

## MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# **MATAWA CHIEFS COUNCIL REJECTS THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT BILL 197 CROWN TACTICS TO 'TAKE UP THE LAND' AND ACCESS THE RESOURCES AND WEALTH OF THE NORTH**

**Thunder Bay, ON**– Following the passing of *Bill 197 – Ontario's COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act* on July 21, 2020 which has instituted strategic revisions to the *Environmental Assessment Act* and weakened the requirements of Ontario's Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) to oversee and monitor the environmental impacts of resource extraction authorized by the Ministries of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) and Energy, Northern Development and Mines (ENDM)—the Matawa Chiefs Council issued this statement today rejecting the Ontario Crown's tactics to unlawfully access the wealth of the north:

At the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Ontario government declared a black-out on environmental reporting requirements and now the big reveal is the stripping of all 'red-tape' for the mining, forestry and energy industries who are eyeing the resources of the North. The Ontario government has used the cover of COVID-19 to make legislative, regulatory and policy changes that attempt to diminish the obligations of Ontario to honour the constitutionally-protected Inherent Aboriginal and Treaty Rights of First Nations across Ontario.

The Ontario government's latest strategic changes to Mining, Forestry, Energy, Environment and other land- and water-related legislation and regulations, including the *Far North Act*, 2010 which is still under 'revision' by the MNR are intended to facilitate industry access to the resources and wealth of the north. However, under the James Bay Treaty # 9, Ontario does not have singular authority to govern the region and Crown duty would require Ontario, the Premier and all Ministers of the Crown to act in a way that protects the rights and interests of Treaty # 9 descendants and beneficiaries. Instead, the Ontario government's publicly stated approach is to access the north via industry and First Nation project proponents signed to provincial-type agreements.

The Ontario government fails to recognize that the development of the north potentially constitutes a 'taking up of land' which will require significant Crown level discussions with the rights-bearing First Nations.

Specifically, Bill 197 accomplishes the introduction into Ontario legislation the new emphasis on 'projects' and 'proponents' and deletes the definition of and hiding the activities of 'undertakings' that impact our interests, rights and future.

***The Inherent Aboriginal and Treaty Rights and interests of our people are of a higher order, above the limited consultation activities and environmental protection role that the Ontario government and industry may prefer. Bill 197 demonstrates a deliberate attempt of the Ontario government to absolve itself of its Crown obligations, use Section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982 in its own interests, and eliminate the legitimate concerns and interests of our Peoples.***

### **Quote 1**

"We have inherent Aboriginal and Treaty rights over our Homelands that must be acknowledged and respected by the Crown," stated Nibinamik First Nation Chief Sheldon Oskineegish. "Our rights cannot be swept under the rug by Crown governments passing legislation designed to clear the way for mining and development on our lands

without our consent. It's shameful that Ontario is proceeding in this way and attempting to use the COVID-19 global pandemic as a smokescreen to ignore their constitutional duties to First Nations. Nibinamik will not stand for such dishonourable action. Any developments or decisions over our Homelands must be made in deep partnership with us."

## Quote 2

"Due to the economic pressures of a global pandemic, the Matawa Chiefs Council demand that Ontario will demonstrate higher standards for world class investment and growth to occur" stated Sheri Taylor, Ginoogaming First Nation Council. "We are deeply concerned about Crown government representatives making assurances to industry that Ontario will 'handle' and manage the legislation, regulations and policy related to the development of our traditional territories and homelands, intending only to extinguish our rights, disrespecting sacred sites and exclude the interests of our people, our communities and our future."

## Quote 3

"We all know that when Ontario and Canada made Treaty their goal was simple; to get our people off the land to make way for mining, forestry, dams and other so-called developments." stated Chief Chris Moonias, Neskantaga First Nation "Bill 197 is just the latest in the long history of attempts by Ontario to break the Treaty and violate our rights. The reality is that without the consent of our people resource development in the North simply will not happen."

## Additional Follow Up Efforts

- The Matawa Chiefs Council have continued to state the position of being equity partners to move forward in the Ring of Fire and the development of the North; a position put into action by participating at their own expense in Ontario Standing Committee presentations at Queen's Park and Thunder Bay on various topics to share a reasonable and workable platform that has been presented publicly and on the government record, with no response to date.
- In addition, the Matawa Chiefs Council sent a [letter to the Office of the Premier on June 8, 2020](#) requesting an opportunity to formally participate and collaborate with Ontario on the (COVID-19) Action Plan for Jobs and Economic Recovery.
- On the issues related to the revoking of MNR-75, Ontario Draft Forest Sector Strategy including proposed resource revenue sharing and the *Far North Act*, 2010, the Matawa Chiefs Council sent [a letter to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry \(MNR\) on July 29, 2020](#).

## Matawa Chiefs Council

- Provide this [background analysis and overview](#) of Ontario's Strategic Areas Related to Accessing the North.
- The Matawa Chiefs Council 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.
- The Matawa Chiefs Council reserves the right to re-assess and further its positions on this issue.

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