

Submission to the Anishinabek News – June 2011

First Nation Policing in Ontario

This is the first article in a series on First Nation policing that will appear in the Anishinabek News. Strengthening First Nation police services is a key recommendation made in the Report of the Ipperwash Inquiry, a public inquiry into events surrounding the shooting death of Dudley George by an OPP officer during a land claim occupation at Ipperwash Provincial Park. The Union of Ontario Indians has been involved in the process to implement the Report's recommendations since 2008. Read the second article in the series, Ipperwash Inquiry Report and First Nation Policing, in the next edition of Anishinabek News.

By Jim Ransom

First Nations Police Services in Ontario provides critical services within First Nation communities across the province. They are the frontline personnel in keeping the peace, in ensuring public safety and health, first responders to domestic disputes, and the community's point of contact with the Ontario Provincial Police.

First Nations Police Services has gone through over 50 years of change that has defined where it is at today. Up through the 1950s, policing in First Nations communities was a federal responsibility so the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) provided policing services. Then in the 1960s, the RCMP withdrew from regular policing in First Nations in Ontario.

In 1971, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development issued its first major First Nation policing policy called Circular 55. This policy defined how policing would occur in First Nations communities and opened the door to First Nations taking over this responsibility. It allowed for special constables on reserves who could police band by-laws. However, First Nations Police Services were viewed as an add-on and not a replacement for senior police in the local area.

In 1991, the First Nations Policing Policy transferred the responsibility for First Nation policing from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to the Aboriginal Policing Directorate under the Solicitor General of Canada. It allowed for either self-administered First Nation police services or community tripartite agreements. It also provided cost-sharing between the federal and provincial governments to cover the budgets for First Nations Police Services.

Today, First Nation policing in Ontario is unique. Ontario is one of two provinces (Quebec is the other) in which the First Nations themselves have chosen to take on the responsibility for policing their communities. There are nine self-administered policing service agreements in Ontario involving 94 First Nations communities. They include four regional police services (Nishnawbe-Aski, Treaty Three, Anishnabek, United Chiefs and Councils of Manitoulin) and five individual First Nations police services (Akwesasne, Lac Seul, Rama, Six Nations, and Wikwemikong).

The Ontario First Nations Policing Agreement, where the Ontario Provincial Police provide administrative support, coordination of responsibilities and consultation, currently has some 70-plus officers and 19 First Nations under its administration. Ninety-six percent of the on-reserve population and all but 17 of the 133 First Nations communities in Ontario are covered by First Nations Policing Policy agreements. The 17 remaining First Nations communities are exploring options for addressing their police services needs.