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WME Hosts YK Geoscience Forum Panel Focused on Opportunities for Women in the Energy Sector



On November 25, 2025, Women in Mining and Energy Northwest Territories (WME) hosted a panel event at the Yellowknife Geoscience Forum focused on representation in the energy sector.

The event reflected the recent expansion of the NWT-based organization's mandate to advance the participation and leadership of women in the territory's growing energy sector.

Former WME NT president Gaeleen MacPherson moderated the event, which featured insights from panelists Dionne McGuinness, Belinda Whitford, and Lenora McLeod on how to create opportunities for women to help shape the territory's energy industry.

Whitford, Chief Operating Officer of the Northwest Territories Power Corporation (NTPC), said the organization is well-represented by women in more traditional roles in finance and customer service. "And that is great," she said.

But when she came into her role at NTPC, her goal was to increase the number of women in trades and on the industrial side of the business. This remains a work-in-progress, she admitted, although even recent changes to job titles from lineman to power line technician can shift attitudes.

"I think trying to recruit is number one and then retention—making sure we have an environment that supports women as they learn and start to develop in these roles and succeed in the roles," she said. Whitford, who has more than 20 years of experience in utilities finance, added NTPC has focused on creating capacity in communities and on apprenticeship recruitment, which she says will benefit the organization in the long run. She highlighted the Schools North Apprenticeship Program (SNAP) as a "strong avenue" for getting young women involved in trades in the NWT.

McLeod, Acting Manager of Oil and Gas Rights with the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment with the Government of the Northwest Territories, said one of the biggest opportunities she sees in the coming years is women moving from administrative roles into management positions. "Within the department I work in, I can really see a change at least over the last five to ten years, where women are starting to see more management and senior management roles," she said.

McLeod, elected treasurer-secretary for WME earlier in the day, added "it's encouraging for young women like myself and some of my colleagues to know that there is a possibility for women to move up."

McGuinness, co-founder of Edmonton-based IndigenUs Consulting, highlighted mentorship as a key factor in successful recruitment and retention. "I think a big function for me has been to mentor women," she said. "Not in just technical roles, but in helping them network themselves successfully, getting connections to professional networks and people within the professional community." She explained this also helps women get established into more informal networks within the community and helps them realize the power they bring to their organizations and industries.

As a senior engagement strategist with more than two decades of experience across energy, mining, infrastructure, and community development, McGuinness takes her role as a mentor seriously. Through these relationships, she has learned about negative experiences women have gone through. "It's really helped me to understand some of the behaviors that have happened in the workplace, some of the triggers that happen for these women, and some of the ways we can start to mitigate and work through solutions together in a very gentle and supportive way," she said.

It's important these women have a clear path forward, McGuinness said, "so they don't take themselves right out of the game early on in their careers."