

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday, March 28, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**AROLAND, EABAMETOONG AND MARTEN FALLS FIRST NATIONS SIGN
HISTORIC OGOKI FOREST AGREEMENT WITH ONTARIO BRINGING ECONOMIC
OPPORTUNITIES TO THE GREENSTONE REGION**

THUNDER BAY, ON: Three years after the First Nations of Aroland, Eabametoong and Marten Falls signed a [co-operation agreement](#) on forest tenure and forestry related economic development, officials from the Agoke Development Corporation (ADC) announced today that they signed a Forestry Agreement (the “Agreement”) with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. ADC was established in 2015 by the three First Nations to seek a greater role in the management of the Ogoki Forest. The forest was identified as a priority for forest tenure in 2012 and is currently a crown managed unit.

The Agreement gives ADC the right to implement an interim forest management approach on the Ogoki Forest while they negotiate a long-term management licence. It includes the right to harvest and responsibility to undertake renewal and maintenance in the forest. A quarterly periodic progress review including the implementation of the Independent Forest Audit action plan will also be part. ADC will be entirely responsible for the management of the silviculture and road programs. The Agreement expires on March 31, 2020 with a final date of the extension term which can be no later than March 31, 2022.

ADC has been working with local First Nations to identify and implement ways of allowing them to share in the benefits provided through forest management and the proper planning. Since 2016, ADC has built tremendous capacity by harvesting fibre to the Longlac sawmill as they explore expanding their market base. It is continuing partnership discussions with regional consuming mills and is working on a plan to re-start the sawmill in Nakina that could bring long-term economic development to the region and upwards of 300 jobs. ADC has also completed the annual work schedules and annual reports and in September 2017 began working with stakeholders and partners in the development of the next 10-year forest management plan (FMP) for 2020-2030. The current FMP is set to expire in March, 2020.

ADC sees a direct role First Nations peoples have in environmental stewardship and believes the future of the Ogoki Forest relies on strengthening the vital links between a well-managed, healthy forest, industry and local communities. ADC is committed to do its part, in the spirit of partnership, to make sustainable choices that, at the same time, improve everyone’s shared quality of life. Signing the Agreement today were Agoke Development Corporation President Mark Bell, and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry District Manager Chris Magee.

The Ogoki Forest is located 400 km north-east of Thunder Bay immediately east of the Wabakimi Provincial Park and is approximately 10,900 km² in size. It is in the traditional territories of Aroland, Eabametoong and Marten Falls within James Bay Treaty No. 9.

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

Matawa First Nations Management is a Tribal Council providing a variety of advisory services and programs to 8 Ojibway and Cree First Nations in James Bay Treaty No. 9 and 1 First Nation in the Robinson-Superior Treaty area. Follow them on Facebook or Twitter @MatawaFN

QUOTES

“I am thrilled to see our First Nations work together on the forest management of the Ogoki and I congratulate our Agoke Working Group and Matawa for working hard throughout the past few years to make this a reality. With our First Nations taking a leading role in the Ogoki, we will ensure that the right decisions are being made for the future generations.”

—*Chief Dorothy Towedo, Aroland First Nation*

“Finally, the Ministry has taken action and have heard us. The partnership with Ontario is important and in the spirit of Treaty 9. It moves us in a direction towards reconciliation. For decades we had limited or no say in the Ogoki and the Crown’s forestry process has been backwards. Are we fully there yet? No, ... but it is a starting point to talk about how we share the land and how we co-manage the land with this forestry agreement. We still need to talk revenue sharing and stumpage, we still need to make sure that government and industry adhere to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and the free, prior and informed consent framework. The time is now to get serious about making that a priority with all involved.”

—*Chief Bruce Achneepineskum, Marten Falls First Nation*

“This is a huge opportunity for our First Nations to build more capacity in managing the forest and provides a new pathway to prosperity for our youth. The forest is a sacred place and has always been our home. Since time immemorial, we have relied on it for our traditional economy of hunting, trapping, gathering of medicines and for survival. With the unemployment rate of 80 plus percent in some of our remote First Nations, this opens the door to an industry that has been stranded due to the market conditions and government bureaucracy. Now – we can educate our youth and membership and encourage them to explore careers in the forest sector. We will require federal and provincial government funding for targeted training and wrap-around support for our people to capture these opportunities. We also need to top-up the provincial road funding to assist with addressing the key infrastructure gaps in a way that respects our longstanding history on the land and makes accessing these opportunities possible.”

—*Chief Elizabeth Atlookan, Eabametoong First Nation*

