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NEWS LOCAL

No nuclear Northwest: Grand Chiefs



By Jon Thompson, Kenora Daily Miner & News
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Grand chiefs representing every inch of Northwestern Ontario are publicly taking a hard line against burying nuclear waste in their traditional territory, claiming it would violate international law.

Treaty 3 Grand Chief Diane Kelly spoke out on Monday, following Thursday and Friday's announcements from leaders representing Treaties 9, 5 and Anishinabek Nation territory, including Robinson-Superior Treaty land.

"We're not looking at storing nuclear waste. We're not even beginning a consultation process with them, despite what these municipalities are doing," Kelly said. "I don't think anyone wants nuclear waste in their area, us included. There are too many risks involved. It's not a one-time thing, it goes on forever. We have always lived here, we're not going anywhere and I can't see how storing nuclear waste is compatible with anyone's lifestyle."

In 2010, the Chiefs in Ontario hosted the Nuclear Waste Management Organization in meetings at Obashkaandagaang (Washagamis Bay) First Nation. Kelly said regional elders made their unequivocal opposition clear at that time and a resolution to that effect was passed at the Annual General Meeting of Grand Council Treaty 3 in the summer of 2011.

Municipalities considering hosting a nuclear waste storage facility in the Treaty 3 area are Ignace and Ear Falls.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) representing Treaties 9 and 5 passed a similar resolution unanimously at a Chiefs-In-Assembly meeting in 2009.

Calling nuclear waste "a poison that will damage our homelands," Grand Chief Stan Beardy accused the site selection process of contravening Article 29 (2) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which requires nation states to "... take effective measures to ensure that no storage or disposal of hazardous materials shall take place in the lands or territories of indigenous peoples without their free, prior and informed consent."

On Friday, Beardy called all First Nations in the Northwest to join him in declaring their opposition.

"I'm just serving notice to third parties that it's the position of Nishnawbe Aski Nation that we don't want to have nuclear waste in our territory," he said. "If we look at a world map, the most intact forests in the world are in Northwestern Ontario and in Manitoba. All the rest has been depleted. Ontario should take pride that they should be saving the planet but the First Nations people are taking the lead. It's taking from the land what we need but to maintain it as much as possible."

Municipal contender Hornepayne falls in the southeast tip of the Treaty 9 area.

Wawa, Schreiber and Nipigon - the other three Northwest communities pursuing the concept - all lie in the territory of Anishinabek Nation (Union of Ontario Indians), which has been opposed to nuclear waste storage since 2004. Its Grand Chief, Patrick Madahbee, expressed uranium mining and processing has had "significant and long-term consequences" to the land and its inhabitants.

"We always hear non-Native communities saying they don't want certain projects or developments in their backyard. Well, First Nations don't want nuclear waste in our backyard," he stated in a release. "Representatives from Chiefs in Ontario have been attending information sessions held by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization and this is not the proper consultation we're

entitled to."

Spokesman for the Nuclear Waste Management Organization, Mike Krizanc was in Saskatchewan Monday, meeting with one of the three communities there who have engaged in the "Learn More Process." He didn't feel the opposition announced by First Nations was a setback and expressed eagerness to address concerns.

"All citizens - aboriginal citizens included - have an expectation and a right to have their voices heard on important policy issues that affect them," he said. "We look forward to hearing their questions and concerns and taking their advice into account."

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