjacent a municipal park near forest and bodies of water including a pond and a fish-bearing creek. The substation contains equipment originally from the 1950s that is nearing end of life and a full station replacement is required.

BC Hydro's historical and present-day activity in the area has impacted Squamish Nation culture and way of life. Squamish Nation has shared with BC Hydro their experience of the cultural hardships experienced by the community during the original construction of the electrical system in their territory, including the nearby Daisy Lake Dam and Cheakamus Generating Station.

Recognizing this history, BC Hydro has been working to build a new positive relationship with Squamish Nation. Their work together on the Capilano Substation Replacement Project provided an opportunity to do just that. They worked together to mitigate the impacts of the project, to identify mutual interests and economic opportunities and to look for opportunities for cultural recognition.

Squamish Nation is seeking to grow its business opportunities to sustain an economically thriving and self-reliant community, and working with BC Hydro is an opportunity to advance this objective. Squamish Nation has successfully partnered with several qualified businesses which have substantial experience on BC Hydro projects and which also employ Squamish Nation community members.

BC Hydro and Squamish Nation engaged in early discussions to identify potential procurement opportunities and the designated Squamish business partners that were best matched to complete the work. This early engagement with Squamish Nation and their business partners was a key component of relationship-building and advancement of reconciliation through economic opportunities.

The contracts awarded to these businesses encompassed almost all the work for the project, including environmental monitoring, site preparation, demolition, civil, electrical and landscaping. Work began in late 2020 with an in-service date of spring 2024.

In addition to the business opportunities, the project also provided an opportunity for reconciliation through cultural recognition work. As part of site preparation, several trees blocking the access road had to be removed. Instead of letting these go to waste, one of the trees was repurposed into a canoe and others will be used in cultural and art pieces and in carving programs at local high schools. BC Hydro is grateful for the generosity of the Squamish Nation in sharing their culture and teachings through this process, including the importance of a blessing ceremony which honours all parts of the tree from roots to the canopy and how these represent all aspects of Squamish people's lives.

*“Like forests with many trees, every tree has life and purpose and, like the forest, trees fall and are reborn, made into new forms,” says Ray Natraoro, Squamish Nation Hereditary Chief and Master Carver. “That’s what we’re trying to do with our relationship: using what is there to transform our environment and people, and create a legacy piece with meaningful stories and engagement behind it.”*





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# Manitoba Hydro: Benefits to building a joint venture



When Manitoba Hydro announced that it would begin construction of the Birtle Transmission Project, a 46-km-long, 230-KV transmission line to the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border, Birdtail Sioux First Nation knew it would bring employment and business opportunities to the area.

The community also saw an opportunity to forge a business venture to successfully bid on the work. Their joint venture with Forbes Bros. Ltd, an experienced transmission line contractor, is now in its third year and completing its third contract with Manitoba Hydro. Both partners have big plans to keep growing.





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The project began with public and Indigenous engagement from fall 2016 to spring 2017. “Manitoba Hydro was very responsive of the First Nation and our desire to be actively involved,” says former Birdtail Sioux First Nation Chief Ken Chalmers.

The First Nation began looking for a partner to bid on the project, one that could ensure the community would benefit from an employment and business perspective. It was determined that Forbes Bros. had the best to offer the Nation by far.

***“Birdtail Sioux First Nation has always maintained its business philosophy that any partnership entered into has to have a direct benefit to all parties involved. We believe in the competitive process,” says current Chief Lindsay Bunn. “Forbes Bros. went above and beyond in their work with the community, and the partnership arrangement included guaranteed employment levels, subcontracting opportunities, profit sharing and management involvement in the entire process from bidding to construction.”***

Birdtail Sioux and Forbes Bros. worked closely to determine how they could leverage each other’s strengths. They formed the Birdtail Sioux Forbes Bros. Joint Venture partnership in March 2020. They were awarded the transmission construction contract in July 2020, following a competitive tender process. Construction took place between July 2020 to March 2021.

As a family-owned company, Forbes Bros. attributes much of its success over the years to its partnerships with its clients, subcontractors and communities.

“Without the support of these communities and partners, we would not be where we are today,” says Robert Throop, Labour Relations Manager. “In many of the places we work we rely on the local knowledge, local workforce and communities to help support our work and help us remain competitive.”

A total of 125 structures (69 lattice towers and 56 tubular steel structures) were installed on the Birtle Transmission Project. The Birdtail Sioux Forbes Bros. Joint Venture self-performed nearly all aspects of the project, including access, foundations, assembly, tower erection and stringing of the conductor wire. This approach allowed the Joint Venture to maximize local employment and provide

training opportunities in a variety of skills, like concrete pouring and forming and tower assembly.

The Birtle Transmission Project achieved an average of 50 per cent Indigenous employment throughout the project. This was in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had the Joint Venture continuously adapting policies and procedures to ensure the workers stayed safe and protected.

While the Joint Venture was formed in the context of the Birtle Transmission Project, they have since pursued three other tender opportunities — and were the successful bidder in two of these projects. Currently, the Joint Venture is working on another Manitoba Hydro project, the De Salaberry - Letellier G79L Transmission Line.

***“Manitoba Indigenous employment is averaging 60 per cent to date with a peak of 68 per cent,” says Throop. “We’re so proud of the workers and their dedication to our projects. At the end of the day, we want our clients to have confidence in our capabilities and continue to perform work for them for years to come.”***





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# SaskPower: The story of Kitsaki Vegetation Services Partnership



SaskPower had its strongest year ever in Indigenous procurement in 2021-2022 with \$94.5 million in contracts with Indigenous suppliers. Since 2014, Indigenous procurement has resulted in \$350 million in contracts awarded to Indigenous suppliers.

Kitsaki Vegetation Services Limited Partnership (KVSLP) is one of SaskPower's three prime contractors for vegetation management. They are a division that belongs to Kitsaki Management Limited Partnership (KMLP), whose portfolio includes investments in catering, consulting and management, environment, insurance, mining, vegetation and forestry.



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KMLP has managed business interests of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band (LLRIB) since 1981. The LLRIB is the largest First Nation in Saskatchewan, located in north-central Saskatchewan, in Treaty 6 territory and is a Woodland Cree Nation. LLRIB is a multi-reserve band that includes six communities: Little Red River, Morin Lake (Hall Lake), La Ronge, Sucker River, Stanley Mission and Grandmother's Bay.

KVSLP is considered one of Saskatchewan's leading vegetation management companies that supplies aerial tree trimming, right-of-way/brush clearing, danger tree removal, hand slashing, herbicide application and consenting services to the utility industry. The primarily Indigenous workforce holds various certifications to deliver safe and reliable services and to ensure that regulatory requirements are met. The company has committed to maintaining an 80 per cent Indigenous staff complement.

KVSLP is also playing an important role in supporting SaskPower's climate change adaptation efforts. The company is directly involved in a multi-year project to widen right-of-ways along SaskPower's northern distribution and transmission lines, thanks to the funding SaskPower received from the federal Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund. SaskPower's Wayne Rude, manager of Indigenous Relations, says KVSLP's support for the application was critical in securing the Government of Canada funding.

In November 2021, SaskPower received the Premier's Award for Excellence in the Public Service for developing and implementing a strategic plan to mitigate the risk of wildfires to northern communities, the forest and the environment, while maintaining customer electrical services. The following month, KVSLP was awarded the SaskPower Supply Chain Award for Service Leadership after partnering with SaskPower since 2011. This award recognizes suppliers that consistently provide exceptional service to SaskPower.



## **PATHS FORWARD**

Celebrating Indigenous Businesses in  
Canadian Hydropower

### Foreword

### Letter from the President & CEO

### Celebrating Partnerships

- Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke and Hydro-Québec
- Tlingit Homeland Energy Limited Partnership (THELP) and Yukon Energy

### Celebrating Indigenous Businesses

- Ontario Power Generation
  - A Committed Partner in Reconciliation
  - Building Things that Matter
- TC Energy – Pumped Storage Hydro Project
- BC Hydro – Capilano Substation
- MB Hydro – Birtle Transmission Project
- SaskPower – Kitsaki Vegetation Services Partnership

### Connect With Us

