

Denise Restoule / Dokis First Nation, Canada

Chief who led her First Nations Community to a 100% renewable reality that stands to benefit their culture, identity and economy



## INTRODUCTION

Chief Denise Restoule is the leader of the Dokis First Nation community that has existed in harmony with nature on the banks of the French River in Ontario, Canada for time immemorial. For the benefit of her community and the bountiful ecosphere in northern Canada Restoule has catalyzed the Dokis people around a legacy-oriented project - to construct a small hydro-plant and go 100% renewable.

“Our culture is deep and enduring” says Restoule, “for our Ojibway culture; art, history, faith, family, ceremonies and traditions are essential parts of community life. Our people also have a deep and abiding connection to nature. [We believe that a run-off-river, small hydro project, planned and built in a sustainable manner, can be culturally and ecologically beneficial whilst contributing to a low carbon future for Canada.](#)”

Restoule’s vision to restore the heritage of the Dokis people, revitalise the local economy and reinvigorate the Dokis nation gained the support of the community who made a collective decision to support the Okikendawt Hydro Project. Today the plant is operational, around 4% of the renewable energy generated flows into the Dokis community - making the community’s energy 100% renewable - while the remaining 96% flows into the power grid, offsetting coal-based generation.

# PROJECT

Chief Restoule helped forge an important relationship between the Dokis First Nation and private firm Hydromega in order to deliver the Okikendawt Hydro Project. The community and the business now own 40% and 60% of the project respectively and have a close, collaborative working relationship. Restoule says, "operations began this year and I can say that Hydromega is an outstanding project development company with a deep understanding and appreciation for Aboriginal communities."

The Okikendawt Hydro Project would not have been possible without Ontario's Green Energy and Economy Act, which acknowledges the important role that First Nations communities are playing as they shift away from harmful fossil fuels to renewable energy sources on traditional territory.

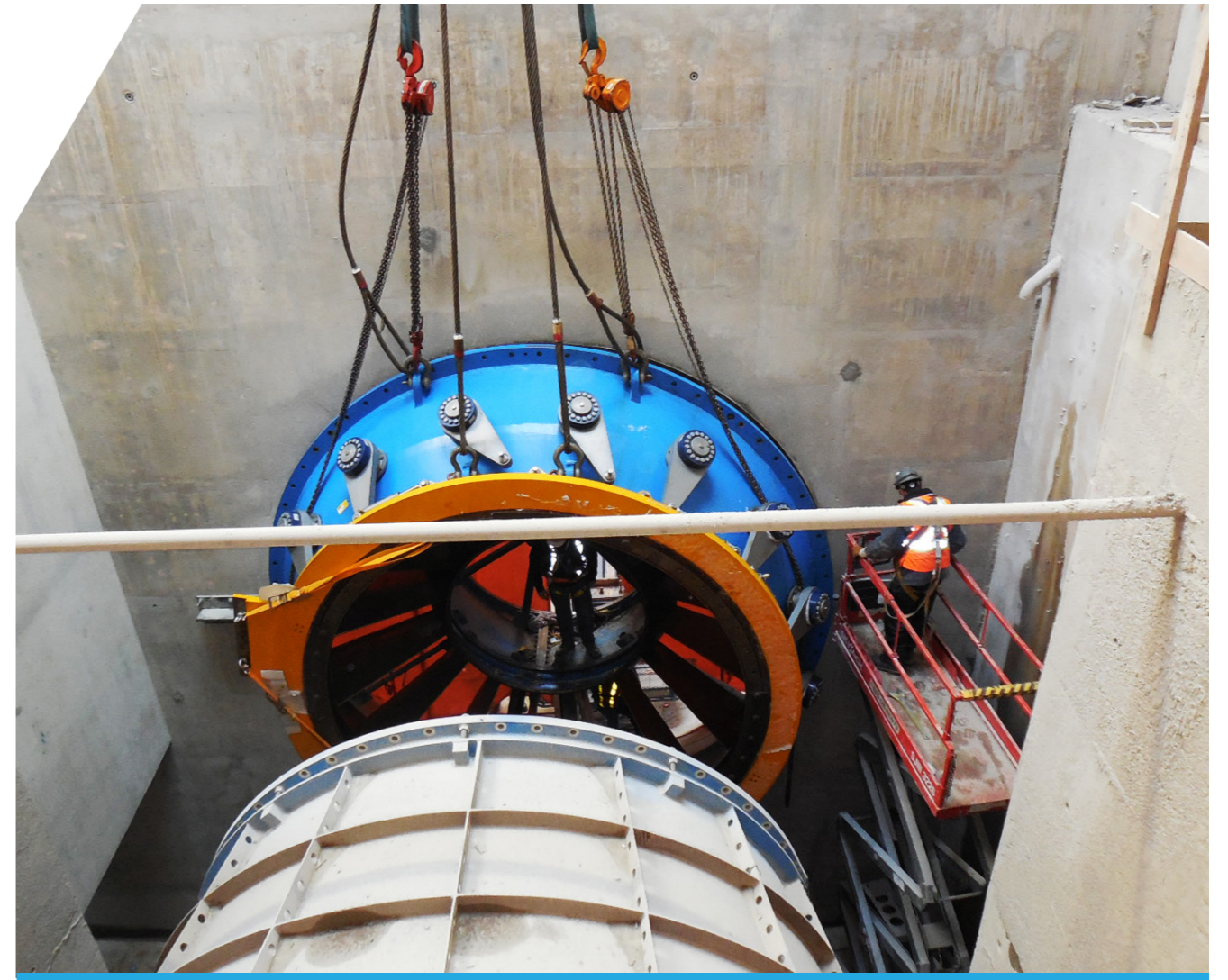


By enshrining the role of indigenous communities in developing sustainable, renewable energy sources in Ontario, the provincial government has accorded indigenous communities the most important thing they seek - Respect.

"We are enormously grateful for the Ontario government going further and establishing a range of regulatory and program measures to promote economic and social improvements for First Nation through green energy, while protecting the environment," says Restoule.

Restoule worked with the Dokis people to ensure that community level policies were in place to ensure the shift to 100% renewable energy provided maximum benefits for the people and the local environment. The community and Council approved strict guidance for the Okikendawt Hydro Project to ensure that it respects the environment, restores the heritage of the Dokis people, revitalises the local economy and reinvigorates the Dokis Nation.

The Chief also helped to develop a core set of sustainability principles that fundamentally shaped the way the project was designed, constructed and is operated today. These principles include the need to prevent any significant impact on the water flow of the French River, the need to focus economic benefits around the legacy of the Dokis Nation, and ensuring a programme of community engagement and education is delivered.



# RESULTS

The Okikendawt Hydro 100% renewable project is a restorative initiative that is already advancing social and economic goals for the indigenous Dokis people, while at the same time generating clean power for the rest of Ontario.

Restoule explains how the project is delivering prominent economic and social benefits for the Dokis Nation and surrounding communities. "This is a \$64 million capital pro-

ject that significantly boosted local economic development. Over 30 members of the Dokis Nation were employed during the project's development, and on-going operating staff will be indigenous people. On top of this our community infrastructure has been greatly improved."

The Dokis Nation has established the Okikendawt Hydro Trust to ensure the earnings from the hydro-plant are effectively used - so that funds are invested wisely, to promote long term community prosperity for purposes such as: economic development, health care, education and community infrastructure.

The finances obtained by switching to 100% renewable energy are supporting work to improve local fisheries and protect the breeding sites of the rare Blandings turtle. Similarly, efforts to preserve ancient archaeological pictographs have been enabled, as have plans to reconstitute the traditional chaudiere (a form of oven) and preserve important stone pots retrieved from the river. Over the next 40 years, the it estimated the project

will generate in excess of \$45 million for the Dokis Nation, to continue these and other efforts.

Restoule says, "our community plans to build interpretive trails, a "portage" bridge, shaped like a canoe, and a ceremonial cultural centre adjacent to the Okikendawt site that truly restores the heritage habitat of the French River. We will be actively linking the positive features of renewable hydropower with the revitalization of our heritage landscape to promote tourism, fishery and the sustainable use of lands and waters."



## CONCLUSION

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Restoule and the Dokis Nation have expressed their thanks to all the workers and the leaders of the organisations and institutions that have supported them in planning, financing and constructing the hydro-plant that provides them with 100% renewable energy. The Dokis Nation has made a solemn pledge to use these resources wisely to build a sustainable legacy for their community on a foundation of clean, renewable energy. Restoule hopes that their example can provide a beacon of hope for other communities across Canada, "for people seeking to consolidate their rights, protect their heritage, live in harmony with their surroundings and leave a legacy for the future – we have shown that renewable energy can deliver."



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## **Other resources**

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