



Regional Assessment in the Ring of Fire Area
Impact Assessment Agency of Canada
160 Elgin Street, 22nd floor
Ottawa, Ontario
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Sent via email: regionalrof-cdfregionale@iaac-aeic.gc.ca

September 30, 2025

Re: Joint Submission from Legal Advocates for Nature's Defence and the Friends of the Attawapiskat River in Response to the Call for Information and Data

The following information and data is being provided jointly by Legal Advocates for Nature's Defence (LAND) and the Friends of the Attawapiskat River (the Friends), both of whom are on the roster of Expert Supports and have been actively engaged in the Regional Assessment for the proposed Ring of Fire Area.

We note that in providing this submission to the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC), the Friends are not speaking on behalf of any of the communities or its leadership where its members are based (including but not limited to Neskantaga, Peawanuck, Kashechewan, Attawapiskat, Moose Factory and Fort Albany First Nations), but rather sharing the views and concerns of the Indigenous grassroots. Furthermore, our comments do not constitute consultation in any way, nor discharge the Crown's duty to consult per section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

In Appendix A, Michel Koostachin, founder of the Friends, has shared his knowledge and perspectives in regard to the four assessment priorities and potential impacts on environmental, health, social, cultural and economic conditions and on Indigenous rights and interests, as well as cultural considerations and customs that should be considered when conducting the RA. We ask that this Indigenous knowledge be respected by the IAAC.

Below is our joint response to the IAAC's "[Call for Information and Data](#)" released on August 19, 2025.

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DETAILED RESPONSE

1. Assessment Priority: To be well together (Community wellbeing)

- **Community Safety:** Policing of roads; Drug trafficking; Safety supports/ programs; Safety issues around mining/ work camps (ex: substance use, violence, MMIWG2S); Human trafficking; Environmental hazards & areas of concern; Evacuation plans
- **Family, Youth and Children:** Poverty and Homelessness; Elder care; Impacts on the family unit; Services and supports for children and families
- **Housing and Infrastructure:** Overall housing picture; Infrastructure development and maintenance; Community infrastructure deficit; Land base expansion; Transportation infrastructure; Waste management and recycling
- **Education:** Special needs within communities; Distance education opportunities; Education levels within communities
- **Food security:** Food shipping and storage; Potential for growing food locally; Food insecurity, costs and subsidies
- **Economic development and livelihoods:** Cost of living; Power supply ownership opportunities; Renewable energies; Employment and jobs availability; Building community economic development; Potential for members to fill project jobs
- **Community Health:** Mental wellness; Health issues (incl. rare and chronic conditions)

| Description (title, topic, time frame, geographic extent, purpose, etc.) | Holder and Availability | Format (data, oral communications , print, online, etc.) | Limitations or Restrictions (public information? Access or costs? Confidential? Indigenous knowledge?) |
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| <p>“End of Mission Statement by the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, Mr. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo at the conclusion of the country visit to Canada” (April 19, 2024). This statement speaks to the risks and impacts of toxic contamination of the water sources that supply First Nations communities, as a result of the development of certain extractive activities, mainly</p> | <p>Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, United Nations Human Rights Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation. Open access.</p> | <p>Statement available online here.</p> | <p>Publicly available.</p> |

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| mining and hydrocarbons, which violates the human right to safe drinking water. | | | |
| “Racism, traditional food access, and industrial development across Ontario: perspectives from the fields of environmental law and environmental studies” (March 2023). This article speaks to the impacts of racism and industrial development on access to traditional food for Indigenous peoples, with specific reference to mineral exploration. | Written by Kristen Lowitt, Jane Cooper and Kerrie Blaise. Published by Canadian Food Studies Journal. Open access. | Article available online here . | Publicly available. |

2. Assessment Priority: Cultural and Spiritual wellbeing

- **Physical and cultural heritage:** Sites of archaeological significance; Historical trade routes and ecological corridors; Identification of routes, corridors, and cultural sites linked to routes and corridors
- **Cultural vitality and traditional practices:** Loss of cultural practices, ceremonies, etc.
- **Continued way of life, Aboriginal and Treaty rights:** Enacting and protecting rights, way of life; Treaty rights education
- **Community- based teachings:** Oral history vs. Crown info
- **Language maintenance and revival:** Use of traditional languages
- **Traditional processes for decision- making:** Potential for new governance structures
- **Exercise of natural law**

| Description | Holder and Availability | Format | Limitations or Restrictions |
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| “Protection Declaration” (2025). Declaration of protection for the lands and waters in the region where the Ring of Fire is proposed, as the health of this region is critical for upholding Treaty promises and Natural Laws, exercising inherent and Treaty rights, protecting biodiversity and mitigating climate change. | Declaration by the Friends of the Attawapiskat River. Open access. | Declaration available online here . | Publicly available. |

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| <p>“We are the River” (2024). Short film showcasing community voices, concerns about the Ring of Fire and critical need to pause decision-making until community members are meaningfully informed and aware about the RA and the proposed Ring of Fire.</p> | <p>Short film featuring the voices of the Friends of the Attawapiskat River, produced by Legal Advocates for Nature’s Defence and Eleven North Visuals. Open access.</p> | <p>Film available on YouTube here.</p> | |
| <p>“<i>Kebaowek First Nation v Canadian Nuclear Laboratories: Opportunities and Challenges as the Federal Court helps UNDRIP take shape in Canadian law</i>” (March 24, 2025). This article outlines the <i>Kebaowek</i> case, highlighting the Federal Court’s finding that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is Canadian law (by way of the UNDRIP Act) and must be used to interpret Canadian law, including section 35 rights and the duty to consult.</p> | <p>Written by Olthius Kleer Townshend LLP. Open access.</p> | <p>Article available online here.</p> | <p>Publicly available.</p> |
| <p>“Submission from the Friends of the Attawapiskat River to the United Nations Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (January 28, 2022). The Expert Mechanism provides the United Nations Human Rights Council with expertise and advice on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, to assist Member States in achieving the goals of UNDRIP. This submission focuses on the Friends’ lived experience and the extent to which Canada has sought to meaningfully protect and respect Treaty rights.</p> | <p>Submitted by Michel Koostachin, Founder of the Friends, and Kerrie Blaise, Legal Counsel at the Canadian Environmental Law Association. Open access.</p> | <p>Submission available online here.</p> | <p>Publicly available.</p> |

3. Assessment Priority: Social and Economic Equity

- **Intra- and inter-generational values:** Income distribution within communities
- **Social and Economic conditions, incl. immediate and long-term benefits:** Potential partnerships with developers; Industry investment in communities; Regional collective approaches to Ec. Dev.; Capturing economic benefits of projects; Economic leakage
- **Diverse economies and livelihoods:** Land-based economy; Workforce participation
- **Indigenous Women, girls and 2S individuals:** Economic barriers and benefits for women; Childcare; Violence and harassment
- **Current use of lands and resources for traditional purposes:** On-the- land activities; Harvesting
- **Access to skill development and economic opportunities:** Successes and challenges re: education/ employment; Indigenous employment at projects

| Description | Holder and Availability | Format | Limitations or Restrictions |
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| <p>“Deeper Dive: Resource Extraction Projects and Violence against Indigenous Women”, pp 584-594 of the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (Volume 1a). This section of the report examines the increased rates of violence that ensue within the context of transient and temporary workforces and how it maintains colonial violence, and the harassment, assault and racism faced by Indigenous women who work at mines/extractive projects. The report calls for governments and resource extraction companies to do a more thorough job of considering the safety of Indigenous women and children when making decisions about resource extraction on or near Indigenous territories.</p> | <p>This excerpt is from Volume 1a of the Final Report, Chapter 7 (Confronting Oppression - Right to Security). Open access.</p> | <p>All documents from the National Inquiry are available here. The excerpt is available here (pp 584-594).</p> | |

4. Assessment Priority: Healthy environment relationships

- **Water and river systems, incl. flows:** Groundwater effects; Water usage (processing); Changes to flow (dams)
- **Wildlife and habitat, incl. SAR, birds, fish:** Effects on harvest species; Impacts on ecological corridors; Effects to spiritual beings; New species making use of road corridors; Higher risk of roadkills; Impacts to breeding and migratory areas
- **Peatlands and other unique environments:** Effects of disrupting peatlands; Permafrost;
- **Forest ecosystems, incl. plants:** ITK, 2- eyed seeing in Forest Management Plans; Impacts due to clear cutting
- **Climate change adaptation:** Use of fossil fuels for electricity; Change in species
- **Biodiversity:** Change in biodiversity

| Description | Holder and Availability | Format | Limitations or Restrictions |
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| <p>“The essential carbon service provided by northern peatlands” (2022). This article speaks to the ecological significance of the Hudson-James Bay lowlands in mitigating climate change and highlights mineral extraction and associated infrastructure development as a human disturbance to peatland health.</p> | <p>Written by Lorna I Harris et al. Published by the Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment Journal. Open access.</p> | <p>Journal article available online here.</p> | <p>Publicly available.</p> |
| <p>“Protecting Treaty 9 Lands and Waters: A Case Study of Indigenous-led Climate Action through Treaty Promises” (2025). This case study explains why protecting the Hudson-James Bay Lowlands is crucial for meeting climate goals, conserving biodiversity, and upholding Indigenous peoples’ rights and heritage.</p> | <p>Written by Michel Koostachin, Rick Cheechoo, and Kerrie Blaise. Published by the Canadian Climate Institute.</p> | <p>Publication available online here.</p> | <p>Publicly available.</p> |
| <p>“Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas: A Dynamic Response to Biodiversity Loss in Northern Ontario” (2022). This publication outlines IPCAs as a multi-purpose and effective tool in land protection and conservation</p> | <p>Written by Alexandra Bridges, prepared for the Native Women’s Association of Canada.</p> | <p>Publication available online here.</p> | <p>Publicly available.</p> |

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| measures, including to protect the region where the Ring of Fire is proposed. | | | |
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5. Contact Information Form

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| Name of individual(s) or organization | Friends of the Attawapiskat River |
| Point of contact | Michel Koostachin, Founder |
| Address | PO Box 49, Reserve 91A |
| Email | michelkoostachin@outlook.com |
| Telephone | 807-627-4375 |
| Alternate contact | friendsoftheattawapiskat@gmail.com |

Brief overview of your organization and its activities and interests relevant to the Regional Assessment:

As ancestors of the Headmen who signed Treaty 9 with the Crown to peacefully share the lands, the Friends work throughout Treaty 9, drawing on our Natural Laws that teach us to respect the land and to maintain our relationship with the Creator. The Friends are Indigenous peoples and rights holders, whose traditional land will be directly impacted should the Ring of Fire be developed. The Friends' members are Elders, youth, knowledge keepers and land users. As such, our knowledge, together with our lived experience, is critical to information the RA, the information gathering, Indigenous knowledge considered and outcomes. Treaty promises to share, respect and be kind, mean our comments to the Agency and participation in the RA process, will be done in a way that recognizes, and respects shared Treaty rights, values and promises.

The Friends have been active in raising awareness about the Ring of Fire and participating in IAAC processes to ensure the voice of Treaty 9 members does not go unheard. The Friends have been involved with the Ring of Fire RA consultation process from the beginning. First, in the winter of 2022 when the Agency invited comments on the draft Terms of Reference for the Ring of Fire regional assessment and again in the fall of 2023 when the Friends co-hosted a gathering with Legal Advocates for Nature's Defence that brought together the Indigenous grassroots of Treaty 9 who stand to be impacted by development activities in the region, along with several ENGO experts to provide public legal education to engage on the draft Terms of Reference. The Friends have also provided detailed comments in response to the Draft Terms of Reference in October 2024, joined the Expert Supports roster in 2025, and has diligently been attending all RA information sessions to date.

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| Name of individual(s) or organization | Legal Advocates for Nature's Defence |
| Point of contact | Kanisha Acharya-Patel, Staff Lawyer; Kerrie Blaise, Founder and Legal Counsel |
| Address | PO Box 754 Callander, ON |
| Email | kanisha@naturesdefence.ca ; kerrie@naturesdefence.ca |

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| Telephone | 778-903-6840; 705-978-4034 |
| Alternate contact | |
| <p><i>Brief overview of your organization and its activities and interests relevant to the Regional Assessment:</i></p> <p>Founder of Legal Advocates for Nature’s Defence (LAND), Kerrie Blaise, has been participating in the Ring of Fire RA and road project impact assessments since their commencement as legal counsel to the Indigenous grassroots group, the Friends. As a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing the rights of nature and honoring of Indigenous sovereignty in law and policy, LAND has actively participated in the RA with the aim of making submissions and comments which promote respect of inherent, Indigenous rights including Treaty rights, and facilitate the participation of directly affected Indigenous communities in the RA process. LAND joined the roster of Expert Supports for the RA in 2025 and has diligently been attending all RA information sessions to date.</p> | |

6. The Regional Assessment Working Group also invites you to comment on:

- 1) Whether you know of information or data on topics that are not listed above, but that you believe would be relevant to the Regional Assessment.

We direct the Working Group to a number of submissions from the Friends which we ask to be taken into account:

- Comments on the [draft Terms of Reference](#) for the RA (October 2024)
 - Comments on the [draft tailored impact statement guidelines](#) and draft Indigenous Engagement and Participation Plan for the Northern Road Link Project (July 2023)
 - Comments on the [Initial Project Description](#) for the Northern Road Link Project (March 2023)
 - Comments on the [draft Policy Framework for RA](#) (March 2023)
 - Comments on the [draft Agreement to conduct an RA](#) (March 2022)
 - [Letter to the Minister and Environment and Climate Change](#) regarding engagement with Indigenous grassroots and Treaty 9 rights holders for the RA (November 2021)
 - Comments on the [draft tailored impact statement guidelines](#) and draft Indigenous Engagement Plan for the Webequie Supply Road Project and Marten Falls Access Road (January 2020)
- 2) Any economic, technical, linguistic or other obstacles that may restrict or prevent you, your community or your organization from participating in this call for information.

Having the deadline fall on Truth and Reconciliation Day, a day focused on healing within Indigenous communities, is not conducive to facilitating meaningful, respectful engagement or honouring the spirit of reconciliation, and creates uncertainty as to the government’s commitment to engage in good faith. We request that the Working Group extend the deadline for this call for information.

Extending the deadline is required to ensure that there is sufficient time to “seek information and advice from community members”¹, as required by the Terms of Reference. The Working Group ought to be

¹ See the [Terms of Reference](#) at p 35.

active in meeting, in community, to discuss this call for information and facilitate the gathering of information. This is to ensure that community members, who will be directly affected should the proposed Ring of Fire development proceed, are not kept in the dark about this process and the proposed Ring of Fire. This is especially important as this call for information pertains to the assessment priorities, which “represent key environmental, health, social, cultural and economic conditions, and their interconnections, that may be affected due to development activities and their contributions to interacting cumulative effects”² and are intended to reflect the priorities and values of First Nation partners. Failure to proactively engage community members will result in the exclusion of their knowledge, information, and perspectives, resulting in an incomplete RA. We remind the Working Group that the RA “must be community-focused and include mechanisms for community dialogue and meaningful involvement of First Nation Partner community members living on their traditional territory or elsewhere”³, to ensure that the RA is “reflective of the different potential positive and negative effects that development activities may have”⁴.

3) Any other notes or comments you would like to bring to the attention of the Working Group.

While the Friends welcome the opportunity to provide information, our position remains unchanged: this ought to have been a first of its kind Indigenous-led RA, conducted within Indigenous legal traditions and knowledge frameworks. Instead, this is a co-led RA wherein Indigenous laws and knowledge are guiding principles within the RA process and ultimately, considered secondarily as a component of the Crown’s framework. The Friends submit a co-led process falls short of the government’s Treaty promises to Indigenous people.

Appendix A

The following comments are from Michel Koostachin, founder of the Friends. These comments include his knowledge and perspectives in regard to the four assessment priorities and potential impacts on environmental, health, social, cultural and economic conditions and on Indigenous rights and interests, as well as cultural considerations and customs that should be considered when conducting the RA. We ask that this Indigenous knowledge be respected by the IAAC.

A. About the Friends

The Friends are among the ancestral people of the lands where the Ring of Fire is proposed. We have lived in harmony with these lands given to us by the Creator since time immemorial. We are the Water People. The water gives us life and we take care of the water in return. This is our duty to the Creator.

² See the [Terms of Reference](#) at p 27.

³ See the [Terms of Reference](#) at p 35.

⁴ See the [Terms of Reference](#) at p 35.

We are the ancestors of the Headmen who signed Treaty 9 with the Crown to peacefully share the lands. Our Natural Laws teach us to respect the land and to maintain our relationship with the Creator. Our traditional ways do not involve greed or violence to these lands, but love, harmony and an ongoing commitment to each other.

We ask that the government uphold their Treaty promises to our people: to be honest, to be kind, and to share. These promises are to all of us, not just leadership. All community members must be involved in the assessments, and any data collection or monitoring must be done by an independent body with sufficient funding from the government. These assessments are needed to identify what issues must be resolved before any developments can move forward. A Traditional Knowledge committee should be created, to make sure that our knowledge is understood, respected and honoured.

B. Comments on Assessment Priority 1: To be well together

Assessing community safety requires that all roads and entry points into the Ring of Fire area be regulated, with checks for who and what is going in and out. These roads will be going through our traditional territories, putting our people at risk, especially our women and girls and those facing substance abuse issues because of intergenerational trauma.

Assessing poverty requires addressing the backlog of housing issues and assessing what is needed (ex. building materials, land, money, means of transportation). We are limited by the size of reserves and the lack of financial support to build more infrastructure.

Assessing community health involves collecting baseline data on the health conditions impacting our people, including the social determinants of health, the availability of physical and mental health services, and rates of suicide (including youth suicides) and substance abuse. Data must also be collected about drinking water quality – how many communities don't have access to clean water and how it affects their health. This information could be collected from the communities using surveys.

The government must also assess impacts to our traditional diets. Upholding our Treaty rights is essential to food security. The government must be culturally competent – our diets are not the same as yours. We live off the land. Harm to the land is harm to us. Contaminating the lands and waters impacts our food and water security. If the caribou and sturgeon are sick, so are we.

The risks of resource developments must also be assessed before any development moves forward, so that risk management strategies can be in place. We have to know what chemicals are being released – like cancer-causing chemicals from mining processes - and what other environmental and human health hazards we will be exposed to. Waste management processes must be in place before any development moves forward. Our lands and waters cannot be dumping grounds for more waste.

The government must hear from community members about our past experiences – we were promised traditional knowledge consultation and money from the DeBeers mine, both of which were not upheld.

Development on our lands must benefit us. We need training, skills/capacity building, and access to management roles (not just low-level positions like janitors). We need gender equality, where everyone has access to training and employment without intimidation.

Education is important both for our people and for the government and industry. Our communities need more education and information to know what their rights are, how to uphold them, and what developments are being considered. The government and industry need more education and information on our inherent, Aboriginal and Treaty rights, and the history and ongoing impacts of colonization. Cultural competency training is needed.

To be well together, we must all have access to information and decisions that may impact the health of our people and our lands. Informing all community members must be a priority.

C. Comments on Assessment Priority 2: Cultural and Spiritual wellbeing

Assessing physical and cultural heritage requires identifying sacred grounds, burial sites, trading posts, migration routes. They have to ask communities to share this information with them. We also need an explanation of how these sites will be protected.

We are spiritual people. We are nomadic people. We do ceremonies – drumming, powwows, round dances. We travel for ceremonies. Accessing sacred sites is needed for our cultural and spiritual wellbeing. The government has to identify and address the barriers we face – for example, ISC’s decision to cut funding to travel to sacred ceremonies. The government can’t keep establishing new policies to deny our rights. This loss of cultural practices and ceremonies is detrimental to our wellbeing.

The government should assess their own understanding of Treaties, Indigenous rights and our Natural Laws. The Crown and corporations have to understand the Treaties, our rights. We are not considered to be humans. That has to change. Bills 5 and C5 are papers, legislation, with no brain, eyes, mouth, ears, arms, legs, but these papers are being used to extinguish our rights. They are using their legislation to essentially extinguish our rights.

The government has to assess how our Natural Laws are exercised, practiced, and upheld. For future development to move forward, there has to be respect for our Natural Laws.

The government has to assess the decision-making processes, and ask us whether they work for us. We are not being informed. We are being neglected. Leadership does not communicate with us. There is no transparency around how money is being spent. Any information provided to leadership must be provided to us, as the grassroots. The Treaty is between me and the government, not just leadership or regional councils. The government has a fiduciary duty to all of us. The spirit and intent of the Treaty was to foster a mutual, equal, nation to nation relationship where no one nation had ultimate sovereignty and different governance systems were respected - this spirit and intent continues to be violated.

Assessing the use of traditional languages is important to understanding our ability to participate. Our language is very descriptive, it gets distorted when translated to English. Language is very important. The government needs more Indigenous translators so more community members can have a say. We have to make sure history does not repeat itself, like when the Treaties were written completely differently than how they were understood by our ancestors.

D. Comments on Assessment Priority 3: Social and Economic Equity

Our communities have never had equal decision-making powers. We deal with the burdens of resource extraction, without getting any of the benefits. Partnership means equality, it means collaboration, it means respect for our traditional territories, rights, and Natural Laws. Partnership means listening to us, hearing us when we say that we have pre-existing crises that have to be addressed. Without this, social and economic equity will not improve.

There is a lot of potential for partnership with industry. Both sides have to benefit. Who's Ring of Fire? It is on our land. For a mine to run, transportation infrastructure is needed, equipment is needed, employees are needed. We should have equal ownership and control over this. That's partnership. We're not saying no to any mines, we are saying do it right, do it safely, do it in partnership with all of us.

Assessing social and economic equity means asking community members about the problems they are facing, the problems that are keeping them in vulnerable positions. These problems have to be addressed before development moves forward.

People, wildlife, our waters are going to get injured. The government needs an independent task force or committee to make sure that economic development is happening in partnership, in a way that keeps our people, lands and waters safe and healthy.

The government needs to assess the use of our lands and resources for traditional purposes, by speaking to community members. We need to be able to access the land to travel for ceremonies. We need to be able to keep living off the land – we rely on the land for food, water, medicine. Our Treaty rights cannot be compromised.

E. Comments on Assessment Priority 4: Healthy Environment Relationships

We need studies on environmental health, water quality, wildlife habitat, and the health of the peatlands. The studies have to be conducted by independent bodies, not by the government. We don't trust the government's studies and testing. We need studies now, to establish a baseline, during, to see how development is impacting us, and after, to make sure that industry and government have restored the lands and waters.

The government needs to seek community knowledge. We know when the animals are sick. We know when the water is contaminated. With DeBeers, we noticed that the caribou moved further away,

because of the disturbances from the mines. So assessing and identifying the current habitat and migration routes is needed, and these areas must be protected from development. The government needs to speak to us, to understand what animals are especially important to our survival, like caribou and sturgeon. They need protection. Habitat destruction will result in their extinction.

The peatlands store carbon, filter and purify our water. The health of the peatlands keeps the environment healthy, keeps us healthy, should not be disturbed. They're asking for trouble if they disturb the peatlands.

We live off the land. We harvest our trees to create shelters, to survive. The forests cannot be overcut, or overharvested. We take only what we need. The government must assess the longstanding impacts clearcutting will have on our ability to exercise Treaty rights, and on the survival of the wildlife that we depend on. Clearcutting is not sustainable. The government must also remember that we have rights – we need to continue having access to the forests, to the lands that we live off.

The government and industry have to be transparent with us – with all of us, not just leadership. Whatever they're going to do in the area, they have to tell us ahead of time, they have to tell us what they are doing, what resource is being mined, what is being developed, what are the impacts to the watershed, how will those impacts be monitored, water that is coming down river what is the quality? What are the thresholds? Do we have to wait for dead fish to show up in the river, to know that something is wrong?

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

<Original signed by>

Kanisha Acharya Patel, Staff Lawyer, Legal Advocates for Nature's Defence,

per

Kerrie Blaise, Founder and Legal Counsel, Legal Advocates for Nature's Defence and

Michel Koostachin, Founder, Friends of the Attawapiskat River