

Algonquin land claim a concern for Ontario hunters

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A draft agreement in principle on a land claim that promises to deliver a large area in eastern Ontario to the Algonquins of Ontario is worrisome to non-native hunters in the region, who are concerned their own traditions may be in jeopardy.

The Algonquin land claim is still in its early stages, with the draft agreement in principle between the Algonquin people and the Ontario and federal government only in the first step in what promises to be a long process.

If and when it is finalized, it would mean the transfer of 117,000 acres of provincial Crown land to 10 Algonquin communities, along with \$300 million. No private property would be expropriated as part of the deal.

The lengthy process has led to uncertainty, however, for people who may be affected by the claim.

Camp established in 1924

Ralph Fish belongs to a hunting camp on the south shore of the Barron River near Petawawa, Ont., one of dozens of non-

native hunting camps that would be effectively surrounded by what could become Algonquin land. The hunting camp is on private land but the hunters use it as a base for hunting on surrounding crown land, which is part of the land claim.

The founders who started the camp in 1924 are all dead, but their children and grandchildren and other members continue to go back every year during the short deer season.

Mike Chartrand, left, and Charlie Warren started the camp in the 1920s.

Fish, who joined the camp in 1958 and hasn't missed a hunt since, said he's worried about what will happen next.

"It's very sad to say the least," said Fish. "We would certainly like access to the camp, access to the fishing."

"The hunting is minimal... but to get out and ride the bikes and see nature, you are right in the middle of nowhere, go out at night after dark look up at the sky and there's more stars there than anywhere else in the world. It's a wonderful place, just absolutely gorgeous. It's just a little piece of heaven, that's all it is," said Fish.



Camp members CBC spoke with did worry that, should they

not be allowed to hunt beyond their two-acre lot, there would be no point in hunting at all.

'Transitional period' expected

How Algonquins will proceed in negotiations with hunters accustomed to hunting on Crown land is still to be determined, according to Kirby Whiteduck, a negotiator in the land claim and the chief of Pikwakanagan First Nation — the only existing Algonquin reserve in Ontario.

Whiteduck said there would be some allowances to hunters during what he calls a "transitional period."

"We understand then that they would expect to continue for however long to hunt in the normal area... so there will be discussions and hopefully some understanding around that, that will allow it to continue for a certain period of time that it will be like a transitional period," he said.

"We're not going to come and say 'Well, this is our land now, you have to go.'"

But Whiteduck said there's a limit to how accommodating the Algonquins can be, and said for whatever agreement is eventually reached to have any meaning, land turned over to the Algonquins should be for the use of the Algonquins.

"We're trying to incorporate and respect the interests of our non-Algonquin neighbours in the territory, but we would also like to get out of this treaty some recognition of our rights and interests, and some degree of ownership of this Algonquin territory," he said.

The camp is west of Petawawa, and would be surrounded by

an area that is part of the Algonquin land claim.

Questions raised about land claim eligibility

The land claim issue dates back to when settlers first moved into this area. While settlers signed treaties for the land, they never made a treaty with the Algonquins. Then, at the end of the 19th Century, Ontario decided to create Algonquin Park, which deprived Algonquins of what was probably their most important hunting grounds on the Ontario side of the Ottawa River.

While few dispute the reasons behind the claim, non-native hunters CBC spoke with and Algonquin communities not part of the claim say they are skeptical about who has been allowed to join the claim.

Non-native hunters say they suspect some people with little Algonquin heritage have joined the claim to enjoy augmented hunting rights.

Jean-Guy Whiteduck, the band manager and former chief at the biggest of all Algonquin reserves, Kitigan Zibi in Maniwaki, Que., has also been critical of the land claim and said he is concerned it will lead to a sharp rise in hunting.



"I think it's up to each first nation to decide who will be benefiting from a claim so I won't be judgemental, but if you

just put an open approach and say anybody who can prove a little bit of Indian ancestry... you may as well have all of Quebec and a good part of Ontario," said Kirby Whiteduck.

"A lot of people are concerned also that all of the sudden all of these people have rights to fishing and hunting, and it could have a big impact on wildlife that's for sure," he said.

Province wants dispute negotiated

Brian Crane, the lead negotiator for Ontario in the land claim talks, said the province accepts the eligibility criteria and don't have an issue with who's in the claim.

He said for camps like the Barron River camp, Ontario wants to protect existing rights, including the right of access and traditional hunting. While the Algonquins will be the landowners and use the land as they see fit, he said he would like to see both sides negotiate a deal that gives people time to adjust.

"What we're ensuring to the hunt camp people is that there is not going to be any abrupt change and they are going to be part of the solution in working things out with the Algonquins. And Ontario is going to be there as a facilitator in those discussions," said Crane.

With files from the CBC's Evan Dyer