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Neskantaga and Eabametoong issue Declaration of Alliance and Shared Regulatory Territory

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The communities of Neskantaga and Eabametoong continue to stand together while pointing to the way forward in the north, and on the Ring of Fire. These two First Nations, united by a shared history, are committing to advance their interests through a political alliance to regulate and protect their combined territories.

“Our people have always managed the land according to our principles, values, and knowledge. We are committed to moving forward in ways that strengthen our people and provide hope for the future. This alliance is natural and a positive step. We share family lines, our lands and rivers as well as principled positions on development,” said Chief Moonias.

Chief Atlookan stated, **“We are here today to honour our ancestors, create new opportunities for our youth, and to demonstrate to all our members that we are carrying forward the vision we have heard from our people. That vision is of a healthy and prosperous region, achieved through the recognition of our rights and responsibilities as stewards of the land. The land belongs to the Creator, and the people belong to the land. We support positive community and regional development. We have been saying that for years and working hard to ensure that anything that happens in our region is a positive contribution to community life. We are declaring our role as informed decision-makers must be recognized in the planning, assessment, and final decisions for any projects in our area.”**

The nine Matawa Nations and the Ontario government have held four years of productive exploratory talks under the Regional Framework Agreement process and Statement of Commitments which recognized the need for an enhanced environmental assessment process on a regional basis and agreed to create 'joint decision-making processes' involving all of the Nations in the region.

“We are disappointed that Ontario's new government has terminated their negotiator and temporarily suspending funding. This will slow the process of reaching agreement and potentially delay future developments in the Ring of Fire. However, we remain committed to the process and the principles already agreed” said Wayne Moonias, Chief of the Neskantaga First Nation.

While the Ford government is quietly using some communities to advance bare-bones environmental processes to get roads planned, these Chiefs warn that approach is fraught with legal and technical issues that will backfire.

Chief Atlookan added, **“By ignoring the voices of our people, and secretly working to impact the rights of our members, Ontario is not only frustrating a process that we established as Treaty partners, they are now creating unnecessary legal risk for the Ring of Fire projects and access roads. We haven't said no to any of these projects, but our people are being excluded from the decisions that will impact us.”**



“It was the same way with Landore and their exploration project. Both the company and the government failed to act honourably. In this case, however, we are talking about a quick and dirty approach to opening the whole north, and the stakes are much higher. I’m honestly confused as to why Ontario won’t sit down with us. We went to Queen’s Park in September to ask direct questions about reconciliation and the Ring of Fire, but Ford’s lack of understanding and action is making a difficult situation far worse.”

Despite the Ford government’s suspension of the Regional Framework Agreement negotiations, these two First Nations are inviting the Premier to visit their communities and reaffirm Ontario’s commitment to the common principles and objectives in the 2011 Unity Declaration, signed by all nine Matawa Chiefs.

In the meantime, we will be establishing our own processes.

We confirm that the priority issues, as agreed with Ontario at our Jurisdiction Table negotiations are road infrastructure and road ownership and governance, land management, and permitting. We encourage Ontario to continue with the processes that will lead to a common agreement.

To get the estimated \$60 Billion+ of chromite, nickel and other minerals from the Matawa Nation homelands onto the world market, Ontario wants to build hundreds of kilometres of industrial roads and potentially a railway - crossing forests, globally significant wetlands, our ancestral Indigenous lands and many rivers.

Chief Moonias stated, “If built, the road(s) to the Ring of Fire will open up the entire region to uncontrolled mining development, changing our way of life and bringing with it increased risks to the fish and wildlife we depend upon and pollution in our lakes and river systems that could last forever. **The homelands of Eabametoong and Neskantaga are in the path of these proposed industrial mining roads and some of the richest orebodies in the ROF area, but we will fight back unless we arrive at a negotiated agreement with Ontario on the scale, pace and forms of development that are helpful to our people as we work towards a sustainable future.**”

We are asking the public to stand with the communities of Eabametoong and Neskantaga, who are protecting lands, water, wildlife and our wetlands and river systems, and hold the Ford government to account. ROF projects will impact many communities throughout the whole watershed, and we are now reaching out to all who have an interest in being involved in these critical decisions.

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