

*Biodiversity,  
A priority*

# Forêts

*Lettre du Québec*

## A Historic Agreement in Northern Québec

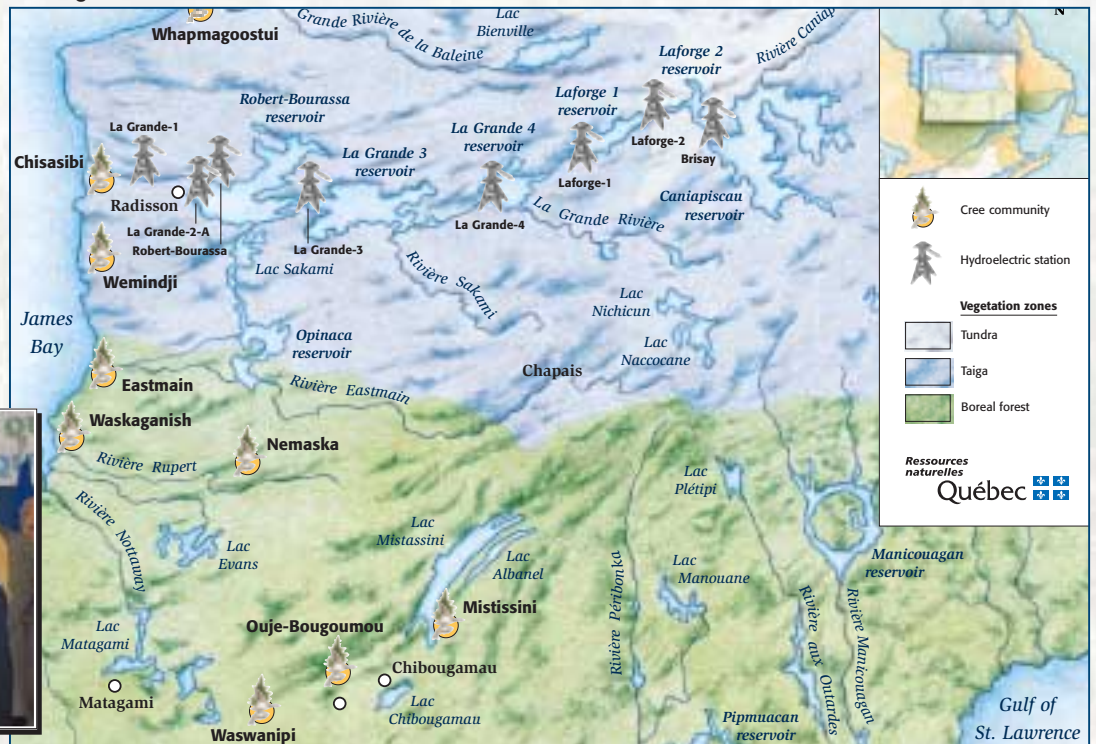
**Québec and the Cree Nation sign an agreement to ensure a concerted approach to economic development in the James Bay area.**

On February 7, 2002, Bernard Landry, Premier of Québec, and Ted Moses, Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees, signed a historic agreement between Québec and the Crees, an indigenous people living in the James Bay area of northern Québec. The Agreement Concerning a New Relationship between Le Gouvernement du Québec and the Crees of Québec, as its name indicates, heralds a new era in relations between Québec and the Cree Nation, giving the Crees genuine control over their economic and community development and allowing both sides to work

together to promote harmonious and sustainable development in a vast area of northern Québec. By providing a mechanism to harmonize development in the region and to protect Cree culture, the agreement creates a bridge between tradition and modernity.

The James Bay region covers roughly 330,000 square kilometres,

an area that represents almost 20% of the Québec land base and is equivalent to about eleven times the area of Texas, in the United States. It currently produces over 40% of Québec's hydroelectric power, thanks to the eight La Grande generating stations built within the drainage basin of the La Grande river. Already well-known for its considerable gold potential, the region has also attracted attention as a potential source of diamonds following several discoveries made during the last two years, in particular in the Monts Otish area.



### A PARTNERSHIP BASED ON TRUST AND RESPECT

The Québec-Cree Agreement is based on principles clearly stated by both parties, namely:

- A nation-to-nation agreement
- A new partnership based on cooperation, trust and mutual respect
- Greater autonomy and greater responsibility on the part of the Crees for their economic and community development
- Respect for the principles of sustainable development and the traditional way of life of the Crees

# The “Peace of the Brave”

A meeting between Premier Bernard Landry and Grand Chief Ted Moses, in June 2001, led to this broad-based renewal of the relationship between the Crees and Québec. During the meeting, the two leaders agreed that the Cree and Québec Nations needed to break free from the legalistic approach that had become the norm in previous years. Stating a shared vision of economic and community development for the two peoples, based on a “nation-to-nation” relationship, the Premier and the Grand Chief launched a series of negotiations that led to the signing of an agreement in principle on October 23, 2001, barely four months later.

Continuing their work, the two nations brought together by the new agreement signed the definitive version of the agreement on February 7, 2002. The agreement renews the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA) by establishing new application procedures. The JBNQA was recognized by both signatory parties in 1975 as an innovative approach to relations with Native peoples, but has proved complex to apply.

The new global agreement, approved by almost 70% of voters in a referendum in the nine Cree communities in Québec, contains many different measures for economic and community development, together with provisions to introduce harmony into the relationship between Québec and the Crees. The measures stress the importance of respecting the values and traditional way of life of the Crees, and offer them greater autonomy and greater responsibility for managing their own development, in addition to redefining the political and economic relationship between the two signing peoples.

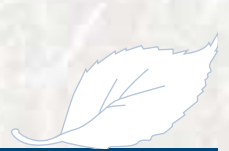
As emphasized by Grand Chief Ted Moses in a speech given in December 2001 to the Association de l'industrie électrique du Québec (AIEQ), the agreement “allows the Cree people [...] to enter into the new relationship with Québec – a relationship based on mutual respect, good will, and common understanding.” As he pointed out, “the Crees are recognized as essential to development.”

Premier Bernard Landry saluted the conclusion of the “Peace of the Brave” using the description of Grand Chief Moses, and described it as “a major collective challenge that, in several ways, honours both our nations. [...] This is a unique opportunity to demonstrate our willingness and determination to make this partnership a resounding success.”



*In the Red Room at the Parliament Building, a handshake seals the agreement in principle*

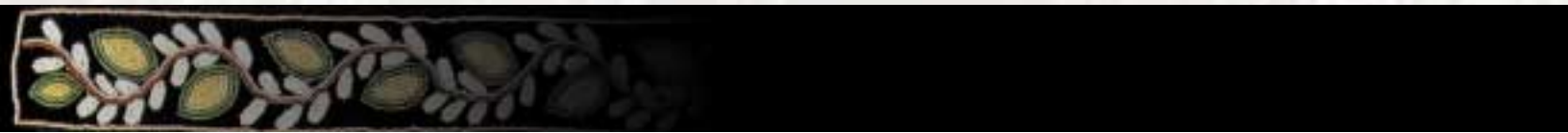
Since the signing of the agreement in principle, Cree and other Native leaders have underlined its innovative nature on several national and international platforms. On January 30, 2002, the Grand Council of the Cree presented the agreement to the Working Group on the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the UN Commission of Human Rights, stressing that it complies with several recommendations made by the UN Human Rights Committee under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and that it therefore constitutes a precedent for Canada.



## HIGHLIGHTS

*The Québec-Cree agreement provides, in particular for:*

- the adaptation of the Québec forestry regime to reflect traditional Cree values and activities
- the creation of the Cree Development Corporation
- the taking in charge, by the Crees, of economic and community development programs under the JBNQA
- a \$3.5 billion commitment by the Québec government over the next fifty years
- Cree consent to two hydroelectric projects
- the settlement of disputes and court challenges
- new procedures for natural resource development and the implementation of the JBNQA



# Economic and community development

The agreement signed on February 7, 2002 notably transfers responsibility for economic and community development to the Crees. The funding previously paid by Québec, Hydro-Québec and the Société d'énergie de la Baie-James to assist trappers, tourism, Native handicrafts, the development of Cree businesses and the creation of community centres and infrastructures, and to support firefighting, will now be paid by the Crees, in particular through the Cree Development Corporation.

The Québec government will continue to support the development of the Cree communities by committing almost \$3.5 billion in funding over the next fifty years. The actual amounts will be adjusted to take into account the level of economic activity in the James Bay area in the fields of hydroelectric development, forestry and mining. With its provisions covering financial assistance and various measures to promote economic development, job creation and the awarding of contracts to the Crees, the agreement is designed to ensure a sharing of resources and financial spin-offs between the Cree communities and Québec society as a whole.



*Community buildings in Ouje-Bougoumou. From now on, the Crees will have responsibility for developing new infrastructures.*

## Hydroelectric development

Under the agreement, the Crees will benefit from some of the jobs created by and contracts awarded under the major hydroelectric projects known as Eastmain-1 and Eastmain-1A/Rupert. The completion of these two projects, which will cost almost \$4 billion, is one of the key provisions of the agreement, and puts an end to decades of arduous, complex discussions between the Crees and Québec.

Once completed in 2010, these hydroelectric facilities will add around 1250 megawatts to Hydro-Québec's production capacity.

Their strategic importance for economic development in Québec is clear, since they will provide a clean, renewable energy source to meet expected growth in the demand for electricity in Québec and in the markets served by Hydro-Québec.

Parallel agreements between the Grand Council of the Crees and Hydro-Québec were also signed on February 7, 2002 to specify how Cree businesses and workers will gain access to the contracts and jobs generated, beginning in the spring of 2002, by the Eastmain-1 and Eastmain-1A/Rupert projects. In addition, the Crees will participate directly with Hydro-Québec in the process to assess environmental and social impacts under the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement.



*A partial view of the La Grande complex, where construction began in the mid 1970s following the signing of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement. Future hydroelectric development projects, including those on the Eastmain and Rupert rivers, will call on the skills of Crees businesses and workers.*

### THE CREES OF QUÉBEC

Over 13,000 Crees live in nine communities in the James Bay area. Population growth is high (over 50% of the Cree population is aged under 25), and the communities face major challenges in terms of social and cultural development and the need to reconcile tradition and modernity. Although the Crees own the Air Creebec airline and the Cree Construction and Development Corporation (Québec), one of the ten largest construction companies in Québec, almost 30% of the population (all of whom speak the Cree language) live mainly from traditional activities such as hunting, fishing and trapping.



# Joint forest management

In the field of forestry, the agreement establishes authorities with responsibility for adapting the Québec forestry regime. The Cree-Québec Forestry Board will oversee this part of the agreement, make proposals to the Québec government concerning the application of laws and policies, and help plan and supervise forest management activities. Joint working groups will also be established in the five Cree communities affected by the forestry component of the agreement to analyze and oversee the implementation of specific measures.

The forestry component of the agreement also provides for the adaptation of the Québec forestry regime in the territory covered by the agreement to better reflect traditional Cree activities, in particular by taking trapline boundaries into account and protecting forests around lakes, along rivers and on sites of special interest to the Crees. This adapted forest management approach will also take into consideration the specific features of the forest in the area covered by the agreement.

To encourage economic development in the Cree communities, the agreement stipulates that an annual volume of 350,000 m<sup>3</sup> of timber will be allocated to Cree businesses by 2006, according to the allocation schedule set out in the agreement.



Québec's forestry regime will be adapted in the James Bay area to better reflect traditional Cree activities, to take into account trapline boundaries and to provide protection for forests around lakes, along rivers and on sites of interest to the Crees.

## Mining

In the mining sector, the Crees will benefit from measures to improve their access to contracts and jobs with mining companies working in the James Bay area. A Mineral Exploration Board, made up of Québec and Cree representatives, will work to facilitate the development of mineral exploration activities by the Crees and access to government financial assistance programs for mining. These measures are of particular importance at a time when Northern Québec is experiencing a high level of activity in the mineral sector.



## A model for future agreements

The creation of joint bodies to oversee the implementation of the agreement, the financial commitments made by Québec and the transfer of a large number of social and economic responsibilities to the Crees are all examples of concrete measures that have been designed to support harmonious, sustainable development in northern Québec. Through these measures and the underlying principles of partnership, the agreement creates a clear framework to govern actions by all parties for many years to come, offering an approach that will benefit the whole of Québec and will doubtless become a model for agreements signed with various indigenous peoples around the world.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

The full text of the Agreement Concerning a New Relationship between Le Gouvernement du Québec and the Crees of Québec, along with a series of descriptive summaries, is available through the website of the Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones:

<http://www.saa.gouv.qc.ca>

The website of the Grand Council of the Crees, which brings together the nine Cree communities in Québec, offers a range of information on the Cree Nation and French and English versions of the full text of the agreement:

<http://www.gcc.ca>

The website of the Ministère des Ressources naturelles provides a wide range of information on forestry, mining, energy and land in Québec:

<http://www.mrn.gouv.qc.ca>

Additional information concerning hydroelectric projects on the Eastmain and Rupert rivers can be accessed on the Hydro-Québec website:

<http://www.hydro-quebec.com>

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