

Matawa pulls Ring of Fire support

BY CARL CLUTCHNEY
NORTH SHORE BUREAU

Saying they "are done repeating ourselves," the nine First Nations in the immediate orbit of the Ring of Fire zone has withdrawn their mining development support over concerns about pollution and what they contend is inadequate consultation.

"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," Matawa First Nations said Thursday.

"We want development, but we al-

so want to make sure that our lands, waters, wildlife and our way of life are not destroyed in the process."

Matawa said it is "outraged" that the first proposed Ring of Fire project — Cliffs Natural Resources chromite mine — has yet to be referred to an independent environmental review panel.

"Cliffs is already advertising its inappropriate consultation schedule, and the Canadian Environment Assessment Agency posted its public invitation to comment with a map of Northern Ontario that makes it look like no one lives near these projects," said Matawa.

"The map didn't have a single First Nation community on it. We

aren't even on their radar."

Cliffs wants to have its mine, located about 500 kilometres north of Thunder Bay, in production by 2015.

Under the company's current proposal, chromite ore — a key ingredient in stainless steel — would be trucked to Nakina on an all-weather road, then railed to a Sudbury-area smelter via CN Rail's main line.

Though Cliffs' proposal hasn't been referred to an independent review panel, the CEAA's "comprehensive" process that started this week can provide a thorough review, federal officials say.

"It delivers both a high-quality assessment and opportunities for public participation," said CEAA

spokeswoman Celine Legault.

That said, added Legault, federal Environment Minister Peter Kent can at anytime in the process require that Cliffs' project be reviewed by an independent panel.

Matawa said earlier it was surprised that the Cliffs project wasn't immediately referred to a joint provincial and federal panel, when a proposal for a copper-palladium mine near Marathon was.

"A joint review panel (assessment) is critical for the (Ring of Fire)," said Matawa.

"It brings together the provincial and federal governments to produce one environmental assessment for each project. There is no set timeline

and more opportunity for public participation, allowing for oral hearings to be held in the communities."

For a mining project to be subject to a review panel, which includes public hearings, it must have the potential for significant adverse effects on the environment, generate significant public concern and potentially cause an infringement on Aboriginal and treaty rights.

For five months, the Matawa chiefs have insisted "that all of these conditions exist right now and a joint review panel environmental assessment is critical."

Matawa is to hold a news conference about the issue today at noon at Thunder Bay's Da Vinci Centre.