

July 31, 2012

AN OPEN LETTER TO MUNICIPALITIES
IN THE AREA OF THE ALGONQUIN LAND CLAIM

Dear Mayor/Reeve:

As you know, the discussions around the Algonquin Land Claim, and negotiations toward an Agreement-in-Principle (AIP) by the three parties at the table has been accelerated over the last two or three years, after a lack of progress on this file since the early 1990's.

The groups listed below represent tens of thousands of members who live, work and recreate within the area of the land claim. We have recently been involved in what the provincial and federal governments refer to as "public consultations." In our view, these meetings are less about consultation and more about the province providing us with vague generalities about the state of negotiations. True public consultation has yet to occur and we had asked in advance of our meeting with the negotiators on July 26, 2012, for a schedule laying out how the two levels of government intend to broaden the consultation process to include the general public who may be directly affected by the outcome of negotiations. This information was not presented, and no commitment was made as to when the information might be expected.

We are reaching out to municipalities who have been part of the Committee of External Affairs/Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs process. We have repeatedly been told that Sydne Taggart of the Ministry of Natural Resources' Aboriginal Affairs Negotiations Unit, has been working closely with affected municipalities on issues including land selection, taxation, development and other related issues. Given the lack of in-depth consultation on issues such as enforcement, harvesting, fish and wildlife management plans and others, we hope that the municipal sector has been more successful in having its issues addressed as part of the process.

We strongly believe that a thorough review of the potential impact of the claim on fish and wildlife populations, conservation of those resources and the impact on local businesses and the economy should be a priority. These factors, along with the potential impact on the lives of your residents, on anglers, hunters, tourism, hunt camps, forestry, cottage associations, and others argue for broader public consultation and transparency as part of the process BEFORE an AIP is signed. Parks, fish and wildlife, forests, and Crown lands may be subject to considerable change as a result of the claim. Access to Crown land and trails may also be affected. There will be considerable land given over to the Algonquin as part of the settlement. What land parcels are involved? How will the land in question be used? What rules for development will apply? What impact will the land selection have on local residents, on cottagers, on hunt camps, outfitters and resource-based tourist operators? What impact will the land selection process have on local lakes and watersheds? The answers to these and other questions remain to be answered to our satisfaction.

Suggestions by government that the AIP will be general in nature, with twenty topical chapters, are questionable in light of other AIP's across the country which contain very specific levels of detail in them. It is important that the province and the federal government get it right the first time, not just for the sake of the Algonquin, but in the interests of the 1.4 million nonaboriginal residents within the land claim who are depending on their local, provincial and federal governments to represent their interests at the table.

Our members and customers are your constituents, and we are sure that many of the concerns that we have expressed are also of concern to municipal leaders such as yourself. Recreational fishing and hunting generates over \$2.5 billion in annual economic activity in Ontario, and the license revenue from the almost 1.5 million anglers and hunters pays for over two-thirds of all fish and wildlife programs in the province. In the area of the claim, fishing, hunting and the related economy support over 8,000 jobs and generates \$699 million in annual business. Hotels, tourist outfitters, gas stations, restaurants, and other retail establishments in eastern Ontario benefit significantly from recreational fishing and hunting, and in turn, contribute significantly to the local tax base.

It is critical that the views of local businesses and the 1.4 million nonaboriginals who live within the claim area are heard. It is important that the broader public has a vehicle through which they can ask questions, get answers and voice their concerns. It is important that an economic impact statement is prepared and that the rules for development are clear.

We will continue to press for a more comprehensive consultation process around the land claim process that will address the issues outlined above, and that will provide the general public with an opportunity to be fully informed in advance of a landmark agreement that may significantly impact on their daily lives. On behalf of the residents and businesses in your municipality, we respectfully ask that you join us in demanding that the public's voice be heard.

Yours sincerely,

Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association
Canadian Shooting Sports Association
Canadian Sporting Arms and Ammunition Association
Conservationists of Lennox and Addington
Delta Waterfowl
Friends of Fur
Land O' Lakes Tourist Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters
Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs
Ontario Fur Managers Federation
Ontario Hunt Camps Association
Ontario Trails Council
Ottawa Valley Tourist Association
Safari Club International - Canada