

Climate Change Action Plan: Indigenous Partnerships and Clean Energy

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Background

On June 8, 2016, Ontario released its Climate Change Action Plan (“CCAP”). The five year plan outlines the province’s strategy and commitments to address climate change. For more information about other CCAP initiatives, click [here](#). Consistent with this government’s objectives, the CAPP provides for collaboration with First Nation and Métis communities to reduce emissions and transition to a low-carbon economy.

By way of example, shortly after releasing the CCAP, Ontario announced Wataynikaneyap Power has been selected to connect sixteen remote First Nation communities to the electricity grid.

Ontario’s plan to collaborate and partner with Indigenous communities to reduce emissions and transition to a low-carbon economy

The CCAP recognizes that climate change creates unique challenges and circumstances for Indigenous communities. The CCAP also reflects Ontario’s recognition that Indigenous communities possess special knowledge arising from their relationship with the land. It outlines Ontario’s plans to partner with Indigenous communities to create Climate Change Tables and symposia to share knowledge, including Traditional Ecological Knowledge, about climate change mitigation.

Partnerships with Indigenous communities create opportunities for economic development during the shift towards a low-carbon economy. Wataynikaneyap Power, a consortium of 20 First Nations communities and a transmission partner (Fortis Ontario and RES Canada) is the first recipient of CCAP funding.

The CCAP outlines plans to facilitate further investments in energy efficiency, micro-grids and renewable energy for Indigenous communities, including connecting remote communities to the provincial electricity grid, or shifting towards stable and predictable sources of power such as biomass, solar, waterpower and wind. The CCAP does not specify whether these projects can be on or off-reserve. Its vision is to support economic growth by creating jobs and reducing the reliance of remote communities on diesel fuel. The Wataynikaneyap Power project is an excellent example of First Nations developing a partnership with a transmission partner to move the CCAP goals forward.

The long-term success of the CCAP will depend on the development of the renewable energy sector and adequate funding to support projects. The CCAP envisions establishing low-carbon jobs and training partnerships between post-secondary institutions and Indigenous communities. The province also proposes to establish funds for First Nation communities to develop community-level greenhouse gas reduction projects and energy and climate action plans.

Implications

The CCAP sections on indigenous communities clearly reflect the provincial government mandate letters. This government has signalled that connecting remote communities, and reducing their dependency on diesel fuel are priorities.

The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs was mandated to improve business opportunities for First Nations, and to work with the Minister of Energy and the federal government to ensure that remote First Nation communities are positioned to benefit from remote transmission projects.

The Minister of Energy was mandated to support and encourage participation by First Nation and Métis communities in new generation and transmission projects, and in conservation initiatives.

Awarding the first contract to Wataynikaneyap Power to connect remote First Nations to the grid is a step towards ensuring First Nations benefit from the renewable energy shift in Ontario. However, the CCAP is only a starting point. It will be judged a success to the extent it fosters meaningful communication between governments, industry and Indigenous communities while generating further support for renewable energy in Ontario.

For more information on the province's initiatives to support renewable energy projects in Indigenous communities see our article dated July 11, 2016 [here](#).

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