

# Tobique (Neqotkuk) First Nation

## Defenders of Wolastoqey

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Neqotkuk, or Tobique First Nation is the largest of six Wolastoqiyik (wah-lew-stook-gey-ick) or Maliseet Nation First Nation community in New Brunswick, Canada. Located 180 kilometers north of Fredericton on the far west side of the province close to the US border and just north of the mouth of the Tobique River. Wolastoqiyik, which translated into English means “people of the beautiful or bountiful river.” Wolastoqey (wah-lew-stook-gay) refers to the Nation itself. However, many prefer to just use the term Wulastuk (wuh-lew-stook), much like the word Mi’kmaw, instead of Mi’kmaq.

To the Wulastuk the St. John’s river system and water shed was know as the Wolastoq. Anthropological evidence shows that the Wulastuk have maintained settlements along the Wolastoq (St. John’s) river system for over 6,000 years. In 1604, French explorers “discovered” the Wolastoq watershed and renamed it “rivière St. Jean.” The French called the Wulastuk people Etchemin. Later they referred to them as Maliseet. The word Maliseet derives from the Mi’kmaw word Mali’sit (muh-lee-set), which translated into English, means “calm flowing dialect”. Many Wulastuk words have the same meaning as Mi’kmaw words with a slight difference in how they are pronounced.

Tobique community as well as the river it sits next to was named after the Wulastuk Chief Noel Tobec in the late 1700s. During the early to mid-1700s, Chief Tobec was the Chief of a large



fortified village that stood for hundreds of years at the mouth of the Tobique river where it connects to the St. John’s river. Historical data states the Fortified village once was home to 500 to 1000 Wulastuk at any giving time. The Wulastuk call the river Neqotkuk which derives from the Wulastuk word Neqoot or Neqotom which translated into English, means “to block” or “to obstruct”. The rest of Wolastoqey often referred to the Wulastuk in this area as Neqotqiyik or Neqotkew, which translated into English means “the people of Neqotkuk”. The Neqotkew were known as fierce fighters who defended against Mohawk raiding parties coming down the St.

John river into Wulastuk territory. They would block or obstruct Mohawk raiding parties hence the name.



Since time immemorable the Neqotkew would defend the western borders of Wolastoqey. Other Wulastuk villages would often send their young men to spend a few winters at Neqotkuk in hopes they would come back as seasoned warriors. However, within only 50 years after the French started entering the St. Johns watershed in 1604, 75% of the Wulastuk population were decimated by European-borne illnesses and disease brought over by the French explorers and Portuguese fishermen. By mid-1600s the Wulastuk could no longer send their young men to Neqotkuk to defend their western borders.

Today Tobique First Nation (Neqotkuk) has a population of 2,511 registered members with around 1,600 living on reserve and around 900 off reserve. The reserve comprises of two lots (The Brother's #18, 4 ha; Tobique #20, 2724 ha). The reserve was established in 1801 with nearly 20,000 acres, but over the years the reserve was reduced by surrenders to squatters and a major surrender in 1892. Tobique First Nation has filed two suits to recover the loss; one for 2,539 acres lost in the town of Perth; and one for more than 10,000 acres lost in the 1892 surrender. In 2009 the government accepted only the second claim for negotiation. In 2016 Tobique First Nation accepted a deal for \$39 million in compensation for the lands lost in 1892. The funds were distributed to community members and funds were put aside for community development.

Tobique First Nation has both band owned enterprises and community owned by individual members. There are currently eight businesses owned and operated by band members in the community. Tobique Tobacco sells tobacco products. Crispy's Takeout offers food and gaming 7 days a week. Outback Smokehouse is a small mom and pop takeaway cookhouse whose slogan says, "to make people happy with the love of our food is our goal and we do our best to keep it affordable for all pockets". Boats Entertainment & Totem Smokes is known for bringing entertainment to a whole new level with new gaming machines, pool tables and a lounge. 180 Sports Bar & Entertainment offers drinks, gaming machines, darts, karaoke, Texas hold'em, and dances. Bodin's is known as the place to be any night or day of the week with 10 VLT machines, full bar, smokes, dart boards, Maliseet, Elders Club, and Maliseet One-Stop. Operations like these are helping to build the local economy by keeping money in the community.

Tanna Pirie-Wilson is the CEO of Band Operations and responsible for overseeing the six band-owned and operated businesses. Tobique First Nation is the first indigenous community in New Brunswick to receive Financial Management Systems (FMS) certification from the First Nations Financial Management Board.



Tobique Gaming Center has over 250 slot machines, a fully staffed bar, and chances to win big cash prizes, open 7 days a week. The Band has not signed a gaming agreement with the province and all machines are band owned with 100% of the revenues going to the band. The casino has a poker room and 6

black jack tables as well as a Roulette Wheel and table. The casino employs 110 people and over 70% of employees are band members. The band uses some of the profits to provide for a \$50 weekly stipend to band members over 60 years old and a bi-yearly stipend of \$2,500 to all band members at Christmas and at the start of summer in June. The casino profits also fund community events like the Christmas party and annual Pow Wow. This



past Christmas alone, the band spent over \$50,000 of their casino profits for the 2018 Christmas party. The band provided high value prizes drawn at the end of the night as well as Christmas presents for every child in the community. In addition to the casino, there is Tobique Bingo that runs 4 nights a week with \$1000 jackpots. When people get hungry, they can dine at the Two Rivers Restaurant that is open 7 days a week located in the Tobique Gaming Center.

The band is also responsible for running the Tobique Youth Center which is a non-profit organization staffed by two community members and 8 high school mentors. The center is the heart of Tobique First Nation and provides a drug and alcohol-free space where diverse youth



can gather and call their own. The Paul Pyres Community Hall is another gathering place for community members to host events, private parties, banquets, receptions, fundraisers, public meetings, business meetings, and dances. The hall was named in honour of the late council member Paul Pyres, who dedicated himself to securing funds to build a much-needed new hall for the community who now enjoy the beautiful building, greenspace, and playground surrounding the building.

Tobique First Nation also runs its own convenience & tobacco store and gas bar with five service stations. The fishing industry is also an economic driver for the community with 10 commercial lobster licenses and a snow crab quota. All band licenses are fished by band members and 100% of the deckhands and captains are band members. All the band operations bring revenue to the band account that can be used to deliver services and programs to the community and employment for its members.



Recently, Tobique First Nation has partnered with Nova Scotia-based company, Natural Forces to invest in a \$50 million wind energy project called Wocawson Wind Proejct. Tobique is a majority owner and responsible for 51% of the cost of building the wind farm and Natural Forces the rest. No government financing is involved in the project. This partnership came out of a provincial project called LORESS, which stands for Locally Owned Renewable Energy Projects that are Small Scale. Natural Forces, with 49% ownership of the project, has leased Crown land about 20 kilometers northeast of Sussex, between Route 114 and Portage Vale. The project is designed to have 10 turbines that provide 20 megawatts of power that will supply 5,000 homes and generate \$3 million a year in revenues for Tobique First Nation. The band plans on using the revenues to support education and housing in the community. Construction activities commenced onsite in March 2019, starting with tree clearing. There are talks of adding a solar plant, but it is just in the beginning stages.

*“Moving towards solar and other green renewable energies is the way to the future and us as a community need to take part of that... It’s part of our duty as stewards of Mother Earth is to take care of it.”*

– Chief Ross Perley

Canada’s forests continue to be important sources of good jobs in communities across the country, especially rural, remote and indigenous communities. The government of Canada has invested \$255,000 in a multi-year project with Tobique First Nation that will establish a forest-based community business to create long-term employment and increase revenues in the community. Part of this funding has so far supported a detailed analysis of Tobique’s manufacturing options, which led to the purchase of a sawmill in Perth-Andover. The next phase of this funding will create standard operating procedures, training in grading and stamping lumber and management succession planning for the mill that will lead to more local jobs. The mill currently employs a dozen band members as well as several non-natives from the town of Perth-Andover. The band forestry generates over \$300,000 in profits each year.

Tobique First Nation has its own housing authority that comprises eight members who assess anonymous housing surveys that members fill out expressing their need for housing. The

housing authority reviews the surveys and decide who has the biggest housing need. In 2018 the band made plans to build five houses including two one-bedroom, a two-bedroom, a three-bedroom, and a four-bedroom house. The five houses are expected to cost \$565,000, which will come from Tobique First Nation, Canada Mortgage and housing Corp., and Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. The band plans to create a cul-de-sac with an additional ten houses the following year. Tenants will be paying subsidized rent that will go toward the mortgage. After about 25 years, tenants will have the option of ownership of the home. Councilor Julian Moulton believes housing may be the first step to battling the other challenges facing people on the reserve. The housing project also employs community members on the construction crew.

Tobique First Nation has entered the cannabis industry with the opening of their first medical marijuana dispensary named Tribal ReLeaf. Tribal ReLeaf is band owned and employs 15 band



members. Tobique First Nation has passed cannabis by-laws within the community and only the band itself can participate in the sale of cannabis, not individual band members. The band is looking into building their own cultivation facility that will supply the dispensary and neighboring first nation communities who also have band owned and operated dispensaries.

More recent developments in Tobique First Nation include a detachment for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, a Band Fire Station and a one bay Paramedic base for the New Brunswick Emergency Medical Services. The new emergency service building should be operational by June 2019.

The band has developed other building projects including new log cabins. The log cabins will be available for purchase to the general public. In addition, the band plans on opening a canoe and kayak rental business in the summer 2019. There are new plans to build a hotel that will also house the band's new casino facility. The band has their own school that offers classes from K4 to grade 4 and provides an income tax program that does income tax filing for all band members. The community health center, Neqotkuk Health Center looks to promote, educate and provide primary health care services as well as support holistic health (spiritual, physical, emotional and mental) and encouraging self-responsibility of the Wolastokiyik people at Neqotkuk. The community also has Neqotkuk Community Learning Garden, that was created to provide an answer to rising food prices and offer an alternative for individuals looking to pursue a healthier lifestyle. The garden is funded by Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative and Chief and council allotted the land used in the garden, while community members built the boxes as part of a carpentry program. All the produce yielded by the garden is shared with community members.