

Mining peace sought

Plan to end blockade outlined

THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

A First Nations blockade at the Ring of Fire could come to an end as early as next week if a new memorandum of agreement is accepted by the Ontario government and mining companies.

Marten Falls First Nation Chief Elijah Moonias met with government and industry representatives Tuesday, and outlined the First Nations' concerns. Those include speeding up construction of a new airport, more environmental accountability for the mining companies, and the end to the use of frozen lakes as winter landing strips due to environmental concerns.

A group of First Nations has set up blockades on the landing strips at Koper and McFaulds lakes in the Ring of Fire, a potentially massive chromite deposit about 500 kilometres northeast of Thunder Bay.

The blockade is effectively preventing planes used by mining companies from landing in the area.

The blockade, the First Nations said in a prepared statement, could end by Feb. 18 if all parties agree to address First Nations' concerns within the next six months.

"We are against development where we have no input," Moonias said in the release. "We want to ensure long-term benefits from development in our treaty-protected territory."

Tuesday in Thunder Bay, Webequie First Nation Chief Cornelius Wabasse said the First Nations' requests are simple ones.

"There's nothing really that's very complicated to be addressed," he said during the Matawa First Nations Mineral Exploration Mining Symposium at the Italian Cultural Centre.

"Once those things are addressed, then we will dismantle the blockade."



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Constance Lake First Nation Coun. Raymond Farris makes a presentation Tuesday on mining and his community, during the Matawa First Nations Mineral Exploration Mining Symposium in Thunder Bay.

Process to end conflicts unveiled

BY KRIS KETONEN
THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL

A new document aims to stave off conflicts between First Nations and mining companies looking to start operations on band territories.

The Interim Minerals Measures Process (IMMP) was unveiled Tuesday during the Matawa First Nations Mineral Exploration Mining Symposium.

The IMMP is a guide, developed by First Nations and mining companies, which outlines the process that should be followed as mining developments move along — initial notification, initial contact, the first meeting, and even suspension of negotiations.

"It is very important," Webequie First Nation Chief Cornelius Wabasse said at the symposium, being held at the Italian Cultural Centre in Thunder Bay. "Previously, we didn't have that document, so we didn't know what processes to look at, or even to use, to deal with the mining companies."

"It's a really good document. It's a guideline that sets our way towards working with the mining companies," Wabasse said.

However, since the IMMP is a guide to how consultations between mining companies and First Nations should work, he cautioned that it might not always keep conflict in check, since other issues outside of the process itself could arise.

"It's a way of putting a process around it, so it's a similar way with each First Nation, so a company doesn't go in and do something with Marten Falls and another thing with Aroland," said Richard Fink, general manager of acquisitions and development with Cliffs Natural Resources.

"I thought it was just an excellent process," Fink said.

"It makes it much more understandable for us and, I think, eliminates the potential for confusion or miscommunication."

Feedback was given on the IMMP Tuesday, and word at the symposium indicated a final version of the plan is to be ready by March.

The symposium continues today, with Northern Development, Mines and Forestry Minister Michael Gravelle and Aboriginal Affairs Minister Chris Bentley scheduled to speak in the morning.