

Chief Sellars shares perspective on working with industry while respecting culture and tradition

“It’s exciting times to be a First Nation. If you’re able to get the right team under you, you can do some positive things—not only for your own community but also the surrounding community. That’s what fires me up every day.”



**Chief Willie Sellars,
Williams Lake First Nation (WLFN) in British Columbia**

WLFN is one of many First Nations participating in upgrading Enbridge’s T-South natural gas transmission system. The WLFN owns and operates businesses in petroleum services, forestry, professional services, ranching, land development and retail sales. Recently, Ivana Suta, Strategist, Indigenous Policy, had an opportunity to sit down with Chief Sellars to gain his perspective on the Band’s work with Enbridge and how industry and First Nations can work to align interests and economic engagement.



**Ivana Suta,
Strategist,
Indigenous Policy**

Suta: How would you describe the relationship between Enbridge and Williams Lake First Nation and how it’s evolved over the years?

Chief Sellars: We have a historical agreement with Enbridge. When we – seven First Nation communities – requested a meeting, Enbridge came to the table right away. We looked at projects in the different territories and the (preventative maintenance) digs in the region. It’s evolved into major projects like Soda Creek and the compressor station upgrade in our territory. We now have a First Nation liaison working out of the project office and getting boots on the ground for construction and archaeology, medics and security.

The spin-offs of these projects have been really cool to see, especially in a small town like ours which is very dependent on mining, forestry and resource extraction. If we can capitalize on these and other opportunities, it’s great for our membership and it’s great for the region.

Suta: How can proponents like Enbridge more closely align its projects with the environmental, social and economic priorities and goals of Indigenous communities?

Chief Sellars: For industry, it’s always go-go, the price is high, and you’re rewarded for getting things done in a timely manner. But what we all look at as leaders is having a healthy community. So, it’s about finding that balance, making sure people go to work every day and have an opportunity to provide for their families but also keeping in mind the cultural, ceremonial and traditional components of our way of life.

For example, when we opened the compressor station upgrade at 150 Mile House with Enbridge, we made sure our traditional coordinator and an Elder were there. We blessed the grounds and started the project off in a good way by praying and singing. It’s about introducing workers to that way of life so they can understand and hopefully respect what we’re doing.

Suta: Where do you see opportunities for Indigenous communities and the corporate sector to advance reconciliation?

Chief Sellars: Industry needs to continue the dialogue and get out into communities. I’m a big supporter of education – cultural sensitivity or Indigenous awareness training that will help industry leaders have a better understanding of what First Nations communities are going through.

I’ll go back to the compression station upgrade – Enbridge was awesome. We were able to put together opportunities for different partners and get this First Nations liaison position. This brings an educated Band member back to work for the community part-time and that individual starts to believe in the vision of the Williams Lake First Nation and all the exciting things we’re doing.

Now that individual is applying for higher level positions and with her education and job experience, it makes sense. That’s something Enbridge should be proud of – giving communities the opportunity to get these educated Band members home and building capacity in the nation. That’s Enbridge embracing reconciliation and the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in First Nations communities.

That’s a good legacy to leave behind after this project is done.

To read the full interview with Chief Sellars please visit [enbridge.com](https://www.enbridge.com).