



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Matawa Chiefs fear the consequences of Canada's choice to use a Comprehensive Study Environmental Assessment process in the Ring of Fire.

Thunder Bay, October 13, 2011 – Matawa Chiefs are in a state of disbelief about the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency's (CEAA) decision to side with industry by choosing a Comprehensive Study Environmental Assessment (EA) process for the Cliff's Chromite Project near Webequie and Marten Falls First Nations. The Matawa Chiefs have been calling for a Joint Review Panel Environmental Assessment since May 2011.

"I don't understand how the CEAA can make this kind of choice," said Chief Sonny Gagnon of Aroland First Nation. "The area being affected is among one of the largest groups of intact wetlands in the world. These Ring of Fire developments are going to impact everyone in the region, one way or another, but especially the First Nations near these developments. These are First Nation homelands and we need the best EA process out there to protect them. A much smaller project near Marathon was bumped up to a Joint Panel Review EA process. Matawa First Nations would like the same for these larger projects in their region."

"Cliffs asked for a Comprehensive Study EA and got it. However, it is not the most appropriate EA for these projects. Currently, the Joint Review Panel EA is the most extensive and inclusive assessment required by government before approval of a project. It will give more time for community input and public hearings. First Nations are not stakeholders in these matters. These are our homelands since time immemorial," said Chief Peter Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) announced the formal start of the EA process for the Cliffs Chromite Project earlier this week by notifying First Nations that it plans to use the Comprehensive EA process. It will also make a decision about Noront Eagle's Nest Project in early November. For over five months Matawa Chiefs have been demanding that a Joint Review Panel EA be adopted in order to safeguard the sustainability and integrity of their lands.

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 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 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.

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.

Matawa Chiefs insist that the Cliffs and Noront Projects meet all of these conditions and require a Joint Review Panel EA process.

“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.”

Matawa community members have been writing 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

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Matawa First Nations 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 (ROF) is the name given to a resource rich geographical area located around McFaulds Lake, North of Marten Falls First Nation and east of Webequie First Nation, located in the heart of the boreal forest and in a one of the largest wetlands in the world.