

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS



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April 12, 2011

Mr. Vaughn Collins, Chair
Fish and Wildlife Heritage Commission
1615 Canning Road, RR #1
Severn Bridge, Ontario
P0E 1N0

Dear Mr. Collins:

Subject: Algonquin Land Claim

You recently received a letter from our colleagues at the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association (CSIA), in which they outlined their concerns over the Algonquin Land Claim and the potential impact it might have on fisheries resources in Algonquin Park itself, and throughout the claim area.

The CSIA and the OFAH sit on the Committee of External Advisors for the land claim, and have recently met with the federal Minister of Indian Affairs. We have also met with the Chief Provincial Negotiator several times, the Federal Chief Negotiator and the provincial Minister of Aboriginal Affairs twice in the last three months. We share the concerns expressed by the CSIA in their correspondence, and were pleased to partner with them in a joint presentation on the land claim at the 83rd OFAH Annual General Meeting and Fish & Wildlife Conference.

Enclosed is a copy of the presentation we made at that meeting, which outlines the concerns that the OFAH has with the land claim process, the potential impact the claim may have on our fish and wildlife resources, on access, and most critically, the fair sharing of these resources. Given the fact that 1.4 million nonaboriginals live in the claim area, including 150,000 licensed hunters and 22,000 OFAH members, it is imperative that the governments involved get this right the first time.

As the only comprehensive claim in Ontario, the Algonquin Land Claim is being watched closely, not only by aboriginal groups in Ontario and across the country, but also by other provincial governments as a template for future negotiations of this type. It is incumbent upon the parties at the table to ensure that a full and robust consultation process occurs with all of the groups and individuals impacted upon by the claim, including anglers, hunters, trappers, cottage associations, hunt camps, municipalities, businesses, landowners and others.

Conservation of resources, fish and wildlife management plans for Algonquin Park, fair sharing, enforcement, monitoring and assessment, designated harvest agreements for many fish and wildlife species, access, park management structure, and overlapping claims are a few of our primary concerns.

This in turn has created a number of key questions that demand to be answered before an Agreement in Principle (AIP) is signed.

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First among these is the question of how both levels of government can state that an AIP and Treaty will result in certainty, when so many overlapping claims have yet to be resolved. Secondly, what is the province's definition of "fair sharing," a critically important question to nonaboriginal stakeholders? Thirdly, how much has the province spent to date on the land claim? The federal government has been forthcoming with its expenditures, but the province has yet to comply with a request for similar information.

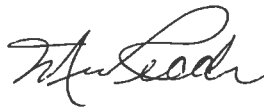
Lastly, how is it that the Métis, who have not conclusively demonstrated that they meet the test set down in the Powley decision, are able to continue hunting in the claim area while the province looks the other way? Three separate reports have all concluded that there is no evidence that a Métis community ever existed in the Mattawa area. Two of these reports were compiled by the provincial government, the other by the Algonquin themselves, none of which have been released to the public despite repeated requests by the OFAH.

Like the CSIA, we were pleased when the federal Minister indicated that they support a longer timeline in reaching an agreement, and are on side with requests for a full and meaningful consultation with all interested parties before the AIP is signed. The province has made no such commitment. They recently agreed that their original goal of having an AIP in place by this spring was overly ambitious, and backed away from that timeline. However, they have not indicated how they will ensure that all voices will be heard, not just those at the negotiating table.

With a mandate to serve as both a sounding board and as an independent advisory body to the Minister, the Commission has a unique opportunity to bring a different perspective to the discussions. We are interested in knowing if the Commission is being proactive on this file. Has the Commission raised this issue with the Minister? Is the Commission advocating on behalf of the tens of thousands of anglers and hunters who may potentially be affected by the claim, and in the best interests of conservation? Does the Commission support an open and accountable public consultation process, the principle of fair sharing, the concept of cooperative management as opposed to comanagement, the maintenance of public ownership of Crown lands in the area of the claim, particularly provincial parks, and continued access for nonaboriginals to hunt and fish?

We look forward to hearing about the Commission's support for these principles, and what actions have been taken to reinforce them with the Province in order to convey back to our membership the role of the Commission on this critical file.

Yours in Conservation,



Michael A. Reader
Executive Director



Greg Farrant
Manager, Government Affairs & Policy

MAR/GF/jb
Encl.

cc: Tom Brooke, Fish & Wildlife Heritage Commission
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