

Northern Threads Magazine

Our Northern Stories Woven Together

Est. 2025



From the Editor...



They say March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb, but here in Northern Ontario, that “lion” seems to have a lot of extra roar this year. Between record-breaking snowstorms in Sudbury and the Sault, and the rare “thunder snow” shaking our windows, it’s been a wild ride.

But as the days stretch out, the light is changing. We’re trading the glow of the furnace for the shimmer of the Northern Lights, which are hitting a decade-high peak this season. In this issue, we’re looking past the snowbanks to the things that ground us: the ancient fossils at Kakabeka Falls, the return of the Northlander rail, and the local makers redefining our style.

Winter isn’t giving up without a fight, but spring is whispered in every thawing trail. Stay warm, stay curious, and let’s get ready for the green to return.

Event Calendar...

Jesus Christ Superstar
April 3, 2026 7:30 pm - 9:30 pm
Magnus Theatre
10 Algoma St. S. Thunder Bay ON

Hogan’s Homestead Maple Weekend
April 4th - April 5th, 2026
Saturday 10:00am - 4:00pm
Sunday 10:00am - 4:00pm
1340 Great Northern Road
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario

Paint Social
April 3, 2026 7PM-9PM
Nori Gallery 117 Cedar St.
Sudbury, Ontario Canada

Brass Band Concert Salvation Army Band
April 17, 2026 7PM
Trinity United Church
111 MCINTYRE ST. EAST
North Bay, ON

Hockey Mining Cup
April 17-19, 2026
Sportsplex Arena
Timmins, Ontario

The Great Whiteout of ‘26: Inside the Record-Breaking Storm that Buried the North

by KARRIE O’CONNOR

Did you survive the “Great Whiteout”?

If you live anywhere between Kenora and North Bay, chances are you spent the last week digging your way out of a literal mountain of snow. We’ve all seen Northern Ontario winters before, but the storm that hit us between March 16th and 18th, 2026, was something else entirely.

They’re calling it “Winter Storm Iona” in the media, but around here, we just call it the week the world stopped. From the record-breaking drifts in Sault Ste. Marie to the eerie “thunder snow” over Sudbury, this wasn’t just a storm, it was a historic event that will be talked about at Tim Hortons for decades.

Grab a hot coffee, settle in, and let’s look back at the chaos, the science, and the incredible community spirit that defined the Great Whiteout of ‘26.

The Numbers: A Record-Breaking Dump

We knew it was coming, but nobody expected this. When the clouds finally parted on the 19th, the stats were staggering.

Sault Ste. Marie took the biggest hit, clocking in at a massive 55cm of fresh powder in just under 48 hours. To put that in perspective, that’s nearly two feet of snow falling faster than the plows could even clear a single lane.

Sudbury wasn’t far behind, measuring 42cm at the airport, though drifts in the South End were reported to be much higher. North Bay, Timmins, and even parts of the Muskoka region saw totals that shattered records dating back to the late 1970s.

Why Was This Storm So Mean?

You might be wondering: “Penny, we get snow every March. Why was this one so different?”

It all comes down to the science of atmospheric pressure. Meteorologists watched as the storm “bombed out” over the Great Lakes. The system intensified at a terrifying rate, with the central pressure dropping from 983 millibars over Michigan to a bone-chilling 944 millibars by the time it crossed into Quebec.

In weather-speak, that’s a “Bomb Cyclone.” A drop that sharp creates high-velocity winds that turn a regular snowfall into a blinding, life-threatening blizzard. We weren’t just dealing with falling snow; we were dealing with 90km/h gusts that created zero-visibility conditions in seconds.

The “Thunder Snow” Phenomenon

If you were awake at 3:00 AM on the 17th in Greater Sudbury, you probably heard it.

It started with a flash of eerie, blue-tinted light, followed by a low, muffled rumble. No, it wasn’t a transformer blowing up (though many of those did, too). It was Thunder Snow.

Thunder snow is a rare meteorological treat. It happens when there is a strong upward push of air (convection) within a winter storm. Because the snow is so dense, it actually muffles the sound of the thunder, making it sound more like a deep “thump” than a sharp “crack.”

Seeing lightning while standing in a blizzard is a surreal experience that many Northerners got to check off their bucket list last week. It added a cinematic, almost apocalyptic feel to the already intense whiteout.

The Great Lockdown: Highways 17, 144, and 11

For two days, Northern Ontario became a series of isolated islands.

The Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) had no choice but to shut down our lifelines. Highway 17: the Trans-Canada: was closed from the Sault all the way to Thunder Bay. If you’ve ever driven that stretch in the winter, you know how dangerous it is on a good day. In the middle of Iona, it was impassable.

Highway 144 and Highway 11 followed suit shortly after.

Hundreds of travelers were stranded at truck stops and motels. In towns like Wawa and White River, the local arenas were opened as emergency shelters. It’s a stark reminder of how vulnerable our infrastructure is when the weather truly turns. When the highways close, the North stops.

Snowblower Solidarity: The Human Story

Despite the power outages (at one point, over 100,000 people across the Great Lakes region were in the dark), the “Northern Spirit” was on full display.

I saw neighbors in Sudbury using their industrial-sized snowblowers to clear three or four driveways on their block just because they could. I heard stories from the Sault of teenagers delivering groceries on snowmobiles to seniors who couldn’t get their doors open.

This is what makes Northern Ontario special. We don’t wait for the city to save us; we grab a shovel and help the person next door.

Lessons Learned for Next Time

While we’re all enjoying the melt (and the massive puddles that come with it), there are some things you should do to prep for the next big one. Because let’s face it: it’s Northern Ontario. It will happen again.

Check Your Emergency Kit: Do you have three days of water and non-perishable food?
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Update Your Tech: Make sure your portable power banks are charged.

Stay Informed: Keep an eye on our Spotlight section for local updates and safety tips.

Community Connection: Make sure you have the phone numbers of your immediate neighbors.

What's Next for the North?

As we head into the final weeks of March, the focus shifts from shoveling to flooding. All that snow has to go somewhere! The massive accumulation in the bush means our rivers and lakes are going to be rising fast.

We'll be keeping a close eye on the spring run-off and providing updates on any potential flood risks for the Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie watersheds.

Did you take any incredible photos or videos of the thunder snow or the massive drifts at your house? We want to see them! Reach out to us via our Contact Page or tag us on social media. Your photo might even end up in our next print issue.

Stay safe, stay warm, and maybe keep the shovel handy for just a couple more weeks: just in case!



Just one of the many photos shared in the aftermath of the monumental snowstorm that crippled cities in the North like Sudbury. We are hearing so many good news stories about neighbours helping neighbours and community coming together. If you have one sto share please contact us and we will do our best to make sure your voice is heard!

Message us at:
info@northernthreadsmagazine.ca

All Aboard the Northlander:
What the \$138 Million Rail Expansion Actually Means for Us

by KARRIE O'CONNOR

It's finally happening! If you've lived in Northern Ontario for more than a minute, you know the struggle of getting "down south" without a car. For over a decade, we've been relying on long bus rides or pricey flights just to see family, get to a medical appointment, or catch a Jays game.

But the wait is almost over. The "Big Red" engine is revving up again, and the latest news is a total game-changer for our region.

The Ontario government just dropped a massive \$138 million to buy a 200km stretch of track between North Bay and Washago from CN. This isn't just some boring corporate paperwork: it's the final piece of the puzzle to bring the Northlander back to life!

Why This \$138 Million Purchase is a Big Deal

You might be wondering: why did we need to buy the tracks? Couldn't we just share?

In the rail world, owning the tracks is everything. Before this purchase, passenger trains often had to "pull over" and wait for massive freight trains to pass. That meant delays, unpredictable schedules, and a lot of frustration for passengers.

By owning the 200km corridor between North Bay and Washago, Ontario Northland now has way more control over the schedule. This means when the Northlander officially launches later this year, it can actually run on time. It's about reliability. It's about making sure you actually make it to your 10:00 AM appointment in Toronto without having to leave two days early!

The Return of a Legend: Where is it Going?

The new and improved Northlander isn't just a nostalgia trip. It's a 740-kilometer lifeline connecting the North to the South. Here is what the route looks like:

The Hubs: Toronto (Union Station) to Timmins.

The Connection: A dedicated rail link from Cochrane to connect with the Polar Bear Express.

The 16 Stops: We're talking North Bay, Huntsville, Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Temiskaming Shores, Kirkland Lake, and more.

Whether you're in the Tri-Towns or hanging out in the Nickel City and catching a connection, this rail line stitches our communities back together. Check out our Spotlight section to see how local businesses in these stop-towns are already prepping for the influx of visitors!

What's it Like Inside? (Hint: It's Not Your Grandpa's Train)

Forget everything you remember about the old

rail cars from 2012. The new trainsets: the first of which arrived right here in January 2026: are built for the modern Northerner.

We're talking:

Full Wi-Fi Connectivity: You can actually get work done (or binge your favorite show) while crossing the Muskoka region.

Charging Ports: No more "low battery" anxiety. Every seat is geared up.

Accessible Amenities: These trains are designed to be inclusive, with spacious seating and accessible washrooms.

Food Options: Ontario Northland is even working on menus that include gluten-free and vegetarian options.

Imagine sitting back with a coffee, looking out at the rugged beauty of the Shield, and not having to worry about black ice on Highway 11. That's the dream, right?

Connectivity: It's More Than Just a Ride

At Northern Threads Magazine, we're all about the stories of the people who live here. For us, this rail expansion is about more than just steel and engines. It's about equity.

1. Healthcare Access: Let's be real: specialized healthcare is often concentrated in the south. For seniors or those with chronic illnesses in Northern Ontario, driving six hours to Toronto in a blizzard is dangerous and exhausting. The Northlander provides a safe, climate-controlled way to get to those vital appointments.

2. Education for our Youth: Think about the students at Nipissing, Laurentian, or Boréal. Having a reliable train means they can head home for the weekend or for the holidays without stressing about car maintenance or bus schedules. It keeps our families connected.

3. Economic Growth: When it's easier to get here, more people come. We're talking about a boost for our local hotels, restaurants, and shops. If you're a local business owner looking to get featured as we gear up for the rail launch, head over to our Contact Us page. We want to hear how you're getting ready!

Safety First: Beating the "National Security" Highway

We've all seen the headlines. Highway 11 and Highway 17 can be brutal. Between the transport trucks and the lake-effect snow, winter driving in the North is no joke.

By moving more people onto the rails, we're taking cars off the road. It's a safer alternative that saves lives. Many of our local mayors have been calling for "National Security" status for our highways because they are so critical: and so dangerous. The Northlander is the pressure valve we've been waiting for.

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What Happens Next?

Right now, we are in the “Testing and Commissioning” phase. You might see the new trainsets moving along the tracks over the next few months. They aren’t taking passengers just yet: they’re making sure everything is perfect for the full launch later in 2026.

Ontario Northland is currently finalizing the service schedules and ticket pricing. They’ve promised to keep it affordable because they know this isn’t a luxury: it’s a necessity.

Want to stay in the loop?

- Keep an eye on our Directory for travel services.
- Follow the official Ontario Northland updates for the exact launch date.

Your Turn: Are You Ready to Ride?

We want to know what you think! Does the return of the Northlander change your travel plans for next winter? Are you excited to skip the drive through the “Cochrane to North Bay” stretch and just relax in a train car?

Here’s what you can do right now:

- Share this post:** Let your friends know the \$138M track deal is done!
- Plan ahead:** Start thinking about that Toronto weekend trip for late 2026.

The North is changing, and for once, it feels like the distance between us and the rest of the province is getting just a little bit smaller. It’s a huge win for regional connectivity, and we can’t wait to see you on the platform.

See you on the rails!



Interior seats in a new Ontario Northland Northlander train car. Photo Credit Ontario Northland.

Northern Vibes: Your Guide to the Hottest Spring and Summer Festivals of 2026

by KARRIE O’CONNOR

Are you tired of the snow yet? We know, we know: March in Northern Ontario is a bit of a gamble. One day you’re looking for your sunglasses, and the next, you’re digging your car out of a drift that’s taller than you are. But here at Northern Threads Magazine, we have a secret to getting through the tail end of winter: planning for the sun.

Spring is officially on the horizon, and with it comes the absolute best part of living in the North: festival season! 2026 is shaping up to be a legendary year for live music, community art, and those long, sun-drenched weekends

that make the winter struggle totally worth it.

It’s time to start mapping out your road trips. Grab your calendar, clear your schedule, and let’s dive into the must-attend events for spring and summer 2026!

The Legend Continues: Northern Lights Festival Boréal (Sudbury)
When: July 10-12, 2026
Where: Bell Park, Sudbury

Can you believe it? The Northern Lights Festival Boréal (NLFB) is hitting its 55th edition this year! That is a massive milestone. For over half a century, NLFB has been the heartbeat of the Sudbury summer, and they aren’t slowing down.

Walking into Bell Park during NLFB feels like coming home. You’ve got the shores of Ramsey Lake as your backdrop, the smell of local food



An exterior view of the engine on a new Ontario Northland Northlander train set currently being tested in the North prior to the relaunch scheduled for 2026. Photo Credit Ontario Northland.

vendors in the air, and a lineup that always perfectly blends iconic Canadian legends with the next big things in indie, folk, and world music.

Because it’s the 55th anniversary, rumor has it the organizers are pulling out all the stops. Whether you’re sitting on the grass at the Grace Hartman Amphitheatre or catching an intimate workshop under the trees, this is the one festival you cannot miss. It’s more than just a concert series; it’s a piece of Northern history.

High Energy at Hollinger: Rock On The River (Timmins)
When: July 24-25, 2026
Where: Hollinger Park, Timmins

If your idea of a good summer night involves loud guitars and thousands of people singing along at the top of their lungs, Timmins is your destination this July. Rock On The River has quickly become one of the premier music events in the North, and the 2026 lineup is absolute fire.

This year, the festival is bringing in the heavy hitters. We’re talking about The Offspring taking the stage to remind us all why we loved the 90s, alongside country powerhouse Russell Dickerson. It’s that perfect mix of rock energy and modern country vibes that brings the whole community together.

Hollinger Park is a fantastic venue: right in the heart of the city, making it easy to hit up local shops and restaurants before the gates open. Pro-tip: book your hotel early. Timmins fills up fast when the big acts roll into town!

Sweet Traditions: Sudbury Blueberry Festival
When: Expected mid-July 2026
Where: Various locations, Sudbury

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The Northern Chuckle

by GILLIAN HEBERT
@StudioGillian
Artwork By Gillian Hebert

Daylight Savings Time has arrived!
Also known as the annual tradition
of pretending one less hour of sleep
won't affect us. Because clearly, what
everyone needed was less sleep...

Some people adapt quickly. Meanwhile,
I've been struggling to convince
my brain that the new "morning" is
legitimate, and not a cruel prank.

Three weeks later and my brain remains
unconvinced.

At this point, my sleep schedule has
officially become more of a loose
concept than an actual system. Getting
tired early enough for this "earlier"
wake-up time? Not happening. Also,
for reasons I cannot explain, my alarm
clock has been turning itself off in the
mornings. *Clearly* a mechanical issue.
Very suspicious. I have no memory of
being involved. Definitely *not* user
error.

After the most recent snowfall, I'm
starting to question whether the first
day of spring is actually March 20th. I
think we are all being lied to up here in
the North.

Spring also means more opportunities for cleaning jobs. It's been a little slow finding clients who need consistent work during winter months, but the downtime hasn't gone to waste. I've been training a new recruit and passing along what I've learned about professional cleaning. I wouldn't call myself an expert, but after a few years, I've got some useful advice for newcomers. However, I've also become known as the slightly clumsy one...

With all that being said, I am looking forward to warmer weather. There is hope in the air and the sun is trying to peak through the snow clouds.



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The Sudbury Blueberry Festival is the ultimate tribute to the fruit that practically defines our landscape. While the music festivals are about the roar of the crowd, the Blueberry Festival is about the soul of the community.

Expect pie-eating contests, community breakfasts, and: of course: plenty of opportunities to buy fresh, wild Northern blueberries. It's a great time to explore the city's various neighborhoods, as events are often spread out, giving you a chance to see parts of Sudbury you might usually drive right past. Check out our Spotlight section closer to the date for a deep dive into the best picking spots!

Waterfront Magic: North Bay & Thunder Bay

If you're a fan of "free and frequent," the waterfronts of North Bay and Thunder Bay are where you need to be all summer long.

North Bay Summer Concert Series & Arts & Culture Nights

North Bay has mastered the art of the midweek hang. Throughout the summer, the waterfront becomes a hub for the Summer Concert Series. These free weekly events are the perfect excuse to grab an ice cream, walk the pier, and discover local talent.

Beyond the music, the Arts & Culture Nights bring a contemporary edge to the city, featuring live demonstrations and interactive installations. It's a great way to see how Northern Ontario's creative scene is evolving.

Live on the Waterfront (Thunder Bay)

Thunder Bay doesn't stay quiet in the summer, either. Their "Live on the Waterfront" series is a staple. There is something truly special about watching a band play as the sun sets over Lake Superior and the Sleeping Giant. It's a reminder of why we live here: the scale of the beauty is just unmatched.

Heritage and Hard Rock: Mattawa Voyageur Days

When: Late July 2026
Where: Mattawa, ON

Mattawa might be a small town, but Voyageur Days is a huge deal. This festival has a reputation for bringing massive acts to a small-town setting, creating an atmosphere that is both cozy and electric.

Located at the meeting of the Mattawa and Ottawa Rivers, the setting is breathtaking. It's a celebration of the historic voyageur routes, mixed with a very modern party vibe. If you want to experience true Northern hospitality, this is where you'll find it.

Tips for Your 2026 Northern Road Trip

Planning a festival run in Northern Ontario isn't like hitting a festival in Toronto. You've got distance, wildlife, and limited cell service to consider. Here's how to do it right:

Book Your Accommodations Now:
Seriously. Whether you're camping or looking for a boutique hotel, spots in cities like Timmins and Sudbury disappear months in advance.

Prepare for All Weather:
It's July, so it'll be 30 degrees, right? Maybe. Or maybe it'll drop to 12 degrees at night with a thunderstorm. Pack layers!

Check the Directory:
Not sure where to eat while you're in town? Our business directory will be packed with local gems that aren't just the usual fast-food chains by summer. **REMEMBER: Support local while you're on the road!**

The Bug Factor:
If you're heading to Mattawa or the outskirts of Timmins, the blackflies might want to join the party. Bring the good spray.

Why We Love Festival Season

At Northern Threads Magazine, we believe that culture is the thread that holds our vast region together.

When we gather in a park in Sudbury or on a pier in North Bay, we're doing more than just listening to music. We're celebrating the fact that we choose to live in this wild, beautiful, and sometimes challenging part of the world.

These festivals are the perfect time to show off your style, too! Whether you're rocking vintage finds or supporting local Northern designers, we want to see your festival looks.

Tag us in your photos: we might just feature you in an upcoming issue!

Are you ready to make 2026 the summer of the road trip? We certainly are. Let's get out there, support our local artists, and show the rest of the province how we celebrate in the North.

The Fight for the 17: Why Northern Mayors are Pushing for a "National Security" Highway

by KARRIE O'CONNOR
Have you ever white-knuckled your steering wheel while passing a triple-trailer transport on a slushy stretch of Highway 17?

If you live in Northern Ontario, you know the feeling! It's that split second of "I hope the ice holds" and "I hope they see me."

For most of Canada, the Trans-Canada Highway is a scenic route. For us, it's a lifeline. But right now, that lifeline is fraying.

Our local leaders have had enough! The Northwestern Ontario Municipalities Association (NOMA) is stepping up. They aren't just asking for a few potholes to be filled anymore. They are taking a massive stand.

They've officially asked the federal government to designate Highway 17 and Highway 11 as national security infrastructure.

Why? Because if these roads fail, Canada literally splits in half.

Let's dive into why this matters for your commute, your safety, and the future of our Northern towns.

The Letter That Changed Everything

In mid-March 2026, a very important letter landed on the desks of Prime Minister Mark Carney and the Federal Transport Minister.

NOMA President Rick Dumis didn't hold back. The message was clear: Northern Ontario's highways are a "single point of failure" for the **Continues on Page 6**



Photo Source: Festival Boreal Facebook Group.

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entire country.

Think about it! Most of the goods moving from the Port of Vancouver to the shops in Toronto have to pass through a two-lane stretch of road in our backyard.

If a major storm hits, or worse, a bridge fails, that supply chain doesn't just slow down. It stops.

Taking a Page from Eisenhower

You might be wondering, "What does 'national security' have to do with a highway?"

The mayors are actually looking back at history for this one! They're referencing President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Back in the 1950s, he created the U.S. Interstate system. He didn't just do it for road trips. He did it so the military could move quickly and the country could stay connected during a crisis. NOMA is saying Canada needs that same strategic thinking right now. While the feds are busy investing in submarines and coastal defense, the mayors are pointing at our cracked asphalt and saying, "Hey! What about the middle of the country?"

The Nipigon Bridge Nightmare

Do you remember 2016? That was the year the Nipigon River Bridge literally split apart in the cold.

For days, Canada was severed. The only way to get from Western Canada to Eastern Canada was to drive 17 to 18 hours south through the United States!

Imagine that. Our national economy was at the mercy of a foreign border crossing because we didn't have a backup plan.

NOMA is highlighting this vulnerability. They are demanding funding for the Nipigon River Bridge area to ensure it remains resilient. But they're going even further. They want a second east-west highway north of Lake Nipigon.

Redundancy isn't a luxury; it's a necessity for national survival.

The Human Cost: High Fatality Rates

We can talk about trucks and bridges all day, but the real heart of this fight is about the people.

We've all seen the news reports. Another collision. Another closure. Another family that didn't make it home.

The fatality rates on Highways 11 and 17 are staggering compared to Southern Ontario's 400-series highways.

Why should your safety depend on your postal code?

Living in Thunder Bay, Kenora, or Dryden shouldn't mean you have to risk your life just to visit family or go to a medical appointment.

Twinning vs. the 2+1 Solution

So, what is the fix?

The gold standard is twinning. That means making the whole highway four lanes with a median in the middle.

It's the safest option. It prevents head-on collisions. It keeps traffic flowing even if one lane is blocked.

But twinning is expensive and takes decades. That's why you'll hear a lot about the 2+1 model.

What is a 2+1 highway?

- It's a three-lane road.
- The center lane switches directions every few kilometers.
- A cable barrier separates the two sides of traffic.

It gives drivers a safe, predictable place to pass slower transports without having to veer into oncoming traffic. It's a game-changer that's worked wonders in Europe, and we need it here, fast!

The Economic Engine

Northern Ontario isn't just "the space between cities." We are the powerhouse!

Think about the Ring of Fire. Think about the critical minerals needed for the world's green energy transition. All of that wealth has to travel on our roads.

If we want the North to thrive, our infrastructure needs to match our potential.

The mayors are pushing for long-term, predictable investment. No more "wait and see" budgets. They want a commitment that reflects the fact that our highways carry the weight of the nation's economy.

How You Can Help

This isn't just a battle for politicians. It's a battle for every person who fills up their tank at a Northern gas station.

Here is what you can do right now:

- Talk about it! Share this post and keep the conversation going in your community.
- Contact your MP. Tell them you support the "National Security" designation for Highways 11 and 17.
- Stay informed.

We need to make sure the voices of the North are heard in Ottawa. We aren't just a "scenic drive." We are the backbone of Canada!

Why Now?

Why is this happening in March 2026?

Because we've just come off a brutal winter.

We've seen the closures. We've felt the frustration of being cut off from the rest of the province.

The push for a National Security Highway is about more than just asphalt. It's about respect. It's about recognizing that Northern Ontario is an essential part of the Canadian fabric.

Our mayors are standing up for us.

It's time we stood up with them.

Looking Ahead

The next few months will be critical. NOMA is waiting for a formal meeting with the Prime Minister.

Will the federal government step up? Or will they keep treating the Trans-Canada like a secondary road?

We'll be watching closely. Because for us, this isn't just news. It's how we get home at night.

If you have a story about your experiences on the 11 or 17, we want to hear it!

Reach out to us at:
info@northernstreadsmagazine.ca

Your voice matters.

Stay safe out there on the roads, Northern Ontario!

We Are Accepting Submissions

Are you interested in contributing to Northern Threads and sharing a story or news item or human interest piece from your area?

Northern Threads Magazine is seeking engaging, heartfelt, and community-focused stories that reflect life, creativity, and culture across Northern Ontario.

We are currently accepting articles between 600-900 words for upcoming issues. Human-interest stories, profiles, lifestyle pieces, arts and culture features, and thoughtful reflections on northern living are all welcome.

If you have a story to share, we'd love to hear from you.

Please submit your article to:
info@northernthreadsmagazine.ca

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The Science of the Shimmer: Why 2026 is the Golden Year for Northern Lights

by KARRIE O’CONNOR

If you’ve lived in Northern Ontario for more than five minutes, you know that our winters aren’t just about shoveling the driveway and keeping the woodstove stoked. There is a payoff for those long, dark nights.

Lately, have you noticed your social media feed blowing up with vibrant greens, deep purples, and ethereal reds dancing across the sky? That’s not just a lucky streak for local photographers. We are officially in the middle of a celestial “golden era.”

Welcome to 2026: the year the Northern Lights are going absolutely rogue, and in the best way possible!

Whether you’re in Sudbury, North Bay, or way up in Moosonee, you have a front-row seat to one of the most intense solar displays in a decade. But why now? Why is 2026 the year everyone is talking about?

Let’s break down the science behind the shimmer and why you need to get outside tonight.

The Sun is Throwing a Party (And We’re Invited)

To understand why the sky is glowing, we have to look about 150 million kilometers away at the sun.

The sun doesn’t just sit there being a hot ball of gas. It goes through cycles: specifically, an 11-year cycle known as the Solar Cycle. Think of it like a giant battery that slowly charges up and then releases its energy.

Right now, we are in Solar Cycle 25.

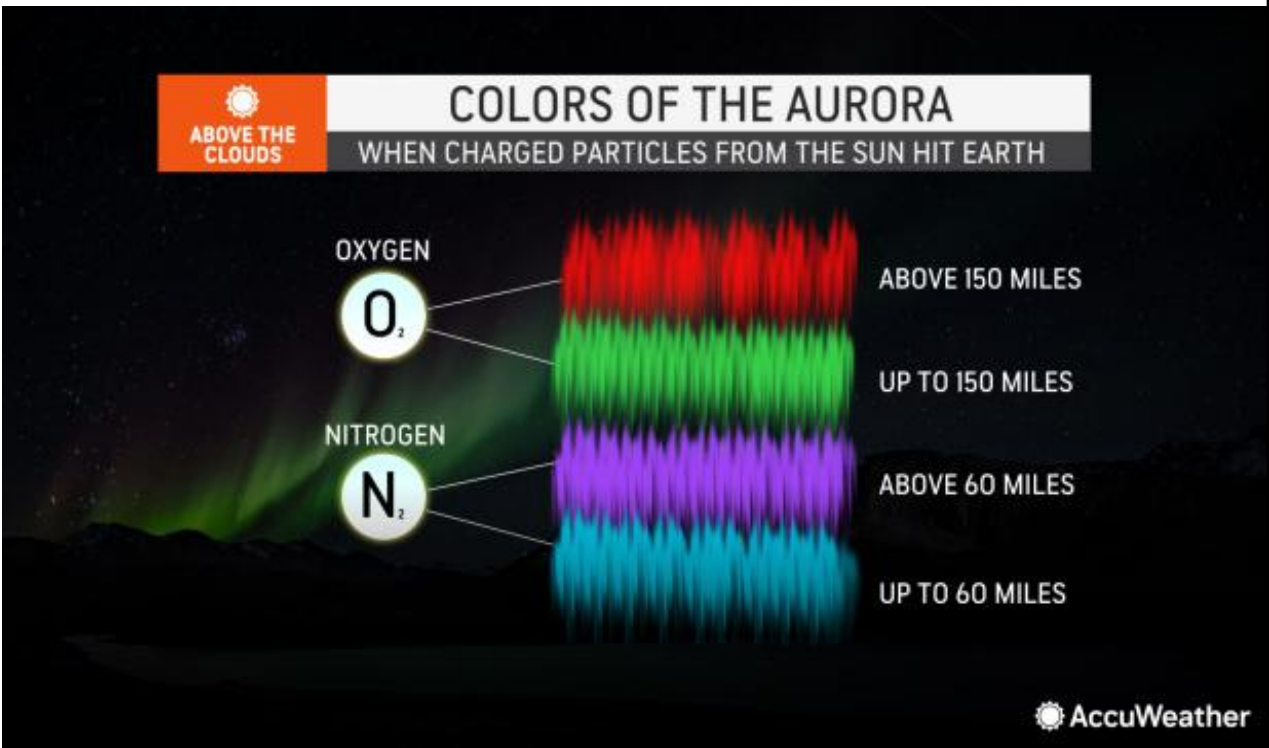
Back in 2024 and 2025, we hit what scientists call “Solar Maximum.” This is the peak of the sun’s activity. But here is the secret most people don’t know: the best Northern Lights shows actually happen a year or two after the official peak.

That makes 2026 the “Golden Year.” The sun is still incredibly active, firing off solar flares and Coronal Mass Ejections (CMEs) like cosmic confetti. When these charged particles hit Earth’s magnetic field, they funnel down toward the poles.

When they crash into our atmosphere, they excite the atoms up there, causing them to glow. It’s essentially the same science behind a neon sign, just on a planetary scale.

The Chemistry of the Colors: Green vs. Purple

Have you ever wondered why some nights the sky is a ghostly green and other nights it looks like a scene from a sci-fi movie with deep magentas and blues?



An explanation of the Northern Lights and where the color comes from in simple form Photo Source AccuWeather

It all comes down to chemistry and altitude.

When those solar particles hit our atmosphere, they bump into different gases. Each gas reacts by glowing a specific color.

Oxygen (Lower Altitude): This is the most common. When particles hit oxygen about 100 to 300 km up, you get that classic, bright neon green.

Oxygen (Higher Altitude): If the particles hit oxygen much higher up (over 300 km), they produce rare, stunning blood-red auroras.

Nitrogen: This is where things get fancy. If the solar storm is strong enough to push deeper into our atmosphere, it hits nitrogen. This produces the beautiful purples, pinks, and deep blues we’ve been seeing lately.

In 2026, because the solar activity is so high, we are seeing way more of these nitrogen-fueled purples and high-altitude reds than we usually do. It’s not just a “green glow” year; it’s a full-spectrum year!

Why Northern Ontario is the Ultimate Viewing Gallery

We are incredibly lucky. While people in Toronto or New York are squinting at their phone screens hoping to see a smudge of light, we just have to drive twenty minutes out of town.

Northern Ontario is one of the best places on Earth to see the Aurora Borealis for three main reasons:

- The Latitude Sweet Spot:** We sit far enough north to be under the “aurora oval” frequently, but south enough that we don’t have 24-hour daylight in the spring and fall like the high Arctic does.
- The Dark Sky Preserves:** We have some of the darkest skies in North America. Places like Killarney Provincial Park and Lake

Superior Provincial Park are officially designated Dark Sky Preserves. Check out our About page to learn more about our local landscape.

- The Lakes:** There is nothing like seeing the Northern Lights reflected in the still waters of Lake Nipissing or Lake Superior. It doubles the show!

How to Catch the Show (No Gatekeeping Here!)

You don’t need to be a scientist to track the lights, but a little prep goes a long way. 2026 is moving fast, and you don’t want to miss the big displays.

- 1. Watch the KP-Index**
The KP-Index is a scale from 0 to 9 that measures geomagnetic activity. KP1-3: You might see a faint glow if you’re far north. KP 4-5: The “Sweet Spot.” You’ll see clear movement and distinct colors in Sudbury or North Bay. KP 6+: This is a “G-Scale” solar storm. Get your camera ready. The lights might even move directly overhead (the “Corona” effect).

- 2. Timing is Everything**
The best viewing window is usually between 10:00 PM and 2:00 AM. This is when the Earth is positioned perfectly within the solar stream.

- 3. Use the Apps**
Download “My Aurora Forecast” or “SpaceWeatherLive.” These apps will send a notification to your phone when the “probability of aurora” in your specific Northern Ontario town goes up. It’s like having a cosmic weather reporter in your pocket.

Pro-Tips for Your 2026 Aurora Hunt

If you’re planning to head out, here’s the “Northern Threads” guide to staying comfortable and getting the shot. *Continues on Page 8*

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Photo Credit @ StudioGillian

Ditch the City Lights: Even a single streetlamp can ruin your night vision. Head toward the bush. If you can't see the Milky Way, you're not in a dark enough spot.

Look North (Obviously!): Use the compass on your phone. Find a clear horizon looking North with no trees or hills in the way.

Phone Photography: Most modern smartphones have a "Night Mode." Use a tripod (or prop your phone against a rock) to keep it still for a 3-10 second exposure. You'll be shocked at how much more color your phone can see than your naked eye!

Be Patient: The lights come in waves. You might see nothing for an hour, and then ten minutes of absolute magic. Don't give up too early.

Let's Share the Magic

At Northern Threads Magazine, we're all about celebrating the unique lifestyle that comes with living in the North. Seeing the Northern Lights is a rite of passage for us. It's a reminder that even in the coldest months, there is incredible beauty right above our heads.

If you capture an amazing shot of the 2026 solar maximum, we want to see it! You can reach out to us through our Email: info@northernthreadsmagazine.ca

Why This Matters Now

We won't see another solar cycle like this until the mid-2030s. That means the displays we are seeing right now are literally once-in-a-decade events.

In a world that moves so fast, there's something grounding about standing in a dark field in Northern Ontario, breathing in the crisp air, and watching the universe put on a show. It's free, it's beautiful, and it's happening right now.

So, grab your warmest parka, fill a thermos with coffee, and head north of the city lights. 2026 is the year of the shimmer: don't let it pass you by!

Frozen in Time: The 1.6 Billion-Year-Old Secrets Hiding in Kakabeka Falls

by KARRIE O'CONNOR

Have you ever stood at the edge of the boardwalk at Kakabeka Falls and felt the ground vibrate under your boots? It's a rush! That thundering sound isn't just water hitting rock, it's the sound of the Kaministiquia River carving through nearly two billion years of Earth's history.

We often call it the "Niagara of the North," and for good reason! At 40 meters high, it's the second-highest waterfall in Ontario. But while Niagara is famous for its bright lights and honeymoon suites, Kakabeka holds a secret that is way cooler (and much older).

We're talking about fossils that were around before plants, before fish, and long before dinosaurs even thought about showing up.

The Power of the Kaministiquia

The story of the falls starts with the Kaministiquia River. In the Ojibwe language, "Gakaa-bikaa" means "waterfall over a cliff," and man, does it live up to the name! The river flows with an incredible amount of force, especially during the spring melt we're seeing right now in March 2026.

As the water plunges those 40 meters, it reveals layers of dark, crumbly rock. This isn't just any rock; it's unstable shale from the Precambrian Shield. It's some of the oldest exposed rock on the planet!

Because the shale is so fragile, the river is constantly eating away at it. This means the waterfall is actually "moving" backward over thousands of years. It's a living, breathing geological process happening right in our backyard.

Meet Your Ancient Ancestors: The 1.6 Billion-Year-Old Fossils

Okay, let's get into the mind-blowing science stuff! Most fossils people know about are bones or shells. But at Kakabeka Falls, the fossils are tucked inside the rock face in the form of stromatolites.

What are they? Think of them as ancient "microbial reefs." They were formed by layers of cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) that trapped sediment and grew into mounds. These aren't just old; they are 1.6 billion years old!

But the real star of the show for scientists is an organism called *Kakabekia barghoorniana*.

This tiny, prehistoric life form was discovered right here in the Kakabeka chert. It's a "living fossil" mystery! When scientists first found it, they realized it looked exactly like a modern microorganism that was later discovered in the soil at Harlech Castle in Wales.

How does a 1.6 billion-year-old organism from Northern Ontario end up related to something in a modern-day Welsh castle? It's a puzzle that still keeps researchers excited. It's proof that the "threads" of life on our planet are more connected than we ever imagined!

The Legend of Princess Green Mantle

You can't talk about the falls without honoring the stories that have been told here for generations. The Ojibway legend of Princess Green Mantle is a powerful part of the soul of this place.

The story goes that a young Ojibway woman named Green Mantle was captured by a group of Sioux warriors who intended to attack her village. Thinking quickly, she pretended to lead them to her people by way of the river.

Instead of showing them the safe path, she led their canoes straight over the 40-meter drop of the falls. She sacrificed her own life to save her tribe, and the legend says that if you look closely into the mist of the falls today, you can still see her spirit, the Green Mantle, protecting the waters.

It's a beautiful, haunting reminder that this land has seen incredible bravery long before it was ever turned into a Provincial Park.

Why You Can't Go Down into the Gorge

We get it, you see that beautiful mist and you want to get closer. You want to touch those 1.6 billion-year-old rocks, right?

Well, don't do it!

There is a reason the gorge is strictly off-limits to hikers. First, the shale is incredibly unstable. One wrong step and the rock can crumble right out from under you. Second, the flora that grows on those cliffs is super sensitive. These plants have adapted to live on ancient rock in a very specific misty environment.

But the biggest reason is protection. Those stromatolites and *Kakabekia* fossils are irreplaceable. Once they're gone, they're gone forever. We want to make sure people in the year 3026 can still see the same secrets we're seeing today.

A Hub for History and Fur Traders

Long before tourists were snapping selfies on the boardwalk, Kakabeka Falls was a major hub for the fur trade.

Back in the 17th and 18th centuries, the Kaministiquia River was the main "highway" for French fur traders and the legendary voyageurs. Imagine paddling a heavy canoe loaded with furs and then having to carry everything: including the boat: around a 40-meter waterfall!

This "portage" was back-breaking work. These men were the first Europeans to stay through the harsh Northern Ontario winters, and the falls were a landmark they both respected and feared. When you walk the trails today, you're

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literally walking in the footsteps of the people who built the early economy of the North.

Planning Your Visit This Spring

March is a wild time at the park! The ice is starting to break up, and the “thunder” of the falls is at its loudest. Here are a few tips for your trip:

- Dress in layers:** Northern Ontario weather in late March is unpredictable. It might be sunny at the trailhead and freezing in the mist of the falls!
- Stay on the boardwalk:** Seriously. The views from the pods are the best anyway, and it keeps you and the fossils safe.
- Bring a camera:** The ice formations on the rocks look like alien sculptures this time of year.
- Check the map:** There are over 10km of trails. The Mountain Portage Trail is a personal favorite because it gives you a great view of the gorge and the river downstream.

Why This Matters to Us

At Northern Threads Magazine, we believe that knowing the history of the ground you walk on makes you feel more connected to your home. Whether it’s the 1.6 billion-year-old fossils or the stories of Princess Green Mantle, Kakabeka Falls isn’t just a park: it’s a monument to time itself.

It reminds us that even the hardest rock can be shaped by the steady flow of water. It reminds us of the strength of those who came before us. And most importantly, it reminds us that Northern Ontario is one of the most scientifically interesting places on the planet!

Do you have a favorite memory of the falls? Maybe you saw a double rainbow in the mist or did the portage trail in record time? We want to hear about it!

Join the Conversation

We are always looking for stories from our readers! If you have a local history tip or a scientific discovery from your neck of the woods, don’t be shy.

Reach out: Hop over to our Contact Us page and drop us a line.

Stay Updated: Want to make sure you never miss a post about the wonders of the North? Subscribe from the main page prompt and Never miss an issue!

Northern Ontario is more than just a place on a map. It’s a deep, ancient story that we are all still writing together. So, the next time you’re standing at Kakabeka, take a second to look past the water. Look at the rock. Look at the history.

You’re standing on 1.6 billion years of secrets. Pretty cool, right?

Stay curious, North!

Under One Roof: Why 2026 is the Turning Point for Northern Ontario’s Housing and Health

by **KARRIE O’CONNOR**

It’s Tuesday, March 24, 2026, and if you’ve stepped outside anywhere between Kenora and North Bay this morning, you know exactly what kind of mood Mother Nature is in. They say March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb. Up here, we’re currently staring down the throat of the lion.

The wind is whipping off Lake Superior, and that late-season slush is clinging to everything. But there’s a different kind of storm brewing in our boardrooms and on our street corners. It’s a storm that hasn’t let up for years, and as we navigate the spring of 2026, we’ve reached a breaking point.

We’re talking about the Northern Ontario crisis, a perfect storm of housing shortages and health-care gaps that is threatening to undermine the very prosperity we’ve been promised. Are you feeling the squeeze? Because your neighbors definitely are.

The \$435 Million Roar

Let’s talk about that “Lion” for a second. This month, the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities (FONOM) and the Northern Ontario Mayors’ Coalition didn’t just ask for help, they roared. They’ve put a \$435 million demand on the provincial government’s desk.

Why such a staggering number? Because our infrastructure is buckling. For years, Northern cities have been expected to manage provincial-scale problems with municipal-scale budgets. We’re talking about the soaring costs of emergency services, the desperate need for supportive housing, and the sheer weight of a mental health crisis that hasn’t been met with adequate funding.

Think about your own town. Have you noticed the increase in emergency sirens? The \$435 million isn’t just a wishlist; it’s a survival kit. It’s the cost of keeping our heads above water while the “Lamb” of economic recovery feels further away than ever.

The Ring of Fire: A Paradox of Wealth and Want

You’ve heard the buzz. 2026 was supposed to be the year the Ring of Fire truly ignited. We’re told this is our “generational opportunity”, the critical minerals under our feet are the key to the global EV revolution. Jobs are coming. Industry is booming. The North is the future of the green economy.

But here’s the paradox: How do you build a multi-billion dollar mining industry when there’s nowhere for the workers to sleep?

The Ring of Fire impact is a double-edged sword. While the province focuses on the wealth deep

in the earth, the towns on the surface are struggling to accommodate the influx of people. In 2026 housing trends, we’re seeing “boomtown” prices without the boomtown infrastructure. It’s getting harder for a local family to rent an apartment in Thunder Bay or Timmins because the market is being swallowed by industrial demand.

We want the jobs. We want the prosperity. But we can’t eat lithium, and we can’t sleep in a mine shaft. We need a plan that puts people, specifically Northern people, under a roof before the first shovel even hits the ground.

The Human Element: Our Streets, Our Neighbors

It’s easy to get lost in the numbers, but the Northern Ontario crisis has a human face. Actually, it has 8,142 faces.

According to recent data, homelessness in Northern Ontario has increased by a staggering 37.3 percent since last year. Compare that to the 7.8 percent increase in the rest of the province. Since 2021, the number of people experiencing homelessness in our region has more than doubled.

Walk through downtown Sudbury or the core of Sault Ste. Marie. You’ll see it. It’s not just a “big city” issue anymore. It’s happening in our parks, under our bridges, and in the hearts of our communities. Indigenous people account for over 40 percent of those experiencing homelessness in the North, a heartbreaking statistic that points to systemic gaps we haven’t even begun to close.

When you look at the 2026 housing trends, the most alarming one is the waitlist for community housing. It’s grown by 50 percent in just four years. People are waiting for years, literally years, for a safe place to call home. Is that the kind of North we want to live in?

The Healthcare Shortage: A Long Way from Care

If you’ve tried to find a family doctor in the last six months, you know the Northern healthcare shortage isn’t just a headline, it’s a daily stressor.

In our remote regions, the situation is even more dire. We are living in a reality where your postal code determines your life expectancy. If you’re in a fly-in community or a small town three hours from the nearest hospital, a simple infection can become a life-or-death crisis.

We are seeing healthcare professionals burnt out and leaving the North, drawn away by the resources of the south. We need more than just “incentives” to bring them here; we need a healthcare system that treats Northern Ontario as a priority, not an afterthought. You shouldn’t have to drive five hours for a specialist appointment in the middle of a March blizzard.

31 Years of Waiting: The Neskantaga Symbol
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31 Years of Waiting: The Neskantaga Symbol

If you want to understand the infrastructure gap in Northern Ontario, you only need to look at Neskantaga First Nation.

As of March 2026, Neskantaga has been under a boil water advisory for over 31 years. Let that sink in. That is more than three decades without the basic right to turn on a tap and drink a glass of water.

Neskantaga is the ultimate symbol of the “Lion” of neglect. While we talk about high-speed rail in the GTA and billion-dollar mining projects in the Ring of Fire, a community in our own backyard is being denied the most basic human necessity. If we can build a road to a mine, we can surely build a water treatment plant that works.

This is the turning point. We cannot claim to be a modern, prosperous region while Neskantaga remains in a state of permanent crisis.

Finding the Lamb: What Happens Next?

So, how do we find the “Lamb”? How do we move toward a spring where everyone is under one roof and healthcare is a right, not a luxury?

- 1. Fund the Demand:** The province needs to meet the \$435 million request from Northern mayors. This isn’t charity; it’s an investment in the people who power the province’s economy.
- 2. Housing-Led Recovery:** We need deeply affordable, supportive housing built now. Not in five years. Now. You can check out our directory to see local organizations that are on the front lines of this fight.
- 3. Indigenous Partnership:** No more decisions about the North without the people who have lived here since time immemorial. Real reconciliation starts with clean water and safe housing.
- 4. Healthcare Innovation:** We need to lean into telehealth and mobile clinics, but we also need to train Northern doctors right here in the North.

We at Northern Threads Magazine believe in this region. We believe in the strength of the people who survive the winters and the resilience of our communities. But resilience shouldn’t be an excuse for government inaction.

The lion of March 2026 might be roaring, but the lamb is waiting to be found. It’s time we brought everyone under one roof.

Do you have a story about how the housing or healthcare crisis has affected you? We want to hear it. Reach out to us on our contact page or by Email to:
info@northernthreadsmagazine.ca

Next month we will begin offering free advertising to Northern Ontario Businesses. If you would like your business featured submit your business card to:
info@northernthreadsmagazine.ca

Some Scenes From Home...

