

Indigenous Leadership: Governance and Development Project

Case Study

Mosquito Grizzly Bear's Head Lean Man First Nation | MGBHLM Economic Development Corporation Inc.

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One of the key actions in Saskatchewan's Growth Plan 2020-2030 is to grow Indigenous participation in the economy. The success of this action depends on Indigenous nations in Saskatchewan building and maintaining their economic development activities. The Indigenous Leadership: Governance and Development project provides made-in-Saskatchewan tools for Indigenous communities to build the governance foundation that will support long-term economic development. An important part of the project involves capturing the experience of Saskatchewan Indigenous communities through case studies and toolkits based on this experience.

The case study in this document was developed by a team of researchers and their affiliates at the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Saskatchewan. The project is funded by the Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of Trade and Export Development.

The case studies are designed to be used first and foremost by Indigenous communities across Saskatchewan. The premise of the work is that economic development stories need to be shared among those involved in economic development, both in the community where the economic development activities take place and in other communities looking to undertake economic development. It is important to focus on what has and has not worked. One of the long-term goals is to develop a set of resources that is Indigenous-led and available to Indigenous communities across the province and the country. The cases may also be used as governance training components and/or strategic planning exercises, as well as in teaching.

The case studies combine material from websites and other publicly available sources with material gathered through interviews with leaders and representatives involved in economic development activities. The interviews last between two and four hours and involve a small group of economic development leaders in the community. The questions asked focus solely on the corporate entities and activities that have been developed, and those interviewed are asked questions in their role as a corporate leader.

When approaching community leaders and representatives, we begin with an informal discussion. If the leaders and representatives indicate an interest in participating, we proceed with sending them a formal letter of introduction, which they can use to obtain official permission to proceed. We know communities receive many requests for information, and they do not always see the results of the work that is undertaken. Our goal is to ensure that the case study is shared with the community in a way that is beneficial. To this end, a draft of the case study is shared with the community, and the case study is not finalized until the community gives its agreement. Once a set of case studies have been developed, leaders from the communities involved will be given the opportunity to discuss the findings.

We would like to thank the leaders and representatives for their time and effort. Their knowledge and insights are critical to understanding economic development in Indigenous communities.

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Lessons Learned

- In the late 1800s, the Mosquito Band, the Grizzly Bear's Head Band, and the Lean Man Band were united to form the Mosquito Grizzly Bear's Head Lean Man First Nation (MGBHLM).
- Through patient efforts, Mosquito Grizzly Bear's Head Lean Man First Nation has finally achieved recognition. The situation where land was taken from them by the government illegally has been rectified and land claims with the government have been settled.
- Embracing their past and their culture, the MGBHLM First Nation is transforming negative history into positive outcomes.
- Recent substantial claims settlements have provided them with capital for economic development.
- Prioritizing the development of human capital underscores their values.
- While starting late in economic development, they are rapidly catching up.
- Understanding both early-stage and mature economic development corporations (EDCs) is crucial.
- The First Nation is emerging as a promising and dynamic group.

Background and History

History

In the late 19th century, in the period between 1890 and 1898, Chief "Misketo" united the Mosquito Grizzly Bears Head Lean Man First Nation (the First Nation). The First Nation was comprised of three tribes: Mosquito Band #109, Grizzly Bear's Head Band #110, and Lean Man Band #111.

Chief Mosquito signed an adhesion to Treaty 6 in August 1878 at Battleford, succeeding Little Chief as Band leader. The band's reserve lands, adjacent to the Red Pheasant reserve in the Eagle Hills, were surveyed in 1879 but surrendered in 1905. Lean Man Band signed Treaty 4 in 1877 at Fort Walsh. Both Lean Man and Grizzly Bear's Head moved north to Treaty 6 territory in May 1882 when Fort Walsh was closed. They were given reserve land south of Battleford.

All three bands participated in the 1885 rebellion, resulting in the suspension of their annuity payments until 1887. Since that time they have been recognized as both a Treaty 4 and a Treaty 6 band.

In 1948, the chief and council declared the unity of the Mosquito, Grizzly Bears Head, and Lean Man bands. Chief Mosquito remained the Primary Chief.

Today

The Mosquito Grizzly Bear's Head Lean Man First Nation is committed to providing leadership in social and health services for its constituents, implementing an economic strategy for prosperity and infrastructure growth, and preserving its unique culture and heritage. Their vision entails long-term

sustainability and self-sufficiency, promoting health and wellness for individuals, families, and the community.

In May 2021, the First Nation reached a significant milestone in its 25-year legal battle over land stolen in 1905. After rejecting a \$127 million settlement offer, the First Nation ultimately agreed to a \$141 million settlement with the federal government, managed through an independently administered trust. These funds will support housing, education, and initiatives benefiting Elders and youth, marking a rewarding end to their perseverance.

It has a very unique history, unlike any other First Nation community in Canada.

Grant Beaudry, CEO

Economic Development

Governance

Shortly after Chief Aguilar-Antiman (Stone) was elected in 2019, the chief and council had to develop its approach to economic development. The First Nation officially incorporated MGBHLM Economic Development Corporation Inc. (the EDC) in July 2019. The purpose of the EDC is to create businesses that will earn profits to provide the First Nation with funds over and above what Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) provides. To achieve this, they aimed to separate economic development, or the generation of their revenue sources, from the day-to-day operations of the First Nation.

As is common in First Nations' economic development, the creation of the EDC allowed for the formation of a limited partnership, with the EDC as the general or operating partner and the First Nation as the limited partner providing the resources. In the EDC's first year of operations, Chief and council sat on the board and developed the board's governance policy. When this policy was completed, the board invited people with business experience to apply to sit as board members.

The EDC now has an independent board of directors, that works at arm's length from Chief and Council. The board members bring valuable business expertise to the table that they acquired through diverse backgrounds in business and project management. Their experiences range from operating local businesses to working for various organizations within the community.

The EDC is managed by a corporate executive officer (CEO), who is hired by the board and is responsible for the daily affairs of the corporation. The CEO works closely with a staff member who manages new business and the corporate lawyer who takes care of the legalities of the EDC's affairs. The CEO reports to the board of directors and liaisons with the Chief and Council, in the interest of establishing and operating profitable businesses that will benefit the community. These benefits include creating more "own source revenues" for the First Nation to further grow its economy and to provide training opportunities, work experience, and employment for the First Nation's members. Developing the First Nation's human capital is an important goal of the EDC. The CEO is part of the First Nation's management team. The current CEO is Grant Beaudry.

“We're building capacity. We're in the growing stages. We're in the infancy stages. this is how I would talk to my council. This is our baby. We've got to nurture the EDC because, one day it is going to take care of the nation.”

Chief Tanya Stone

MGBHLM Economic Development Corporation Inc.

Reforming the Past

In 2020, the First Nation purchased the St. Mary's Oblate Residence and adjoining property near the former Battleford Industrial Residential School site. At first, the Oblates were reluctant to sell the residence and property to a First Nation. To convince the Oblates to sell the property, the CEO told them of the vision that he had of how the First Nation would tell its story from a Nakoda perspective. This story involved their migration from the United States where their people were at the battle of Little Bighorn with Chief Sitting Bull. After that battle, a lot of the tribes dispersed, with the First Nation's people going to the Cypress Hills, settling there and signing Treaty 4. After the Cypress Hills Massacre the First Nation's people were moved into the area where they are now, approximately 30 kilometers south of Battleford, Saskatchewan.

The EDC is converting the residence into a business centre and training facility, with future plans for an interpretive centre. Purchased at a cost of \$1.1 million (estimated value \$1.4 million), the property includes 138 acres of land, several buildings, a cemetery, and a religious grotto. The residence, estimated at 10,000 square feet, is being repurposed for the First Nation's use. Many First Nation members have ties to the former residential school. The Oblates viewed the acquisition as a positive step towards reconciliation and dialogue. Elders from the First Nation emphasized the importance of the land for healing and education, calling it a historic site and expressing pride and happiness in the purchase. They call this centre, The Ridge.

During COVID-19, the community identified the need to have temporary accommodations to protect Elders. The Ridge had a twenty-bedroom facility, so they submitted a proposal for \$2.4 million to get renovations done to make it an isolation facility. Each unit now has its own ventilation similar to a hotel room. They also upgraded the kitchen to a commercial kitchen to feed the clients. Some of the rooms are set aside for victims of domestic violence. With funding running out, the First Nation has submitted a proposal to build temporary accommodations for people seeking healthcare in the Battlefords. Patients and family members can stay at The Ridge during appointments and healthcare stays. The long-term vision is to use the facilities for a wellness centre.

The intergenerational impacts of residential schools have resulted in many Indigenous youth losing their cultural identity. Some have adopted identities from other cultures portrayed in pop culture, as depicted in TV shows and films. The goal is to reintroduce Indigenous culture into the community. Beaudry states that this was a primary motivation behind purchasing the old Indian school. Assuring the Catholic Church that the site would serve as a place for healing, the purchase signifies a form of reconciliation, acknowledging the truth of residential school experiences and their hidden effects.

New Ventures

The EDC got off to a good start by setting up three new businesses in 2019, which they are working hard to make successful. They know that most new businesses require three to five years to be profitable, and they hope that all three businesses will provide the EDC with a return on investment for the community.

The three businesses are a home construction company, a security firm, and the Three Nations Gas Bar and Convenience Store. The vision of MGBHLM Home Builders is to help alleviate the housing needs of the First Nation's members and to contribute to the economy and capacity building (e.g., training people for work in the construction trades). The construction of 20 new homes is in progress on the reserve, with completion expected by late spring or early summer of 2024, with planned move-ins for the fall of 2024.

Plans are also underway to establish the Three Nations Gas Bar, slated to open in late October or early November. Additionally, the First Nation will procure trucks for a security company to serve local businesses and neighboring communities. These developments align with the community's goal of fostering economic growth and job creation. Chief Stone emphasizes the significance of these initiatives, which represent years of planning and leadership effort. The ventures are expected to generate between 32 and 38 job opportunities further enhancing the local economy.

Interpretive Centre

The Interpretive Centre is a collaboration between the First Nation and the EDC involving the development of a new 1,342 square-metre Interpretive Cultural Art Gallery. The gallery will focus on Indigenous mental health and wellbeing, emphasizing Indigenous land, language, and relational healing. The federal government is contributing \$4,371,287, while the province is investing \$1,457,096 through the Investing In Canada Plan (ICP). The property, situated near the former Battleford Industrial School, was acquired in 2020.

The First Nation is excited about sharing the culture, language, and history of the Nakoda people. The project will be named the Mosquito Grizzly Bear's Head Lean Man First Nation Interpretive Cultural Centre and Henry Beaudry Art Gallery (Henry Beaudry was a renowned artist and war veteran). The interpretive cultural centre will showcase the history of the area and its Indigenous inhabitants, including stories of residential school survivors, Nakoda perspectives on historical events, and the signatories of Treaties 4 and 6. CEO Grant Beaudry hopes the centre will foster healing and dialogue among First Nations, government, and churches, contributing to reconciliation efforts.

The Future

The future generations are key, and the work being done now is laying the foundation for future generations of the MGBHLM First Nation. Chief and Council are working with their Knowledge Keepers/Elders on the best way to utilize The Ridge in the future for community members. The long-term goal is to develop The Ridge as a Wellness Centre. A business plan is also being developed to convert some of this space into a landmark Indigenous Historical Resort Oasis. This facility would include a five-star hotel with a spa, a fine-dining restaurant featuring Indigenous-themed cuisine, and a scenic meditation walk along a historically significant trail. The First Nation is excited about its plans to market

its proposed tourist destination, with a spiritual/cultural theme, to attract national and international guests

In addition to setting up its own businesses to help develop the local economy and create more own-source revenue, an important goal for the EDC is to support its community in developing human capital and in getting community members off social assistance through training, employment, and entrepreneurship. As an example, there are plans to develop a Training & Business Development Centre in the same building as their corporate offices. The first programs that have been offered are the Heavy Equipment Operator Program and the Home Builder Program. Funding support is also being sought for the MGBHLM Youth Healing, Empowerment, Education & Employment Program that would support new training.

The First Nation is planning to offer First Nations Staff Capacity-Building Retreats to their staff, as well as marketing their retreats to other First Nations who will also want to enjoy the amenities of their proposed spa, provided in a beautiful natural and historic setting. The EDC is also planning to use the Centre to offer Healing Retreats for Indigenous Language Revitalization & Recovery and as a place to offer exciting Business Generator Workshops.

This land is our traditional territory, encompassing Treaty 4 and Treaty 6, extending from Alberta to Manitoba and reaching into the United States. It's the area where we conduct business and share resources with our members and we are open for business.

Chief Tanya Stone

The economic development team is preparing a strategic plan that charts the course from the current position to future goals with a strong work plan. The team is looking at purchasing urban office rental space and looking for government, organization, and business tenants as a way to create some certainty in their revenue streams. They anticipate running various businesses within the acquired buildings and are considering partnerships in the education and health sectors. They recognize the challenge of selecting the most suitable partners for collaboration.

The EDC is currently conducting feasibility for several other businesses. These projects include a livestock operation on the First Nation's pasture lands and a gravel business. Both businesses would create jobs and help grow the local economy. Studies are also being conducted on the feasibility of buying greenhouses and investing in market gardens. In addition to their potential for making profits, greenhouses would also increase the First Nation's "food security."

MGBHLM First Nation is very new to economic development; it has only been approximately four years since the EDC began operations. To learn more about economic development, they are developing partnerships in the oil and gas industry and in agriculture. They are also partnering with training institutions for training programs, such as electrical, business, guest services, mental health and wellness programs, foundations, carpentry, scaffolding, truck driving, and agriculture.

The University of Saskatchewan's Department of Anthropology is working on-site (The Ridge) with ground penetrating radar equipment to search the residential school grounds for anomalies and unmarked graves. Seventy-four graves are known, seventy-two of which are for children who never made it home.

Analysis

Over the past twenty-five years, the MGBHLM First Nation was in co-management due to challenges in managing their own finances. Co-management for a First Nation involves sharing management responsibilities and decision-making authority with another entity, typically a government agency or organization. However, in the last eight years, there has been a shift in mindset towards achieving self-determination.

Leadership and management have worked together to build momentum, resulting in significant achievements. One such achievement is the passing of a financial administration law, leading to the First Nation's participation in the First Nations Fiscal Management Act (FMA). The FMA is legislation designed to provide support and tools for First Nations to strengthen their communities and economies. The current staff at the band level is educated and well-trained.

Participation in the FMA is optional for First Nations. By opting into the FMA, First Nations gain authority over financial administration laws, local revenues, and financing for infrastructure and economic development, among other areas. Access to FMA services is facilitated through institutions such as the First Nations Financial Management Board (FMB), the First Nations Finance Authority (FNFA), the First Nations Tax Commission (FNTC), and the First Nations Infrastructure Institute (FNII). Currently, over 350 First Nations are scheduled to or are participating in the FMA, benefiting from services such as independent validation of good governance and financial practices, access to loans from the FNFA, and the ability to collect local revenues under the FMA framework.

The First Nation is registered to charge the First Nations Goods and Services Tax (FNGST). The FNGST may be imposed by a band council or other governing body of a First Nation, listed in the First Nations Goods and Services Tax Act, on the lands that it governs. FNGST at 5% applies to most supplies of property and services made on these lands. This replaces the federal GST. The CRA administers the FNGST for the First Nations.

There's a fear in the membership that by participating in these initiatives that it may lead to a municipality-like setup and undermine the Treaties. However, in truth, these governance initiatives are strengthening our nation. Our next focus in governance involves developing a constitution, particularly as we identify ourselves as Nakota Cree people.

Chief Tanya Stone

The First Nation is part of Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 which is part of Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta. They are ready to do business with those areas and prepared to work with other nations within their traditional territories.

Chief Stone says that, when she was elected in 2019, the Elders advised her to purchase The Ridge. At the time it was recognized that the First Nation lacked the capital to move forward with the acquisition. The First Nation understood that a claim was impending due to the 1905 land surrender, prompting them to seek advice from banks regarding potential options. Recognizing the need for a separate entity dedicated to economic development to facilitate these initiatives, the decision was made to create the EDC. The First Nation also recognized the need to be creative and to have a good team.

We need to educate, educate, educate our old people, membership, everybody about economic development. That's what we did and we were able to purchase land and create a separate legal entity."

Chief Tanya Stone

The First Nation was able to purchase the land by creating the EDC. They learned that the original economic board comprised of Chief and the Council could cause a conflict of interest, so they created a separate board of directors for the EDC.

The First Nation took their Elders to other communities to observe the success of other communities and to see what the First Nation could potentially accomplish. As a result of three claims settlements in the past six years and the potential for a fourth, the First Nation now has its own source capital. This money has been put into a trust and is thus protected for generations to come.

The First Nation has a strong team. The CEO, Director of Operations, and Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) chairperson are all from the First Nation and they're all experienced. The First Nation believes the process is about listening to and educating the membership and that this is not a one-and-done process.

What was beneficial was bringing in a translator when doing the vision mission and planning around Economic Development. Our Elders were sitting around a table, and we asked, "What's economic development?" Nobody spoke, but when it was translated into Cree, the feedback was powerful and it helped guide us.

Chief Tanya Stone

There is a need for the First Nation to maximize land use, particularly in agriculture, while also addressing challenges and potential improvements in their gas bar operations. They aim to maintain an Indigenous presence in the gas bar and explore additional revenue streams like selling crafts. Chief Stone acknowledges the significant historical impact of the events that took place in the Battlefords area, emphasizing the importance of sharing its history and fostering unity. Despite past challenges, they are optimistic about future collaborations with local leaders, focusing on healthcare investment and potential business ventures such as a culturally sensitive senior facility. Additionally, they highlight their involvement in hotel investments and ownership of the Gold Eagle Casino land, viewing these as

opportunities for economic development and self-sufficiency. Despite past negative experiences, they are now exploring new options and embracing independence.

Challenges and Successes

It is important to emphasize that government provides limited operational funding for economic development. Regrettably, economic development is not given significant investment priority. Despite these challenges, the First Nation has made concerted efforts, including drafting work plans and submitting project funding proposals to Indigenous Services Canada. The progress in economic development initiatives primarily stems from the proactive endeavours of the First Nation, utilizing their own resources. No one is going to or can do it for them so they are taking on the challenge of developing economically themselves. They are hopeful and optimistic about how economic development will transform their community.

References

Mosquito First Nation. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <https://mosquitofn.ca/home.html>

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