



O-PIPON-NA-PIWIN CREE NATION / SOUTH INDIAN LAKE:

Ithinto Mechisowin Program

Ithinto Mechisowin means ‘food from the land’. This program responded to the community’s desire to return to traditional ways and improve community food security. The community champions believed that a food program inspired by OPCN’s land based food harvesting culture could be the way to fulfill and unite these two goals. Through Ithinto Mechisowin Program (IMP), the community food champions explored how this dream could be made a reality, under the wing of OPCN’s Tommy Thomas Memorial Health Complex and Community Care and Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative program. The Oscar Blackburn School (OBS), OPCN Band, Fishermen’s Association, Trappers Association have all been providing in kind support for the program since its inception. IMP is managed by a community committee that includes elders, teachers, health care professionals, fishers, and more.

IMP provides youth training on wild food and medicine harvesting, preparation, preservation and cooking techniques every season. Harvested and prepared food is shared with 350-400 people every month. Food is distributed every week based on the availability, need and

number of family members. A number of people with diabetes have self-reported that the regular intake of wild food has been keeping their blood sugar low, helping to lose weight and reduce hypertension. In addition, the weekly food distribution is helping people to boost their mental health. IMP office space has become a community social gathering place, especially for elders, youth and food champions. We believe this positive environment is contributing towards healing and bringing out courage to deal with everyday challenges that the community members have been facing since the hydro flooding and displacement in early 70s.

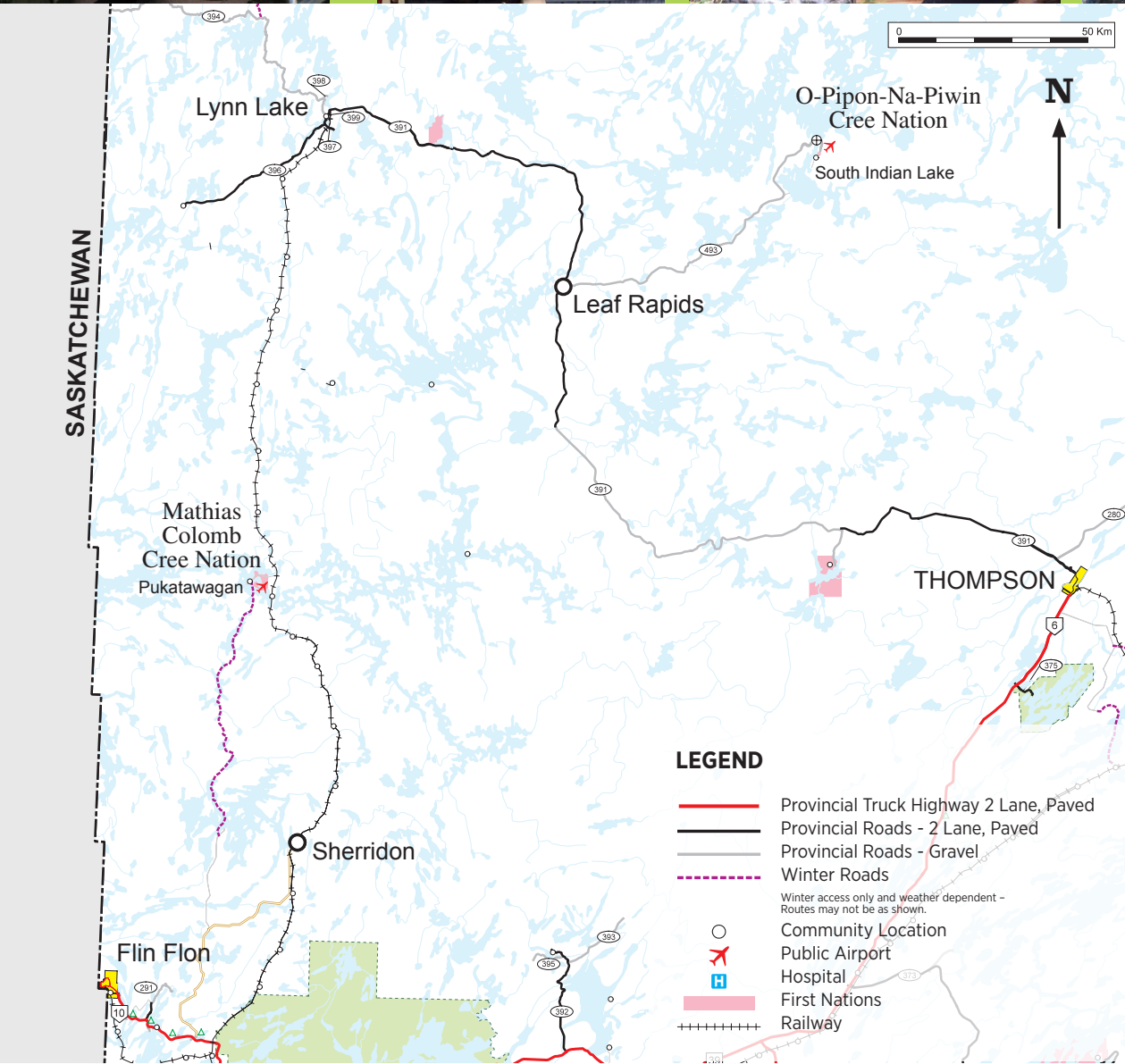
IMP runs workshops through the different seasons. The workshop helps OPCN people to reconnect with land and provide access to a healthy, culturally appropriate diet. We have seen growing interest and participation from youth, elders and adults to learn about different types of land based food and get seasonal food harvesting and medicine picking experience. We think the workshops are creating opportunities for more physical activity for the entire community which is required for a healthy lifestyle.

Workshops we do include: winter fishing, rabbit snaring, medicine picking, indoor gardening, goose hunting, berry picking, moose hunting, wild meat preparation and land safety skills.

Students from our community have been able to make participatory videos about their experiences and they have even travelled Canada and abroad to share what we are doing and how we are reclaiming our culture and health.

There are challenges to our program. These challenges include: staff turnover, limited funding and support, the challenges that local people face with poverty and health make it hard for them to participate regularly, weather can mess up our plans for harvesting and workshops, but we still continue. We consider IMP a testimony of indigenous strength and a validation for positive outcome of indigenous food sovereignty. IMP is a truly community driven initiative. John Bonner, former IMP coordinator said, “This program encourages people to get back on the land. It helps us recover from the shock of the flooding and all of the changes in the community that have happened.”





**NFMCCC
funding**

- ☑ 2013
- ☑ 2014
- ☑ 2015
- ☑ 2016
- ☑ 2017

> OBJECTIVES

To respond to the community's desire to return to traditional ways and improve community food security

> LOCATION

O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation (OPCN) (also known as South Indian Lake) is located on the southeast shores of Southern Indian Lake, about 130 km north of Thompson. It is home to approximately 1500 people.

> PHOTO DETAILS

[1] Laughing & Cutting moose for IMP. [2] Youth smoking fish. [3] Rose Linklater showing off her country foods meal. [4] Elder Annie Spence [5] Rene Linklater, IMP chair showing food from the land for community members. [6] Nora Spence teaching goose plucking. [7] Youth Leader Howard Dumas teaching gardening skills. [8] The docks in South Indian Lake.

“ It’s [IMP] important because it’s good for the indigenous diet because it allows us to connect to our cultural foods, good physical health, and for social interaction. People come around (IMP office) and talk about the hunting and the skills. Talk about where to hunt and best spots to go and get fish and moose. ”

- John Bonner, former IMP Program Coordinator