



OPASKWAYAK CREE NATION:

Opaskwayak Culture & Healthy Living Initiatives

We have 5 big gardens, a summer kitchen, bee hives, a turtle mound herb garden, pumpkin patch, and will soon build our clay oven. People bring their kids and grandkids and it is good to see families getting together in the gardens. We set days aside (Tuesday night and Thursday night) for each garden so that people would go and work in the gardens. Part of that is because socializing is just as important as anything else. People go there and visit as they work.

In 2013 we began our journey by planting 55 fruit trees. Unfortunately, that year our potential orchard was flooded. But we didn't give up. We started again; "...if at first you don't succeed, etc..."

We started over again and we planted. In 2014 38 families signed up to take part in a community vegetable and berry garden. For the main garden, we chose a high ridge of land beside an old creek bed, in the center of the settlement so that everyone would have access by walking to the site. Preparing the Site: Wa weni kani wak. Because there was no topsoil, we had to scrape the top layer, remove all the rocks, haul in topsoil and level the area; an

expensive and labour intensive job. The OCN Recreation and Beautification Team helped a lot with this work. The soil came from across the river from a farmer and took most of our budget. The soil came from the land that is our traditional territory.

Planting and seeding: Kistiganiwak. In two separate gardens we planted 87 fruit trees: apples, crabapples, plums, chokecherries, raspberries and cherries. Then we focused on the vegetable garden. Each worker took a tree home to plant in their own yard. We had to re-learn all those necessary things that go into making a garden (and a family) grow. I had forgotten that garden work requires continuous attention, endless patience all those things that go into a healthy happy family. To build community and get kids involved with adults, we held a birdhouse making competition. It was a huge success and helped us wait as the seedlings took root and began to sprout.

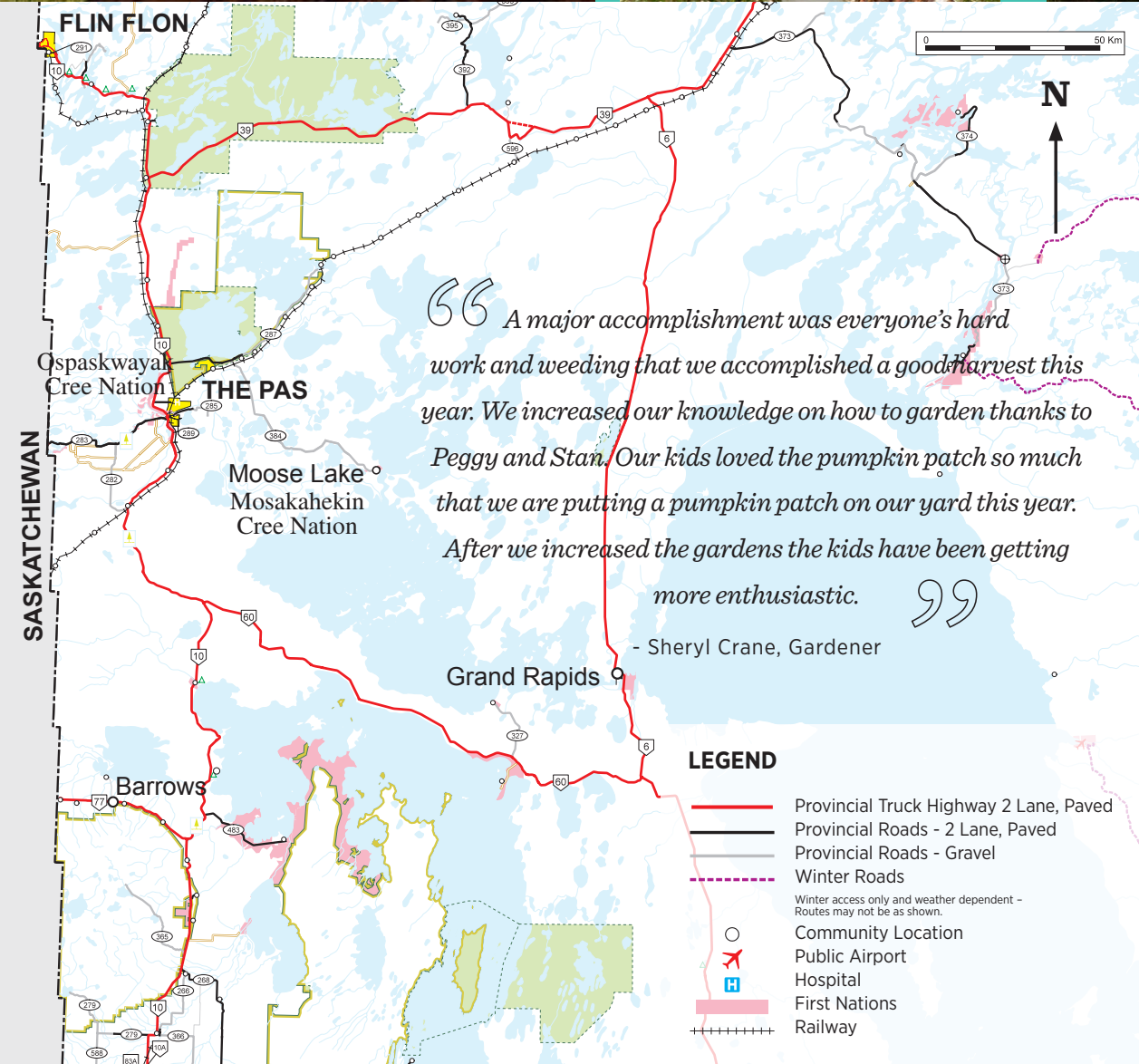
Growing: Nitawigin. The excitement of seeing new plants –and learning the difference between weeds and

vegetables and weeding and weeding, and weeding...

Harvesting: Moonay Kaniwak. The food from the garden is shared with everyone who helps out. Some of it goes to feasts and community events. The kitchen will help us learn to cook and use the all of the foods grown.

What we learned: It's good for the Elders to get moving again, instead of thinking they have to stop living at 50. We need to prepare and plant the garden together but after that we need an individual weeding schedule so everyone does it regularly. Everyone has to help out or else it is too much work for a few people. Having students can help, but it is a lot of work to manage them. Peggy and Stan need successors so that the major load is shared, we have been working to get more people involved in the leadership of the garden. People really like beets! We need less seeds and we need to take more care in planting; space the seeds further apart and thin the plants sooner.





“A major accomplishment was everyone’s hard work and weeding that we accomplished a good harvest this year. We increased our knowledge on how to garden thanks to Peggy and Stan. Our kids loved the pumpkin patch so much that we are putting a pumpkin patch on our yard this year. After we increased the gardens the kids have been getting more enthusiastic.”

- Sheryl Crane, Gardener

NFMCCC funding

- ☑ 2014
- ☑ 2015
- ☑ 2016
- ☑ 2017

> OBJECTIVE

We are Opaskwayak Cree Nation (Opaskwayak Cree). We were a healthy nation with our own gardens and a healthy hunting and fishing culture until processed foods, sedentary lifestyles, and dependency moved in. Now 65% of our population has diabetes and as many are obese and sickly. We want to change. We want to return to our roots of strength, physical prowess and harmony with the earth.

> PHOTO DETAILS

- [1] [2] [3] Families working at the Big Eddy Garden.
- [4] Youth building the Turtle Mound Herb Garden at the main garden.
- [5] [6] Honey extraction at Peggy and Stan’s.
- [7] Mabel and her granddaughter harvesting carrots.
- [8] Northern lights over the main garden.

“Learning how to grow the vegetables gave me the confidence to know that I can do this. Now that I have a hand in gardening I want to try more things and the fruit side and see just how far we can go with this. It feels like we are getting started and can do much more.”

- Noreen Singh, Gardener

> LOCATION

Opaskwayak Cree Nation is adjacent to the Saskatchewan River and The Pas, Manitoba. OCN has year round road access, and a population of about 3,200 on reserve.