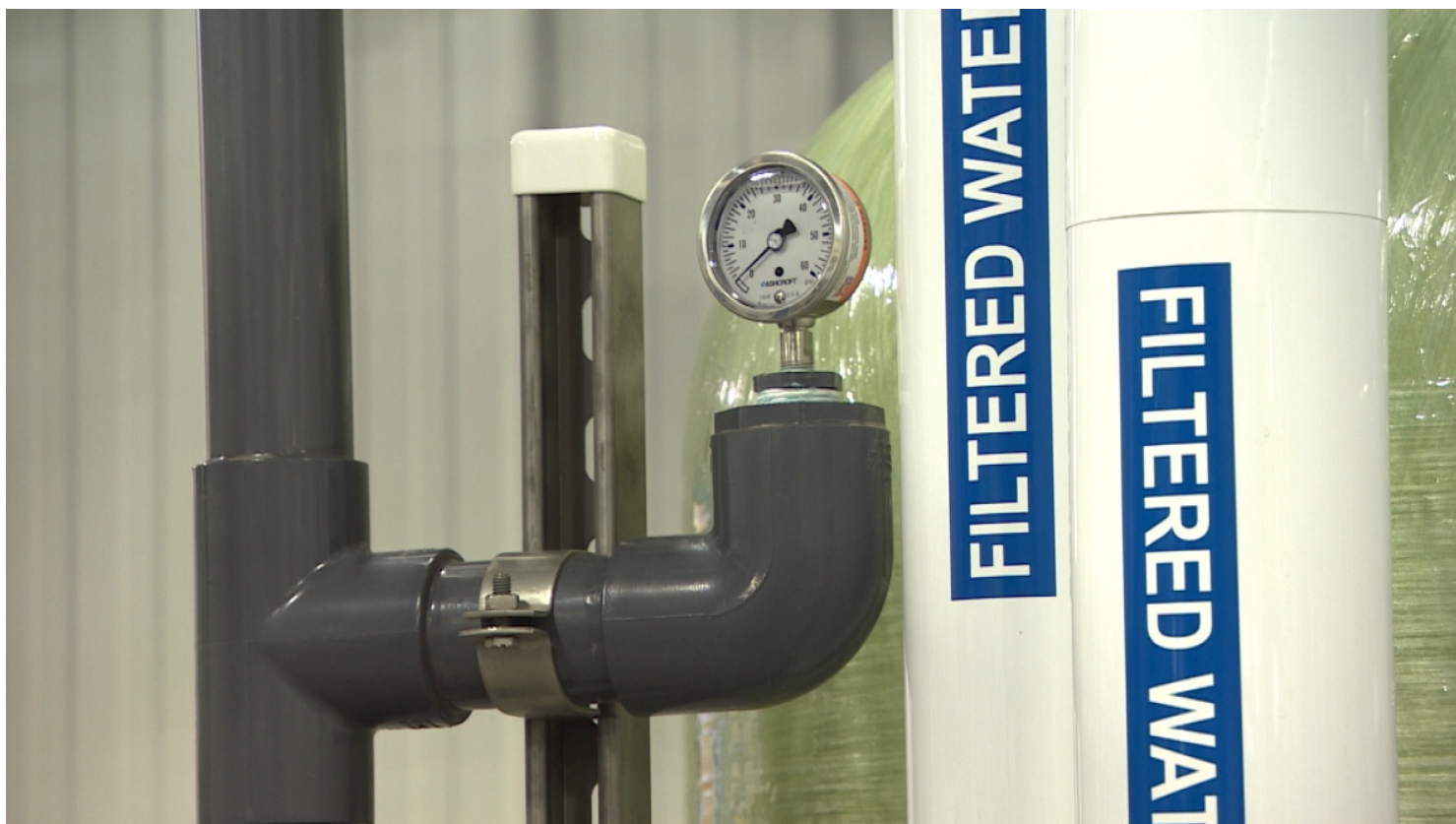


Northern Ontario First Nation now has clean drinking water after 14 years

81 long-term boil-water advisories remain in First Nation communities in Canada

Matt Prokopchuk · CBC News · Posted: Mar 07, 2018 5:44 AM ET | Last Updated: March 7



Slate Falls First Nation, about 550 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, Ont., celebrated the opening of its new water treatment plant on Tuesday. (Brett Purdy / CBC)

A First Nation in northwestern Ontario that had been under a boil-water advisory for 14 years now has clean water with the opening of a new treatment plant.

Slate Falls, about 550 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, Ont., celebrated the opening of the plant on Tuesday.

- [Northern Ontario First Nation receives \\$11.6M for safe water supply](#)
- [Bad water foils attempt to build healthy community](#)

"Very important," Slate Falls Chief Lorraine Crane said of the new facility, which will serve the community of about 300 residents. "[It means] better care, better health, clean water for our children and also for the elders."

For the past 20 years, homes and other buildings got their water from a series of pump houses, according to the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), a territorial organization that represents 49 First Nations in Ontario, including Slate Falls. None of those facilities was able to provide clean water from 2004 onward, NAN officials said.

The new plant means 'better care, better health, clean water for our children and also for the elders,' says Lorraine Crane, the chief of Slate Falls. (Brett Purdy / CBC)

That system, which took water from a nearby lake, and ran it through a filter and briefly through a chlorination system, lacked the capacity to properly rid the water of E. coli and other contaminants. The new plant effectively brings the community's water system up to modern standards.

"It's hard. We had to boil water for drinking," Crane said of how the community has lived for nearly 15 years. "Many people actually bought their water."

She said relying on bottled water for everyday use was expensive.

Slate Falls First Nation has a population of about 300 and is about 550 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, Ont. (Google)

The federal government pledged \$11.6 million for the treatment plant project in 2016, after more than a decade of efforts by community leadership in Slate Falls to secure funding. The lack of clean water has hampered plans to build more homes to help with overcrowding.

- [Canada's longest-standing First Nations boil water advisory will end in 2018, Liberals say](#)
- [Bad water: 'Third World' conditions on First Nations in Canada](#)

"I feel incredibly happy to be able to see this absolutely beautiful facility and to be here, to see the pride the community has and realize how long it's been since they've been able to turn on the taps in this community and drink the water," Indigenous Services Minister Jane Philpott said at Tuesday's opening.

Jane Philpott, Canada's minister of Indigenous services, says the federal government remains committed to its promise to end long-term boil-water advisories in First Nation communities by 2021. (Brett Purdy / CBC)

There are still 81 long-term boil-water advisories in First Nations communities in Canada.

Philpott's office pointed out that doesn't mean 81 individual communities are affected, as some have multiple advisories in place. Prior to the new treatment plant opening, Slate Falls had 11.

The federal government has pledged to end all such advisories by March 2021, a commitment that Philpott said Ottawa continues to stand by.

- **Liberals stick to First Nations water promise amid new boil-water advisories**

"We are firm in our plan to make sure every long-term water advisory for public systems like this will be lifted," she said. "We have a detailed plan in place for every remaining long-term advisory that's there."

Philpott said the recently announced 2018 budget will "speed some of them up a little bit and get the work done faster."

The budget promises an additional \$172.6 million over three years — beginning in 2018-19 — for projects to ensure First Nations have clean drinking water.

Not only will Slate Falls's new plant provide clean water, it also includes firefighting infrastructure such as water pumps and hydrants, according to Nishnawbe Aski Nation. A lack of dependable access to water and firefighting equipment has been blamed for a number of fatal fires in Indigenous communities.

- ['Chief coroner's table' struck to probe fire deaths in Ontario First Nations](#)
 - [Indigenous leaders call for coroner's inquest into First Nations fire deaths](#)
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