



COMMUNITY CONTACT

The Northern Affairs Newsletter

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES • BUILDING CONNECTIONS • SHARING SUCCESSES

COMMUNITY FEATURE

Above and Beyond: Sherridon's Austin Matheson Named Rookie Operator of the Year

A historic achievement for a Northern Affairs Community and a shining example of dedication, professionalism and community pride.



Austin is the first Water Operator from a Northern Affairs Community to receive this award and the first operator north of the 53rd parallel to ever earn this honour.

STORY ON PAGES 2-3



“ In a short period of time, Austin Matheson has exceeded expectations for a rookie operator!”

– Dillon Shingler,
Technical and
Public Works
Consultant

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



Rookie of the Year Award

Pages 2-3



Personal Protective Equipment Upgrades

Page 4



Community Election Process

Pages 5-6



Election Manitoba: Provincial Elections

Page 7



Census 2026

Page 8



Northern Affairs Events

Pages 9-10 & More

COMMUNITY FEATURE

Above and Beyond

Sherridon's Austin Matheson Named Rookie Operator of the Year

"In a short period of time, Austin has exceeded expectations for a rookie operator."

— Dillon Shingler, Technical and Public Works Consultant

Each year, the Manitoba Water & Wastewater Association (MWWA) recognizes excellence in the water and wastewater industry during its Annual Conference and Trade Show. Among its highest honours is the Jim Warrener Rookie Operator of the Year Award, presented to new operators who demonstrate exceptional dedication to public health and essential services.

This year, that honour went to Sherridon's own Austin Matheson, Primary Water and Wastewater Treatment Plant Operator for the community.

Austin is the first operator from a Northern Affairs Community and the first operator north of the 53rd parallel to receive the award, marking a significant and historic milestone for Northern Affairs Communities.

Austin's recognition reflects not only his personal dedication, but also the strong partnerships among Sherridon residents, Northern Affairs staff and industry professionals working together to provide safe and reliable water and wastewater services across northern Manitoba.



Austin Matheson accepts the Jim Warrener Rookie Operator of the Year Award at the MWWA 2026 Conference and Trade Show.

A FIRST FOR THE NORTH

Austin is the first Water Operator from a Northern Affairs Community to receive this award, and the first operator north of the 53rd parallel to ever earn the honour.

MESSAGE OF CONGRATULATIONS

On behalf of the Department of Municipal and Northern Relations and the Northern Affairs Branch, congratulations to Austin Matheson on this well-deserved recognition. His achievement highlights the critical role water and wastewater operators play in protecting public health in communities. Northern Affairs continues to support operators through training, mentoring, and technical assistance to help ensure systems are safe and reliable.

Rising to the Challenge

Although Matheson has only been working in the field for about two years, he serves as the primary operator responsible for Sherridon's water treatment plant, wastewater treatment plant, water distribution system and wastewater collection system. The role requires technical expertise, strong problem-solving skills and a deep commitment to community wellbeing.

He was nominated by Northern Affairs Branch Public Works staff member Dillon Shingler, who recognized Austin's professionalism, initiative and steady leadership under demanding circumstances.

A Steady Hand During a Crisis

Matheson's dedication was especially evident during the 2025 wildfire season, when forest fires forced the evacuation of Sherridon and left water and wastewater facilities shut down for nearly a month.

When residents returned, Matheson led the complex process of bringing both systems safely back online. Restarting facilities after a prolonged shutdown requires detailed monitoring and strict adherence to regulatory standards to ensure water safety.

Through careful planning and methodical work, he successfully restored operations while ensuring all regulatory and safety requirements were met.

Protecting Public Health

Clean, safe drinking water is one of the most essential services in any community. In Sherridon, where the water system previously faced a long-standing boil-water advisory, Austin has taken extra care to meet chlorine residual, turbidity and operational monitoring requirements.

Day in and day out, he applies his training and follows standard operating procedures to keep water safe for residents while navigating the realities of operating small systems in northern communities.

Safety and Professional Growth

Safety is a priority in Matheson's work. He has identified and addressed several potential hazards within treatment facilities, including electrical concerns, chemical handling risks and other operational safety issues. By documenting hazards and coordinating with Northern Affairs Branch staff and Manitoba drinking water officials, he ensures issues are addressed promptly and safely.

Matheson is equally committed to continuous learning. He has already completed Small Systems Certification and Level I Water Treatment Certification and recently passed his Level II Water Treatment Exam.

His initiative has also helped resolve long-standing software, reporting and mechanical issues within the treatment systems, improving reliability and strengthening regulatory compliance.

COMMUNITY PRIDE

The Sherridon Community Council is proud to celebrate Austin's achievement and the important role he plays in protecting the community's health and wellbeing. Clean, safe water is one of the most important services in any community, and Austin's hard work and dedication make a real difference for Sherridon every day.

Congratulations, Austin, your community is proud of you!" - Sherridon Community Council

New PPE Strengthens Safety for 40 Northern Communities



Eric Trumbula, Waterhen Community Public Works Staff wearing new high-visibility PPE.

“Our goal is to make sure community workers go home safe at the end of every shift. By working with communities and listening to the needs of public works staff, including water, wastewater and landfill operators, we were able to provide PPE that improves visibility, comfort, and protection in the conditions they face everyday.”

— Ron Bruneau & Jaime Bertrand, WSH Consultants

Northern Affairs’ Workplace Safety and Health Services (WSH) has completed a major safety upgrade, providing 40 Northern Affairs Communities with new, high-visibility personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline public works, water and wastewater treatment employees, and disposal site operators across participating communities.

The project began in May 2023, when WSH identified the need for modernized, durable PPE suited to varied working conditions. Across road maintenance, solid waste operations, water treatment, emergency response and seasonal public works projects, many tasks are carried out in challenging weather and low-visibility conditions. Ensuring workers are visible, protected, and properly equipped is essential.

A comprehensive range of PPE was purchased: high-visibility vests, jackets and coveralls; needle-prick resistant gloves; work gloves; safety glasses; and other required protective equipment.

Environmental Services also partnered with WSH to develop embroidered identification on PPE for water, wastewater and landfill operators, recognizing the operators’ hard work and dedication to the communities they serve. Custom t-shirts, hats and toques were also provided to support the Lead Testing Program, helping to ensure workers entering residents’ homes can be easily identified as community staff.

The PPE was distributed through a coordinated rollout, ensuring consistent safety standards and equipment availability across all locations. Early feedback has been positive, with employees reporting improved visibility, comfort and confidence while carrying out their duties.

WSH will continue working collaboratively with Environmental Services and communities to support training, equipment enhancements and operational readiness across Northern Affairs Communities. The department also recognizes operators’ continued efforts to achieve certification. This project reflects the department’s ongoing commitment to safe workplaces, safe drinking water, operator training and community well-being.

THE NEXT REGULAR ELECTION IN NORTHERN AFFAIRS COMMUNITIES IS WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2026

Get Involved — Run, Vote, Serve

Running for a council position in a local election is an excellent way to get involved with your community and make a difference. If you are interested in learning what the position entails, please refer to the *Running for Council* guide published by Manitoba Municipal and Northern Relations (MNR). The updated version is being released this month.

TO QUALIFY AS A CANDIDATE, YOU MUST BE:

- A Canadian citizen
- At least 18 years of age on the day of the election
- A voter of the community
- Not subject to any disqualification under any act

TO QUALIFY AS A VOTER, YOU MUST BE:

- A Canadian citizen 18 years of age or older
- A resident of the community for at least six months before election day

[The Northern Affairs Act](#) (the act) under Part 4: Elections RE Community Councils contains a complete list of the qualifications and disqualifications of a candidate, along with the rules and process for electing members. Elections are run by your community election officials in accordance with the [Community Councils Election regulation](#). During the election period, a copy of the regulation and relevant sections of the act will be posted in your council office. Regulation amendments to streamline and ensure the integrity of the election process are underway and expected to take effect this month.



Voters List

Each regular election starts with the preparation of the voters list. The established community boundary is used for election purposes and the list must contain all persons qualified to vote in a community election. Persons wishing to make revisions about themselves may do so by contacting their senior election official (SEO).

Nominations

Anyone pursuing a nomination must file papers with the SEO on the date and time stated on the notice of nominations. You become a candidate once your nomination papers have been accepted by the SEO.

Terms of Office

Terms are for four years and start 14 days after the day of the election — November 11, 2026, for this election year — and expire 14 days after the next regular election that completes the term — November 6, 2030 for members elected this year.

Election Day

The voting place will be open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day. Any eligible voter whose name does not appear on the voters list must take an oath in Form 16 – Oath of Voter and establish proof of identity prior to receiving a ballot by providing a government-issued document containing their name, civic address and photo or at least two other documents that provide evidence of identity sufficient to the election official.

A person’s oath is conclusive of any evidence to the contrary. Knowingly making a false statement for the purpose of being added to or kept on a voters list is an election offence which carries strong penalties.

A person who is unable to establish their identity will not be provided a ballot and will be asked to leave the voting place. Non-residents who own property in the community do not meet the eligibility requirements as a voter.

Advance and Sealed Envelope Voting

If you know you will be unable to vote on Election Day, you may vote at an advance voting or arrange with the SEO to vote by sealed envelope ballot, which requires the voter to apply in writing.

After the Voting

On the day after the election, the SEO will announce the election results at the council office and post the results.

With Rights Come Responsibilities

While it’s understandable that not everyone may want to run for office, in a democratic system, everyone should vote. It’s a right, but it’s also a responsibility. Your vote is your say in governing your community and it’s important to get involved and make a difference.

Election Officials

Election officials are responsible for ensuring that community elections are conducted properly and efficiently. While often community residents themselves, officials must act in a non-partisan manner to ensure the election follows the democratic process.

The senior election official (SEO) has overall responsibility for ensuring the community election process takes place according to the governing legislation. The SEO supervises all community election officials, ensures a properly conducted election and is responsible to both the council and the principal electoral officer (PEO).

Duties of the PEO

The PEO, appointed by the MNR minister, has overall responsibility for coordinating election matters. The PEO is currently working on a dedicated Community Elections website page to go live this month, which will include election resources, forms, FAQs and links to applicable legislation. The PEO will deliver a three-hour virtual training session to community election officials in August.



Voting places are open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day.

PEO contact information: Donna Chéné
Manitoba Municipal and Northern Relations
Northern Affairs Branch
59 Elizabeth Drive (Box 20)
Thompson, MB R8N 1X4
Cell: 204-679-0678 / Fax: 204-677-6525
Email: donna.chene@gov.mb.ca

NOW HIRING: RETURNING OFFICERS

Help Deliver the 2027 Provincial Election

Elections Manitoba is recruiting returning officers and assistant returning officers to help deliver the 2027 provincial general election. Elections Manitoba is the independent office responsible for the conduct of provincial general elections and byelections. The 2027 election must be held by October 5, 2027.

Returning officer and assistant returning officer are key leadership roles, making direct contributions to the delivery of the election in their electoral division.

Key responsibilities include:

- Hiring, training and managing staff
- Managing financial resources, materials and supplies
- Communicating with voters, political participants and Elections Manitoba staff
- Managing the delivery of all voting opportunities — from locating suitable polling places and staffing, to coordinating and overseeing the delivery of election results



*Voting equipment demonstration.
Photo: Elections Manitoba*

One returning officer is hired for each of Manitoba's 57 electoral divisions, each supported by one (sometimes two) assistant returning officers. This is a term position with some part-time work before the election, starting September 2026, with full-time work expected in August, September and October 2027. These dates will change if the election is called sooner. During the election period, returning officers and assistant returning officers work longer hours, seven days a week.

Returning officers must be eligible voters, meaning they are 18 years old, Canadian citizens, and residents of Manitoba. They are also subject to a satisfactory criminal record check and must remain completely non-partisan during the term of their employment. Returning officers are one of many positions needed to deliver an election. Elections Manitoba will begin hiring staff for local election offices and polling places as the election approaches.

Visit electionsmanitoba.ca to see current openings, learn more and apply.

ELECTORAL SERVICES FOR COMMUNITIES

Did you know Elections Manitoba can help other levels of government with their elections? They regularly work with Northern Affairs Communities, municipalities and school boards.

Elections Manitoba can provide voters' lists to election officials for your communities. Voters' lists are based on the Manitoba Voter Registry, the permanent list of all Manitobans registered to vote in provincial elections.

For more information about this free service, please contact Elections Manitoba at:

Phone: 204-945-3225 · Toll-free: 1-866-628-6837 · Email: elections@elections.mb.ca

STATISTICS CANADA / COLLECTION BEGINS MAY 4, 2026

Be Counted — Your Community Counts

Canada's 2026 Census is underway, with collection beginning May 4, 2026. Households across the country have started receiving census invitation letters with instructions on how to complete their questionnaire.

The census collects demographic, social and economic information to build an accurate picture of Canada's population and communities. This information is used by all levels of government, Indigenous communities and organizations to support planning and decision-making.

Why It Matters for Your Community

Accurate census data play an important role in how governments and organizations plan programs, allocate resources and deliver services. Population counts are used to inform funding decisions, infrastructure planning and service delivery. Ensuring everyone in your household is included helps provide a more complete picture of your community's needs now and in the future.



We thank you in advance for your participation in the 2026 Census.

Mesē cho nyá:wəh Mēduh Meegwetch suchanailya kinanāskomitin
 Wela'lin Máhsi' cho 'anátzaxw nūg'uúla Mussi Tsin'ji choh
 Marsi tchógh ġiáxsixa ᓄᓄᓄᓄᓄᓄᓄᓄ Shāw nithān Gūnēchīsh
 Mikwēc Thank you Máhsi Qujannamiik Tchinishkumitin
 Sechanalyagh Máhsin cho Merci Sógá sēnlá' masicho isni'yēs
 Miigwetch Marsee Háw'aa Slyisgaas Mási cho Hau Pidamayaye
 Maarsii gilakas'la Gunalchish HÍSWŪKE ʔimot t'oyaxsii' 'niin
 Hoy chexw Tīniki Hiy Hiy / Ay-hay Wela'liq Misiyh Miikwehch
 Tshinashkumitin Miigwech Nakurmiik T'oyaxsut 'nūsm
 Mikwēc mikwēc Nitsiniyi'taki Hu sukifqukni. Niá:wen kwukwstéyp
 yaw^ko Woliwon imlēm Wuujo aasanaláa? Huy chexw a
 Kukwstétselp ish nish ʔuusyak šiʔii?ic Kukwstumckálap
 Ho Pidamayado Dégharé marsi nénesdhen

HOW TO RESPOND

Online is quick, secure and confidential.

Households without reliable internet can respond by phone or request a paper questionnaire.

All information is collected under the authority of The Statistics Act and is kept strictly confidential.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Community partners are encouraged to share census information and encourage participation using #2026Census online. Census questions are available in multiple languages, and additional resources can be found at census.gc.ca

If you require additional assistance, please contact the Census Help Line

Toll-free number: **1-833-852-2026**

Teletypewriter (TTY): **1-833-830-3109**

NORTHERN AFFAIRS EVENTS

FIRST-EVER JOINT REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

Northern Affairs & NACC Hosted Regional Sessions



Sheryl Matheson (President, NACC) and Andrea Kwasnicki (Executive Director, NACC)



Paul Doolan (Executive Director, Northern Affairs Branch)



Community delegates from the Western Region in Dauphin

Between January and February 2026, the Department of Municipal and Northern Relations (MNR) — Northern Affairs Branch (NAB) and the Northern Association of Community Councils (NACC) hosted their first-ever joint regional engagement sessions across Eastern, Western and Northern Manitoba.

Traditionally, NACC has held regional meetings independently. However, following the installation of a new NACC President and a renewed commitment to collaboration with Northern Affairs, both organizations identified an opportunity to strengthen their partnership. The sessions were co-led by Andrea Kwasnicki (Executive Director, NACC Manitoba), Sheryl Matheson (President, NACC) and Paul Doolan (Executive Director, Northern Affairs Branch), with support from the NACC Board and NAB Staff, reflecting a strong, coordinated leadership approach to regional engagement.

Held in Winnipeg, Dauphin and Thompson, the sessions brought together approximately 65 Community Council representatives, along with NACC leadership and departmental staff, both in person and virtually.

Community representatives from across the province participated in meaningful discussions, sharing perspectives and contributing to conversations on key priorities for Northern Affairs communities. Across all three sessions, several common priorities emerged:

REGIONAL SESSIONS

Eastern Region — Winnipeg · January 22, 2026

Western Region — Dauphin · February 4, 2026

Northern Region — Thompson · February 26, 2026

JOINT REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT · KEY TOPICS

FIRE PROTECTION & WILDFIRE RESPONSE

Strengthening volunteer fire services, enhancing training and equipment support, and improving coordination during emergency and wildfire response.

COMMUNITY SAFETY OFFICERS' (CSO) PROGRAM

Community safety initiatives and opportunities to strengthen partnerships and local approaches.

FUNDING MODERNIZATION

Enhancing funding approaches and program delivery to better support service provision in northern and remote communities.

WORKFORCE & SUSTAINABILITY

Workforce development, retention and long-term sustainability in Northern Affairs communities.

GOVERNANCE & COUNCIL COMPOSITION

Strengthening local governance — council composition, recruitment and overall capacity.



Looking Ahead

The joint engagement sessions demonstrated a strong and effective model for regional collaboration enabling more coordinated discussions, efficient use of resources and strengthened relationships between Community Councils, NACC and the Department. Building on this success, Northern Affairs and NACC intend to continue this joint approach. Further updates will be shared at future community events.

The Department extends its sincere thanks to all Community Council members, NACC representatives and staff who participated. We look forward to hosting you at the next session!

MEET THE TEAM

New Staff & Updates



JULIE PROULX

Municipal Development Consultant

Welcoming Julie as a new Municipal Development Consultant who has joined us from the Department of Housing, Addictions, and Homelessness, where she started her career in government 14 years ago. Julie held former roles such as Clerk, Property Manager, Administrative Officer and most recently District Manager (7 years). Prior to joining the Province, Julie graduated from Business Administration at University College of the North (UCN) and previously worked with UCN and the Town of The Pas.

Julie lives in The Pas with her husband and children. In her spare time, you will find her cheering in the stands, watching her son play hockey and her daughter swimming laps.



BUSOLA BOLATITO

Administrative Assistant

We are pleased to welcome Busola as the Administrative Assistant supporting the Executive Director's Office. Busola brings extensive experience in Administration and Human Resource Management from both the public and private sectors, most recently with Seneca Works at Seneca Polytechnic in Toronto, Ontario. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Sociology and graduate certificates in Human Resources Management and Supply Chain Management.

In her free time, Busola enjoys singing, listening to songs, spending time with family and friends, and exploring new places.



BETH LADYKA

Municipal Development Consultant/Lands Development Consultant

Congratulations to Beth on her role as a Municipal Development Consultant, while continuing her work as a Lands Development Consultant until the role is filled. Over the past year, she has contributed to key initiatives, including the Fire Program and Community Safety Officer Program Reviews and previously supported the Branch as a co-op student.

Before joining Northern Affairs, Beth worked as a civilian instructor with Cadets Canada at an Air Cadet Squadron in Stonewall, MB. She holds a Master of Public Administration (2025). Outside of work, Beth is an active member of her local Legion, enjoys reading, and loves spending time with her dog, Snoopy.

Lead Testing in Your Community



Water quality testing, including lead testing, will begin at residential kitchen taps in select communities.

While lead levels in the water supply are below national guidelines, plumbing materials in some older homes may contain lead. We are not expecting lead levels in tap water from your community to be high, but we will not know for sure until we test. Testing helps confirm water quality at the tap and ensures accurate results for each household.

Lead exposure is a greater risk for young children, infants and pregnant individuals due to developing health systems. Participation is encouraged to support accurate results for the community.

To learn more, please contact Kim Philip at Kim.Philip@gov.mb.ca

Spring Safety Preparedness

As spring conditions change across Manitoba, communities are preparing for seasonal risks such as flooding and wildfires. In mid-April, Northern Affairs staff joined colleagues across the province in supporting sandbagging efforts in Peguis First Nation, demonstrating how public service staff can work together to support urgent response efforts and help protect homes and infrastructure during spring melting and ice break-up.

Manitoba is also preparing for the 2026 wildfire season through investments in equipment, staffing and enhanced fire management capacity alongside ongoing prevention efforts during the high-risk spring season.



Hesham Aly, Kalyca Hebert, Justin Tsang



Staff and community members sandbagging

RESIDENTS CAN HELP REDUCE RISKS BY:

- Following local burn restrictions and avoiding open fires in dry or windy conditions
- Never leaving fires unattended and fully extinguishing them before leaving
- Clearing dry brush, leaves and debris from around homes and properties
- Using equipment responsibly and checking for sparks or debris when operating machinery

Taking precautions early in the season helps reduce emergencies and supports safer communities across Manitoba.

COMMUNITY REMINDERS

Upcoming Dates

- **June 2 @ 1:30 PM** — Community Townhall (Teams)
- **June 21** — National Indigenous Peoples Day
- **July 1** — Canada Day
- **July 7 @ 1:30 PM** — Community Townhall (Teams)

[View the Municipal Calendar](#)



Spring doesn't arrive all at once, it comes slowly, in small signs, reminding us that meaningful change takes time.

ALERO TENUMAH

Editor · Community Contact

📍 400 – 352 Donald Street, Winnipeg, MB R3B 2H8

☎ 204-914-9440

✉ Alero.Tenumah@gov.mb.ca

🌐 <https://www.gov.mb.ca/mr/northern/newsletters.html>

Thank you for reading Community Contact. We welcome story ideas, photos and community updates.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that Manitoba is located on the Treaty Territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishininewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline and Nehethowuk Nations, the ancestral lands of the Inuit, and the homeland of the Red River Métis.