



COMMUNITY WELL-BEING PLAIN LANGUAGE SUMMARY

Issued February 2026



To Marten Falls First Nation members, the Community Access Road means freedom—the ability to travel safely and easily, to visit family without barriers and to access opportunities that were once out of reach. Year-round access will ensure dependable routes to healthcare, education and social services, giving our members the support they need and deserve. Beyond meeting essential needs, the Community Access Road will open doors to economic growth.

Understanding these potential changes—including those related to socio-economic conditions, cultural preservation, public safety and human health—is a critical part of the Environmental Assessment / Impact Assessment. Together these factors contribute to community well-being.

These components of community well-being 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 provided by 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 put pressure on housing and other local services by attracting more people to live in the Community.



Potential Effects and Mitigations

The Community Well-Being Effects Assessment evaluates the effects of the Marten Falls First Nation Community Access Road on community well-being, including socio-economic conditions, cultural preservation, public safety and human health. Cultural well-being supports a strong sense of identity, pride and cultural continuity among community members and residents. As part of the Environmental Assessment, valued components related to community well-being, and associated indicators, have been identified and assessed throughout construction and long-term use of the Project. This summary focuses on Marten Falls First Nation and Aroland First Nation because their communities are within the Local Study Area and the proposed Community Access Road travels between these locations. Along with Marten Falls First Nation and Aroland First Nation, Indigenous communities were also considered in the assessment when their Areas of Interest overlap with the Local Study Area or where the Community Access Road may have effects through shared waterways or harvesting areas.

Considering these Indigenous Communities helps reflect how Community Access Road activities may interact with traditional practices and places that are important to communities.

Construction Phase

During the construction phase, the project is expected to bring positive effects to Marten Falls First Nation, Aroland First Nation and other regional communities, including the creation of job opportunities that could boost local employment. Indigenous businesses will have new opportunities, leading to regional development and economic growth. Increased employment could encourage off-reserve members to return, leading to an increase in the on-reserve population, and potentially increasing demand for infrastructure, services and housing, all of which are already strained. While there will be positive effects due to increased access to the community and the availability of goods and services supporting construction activities, there will also be effects from increased traffic and temporary reliance on the winter road during construction.

During construction, there may also be disruption to traditional activities and language, decreased availability of traditional foods, loss of traditional harvesting areas and impacts on water and food quality, negatively affecting the traditional economy and access to traditional foods. Reliance on store-bought foods may increase if working-aged adults prioritize construction employment over traditional harvesting. While there may be positive effects on mental well-being due to improved financial stability and self-sufficiency, there is also potential for increased mental health challenges, substance use, violence, harassment and road accidents due to potential changes in social dynamics and increased traffic.

Long-Term Use (Operation and Maintenance Phase)

Both positive and negative effects will occur once the Community Access Road is operational. There may be an increase in the on-reserve population due to improved access to Marten Falls First Nation. Positive effects expected include increased employment and business opportunities, supporting long-term economic growth. Population and business growth, however, may strain local infrastructure,

services and housing. At the same time, the Community Access Road is also expected to increase access to essential services and building materials to make new homes. While the Community Access Road will improve access to the area, potentially allowing more participation in the traditional economy and cultural practices and increasing access to fresh, high quality foods, increased population may reduce traditional food availability due to environmental strain or an increased overharvesting.

While the road may provide access to new areas for traditional activities, it could also lead to greater reliance on store-bought food as road operations could result in real or perceived changes to water or food quality in the area, leading to decreased consumption of traditional foods. Operations will increase access to goods and services, including health services, possibly improving physical health and mental well-being. At the same time, challenges related to mental health, loss of connection to the land and increased violence due to shifting social dynamics may occur. Easier access may also increase amounts and / or types of drugs and alcohol entering Marten Falls First Nation, worsening existing addiction challenges. Year-round road travel will likely lead to more accidents and increase pressure on emergency services.

Mitigation Measures

To reduce potential negative effects during construction and long-term use, several mitigation measures will be implemented. Working groups will be established between the owner, contractor and representatives from Marten Falls First Nation, Aroland First Nation and other Indigenous communities, as appropriate, to support ongoing engagement and feedback. This will help the Marten Falls First Nation Community Access Road Project Team respond to community needs and concerns effectively and appropriately, such as Community Access Road-related substance use concerns.

Additional measures include:

- Training for Indigenous Conservation Officers may be made available to help address illegal or over-harvesting and signage related to hunting restrictions for non-Indigenous people will be installed;
- Workers will be housed in autonomous, self-sufficient work camps outside the community to minimize social disruptions and reduce pressure on local housing and infrastructure;
- Inclusive hiring policies will be implemented to create equitable opportunities for community members; and
- Plans for equipment movement and traffic management will be developed to limit disruptions to daily life.

Furthermore, mental health programs will be available to address challenges related to employment and social change, zero-tolerance policies for harassment and discrimination will be enforced to maintain a safe working environment, and impacts to human health factors including air quality, noise and vibration, soil quality and sediment quality will be monitored.

“ For generations, Marten Falls First Nation has dreamed of connecting our remote northern community to the Ontario provincial highway network and the rest of the province. This vision is about more than building a road—it’s about creating a future where our people can thrive. – Chief Bruce Achneepineskum. ”



Residual Effects

Despite mitigation measures, some residual effects are expected. Positive residual effects include improved accessibility, economic growth and lower cost of goods. The road will make it easier for residents to travel, access services and receive goods, which could contribute to economic development and improved quality of life.

Negative residual effects could include road injuries, disruption to traditional economy and cultural practices, reduced traditional food availability, long-term mental health impacts from loss of cultural identity, and increased risk of substance abuse and violence due to easier access to drugs and alcohol.

Cumulative Effects

Cumulative effects consider the combined impact of the Community Access Road with other existing and future developments. The assessment identified potential negative effects including strain on transportation, disruption to traditional economy and cultural practices, reduced availability of traditional foods, impacts to mental health, and public safety risks from violence and harassment, including human trafficking.

These risks will be mitigated through: safety training for residents; environmental monitoring of air, water and soil quality, noise levels and wildlife; and implementing community-based reporting systems to report concerns. Mitigation strategies will be monitored and adapted, demonstrating a commitment to mitigating cumulative effects and creating positive outcomes for the community and environment.

The Project includes several future commitments aimed at addressing negative effects through mitigation measures. These commitments will be carried out as needed during the detail design through operations phases of the Project, while monitoring programs will verify the accuracy of the effects assessment and evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation measures.



Conclusion

The Marten Falls First Nation Community Access Road presents an opportunity for improved connectivity, economic growth and long-term resilience for Marten Falls First Nation and surrounding communities. While it brings many benefits, it also introduces challenges that require careful management. By implementing proactive mitigation measures and ongoing monitoring, the Community Access Road aims to balance economic development with cultural preservation, public safety, and physical and mental health, helping future generations benefit from a more connected community. The road will enhance connection, allowing education opportunities, family visits, jobs creation, increased access to essential services, and improved food security and housing adequacy, each contributing to the overall well-being of the community.

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For too long, our community has faced challenges that threaten our well-being—housing shortages, boil water advisories, mental health crises, reduced opportunities for our youth, and the staggering cost of food and supplies. These hardships have inspired us to take action and create change. Year-round access will ensure dependable routes to healthcare, education and social services, giving our members the support they need and deserve.

– Chief Bruce Achneepineskum.

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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 Final 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.

Email: eaisinput@martenfallsaccessroad.ca

Phone: 1-800-764-9114

Web: eais.martenfallsaccessroad.ca

