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## MEDIA RELEASE

# AROLAND, EABAMETOONG AND MARTEN FALLS MOVE FORWARD WITH AGREEMENT FOR THE OGOKI FOREST

*The First Nations are united in their position for forest tenure and economic initiatives in forestry*

**THUNDER BAY ON – FRIDAY MARCH 27, 2015:** The First Nations of Aroland, Eabametoong and Marten Falls have agreed to move forward together with forest tenure and forestry related economic development within their traditional homelands with the signing of a co-operation agreement. The three First Nations intend to play a leading role in forest governance by obtaining a long-term forest license for the Ogoki Forest Management Unit. This would allow them to undertake full forest management responsibilities including forest management planning, harvesting, road construction, forest renewal, monitoring, reporting and also establish forest-based First Nations business ventures that support community interests and values.

In 2013, Ontario identified the Ogoki Forest as one of eight forest management units that are provincial priority for modernizing forest tenure. In the past the Ontario government has faced social problems in the forest, having failed to live up to its obligations to obtain the free, prior and informed consent of First Nations. Having First Nations on side to move forward with stewardship of the land will prevent being locked into avoidable conflicts with First Nations over forest management on their traditional lands.

The Ogoki Forest is the source of life for the three First Nations, providing jobs, food, water, medicine, and the physical and spiritual base for the traditional culture. The area has been traditionally used by the local Ojibway for hunting, fishing, and trapping for over thousands of years. The Ogoki Forest's network of rivers, lakes and wetlands is also home to a rich variety of wildlife including moose, caribou, marten, wolverine, and bear.

"One of our hopes in forest tenure is minimizing the rate of unemployment and poverty and the significant lack of opportunities within our First Nations. The Ogoki Forest provides a real opportunity to access forest resources while managing the land in an environmentally sustainable way that reflects our First Nations principles. Our traditional lands are essential to the spiritual, social and economic well-being of our people, and as such we must play a critical role in the management of our lands and share in the benefits derived there from," stated Interim Chief Bruce Achneepineskum of Marten Falls First Nation.



"Ontario's forestry labour force has decreased dramatically over the last number of years. Many have either retired or moved away out west. As things improve in forestry, there will be an increased demand for a new labour force. Our First Nations are uniquely positioned to take advantage of this new demand. This is due to the location of our First Nation communities and the high percentage of youths living in our First Nations. Our youth is our future and we need to help them with education and specific training to get them ready for the future. Eabametoong is excited to be more involved in the forest industry to build business experience and for community members to develop skills and secure jobs," says Chief Elizabeth Atlookan of Eabametoong First Nation.

"Taking the lead in the management of the Ogoki Forest will create harvesting opportunities through licensing to our community loggers and entrepreneurs. Given the fact that substantial amounts of wood fibre are removed from our backyards, there is no reason that we cannot be major players in the forest sector and in the regional and global economy. We must have a fair 50/50 share in the Crown revenue derived from the fibre harvested from our territory, and we require assistance in building our capacity to capture the business and employment opportunities that flow from natural resources within our traditional lands," says Chief Sonny Gagnon of Aroland First Nation.

There will also be increased hiring opportunities in other areas. Examples are foresters, forest and environmental technicians, biologists, and environmental monitors. As First Nations become more involved in forestry economic opportunities, especially when taken to such levels as community managed forests, then many of these new positions will be with First Nation owned businesses.

The Ogoki Forest is located approximately 250 kilometres northeast of Thunder Bay, and immediately East of Wabakimi Provincial Park within the traditional lands of Aroland, Eabametoong and Marten Falls. Matawa Economic Development and Four Rivers Environmental Services are providing technical support, coordination and facilitation to assist the communities in the negotiations.

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