

MEDIA STATEMENT

Wednesday, April 10, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA CHIEFS COUNCIL REJECT ONTARIO GOVERNMENT PROPOSAL TO REPEAL THE FAR NORTH ACT

THUNDER BAY, ON: Responding to a February 25, 2019 Government of Ontario announcement proposing to repeal the *Far North Act, 2010*—the Matawa Chiefs Council offered the following statement:

“The Matawa Chiefs Council is opposed to any unilateral legislative change that will have an impact on the Inherent Aboriginal and Treaty Rights of Matawa First Nations protected and affirmed under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982; that includes repealing the Far North Act, 2010 and proposed amendments process for the Public Lands Act, 1990 as the basis of Land Use Planning and implementation of our Inherent Aboriginal and Treaty Rights. The Matawa Chiefs Council reject the Ontario government’s proposal to repeal the Far North Act, 2010.

The proposal will have a high-level of impact on the Inherent Aboriginal and Treaty Rights of Matawa First Nations and our members, and a permanent impact on our future generations.

The proposal will place the lands of James Bay Treaty #9 under the control of the Public Lands Act, 1990 which is a significant piece of legislation that will enable other unmentioned land related legislation, regulations and policies.

The Public Lands Act, 1990 does not recognize the Inherent Aboriginal and Treaty Rights of any First Nations in Ontario. The Public Lands Act, 1990 was never intended to be applied in a fair, meaningful manner to First Nations.

The Ontario proposal to transfer existing, or yet to be completed, land use plans from the Far North Act to an ‘amended’ Public Lands Act that will have ‘substantially the same effect as under the Far North Act’ is not sufficient to address First Nations concerns. Land Use Planning in Ontario requires the participation and joint-decision making between First Nations and Ontario.

If the Far North Act is to be replaced by some other legislation, then Matawa-member First Nations must be involved in co-developing a better decision-making framework that is based on our Inherent Aboriginal and Treaty rights. The stakes are increasingly high as we continue to put forward reasonable solutions in the spirit of the Treaty, and Ontario appears to be withdrawing from commitments and damaging relationships.

Matawa Chiefs expect direct engagement from MNRF Minister Yakabuski since our members hold rights in the far north and have some First Nations that are nearing the completion of

their community-based plans, and this proposed unilateral change will have a serious impact on both our rights and planning relationships.

The Matawa Chiefs Council do not accept the Ontario position that the Public Lands Act will “continue to apply to the Far North if the Far North Act is repealed.” The land is subject to the Spirit and Intent of the James Bay Treaty # 9, and First Nations have not been included in the issue to-date.

The Matawa Chiefs Council require that Ontario abandon its approach to the Far North and unilateral imposition of legislation that impacts the Inherent Aboriginal and Treaty Rights of Matawa First Nations and our members.

The James Bay Treaty #9 is an agreement to share land and economic benefits. A government-to-government, nation-to-nation relationship will require equal decision making and revenue sharing positions for First Nations and Ontario.”

They submitted this position to the Ontario government today.

Background

- The Matawa Chiefs and Matawa First Nations represent 9 First Nations and respect the autonomy of each member First Nation.
- This statement is without prejudice to the positions Long Lake #58 First Nation takes, or may take, on the issue of whether Long Lake #58 First Nation is a party to any Treaty.
- Based on the limited amount of information provided in the Ontario proposal to repeal the Far North Act, 2010 – the Matawa Chiefs Council reserves the right to re-assess and further its positions on this issue.
- The Regional Framework Agreement (RFA) was signed by the Matawa Chiefs Council in March 2014. The RFA agreement consists of Ontario and Matawa jointly agreed upon principles and objectives that outline key priority areas of: Infrastructure; Environment; Socio-economic; and Revenue Sharing.
- The Matawa Jurisdiction Table was established in January 2017 following Matawa Chiefs Council discussions and initial commitments by former Premier Kathleen Wynne to develop a Matawa/Ontario Statement of Shared Commitments; the Statement was intended to serve as a framework to address the jurisdiction issues on roads, permitting and land management.

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For more information, please contact Carol Audet, Communications Manager – Matawa First Nations at (807) 632-9663 or by email at caudet@matawa.on.ca

Note to media: Thank you for your interest but the Matawa Chiefs are not offering any additional comment further to this statement at this time.

