

NAN questions mining activity

Platinex moving equipment to claims near Big Trout Lake

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Citing a lack of consultation between a southern Ontario mineral exploration company and Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug First Nation, the Nishnawbe Aski Nation claims the province isn't living up to its treaty obligations on resource development.

"We had high expectations after the November 2005 Mikisew Supreme Court decision regarding the Crown's duty to consult and accommodate with First Nations when activities like mining threaten our aboriginal and treaty rights," NAN Grand Chief Stan Beardy said.

"The fact that Ontario has not implemented this decision in our province sets the tone for First Nation and government relations for resource development in NAN territory," Beardy said.

"Our treaty partners continue to dis-

regard direction from the Supreme Court in dealing with our people," claimed band council spokesman John Cuffeet.

Toronto-based Platinex Inc. began mobilizing equipment this month on to its mining claims about 25 kilometres southwest of Big Trout Lake First Nation.

While band leaders maintain there has been a lack of consultation about the company's exploration plans, Platinex spokesman Simon Baker said exhaustive discussions have taken place.

"Absolutely yes, we have been talking. We've been talking for seven years," he said.

"We've worked successfully with the band in the past, and we know we're dealing with a situation where I think the community has some issues with the government," said Baker.

"Alas, I think the government is get-

ting involved, and hopefully this issue, that has been in the press, will be resolved very soon."

Deputy Mines Minister Christine Kaszycki said the ministry has attempted to set up a meeting with the band council to discuss the issue.

"We've had a favourable response from the community (earlier this year about holding a meeting), but haven't been able to confirm a date," she said.

In a letter to the Globe and Mail published Wednesday, Platinex president James Trusler states that the company "continues to seek consultation in good faith to ensure appropriate benefits to the community," including assistance to develop sustainable economic development projects.

However, he said, following the chief and band council's recent "refusal to continue consultation in good faith, the company is proceeding with exploration.

... Nevertheless, if a (chromium/platinum/palladium) ore body is discovered and developed, Platinex will do its best to ensure that benefits accrue to the community.

"We invite Chief Donny Morris to join us in an initiative that could be of tremendous value for the future of people in the region," Trusler states in his letter. "Platinex respects the people of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug and continues to seek a mutually beneficial working relationship."

Platinex is exploring for platinum group elements on its 8,840-acre Big Trout Lake property as well as 81 mining leases acquired from Inco in November. The mining claims are about 580 kilometres north of Thunder Bay.

Meanwhile, band leaders say they are worried that the addition of seven Ontario Provincial Police officers in the community "to keep the peace" will in-

crease tension and paranoia among residents.

"We've been told by the OPP that extra officers have been brought in to keep the peace in the community," said Cuffeet. "However, their presence, particularly the vehicle checks of those coming or leaving the community, has created increased tension."

OPP Sgt. Deb Tully said police sent in the extra officers due to a land claim dispute between the band and a mining company, and the possibility of a blockade of the winter road.

"We're dealing with a very remote area so we wanted to ensure the situation is properly monitored and to ensure public safety," she said.

There has been no road block to date, but Tully said there is a possibility of a peaceful demonstration at the exploration site over the next few days.