Two years ago, the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) and the Government of Ontario signed a framework agreement recognizing the distinct history, culture and way of life of Métis communities in Ontario and the Métis Nation of Ontario’s important role in representing its citizens and communities in the province.

This framework agreement set the course for a new, collaborative relationship. It reinforced our commitment to work together to improve the well-being of Métis children, families, and communities while building knowledge and understanding of Métis culture among all Ontarians. It also committed to the implementation of the historic Powley decision on Métis harvesting rights and to facilitate the recognition of Métis rights in Ontario, as a part of the reconciliation process between the Crown and Métis communities.

Much has happened since the agreement was signed. We are pleased to provide this update on our progress and the results that have been achieved in several key areas.

While we are proud of the advancements we’ve made so far, there remains work to be done. As we mark the second anniversary of the framework agreement, our shared commitment to addressing the unique issues of Métis people in Ontario remains strong. Together, we are honouring the traditions of the past and working toward a better future.
The Métis Nation of Ontario

In 1993, Métis in Ontario came together to form the Métis Nation of Ontario, a Métis-specific governance structure.

With the creation of the MNO, Ontario Métis proudly raised the Métis Nation flag in Ontario again and asked Métis citizens and Métis communities who shared the same history, goals and vision to join the MNO.

Today, close to 15,000 adult Métis citizens in Ontario have come forward to join the MNO and advance the Métis Nation’s agenda in Ontario.

The MNO has a democratic governance structure that includes local (i.e., MNO Chartered Community Councils), regional and provincial governance structures (i.e., Provisional Council of the MNO). Ballot box elections for Métis leadership at the local, regional and provincial levels are held at regular intervals.

Since its creation, the MNO has achieved many successes. It advanced the historic Powley litigation, which recognized and affirmed Métis harvesting rights. It has a negotiated agreement on Métis harvesting with the Ontario government. It has created a centralized registry of Métis. As well, the MNO delivers a multitude of important programs and services to Métis people living throughout the province.

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Who are the Métis?

The Métis are a distinct Aboriginal people with a unique history, culture, language and territory that includes the waterways of Ontario, surrounds the Great Lakes and spans what was known as the historic Northwest.

The Métis Nation is comprised of descendants of people born of relations between Indian women and European men. The initial offspring of these unions were of mixed ancestry. The genesis of a new Aboriginal people called the Métis resulted from the subsequent intermarriage of these mixed ancestry individuals.

Distinct Métis settlements emerged as an outgrowth of the fur trade, along freighting waterways and watersheds. In Ontario, these settlements were part of larger regional communities, interconnected by the highly mobile lifestyle of the Métis, the fur trade network, seasonal rounds, extensive kinship connections and a shared collective history and identity.

The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs

In June 2007, the stand-alone Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs (MAA) was created.

This was a significant and symbolic step that reflected the importance of developing a stronger, broader partnership with Métis, First Nations and Inuit.

Building relationships with Aboriginal partners is a key priority for the ministry. These relationships form the foundation of the government’s work in all aspects of Aboriginal affairs.

Aboriginal governments and organizations represent the interests of the Métis, First Nations, and Inuit. By working together with them, the Government of Ontario can better understand and address the needs of Aboriginal people and their communities.

The ministry itself works on relationships and a range of policies and programs. It also coordinates policies and programs with other ministries whose responsibilities touch the lives of Aboriginal people in Ontario.

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It was a banner year for the recognition and celebration of Métis culture in Ontario.

The year 2010 marks the 125th anniversary of the Northwest Rebellion in Saskatchewan as well as the death of Louis Riel in 1885, which were significant events in the history of the Métis Nation.

The Ontario government proclaimed 2010 the “Year of the Métis” in order to recognize and celebrate the unique history, identity, culture and contributions of Métis communities in Ontario.

On April 19, 2010, for the first time ever, a Minister greeted members of the Legislature in the Michif language. Minister Bentley delivered the greetings as he made the historic declaration, kicking off a year-long celebration of Métis culture and heritage in Ontario. It was a proud day for the MNO with President Lipinski and other Métis representatives present in the legislature to witness this historic event.

It was a fitting tribute and an important step in the ongoing journey of reconciliation between the government and Métis in this province.

Over the course of the year, as a part of the “Year of the Métis” celebrations, the MNO and its Community Councils held a series of cultural and social events throughout the province.
The MNO is developing the capacity needed to attract new business opportunities and create jobs through Ontario's New Relationship Fund (NRF). The NRF has provided the MNO with the capacity to create and support its consultation framework and MNO Lands Resources and Consultation (LRC) Branch so Métis communities can participate effectively in consultation processes with industry and government.

The fund responds to a key recommendation of the Ipperwash Inquiry. It is designed to help Aboriginal communities and organizations participate in meaningful consultation and engagement with government and the private sector on resource related projects.

The Ontario government recently reaffirmed its commitment to the program in the 2010 Budget, earmarking an additional $60 million over the next four years.

NRF funds are helping the MNO to hire staff, engage Métis citizens, collect Métis traditional knowledge, and get technical training in resource-related industries like mining, forestry and green energy.

The MNO’s LRC Branch has received approximately 450 consultation notices. Of these, MNO is currently involved in consultation activities for approximately 60 major and medium-sized projects across the province, and has established relationships with over 20 major proponents in Ontario.

This year the MNO was approved to receive four years of renewed NRF resources in order to continue the positive work started since the Fund was launched in 2008. The MNO is also receiving support through the New Relationship Fund’s enhanced funding component.

In 2010/11, the MNO will receive $2.1 million through the NRF to build core consultation capacity within the communities it represents.

Delegates arrive at the 17th Annual Assembly of the Métis Nation of Ontario held at Fort William Historical Park in Thunder Bay, Ontario.
Métis Chair at the University of Ottawa

The province’s first Chair in Métis Studies began her duties at the University of Ottawa this spring.

Dr. Brenda Macdougall, a leading expert in Métis history, took on her new role at the university in March.

As the chair holder, Dr. Macdougall is establishing a research facility to trace a genealogical map of Métis history in Canada. She is also designing and teaching courses in Métis studies at the undergraduate and graduate levels and acting as a primary mentor and supervisor for student researchers. Some of Dr. Macdougall’s research to date is captured in her recent book One of the Family, which explores Métis culture in 19th century northwestern Saskatchewan.

The University of Ottawa was chosen from among eight short-listed universities as the recipient of $3 million to create a Chair in Métis studies. The university is contributing an additional $1 million to host the Chair.

The role of the Chair is to increase research and create a greater understanding of the Métis people in Ontario as part of the province’s Aboriginal Education Strategy. The strategy is aimed at closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and increasing knowledge and awareness of Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives among all students.

Economic Development Symposium

In December 2009, provincial and federal ministers of Aboriginal Affairs and Métis National Council leaders gathered in Calgary for the Métis Economic Development Symposium.

The symposium brought together government and Métis leaders to discuss economic development opportunities for Métis people as set out in the Métis Nation Protocol.

The two-day event included a joint presentation by the Métis Nation of Ontario and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. MNO President Gary Lipinski and former Ontario Minister of Aboriginal Affairs Brad Duguid spoke about the improvements in the relationship between Ontario and the MNO, and the necessity for progress on economic development.

The presentation touched on the many successes that had been achieved including the Ontario-MNO Framework Agreement; the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education; a successful application to the New Relationship Fund (resulting in the creation of MNO’s Lands Resources and Consultation Branch) and the development of the MNO Strategic Plan and Economic Development Strategy.
According to the 2006 Census, there are 73,605 Métis in Ontario.

Ontario is home to the historic Powley decision which recognized the constitutionally protected right to hunt of the Métis community in and around Sault Ste. Marie.

Métis citizens are represented at the local level through 30 MNO Chartered Community Councils.

The MNO is a Governing Member of the Métis National Council.

The MNO was created in 1993 and currently employs over 130 individuals throughout the province with an annual budget of over $20 million.
Collaborative Workshop on Consultation and Accommodation

In March 2010, the Métis Nation of Ontario and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs hosted a two-day collaborative workshop on consultation and accommodation.

The workshop brought together representatives from the MNO, government and industry to discuss consultation strategies.

Participants took part in breakout sessions on conducting effective consultations, incorporating Métis interests, and forming productive partnerships and relationships.

Overall, it was a positive and productive two-day workshop with many opportunities for learning and relationship building.

Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy

The MNO is a partner in the Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Strategy (AHWS). Through funding received from the strategy, the MNO delivers a variety of health and healing programs and services to Métis people in Ontario.

The Ontario government has confirmed its support for the renewal of AHWS and the continuation of these important programs under a strengthened governance and accountability model.

Under the new model, Ontario will move to direct contracts with the Aboriginal partners and service providers. These contracts will enable organizations to design and implement services that address local community priorities while being accountable for administration and results.

Aboriginal Health Access Centres are important providers of health and healing services to Aboriginal communities. To strengthen their role as partners in Ontario’s health-care system, the centres will move to a direct funding and accountability relationship with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

Formally established in 1994, AHWS is a unique service delivery model. It is a partnership between the Government of Ontario and 14 Aboriginal organizations. Its aim to reduce family violence and improve health in First Nations, Métis and Aboriginal communities through programs that are directly designed, delivered and managed by them.
This was followed by an agreement with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to work together to improve postsecondary education, training and employment outcomes for Métis people in Ontario.

Supporting Students

In 1998, the MNO established a bursary program to assist Métis students in accessing postsecondary education opportunities. Initially, contributions were matched by Ontario’s Student Opportunity Trust Fund. Each year awards are paid from the interest earned on the endowment with an average of more than $100,000 awarded annually to more than 110 Métis students. Today, bursaries are established at 33 colleges and universities across Ontario. The MNO has recently engaged additional schools and industry partners to expand the program.

In 2009, the MNO, with the support of the tripartite process, developed a five year Strategic Plan that sets out the vision, mission, and key priorities of the MNO for the next five years as well as the initiatives the MNO will pursue to realize them. The MNO is pleased to report that it has surpassed the milestones that were set to measure success and progress to date.

Economic Development

MNO and the Ontario government are working collaboratively on a number of initiatives related to economic development. The results of this joint work include the creation of an economic development strategy for the MNO. Some of the key priorities identified by the strategy are now being implemented, such as the establishment of the Métis Nation of Ontario Housing Investments Corporation, and the identification of Métis businesses for inclusion in an Aboriginal business directory for Ontario.

As part of the framework agreement, Ontario and the MNO are also working together to promote and preserve the distinct history and culture of Métis people. One of the ways this is being accomplished is through work on identifying culturally significant sites and the creation of a Métis monument. MAA has assisted MNO’s efforts to research and identify possible Métis memorial sites that recognize historic Métis contributions in Ontario.

Public servants in ministries across the Ontario government are also expanding their knowledge of Métis rights, communities and organizations. MAA has hosted Métis awareness sessions for government staff to raise awareness of Métis history in Ontario, Métis rights and consultation obligations. These sessions will continue in the future. In addition, the MNO has provided awareness sessions to ministries such as the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The MNO and the Ontario government have also continued to engage in discussions on the implementation of the recommendations in the Report of the Ipperwash Inquiry. As well, discussions are taking place on collaborative research on Métis communities in Ontario, Métis harvesting rights issues, the government’s duty to consult and accommodate and resource benefits sharing.

Relationship Building

The framework agreement is complemented by the strong working relationship that exists between MNO and the Government of Ontario. This is shown by the frequent interactions, meetings and visits that continue with a number of Ontario ministers.

President Lipinski and Minister Bentley are engaged in regular proactive meetings to discuss issues affecting Métis people in Ontario. This ongoing dialogue presents an opportunity to clarify or re-assess shared priorities, identify new approaches and liaise with other ministries.

Over the past year, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs has visited several Ontario Métis communities. In August, Minister Bentley and Michael Gravelle, Minister of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry, joined Métis citizens from across Ontario in Thunder Bay at the MNO’s Annual General Assembly.

We look forward to continuing our work together as we build on a solid foundation of mutual respect and collaboration.