

PRINCIPLE #3: **THE MÉTIS COMMUNITIES IN ONTARIO**

FAQs

Principle #3: The Métis Communities in Ontario

Within the portion of the historic North-West now known as Ontario, distinct Métis communities emerged surrounding the Upper Great Lakes and along strategic waterways and historic fur trade routes in northern Ontario. These historic Métis communities are:

- Northwestern Ontario
 - the Northwestern Ontario Métis Community;
- Upper Great Lakes
 - the Northern Lake Superior Métis Community;
 - the Huron-Superior Métis Community, that includes the Métis at Michipicoten, Sault Ste. Marie, and Killarney;
 - the Georgian Bay Métis Community;
- Northeastern Ontario
 - the Abitibi Inland Métis Community; and
 - the Mattawa Métis Community.

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT FOR THIS PRINCIPLE

During the late 1700s Métis communities emerged in the historic North-West, including in the Upper Great Lakes and along strategic waterways and historic fur trade routes in what is now northern Ontario. These distinct Métis communities all emerged in areas not yet subject to European control and have their own collective identities, stories, language, culture, and way of life. These Métis communities also all have their own histories of strategic alliances and collective action when their rights, interests, or lands were threatened.

The MNO was established by these Métis communities in Ontario coming together, along with Métis citizens from other parts of the historic North-West who lived in Ontario, and creating the MNO as a Métis-specific government. These Métis communities and citizens tasked the MNO with advancing the objectives set out in the MNO Statement of Prime Purpose, which includes to:

- “ensure that Métis can exercise their Aboriginal and Treaty rights and freedoms”; and
- “promote the history, values, culture, languages and traditions” of the Métis within Ontario.

To advance these objectives, the MNO has fought over the last 30+ years through the courts and in negotiations with the Crown for the recognition and respect of Métis rights and of the distinct history, values, culture, language and traditions of Métis communities in Ontario.



The MNO and Métis in Ontario have had many successes in this ongoing fight for the recognition and respect of Métis rights, including:

- Supporting Steve and Roddy Powley—two MNO citizens and Métis harvesters—in their fight against the Government of Ontario that took them all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to ultimately prove that the Sault Ste. Marie Métis community have Métis harvesting rights protected by section 35 of Canada's *Constitution Act, 1982*;
- After decades of collaborative negotiations—involving historians, ethno-historians, genealogists, lawyers, and other experts, [more than 25 historic reports](#) and thousands of historic documents—the MNO reached common understandings with the Government of Ontario in 2017 about the existence of seven historic Métis communities emerged in the Upper Great Lakes region or in northern Ontario, prior to effective Crown control in those regions;
- Building on the above court decisions, recognition, and agreements, the MNO successfully negotiated two Métis harvesting agreements with the Government of Ontario, in 2004 and 2018, through which the MNO now regulates the Métis harvest in Ontario and the Government of Ontario respects and accommodates Métis harvesting practices in the province; and
- Reaching two self-government agreements with the Government of Canada, in 2019 and 2023 respectively. The 2023 Self-Government Agreement includes the commitment that Canada reach a treaty with the MNO that will constitutionally protect the self-government rights of the Métis communities in Ontario for generations to come.

These victories for the Métis in Ontario are built on the facts of history and evidence affirming that there are distinct, rights-holding Métis communities in Ontario that meet the requirements set out by the Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. Powley*. These distinct Métis communities and their collectively-held section 35 rights are the foundation on which all of the MNO's successes on Métis rights and self-government are built.

Notably, the Métis communities in Ontario do not cover all of the province. Instead, as MNO citizens already knew, the evidence from the negotiations with the Government of Ontario showed that these historic Métis communities were located around the historic fur trade routes of the Upper Great Lakes and strategic waterways in northern Ontario. Each of the Métis communities in Ontario have their own traditional territories and relationships with the lands and waters of the areas that they used historically and today.

The MNO has also looked at other areas of Ontario, such as the Kawartha and Ottawa River regions, where some individuals asserted historic Métis communities may have existed. However, during the decade of negotiations with the Government of Ontario, once the evidence was assessed, it was clear to both MNO and Ontario that no historic Métis communities emerged in these regions or elsewhere in southern Ontario.

As the MNO, Métis communities in Ontario, and MNO citizens work to develop the MNO Constitution, it will be important to ensure that the above 30+ years of work on the recognition and respect of Métis rights is understood and respected. The MNO Constitution provides the opportunity for this history of struggle for recognition, respect, and the truth about the Métis communities in Ontario to be proudly shared with the public, First Nations, and others.

Importantly, the future MNO Constitution is a way to honour and consolidate this history – and the hard-earned recognition of rights-holding Métis communities in Ontario – for generations to come.



EXAMPLES FROM OTHER INDIGENOUS GOVERNMENTS

Other Indigenous Constitutions also includes sections that recognize where there are multiple, distinct rights-holding communities that come together to mandate a central or common government. For example:

- The [Tlicho Constitution](#)¹ includes the recognition that the “Tlicho Nation is composed of four communities – Behchokö (Rae-Edzo), Whatì (Lac La Martre), Gamètì (Rae Lakes) and Wekweètì (Snare Lake). Each community is a unique and valued part of the Tlicho Nation” (s. 1.2)
- The [Nisga’a Constitution](#)² outlines that the Nisga’a Government is composed of the central government (e.g., the Nisga’a Lisims Government) and governments for each of the four Nisga’a Villages (New Aiyansh, Gitwinksihlkw, Laxgalt’sap, and Gingolx) that are a part of the Nisga’a Nation (s. 25(1)).
- The [Stó:lō Xwexwilmexw Government](#)³ draft Constitution outlines that it represents six distinct Stolo communities: Aitchelitz, Leq’á:mel, Skowkale, Skawahlook, Tzeachten, and Yakwekwioose.
- The [Hopi Constitution](#)⁴ is an example of an Indigenous constitution from a Tribe located in the United States of America. It outlines that “the Hopi Tribe is a union of self-governing villages sharing common interests and working for the common welfare of all” and includes the following recognized villages: First Mesa; Mishongnovi; Sipaulavi; Shungopavi; Oraibi; Kyakotsmovi; Bakabi; Hotevilla; and Moenkopi.

WHAT WE’RE DOING NOW / EXISTING MNO EXAMPLES

Many of the MNO’s existing governance structure and processes already respect the distinct rights of the rights-holding Métis communities in Ontario.

For example, the MNO’s harvesting agreement and practices require citizens to ancestrally connect to one of the rights-holding Métis communities in Ontario in order to be eligible for a harvesting card. This agreement was made possible because of the decades of struggle through the courts, in *R. v. Powley*, and at negotiation tables with the Government of Ontario to reach common understandings on where there are rights-holding Métis communities in Ontario. MNO citizens have to travel back to the traditional territory of the Métis community in Ontario they ancestrally connect to in order to exercise their harvesting rights.

¹A copy of the Tlicho Constitution is available at:
<https://tlicho.ca/sites/default/files/documents/government/tlichconstitution.pdf>.

²A copy of the Nisga’a Constitution, is available at:
<https://www.nisgaanation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Constitution-of-the-Nisga-Nation-1998-10-01-1.pdf>.

³For more information about the Stolo Constitution, please see the video available at this link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=O61AWT7tYZc>.

⁴A copy of the Hopi Constitution is available at:
[Microsoft Word - Hopi Tribe.docx](#).



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can the MNO Constitution better recognize and respect the history of struggle and negotiations that led to the recognition of the rights-holding Métis communities in Ontario?
- How can the MNO share and promote the history, stories, and evidence of the rights-holding Métis communities in Ontario?
- How can the MNO, Métis communities in Ontario, and all MNO citizens work together to ensure that nothing jeopardizes the successes that the MNO and Métis in Ontario have achieved to date?
- How can the MNO Constitution further build on and cement these past successes?