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Statement on Potential Uranium Development in Eeyou Istchee

Matthew Chiskamish, Local Environment and Land Administrator

My biggest concerns around uranium mining are around the land, wildlife and the people who hunt year-round on the land, especially in the fall, spring and winter. The tailings ponds of uranium mines are toxic; if they break or leak, a large quantity of toxic materials would spill onto the land. We are nervous about this, even if there are many assurances in place. The fur-bearing animals that are trapped and eaten by our people would be affected by such a spill.

In Chisasbi, we get our water supply from the river, and the known uranium deposits in our territory occur right near the river. Many people dislike the taste of chlorine in the community water supply and will take water from the streams and creeks when they are on the land. Many people will go to the land just to get water. The problem is, no testing is done on this water, therefore people would have no way of knowing whether it was being polluted with mining contamination. Even if no spill or leak were reported, people would still be nervous and would no longer trust the water resources.

With a facility such as a tailings pond, we are talking about a large body of water that has the ability to penetrate into the ground and reach the main water sources, what our elders call the "secondary river" that flows underground. This underground river can reach La Grande and even the James Bay. We are still living with the impacts of past development projects like the LaGrande complex. We are still concerned with developments that occurred in the 1970s. We were told that the Rupert Diversion project was a safe project, but it changed the water flow drastically. No development is "safe" when it takes place on the land, because nature is unpredictable. Anything is possible: the land can subside (like quicksand), there could be an earthquake, and a dam could breach. We are not always in control of nature.

We have already had too many impacts in our traditional hunting territories, with past and current, on-going developments. Why take on more risks? We are not going for uranium.