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PROTEST AND PARTNERSHIP: CASE STUDIES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES, CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT, AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA

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Meadow Lake: Looking Back on 30 Years of Aboriginal Forest Management and Manufacturing

Stephen Wyatt and Jonah Dumoe

Since 1988, the nine First Nations of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC) in Saskatchewan have been engaged in forest management, harvesting and forest product manufacturing to an extent not equalled by any other First Nation in Canada. This model is centred around the action of Mistik Management Ltd. (Mistik, a forest management company), NorSask Forest Products Inc. (NorSask, a sawmill) and Meadow Lake Mechanical Pulp (MLMP, a pulp mill), but has expanded to include a range of other businesses and operations. It has enabled the MLTC nations to exercise self-determination and accrue economic benefits from forestry operations occurring in their traditional territories. Their success has been the subject of several studies (Anderson and Bone 1995; Beckley and Korber 1996; Chambers 1999; Anderson 2002), and is often used as an example of Indigenous engagement in forestry.

The success of MLTC needs to be seen against the backdrop of First Nations engagement in Canada's forests. Historically, First Nations have inhabited forest lands in Canada, and have used a variety of knowledge and practices to utilize and manage these lands and resources to meet their cultural, spiritual, and material needs. In most cases, this close connection with lands and resources has been maintained (e.g., Berkes 1998). The same lands provide the basis of Canada's forest industry, a vital sector in the national economy, with 94% of forest lands being vested in governments (provincial, territorial, and federal), and approximately 80% of First Nation communities are located in areas of importance to the forest industry.[1] While the majority

of forestry activities occur on traditional lands, studies typically find that control of these lands and resources remains with government agencies or private companies, while Indigenous communities receive relatively few tangible benefits (Parkins et al. 2006). Legal challenges by First Nations have led to landmark court rulings that have established the rights of First Nations regarding resource development occurring in traditional territories, including the *Haida* (2004), *Taku River* (2004) and *Mikisew Cree* (2005) cases (Newman 2009). As Tindall and Trosper (2013) note, the history of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations in relation to natural resources is characterized by both conflict and collaboration, reflecting differing visions about rights, knowledge, appropriate use and, indeed, whether the land should be used or not.

Unsurprisingly, the diversity of Indigenous Peoples and land issues across Canada has given rise to an extensive literature of case studies, with a variety of disciplinary perspectives illuminating these complex relationships in different ways. Anthropological and historical analyses help us to understand the reciprocal relationship between Indigenous Peoples and their lands (Feit 2000), and how traditional institutions may apply in contemporary contexts (Nadasdy 2003). Collaborative management approaches have received much attention, highlighting both the potential benefits and the challenges and barriers that may prevent a more balanced relationship (Feit and Spaeder 2005; Natcher, Davis, and Hickey 2005). Research on economic arrangements, such as that at Meadow Lake, has explored how to promote economic development in an Indigenous context and particularly the importance of distinguishing between ownership and management roles (Hickey and Nelson 2005; Trosper et al. 2008). The colonial structures that underlie land and resource management in Canada are being increasingly questioned, especially by Indigenous scholars who stress the importance of responsibilities and relationships as a means of enabling Indigenous Peoples exercise their rights in ways that they choose (Alfred and Corntassel 2005; McGregor 2011; Corntassel 2012). The Meadow Lake experience brings together all these themes, and the success of the MLTC First Nations could serve as a model to inspire other First Nations and provincial authorities to encourage the participation of First Nations in resource development, as well as practical examples of how these complex issues and relationships can be managed. This case study examines the Meadow Lake model of forest sector development, focusing on three elements: governance, community engagement, and economic development. This approach is relevant for two reasons: to understand how First Nations

can improve the socio-economic well-being of their communities through entrepreneurship and by participating in decision-making pertaining to local resource development; and to understand the elements that are critical to resolving resource development disputes in traditional territories. To do so, we review documents and annual reports from MLTC, its forestry businesses and from member First Nations. We also interviewed key people who have played critical roles in MLTC forest sector development at tribal, corporate and community levels.[2] Finally, we use a range of business and statistical data to consider the economic impacts of the Meadow Lake forestry model, including the Community Well-Being Index developed by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC 2015).

We begin by summarizing the development of forestry activities at Meadow Lake from the 1980s to the current day, providing a backdrop that helps understand the key elements of the Meadow Lake forestry model. We then dig deeper into this experience by focusing on three key elements: the governance and organizational structures that help to balance relations between political and economic interests, and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous parties; the mechanisms that have been established to support community engagement in forest management and to overcome challenges; and the results obtained by MLTC's economic development strategy in relation to promoting business and employment and to enhancing community well-being. These themes are all interconnected, and so our conclusion seeks to identify a number of lessons that could be of use to other Indigenous nations, to government policy making and to private enterprises who seek to collaborate with Indigenous nations.

Chronology of Meadow Lake Forest Sector Development

The Meadow Lake Sawmill was built in 1971 by Parsons and Whittemore, a U.S. firm. Although working as a sawmill, the primary function of the mill was to supply softwood chips to the Prince Albert Pulp Mill, owned by the same company. However, poor design, operational difficulties and low production led to Parsons and Whittemore abandoning the mill for several years before selling it to the provincial government in 1986 (Anderson and Bone 1995). This was an interim measure and in 1988 the Saskatchewan government sold equal parts of the mill to MLTC and to TechFor Services Ltd (a

company formed by mill employees). Soon after acquisition, the company was renamed NorSask Forest Products Ltd.

Negotiations around the purchase of the mill involved conditions from both MLTC and the Saskatchewan government. In addition to the employment created by the mill, MLTC was seeking a Forest Management Licence Agreement (FMLA) that would give them forest management responsibilities over much of the traditional territories of MLTC member nations (Interview ex-MLTC, March 23, 2017). The 3.3 million hectares of Crown land covered by this FMLA included both softwood and hardwood. As the NorSask mill used only softwoods (i.e., spruce and pine), the Saskatchewan government required that MLTC agree to seek other partners to use the hardwood resource (Anderson and Bone 1995). Finally, the government required that NorSask establish forest management partnerships with all First Nations whose traditional territories could potentially be impacted by forestry development activities within the FMLA area.

In 1990, Millar Western Pulp (MWP), a forestry company located in neighbouring Alberta, agreed to establish a pulp mill at Meadow Lake as a joint venture with the Crown Investment Corporation of the Province of Saskatchewan to use the hardwoods (Anderson and Bone 1995). MWP purchased a 20% stake in NorSask, with the remainder being held by MLTC (40%) and the employees (40%). The mill began operations in 1992 with a production capacity of 240,000 air-dry-metric-tons (ADMT), but this has been increased to reach nearly 400,000 ADMT (about 1 million m^3 of logs) in 2016. With the establishment of the pulp mill, NorSask and MWP created a not-for-profit operating company called Mistik Management Ltd., each with a 50% shareholding (Mistik is a Cree word for wood). In 1998, Mistik took over responsibility for all forestry-related operations including harvesting, hauling, road construction and community engagement (Mistik 2007). Employees remained shareholders in NorSask until 1998, when MLTC bought out its partners to become sole owners. MWP also bought out the government share of the pulp mill to become the sole owner. However, in 2006, Millar Western chose to refocus its activities and the pulp mill was placed under bankruptcy protection. The following year, it was acquired by Paper Excellence, a Vancouver-based forestry company that is owned by an Asian conglomerate, and the mill is now named Meadow Lake Mechanical Pulp (MLMP) (Interview MLMP, February 15, 2018; SJRS 2016). The current ownership structure is presented in figure 6.2.

Mistik's forest management processes were challenged in 1992–93 during the Canoe Lake crisis. Following this, Mistik established a range of community engagement processes for both MLTC member communities, and other communities in the FMLA area. A comprehensive twenty-year management plan (totalling nine volumes) was approved in 1997, with subsequent updates being adopted in 2007 and 2018. Changes to provincial forestry legislation in 2002 lead to part of the original FMLA being transferred to support the establishment of a new fiberboard mill (Meadow Lake OSB) with Mistik retaining management of 1.8 million ha (see figure 6.1; Mistik 2007). The management plans paved the way for certification of Mistik operations according to sustainable forest management standards, notably the international Forest Stewardship Council standard in 2007. Finally, it should be noted that Mistik has actively supported forest-related research by collaborating in projects with a variety of university and government research institutions and a Science Advisory Board, although the latter is no longer active (Mistik 2007).

Canada's forestry economy is cyclic by nature, and NorSask and Mistik are not exempt from the rises and falls of other businesses in the forest sector. The Canadian recession of 1980–82 almost certainly affected the profitability of Parsons and Whittemore, with the establishment of NorSask coinciding with a stronger economy. Another recession in 1989–92 was followed by a relatively long period of high demand and profitability (strong U.S. demand, a weak Canadian dollar and duty-free access to the U.S. all contributed to this), during which MLTC, communities and partners were all able to enhance ongoing operations and invest in new initiatives. However, this period ended in 2004 when Canada's forest sector fell into crisis with the imposition of U.S. duties on Canadian timber (2001), the bursting of the housing bubble in the USA (2006) and the 2007–09 global financial crisis (Barriault et al. 2017). This caused great disruption across Canada, with many sawmill and paper mills closing, either temporarily or permanently. Although NorSask reduced production and employment during this period, the mill remained operational and MLMP maintained pulp production, thereby providing stability for Mistik and its contractors (see table 6.2). Since 2012, the economic viability of forestry businesses has gradually improved, but a major fire at NorSask in January 2017 and a renewal of U.S. duties on Canadian timber provide future challenges.

Formal ownership and governance structures have also changed over the years. Initially, MLTC held its NorSask shares through MLDC Investments.

Table 6.1 Timeline of MLTC Forest Sector Development

YEAR	EVENTS
1971	Parsons and Whittemore build the first sawmill in Meadow Lake.
1981	The Province of Saskatchewan acquired all mill assets from Parsons and Whittemore.
1988	NorSask Forest Product Ltd. established and the first FMLA signed (3.3 million ha).
1990	Millar Western Pulp mill built and Mistik Management Ltd. created.
1992	Canoe Lake Crisis erupted.
1993	Co-management boards established.
1994	MLTC transferred its business holdings to MLTC RDI.
1997	NorSask twenty-Year Forest Management Plan (1997–2017).
1998	MLTC acquired 100% ownership of NorSask Forest Product Ltd.
2002	Forest legislation changes, FMLA changed to a Forest Management Agreement for 1.8 million ha.
2004–12	Canada-wide forest sector crisis.
2004–07	Forest certifications—ISO 2004, CSA 2005, FSC 2007.
2007	Mistik's twenty-year Forest Management Plan (2007–2027).
2007	Paper Excellence buys pulp mill, now named Meadow Lake Mechanical Pulp (MLMP).
2013	MLTC RDI launched MLTC II.
2017	Major fire at NorSask Sawmill, subsequent rebuilding. Renewal of U.S. duties on timber.

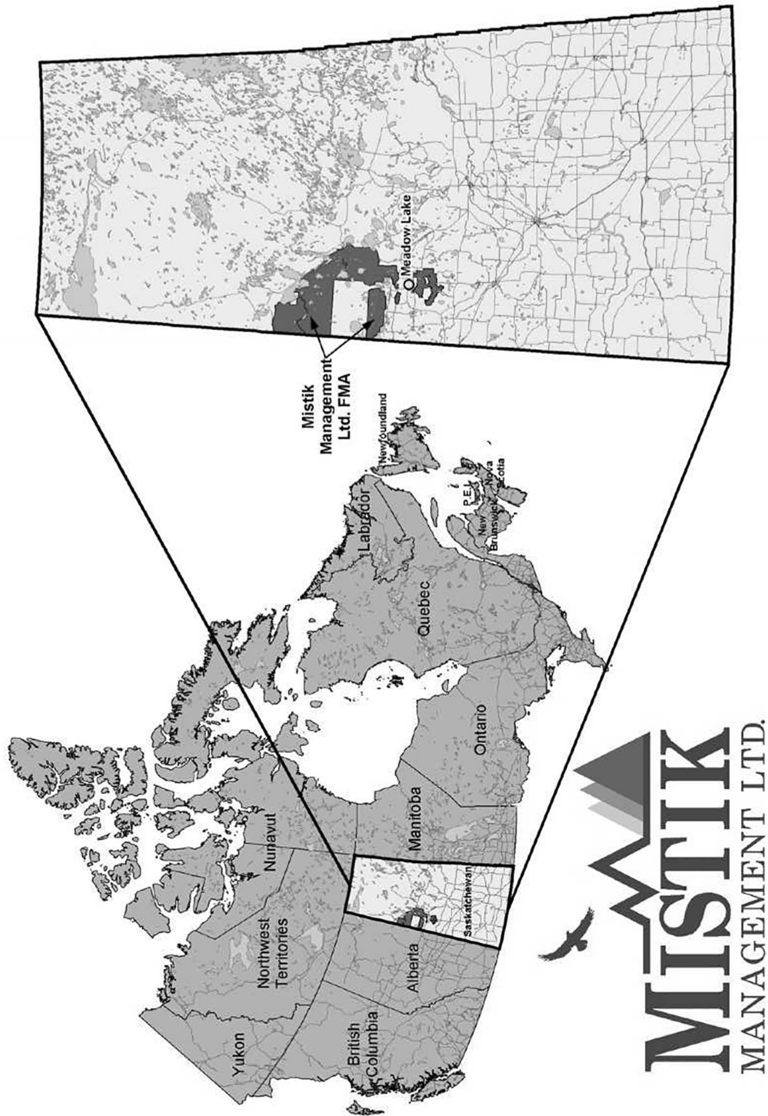

Figure 6.1:
The Mistik Forest
Management Area

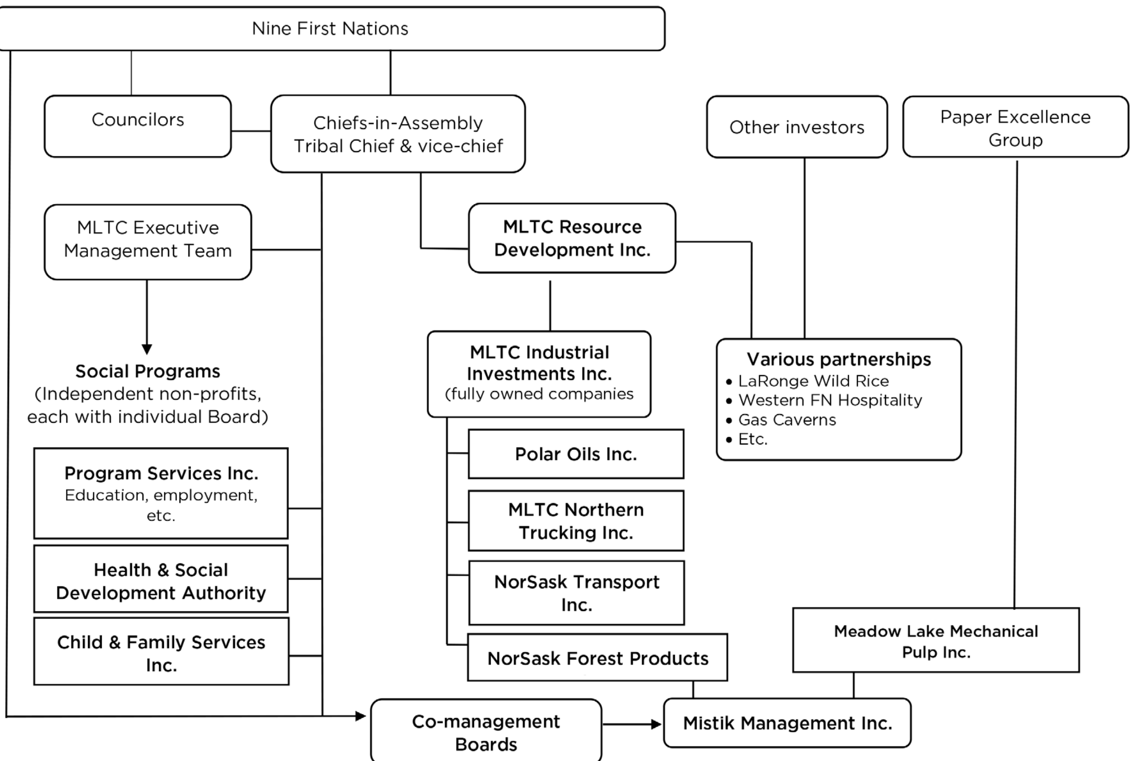

Figure 6.2: MLTC Governance Structure.

Table 6.2 Key Economic indicators of Meadow Lake Forestry Businesses (1997–2016).

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
EMPLOYMENT																				
NorSask	194	161	161	173	163	152	152	144	144	144	149	101	84	55	103	115	191	251	205	145
MLMP	207	206	204	202	200	173	174	171	171	171	153	164	168	169	161	164	175	184	195	195
Mistik	45	45	45	45	35	30	25	25	25	25	17	12	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
L&M									86	80	88	89	91	37	70	86	80	82	81	78
Harvesting	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	228	228	228	228	210	210	210	210	210	210	210	210	210
L&M Harv									41	41	38	38	36	30	32	28	26	26		
Renewal	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	17	17	17	17	17	10	10	20	20	17	17		
Total	707	673	671	681	659	616	612	585	712	706	690	631	610	522	607	634	710	781	702	639
QUANTITY OF WOOD PRODUCTS																				
MLMP Pulp	242	244	269	278	256	293	299	321	316	312	325	328	343	364	346	261	371	348	362	398
NorSask Lumber	101	101	101	107	108	109	109	76	105	76	100	85	53	24	20	57	71	95	122	106
NorSask Chip	76	76	76	74	77	71	50	49	65	50	56	51	23	11	9	27	37	50	69	57
Dillon Lumber	0	0	0	0	3	3	8	3	3	3										
L&M Lumber											12	13	16	5	17	20	21	19	17	16

Data on employment provided by MLMP and NorSask to Mistik Management and included in 10-year management plans for 1997-2006 and 2007-2016. See https://mistik.ca/forest-management/2019-fmp/. Wood product quantity is pulp, thousand air-dry-metric-tonnes; lumber, million foot-board-measure; chip, thousand oven-dry-tonnes.

Subsequently, a holding company, MLTC Resource Development LP (referred to as MLTC RDI), was formed and by 1994 all MLTC business holdings were transferred to this company (Interview MLTC II, March 23, 2017). In 1998, MLTC RDI became full owner of NorSask and the FMLA was transferred to Mistik, in which NorSask and MLMP continued to hold equal shares. In 2013, MLTC RDI formed another holding company called MLTC Industrial Investments LP (MLTC II) to manage all companies fully owned by MLTC.

Governance of Meadow Lake Forest Sector Development

Over the last thirty years, Meadow Lake has developed a fairly sophisticated governance structure for the political and commercial aspects of forest management, as well as for its other activities, as illustrated in figure 6.2. In this context, "governance" does not simply mean the actions of a government, but instead refers to the different types of relationships between governments and non-government parties as they decide on a set of rules and to operate a set of institutions that determine who gets what, where, when, and how in society (Howlett, Rayner, and Tollefson 2009).[3] In Meadow Lake, the interlocking roles of MLTC, of individual bands, of corporations owned by MLTC and bands, and of private companies all contribute to "governance."

Political Governance—The Meadow Lake Tribal Council

Meadow Lake Tribal Council has its origins in 1981 when six Cree First Nations and four Dene First Nations in Northwest Saskatchewan united to form the Meadow Lake District Chiefs joint venture. Big Island Lake Cree Nation (originally known as Joseph Bighead) subsequently withdrew from this arrangement in 1988. An agreement was signed in 1986 and the joint venture was renamed as Meadow Lake Tribal Council (MLTC) in 1996. The agreement set the basic goal of MLTC—to "continue our ancestors' mission to join and unite in a common front to protect and preserve our Indian way of life." Promoting economic development to benefit all nine nations has been a key role of all the organizations (Anderson 1997). MLTC is responsible for the common affairs of the nine nations and for the provision of a range of social programs.[4] However, the members of each nation elect their own Band Council (usually under the process established by the Indian Act), which is responsible for community affairs, and for political negotiations with provincial and federal governments.

Three groups, each with distinct functions, contribute to MLTC governance.[5] Firstly, a quasi-legislative body, referred to as the chiefs-in-assembly, is comprised of the chief of each of the nine member Nations. The chiefs-in-assembly are responsible for approving the bylaws and policies that govern MLTC. Secondly, two members of the chiefs-in-assembly are elected to four-year terms as tribal chief and tribal vice-chief, and are responsible for overall leadership of MLTC. Both positions are elected by 49 voting delegates from all nine First Nations, and if a Cree chief is elected to one post, a Dene chief will customarily be elected to the other. Finally, 47 councillors are elected by the memberships of all nine First Nations to advise the chiefs-in-assembly in making policies that will be responsive to specific needs in each First Nation community. The chiefs-in-assembly and the 47 councillors meet periodically to review operational results against planned priorities.

Rather than managing social programs from within the political structure, MLTC has chosen to establish three incorporated non-profit organizations dedicated to: health and social development; child and family services; and program services (education, employment, etc.). Each of these is wholly owned by MLTC, but with a board of directors appointed by MLTC and by each of the member nations. These boards provide oversight and help ensure that program delivery is effective and responsive to community needs, but also separates daily management from political processes. This separation of operational and political roles was a key lesson from the Harvard project on American Indian Economic Development (Cornell and Kalt 1992), and MLTC business activities have also been delegated to a separate for-profit organization. Nevertheless, some MLTC management staff consider that strict separation is not effective, as programs need to be responsive to community concerns as expressed through elections and political leaders also need to lobby governments for funding (Interviews MLTC & ex-MLTC, March 23, 2017). Balancing the advantages of each role has resulted in some changes as trends towards too much separation have been followed by moves back to increased political oversight.

Commercial Governance—MLTC RDI and MLTC II

While NorSask was a particularly important early investment for MLTC, it is not the only business owned by the council. In 1994, the council decided to transfer their shares in NorSask and other businesses to a holding corporation—Meadow Lake Tribal Council Resource Development LP (MLTC

RDI[6]). As an independent development corporation, it was intended that this would improve opportunities for joint ventures and help attract external investors. The MLTC RDI board is comprised of the elected Chiefs from each of the nine MLTC First Nations, the MLTC Tribal Chief and two independent directors with extensive business experience in the resource sector. While the presence of elected Chiefs is important from a community perspective, it can also lead to tension related to political influence and differences between business and community priorities, particularly if logging is scheduled in certain areas or if members of one community are more successful in obtaining contracts than members of another (Interviews MLTCII & ex-MLTC, March 23, 2017). Strong separation of operational management from band governance has been identified as a key factor in determining the success of Aboriginal forestry (and other) businesses in Canada (Trosper et al. 2008).

The economic growth strategy of MLTC has nevertheless been remarkably successful (section 5 below), with steady expansion in the MLTC business portfolio. As a result, in 2013, MLTC RDI launched a new holding corporation—Meadow Lake Tribal Council Industrial Investments (MLTCII[7])—which became responsible for managing all businesses that are wholly owned by MTLC. While MLTC RDI is the sole shareholder of MLTCII, the latter company is managed by an independent board of directors that cannot include elected officials from any of the member First Nations (Interview MLTCII, March 23, 2017). This arrangement limits the exposure of the First Nations to corporate and legal risks associated with the businesses. While the chiefs on the MLTC RDI board are able to set broad directions for commercial development, the fully owned MLTC businesses are also shielded from direct political influence.

Forest Sector Governance—NorSask and Mistik Management

As described previously, MLTC initially bought a 50% stake in NorSask in 1988, subsequently increasing this to full ownership in 1998. Prior to 1998, company operations were overseen by a board comprising representatives of both shareholders (MLTC and employees). With full MLTC ownership, corporate direction was set by the MLTC RDI board until 2013, and subsequently by the MLTCII board. Throughout these changes, the NorSask management team has comprised both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, with an increasing proportion of the former.

Governance arrangements for Mistik Management are more complex than those of NorSask. Commercial forestry in Canada is often characterized by a separation between operations in the forest and those in the mill (factories), with further separation of mills based on the principal products or wood types. In Meadow Lake, NorSask uses softwood (mainly spruce and jack pine) to produce building lumber; Meadow Lake Mechanical Pulp (MLMP) uses hardwoods (mainly aspen and poplar) to produce pulp for paper making; and Mistik Management is responsible for managing forests and timber harvesting for both mills. Mistik was established in December 1989 as a not-for-profit joint venture, with each partner owning equal shares. The pulp mill has been through several ownership structures but has been wholly owned by Paper Excellence (an Asian-owned company based in Vancouver) since 2007. As a result, the Mistik board is comprised of four directors representing NorSask and MLTC along with four directors representing MLMP and Paper Excellence (Interview Mistik, March 24, 2017). The chair of the board is a non-Indigenous person based in Meadow Lake, and decision-making is based on unanimity, rather than a majority or consensus approach. Co-management boards are also invited to one of Mistik's four board meetings each year, providing an opportunity for all groups to better appreciate wider issues and the concerns of others.

Both Mistik and NorSask have recruited qualified and experienced managers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The Mistik team is responsible for planning forestry operations, harvesting, transport, and reforestation activities and ensuring community engagement while the NorSask team has maintained the viability of the sawmill in a highly competitive forest sector, including during an economic crisis that saw the closure of mills throughout Canada. Forestry operations such as harvesting, road construction, and transport are undertaken by independent contractors, often companies owned by MLTC member nations, families or individuals, but also including non-Indigenous companies. While creation of employment opportunities for individuals from MLTC communities is a central goal of the forestry program, the companies have also recruited non-Indigenous professionals with the expertise necessary to provide effective management. Several non-Indigenous staff members have been with the companies for more than a decade, providing stability and leadership both within the companies and in relationships with non-Indigenous partners. This helps ensure that the companies attain their commercial objectives and implement high quality forest management

as expected by MTLC communities, while also providing training and career opportunities for members of MLTC communities.

MLTC's actions in becoming the proprietor of a sawmill and co-owner of a company holding a Forest Management Agreement issued by the provincial government can be seen as an acknowledgement of state authority over their traditional forest and of Treaties 6 and 10 signed in 1876 and 1906. However, it can also be seen as an assertion of Indigenous rights to occupy, to manage, and to benefit from their presence on the land, making the most of existing opportunities to promote economic, social, and political governance. First Nations across Canada have been faced by this dilemma of how to assert rights within a colonial governance system, with Rynard (2000), Nadasdy (2003) and McGregor (2011), among others, considering how efforts to respect and recognize Indigenous rights in forestry provide some benefits, while also falling short of what is expected or needed. It is likely that each First Nation will need to find its own response to this dilemma—"There is no concise neat model of resurgence in this way of approaching decolonization and the regeneration of our peoples" (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 612).

Community Engagement and Forest Management

The Meadow Lake forestry model establishes a critical role for MLTC member communities in forest management in a way that complements the governance structure presented above. While the Harvard project stressed the importance of separating business and political roles, events at Canoe Lake in 1992 also showed the risks if business management becomes too separated from public concerns. Studies across Canada have described models and presented lessons on how to engage communities (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in forest management (McGregor 2011; Tindall and Trosper 2013; Wyatt et al. 2013; Teitelbaum 2017), but it is rare that the Indigenous community itself has such a strong position in management. Mistik and MLTC have developed a series of mechanisms to encourage community engagement in forestry.

MLTC Member Nations

Meadow Lake Tribal Council comprises five Cree Nations and four Dene Nations, all of which are located in Northwestern Saskatchewan. The head offices of MLTC are located on Flying Dust First Nation reserve, adjoining the City of Meadow Lake. In 2020, the total First Nation population of the

nine member communities was nearly 16,000, including members living both on-reserve and off-reserve (see table 6.3). A tenth community, Big Island Lake Cree Nation, was part of MLTC but chose to withdraw in 1988. While Big Island Lake collaborates with MLTC on some issues, there have also been tensions.

Table 6.3 Population of MLTC Member First Nations in 2020

CREE FIRST NATIONS	ON-RESERVE	OFF-RESERVE	DENE FIRST NATIONS	ON-RESERVE	OFF-RESERVE
Canoe Lake	1,166	1,492	Birch Narrows	481	373
Flying Dust	591	906	Buffalo River	835	683
Makwa Sahgaiehcan	1,281	491	Clearwater River	1,064	1,516
Ministikwan	1,098	259	English River	827	830
Waterhen Lake	993	1,092			
Total population	5,129	4,240		3,207	3,402

Data from the Indian Register maintained by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC 2021).

While all MLTC communities share in governance arrangements, some communities are clearly closer to sites of forestry activities. MLTC headquarters is located on Flying Dust First Nation while NorSask Sawmill, Mistik Management and MLPP are all nearby. Three other member nations (Ministikwan, Waterhen, and Makwa) are less than one hour's drive from MLTC headquarters and both mills, and so benefit more readily from direct employment opportunities. Nevertheless, communities that are further away (e.g., Clearwater River is over three hours drive) can benefit from harvesting and transport contracts provided by Mistik.

The Canoe Lake Crisis

In early 1992, Mistik commenced logging activities on the traditional territories of the Canoe Lake First Nation (the largest MLTC member nation), leading to dissatisfaction among community members (Anderson and Bone 1995; Beckley and Korber 1996; Anderson 2000). Anderson (2000) identified three main concerns among community members: 1) that clear-cut mechanical harvesting was having adverse impacts on the land and on traditional practices, including trapping and hunting; 2) that community members were

unable to contribute to Mistik plans about the size of cut blocks or the rate of harvesting; and 3) that mechanical harvesting provided fewer employment opportunities and economic benefits than more traditional techniques.[8] Beginning in May 1992, protestors, led by Elders from Canoe Lake and including people from other communities, blockaded a provincial highway 65 km north of Meadow Lake, effectively preventing access to Mistik's northern logging operations (O'Meara 1993; Smith 1993). It is important to note that the protestors were not demanding an end to harvesting, but rather changes that would provide them with a more significant role in decision-making and a greater share of the benefits.

After failed attempts to negotiate the removal of the blockade, Mistik requested NorSask (legally responsible for the FMLA) to act, with the provincial government subsequently threatening to charge protestors with illegal occupation of Crown land (Beckley and Korber 1996; Anderson 2000). The protestors then filed a complaint with the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, alleging that the provincial government had repeatedly ignored the rights of First Nations under the treaties, under the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement and under the constitution (Smith 1993). In May 1993, the Court found in favour of the government, ordering the protestors to leave and authorizing eviction if this did not happen (Smith 1993). When the protestors vowed to stay, Mistik, with the support of NorSask and MLTC Chiefs, decided to continue negotiations rather than proceed with a court-authorized eviction. The crisis was finally resolved in October 1993 with the signature, by representatives of Canoe Lake First Nation and Mistik Management, of an interim agreement to establish co-management boards (Windspeaker Staff 1993; Anderson 2000).

Conflicts between Indigenous communities and forestry companies are common in Canada (Booth and Skelton 2011), and the Canoe Lake crisis demonstrates that Indigenous ownership alone is insufficient to ensure close relations with communities. Other activities are also needed to seek and obtain community engagement, while conflict is increasingly recognized as a factor that contributes to transformative change in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Wyatt et al. 2019).

Community Engagement—Co-management and Consultation

Following the Canoe Lake crisis, Mistik and other MLTC partners have developed a range of mechanisms to engage communities, to facilitate dialogue,

and to provide Mistik with better information about the land base and the ways in which it is being used. Most importantly, the 1993 co-management agreement with Canoe Lake was followed by a series of similar arrangements with other communities, although not all are referred to as "co-management boards." Most co-management arrangements in Canada are a formal arrangement between a government and local groups (Feit and Spaeder 2005), but the Mistik boards are actually company-community arrangements (Beckley and Korber 1996; Chambers 1999). By 1995, nine such boards had been established, several representing a number of communities—First Nation, Métis and non-Indigenous. These boards allow Mistik to get information about the land base, its people, culture and concerns, while also enabling communities to voice their opinions and concerns about forest management, thereby reducing the risk of protests (Beckley and Korber 1996). Since the beginning, Mistik has provided financial support to these boards, initially as a fixed amount for each board ($10,000, according to Beckley and Korber [1996]), but as an amount based on harvest volume since 1994 (Mistik email, February 6, 2018). Communities also receive dividends from forestry operations through MLTC RDI. A detailed review of two co-management boards by Chambers (1999) not only identified a number of benefits, especially in relation to greater trust, stronger relationships, and the incorporation of local knowledge, but also acknowledged barriers and recommended that efforts be made to further develop the role and capacity of the boards. Currently, eight boards provide input to Mistik's planning processes (Mistik 2015), but future work to review the advantages and barriers identified by Chambers (1999) would be useful.

In addition to the co-management boards, Mistik also has a range of other ways of engaging with communities (Mistik 2015). Firstly, a Public Advisory Group (PAG) was established in 2004 to provide a common forum for all stakeholders, including non-Indigenous communities, trappers and outfitters, municipalities, employees of NorSask, MLMP and other companies, and non-government organizations, in addition to the co-management boards. The PAG typically meets for a full day twice each year, but also facilitates information mail-outs and individual meetings between parties and Mistik. Secondly, as some of Mistik staff are members of MLTC nations, there are extensive informal contacts between them and chiefs and other members of communities, especially in advance of and during operations in particular areas. Thirdly, community members appear to be more willing to visit or contact the Mistik office to voice concerns or to obtain information than would be

the case with a non-Indigenous forest manager (interview Mistik, March 24, 2017). Fourthly, preparation of the twenty-year management plan in 2015–17 included a lengthy series of consultations, public meetings and open-houses. Finally, Mistik also works with communities (both MLTC member communities and others) to support traditional practices on the land, water quality after fires and floods, and education.

Although the community engagement initiatives introduced since the Canoe Lake crisis appear to have widespread support from MLTC communities, certain challenges remain. In particular, Big Island Lake Cree Nation (not a member of MLTC) has had more limited exchanges with Mistik and has challenged certain elements of management plans and operations (KPMG 2017, 45–46). Nevertheless, recent changes in leadership and more contact appear to be helping resolve this dispute (MLTC II email February 5, 2018; Interview MLMP, February 15, 2018). These community engagement actions also need to be considered in conjunction with MLTC's role in economic development and in distributing benefits to communities.

Economic Development

Economic development has been one of the primary objectives of MLTC since 1986, aiming to "stimulate economic growth for First Nations and to encourage an entrepreneurial spirit among our people" (MLTC 1991 in Anderson 1997, 1495). This is a common theme in Indigenous forestry, leading to benefits such as employment, skills, income and autonomy, but also associated with challenges, especially in reconciling traditional values and non-Indigenous business models (Hickey and Nelson 2005; Trosper et al. 2008; Booth and Skelton 2011). In 1991, MLTC reported that 106 business projects had been undertaken during the past six years, including the establishment of NorSask, Mistik and other forest-related businesses. In 1994, MLTC decided that promoting economic development would best be achieved by adopting a strategy to "develop and establish 'anchor' businesses around which smaller enterprises can flourish bringing long lasting economic activities and benefits" (MLTC 1994 in Anderson 1997, 1495). The goal of the strategy was "to achieve parity with the province in terms of employment rate and income level [and] to create and maintain 3,240 good paying jobs in the next 20 years" (MLTC 1994 in Anderson 1997, 1495). NorSask and Mistik have since become the focal point of a network of businesses that spread through the various communities of MLTC and further afield in Saskatchewan, while also

diversifying into a variety of sectors. Here, we briefly present the outcomes of this strategy using data obtained from websites of First Nations and individual businesses (see also table 6.2).

Business Development, Employment, and Revenue

THE ANCHOR BUSINESSES

While the original anchor business was the NorSask Sawmill, it is now appropriate to include Mistik and MLMP in this group. These businesses have consistently provided between 250 and 460 jobs within the region (table 6.2). Mistik itself is a relatively small employer (currently about fourteen staff), but it creates additional employment opportunities through contract activities, and these are predominately held by First Nation people. The 2015 certification report calculated that "63% of Mistik person days of employment in 2013 were performed by persons of Aboriginal descent" (KPMG 2015, 19). Table 6.4 summarizes the economic contribution of these three anchor businesses, although a breakdown of jobs held by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is not available. Table 6.2 details direct employment and production for NorSask, MLMP and Mistik during the twenty-year period 1997 to 2016. In particular, these statistics illustrate the complementarity of the different companies. For example, sawmills in Canada tend to be cyclic, as evidenced by the fluctuation in NorSask employment between a low of 55 in 2010 (during Canada's forest sector crisis) and a high of 251 only four years later. In contrast, MLMP is more stable, with annual employment ranging from 153 to 207 throughout the whole period.

Revenue and profitability in the Canadian forest sector is highly variable. Nevertheless, MLTC financial reports indicate that in 2014–15, NorSask had an operating revenue of $56.4 million with a net income of $3.9 million. These financial records also indicate that NorSask contributed $14.1 million in dividend and related payouts to MLTC member communities over the five years 2002 to 2007. Mistik Management operates on a cost-recovery basis, with the partners contributing funds to cover operating costs, but with no dividends being declared. Nevertheless, Mistik paid a total of approximately $14.2 million in royalty (or stumpage) to the Saskatchewan government for timber harvested between 1997 and 2006, and another $8.7 million during the following ten years. Financial information for MLMP is not available.

OTHER FORESTRY-RELATED ACTIVITIES

MLTC has expanded its forestry value chain beyond NorSask and Mistik Management to include transport and fuel sales to logging trucks and equipment. This forestry value chain has created additional employment and generated additional revenues for the tribal council. Of particular importance are harvesting and log transport operations who generally work as contractors to Mistik. MLTC Logging and Reforestation Ltd was created in 1990 under contract to Mistik to supply logs to NorSask and MLMP, and by 1994 it employed 140 people and was one of the top ten logging companies in Canada (Anderson 1997). In 1996, this company was declared bankrupt following difficulties over payments by MLTC member communities (email ex-MLTC, January 30, 2018). The company was broken up in order to establish a number of smaller logging businesses owned by MLTC member communities and individuals. The largest of these is now Waterhen Forestry Products, fully owned by Waterhen First Nation, which harvests and transports 180,000 m^3 of logs per year for Mistik and employs approximately fifty people (Interview MLTCII, March 23, 2017). A number of other forestry contractors exist in other MLTC member communities, both as band-owned and private businesses, but more detailed information is not available. MLTCII is full owner of NorSask Transport and MLTC Northern Trucking, operating a combined fleet of about fifteen trucks hauling logs and woodchip to NorSask, MLMP and to other purchasers in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Not all business start-ups are successful—production of wood pellets for home heating was begun in 2011, but failed because of technical problems (Ambroziak 2017).

MLTC is also applying its forestry experience outside the original FMLA area. A small sawmill was established by NorSask in the village of Dillon (adjoining Buffalo River FN) and supplied with logs by Mistik between 2001 and 2006 (Mistik 2007), although the mill is no longer operational. Mistik is currently responsible for forest management planning for the L&M Forest Products FMLA, which covers a smaller area to the south of Meadow Lake. MLTC also contributed to the establishment of an oriented strand board (OSB) mill in Meadow Lake in 2001, with a minority shareholding in a project managed by Tolko Inc. (who took over full ownership in 2013). Most recently, in 2010, NorSask became a partner in Sakâw Askiy Management Inc. which manages the 3.3-million-hectare Prince Albert FMLA, adjoining the eastern side of the Mistik FMA.[9] Other partners in Sakâw Askiy include the Agency Chiefs Tribal Council and Montreal Lake Cree Nation, MLMP and five other

Table 6.4 Businesses Owned by MLTC and Member Communities.

NAME OF BUSINESS	PRINCIPAL ACTIVITY	OWNERSHIP	EMPLOYEES (APPROX.)*	ANNUAL REVENUE (APPROX.)*
FOREST SECTOR ANCHOR BUSINESSES				
NorSask	Softwood lumber	MLTCII 100%	100	$50–60 million
Meadow Lake Mechanical Pulp	Hardwood pulp	Papers Excellence 100%	180	n/a
Mistik Management Ltd	Forest management	NorSask 50% MLMP 50%	14	n/a
OTHER FOREST SECTOR BUSINESSES				
MLTC Northern Trucking	Transport of chips	MLTCII 100%	14	$3 million
NorSask Transport	Transport of logs	MLTCII 100%	16	$2.5 million
Polar Oil	Fuel sales, distribution	MLTCII 100%	4	$8 million
Waterhen Forestry Products	Harvesting & transport	Waterhen 100%	50	n/a
Sakâw Askiy Management	Forest management	NorSask 9.45%	n/a	n/a
Meadow Lake Bioenergy	Power Plant	n/a	Under development	
BUSINESSES NOT IN THE FOREST SECTOR				
Prud'homme Gas Cavern	Gas storage	MLTC RDI 75%	n/a	$670,000
Western FN Hospitality	Super 8 Hotels	MLTC RDI 20.9%	85	$6.4 million
Lac LaRonge Wild Rice	Wild rice packaging	MLTC RDI 21%	n/a	$1 million
Ceres MLTC Fertilizer	Bulk fertilizer sales	MLTC RDI 50%	n/a	$7.3 million
RobWel Constructors	Fabrication, equipment	Clearwater 100%	n/a	n/a
Saskatoon FastPrint	Printing	Birch Narrows 70%	n/a	n/a
Tron	Mining services	English River 100%	n/a	n/a
Mudhajtik & Mintec	Mining services	English River % n/a	n/a	n/a
JNE Welding, Saskatoon	Steel fabrication	English River 30%	n/a	n/a
FDB Gravel	Gravel pit	Flying Dust % n/a	n/a	n/a
FDB Fuel	Fuel station	Flying Dust 100%	n/a	n/a
Flying Energy	Oil and gas holding co.	Flying Dust % n/a	n/a	n/a

* Employment and revenue figures are for 2016–17, or the most recent available. n/a" indicates data not available.

forestry companies. NorSask also holds an allocation of 175,000 m^3 of softwood timber from this FMLA.

NON-FOREST BUSINESSES

MLTC, member communities and private individuals have all invested in a variety of businesses that are not directly related to forestry, which are also included in table 6.4 (although we have not been able to obtain data on all businesses). Among the earliest such businesses was a partnership in 1996 with TransGas (a natural gas distributor) to construct an underground gas storage in the village of Prud'homme (250 km south-east of Meadow Lake and outside MLTC traditional lands). TransGas was seeking a First Nation partner for the project, with MLTC finally taking a 75% shareholding.[10] This project, now renewed through to 2046, provides a stable revenue of $670,000 annually, which contributes to financing other MLTC investments. Partly as a result of this revenue, MLTC has been able to take a 20.9% share of Western First Nation Hospitality, who own and operate eight Super 8 hotels in various parts of Saskatchewan. MLTC is also a shareholder in a variety of other businesses, both in their traditional lands and elsewhere in Saskatchewan, including fuel distribution, wild rice packaging and marketing.

A number of communities have also established their own businesses and shareholdings, often after having created their own holding company (following the MLTC RDI example). In 1990, Clearwater River Dene Nation purchased RobWel Constructions (located in Meadow Lake rather than in their own community), fabricating metal parts and equipment for resource industries. English River First Nation bought Tron, a mining infrastructure company, in 1997 and has since expanded into variety of other businesses in the mining sector. In 2013, Birch Narrows First Nation took a majority share in Saskatoon Fastprint, a printer in Saskatoon. Flying Energy was established in 2014 by the Flying Dust First Nation in order to establish a role in the oil and gas sector, especially in the Bakken field in southern Saskatchewan where the nation obtained lands under the Treaty land entitlement program.

COMBINED EFFECTS

MLTC RDI and MLTCII have provided information on financial benefits of their investments for member communities, but we do not have employment or revenue data for all businesses. During the five-year period April 2002 to March 2007, MLTC paid over $15 million in dividends to member communities, representing nearly $1.7 million per community.[11] Dividend payments

are usually made several times each year, with individual payments to each community during this period ranging from $7,000 to $300,000. It should be noted that this period included the beginning of Canada's forest sector crisis (2004–12). MLTC has determined that dividends should be distributed with an equal share to each community, rather than being adjusted to reflect the population of the community. Communities may use these payments for community services or may choose to establish their own businesses or purchase shares in other businesses.

While table 6.4 is not a full list of businesses and investments and much data is missing, it does illustrate the extent and diversity of economic development of the MLTC communities since the early 1990s. We are not able to provide a clear history of all businesses or to determine whether or not these are a result of the anchor strategy outlined by MLTC in 1994. For example, to our knowledge, only Waterhen Forestry Products was established as a direct result of NorSask Forest Products Limited. However, a number of businesses have been created with financial resources and experience made available as a result of profitable forest sector businesses, and others have been established in response to needs or opportunities linked to the forest sector. Anderson (2002) identified 243 direct jobs related to forestry and estimated a further 730 indirect jobs. At the time of writing, the MLTC RDI website notes that their portfolio of eight companies employs more than 2,400 people. Employment data for the forestry businesses (table 6.2) shows an average of 657 direct jobs per year for the period 1997 to 2016. Hence it does appear that MLTC and member communities have been able to leverage their success as owner/manager of NorSask to obtain investment funds and partners, to take advantage of business opportunities and to expand cash flow, without necessarily using profits from NorSask.

Partnerships and Relationships

The number and variety of agreements, joint ventures and partial shareholdings described above and in figure 6.2 and table 6.4 illustrate the importance of partnerships in the Meadow Lake model. NorSask began as a joint venture in the sawmill between MLTC and non-Indigenous workers, successfully creating a profitable business where previous individual efforts by Parsons and Whittemore and by the Saskatchewan government had failed. However, the financial viability of NorSask was conditional upon the establishment of a pulp mill to use the hardwood from the licence area, and this required

that NorSask find a suitable industrial partner who was willing to work with MLTC and NorSask in managing and harvesting the forest. The industrial partners, initially Millar Western and then Papers Excellence, have been prepared to work with Norsask and MLTC in a situation where neither party has a majority shareholding in Mistik. This is different to many other joint ventures between First Nations and non-Indigenous forest companies where one partner holds more shares than the other (even if only a few percent).

Successful partnerships are not simply the outcome of formal arrangements, and representatives from both MLTC and non-Indigenous businesses stress the importance of building relationships through these partnerships. This has required building trust and long-term relationships between MLTC and industry partners. Nevertheless, both parties mentioned the presence of conflicts over issues including priority harvesting areas; scheduling; costs of wood delivered to mills; harvesting practices and clear-felling (Interviews ex-MLTC, Mistik & MLMP, March 23–24, 2017, February 15, 2018). Nevertheless, an emphasis on people, on communicating and listening, and on having a consistent vision (which helps focus on beneficial outcomes) has proven useful. According to one senior Mistik representative, the corporate management framework with unanimous decisions and equal shares "should not work." However, instead of causing gridlock, this obliges board members to respect and appreciate the perspectives of others, knowing that neither party can override the other and that they have to find a solution. This has been a source of innovation and has helped to build trust (Interview Mistik, March 24, 2017). Industry representatives also appear to appreciate the professionalism and expertise of MLTC and of its forestry operations, noting that political changes in MLTC or the individual band councils rarely lead to changes in management direction or in the underlying relationships (Interview MLMP, February 15, 2018). However, they did note that there are a number of cultural differences between Papers Excellence and the Dene and Cree peoples of MLTC, and that it was necessary to ensure that these differences did not develop into conflicts.

Joint ventures such as Mistik, or partial shareholdings such as Sakâw Askiy Management, are not the only forms of partnerships. Businesses that are fully owned by MLTC or by individual First Nations, such as MLTC Northern Trucking and Waterhen Forestry Products, are in contractual arrangements with Mistik and also with MLMP (among others). Managers of these businesses need to establish their own relationships, addressing issues

similar to those mentioned above. Furthermore, these contractors are also in competition with non-Indigenous contractors within the region and from elsewhere. Hence they need to respond to expectations and needs within their communities while also ensuring economic viability in their commercial operations. As such, Mistik has acted as an incubator for small business, providing contract opportunities, financial assistance, and management support to member nations and to individuals seeking to engage in forestry (Interview ex-MLTC, March 23, 2017).

Income, Employment, and Community Well-being

An important goal of MLTC's economic development strategy was to improve the quality of life for members by providing employment and revenue opportunities. While some previous studies have compared revenue and employment data (e.g., Anderson 2002), we have chosen to use the Community Well-Being Index (CWBI), developed by researchers at Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC 2015). The CWBI integrates census data for four factors—education (high school and university), housing (quantity and quality), labour force (participation and employment), and income—to produce a unified index value that ranges from 0 to 100, in addition to individual indices for each factor. This provides a more complete view than simply comparing employment or revenue figures and also facilitates comparison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. We accessed the CWB scores for each of the nine MLTC First Nations, covering the period from 1981 to 2016. We also compared average CWBI for the MLTC communities to averages for First Nation and non-Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan and across Canada. Figures 6.3 to 6.7 present several key indicators, using the 1 to 100 index, although data was not available for all communities in each census year.

All MLTC member nations experienced improvement in community well-being, except for Mistikwan Lake, which had the same CBWI in 2016 as in 1981. A significant slump in 2006 was compensated for by stronger growth to 2011 in some communities, but levels in 2016 are still below those of 2001 for other communities. We note that four communities—Flying Dust, Canoe Lake, Buffalo River, and English River—are to be found fairly consistently among the highest CBWI scores. We do not know why this should be so, other than noting that the MLTC offices are to be found on Flying Dust reserve, just outside of Meadow Lake. Nor can we explain why Mistikwan Lake

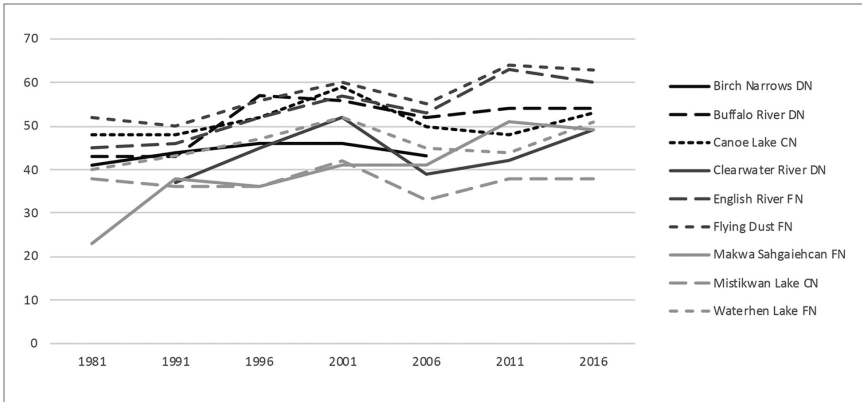

Figure 6.3: Community Well-Being Index (1-100) for the MLTC Nations (1981–2011).
Note: Data source is ISC (2023). CN is Cree Nation, DN is Dene Nation, and FN is First Nation.

has not increased it's CBWI. Finally, we note that Makwa Sahgaihcan First Nation (in the southwestern part of the MLTC area) has made the biggest gains in CBWI, progressing from 23 in 1981 to 51 in 2011, but falling back to 49 in 2016.

The slump in CBWI in 2006 is unfortunately consistent with a broader trend. In their analysis of CBWI across the country, AANDC (2015) notes that average CBWI for First Nations fell in both Saskatchewan and Manitoba in 2006, even though it rose in most other provinces. This appears to be related to housing—the AANDC report noted that housing quality had dropped even though the number of houses had increased, resulting in an overall decline in the housing index in 2006. The 2006 census also coincided with a downturn in Canada's forest sector, which would likely have impacted employment and income in communities engaged in timber harvesting and working for NorSask (see table 6.2). This would almost certainly have affected labour activity in some communities, with a roll-on effect on income (which depends mainly upon employment and government transfers). Hence it appears likely that the 2006 slump is due principally to falling housing quality across Saskatchewan as a whole, with a lesser impact from the forest sector downturn.

Figure 6.4 compares CBWI against provincial and national averages and shows the extent of the gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous

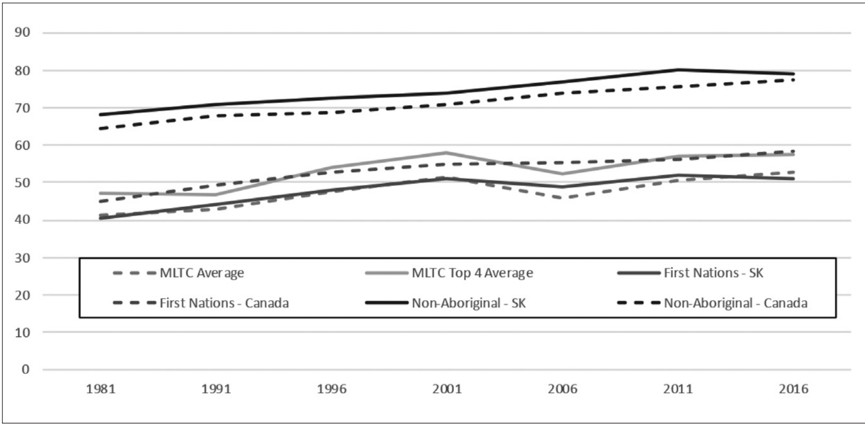

Figure 6.4: Comparing Community Well-Being Index (1-100) for the MLTC Nations Against Other Groups (1981–2016).
Note: Data source is ISC (2023).

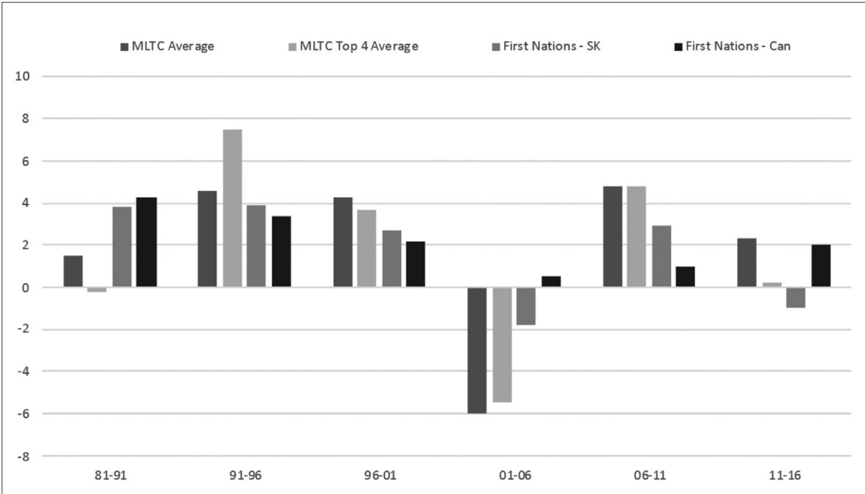

Figure 6.5: Comparing Change in Community Well-Being Index (1-100) Across Five-year Periods (1981-2016).
Note: Data source is ISC (2023).

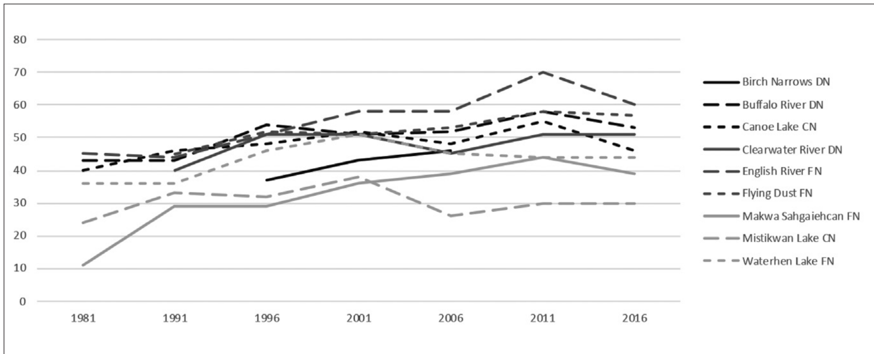

Figure 6.6: Income Component of the CBWI (1-100) for the MLTC Nations (1981–2016).
Note: Data source is ISC (2023). CN is Cree Nation, DN is Dene Nation, and FN is First Nation.

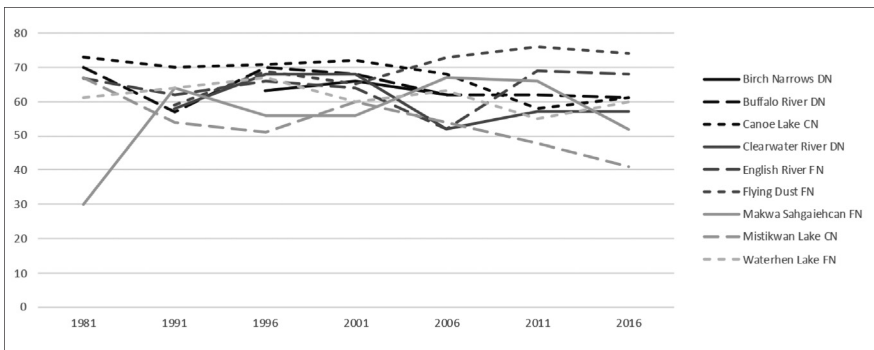

Figure 6.7: Labour Force Component of the CBWI (1-100) for the MLTC Nations (1981–2016).
Note: Data source is ISC (2023). CN is Cree Nation, DN is Dene Nation, and FN is First Nation.

communities at both national and provincial levels.[12] The average CBWI for the nine MLTC communities is consistent with the provincial average for First Nations up until 2001, before falling below in 2006 and 2011 and then moving higher in 2016. However, the average for the top four MLTC communities has remained consistently above the provincial average and exceeded the national average on several occassions. An examination of the rate of change (figure 6.5) shows that the MLTC communities have improved at a faster rate than the provincial and national averages except for the slump in 2006.

Results for income and labour are broadly consistent with those presented by Anderson (2002) who examined changes in employment rates and family income between 1986 and 1996, but the CBW indices provide a more nuanced perspective. Overall, per capita income in the MLTC member nations increased from 1981 to 2016, although a number of communities experienced drops in 2006 and 2016. Four communities (Waterhen, English River, Canoe Lake and Mistikswan Lake) have all declined from 2001 to 2016 (figure 6.6). Several other communities experienced a temporary drop in 2006, before recovering in 2011. Labour force activity (figure 6.7), representing both the employment rate and the number of people available for work, appears variable with no clear trend.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although Meadow Lake's involvement in forestry has been successful, there have also been a number of events that could have caused its failure—the Canoe Lake protests, the forest sector crisis from 2006, relations with non-Indigenous partners, meeting expectations of member communities and contractors, obtaining forest certification, and so on. Avoiding and overcoming these events and achieving successful outcomes provides a number of lessons for other Indigenous nations, for the private sector, and for policy makers from both federal and provincial governments.

MLTC adopted and maintained a consistent economic development strategy, aimed at establishing anchor businesses in forestry as a key sector. Revenues from these businesses have not simply been returned to community services, but have also been re-invested in other businesses, by both the tribal council and member communities. MLTC and member communities appear to have been fairly successful both in identifying business opportunities and in choosing private sector partners, although there have been some failures. With this economic strategy, employment and community well-being have increased faster than the average for Saskatchewan First Nations, although this remains well behind non-Indigenous communities. This creation of wealth within communities also contributes towards greater autonomy by reducing First Nation's dependence upon government funding. While there are many indicators that this economic development strategy has been a success, we consider that there is still a need for more detailed work on employment, income and other returns, and on factors that have contributed to the creation of successful subsidiary businesses within the anchor strategy.

Partnerships and relationships have been an important characteristic of the Meadow Lake model. Government assistance was essential at the start-up stage in agreeing to transfer the mill and an FMLA, and policy appears to have been generally supportive of First Nations owned businesses (although our data is limited). However, it is the engagement of non-government stakeholders that is particularly remarkable in the Meadow Lake model. The partnership of unionized non-Indigenous workers and nine First Nations to turn around a failing government-owned sawmill is especially noteworthy. Subsequently, private sector partners have included a major pulp mill (now owned by an Asian-based firm) and shareholders in businesses in forestry, oil and gas, hospitality, and other sectors. Recognizing different interests, partners have had to develop trust and confidence in each other.

Strong professional management, by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, has contributed to providing leadership for NorSask and Mistik, to enhancing employment and career opportunities for MLTC member communities, and to ensuring relationships with non-Indigenous partners. Importantly, the companies have recruited non-Indigenous professionals to key positions, recognizing that the long exclusion of First Nations from forestry and other resource sectors has resulted in a shortage of skills and experience among members of the communities. In addition to providing contracting opportunities for small businesses (whether owned by individuals or bands), Mistik and MLTC have provided financial and management support and facilitated access to training.

The governance structure has contributed to the success of the model with strong institutions and clear distinctions between political and business roles. The chiefs-in-assembly, tribal chief and vice-chief, and the roles of councillors all provide accountability back to member communities. As Jorgenson (2007, 24) stated, "When Native Nations back up sovereignty with stable, fair, effective, and reliable governing institutions, they create an environment that is favorable to sustained economic development. In doing so, they increase their chances of improving community well-being." The distinction between the business and political roles of MLTC is consistent with the Harvard project on American Indian Economic Development (Cornell and Kalt 1992), which found that the successful American Indian reservations were those that separated their business operations from the influence of political power. Hence, rather than MLTC chiefs being responsible for managing businesses, this role has been delegated to MLTC RDI and MLTCII. In a

similar way, MLTC has delegated social programs to non-profit organizations with independent boards within the MLTC structure, while still maintaining a degree of political oversight.

Community engagement is a critical counterbalance to the separation of political and business roles. As the Canoe Lake crisis demonstrated, business management that does not pay sufficient attention to community concerns risks facing conflict. The co-management boards and other public engagement processes established by Mistik Management provide ways for community members and their chiefs to influence forest management, while reducing opportunities for undesirable political interference in matters that should be left to business managers. The MLTC experience also demonstrates that bilateral agreements between communities and businesses can be effective in ensuring effective consultation on natural resource development, and that government-mandated processes are not always necessary. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that this community engagement approach is strongest with Mistik but is not the norm for other businesses. Furthermore, as noted for Big Island Lake Cree Nation, tensions that have continued over many years are only now being resolved, demonstrating equally the usefulness of third-party forest certification systems.

The Meadow Lake model also provides options for sovereignty and autonomy. MLTC's initial engagement in the sawmill partnership was conditional upon being granted an FMLA that delegated responsibility for much of the MLTC traditional lands to Mistik Management—an action of territorial affirmation. Although Mistik is only 50% controlled by MLTC and their practices must respect provincial regulations, its management system and style effectively provide a high degree of autonomy to MLTC. Revenue, employment, and other benefits created through forestry and other businesses contribute to making the MLTC communities less dependent upon government transfers and programs, representing both economic and social autonomy. Furthermore, opportunities created by NorSask, Mistik and other businesses have enabled hundreds (if not thousands) of individuals from MLTC member communities to gain skills and expertise and build their capacity in management of natural resources and in other sectors. The participation of Mistik and NorSask in Sakâw Askiy Management could help to expand the Meadow Lake model, adapting it to the needs of a different set of First Nations and their partners.

This review of MLTC's efforts in forestry, and in other business sectors, since 1988 has sought to understand the critical elements of the process that has enabled the tribal council to effectively use their natural resources to leverage greater autonomy on their traditional lands and provide improved benefits and well-being to their population. Although the available information is incomplete, much of this does indicate that the Meadow Lake model has been successful. There have of course been challenges and failures in implementing this model, but along with successes, these provide valuable lessons for other Indigenous nations who seek to assert a greater role in managing and using the natural resources on their traditional lands. We hope that this story will enable MLTC members and leaders to appreciate the uniqueness of what they have achieved and assist other Indigenous Peoples to adapt these lessons to their own situations.

Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without the support of key individuals and organizations involved in the Meadow Lake forestry model. Chief Eric Sylvestre of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council welcomed us to the organization and the community, shared his experience and insights and provided us with access to documents and staff. Al Balisky of MLTCII, and previously manager of Mistik, co-ordinated our visit and meetings with key informants, and provided a wealth of information. We were especially lucky to be able to speak with three people who contributed to establishing the Meadow Lake forestry model and we hope that this study bears witness to the vision, commitment and perseverance of Richard Gladue, Ray Ahenakew, and Vern Bachiu. From Mistik, Roger Nesdoly, Bill Murray, Kevin Gillis and Brenda Nightingale, chair of the board, gave us their time and knowledge in addition to sharing an impressive quantity of documentation. At MLTC, Isabelle Opikokew and Christine Derocher explained the governance and institutional structures that underlie much of the success of MLTC and its economic and social programs. Blaine Holmes guided us around the NorSask Sawmill, Paul Orser of MLMP emphasized the importance of the relationships between the partners, and Erica Gladue and Shayne Gladue of MLTC Northern Trucking helped us to recognize the network of businesses that contribute to the Meadow Lake success. Looking to the past, we believe that it is important to remember the names and contributions of several people who helped lay the foundations of the Meadow Lake forestry model: Percy Durocher and

Jim Dalgleish were MTLC Chief and CEO during the initial years and the Canoe Lake crisis; Allen Brander, manager of the sawmill as it transferred from government ownership to NorSask and first CEO of the company; Ray Cariou, chairman of both NorSask and Mistik; and Ty Rutzki, Bob Stromberg and Brock Folkersen—all of whom helped build the governance and financial structures. Finally, we acknowledge the Dene and Cree people of northwest Saskatchewan and their ancestors who acted as stewards of this land over countless generations, providing the basis for everything described in this study.

NOTES

1 Natural Resource Canada. "Forest land Ownership." Accessed July 25, 2017. http://www.nrcan.gc.ca/forests/canada/ownership/17495.

2 Interviews with key informants are identified as sources in the text. However, in order to protect confidentiality, these are referred to by either an organization or a generic group.

3 See also Institute on Governance (IOG), "Defining Governance." Accessed November 5, 2017, https://iog.ca/what-is-governance/.

4 For the roles and responsibilities of the MLTC, see "Governance & Organizational Structure of MLTC," Meadow Lakes Tribal Council, https://www.mltc.ca/governance.php, accessed August 8, 2023.

5 "Governance & Organizational Structure of MLTC."

6 "About MLTC RDI," MLTC Industrial Investments LP (MLTCII), https://mltcii.com/about/rdi/

7 See "MLTC Industrial Investments LP," MLTC Industrial Investments LP, http://mltcii.com/, accessed August 8, 2023.

8 O'Meara, Diana, "Protesters want Logging Control" *Windspeaker*, 10, no. 5 (1992): 12, http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/protesters-want-logging-control-0.

9 "Prince Albert Timber Supply Area," Sakâw Askiy Management Inc. (Sakâw), http://www.sakaw.ca/.

10 Documents provided by MLTC RDI.

11 Documents provided by MLTC RDI.

12 The City of Meadow Lake follows the Saskatchewan average almost exactly.

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