

## Column Eight

### **The Algonquin Land Claim – Ongoing Consultation Efforts and Next Steps**

*by Robert Potts, Principal Negotiator and Senior Legal Counsel for the Algonquins of Ontario*

Nearly 250 years ago, the Algonquins of Ontario (AOO) embarked on a journey of survival, rebuilding and self-sufficiency – a journey of reconciliation. In search of a fair and equitable settlement of their outstanding claims, the AOO have remained united in our commitment to reach out and build relationships with our neighbours.

On December 13, 2012 the negotiators for the AOO, Canada and Ontario took an unprecedented step in treaty negotiations with the release of the Preliminary Draft Agreement-in-Principle (AIP) for public review. It was determined that engagement in a wide range of consultation activities was essential in order to obtain feedback from Algonquin Voters, stakeholder groups, elected officials and the general public. Such efforts include:

- A series of 9 Public Information Sessions hosted by the three negotiating parties which were attended by more than 2,000 people
- Dozens of community meetings organized by the AOO for Algonquin Voters
- 3 Forums hosted by the AOO for elected officials throughout the Settlement Area, including Members of Parliament, Members of the Provincial Parliament and municipal representatives
- Over 125 meetings organized by Ontario with those who hold legal interests on Crown lands proposed for transfer or require access across those lands
- Meetings to deal with questions or concerns raised by interested parties including cottage and property owner associations, municipal councils, adjacent landowners, ratepayers and others
- Meetings with neighbouring Aboriginal groups
- The publishing of the AOO Newsletter - Issues 1 and 2 (both available at [www.tanakiwin.com/newsletter.htm](http://www.tanakiwin.com/newsletter.htm))
- Reviewing and responding to the hundreds of contacts that have been received by the negotiating parties through letters, emails and telephone calls
- Various modifications to Descriptive Plans, specifically the plans and drawings describing the configuration, legal interests and acreage for each parcel of land

As a result of these extensive consultations and the suggestions we have received, currently the AOO, Canada and Ontario are completing a comprehensive review of the content of the Preliminary Draft AIP and are engaged in further negotiations.

In the spirit of reconciliation, the AOO are committed to finding “win-win” solutions for Algonquins and our neighbours alike. Consequently, each comment has been carefully considered and where necessary, revisions to the document are being negotiated by the three parties. These changes will be reflected in the Draft AIP.

Once a Draft AIP is reached, it is critical that the document is forwarded for ratification by the Algonquin Voters. The text of the Draft AIP will be publicly available at least 60 days prior to the date of the ratification vote.

Should the Algonquins’ vote be in favour of the Draft AIP and the governments concur, it will serve as a non-binding framework for the negotiation of a Final Agreement. These negotiations could take up to four to five years. Ongoing consultation will continue to be integral to the negotiation process and it will take many different forms as we work towards reaching a settlement of this outstanding claim.

Throughout the negotiation process, the AOO have demonstrated continuously our willingness to work in partnership with our neighbours to reach a Final Agreement that is respectful and mutually beneficial. As we move forward in this historic endeavor, together we will strengthen the social, economic and political fabric of Eastern Ontario for generations to come.

*This column is the eighth and final in a series providing insights into Algonquin history, the foundation for the land claim, elements of the Preliminary Draft AIP and next steps in the journey. For more information visit [www.tanakiwin.com](http://www.tanakiwin.com).*