



Mapping for Water Monitoring and Place. Names L-R: Joseph Rabaska, John Tobac, Derek Shae and Joel Lafferty © Jordan Melograna

Collaboration, Leadership and Investment: Transforming Communities in the North

Northwest Territories: Our Land for the Future PFP

The Northwest Territories: Our Land for the Future (OLF) PFP Agreement was signed in November 2024 by 21 Indigenous Governments, the Government of Canada, the Government of the Northwest Territories, and private donors led by The Pew Charitable Trusts on behalf of Enduring Earth. Building on the Northwest Territories' strong tradition of collaboration, the OLF PFP Agreement reached a new level of breadth and scale of cooperative action. The initiative attracted philanthropic partners across Canada, including the Metcalf Foundation, The McLean Foundation, and the Sitka Foundation, as well as international supporters such as the Waltons Trust, Bezos Earth Fund, Ducks Unlimited, Inc, the Wyss Foundation, and ZOMA LAB.

Guided by a shared vision of healthy lands, waters, and communities, the OLF PFP is an Indigenous-led initiative that aims to protect lands and waters across the Northwest Territories, preserve biodiversity, support thriving cultures, build community capacity, and contribute to healthy and equitable economies. This includes prioritizing Indigenous values and laws as guiding principles for economic development. Support for Indigenous Guardians - trained experts who manage lands and waters on behalf of their Nations - is also central to achieving these objectives. All activities and outcomes achieved under the OLF PFP are intended to be supported and sustained over the long term.

Immediately after signing the agreement in December 2024, OLF partners constituted the governance bodies by appointing all required representatives and establishing an interim Secretariat, supported by the Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI). As an Indigenous-led organization with deep roots in the North, ILI had served as convener of the OLF PFP negotiations over a two-year period and was uniquely positioned to facilitate the intensive PFP development process and its early implementation.

The Our Land for the Future Trust was established to oversee the PFP implementation and is guided by several bodies that support shared decision making, accountability, and responsible management of funds. The Partners Table brings together all parties to the agreement - Indigenous governments and organizations, territorial and federal governments, and philanthropic partners. It provides a forum for collective oversight towards the purpose and vision of the OLF PFP. The Partners Table holds key responsibilities, including appointing an independent financial auditor, approving key administrative and financial policies, and approving the OLF annual operating plan and budget.

The Governance Committee, composed of five Directors appointed by the Indigenous partners, is responsible for funding decisions and disbursements to Indigenous partners, in accordance with approved plans and agreed-upon priorities. The Financial Committee, comprised of the five Indigenous partner-appointed Directors and two Directors appointed by the donor partners, handles investment management responsibilities and financial oversight. Together, these structures support transparent decision making, Indigenous leadership, and long term stewardship of Trust funds.



K'ahsho Got'ine Hunters on a winter hunt camp in Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta, 2022 ©Pat Kane

By March 2025, important groundwork had been completed on critical oversight structures - fund management policies and key operating and administrative policies, fund managers, and accounts - meeting the conditions that enabled Canada's parliament to pass an appropriations bill to flow the public funds. In June the appropriations bill passed, and in July, the Trust signed a grant agreement with the Government of Canada, thereby formally facilitating the transfer of CAD \$300 million in federal funding to the Trust's contribution accounts. Grant agreements totaling CAD \$75 million with private donor partners were also signed.

With financial contributions into the newly established OLF Trust arriving halfway through the year, 2025 was the Trust's first - partial - year of operations. As such, the focus of the work was ensuring that initial core governance and disbursement systems were in place to support the first round of funding to OLF's Indigenous partners, and to lay the groundwork for future years.

In September, Dahti Tsetso became the Trust's CEO. Tsetso has played a central leadership role during the development of the OLF initiative, building trust and consensus among the many Indigenous Nations involved, and will carry this valuable knowledge of how the agreement was reached to the ongoing implementation phase. In her new role, Tsetso has begun initiating the transition towards a formally established Secretariat, including plans for staff recruitment and office set-up in 2026.

In September, the OLF Partners Table also approved several key operational policies, including a Statement of Investment Policy and a Disbursement Policy, which establish the conditions under which funds will flow to Indigenous partners to support Core Activities outlined in the OLF PFP Agreement.

To support the first disbursement cycle, in the fall the Trust led a relationship-based exercise with all Indigenous partners, which resulted in a streamlined process to submit proposals for support from the Trust. This exercise contributed to a successful process for the first disbursement cycle; in December, the Governance Committee made their first funding decisions for projects in 2026 and 2027. The Trust also initiated work to develop an Indigenous-led comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework, including retaining a service provider to support those efforts.



Deho (Mackenzie River) Water Monitoring L-R: John Tobac, Derek Shae, Joel Lafferty, Tanya Ball (Kaska visitor) © Jordan Melograna



Top left photo: KG Guardians Twyla Edgi-Masuzumi and John Tobac at Airport Creek © Jordan Melograna; Top right photo: Overhead view of the camp at Turnitli Tue in Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta Indigenous and Territorial Protected Area Harvest Camp © Pat Kane; Bottom photo: At the 2022 Harvest Camp cabins in Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta at Turnitli Tue; working with Youth L-R: KG Elder Jon Cotchilly, John Tobac, KG Youth Robert Gully Jr., Elder Wilfred Jackson, Lawrence Caesar © Pat Kane

By October 2025, with the support of an investment consultant the Trust retained to advise the Directors, Secretariat and partners on developing the Statement of Investment Policy and on recruiting experienced investment managers, the Trust selected two investment managers. In December, members of the OLF Trust participated in a Pew-hosted Investment Management Workshop to build understanding of best practices in investment management and engage in knowledge and skill-sharing with their counterparts from the SINAA and Great Bear Sea PFPs. Contributing to the success of the Trust's first operating year was the essential interim Secretariat role supported by ILI, coupled with the early advancement of private funding through Pew to support early implementation efforts. Without having both the human and financial capacity needs met, these early implementation milestones could not have been achieved.

A key learning from the OLF PFP Agreement and the first year of the Trust's operations is the need to provide the space and time required to design and implement appropriate governance structures and processes that uphold the Indigenous-led nature of Canada's PFPs. Canada's colonial history, combined with the complex and diverse jurisdictional context in the Northwest Territories, necessitated a high degree of flexibility and willingness to learn on the part of donor partners. Ultimately, the governance arrangements reflected in the OLF PFP Agreement and operationalized through the Trust provide a strong basis for an effective long-term partnership based on mutual respect and collaboration.

A recent decision by the Tłı̨chǫ Government marks a major milestone for this initiative. The Tłı̨chǫ declared three new protected areas on Tłı̨chǫ private lands under Tłı̨chǫ law, spanning 22,565 km²: Tłı̨chǫ Naowoo K'e Det'ahot'ıı, Gowhaehdǫǫ Yek'e Aet'ıı, K'e, and Tits'aadıı Nadee K'e Wexoedıı. These designations constitute a major contribution to Canada's target of protecting 30% of lands by 2030 and make substantial progress toward the NWT: Our Land for the Future milestones.

The work supported by the Trust builds on a strong foundation of Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship in the Northwest Territories, including existing conservation and management zones as well as protected areas established under Indigenous, federal, and territorial laws such as Thaidene Nënë, Edézhı́e, and Ts'udé Niljné Tuyeta. Designed through shared decision making, and reflecting the northern focus on consensus and collaboration, it involves more Indigenous Governments than any similar conservation initiative in the world.

“We are proud to take care of the land at the same time as we explore opportunities like Tłı̨chǫ Minerals and the Arctic Economic Corridor. As Tłı̨chǫ we are strong like two people - we are leaders in economic development and in protecting our language, culture, and way of life. We are grateful to all our partners, including the Our Land for the Future Trust, for helping catalyze these new designations, honouring self-determination, and recognizing the balance of conservation and development.”

Grand Chief Jackson Lafferty of the Tłı̨chǫ Government

“When you work together in the right way, incredible things happen. All partners worked hard to build consensus and unite around supporting Indigenous leadership on the land. This spirit of collaboration enabled us to go from vision to implementation in a little over a year. Now we get to see these investments help to transform communities across the north.”

Dahti Tsetso, CEO, Our Land for the Future Trust

Northern Lights over the Harvest Camp © Pat Kane

