



Northwest Ontario Region

Scoping Assessment Outcome Report

September 19, 2025



Introduction

To keep pace with the rapid growth and economic development in Northwest Ontario, the IESO and the rest of the Northwest Region Technical Working Group is implementing a streamlined regional planning process. Specifically, the Scoping Assessment stage, which has traditionally taken several months to complete, will now be conducted in an accelerated manner, enabling the IESO to move directly into the next phase of planning. This approach reflects feedback received through stakeholder engagement and aligns with government priorities, particularly around economic development and critical mineral mining.

Engagement continues to remain central to the IESO's planning process. We are committed to working collaboratively with Indigenous communities, municipalities, developers, and consumers, each bringing unique perspectives and expertise to shaping Ontario's energy future.

The process will be initiated with the release of this Scoping Assessment Outcome Report, which concludes that a single Integrated Regional Resource Plan (IRRP) covering the entire Northwest region will be undertaken, commencing on September 22, 2025. This decision reflects the scale, magnitude, and timing of electricity needs identified by the transmitter and other members of the regional planning technical working group.

Strategic Context and Rationale

The Northwest region is experiencing robust and urgent electricity needs, driven by:

- Mining sector growth, particularly in the Red Lake and North of Dryden areas.
- Connection requests across the region, with notable activity in the Thunder Bay area.
- Provincial supply needs, as Northern Ontario plays a growing role in meeting Ontario's electricity demand.

In response, the IESO initiated an urgent IRRP Addendum in Q3 2024 focused on the North of Dryden area which resulted in significant transmission reinforcement into the Ear Falls and Red Lake areas to support mining, economic development and community growth. The expedited transition to an IRRP for the Northwest is a continuation of this proactive planning approach, enabling faster response to emerging needs and aligning with stakeholder expectations and government objectives.

Commitment to Engagement

Engagement remains central to the IESO's planning process. We are committed to working collaboratively with Indigenous communities, municipalities, developers, and consumers, each bringing unique perspectives and expertise to shaping Ontario's energy future.

The IRRP process will continue to include:

- Webinars and targeted meetings
- Broad communications
- Ongoing opportunities for feedback and dialogue

The IESO remains committed to reconciliation and to building respectful, trust-based relationships with Indigenous communities, guided by our Indigenous Engagement Framework. Committed to

ongoing, effective dialogue with Indigenous communities will help shape long-term planning across Ontario. To raise awareness about the regional planning cycle in Northwest Ontario and provide opportunities for input, the IESO will notify and invite Indigenous communities that may be potentially impacted or may have an interest based on treaty territory, traditional territory or traditional land use to participate in engagement activities.

- Animakee Wa Zhing No. 37
- Animbiigoo Zaagi'igan Anishinaabek
- Anishinaabeg of Naongashiing (Big Island)
- Anishinabe of Wauzhushk Onigum
- Aroland
- Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation
- Bearskin Lake
- Big Grassy River (Mishkosiminiziibiing)
- Biigtigong Nishnaabeg
- Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek
- Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek
- Brunswick House First Nation
- Cat Lake
- Constance Lake
- Couchiching First Nation
- Deer Lake
- Eabametoong
- Eagle Lake
- Fort Severn
- Fort William First Nation
- Gakijiwanong Anishinaabe Nation
- Ginoogaming First Nation
- Gull Bay First Nation
- Iskatewizaagegan No. 39
- Kasabonika Lake
- Keewaywin
- Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek
- Kingfisher Lake
- Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig
- Koocheching First Nation
- Lac des Mille Lacs
- Lac Seul
- Long Lake No. 58
- Marten Falls
- McDowell Lake
- Michipicoten
- Mishkeegogamang
- Missanabie Cree
- Mitaanjigamiing First Nation
- Muskrat Dam Lake
- Naicatchewenin First Nation
- Namaygoosisagagun
- Naotkamegwanning

- Neskantaga
- Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg (Pic Mobert)
- Nibinamik
- Niisaachewan Anishinaabe Nation
- North Caribou Lake
- North Spirit Lake
- Northwest Angle No. 33
- Ojibway Nation of Saugeen
- Ojibways of Onigaming
- Pays Plat
- Pikangikum
- Poplar Hill
- Rainy River
- Red Rock Indian Band
- Sachigo Lake
- Sandy Lake
- Seine River First Nation
- Shoal Lake No. 40
- Slate Falls
- Wabaseemoong
- Wabauskang
- Wabigoon Lake
- Wapekeka
- Washagamis Bay (Obashkaandagaang)
- Wawakapewin
- Webequie
- Weenusk
- Whitesand
- Whitewater Lake
- Wunnumin Lake
- Shoal Lake No. 40
- Slate Falls

The Tribal Councils and Provincial Territorial Organization (PTO) invited to participate in engagement activities are:

- Anishinabek Nation, Union of Ontario Indians
- Chiefs of Ontario
- Grand Council Treaty #3
- Independent First Nations Alliance (IFNA)
- Keewaytinook Okimakanak/Northern Chiefs Council
- Matawa First Nations Management
- Matawa First Nations Tribal Council
- Nishnawbe Aski Nation
- Shibogama First Nations Council
- Windigo First Nations Council

The Métis communities invited to participate in engagement activities are:

- Métis Nation of Ontario
- Red Sky Independent Métis Nation

Overview of Region and Background

The Northwest region includes the districts of Kenora, Rainy River, and Thunder Bay, bounded by Lake Superior to the south, the Marathon area to the east, and the Manitoba border to the west. Planning in this region presents unique challenges due to its vast geography and resource-based industrial demand, which is sensitive to commodity prices and financing conditions.

Several recent and ongoing transmission reinforcement projects help improve supply capacity and reliability in the region:

- East-West Tie Reinforcement – Completed and in service
- Wataynikaneyap Transmission Project – Completed and in service
- Waasigan Transmission Line Project
- Phase 1: Under construction, in-service expected October 2026
 - Phase 2: Under construction, in-service expected December 2027
- Dryden-Ear Falls-Red Lake Transmission Plan – in-service date to be confirmed (2031-2033)
- Pickle Lake SS Reactor – in-service date Q4 2026

Scoping Assessment Outcome Report Details

This scoping Assessment Outcome Report is part of the Ontario Energy Board's (OEB or Board) endorsed regional planning process and sets out the planning approach to address electricity needs that have been identified in the Northwest Ontario region. The OEB started regional planning in 2011 and endorsed the Planning Process Working Group's Report to the Board in May 2013. The Board formalized the process and timelines through changes to the Transmission System Code and Distribution System Code in August 2013.

This is the third cycle of regional planning for the Northwest Ontario region, and it was initiated in summer 2025. The Needs Assessment (NA) is the first step in the regional planning process and was carried out by the Study Team led by Hydro One Networks Inc. (Hydro One). The Needs Assessment¹ was finalized on September 3, 2025. While it did not include a formal identification of specific needs, it highlighted a range of clear and emerging drivers that point to the need for further regional coordination. These include strong stakeholder and government interest in economic development particularly in the mining sector, as well as a high volume of load connection requests and inquiries. Together, these factors underscore the importance of moving the region into a comprehensive Integrated Regional Resource Plan (IRRP). The findings from the Needs Assessment served as an input to this Scoping Assessment Outcome Report.

¹ 2025 Northwest Ontario Needs Assessment, Hydro One <https://www.hydroone.com/about/corporate-information/regional-plans/north-west-ontario>

As part of the Scoping Assessment, the Study Team reviewed the nature and timing of all the known needs in the region to determine the most appropriate planning approach to address them. The planning approaches considered include:

- **An Integrated Regional Resource Plan (IRRP)** led by the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) – through which a greater range of options, including non-wires alternatives, are to be considered and/or closer coordination with communities and stakeholders is required;
- **A Regional Infrastructure Plan (RIP)** led by the transmitter – which considers more straight-forward wires only option with limited engagement; or
- **A local plan (LP)** undertaken by the transmitter and affected local distribution company (LDC) – for which no further regional coordination is required.

Conclusion

This Scoping Assessment concludes that a single IRRP covering the entire Northwest Ontario region will be undertaken, with work commencing on September 22, 2025. The IRRP is expected to be completed within an 18-month timeframe, enabling timely identification and resolution of electricity needs across the region. As technical studies and engagement progress, additional needs may be identified and incorporated. The expedited planning approach enables the IESO to respond more quickly to regional and provincial electricity needs, supporting economic development and aligning with stakeholder and government priorities.

Appendix 1 – Geographic Map of Northwest Ontario Region



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