

Good morning.

I would like to take the opportunity to express my thoughts on the issue presented by BlackRock Metals and Comex representatives on Tuesday, December 4, 2018.

First, I would like to point out that the 30 day grace period to respond is not exactly fair because December 19, 2018 to January 8, 2019 were considered holidays for the Cree world thus limiting our access to the internet to respond but it was also an opportunity to get some feedback from family members of the impacted area. Therefore I would like to request a grace period of twenty days (20) to ensure all impacted family members are aware of the new proposal and its potential impact on future generations. The defining date would be January 28, 2019. This only pertains to individuals wishing to express their concerns.

I would like everyone to keep in mind that I am not a politician nor a spokesperson for the Wapachee family. I am an employee of Ouje-Bougoumou Cree Nation in the Human Resources Department as the Training & Development Officer. In this case I have to wear three (3) hats when in conference discussion however I have to ensure each is represented at each discussion setting. Most importantly, I am hearing impaired and thus cannot participate immediately or respond to questions as they arise during the discussions. Therefore most of my responses to BlackRock Metals meetings with family, community and the organization are based on briefs, reports and submissions and my thoughts and concerns are usually submitted shortly after the meetings.

As well, I would like to add that as a survivor of the residential school system since the age of six (6) at Moose Factory, Ontario and then in La Tuque, Quebec for an additional nine (9) consecutive years, I have lost touch with a lot of my family history, our traditions, our culture and our language. It seems to me that almost every cornerstone of the Cree household has been impacted by the larger society and the survival of our future generations is dependant on keeping these foundations intact no matter how impacted they are at the moment.

As our recent history will tell you, some of our leaders from the residential school system were outspoken and fought hard to keep Cree culture, traditions and environment intact. Late Grand Chief Billy Diamond was representative of this fact during the James Bay Hydro negotiations. Realizing they could not stop the project they fought to protect the land. They were painted in negative tones by the dominant society but they held on to their belief that Cree and land were interwoven together and should be protected as much as possible.

However in the midst of all discussions, be it in Great Whale River development, forestry negotiations and mining developments in our territory there are pockets of Cree who do not participate in these discussion be it because of residential school issue whereby they assume that the dominant society will decide the future anyways; or they are at work outside of the community; or have moved elsewhere due to marriage; or they are on invited hunting territory; or they are at their post-secondary studies down south. They need to have a voice.

We, the employees of Cree organizations or decision-makers of governmental departments work with schedules that are not compatible with those concerned. In this case, I refer to family members who have not attended family discussions especially with the new parameters redesigned by BlackRock Metals in their proposal. If we are to achieve successful input from all impacted family members, then we need to reach out using various approaches be it by email or visitations to their homes in other communities or on the trapline. I would suggest an independent task force of maybe three (3) or four (4) people be engaged rather than BlackRock Metals doing a study on this issue.

With respect to timelines set by BlackRock Metals on this particular project, may I remind everyone that the Bally Husky Agreement was signed 2013, and thus far BlackRock Metals has implemented basic exploration activities such as drilling and an access route to the site plus they have stalled due to price fluctuations beyond their control. Very little has been actually done. Thus it is now 2019, and BlackRock Metals has revised a new plan that extends far beyond the original scope.

I believe the original plan of thirteen (13) years of activity seemed acceptable to the family and the community of Ouje-Bougoumou. The potential for employment and business opportunities were inherent in the plan. It also seemed that the impact to the environment and family life would be short term. However, with the revised proposal, I can clearly see the long term impact on the environment and the socio-cultural and traditional life of the family and the future generations.

Yes, the loss of business opportunities are lost when the construction camp of 500 workers was deleted from the original plan.

Yes, the use of a new rail line will decrease Cree employment in the trucking sector

Yes, the environment both flora and fauna will be impacted for years

By that last statement on the environment, I have seen many changes since my youth following my grandfather into these mountains. The mountains, valleys, creeks and small lakes were abundant in game such as bears, moose, grouse, martin, beaver, rabbit, lynx and other small game. The creeks were loaded with fish for martin whose fur provided extra income. There were berries for the bear and various plants for the rabbit. We carved our paddles and snowshoes from the trees. My grandfather taught me how to read the land so I would know where I was all the time. My grandfather Bally Husky was connected with the land then. In our family, we still have those that have lived most of their lives on the trapline today.

Today, we see forestry roads traversing the territories of both O-57 and O- 59 where BlackRock Minerals proposed mining project will be located. The forestry agreement has not benefited the environment and its inhabitants, including the Cree hunters. In fact, fewer large game and fur-bearing animals such as the lynx have moved to different territories due to food source scarcity and disturbance so with the entrance of the mine into their midst, they will soon disappear completely, especially over the forty-three (43) year period. The lynx, once an financial input into the family equipment purchases and delicacy on the family table is now a memory for me. For my grandchildren, the lynx will be a picture found in the library and most likely the Cree term "pishsuu" will be lost.

In my youth, as a post-secondary student, I brought two young non-First Nations friends with me to visit my family. Basil Tynes, now a Bishop of Bahamas and Peter Bergsagel, now a neurosurgeon, commented on the impact of forestry operations on the land, more specifically how indigenous trees were cut and replaced by pine thus causing detrimental impact on the soil and nutrients. I shared this information many years ago (35 years past) and it is only recently that changes have been made by these forestry companies. We see this also with Principale Mine Restoration project that was announced several years past. Even now, a recent exploration of Corner Bay Mine operation has not be restored to its original state. So we need to be careful.

I see our lands, our culture, our traditions, our language slowly being eroded by the definitions of “development” or “quality of life” as defined by the larger society. I personally don’t see “quality of life” in the cities when families are working daily trying to make ends meet in terms of ensuring mortgages, hydro, food, clothing and schedules are met by stressed out dual income families. The Cree have lived quietly in the midst of these changes in their backyard and it is time to look closely at each “development” proposal presented by governments and businesses and how it will impact the environment and our grandchildren and their children so the connection between them continues to exist in our language, customs and traditions that have been graciously handed down for generations for safe guarding.

I think our current generation is standing at the precipice. In forty-three (43), will our children cross the bridge into the melting pot of anonymity or will they be proud descendants of the Cree who protected their ancestral lands and heritage. I am at the crossroads myself because of my past as a residential school survivor. I like the improvements our community has seen since the signing of the James Bay Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975. However the “quality of life” theme seems to loose its flavor if we loose sight of who we are!

So this is what I propose...

Timetable:

It is time we used our timetable. We have been using BlackRock schedules and timetables for family and community meetings. Thus I propose we look at a few scenarios for the next four (4) months; February, March, April and May.

1. Funds should be secured to engage three (3) or four (4) independent and objective persons to do a survey on the thoughts and concerns of family members regarding the revised proposal. All the information available from reports by BlackRock should be made available both in Cree and English.
2. The team should be allowed to research the issues from other sources especially those First Nations communities impacted by mining development in their territories so that impacts are well understood and resolutions to issues are known to all impacted. In this case, we may see the emergence of new ideas or concerns not known before in Cree communities impacted by mining operations.

3. The team should also ensure every single impacted family member is notified and understands the issues and more specifically, their concerns noted for those reviewing the study. We have family members living in different communities for various reasons such as invitation to hunt; employment; marriage or studying down south in Montreal, Ottawa or Toronto. They also are indirectly impacted at the moment while away from the community.
4. The team composition should be varied; an environmentalist; socio-economic geographer; a recent graduate from law school; or a professional human resources person and these people would work together to gather information and get feedback from the impacted family to share within the family and with the community. Too often much information is kept back until the opportune moment when a quick decision is required by family and community and thus this process would eliminate this aspect.
5. Once all information is compiled then the team will assemble the impacted family and community to show what the future holds. Only then can we look at BlackRock Metals newly revised proposal.

I look to Comex mission and mandate as support to this request submitted today on January 8, 2019. I am not a tree-hugger but I look to the pillars of our culture, traditions, our way of life and language in connection with the environment as a basis for continuity of Cree life so that our youth, our grandchildren and their children can freely roam and choose their path and not be pressured by outside definitions of “development” or “quality of life”.

Yes, forty-three (43) of operations on our land will drastically impact our way of life and the environment.

Yes, it is our request to review the revised BlackRock Minerals proposals so that it meets our needs not just for profit

Yes, we would like all family members to review and submit their concerns regarding this revised proposal

After all, we are most impacted by this proposal

I am positive many will favor the proposal because of employment opportunities

But it is necessary and vital to all family members that they voice their thoughts and concerns

Be it for the past issues or present concerns or for the future of our grandchildren

Thank you,

Wally Wapachee

Impacted Member of the Wapachee Family

Community Member of Ouje-Bougoumou Cree Nation

Training & Development Officer of the Ouje-Bougoumou Cree Nation