



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Neskantaga and Eabametoong Denounce Wynne Government's Failure on Ring of Fire Planning; Suggest it is time to Re-set the Regional Process

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After nearly a year of secret meetings the Wynne government signed Environmental Assessment Agreements with Marten Falls and Webequie First Nations this month. The agreements mark the beginning of an aggressive process to build roads into the Ontario's Ring of Fire mining mega project. However, any major road development into this region will dramatically impact all of the remote communities and Ontario's approach to making private deals with just two of the First Nations will only lead to further frustrations and delays.

"The approach the Wynne government is taking to roads in the Ring of Fire is a scandal and could be a nail in the coffin for our Aboriginal rights and way of life. We must stop this unfair and unreasonable process," said Chief Wayne Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation. In 2015 all nine Matawa First Nations put forward a plan for developing a regional road system and vital grassroots involvement of all the communities that was ignored by Ontario. The alternative, a haphazard approach to assessing individual segments of roads with just two of nine First Nations in the region, is contrary to the work underway in the Regional Framework Agreement discussions and Canada's new impact assessment legislation.

Suddenly the Wynne government, on the eve of an election, is recklessly launching roads with First Nation "proponents", financed by Ontario, to open up our homelands to 100+ years of mining. **"We agreed to work on these issues together as a group of nine First Nations and Ontario, but Ontario is trying to take a shortcut. A piecemeal approach of unplanned and uncontrolled road development is like driving off a cliff and then trying to sort out how our lives and future have been impacted after the fact. We have worked on community-based solutions for how to do this the right way – carefully considering all the impacts and development scenarios so we can arrive at informed regional consensus, but our suggestions are not taken seriously,"** Chief Elizabeth Atlookan of Eabametoong First Nation added.

We are urging the Ontario government to stop ignoring Neskantaga and Eabametoong and listen to our communities and our Indigenous knowledge holders before it's too late. Whoever is elected, the Ontario government must keep the Premier's 2014 promise and work with all



nine Matawa First Nations on a respectful strategy to partner with our communities in the spirit of reconciliation on the Ring of Fire.

“The development of our homelands is about more than any one mine or road, its about the potential transformation of our lands and way of life-forever. These discussions are serious and must occur in ways that recognize our rights and involve all our communities, not the closed door approach we’ve seen over the past couple of years,” adds Chief Elizabeth Atlookan.

In order to move forward, both communities are calling upon the incoming government to return to the regional table that was established in 2014. As Chief Moonias explains, **“we are for community and regional development, but will not be excluded from life-changing decisions on our lands. Together with the other Matawa First Nations, we expect Ontario to work with us in transparency and honesty.”**

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