

November 13, 2023

CASE STUDY: CLEARFORD'S SUCCESS IN ONTARIO'S LAST FRONTIER, PICKLE LAKE

INTRODUCTION

The Township of Pickle Lake (the Township) lies within the remote landscapes of northern Ontario, nestled within wilderness and close-knit communities. This scenic locale, also known as Ontario's Last Frontier, is approximately 540 kilometers north of Thunder Bay and has been facing an ongoing challenge in sustaining in-house management of its essential water and wastewater operations. Continuing the path to provide safe drinking water and environmental protection across Ontario, Clearford (the Company), a renowned player in the water industry, was quick to answer the call for support in managing these critical services in a safe and reliable way. Clearford met virtually with the management team in Pickle Lake and together devised a comprehensive solution to secure the operation of Pickle Lake's water and wastewater treatment systems.



PICTURED 1: PICKLE LAKE WATERFRONT

Ottawa

Hamilton

Samia

Toronto

OPERATIONAL PRECARITY

Originally known for its gold mining, Pickle Lake is the most northerly community in Ontario that has year-round access by road. However, it is no secret that the region's geographical remoteness presents its own set of unique challenges that have deterred some water operators from committing long-term to the management of the Township's water and wastewater systems. The struggle to retain skilled operators has resulted in high turnover rates, leading to a precarious operations situation.



PICTURED 2: WATER TOWER FOR THE PICKLE LAKE TOWNSHIP

Clearford's team in Thunder Bay was perceptive about the water challenge this small town of approximately 400 people was facing. An initial dialogue between Clearford and Town Council took place to thoroughly understand the Township's circumstances and how Clearford and the Township could work together to tailor a viable solution to meet their operational needs. Having an existing operations hub in Thunder Bay, Clearford was able to immediately extend on-site operations support to Pickle Lake.

With operator training at the forefront of this tailored plan, Clearford stationed an on-site experienced operator to temporarily guide and educate the Township's Operators-in-Training (OIT's) on industry best practices in managing the systems. During the training phase, one of the newly hired OIT's opted to resign, citing the familiar reason of geographical isolation. As a result, roles quickly reversed and Clearford shifted from a support role to the primary on-site operator, now with support from the Township's remaining OIT.

SECURING THE FUTURE OF PICKLE LAKE

Leaning on its extended in-house operations, engineering, and compliance support staff in eastern and western Ontario, Clearford successfully developed a long-term, 5-year operations plan that outlined a solid rotational schedule to ensure consistent management of the treatment systems. This included supervision from an Overall Responsible Operator (ORO), management of the Township's Drinking Water Quality Management Standard (DWQMS), heavy compliance support, and a full-time operator dedicating 40 hours weekly to daily operations, a rarity in the industry. As Lynda Colby, Municipal Clerk for Pickle Lake, explained:

"Clearford's flexibility and readiness to work in such an isolated setting reflects their commitment to going the extra mile for their clients. Their reliability has been pivotal in these challenging times and without this partnership, we'd be uncertain about the future of our operations."



PICTURED 3: MEASURING THE CLARIFIER
SLUDGE DEPTH

NAVIGATING REMOTE OPERATIONS IN A MUNICIPALITY

Alongside the challenges of water operator retention, managing a Municipal system poses its own obstacles. Pickle Lake's project marked Clearford's first municipal water system contract, and navigating these uncharted waters required a collaborative effort and taking a closer look into our operators' experience with municipal treatment plants.

"Drawing on my own experience with municipal operations, I enjoy the opportunity to work with new operators – whether new to the industry or new to Clearford. Training isn't just about skills; it's about showing the ropes, sharing the passion, and ultimately, helping them see the real value in what they do," said James Wheatley, Operator and Compliance Coordinator at Clearford.

Speed and precision were essential when addressing the imminent water and wastewater challenges in Pickle Lake. Strong levels of interdepartmental communication helped streamline the process of task delegation among Clearford's specialized teams.

The Compliance team reached out to its established network at the Ministry of Health which accelerated Clearford's understanding of what needed to be accomplished to operate the Pickle Lake systems: acquiring registrations, obtaining proper Environmental Compliance Approvals, fulfilling DWQMS requirements, and other various essential tasks.

"When we take on a project, it's an all-hands-on-deck approach. We dig deep with our due diligence, resolving necessary issues and getting ahead of potential challenges," said Krystal Lewis, Operations Service Manager at Clearford. "This allows our clients to get a head start on our value-added services, such as engineering upgrades, to make their systems even better."



PICTURED 4: PICKLE LAKE WATER TREATMENT PLANT

FROM PROVISIONAL TO PERMANENT

What initially began as a provisional solution quickly evolved into a sustained and mutually beneficial partnership between Clearford and Pickle Lake. Clearford's unwavering presence not only solidified an uninterrupted management of the water and wastewater systems but secured the Township's operations for the coming years.

Although far, there are many reasons beyond water operations to venture into the northern communities of Ontario.

"Up here in Pickle Lake, it's all about tranquility and togetherness. The peace found within the incredible wilderness, fishing, and hunting is balanced with community events that bring everyone together," said Tyler Foote, Operator and Construction Supervisor at Clearford.



PICTURED 5: NORTHERN LIGHTS IN PICKLE LAKE

CONCLUSION

The Company's effective management of Pickle Lake's water and wastewater systems not only provided the Township reliable access to clean drinking water, but also set new standards for delivering top-notch solutions, even in the most demanding environments.

Clearford began its journey into remote operations in April 2021 with a [project situated in the Yukon](#) and since then, has continued to support Northern communities and remote mining sites in achieving their water-related objectives. The expansion of its municipal and remote water and wastewater portfolio further solidifies Clearford's capacity to be your preferred water operator.

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