



COMMUNITY WELL-BEING PLAIN LANGUAGE GUIDE

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The Marten Falls First Nation Community Access Road could bring important changes to life in the Community. To complete the ongoing Environmental Assessment / Impact Assessment, we need to understand these potential changes; particularly those related to socio-community, human health and community safety, and the economy as together these contribute to Community Well-Being.

These areas are closely connected because strong community relationships, and access to healthcare and job opportunities, work together to improve quality of life. For example, improved transportation and connectivity from the Community Access Road could help people access health care and schools more easily, find jobs, and connect with friends and family. At the same time, the Community Access Road may bring challenges like changes to the environment or the way people live and interact, affecting traditions and relationships within the Community. The Community Access Road could also strain existing infrastructure such as housing by increasing interest in living in the community.



This summary focuses on Marten Falls First Nation and Aroland First Nation because they are located in the Local Study Area and the proposed Community Access Road travels between these locations.

Economics

Existing Conditions

Over the past decade, Marten Falls First Nation has seen its community grow and evolve. Between 2011 and 2021, Statistics Canada data shows that the population living in the community increased from 190 to 243 residents, despite limited local job opportunities. Some members of Marten Falls First Nation have never lived on the reserve because their parents moved away before they were born. Members move off-reserve due to housing constraints, employment and education opportunities. Off-reserve community members access services, such as social programs, within the communities they move to. The working-age population is estimated at 170 individuals. Of those, 41% are either working or actively looking for work (participation rate), and 30% of those participants are unemployed. The remaining individuals are not engaged in the labour market and may include students, retirees, homemakers, individuals with disabilities, and others not seeking employment. The average after-tax income in 2024 was higher for women (\$34,500) than for men (\$26,000). The latest financial statement for the community (2018 / 2019) shows revenues of \$25.1 million and expenditures of \$22.8 million, resulting in a surplus of \$2.2 million.

Over the past decade, Aroland First Nation has seen notable changes in its community. According to Statistics Canada, the population living in the community decreased from 361 to 178 residents between 2011 and 2021. Although not directly comparable to Statistics Canada data, the Aroland First Nation website estimates the population to be approximately 400 residents, which could suggest a growing population. Among the 130 work-aged individuals identified by the census, 38% are actively participating in the labour market. In 2024, women earned an after-tax income of \$30,800, surpassing the \$23,600 earned by men. The latest financial statement (2023 / 2024) shows revenues of \$16.8 million and expenditures of \$13.6 million, resulting in a surplus of \$3.2 million.

Socio-Community

Marten Falls First Nation currently faces challenges such as housing shortages, overcrowding and limited infrastructure. The average household size is 3.5 people, with 71.4% of homes meeting suitability standards. According to Statistics Canada, housing suitability means that a home has enough bedrooms for the number of people living there. In addition, the community requires updated water and wastewater treatment facilities. Traditional activities like hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering are vital to the community's way of life, supporting food security, cultural preservation and community resilience. Additionally, Marten Falls First Nation has limited access to educational opportunities, with the local school only serving students up to grade 8. Students need to leave the community for high school, though Matawa has begun to offer online high school courses.

Aroland First Nation faces socio-community challenges including housing shortages and infrastructure limitations. The average household size is 3.1 people, with 83.3% of homes meeting suitability standards. Traditional activities are vital to Aroland First Nation's way of life but are under pressure from industrial activities. The local school in Aroland First Nation serves students from junior kindergarten to grade nine. For high school, students typically attend school in Geraldton, approximately 70 kilometers away. Kiikenomaga Kikenjigewen Employment and Training Services offers programs to support education and employment for Matawa Nations members.

Human Health and Community Safety

Marten Falls First Nation has limited access to healthcare and social services, including maternal and child health services, mental health support and elder care. The community does not have fire or ambulance services, relying on flight transportation services for medical emergencies. Substance use, particularly alcoholism and opioid addiction, is a significant issue with approximately 80% of the workforce currently struggling with addictions. Efforts are underway to build a treatment center to provide in-community addictions treatment.

Aroland First Nation also struggles with limited access to healthcare and social services. The community relies on medical transportation services for emergencies and does not have a fire station or fire truck. Substance use, including alcoholism and drug addiction, is a significant challenge, although specific data on substance use rates in Aroland First Nation is not readily available.

Potential Effects and Mitigations

Potential Effects:

Construction Phase

During the construction phase, the project is expected to bring positive effects to Marten Falls First Nation, Aroland First Nation, and other neighboring communities such as Webequie First Nation, including the creation of numerous job opportunities that could boost local employment. Indigenous businesses would benefit from new opportunities, supporting regional development and economic growth. Additionally, the project is expected to generate around \$299 million in tax revenues in Ontario, mainly from income taxes. Nationally, the total tax revenue effect is expected to be approximately \$333 million. Improved mental well-being through employment and increased financial stability may reduce stress and enhance the sense of pride and confidence among community members.

Conversely, the influx of workers and construction activities may disrupt traditional activities and lead to a temporary gender imbalance due to more working-age men in work camps. In addition, increased construction-related employment opportunities could encourage off-reserve members to return, applying added pressure to already strained housing and infrastructure. There may also be some disruption to traditional activities and potential loss of traditional harvesting areas, which may adversely affect the traditional economy, consumption of traditional foods, and increase reliance on store-bought foods. There is potential for increased mental health challenges, substance use, violence, harassment and traffic-related accidents due to potential changes in social dynamics and increased traffic.

Long-Term Use (Operation and Maintenance Phase)

In the operation and maintenance phase, the road is expected to improve connectivity, creating long-term economic growth and improving access to goods and services. This could lead to better availability of healthcare resources for both mental and physical well-being, improved food access through more efficient road-based deliveries, and increased access to educational opportunities for members of Marten Falls First Nation.

Ongoing disruption to traditional activities may occur due to increased access and potential loss of traditional harvesting areas. Improved transportation could lead to greater reliance on store-bought food, impacting traditional food consumption. There may be continued challenges related to mental health and substance use, as well as an increased risk of violence due to shifting social dynamics. Year-round road access will likely lead to more road-related accidents as travel increases. The new road may make it easier to bring drugs and alcohol into Marten Falls First Nation, potentially worsening existing addiction challenges, even with increased access to mental health services. Environmental impacts on air, water, soil and noise levels may affect human health directly or indirectly.

Mitigation Measures

To reduce potential negative effects during construction and long-term use of the Community Access Road, several mitigation measures will be implemented. Working groups, consisting of the owner, contractor and representatives from Marten Falls First Nation and Aroland First Nation, will be established to support ongoing engagement and feedback, helping the Project Team respond to community needs and concerns. The working groups will discuss community-proposed topics related to the Community Access Road, including healthcare, emergency services, employment support, housing, safety measures, cultural programming and violence prevention. Incorporating Indigenous languages in worksite signage and minimizing construction disturbances during harvesting seasons may also be considered.

Workers will be housed in work camps to minimize social disruptions and reduce pressure on local housing and infrastructure. Diversity and inclusion hiring policies will create equitable opportunities for community members. The road contractor will also provide ongoing job readiness programs to support community members in their transition into the workforce and long-term career growth. Mental health support will be available to address challenges related to employment and social change. Enforcing strict zero-tolerance policies against harassment and discrimination will maintain a safe working environment. Additionally, alcohol and other substances will be prohibited in work camps. To allow for timely mitigation, environmental monitoring will track air, water, soil and noise levels.

“ For as long as I can remember, Marten Falls First Nation has had a strong desire to develop a road that would connect our remote northern community to the Ontario provincial highway network and advance our vision of building a sustainable and thriving community in the north.

– Chief Bruce Achneepineskum, September 2023.

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Residual Effects

Even with mitigation measures in place, some effects will remain. Positive residual effects include improved accessibility, economic growth and lower costs for goods. The road will enhance connectivity making it easier for residents to travel, access services and receive goods, which can contribute to economic development and improved quality of life.

Negative residual effects may include strain on housing due to increased population, disruption of traditional activities as new areas are accessed, and increased risk of substance use and violence due to changes in social dynamics and easier access to drugs and alcohol. Environmental impacts such as changes in air, water, soil quality and noise levels may also persist, potentially affecting human health and traditional land use.

Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects consider the combined impact of the Community Access Road with other existing and future developments. Identified risks include potential effects on public safety, traditional food consumption, access to clean water and environmental health. For example, increased traffic may raise concerns about road safety and accidents, while disruptions to traditional harvesting areas and changes in water quality could affect the availability of traditional foods, impacting food security and cultural practices.

To address these risks, mitigation measures will include safety training for residents, environmental monitoring of air, water and soil quality, and community support strategies to help residents adapt to the new conditions. Ongoing monitoring and adaptive management will help ensure these measures are effective, demonstrating a commitment to reducing cumulative impacts and supporting positive outcomes for the community and the environment.

Conclusion

The Marten Falls Community Access Road is an opportunity to improve connectivity, economic growth and community resilience. While it brings many benefits, it also poses challenges that need careful management. By implementing proactive measures and ongoing monitoring, the Project Team can seek to balance development with cultural and environmental sustainability.





As we move forward to now begin to consider road construction and operations, our commitment remains to be strong stewards of our lands and our environment, in balance with being active partners in growing economic opportunities and benefits for both our communities and other First Nation communities



– Chief Bruce Achneepineskum, July 2024.



Want to learn more?

If you are interested in learning more about this topic, please review the technical report available in the appendix of the Draft Environmental Assessment / Impact Statement.

Contact Info

You are welcome to contact the Marten Falls First Nation Community Access Road Project Team at any time with questions or comments.

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