

'No mining permitted here': Chief Donny Morris



Wawatay News file photo

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Chief Donny Morris.

Grand Chief Stan Beardy urging other communities to follow suit

by Joyce Hunter

joyceh@wawatay.on.ca

Four First Nations declared a moratorium on mining exploration and forestry in their traditional territories.

Kitchenuhmaykoosib, Muskrat Dam, Wapekeka and Wawakapewin issued the moratorium after meeting to discuss a diamond mining company's request to access their traditional

lands for mining exploration.

While his community declared a moratorium several years ago, Chief Donny Morris said the meeting reaffirmed his community's position.

The four chiefs also discussed the province's plan to spend \$15 million on a three-year geological mapping initiative. Once completed, the mapping will show the region's geology and mineral resource potential. During the program, Ontario Geological Survey (OGS) will collect, compile and analyze data and then publicly post the results for resource companies and other interested parties to access.

The province is now holding public consultations on its mineral development strategy.

With more development pressures being added on Far North communities, the chiefs feel obligated to protect their land.

"Unfortunately, they hold their consultations in urban settings," Morris said of resource-based companies and organizations. "It would cost my people about \$800 each to arrange a return

flight, hotel stay, meals and other ground transportation just to listen to their presentation. Because my people can't afford to travel because of the high rate of unemployment in my community, the government will take it to mean that we are simply not showing any interest. That is not the case."

Because First Nation communities in the North will be directly affected by the outcome of the mapping initiative, Morris said the provincial government should arrange to hold consultations in Far North communities.

"Then they will know that we have different ideas about how the land should be managed," Morris said.

The moratorium will send a strong message to the government that the time has come for a new dialogue on revenue sharing, consultation and an end to the "free entry" system currently being used in mineral exploration.

He also said the rules for resource development on First Nation lands need to be changed.

"What is contained in

my land is a non-renewable resource," he said. "Once it is taken out, it is gone forever."

Morris will not accept legislation from an outside lawmaker when it comes to deciding the fate of his people's lands.

"You are who you are as an Aboriginal," he said. "As an Aboriginal, my relationship with the land I live on does not come from (government). If I go through their legislations or rules, I am accepting outside law. That won't work for us."

Grand Chief Stan Beardy is also urging other Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities to follow Kitchenuhmaykoosib's lead. In a Nov. 4 letter Beardy states "if you support the moratorium, please indicate your support by faxing the endorsement on your community's BCR (band council resolution) or letterhead back.

"We cannot relinquish the natural wealth on the land and in waters under our jurisdiction until fundamental issues regarding the poverty and living conditions of our communities are addressed," Beardy wrote.

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