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Aboriginal Leaders Face Jail Time in Spreading Disputes over First Nations Rights and Mining Claims Consultation and Conservation Demands Conflict with Outdated Mining Law across Canada's Boreal Forest

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Thunder Bay, ON – Spreading disputes between First Nations and mining companies may lead to jail time for Aboriginal leaders in northern Ontario pending the outcome of an Ontario Superior Court of Justice appearance today. Chief Donnie Morris and other members of Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI), an Aboriginal community in the Boreal Forest of Ontario, may be jailed for refusing to comply with an October, 2007 court ruling that allows Platinex Inc., a Toronto-based mineral exploration company, to begin drilling on KI traditional lands without protest or obstruction. KI had established a peaceful protest camp at the Platinex exploration site.

Today's hearing is part of a larger trend of heated battles on the ground and in the courts between northern First Nations and mineral exploration companies. Outdated laws which exclusively promote mining exploration are coming head-to-head with modern appreciation of conservation values, including traditional Aboriginal land use, and modern legal interpretations of Aboriginal rights and title. Booming mineral prices have accelerated exploration throughout the region, and unrest is growing among aboriginal communities throughout Ontario's Boreal. At least nine First Nations in northern Ontario have called for a moratorium on logging and mining over concerns that they are not being properly consulted prior to industrial activities on their lands.

Despite the Supreme Court of Canada's rulings requiring consultation with First Nations prior to making decisions that affect their lands, the Ontario Government allowed Platinex to stake claims and begin exploratory drilling on KI's traditional lands without any consultation. In response, KI decided to peacefully oppose Platinex's mineral exploration activities on their traditional lands. Platinex in turn sued KI for \$10 billion for denying the company access to the mining claims. The KI has now gone bankrupt since accruing over \$500,000 in legal fees resisting Platinex's action. In November of last year, Platinex filed a motion seeking to find KI in contempt of court and seeking fines and imprisonment. "Platinex seeks to jail our leaders and supporters and bankrupt our community," Chief Donnie Morris said. "I'm prepared to go to jail for my belief in my land."

"We want our children and grandchildren to continue to use the lands and resources to pursue their usual vocations of hunting, trapping, and fishing," said Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug elder Mark T. Anderson who led a group of KI protesters on a 2,100 km walk from northern Ontario to Toronto in 2006. "We want to protect the environment at the potential drilling/mining site plus the surrounding area which includes our Kitchenuhmaykoosib Lake."

The Ardoch Algonquin First Nation in eastern Ontario is facing a similar situation. Their land was staked and exploratory drilling approved without any consultation; they are also faced with an injunction which they cannot obey and could soon see their leaders jailed and their community

bankrupted by contempt of court sanctions which will only inflame an already tense situation. Along with KI, they have proposed a joint panel to investigate what led to these conflicts and recommend new approaches to mineral exploration on First Nations' lands, but have received no reply from Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty.

Anna Baggio, CPAWS Wildlands League says, "This conflict could have been prevented if Ontario had taken a respectful "Conservation First" approach and implemented comprehensive land use planning before development in the Boreal Forest. An immediate cessation of staking is needed to allow the conflict to be resolved peacefully."

"It's truly tragic that this community finds itself in this situation", stated JP Gladu, Senior Aboriginal Advisor for the Canadian Boreal Initiative. "Until there is respect for consultation obligations and new policy to ensure that exploration occurs only where Aboriginal communities desire it, conflicts like this one are unavoidable. Governments need to act now to bring mineral exploration and development regulation into accord with this new reality."

The Boreal Conservation Framework, supported by over 170 corporations, 113 First Nations and many leading conservation groups, is a vision to protect at least half of the Boreal in a network of large, interconnected protected areas and support sustainable communities, world-leading ecosystem-based resource management practices in the remaining landscapes. Part of this vision is to ensure that land use planning precedes resource extraction in the Boreal in areas such as the Boreal of Ontario.

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuug is located approximately 600 km north of Thunder Bay in Ontario. Its traditional territory covers approximately 2 million hectares (5 million acres) on intact forest and lakes and rivers in the Boreal Forest of Ontario.

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Sam McKay, Chief Donnie Morris and other KI members will be available for comment in Thunder Bay, Ontario, before the court hearing on January 25, 2008. The court proceeding is scheduled to begin at the Superior Court of Justice at 277 Camelot Street in Thunder Bay at 10:00 a.m. EST.

Sam McKay, Chris Reid and Anna Baggio will be available for comment immediately following the court proceedings at the Superior Court of Justice.

Links:

Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuug Web Site: <http://www.kitchenuhmaykoosib.com>

Platinex Web Site: <http://www.platinex.com/bigtroutlake.htm>

First Nations 2005 call for mining and logging moratorium:

<http://www.wildlandsleague.org/attachments/Press%20Release%20and%20Endorsement%20re%20Moratorium.pdf>