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First Nation paddling trip highlights need to protect watershed

(Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug)-Wildlands League congratulates Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) for completing a three-hundred (300) kilometer plus journey paddling to draw attention on the need to protect the Fawn River and Severn River watersheds. The conservation group continues to support KI and other First Nation communities to help protect rivers, lakes and wetlands in Canada's far North through its Aboriginal Watershed Program.

"We are happy to be able to provide direct support to KI as they implement their visionary watershed declaration to advance watershed protection for the maintenance of healthy ecosystems." says Executive Director, Janet Sumner. "KI, through its activities like the canoe trip, continue to draw attention to the importance of protecting watersheds and lands in the far north. Wildlands League is proud to be able to continue to provide support to KI for its principled stand on environmental protection."

"We are calling on Ontario to respect our protection before this sacred landscape is poisoned by the diamond, gold and metals mining companies who have set their sights on it," says Chief Donny Morris. "The KI people have protected our entire home watershed through Indigenous law."

"Kanawayandan D'aaki, our ultimate law binds us to the sacred duty and responsibility to protect and look after the land and waters," says Jacob Ostaman, Director, KI Lands and Environment Unit. "This water flows through our blood and our bodies are built of the trout that swim in these clean rivers and waters. Taking care of our watershed is a relationship at the core of who we are as an Indigenous Nation. It is a responsibility handed down to us from the Creator through the teachings of our Elders."

At times with caribou watching from the river banks or crossing the river, fast flowing waters yielding fresh fish from its waters and beautiful, picturesque sunsets, KI demonstrated to its supporters the urgency and why it is necessary to protect the rivers, lakes and wetlands that make up the landscape throughout the watershed.

On July 5, 2011, KI passed the Watershed Declaration protecting the entire watershed from industrial development under KI authority, laws and protocols. The Watershed Declaration covers a vast 13,025 square kilometers of lakes, rivers, forests and wetlands in the KI Homeland, including the 661 square kilometer Kitchenuhmaykoosib Lake, which has a buffer zone around the lake which is excluded from all and any development. Under the Declaration, all waters that flow in and out of Kitchenuhmaykoosibik and all lands whose waters flow from those lakes, rivers and wetlands (the entire watershed) are deemed to be protected under KI authority.

All paddlers made up of KI members and other supporters arrived in Fort Severn by Thursday September 6, 2012 after travelling the ancient travel waterways of the Fawn and Severn River from KI to the Hudson's Bay coast.

This project is made possible because of generous grants from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and RBC Blue Water Project.

A leading grantmaker in Canada, the Ontario Trillium Foundation strengthens the capacity of the voluntary sector through investments in community-based initiatives. An agency of the Government of Ontario, OTF builds healthy and vibrant communities: www.otf.ca

The RBC Blue Water Project is an innovative, 10-year, global commitment to help protect the world's most precious natural resource: fresh water. For more information, please visit <http://bluewater.rbc.com/about.php>.

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