



Message from Chief and Council on Ontario's Northern Link Road Announcement

March 5, 2020

Booshoo,

On March 2, 2020 we learned that Premier Doug Ford, Minister Greg Rickford, Chief Wabasse from Webequie, and Chief Achneepineskum from Marten Falls signed a Memorandum of Agreement. This MOA is based on a provision that the two First Nations will jointly propose an environmental assessment to study what they call the 'Northern Link Road' from Marten Falls to the Ring of Fire area (see map on following page).

Within media and government messaging on the Ring of Fire proposals and possible roads, there are rarely clear and reliable facts. Some of the information distributed this week in the news has been recycled from the previous government and is misleading. EFN Chief and Council are committed to presenting facts to inform our members as we uncover the truth, cutting through the confusion on some of these issues. We are primarily focused on improving the quality of life of EFN members, including protecting our rights and promoting community development, and we will approach these issues from that balanced perspective.

We don't have a copy of the agreement yet, but will be meeting with our neighbouring First Nations to better understand what has been signed, and bring that information to the community through meetings and also off reserve discussions when it is available. At present, we know there is no formal commitment by the First Nations or from Ontario to build these roads or to support Ring of Fire mining, but to fund the First Nations to work together to study the expected impacts through environmental assessment. We are years away from a financing or permitting decision, but it is time to get much more informed and engaged in these processes, including on and off-reserve members.

Over the past few years, EFN members have participated strongly in our meetings and community discussions on Ring of Fire and road development issues, especially on principles for protecting the land and approaches to being involved in any assessments or decisions for these projects. All that has been shared in the regional processes and discussions on specific projects like Noront or Cliffs in past years has been a major collective learning experience and EFN will apply those principles and feedback in our approach to these projects. There is a lot for our members to become educated on, and we can continue learning together and charting our pathway forward through ongoing discussions.

We are committed to advocating for the wise and consistent positions that have been put forward by our membership. For example, it has been the collective work of our members and knowledge holders

to raise concerns about the expected cumulative and regional effects of any major industrial road or mine proposal, and the need for a community-based approach to educated and informed assessment. We recognize that any road development in these areas could enable new access to our lands and economic resource interests in our territory. We have consistently raised those issues with both the Provincial and Federal governments in formal submissions and meetings.

At the March 2nd signing at the PDAC convention in Toronto, both Chiefs Wabasse and Achneepineskum said they are working toward a shared decision-making model with Ontario that will guide any future decisions following the environmental assessment, and they have not given consent to any project yet. They made the point that this joint study will provide the information for all communities to base a future decision on. They also mentioned that they will be working with EFN and other First Nations to involve us in the planning and assessment process.

Here are some of the basic facts on what has been going on in the region:

- There are currently two road proposals in the early stages of environmental assessment;
 1. One road proposed by Webequie First Nation as a supply road from the community to the current exploration camp in the Ring of Fire;
 2. One road proposed by Marten Falls First Nation as a community access and multi-use road from Painter Lake to Marten Falls;
- On February 12, 2020 the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada announced that they will soon be initiating a broader, regional assessment of all the current and proposed projects in the Ring of Fire area (something that EFN and all Matawa First Nations called for as far back as 2011, and we jointly proposed a detailed regional EA approach to Ontario through the RFA negotiations)
- The only current mine proposed in the Ring of Fire area, Noront's Eagle's Nest, is sitting in an idle Environmental Assessment, and has not taken major steps on their project assessment since 2017
- EFN understands that these recent road announcements will require Noront to change their economic analysis and business plan, and eventually re-submit a modified environmental assessment for their mine depending on the outcomes of the various road assessments

Now that Ontario has announced that it will be supporting Webequie and Marten Falls to plan and assess this next segment of the road, the situation is a lot clearer. We will begin mobilizing a community engagement process to include on and off-reserve members so that EFN voices and interests are part of any project in the area. It is still early on, but we will work hard to ensure these assessments, and especially the regional assessment, involve EFN and reflect the important factors that our community needs in the studies so that we can all understand what the full picture of possible impacts and opportunities may be.

We are not simply going to sit back while government processes, other communities, or environmental groups influence the assessments and their outcomes. It is vital that EFN members have a role in setting the terms for any assessment and future decisions in our region. We will be working with leadership in Marten Falls and Webequie to bring real information to EFN and find a productive way to work with them on these projects. We have already heard that this next assessment process will not

likely get moving until the fall, so we have time to get organized and informed on what is being proposed.

Chief and Council will be inviting and asking you to participate, share your views, and we will work together as a community to care for the land and find ways to advance all our interests. Before we get too distracted by the promises or fears of billion dollar projects, we need to immediately improve community infrastructure – houses, a high school, rec centre, library, food security, and our energy situation. Our commitment is to work hard to improve all aspects of community life.

Chief Yesno and Eabametoong First Nation Council

The following map was circulated among the media this week. Although it is not precise, it provides a general outline of the various road sections that are being discussed:

