



RING OF FIRE BACKGROUND

Premier McGuinty's Throne Speech in 2007: "[This government] will work with northern and native communities in Ontario's far north to implement a plan that protects the boreal forest -- a key contributor in the fight against climate change."

July 2008: "Although the Northern Boreal has remained virtually undisturbed since the retreat of the glaciers, change is inevitably coming to these lands. We need to prepare for development and plan for it. It's our responsibility as global citizens to get this right, and to act now." -- Premier McGuinty

Ontario's northern boreal region represents one of the last intact, original forests remaining on the planet. Beyond the northern reaches of the forest lies tundra, which supports one of the earth's largest, continuous wetlands, and through which half of Canada's largest dozen rivers drain.

In 2008, the Ontario government pledged to protect at least half of the northern boreal region, an enormous carbon storehouse, while land-use planning that emphasized sustainable development would guide the future use of the other half.

The **Ring of Fire** is located in the James Bay Lowlands, north of the Albany River and about 240 kilometres west of James Bay and about 500 kilometres northeast of Thunder Bay—this falls within the northern boreal ecoregion.

It is a rapidly growing area of mining activity with more than 8,000 mining claims, covering up to 20,000 square kilometres and more claims are being added regularly.

20,000 square kilometres is three times the size of the GTA; it's also equivalent in size to Lake Ontario.

At 20,000 square kilometres, the Ring of Fire is six times the size of the Athabasca oil sands deposit in Alberta.

Local people say exploration camps are littered with garbage and dozens of fuel tanks have disappeared into the bog. A 1,850-metre airstrip is underway and planning has started on a 350-kilometre railway line, which greatly reduces the potential for the interconnected network of protected areas promised by the government. Development is occurring faster than scientists and First Nations communities can record information on sensitive areas, such as eskers or on the fish, birds and other wildlife that live there.

Despite the government's commitment, neither protection nor sustainable development is occurring within the Ring of Fire and the government is not providing oversight of the activities. Yet we know that unchecked development

here would destroy wildlife habitat, contaminate nearby lakes, rivers and soil, and damage a globally-significant carbon bank.

- At least one lake in the area, McFauld's Lake, has been contaminated from mining companies dumping raw sewage, grey water, fuel and chemicals into the water.
- U.S. iron-ore giant Cliffs Resources, together with Canada Chrome, plan to develop a \$1.5 billion chromite mining operation in the Ring of Fire, which will make this the largest chromite mine in the world – chromite is used to make stainless steel.
- Mineral deposits (nickel, copper, zinc, gold, diamonds, chromite) in the Ring of Fire area extend over some 1.5 million hectares.

The northern boreal generally and James Bay Lowlands specifically support diverse wildlife, including many at-risk birds, mammals, fish, reptiles and amphibians. Species at risk that can be found in this region include:

- Lake sturgeon
- Bald eagle
- Yellow rail
- Black tern
- Short-eared owl
- Woodland caribou
- Wolverine

The peatlands of the James Bay Lowlands are a significant component of the northern boreal's enormous carbon storehouse. Ontario's peatlands sequester or capture carbon at a rate of 0.273 tonnes of carbon per hectare per year if left undisturbed. That adds up to about 7 million tonnes stored each year. The peatlands currently store roughly 35 billion tonnes of carbon. To offset the release of that much carbon into the atmosphere, all Ontarians would have to cut their CO₂ emissions by half for the next 350 years just to maintain the status quo.

9% of Ontario's boreal forest is falls within a park or protected area.

5% of Ontario's northern boreal forest is currently designated as protected. That's equivalent to 22,500 square kilometres -- roughly equal to the amount of land staked for mining.