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Matawa takes mine fight to Ottawa

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Matawa First Nations is going to court over what it says is an inadequate environmental review of Cliffs Natural Resources' big chromite mine project.

The move to launch a judicial review into a federal decision to have Cliffs' proposal subject to a "comprehensive" review instead of an independent review panel is to be outlined this afternoon at an Ottawa news conference. Matawa, a group of nine First Nations in

the orbit of the Ring of Fire mining zone 500 kilometres north of Thunder Bay withdrew its support for Cliffs' project on Oct. 20, citing similar concerns.

Cleveland-based Cliffs wants to have the chromite mine in production by 2015. The Ring of Fire deposit of chromite, a key ingredient in stainless steel, is believed to be the largest in the world and could provide more than 1,000 jobs for 30 years.

Matawa, along with the Muskegowuk Council of seven First Nations located east of

the Ring of Fire in the James Bay Lowlands, maintains an independent review panel is needed because Cliffs' project has the potential to cause significant harm to the environment and infringe on Aboriginal and treaty rights.

Cliffs and the federal government argue that a comprehensive approach, which does not involve a panel, can provide an extensive review and consider input from concerned citizens and groups.

A comprehensive review is a more streamlined approach, whereas an independent panel

review can take longer because it includes public hearings.

Matawa says 10,000 First Nation residents live in the James Bay Lowlands, "which holds one of the largest collections of intact wetlands in the world."

Though the Ring of Fire "has the potential to drive the Ontario and Canadian economies for many decades," its Aboriginal inhabitants "still practise their traditional ways of life on their homelands," Matawa says in a news release.