



Attawapiskat  
First Nation

Kashechewan  
First Nation

Fort Albany  
First Nation

Moose Cree  
First Nation

Taykwa Tagamou  
Nation

Chapleau Cree  
First Nation

Missanabie Cree  
First Nation

**MUSHKEGOWUK COUNCIL**

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## **MUSHKEGOWUK CHIEFS CALL FOR MORATORIUM ON DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN THE RING OF FIRE TO ENSURE SENSITIVE WETLANDS AND WATERSHEDS ARE PROTECTED FIRST**

MOOSE FACTORY-Mushkegowuk Council Chiefs are calling for a moratorium on development in the Ring of Fire until a proper protection plan through a comprehensive study (s) based on best science and Traditional Ecological data, is implemented for the globally significant carbon rich Hudson Bay Lowland within the Mushkegowuk Territory. This would include major rivers such as the Attawapiskat, Albany, Ekwan and Winisk and thousands of streams that flow into the Hudson Bay and James Bay.

“We are talking about the peatlands. We see them as the breathing and cooling lands for the planet, which is the third largest wetland in the world and one of richest carbon storehouses on Earth,” Grand Chief Solomon said. “Without the proper planning and appropriate consideration of the sensitive wetlands, much damage will occur downstream, down muskeg, which is the homeland of the Omushkego people. We all rely heavily on this valuable and fragile ecosystem,” Solomon added.

When the Ontario Premier Doug Ford, together with two Chiefs from Mattawa First Nations announced plans to proceed with building roads, three Chiefs from Mushkegowuk met with their counterpart from Neskantaga First Nation to discuss their apprehension regarding opening up access to the Ring of Fire.

Chief Chris Moonias of Neskantaga said, “The practical reality is that no project in the Ring of Fire can proceed without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Neskantaga and the Mushkegowuk Nations. The Divide and Conquer tactics of the government are deplorable. It is irresponsible to continue to plan for mining and industrial roads during the COVID-19 Pandemic and while we are still fighting to secure clean water for our community.”

Both Chief David Nakogee of Attawapiskat First Nation and Chief Chris Moonias of Neskantaga First Nation are concerned over the Attawapiskat River which connects their communities and also flows through the Ring of Fire. Chief Nakogee is especially concerned over the downstream impacts on the Attawapiskat river. “We have seen mercury and other contaminant levels on the Attawapiskat river rise in recent years as a result of one mine, the DeBeers Victor Mine. When the roads are built and many new mines are developed in the Ring of Fire, where will we be able to get safe drinking water and healthy food from the land” asks Chief David Nakogee.

“The Albany River and all the other waterways flowing through our land are the life blood of our culture and our way of life. To have road access and bridges over them will mean that we will see permanent changes to fish, the migration of caribou and to the hydrology of the river and wetlands,” said Chief Robert Nakogee of Fort Albany First Nation.

Chief Leo Friday of Kashechewan First Nation also added: “We are especially concerned over the dangerous materials that will be carried over these roads. Anything that is spilled will be carried downstream, contaminating the James Bay Lowlands and affect our ability to continue to use our lands for our survival”.

Mushkegowuk Council is also deeply concerned by the environmental deregulation agenda of the Ontario government, notably the actions it took in the summer of 2020 to amend the Environmental Assessment Act (EAA) by way of Bill 197 – the *COVID-19 Economic Recovery Act*. The Council shares the concerns of several First Nations and environmental groups that this is a ‘fast-track approach which contravened consultation rights and a violation of Constitutional rights of First Nations’. The amended EAA now gives the Minister the power to decide what projects should, or should not be on the Registered List of projects requiring an Environmental Assessment. Mushkegowuk Council fears that the Ring of Fire and all access roads to the site will be given this ‘fast-track’ approach with very little regard to environmental concerns and cautions, especially when no new regulations for the amended EAA have been conveyed to the First Nations.

“We are proud that the Mushkegowuk Hudson Bay/James Bay Lowlands are one of the largest remaining intact wetland areas left on this planet. We need to think carefully before opening them up to roads and mining. These developments will change them permanently,” Grand Chief Solomon said.

“Ontario needs to work together with all of us First Nations to ensure a safe place for all people of this land, of this province, of this country, this planet. We cannot have them continue to issue permitting licenses for exploration when some of our communities are not able to respond during this pandemic; and we have a larger responsibility as Treaty people, of which Ontario is part of as is evident in the Treaty Commissioner George McMartin Diaries from August 12, 1905 *“that they were allowed as of yore to hunt and fish as they pleased,* Solomon concluded.

Mushkegowuk Council represents primarily 7 communities of Missanabie Cree First Nation, Chapleau Cree First Nation, Taykwa Tagamou Nation, Moose Cree First Nation, Kashechewan First Nation, Ft. Albany First Nation, and Attawapiskat First Nation. Winisk (Peawanuck) First Nation also works with the Mushkegowuk Council Nations.

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