



MATAWA FIRST NATIONS

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Government & Industry steam ahead on Ring of Fire developments, while First Nations are left waiting on the Platform

**Thunder Bay, ON, January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011** - With daily news releases being issued by Ontario, the mining industry and regional municipalities about developments in the Ring of Fire, the local Matawa First Nations seriously question why they have not been consulted about decisions that directly impact their people, communities and way of life.

The nine Matawa First Nations Chiefs, including Marten Falls, Webequie and Neskantaga First Nations, recently held an emergency meeting to discuss the lack of government and industry consultation in the planning and development processes taking place in the Ring of Fire. "To our knowledge, there is not one single advanced exploration or mining agreement in place between any of our First Nations and any mining company that is exploring in the Ring of Fire area." says Chief Roy Moonias.

Continues Chief Sonny Gagnon of Aroland First Nation; "While regional municipalities from Thunder Bay to Sudbury compete for site selection for the smelter facility and construction route of a transportation corridor into our traditional territory, our First Nations who actually live in the Ring of Fire, have not yet been invited to the table to even initiate discussions over community impacts."

Currently Aroland First Nation is lobbying to get the smelter near the First Nation community, signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Greenstone. Chief Gagnon says; "It only makes sense to build a smelter near our community and to benefit the immediate region from where the minerals are being taken out of. It is viable to generate electricity to run this mining facility in the area, but we need the Government's support to make it a reality."

Close to 100 mining companies have staked claims in the Ring of Fire, home of the world's largest chromite deposit, and several companies are reporting that they are in advanced stages of exploration. The Ring of Fire is located in the traditional territories of several Matawa First Nations who have been raising concerns about the impacts of





MATAWA FIRST NATIONS

exploration and mining on their communities for a number of years. Concerns are based on the escalating impacts of a wide range of issues including socio-economic impacts, environmental impacts such as water quality, clear cutting and impacts to wildlife populations. More recently, the concerns have also focused on potential benefits such as employment, new business and training opportunities for local people.

“Consultation means coming to our communities to talk to local people - youth, Elders, trappers, about how a mining development or railway could affect our ways of life or community. Our people only learn about what is happening in their backyards through the media or when they see it with their own eyes when they are out on the lands. They are demanding explanations about how they will be accommodated or benefit from these developments. We as leaders do not have the resources and funding to get the answers and this lack of community engagement by the Government and the mining industry is simply insulting,” says Chief Cornelius Wabasse of Webequie First Nation.

Matawa First Nations have continually asserted that they do not oppose responsible development in their territory and that they recognize the potential benefits for their communities and the Northern Ontario region as a whole. What the Matawa Chiefs are demanding is that exploration agreements be negotiated with each impacted First Nation individually or collectively and that process be properly funded by the government and industry. These agreements must be in place before any development proceeds.

Chief Gagnon says; “This activity in the Ring of Fire cannot continue to move forward without First Nations consent and meaningful participation. We all want to benefit from these potential mining developments and negotiate employment and business opportunities for our people. I am not willing to let history repeat itself by watching this train leave the station without us and have my grand-children ask me in 20 years why we were left behind with nothing while everyone else got rich.”

Continues Chief Roy Moonias; “Today our concerns are manifesting themselves as formal resolutions to the Government of Ontario and Industry to properly consult with us and to accommodate our concerns, but if they continue to ignore us, we are willing and prepared to intervene and take this to the highest level of accountability as First Nations and as a regional group.”





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In 2010, the United Nations Study entitled, *The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* highlights the enormous importance of land and territories to indigenous cultural identity and “that their rights to their own lands and territories must be respected.” It also states “Indigenous peoples suffer from the consequences of historic injustice, including colonization, dispossession of their lands, territories and resources .... as well as lack of control over their own ways of life. Their right to development has been largely denied by colonial and modern States in the pursuit of economic growth.”

Estimates show that the economic growth potential in the Ring of Fire development is worth billions with more than 3000 on-going operations jobs expected, along with 3600 construction jobs.

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