

Eskasoni First Nation

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The Eskasoni First Nation is a Mi'kmaq community located in the district of Unama'kik. Unama'kik is translated into English as "the land of fog". Mi'kmaq territory, known to Mi'kmaq as Mi'kma'kik, was split into seven (7) Districts. The word Eskasoni is derived from a Mi'kmaw word "We'kwistoqnik" meaning "where the fir trees are plentiful".

Eskasoni First Nation sits 50 kilometres south of Sydney along the eastern shores of the Bras d'Or Lakes. Bras d'Or Lakes is an inland saltwater lake made up of bays, inlets, and deep basins located in the centre of Cape Breton Island, in the province of Nova Scotia. This large inland lake was known to the Mi'kmaw as Pitu'pok or Pitu'pa'q. Pitu'pok is translated into English as "the great long salt water", while Pitu'pa'q is translated into English as "Inner Sea". The two names to describe the area were used coextensively amongst the Mi'kmaq of the region. For



over 10,000 years the Mi'kmaq people have maintained permanent summer village sites along the shores of Pitu'pok. Pitu'pok was abundant with resources such as oysters, lobster, eel, gaspereau, herring, cod, flounder, smelt, salmon, and mackerel. They were used as the primary transportation route between hunting and fishing grounds and for spiritual gatherings in all seasons.

Eskasoni was first chartered by the Surveyor-General of Cape Breton in 1832 and officially became a reserve in 1834, consisting of approximately 2800 acres of land. Historically, Eskasoni was a relatively small community of around 80-125 people during the 1800s. After the Canadian government implemented a policy of centralization, the population grew significantly. Eskasoni First Nation was selected as the main site for centralization in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Between the years 1942 and 1949, 2100 Mi'kmaw living in over twenty (20) separate locations around Nova Scotia were pressured to relocate to either Eskasoni or Shubenacadie (Indian Brook). The majority of the Mi'kmaw families in Cape Breton moved to Eskasoni, while those on the mainland moved to Shubenacadie.

This relocation scheme had a devastating effect on the lives of Mi'kmaw in Nova Scotia. Relocation destroyed the Mi'kmaw ability to be economically self-sufficient which contributed to a decline in living standards, social and health problems and a breakdown of political leadership.

Many problems arose out of centralization such as overcrowding, poor housing, substance abuse, and little or no economic opportunities for the residents. Many people wanted to return to their homes but that was not possible because their homes were often destroyed once they were relocated to Eskasoni.

The people of Eskasoni are resilient and have overcome many challenges that come from having a larger population in a rural area. In 1958, the Band Council was established to finally



have some control over the affairs in the community. Since then, Eskasoni has improved by tenfold. Today Eskasoni has the largest population of any Mi'kmaq First Nation with 4,589 members with 3,935 members living on-reserve, and 654 members living off-reserve.

The Eskasoni Economic Development Department is responsible for assisting the community in business development, resource management and other economic activities that help to generate employment, wealth, and capital. Some of the activities performed by the department include economic programming, developing feasibility studies, developing business plans, securing professional services, writing proposals to various funding bodies and performing in a liaison role with the community, various government departments, agencies, and other related parties. Some amazing projects and developments have been developed in the community including the Eskasoni Supermarket, Eskasoni Commercial Mall Development, Eskasoni Comprehensive Community Plan, Eskasoni Wind Energy, Open for Business, Junior Achievement, Entrepreneurship Summer Camps, Youth Summit, Unama'ki Benefits Office, and Individual Clients. Eskasoni Tobacco Wholesale is responsible for the distribution of cigarette and tobacco quotas to Eskasoni retailers and community members. Revenue from the sale of these products are used to fund band operations such as the Dan K. Stevens memorial Arena, the Band Remedial Management plan, and Eskasoni Boys and Girls Club.



There are over 23 businesses owned and operated by entrepreneurs in the community including; Al Gould's Electrical, Brenda's Giftware & Smoke Shop, Bubblo's Jewelry, Gift & Convenience, Denny's Auto Sales & Repair, Denny's Smoke Shop, Denny's Subs, Eskasoni Supermarket Ltd., Eskasoni Trading Post, First Nation Construction, Frenchie's, H.T. Catering, Johns Garden Pool & Billiard Room, L'nuey Building Supplies, Muin Gas, Poulette's Dairy, Rosie's Hair Shop, Sandy's Hair Studio and Say Spa, Sid's Variety, Slick's Smoke Shop, Sylliboy's Grocery & Hardware, Uncle Roddie's General Store, Wikk Pizza.

Eskasoni First Nation works with the METS program to deliver quality job training and work opportunities for members in the community. METS started in 1991 and stands for Mi'kmaq Employment Training Secretariat. Many programs run by METS are geared towards getting people trained in new skills and fields, increasing education and building on previous skills and knowledge, as well as providing apprenticeships and hands-on training. Some of the programs include Employment Insurance Funds, Consolidated Revenue Funds, Work Experience Training, Skill Enhancement, Project Based Training, Single Seat Purchase, Job Creation Program and Self-Employment Program. Many of the programs offer weekly stipends up to \$435/week, travel allowance, and daycare to help with the financial and practical challenges that come with starting a new job or career. Programs run from 4-52 weeks throughout the year. There are members enrolled in heating programs as well as plumbing. Graduates from various programs are matched or placed with non-profit and for-profit organizations throughout Nova Scotia or Canada.



The Eskasoni Fish and Wildlife Commission was established in the early 1990s to acquire and manage communal fishing licenses for Eskasoni First Nation. The departments under EFWC include Administration, Science, Research and Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy (AFS). AFS employs three First Nation Guardians who are involved with negotiations, communicating with the public through education presentations, newsletters and information sessions, explaining the AFS program and conditions of fishing under the

agreement, and management of the fishery by distributing tags. The EFWC is devoted to conducting marine research in Bras d'Or Lakes and involvement in research projects, habitat enhancement, stream restoration and broodstock enhancement, monitoring temperature and salinity, and monitoring runoff onto spawning grounds and habitat.



The Eskasoni Fitness Center provides a healthy activity for the residents. The fitness center offers free weights, circuit training equipment, boxing equipment, and tanning beds. There are also two staff members who are Nova Scotia Fitness Association Certified and can offer personalized training and support to members. The Eskasoni Fire Department consists of 4

career firefighters and 20 volunteer firefighters. The Fire Station operates 24 hours a day and emergency fire services are dispatched through 911.

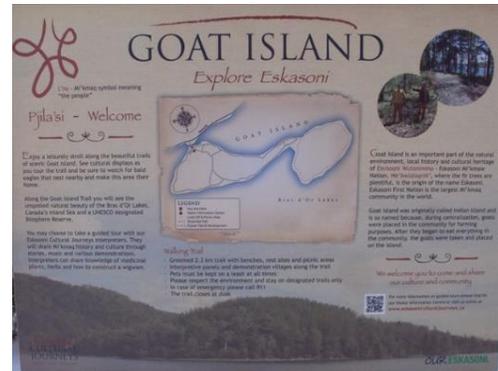
The Eskasoni Gaming Commission as a division of the Eskasoni Band Council, is responsible for the distribution of video lottery terminals in Eskasoni. The gaming commission uses funds to help with hospital assistance, youth assistance, funerals, and emergency situations. It also helps fund the fitness center, skating rink and the annual pilgrimage.



The Eskasoni Lands department is responsible for ensuring all lands activities are compliant with federal regulations and provide members with information updates related to land management. The housing department is divided into the Housing Development which deals with house repairs and maintenance on old INAC units and the Housing Trust that deals with maintenance on CMHC Section 95 units. Eskasoni is a Section 10 band which means Eskasoni Band has control over membership and reports on births, new registration numbers, marriages, divorces, deaths, band transfers, amendments and status cards. Eskasoni also has the Sarah Denny Cultural Center that is available to rent for meetings, celebrations, and other cultural gatherings. The center is also home to the Eskasoni Television (ETV), Eskasoni's community channel 14.

The Eskasoni Health Center provides primary care services including family physicians, nurse practitioner, support staff, and visiting specialist. There is a pharmacy staffed by two full-time pharmacists and two technicians. Blood collection services are also provided. The Eskasoni Mental Health and Social Work Service (EMH&SWS) has eleven staff members who provide helpful services for members in an environment that is safe, confidential, and culturally appropriate. Counselling is available to help members deal with the challenges of life such as grief, intervention, sexual abuse and assault, suicide, family break-up, trauma, Residential School issues, depression, family violence, and addictions. The Social Assistance and Welfare office helps members who are unable through their own or other resources to provide themselves and their families with basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and other items essential to maintaining a basic standard of living.

Eskasoni Cultural Journeys offers visitors a unique experience to learn more about the Mi'kmaq. There are a variety of experiences to choose from if visitors would like to take part in a smudging ceremony, learn to make four-cents cake over an open fire, learn the art of basketry, learn and join in traditional dance, speak with the trading post merchant, play the ancient game of Waltes, and learn about hunting and fishing techniques. Tours cost \$40 per adult and \$20 per youth with group rates starting at \$250. Customized packages are available for events and off-site presentations. The tour takes about 2 hours and includes a 2.4-km hike around Goat Island that gives people a glimpse into what life was like for the Mi'kmaq before and during the time when the first settlers were arriving in the 1700s and 1800s. During the hike through the woods, which is surrounded by the Bras d'Or Lake, there are various stations set up next to wigwams, where visitors learn about beading or cook four-cent bread over a fire. There are also recreational opportunities like canoe rentals. Many of the participants are booked through cruise ships visiting in the area as well as school bookings from all over Cape Breton and Nova Scotia.



Eskasoni Cultural Journeys has received a \$99,021 non-repayable investment through the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency's (ACOA) Innovative Communities Fund to improve the current tourism product offerings. The project will include infrastructure improvements on Goat Island, including a performance space, interpretation materials, signage, trail improvements, the addition of a gate, and the purchase of canoes and carts. This project also supports brand development, website updates and the addition of a project coordinator. Other funding partners for this project include: Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), \$87,827; the Trans Canada Trail, \$16,000; Eskasoni First Nation, \$6,000; and the Province of Nova Scotia through the Aboriginal Community Development Fund, \$4,500. The success of Eskasoni Cultural Journeys has helped to create spinoff business in the community such as the Goat Island Café that is owned and operated by a band member.

Located in Eskasoni is the Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources (UINR) which is a non-profit organization that serves the five Mi'kmaq communities of Eskasoni, Membertou, Potlotek, Wagmatcook, and Waycobah. UINR's Board of Directors are the five Unama'ki Chiefs. Starting in 1999, UINR has been the voice for Mi'kmaq on natural resources and environmental issues in Unama'ki including commercial fisheries, forestry, science research, traditional Mi'kmaq knowledge, and resource management and enforcement. Science paired with Mi'kmaq traditional knowledge is called "Two-Eyed Seeing" and is the key to UINR's aquatic activities. UINR is guided by the principles of Netukulimk, loosely meaning sustainability. Netukulimk is achieving adequate standards of community nutrition and economic well-being without jeopardizing the integrity, diversity, or productivity of our environment. UINR has signed Memorandum of Understandings to work together with many organizations including Environment Canada and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.