



MATAWA FIRST NATIONS

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### *Matawa First Nations form United Front to Protect Natural Resources*

**July 14<sup>th</sup>, 2011**- Today all nine Chiefs from Matawa First Nations communities signed a historic declaration, making the commitment to stand together to protect the natural resources and territories of member First Nations. The Mamow- Wecheekapawetahteewiin- “Unity Declaration”, states that the nine Matawa communities agree that they “must stand together in order to ensure our nation is protected. Therefore, we assert our Aboriginal and Treaty Rights to the land, water and resources by requiring our written consent before any development activity may proceed.” The “Unity Declaration” further states that; “Failure to consult, accommodate and receive the consent of the First Nation(s) to proceed with any work or activity is an unjustified infringement upon our Aboriginal, Treaty and Custodial rights as First Nations.”

The declaration that was unanimously supported comes after a Matawa summit that was held in Neskantaga First Nation in early June, 2011, that focused on the development of a unified strategy to move forward on future developments and the protection of the First Nations lands, waters and resources. Chief Sonny Gagnon of Aroland First Nation says; “With this declaration, we hope to send a very powerful message to industry and government- Matawa First Nations are working as one. Any development occurring around any of our First Nations communities will impact us as one and this needs to be recognized”.

Chief Peter Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation says; “The nine First Nations take the position that our traditional territories are under our control and approval to operate in our territories and cannot be given by the government or any other entities”.





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To date more than 100 mining companies have staked claims in an area now known as the Ring of Fire, some even moving past the advanced exploration phase in the area that is located in territories of Matawa member First Nations. Matawa leadership has been raising concerns about the impacts of the potential developments over the last two years. Chief Elijah Moonias of Marten Falls First Nation says; “We know the Ring of Fire and other developments in our territories will provide opportunity for our communities, but with this also comes challenges for our people. Matawa First Nations must support each other and together we must insist that development cannot continue to move forward without First Nations consent and meaningful participation. Our First Nations do not oppose responsible development but as the people of the land, we want to benefit from these potential mining developments and negotiate meaningful employment and business opportunities for our communities, while ensuring the environment is not at risk.”

The people of Matawa First Nations live and rely on the lands and water entrusted to them by the creator. The Unity Declaration further states, “We are connected through our language, culture and social and economic interests. The First Nations have the inherent right of self-determination as determined by our First Nations.”

The Matawa Chiefs all agree that everyone can and will benefit from these mining developments and as First Nations will work with the industries and governments that want to work with the First Nations as equal and meaningful partners. The Mamow-Wecheekapawetahteewiin- “Unity Declaration”, states that “we will do whatever is necessary in order to protect our land, our resources for the future generations.”

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