MATAWA FIRST NATIONS

MEDIA ADVISORY URGENT: Matawa Chiefs to hold Media Conference Friday October 21, 2011

NO JOINT REVIEW PANEL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT, NO RING OF FIRE DEVELOPMENT SAY MATAWA CHIEFS

THUNDER BAY, ONTARIO – OCTOBER 21, 2011: Matawa Chiefs withdrew their support for development in the Ring of Fire (ROF) today. The Chiefs and the 8,000 people they represent are calling on Premier McGuinty and Prime Minister Harper to intervene in the Environmental Assessment (EA) process.

"We will be forced to resort to alternative measures if Canada and Ontario continue to ignore the First Nations that are being impacted by Ring of Fire developments," said Chief Roger Wesley of Constance Lake First Nation.

Matawa Chiefs are outraged that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) is proceeding with a Comprehensive Study EA. The Chiefs and their people have been calling for a Joint Review Panel EA for five months but the government is still not listening. Both the provincial and the federal governments are failing in their constitutional duty to consult and accommodate First Nations. According to the Chiefs, the government is telling them what they plan to do, but it is not consulting or accommodating them about how they want to be involved. The Chiefs maintain that the manner in which the government is proceeding with development in Northern Ontario is going to slowly destroy their traditional way of life, extinguish their treaty rights and destroy their homelands and their children's future.

"We want development, but we also want to make sure that our lands, waters, wildlife, and our way of life are not destroyed in the process. The government is forcing us to take alternative action. They are not listening to us or consulting us in a meaningful way, and they are certainly not accommodating us," said Chief Roger Wesley of Constance Lake First Nation.

The Matawa Chiefs explained that they do not want a repeat in Matawa homelands of what happened out west with the Athabasca River from the negative impact of the Oil Sands developments. First Nations in Alberta were not meaningfully consulted on those projects either.

"The government is failing in this whole Ring of Fire and northern development initiative. It is failing First Nations again. We need the Ontario Premier and the Prime Minister to intervene and come to the table. We need a government-to-government dialogue here. Visits from junior ministerial representatives telling us what is happening instead of asking

us how we want to participate is not consultation or accommodation. Government departments and ministries are not listening to us**.** Cliffs is already advertising its inappropriate consultation schedule, and the CEAA posted its public invitation to comment with a map of Northern Ontario that makes it look like no one lives near these projects. The map didn't have a single First Nation community on it! We aren't even on their radar. That is offensive to our people. That is exactly the way government views the people who live where these developments are happening, like we don't exist," said Chief Eli Moonias of Marten Fall First Nation.

"We are done with repeating ourselves. The province needs our cooperation and the people of Ontario and Canada need our cooperation. Government is creating conflict between First Nations and industry because they are failing in their duty to consult and accommodate," said Chief Cornelius Wabasse of Webequie First Nation.

All nine Matawa Chiefs are unified in their position. The Chiefs are meeting with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency and the Province of Ontario Ring of Fire (ROF) Coordinator Christen Kaszyck on Thursday October 20 and Friday October 21.

The Chiefs will hold a media conference during the last day of their discussions with the Federal and Provincial Government.

The media conference is scheduled to take place on Friday October 21 at 12:00 pm at the Da Vinci Centre, 340 South Waterloo Street.

For more information contact:

Anita Fraser
Communications Officer
Matawa First Nations
Tel (807) 344-4575
Fax (807) 344-2977
E-mail: afraser@matawa.on.ca

Jason Rasevych
Internal Communications Officer
Matawa First Nations
Tel (807) 346-6517
Fax (807) 344-2977
Email: jrasevych@matawa.on.ca

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) announced the formal start of the EA process for the Cliffs Chromite Project earlier last week by notifying First Nations that it plans to use the Comprehensive EA process. It will also make a decision about Noront Eagle's Nest Project in early November. For over five months Matawa Chiefs have been demanding that a Joint Review Panel EA be adopted in order to safeguard the sustainability and integrity of their lands.

A Joint Review Panel EA is critical for this area. It brings together the Provincial and Federal Governments to produce one EA for each project. There is no set timeline and more opportunity for public participation, allowing for oral hearings to be held in the communities. First Nations need the best environmental assessment process that is currently available and that is the Joint Review Process EA.

The projects include developing mining and infrastructure components such as roads, electrical transmission and telecommunication lines on the traditional territories. These developments will profoundly affect the Matawa communities of Webequie, Marten Falls and Neskantaga First Nations. Many environmental impacts have already been identified for both projects.

The CEAA has indicated that there are three conditions that would convince the CEAA to move to a Joint Review Process:

1. Significant adverse effects on the environment
2. Significant public concern
3. Infringement on Aboriginal and Treaty Rights.

Matawa Chiefs insist that all of these conditions exist right now and a Joint Review Panel EA is critical.

Matawa is a Tribal Council with a membership of nine Ojibway and Cree First Nation communities in Northern Ontario. Five Matawa First Nations are remote and are currently accessible only by air or winter ice road. Matawa First Nations Management provides advisory services and program delivery to Matawa First Nations.

Ring of Fire is the name given to a resource rich geographical area located in Matawa First Nation homelands and tradtional territories, north of Marten Falls First Nation and east of Webequie First Nation, in the heart of the boreal forest and the largest collection of intact wetlands in the world.