WATER FIRST

# QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

## FALL 2026

Fall can feel like a new start, and this season is definitely full of many “new” things to celebrate at Water First. From the launch of a new internship to the graduation of new Indigenous water operators, autumn is ushering in a season of possibility and opportunity. Thank you for being a part of our changing seasons and for supporting the possibilities and opportunities in the work we do.

## Internship launches in Manitoba

Water First’s eleventh internship launched this fall, as participants from eight communities in Manitoba started their journey to become water operators.

The First Peoples Development Inc. Internship (FPDI) began October 5, 2026 and will support Interns through 15 months of hands-on training.

During the program, each intern will accumulate 2,000 hours of on-the-job experience. With training tailored to meet the requirements for water operators in Manitoba, interns will pursue certification as small drinking water and small wastewater operators as well as Class 1 water treatment.

> “As a graduate of this program, I know the benefits that it brings to a community. The internship gave me the skills and confidence I needed to handle anything that comes my way on the job. **My advice for this group is to take full advantage of the opportunity, lean on each other and the trainers for support – and have fun.**
>
> **Walter Spence,**
> 2025 Graduate and Assistant Director of Public Works, Peguis First Nation

## Celebrating new Indigenous water operators

Congratulations to the graduates of the Southern Ontario Drinking Water Internship!

The internship, a collaboration between Water First Education & Training Inc. and eight participating First Nations from southern Ontario, began in July, 2025 and culminated in a graduation ceremony this month in Rama First Nation, near Orillia Ontario.

After graduation, participants are invited to become part of the Water First Alumni Network, giving them access to continuing career development and education opportunities, as well as an ever-expanding professional network. Congratulations to the graduates!

## Another school year begins

This summer, the School Water team ran a robust program, returning to Rama First Nation for the second time, and Beausoleil First Nation for a record sixth time!

High school students earned 21 credits through the GEOSteam course, bringing the total number of summer credits earned over the years to more than 145.

Educators are now back on the road, kicking off the school year with workshops in Six Nations on the Grand River, and a full schedule of classroom visits on the roster.

*School Water Program by the numbers, September 2025 - August 2026*

**2,211** Students participated

**32** Schools engagements completed

**527** Workshops delivered

**21** Summer high school credits earned

## A different kind of training

The Drinking Water team embarked on something a little different this summer, as Walpole Island First Nation reached out to Water First for assistance in getting their staff licensed for their wastewater facility.

Water First happily answered the call, guiding six interns, one Water First Alumni, and three Walpole Island Water Operators through the preparation and writing of the Wastewater Operator-in-Training exam.

There are few regular training opportunities for Wastewater Operators in Canada. Water First was grateful we could continue to challenge our own learning and expertise while fulfilling a need in a partner community, culminating in a true collaborative success!

## Drinking water advisory statistics

Our latest research shows that as of August, 2026, **21% of First Nations across Canada are currently under a drinking water advisory.**

Infrastructure alone cannot solve the water crisis in Indigenous communities. Water First partners with Indigenous communities that have identified training and education as one part of the solution to the clean water crisis. By focusing on technical training and education for youth and adults, Water First aims to support capacity building and sustained access to safe, clean water in Indigenous communities across Canada.

Calculating the number of drinking water advisories is a complex process. Water First relies on information from www.watertoday.ca, www.sac-isc.gc.ca, and www.fnha.ca.

## Water First fall gathering

It was a week of listening, learning and laughing as the Water First staff came together in Rama First Nation for our annual in-person gathering. Learnings included an Anishaanbek Language lesson, a water ceremony, recognition of Orange Shirt Day, and many opportunities for knowledge sharing.

With a staff that includes many remote workers and trainers that are often on the road, coming together is invaluable to our team. Miigwetch to the community of Rama for their warm and welcoming hospitality, and to everyone who helped facilitate an unforgettable week!

## Important upcoming dates

**November**

**1-7** Treaties Week

**7** International Inuit Day

**8** Indigenous Veterans Day

**December**

**21** Winter Solstice

**Visit waterfirst.ngo/donate**

For more information, contact Ami Gopal, Director of Development at ami.gopal@waterfirst.ngo or 1-800-970-8467 ext. 106

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