



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Using the camouflage of Christmas – Province shows it cares more for safety of mine exploration workers than First Nation residents

Cat Lake, [December 29, 2023] – Responding to a December 22, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) letter, Cat Lake First Nation (400 Km N of Thunder Bay) Chief Russel Wesley expresses his distress that Premier Ford puts mining explorers' safety higher than the well-being of the Cat Lake community members.

"The safety of our community members is of utmost importance to us, and it is disheartening to witness the prioritization of miner safety over the safety of our own people," stated Chief Russel Wesley. "The MNR grants First Mining Gold (FMG) an overland winter road, yet our community still has no year around road access and faces the risks of traveling over hazardous ice in several areas. A situation made even more perilous by climate change. It is a clear indication that yet again our safety is not considered equal to that of others."

The letter contains MNR's decision to grant a five-year permit for the winter road raises additional concerns within the Cat Lake community. This extended permit duration signals that Premier Ford has already made long-term plans for the project. It questions the validity of the Federal and Provincial Environmental Assessment (EA) process and the communities ongoing indigenous lead impact assessment, raising doubts about the Ontario governments awareness of free, prior, and informed consent.

"The five-year permit duration raises questions about the EA process being a mere formality," Chief Russel Wesley added. "This decision sends a clear message to Cat Lake First Nation that our consent and concerns hold no weight with Ontario in matters concerning our own territory. It disregards our right to make informed decisions."

The Cat Lake First Nation finds it concerning that the decision made by the MNR and FMG implies a lack of respect for the community's voice. Despite Cat Lake repeatedly having expressed their disagreement, it appears that the Ontario authorities are willing to proceed with their plans without the required consent.

Chief Russel Wesley concluded. "This is not a Christmas present anyone would want - we demand equal treatment and consideration for the well-being of our people, as we continue to work towards protecting our rights and land."

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For media inquiries or to schedule an interview with Chief Russell Wesley contact: Vicki Blanchard, Cat Lake First Nation Advisor at 807-220-3585 or blanchardvicki21@gmail.com

Cat Lake First Nation (CLFN) is a remote fly-in First Nation reserve. It is home to 800 people speaking Ojibwe and English located 180 km northwest of Sioux Lookout, Ontario, The Ojibwe name is Bizhiw-zaaga'iganiing Nitam Anishinaabeg meaning "The First Nation at Wild-Cat Lake," where wild-cat refers to the [Canada lynx](#). CLFN is a member of the Windigo First Nations Council, a non-political regional chiefs' council. In turn, the Windigo First Nations Council is a member of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation which represents 49, Treaty 9 communities.

In late November 2023, Cat Lake First Nation Chief Russell Wesley addressed the Chiefs of Ontario (COO) conference (representing the 133 Ontario First Nation communities) in Toronto. During his speech, Chief Wesley unveiled a button that represents the strength and resilience of the Cat Lake First Nation community, as well as their unwavering commitment to defending their land and culture. COO passed a Resolution supporting Cat Lake First Nation at the Fall Chiefs Assembly on November 23, 2023



The button depicts Premier Doug Ford on a bulldozer being observed by Lynx cats, symbolizing the ongoing struggle between the Cat Lake First Nation and the Province of Ontario. The caption "Cat Lake First Nation Strong" and "Defend Land and Culture" underscore the community's determination to protect their ancestral lands and stand up against encroachment.