

Uashkamitatau Nutshimit:

Let's clean up
the land

Abandoned mine
site restoration
and circuit rider
training



IDDPNQL
FNQLSDI



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The initiative in brief

Since 2018, the Innu Nation and the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Sustainable Development Institute (FNQLSDI) have been working on an initiative to dismantle abandoned sites on Nitassinan. Together, our team and the First Nations of Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam, Matimekush-Lac John, Ekuanitshit, Pessamit, Nutashkuan, and Essipit have cleaned up 38 sites in Nutshimit.

More than 200 community members have received circuit rider training on mines and contamination as part of the initiative.

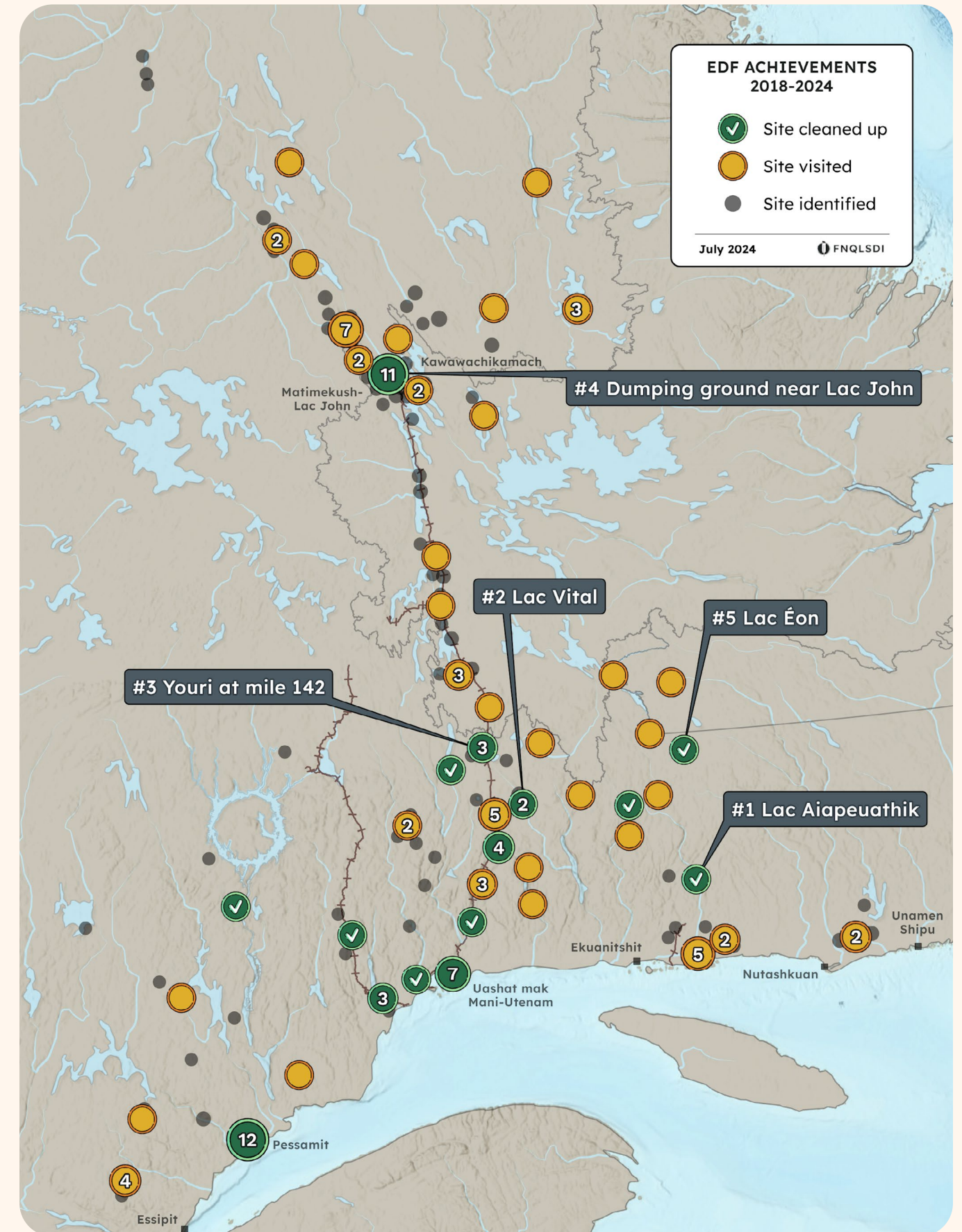
Results and key achievements

In total:

196 Abandoned sites have been identified by community land users

108 Sites have been visited

38 Sites have been cleaned up by our field teams



Here are five examples of site dismantling projects with major logistical challenges:

Lac Aiapeuathik

Former mineral exploration camp

ESTIMATED TOTAL :

5.39 tonnes of waste, including fifty 45-gallon drums, twelve of which were full of oil

Lac Aiapeuathik is located more than 70 kilometres north of Havre-Saint-Pierre and can only be reached by aircraft or snowmobile. It was the first site to be cleaned up in 2019 with the Ekuanitshit community. Helicopters flew the waste in slings 15 kilometres from the site to the Romaine road, then trucks transported it to Havre-Saint-Pierre and Sept-Îles.



Lac Vital

Former outfitter

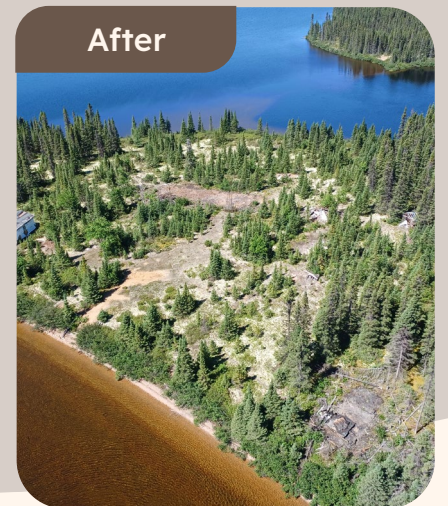
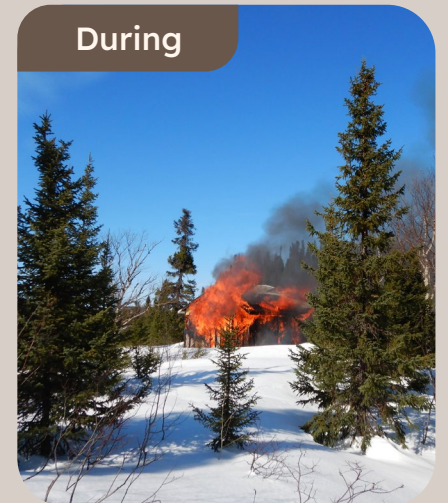
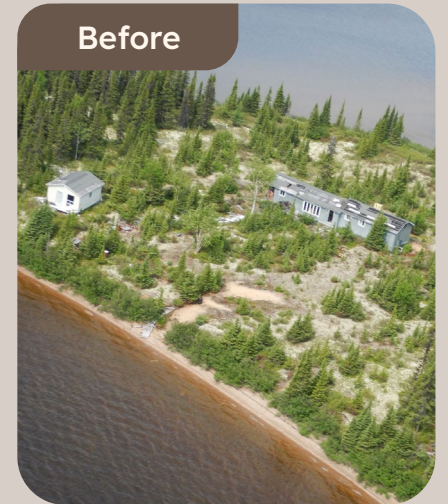
TOTAL :

10.65 tonnes of waste removed from the site

Lac Vital is located in a remote area more than 150 kilometres north of Sept-Îles and is only accessible by train, mountain bike, aircraft, or boat. The site was cleaned up in three stages with work teams from the Uashat mak Mani-Utenam community. The dismantling started in 2020 and was completed in 2022. The waste was flown by helicopter in slings from Lac Vital to mile 102.5 and then shipped south on a Rio Tinto IOC (QNS&L) train.

I enjoyed going out into the woods, shovelling snow, and burning down an old building. I'd love to do it again with a good team like the one I had out in the field.

Bradley McKenzie – site dismantling technician and member of the Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam community



Youri at mile 142

Former outfitter

ESTIMATED TOTAL :

Ten 40-yard containers and multiple wrecked vehicles, including a bus and heavy machinery (loader)

This site is located more than 225 kilometres north of Sept-Îles and can only be reached by rail or air. The work was carried out in 2021 by Nishk Construction and members of the Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam community, who used a 27-tonne excavator and 30-tonne truck to clean up the site. The heavy machinery was brought to the site on an IOC/QNS&L work train, which also shipped the waste to Sept-Îles for treatment.



After

Dumping ground near Lac John

Former wrecking yard

TOTAL :

72 tonnes of waste treated off-site and 120 tires removed

This wrecking yard on the outskirts of the Matimekush-Lac John community was cleaned up in 2023. Transport Montagnais, a company owned by the Innu Nation of Matimekush-Lac John Council, provided our team with heavy machinery, containers, and transportation. The waste was then received and treated at Tricomm, a recycling centre jointly managed by the communities of Matimekush-Lac John and Kawawachikamach and the town of Schefferville.



Before



During





Lac Éon

Former Transport Canada site

TOTAL :
15.25 tonnes of waste removed from the site

This site is located more than 180 kilometres north of Havre-Saint-Pierre and is only accessible by aircraft or snowmobile. It was cleaned up in 2023, in partnership with the Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam and Nutashkuan communities. Staff from Nishk Construction also helped with the work. The team was split into two groups, one to clean up the Lac Éon site and the other to sort the waste at Hydro-Québec’s Mista camp. Innuoptères staff flew the waste in slings from the site to the camp by helicopter. Once full, the containers were transported from the Mista camp to AIM Recycling in Sept-Îles. The buildings could not be dismantled due to asbestos, so they were left on site.



For the 38 sites combined, we’ve removed a total of:

228,75 Tonnes and **twenty to twenty-five** 40-yard containers of debris

+ de 75 Wrecked vehicles of all kinds

Several hundred 45-gallon drums, many of them still full



Thanks to funding from the Environmental Damages Fund (EDF), we were also able to develop a circuit rider training program in mines, environmental contamination, and site preparation.



AU TOTAL :

- **41** First Nations communities in Quebec have received training on either topic (mines or environmental contamination)
- **200+** community members have been trained
- **8** tools and courses have been developed
- **5** training, discussion and networking events have been held
- **13** support projects have been launched (documentary research and synthesis, consultation meetings, etc.)
- **6** site preparation courses have been delivered

The results show that the original objectives have been achieved.

These were:

- 1- Provide tailored training to First Nations communities
- 2- Map abandoned sites on First Nations ancestral lands
- 3- Dismantle the sites

Procurement policy

Priority to First Nations

The initiative's success depends on Indigenous expertise. Our land experts and workers come from the communities we work with. Local First Nations contractors are given priority in the awarding of contracts. Our teams also give priority to partner-affiliated transportation companies, hotels, caterers, translators, room and equipment rentals, and door prizes from local businesses.

IN TOTAL :

- 40+** First Nations people have been hired for field work
- 50+** contracts have been awarded to Indigenous companies and organizations

I loved working on the project and the experience I had! I think it's good for the land and the environment. It sets a good example for people and inspires greater respect for the land. I'll definitely continue if I get the chance.

Billy Jean-Pierre – site dismantling technician and member of the Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam



Tshinashkumitnan

We'd like to extend our sincere thanks to:

The families who welcomed us onto their land

The Shaputuan Museum and the Innu Takuaikan Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam (ITUM) for technical services

The land and resources office in Pessamit

The Innu Nation of Matimekush-Lac John Council (NIMLJ)

The Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach

The Innu of Ekuanitshit Council

The Innu of Essipit First Nation Council

The Innu of Nutashkuan Council

The Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam regional adult education centre (CRÉA)

Rio Tinto IOC and QNS&L¹

Innuoptères

The land experts and community workers

Nishk Construction

UANAN Experts Conseils

Terrassement Katekass

The Tricomm recycling centre

The hotels in each community: Hôtel Innutel – Rodeway Inn (Schefferville); Vacances Essipit (Essipit); Quality Inn (Sept-Îles)

The caterers and cooks in each community

The Elders who provided simultaneous interpreting

The community halls: Maison de la culture Innue (Ekuanitshit); the Shaputuan Museum (Uashat); business centre (Pessamit); former community hall and Kanatamat school (Matimekush-Lac John)

All the small and large businesses that provided door prizes

The Mushuau-nipi corporation

The City of Sept-Îles

Hydro-Québec

Benefits beyond the numbers

Environment

From an environmental perspective, the initiative's benefits are enormous. Many hectares of land and rivers (such as the Moisie) have been preserved, awareness of the impact of waste has been raised, and the families who use the land have become more alert. These are all examples of the initiative's success.

Culture

Cultural preservation is an important part of the initiative. Visits to Nutshimit by young and not-so-young people have promoted the sharing of traditional knowledge and know-how. Land clean-ups have helped to reclaim many culturally important sites and preserve resources that are vital to First Nations. The promotion of jobs combining culture and the environment has also been a major success of the initiative.

Economy

Economic benefits are measured in terms of jobs created, contracts awarded, and community members trained. They also come in the form of costly environmental incident and disaster prevention, tools that all communities can use, and in-kind contributions from private partners.



¹ Rio Tinto won the Mining Association of Canada's 2024 Towards Sustainable Mining Environmental Excellence Award for its contribution to the initiative.



Overcoming major challenges

Every land-based initiative has its challenges. In the six years we've been cleaning up abandoned mine sites, our team has had to be creative, flexible, patient, and resourceful. We've faced major logistical challenges since most of the sites are in remote areas with no road access, infrastructure, services, or electricity. The initiative has moved forward despite uncontrollable government delays, multiple weather hazards, forest fires the likes of which we've never seen in Quebec, and the global COVID-19 pandemic. Our team is particularly proud to have completed these clean-ups under the very special circumstances of the past six years.



Funding

The FNQLSDI received \$1.6 million in funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada's Environmental Damages Fund (EDF). The money comes from the fine imposed on Cliffs Natural Resources in 2015 for violations on Innu land (Nitassinan), the area targeted by the initiative.

Recommendations :

Recognizing the role of First Nations in the EDF

First Nations have a key role to play in the EDF process. In administering this fund, the federal government must recognize the importance of Indigenous expertise in prevention, monitoring, and land restoration.

The role of First Nations

The EDF receives remittances for violations committed by companies on First Nations' ancestral lands.

First Nations should:

- Have priority access to these funds
- Be part of the EDF's governance
- Determine who receives funding for future projects

Funding approach

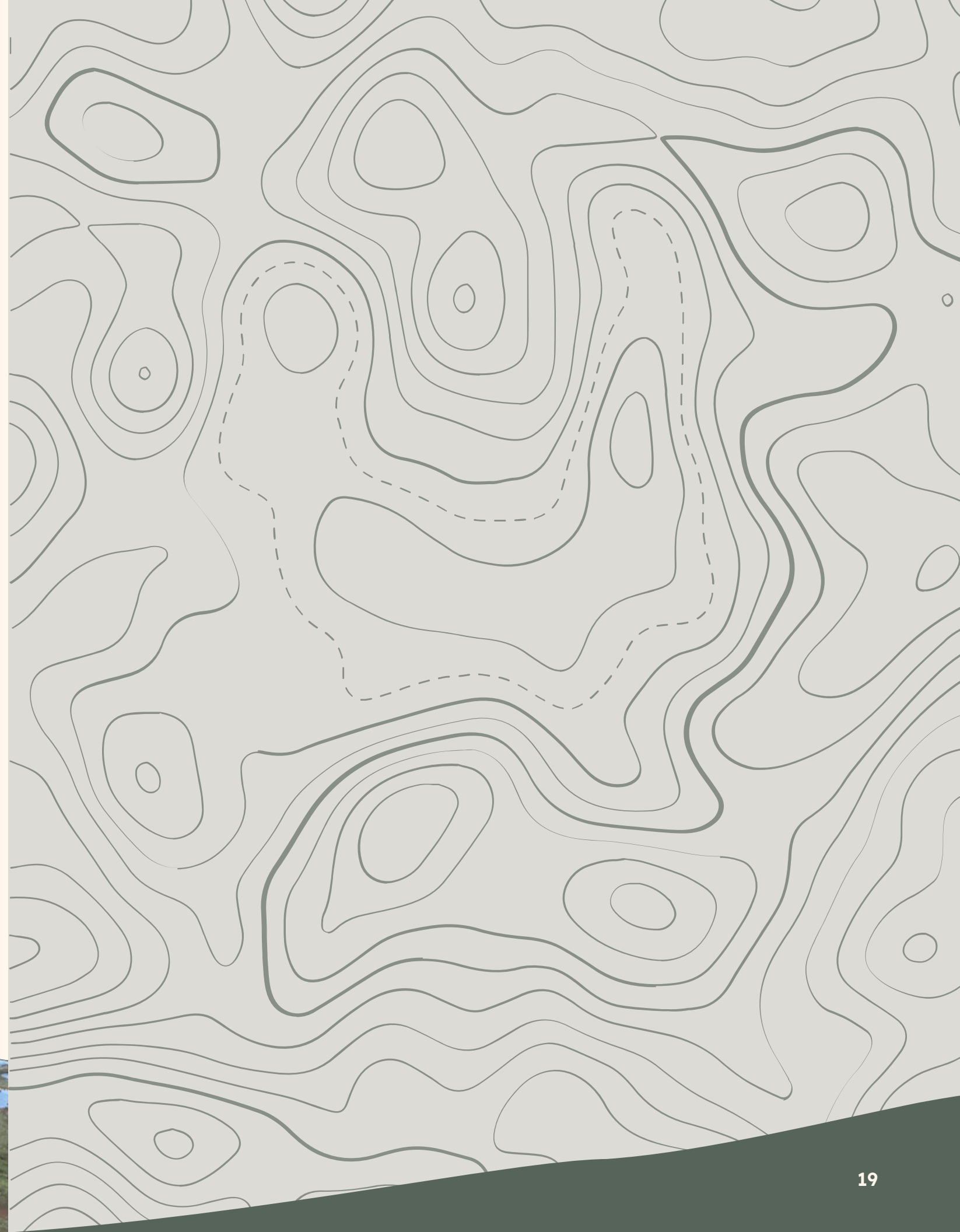
Other initiatives should adopt the funding approach used for the circuit training and site restoration initiative, where funds from fines go directly to projects run by First Nations without a competitive bidding process

Continuing the work

The work on Nitassinan is not finished. More than 100 sites remain to be cleaned up. The EDF must ensure that we can clean up those sites in the future.

I'd seen abandoned sites in the past and wondered how we could clean them up. Then the FNQLSDI came up with the initiative to restore them, which really helped us, and I loved how professional their team was. I would 200% keep the initiative going and do 10 times more.

Gloria Vollant – Innu-aitun consultant for ITUM and member of the Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam community





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