FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Matawa Chiefs Raise Alarm About Environmental Assessment In Their Traditional Territories.

Thunder Bay September 30, 2011 – Matawa Chiefs are deeply concerned about the type of Environmental Assessment (EA) process that will be used to determine the impacts of two resource development projects in their traditional territories. The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) is expected to announce the formal start of the EA process for the Cliffs Chromite Project in early October and for the Noront Eagle's Nest Project in early November. Concerns over the EA have prompted the Matawa First Nations Chiefs to demand that a "Joint Review Panel Environmental Assessment" process be adopted in order to safeguard the sustainability and integrity of their lands.

"These projects are on our traditional territories," said Chief Cornelius Wabasse of Webequie First Nation. "As one of the First Nations closest to these Ring of Fire developments, we expect the highest level of study to be conducted. Our people live off the land and use it for hunting, fishing and gathering activities. The land is our livelihood and needs to be respected by all people. We do not oppose development, but as caretakers of the land it is our duty to protect the land, water and air that was given to us by the Creator. This means ensuring that any negative environmental impacts are properly mitigated and avoided wherever possible."

The projects include developing mining and infrastructure components such as roads, electrical transmission and telecommunication lines on the traditional territories. These developments will profoundly affect the Matawa communities of Webequie, Marten Falls and Neskantaga First Nations. Many environmental impacts have already been identified for both projects.

Cliffs and Noront have stated that they would like a "Comprehensive Study EA". The Matawa First Nations Chiefs passed a resolution in May 2011 in support of a "Joint Review Panel EA". Currently, the Joint Review Panel EA is the most extensive and inclusive assessment required by government before approval of a project.

According to Kim Jorgenson, Environmental Assessment Officer for the Matawa Four Rivers Environmental Services Group, a Joint Review Panel EA is critical for this area. "It brings together the Provincial and Federal Governments to produce one EA for each project. There is no set timeline and more opportunity for public participation, allowing for oral hearings to be held in the communities. We are talking about one of the largest, intact boreal forest and wetland areas in the world. We need the best environmental assessment process that is currently available and that is the Joint Review Process EA. Ideally a new process would be developed to address all the potential environmental impacts from all proposed developments in the Ring of Fire Area, but for now a Joint Review Panel is the most appropriate EA for these projects."

The CEAA has indicated that there are three conditions that would convince the CEAA to move to a Joint Review Process:

1. Significant adverse effects on the environment
2. Significant public concern
3. Infringement on Aboriginal and Treaty Rights.

"There are most definitely environmental impacts to consider," explained Jorgenson, "The roads proposed will cross approximately 100 bodies of water each, including three major rivers. The Cliffs project will re-route three waterways and drain several ponds at the Mine Site. These activities will definitely impact fish habitat and wildlife in the area."

Other concerns surround pollution from the diesel-powered machinery and transporting diesel fuel. Man-made roads/corridors (including the slurry pipeline) can fragment the habitat of significant species (caribou, moose, etc.) disrupting their travel routes, and waste rock from mining has the potential to release harmful chemicals to the environment.

"As far as Treaty Rights go, there is definitely a reason to make this process a Joint Review Panel. The consultation process in a Comprehensive Study EA process, in our view, does not meet the government's duty to consult with First Nations as per Section 35 of the *Canadian Constitution Act, 1980.* As well, we just signed a Declaration with Mushkegowuk Chiefs stating we are committed to implementing the Oral Treaty, which means any activities on our traditional territories require First Nation consent," said Chief Peter Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation.

"Our staff has been visiting Matawa First Nations and the level of concern about these projects is very high. We have had large turn outs to our information sharing sessions, and the people in the communities are expressing their concerns to the government in record numbers. There is also concern in the non-native segment of the general public, and from environmental groups," said Sarah Cockerton, Manager of Four Rivers, Matawa's Environmental Service Group.

The Project Descriptions for the Cliffs Chromite Project and Noront Eagle's Nest Project were accepted this past summer by the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA), Triggering a 90 day Pre-Environmental assessment planning stage which helps determine what kind of EA will take place for the projects.

Matawa Chiefs encourage community members and concerned members of the public to write letters to the Federal Minister of Environment and to their local MPs expressing their concerns over the EA process. More information can found at:
www.fourriversmatawa.ca ww.facebook.com/RingoffireEnvironment

Matawa is a Tribal Council with a membership of nine Ojibway and Cree First Nation communities in Northern Ontario. Five Matawa First Nations are remote and are currently accessible only by air or winter ice road. Matawa First Nations Management provides advisory services and program delivery to Matawa First Nations.

Four Rivers is a Matawa Environment Services Group that assists Matawa First Nations with actively managing lands and water resources within their traditional territories.

Ring of Fire is the name given to a resource rich geographical area located around McFaulds Lake, North of Marten Falls First Nation and west of Webequie First Nation, located in the heart of the boreal forest and encompassing the largest wetlands in the world.

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