



WOLASTOQEY NATION IN NEW BRUNSWICK

Matawaskiye • Negotkuk • Wotstak • Bilijk • Sitansisk • Welamukotok

Dr. John Cloutier - Nihkanatpat (Executive Director, WNNB)
WNNB Annual General Assembly - Fredericton Convention Centre

September 11, 2026

Kulasihkulpon. Welcome, bienvenue, everyone.

It is an honour to stand before you today as we open our 2026 Annual General Assembly.

We gather here in the heart of our territory, steps away from our ancestral highway - the waters of the *Wolastoq*. To meet here at the Fredericton Convention Centre, just down the road from this province's most prominent symbol of colonial power, the legislature building, is a deliberate act of reclaiming our presence in the very center of our homeland. It is a statement that the Wolastoqiyik are not a people of the periphery, but the rightful, sovereign heart of our homeland.

Before we proceed, I want to extend my deepest thanks to Elder Ed for the opening prayer that centered our spirits this morning. To our Emcee, Tanna Pirie, thank you for guiding us with your wisdom and grace. And for doing the hard task of keeping us on time!

I must also recognize the leadership that makes our work at the Wolastoqey Nation in New Brunswick possible. Our six Chiefs, the visionary leaders of our communities:

Chief Patricia Bernard

Chief Justice Gruben

Chief Tim Paul

Chief Allan Polchies Jr.

Chief Ross Perley

Chief Scott Paul

Supported by their respective Band Councils in each community, they collectively represent Wolastoqey citizens with strength, dignity, and integrity.

And to our citizens. Thank you for the trust you place in this leadership. Whether you traveled here from Madawaska, Tobique or from the mouth of the Bay of Fundy, or you are reading this online, your participation is the fuel for our work.

Our theme this year's AGA is "Land Back in Action."

For too long, "Land Back" has been treated by external observers as a slogan, a distant dream, or a thing to be feared. But today, it is a lived reality.

"Land Back" is in the technical data we collect, the treaties we defend, and the jurisdictional space we are carving out every single day. We are here to share and explore that work in action.

To understand where we are going, we must look at where we have come from.

2025-26 marks a milestone that is heavy with both responsibility and pride. This year marks the 300th anniversary of the first signing of the Peace and Friendship Treaties.

Let us be very clear about what those treaties represent. They are not dusty relics sitting in a colonial archive. They represent a living covenant and the constitutional foundation of our relationship with the Crown. When our ancestors put their marks on those agreements, they did so as sovereign equals. They were forming an alliance between nations; an alliance based on peace, on mutual respect, and on a shared future.

Crucially, our ancestors never surrendered their homeland. They never ceded the lands, the waters, or the inherent rights that have been ours since time immemorial. Our territory, stretching from the Bay of Fundy to the St. Lawrence, is an ancestral inheritance. It is held by inherent rights and protected by a sacred trust that no provincial or federal government has the power to extinguish.

When we say, "We are ALL Treaty people," we are not just speaking of the Wolastoqiyik. We are defining a collective responsibility. Those treaties bound both sides to a path of coexistence. However, for 300 years, the weight of upholding that responsibility has rested almost entirely on our shoulders.

The resolve of our ancestors, who maintained our traditions, our language, and our connection to culture, despite centuries of pressure, inspires our modern resilience and unwavering resistance. We are the future they dreamed of. Every time we assert our rights to fish, every time we challenge a land swap that ignores our jurisdiction, and every time we sit at a negotiation table as equals, we are honouring that 300-year-old promise.

Our modern position of strength comes from the marriage of traditional wisdom and high-level, technical expertise. This is the mandate of WNNB. We provide the technical muscles that allow our Chiefs to carry the assertions of our rights into the halls of power and win.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the team that makes WNNB a powerhouse of advocacy. First, to our AGA coordinators: Mason Perley, Billy Weale, and Steven Plume. Thank you also to Darryl Pelletier and Nathan Robichaud for technical support and IT assistance. Many thanks to our finance team, Jacquelynn McCoy and Adam Lloyd. And finally, thank you to our HR team. Thank you all for the months of tireless work that went into this gathering.

Our technical staff are the ones in the field, in the labs, and in the archives. They transform data into a legal and political arsenal.

Our [annual report](#) touches on the volume of work achieved over this past year. Let me provide you with a quick review:

Ethnohistory & Archaeology: Dr. Jason Hall has led the charge in making our history accessible, producing the 2nd Edition of the Wolastoqey Rights Manual, and our treaty rights for our youth. He also supports our archaeological team.

Our Archaeology lead Austin Paul and Monitor Dallas Tomah are doing world-class work, proving our occupancy with science the Crown cannot ignore. On Eqpahaq Island, they've used drone-based Lidar and magnetometry to map burial sites and wigwam villages without disturbing a single patch of soil.

In forestry, Seth McDonald and his team, including Laura Underhill, Doreen Paul, Kieran Johnson, and Nathan Tremblett, are putting "Land Back" into practice. Through the ECCC 30x30 initiative, they are buying land back to be held by the Nation's land-holding company.

The WNNB team also secured a massive victory against J.D. Irving. When the province tried to authorize a land swap of prime conservation areas for harvestable timber, WNNB challenged them, sparked public concern, and stopped it.

WNNB is also partnering with Woodstock First Nation and the WWF to harvest black ash seeds for the National Indigenous Seed Bank, protecting our culturally vital species for the next seven generations.

Led by Dr. Colin Curry, our fisheries team achieved a historic victory this year. When DFO announced the closure of the Mactaquac Biodiversity Facility as a "cost-cutting measure," they didn't count on the "Polamuwok Back" campaign. Our staff: Kianna Bear-Hetherington, Kaleb Zelman, Jodi Paul Doiron, Hilary MacLean, Sage Simon, Jade Polches, and Korey Lyons, supported Chiefs Polchies, Scott Paul, and Gruben who took the fight to Ottawa.

Following a June meeting with Minister Hon. Joanne Thompson, the Chiefs secured a reversal, shared publicly in August 2026 including a temporary restoration of the Tobique SAS program and a commitment to finding a permanent solution to salmon protection and conservation on the Wolastoq.

WNNB is also ensuring passage for Wolastoqey salmon, gaspereau, American Shad, American eel, and sea lamprey, while protecting non-migratory trout and perch.

Furthermore, the blue mussel contaminant study in Passamaquoddy Bay and water quality monitoring in the Nashwaak watershed with our Guardians are providing the baseline data we need to protect our waters from industrial impact.

On the energy file, Thomas Lewey and Andrew Uraih are ensuring our nation is leading the energy transition. The Salmon River Wind Farm is a 203 MW testament to our sovereignty, featuring 34 turbines and a 35 km transmission line on Crown land. This project, advanced by Wolastoqey Resource Developments Inc., is about jurisdiction.

They are also building the Indigenous-led SMR supply chain with the North Shore Mi'kmaq Tribal Council. We've completed Phase 1's Gap Analysis and Phase 2's Business Readiness Mapping. We are now in Phase 3: co-developing the strategic plan to ensure our businesses are "nuclear-ready" and capturing the economic benefits of this emerging sector.

In the consultation team, Ian Peach and our Guardians, Jeremy Underhill and Marissa Kennedy, are building awareness and accountability on UNDRIP. Through art contests and deliberative discussions in Fredericton and Edmundston, they are ensuring that "implementation" means what we say it means, not what Ottawa dictates.

This is what I mean by "technical muscles." Data and evidence give our nation the strength to set the agenda.

As our technical capacity has grown, so too has our organizational strength.

A significant turning point in our recent history occurred during last year's AGA on September 25, 2025, when our six Chiefs signed a historic revenue-sharing tax agreement with Premier Susan Holt and Minister Keith Chiasson.

This was more than a fiscal deal. It was the definitive reversal of the 2021 unilateral termination by the previous provincial administration. We have replaced that paternalistic, top-down structure with a model of respect and reciprocity. By securing "own-source revenue," communities have claimed a new level of fiscal autonomy. This money doesn't come with provincial strings or "poverty management" conditions. It goes directly into our healthcare, our housing, and our language programs based on what Chiefs and Council deem appropriate.

As we look at the remainder of today's AGA agenda, keep the theme "Land Back in Action" at the forefront. "Land back" is not just about a deed to a property, though we are preserving land by buying property. "Land back" is about the restoration of our stewardship.

We are so incredibly fortunate to have Robin Wall Kimmerer as our keynote today. Her work in *Braiding Sweetgrass* is the perfect metaphor for our work, weaving an unbreakable cord of traditional and technical knowledge that will pull our territory back into our care.

Later today, the Chiefs' Panel will detail our strategic vision, and Renee Pelletier will provide a vital update on our Title Claim.

Most importantly, the work we are doing now will mean that today's youth will never have to wonder if they belong on this land. They will know, with the certainty of 300 years of treaty and 10,000 years of history, that this is their home.

The Wolastoqey Nation is strong. We are the people of the beautiful and bountiful river. And we will be here for time immemorial.

Woliwon. Kci-Woliwon!