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# Algonquins fear loss of voice

## *AIP finds community is divided*

By R. Bruce McIntyre  
Staff Writer

**Pikwakanagan** -- A historic vote scheduled for the first week of March has some Algonquins concerned they will not be able to vote on an agreement they fear may mark the end of the Pikwakanagan Reserve at Golden Lake.

"The final Voter's List excludes some people at Golden Lake because they did not register for the AIP (Agreement-in-Principle)," former Pikwakanagan chief Greg Sarazin, who also previously worked on negotiations, stated. "Some of us feel we should not have to register for a

separate vote for the AIP."

On December 2, 2015, the Algonquins of Ontario (AOO) announced they began a process that led to a vote on a proposed AIP. The AIP had the negotiators for the Algonquins of Ontario, and the governments of Canada and Ontario agree to the AIP which, if ratified, could lead to the transfer of 117,500 acres of Crown lands to Algonquin ownership; \$300 million as settlement capital provided by Canada and Ontario and defined Algonquin rights related to lands and natural resources.

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# Algonquins at Pikwakanagan fear loss of voice in negotiations process

## From front

Eligible Algonquin voters will signify whether they approve of the terms of the proposed AIP by their participation in a ratification vote that will be held between February 29th and March 7th.

These and other issues were raised at a community meeting at the Makwa Community Centre on February 17 where 68 residents showed up to voice their opposition with the entire AIP process.

Mr. Sarazin maintains the process is flawed and puts Pikwakanagan status natives at a disadvantage. He is concerned more than 80 per cent of those voting as non-status individuals will overwhelm the voting process in order to gain certain advantages. He is also concerned the process will limit the eligibility of status natives to vote and the end result will be the elimination of the Pikwakanagan Reserve.

"Suddenly, a lot of people who had their Algonquin heritage hidden in the closet have regained their Algonquin history and will be taking part in a vote that could spell the end of Pikwakanagan," Mr. Sarazin said. "For generations they never identified themselves as Algonquin, and suddenly a giant land treaty is taking place and they come from everywhere to vote so they can gain something."

The voters list is excluding some Algonquins who live at Pikwakanagan, he added.

"Since we have status, we have always been on a voter's list and suddenly we found out we had to sign up for another list to vote for the agreement," he said. "Some Pikwakanagan residents have refused to register because we feel the process has been flawed and we don't agree with the terms of the AIP."

Mr. Sarazin compares it to a Ca-

nadian election. He argues that any Canadian citizen who voted for years and showed up at the next election and were told they could not vote because they did not register again for a special vote would still be allowed to vote if they showed proper identification.

Another contentious issue for Mr. Sarazin is what he describes as a cottage industry for all those involved in the negotiation process. There are 10 separate communities representing different regions within the Algonquin Land Claim territory, and each community has its own negotiating team and staff.

The nine non-status regions and Pikwakanagan Reserve receive financial compensation for the process and Mr. Sarazin is concerned the original \$300 million offered in the land claim will continually be reduced to cover all the administration costs used in this process.

He is also very concerned about the future of Pikwakanagan. If the final AIP follows the outline contained within the agreement, then some type of final Algonquin entity will be formed and much of the \$300 million will go towards a bloated bureaucracy and not used for services and economic development, he feels.

Mr. Sarazin cites a letter written by Brian Crane, Ontario's Chief Negotiator in the AIP process.

The letter, dated July 15, 2013 to Hastings County CAO Jim Pine, outlines the future of Pikwakanagan.

*"The AIP will provide that self-government will be discussed before the Final Agreement but this will not be limited to the community of Pikwakanagan. 12.4.1 reminds the Algonquins that the s.87 Indian Act tax exemption will be discussed in the context of those self-government negotiations. The federal government has made its position clear that ac-*

*cording to Canada's policy after a self-government agreement has been negotiated for Pikwakanagan the Pikwakanagan Reserve will cease to exist and s.87 tax exemption will no longer apply."*

One of the frustrating aspects of the process for Mr. Sarazin, has been the lack of leadership shown by Pikwakanagan Chief Kirby Whiteduck and council. Mr. Sarazin, who served as chief from 1987-1989, wants Chief Whiteduck to take a stand for the status residents of Pikwakanagan.

"He is the chief," Mr. Sarazin said. "He was elected to be our leader. We value his opinion and he is staying neutral in the process. I have asked him point blank if he thinks this is a good deal for Pikwakanagan and he has not said either way. That is not good enough. If he thinks it will help our residents, then he should be out there front and centre as a champion,

or if he thinks it does not help, he should say so."

At the end of the February 17 meeting, the 68 participants signed a letter addressed to chief and council demanding the chief and council suspend Pikwakanagan involvement in the AIP process and begin discussions within the Pikwakanagan community to discuss the details of an acceptable AIP. Petitions to this effect are also circulating around the community.

## Council Being Responsible By Letting Voters Decide On Their Own -- Chief Whiteduck

Chief Whiteduck responded to the concerns raised by Mr. Sarazin.

On the issue of residents of Pikwakanagan not being able to vote in the overall AIP process, he told the *Leader* Tuesday they had plenty of time and opportunity to get their names on the Voter's List. He said the Algonquins of Ontario (AOO) invited

all those eligible to vote to register on the list.

"Some residents chose purposely not to register for the AIP Voter's List," Chief Whiteduck said. "That was their choice. However, we know that some people at Pikwakanagan still want to be heard so we are holding our own internal vote on the AIP process. We sent ballots out to eligible Pikwakanagan voters and informed them they can either mail in a ballot or drop it off in person to the polling station at the Makwa Centre. The deadline for that vote is March 5."

Chief Whiteduck said the ballots will not be counted until after the March 7 overall deadline involving the other nine Algonquin communities involved in the process.

The internal vote will only include individuals not registered on the 2015 Final Voters List provided by the AOO.

If there is a strong majority that vote against the AIP Ratification, then Chief Whiteduck and council will review the results and discuss the issues in public meetings within Pikwakanagan.

In terms of the loss of the Pikwakanagan Reserve as outlined in the letter from Mr. Crane to Mr. Pine, Chief Whiteduck said that is the current policy of the federal government under the present day Indian Act. If the AIP continues to move forward, Chief Whiteduck is hopeful the Pikwakanagan Reserve will achieve self-government and will become the Pikwakanagan First Nation and no longer be considered a reserve.

"The wording can sound confusing," Chief Whiteduck said. "But if our ultimate goal is to be a self-government, then we have a chance to get there using this process. That way, we would be able to negotiate with the federal government the issue

of citizenship and other matters."

When asked about Mr. Sarazin's concern that he as chief should be more vocal, he said he did not want to be perceived as showing favouritism for either side of the debate.

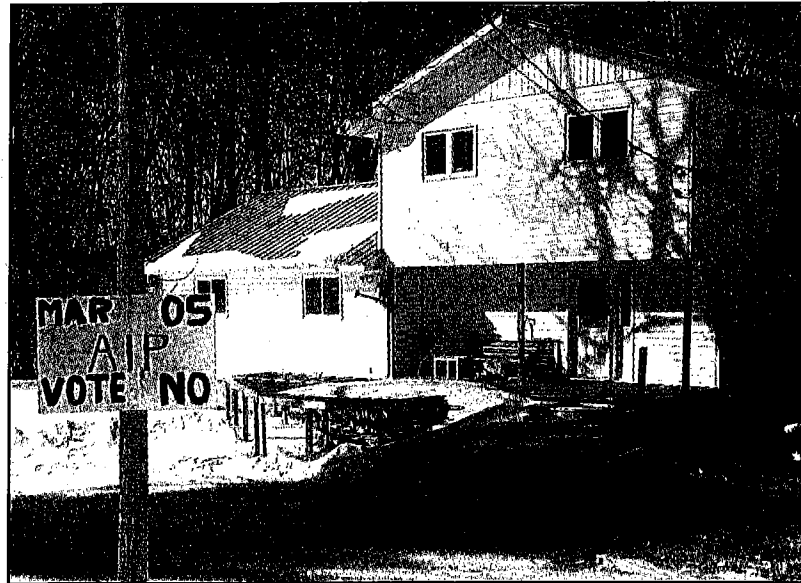
"Yes I am the Pikwakanagan chief but I don't want to be perceived as strong-arming anybody," Chief Whiteduck said. "If I tell people to vote against it, then I will be seen as trying to force my opinion on them and if I tell people to vote in favour of it I will still get criticized."

"I think we as a council are doing the responsible thing by letting the people themselves decide. We have provided information sheets on the AIP and we are having an internal vote for anyone who is not on the AOO's AIP Voter's List. We have done our best to include all Pikwakanagans who are of voting age and eligible to get their vote in before March 5. After that, we will count the ballots and go from there."

The issue of a majority of eligible voters being non-status Algonquins and suddenly declaring their Algonquin ancestry, Chief Whiteduck said he and his council are aware of it and have in the past raised concerns that some people may in fact be trying to take advantage of the process.

However, he reiterated the AIP is only a process and even if it does pass, it has no legal binding in its present form. It is just the first step in the treaty process with the provincial and federal governments.

As the process moves forward Chief Whiteduck vowed to monitor the issue of non-status Algonquins. He is hopeful there is a good turnout for the internal vote taking place at Pikwakanagan and encourages all those who received ballots to vote by the March 5 deadline.



The upcoming vote on the Agreement in Principle for the Algonquin land claim is creating some controversy in Pikwakanagan. Protest signs have been appearing in the community.

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