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**Cree School Board**  
**Commission scolaire Crie**

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**CREE SCHOOL BOARD'S**

**POSITION PAPER on**

**URANIUM EXPLORATION AND MINING IN EYOU ISTCHEE**

This document outlines the Cree School Board's position on uranium exploration and mining in Eeyou Istchee, namely the Otish Mountains region near Mistissini, Quebec.

We, the Council of Commissioners and staff of Cree School Board wish to make it known that the Cree School Board supports the Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee/Cree Nation Government and the Cree Nation of Mistissini in their opposition and stand against the prospect of exploring for and mining uranium in Cree territory.

The Cree Nation's Culture derives from a holistic world view. Our ancestors and Elders understood and still understand how the intricacies of Cree people's relationship with the land are interconnected like the strands of a spider's web. If you do something to break a strand of the web, it weakens it. Because all aspects of our being and our environment are interconnected, a negative impact upsets the balance of everything. And so, it is with the Cree people's relationship with the land. If we destroy one aspect of our environment, we disrupt the rhythm of the land. Our chances of survival are weakened and the perpetuation of our culture as a Nation gets disrupted. We believe that exploring for and mining uranium has a high potential to destroy and pollute our lands and water, as well as disturb the balance of the Cree relationship with the land.

The seasons have always influenced and still determine the activities of our people. For millennia, the Cree have lived on this land: hunting, trapping, fishing and gathering for food and other resources. The Cree in this region also mined resources from the ground. For example, the Cree mined the white quartz from Waapiishakumuk on the shores of Temiscamie River to make arrow heads, axes, and other tools. They also traded these items for various items such as tobacco or corn from other tribes to the south. And in the process of extracting these resources, our ancestors did not destroy the land or pollute the air or water. Our ancestors were a nomadic peoples. They moved from place to place to give time for the land to rejuvenate itself in readiness for the next generation to use the resources which they would need for survival. Most of all, they did not leave footprints on the land to show that they had been there. As much as possible, our ancestors did as little as possible not to disturb or destroy the land while extracting the resources they needed for survival.

In the 1970's, both the federal and provincial governments looked to the Cree homeland as a potential source for development of hydro electric energy and then later for resources in forestry, minerals and other resources. They had no qualms in proposing to flood this region despite the fact that the Cree people had lived and continue to live on this territory. What both governments and their professionals, such as the engineers, failed to understand was that the land was occupied and being used by the Cree, albeit not in the same sense as they viewed how land should be used. Because the Cree have never left footprints





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on the land, this did not mean that they did not use the land. This is the same ploy that governments in both the United States and Canada have used to justify their occupation and dispossession of lands from First Nations peoples. Yet again, there is a proposal for the development and extraction of uranium in Cree territory and this again has a high potential to destroy a vital area of our land, pollute our waters and ruin our sources of food.

As far back as the 1970's, we are aware that the Quebec government, through its Ministry of Development, Environment and Parks, and the Cree Nation of Mistissini negotiated for the development of a provincial park in the Albnel, Temiscamie and Otish regions, including the regions around Mistissini Lake and the head waters of the Rupert's River. What is disturbing to us is that despite these negotiations, the former federal Minister of Environment, Peter Kent, approved the exploration for uranium in the Otish Mountains region. This approval by the former federal Environment Minister is another example of how the federal government and its various bureaucrats and Ministers have so little regard for First Nations people and their desire to protect their lands. The Cree, like other First Nations peoples just want to continue their traditional pursuits on a land upon which they have lived for millennia. We believe that the provincial government of Quebec negotiated for this park in good faith. It was understood at the time that there was to be no mineral explorations within the limits of the proposed park or anywhere near the location of the proposed park. So naturally, it was distressing to learn that the federal government's former Minister of Environment had approved Strateco's project to explore for and potentially mine uranium in the Otish Mountains region. It was disappointing to learn that Strateco had acquired the property in the Otish Mountains region and proposed to develop the Matoush Uranium Exploration Project.

Most Cree are aware and know that the headwaters of many rivers and streams that flow east, south, west and north spring from regions of the Otish Mountains, Mistassini, Albnel, Waconichi lakes. If the Cree are not successful in stopping Strateco's uranium project, the major concern is that this project will have a potential destructive impact on the lands to the east, south, west and north of us.

We at the Cree School Board hope that the Cree Nation Government and the Cree Nation of Mistissini are successful in their bid to stop this proposal to mine uranium in Cree territory. The Cree School Board has an important mandate and responsibility to combine Cree traditional knowledge and skills into its curriculum and still meet the standards of the Ministry of Quebec. A disruption of the Cree way of life through Gov't policies, (for example, residential school system) have always had a negative impact on the Cree. These policies interrupted the intergenerational transmission of Cree knowledge, skills, traditions, and customs. The Cree School Board shares the responsibility with the Elders, parents and other Cree to regain the reality about our history and Cree values. The Cree School Board must teach Cree children and those descendants to come about the Cree language, culture and history. So to this end, the Cree School Board is in the process of revisiting and reviewing how it can incorporate Cree traditional knowledge and skills about Cree culture, language, and other teachings into its curriculum content. We view our land as our classroom wherein we can teach about our culture, language, and traditional knowledge. Through land-based programs, the Cree School Board will continue to pass on the knowledge of our Elders and ancestors to our children and grandchildren. We want our children and grandchildren to understand the delicate balance and intricacies of the relationship between the Cree and the land. We know that there



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will be a high a price to pay if the lands in the Otish region are destroyed. We therefore say NO to uranium exploration and mining in Cree territory.

The Cree School Board’s position is based on our understanding of the Cree way of life as our Elders and ancestors have taught us for generations past. It is now our responsibility as the Cree entity responsible for Cree education to pass on this knowledge and understanding of how delicately the Cree way of life depends on the preservation of our homeland, our Mother Earth and all that she provides us as a Nation.

