

Ontario to pay Six Nations band for use of land along highway

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OHSWEKEN — Ontario will give the Six Nations band council \$445,000 dollars in return for the use of a portion of land along a provincial highway claimed by the band.

Transportation Minister Ed Philip was in Ohsweken Friday to sign the deal with Chief Coun. William Montour, who said he was disappointed to go ahead without the support of the traditional chiefs.

The signing ceremony was

postponed a few weeks ago, when chiefs of the Iroquois Confederacy appeared to protest, and Chief Coun. Montour agreed to meet with them before signing anything.

After a lengthy meeting with the elected council last week, the Confederacy chiefs remained opposed to the deal.

"Although it's not stated, in effect, the agreement sells the land to the provincial government," said Mohawk confederacy chief Allen MacNaughton.

"Today's event represents this government's commitment to take tangible steps toward the resolution of issues affecting native peoples," said Mr. Philip.

"Our government is committed to building a co-operative network with Ontario's native peoples."

Chief Coun. Montour referred to the deal as an "interim measure until our (land) claim has been settled" by the federal government.

He said the band hopes to use the money to buy more land to add to the reserve.

He also said the agreement will help initiate further nego-

tiations on land claims with the province and the federal government.

The band claims two strips of land known as the tow paths, which run 20-metres wide on either side of the Grand River, were unfairly taken from them in the 1830s.

The strips were once used as roadways for horses to tow barges about 60 kilometres between Brantford and Dunnville.

Portions of Highway 54 have been built on the land which is under dispute.

The agreement ensures that the government has access to about six hectares of land along the highway, which the Ministry of Transportation plans to improve this summer.

Chief Coun. Montour praised the province for being open to new ways of resolving disputes.

"This is the first government of Ontario that we have been able to sit down with and make meaningful headway with," he said.

In the past, bands have been powerless to stop development of lands they claim, and haven't received compensation until

their claim was addressed by the federal government, which can take years.

The band is waiting to resolve 14 land claims currently in the federal government's specific land claims process.

Phil Monture, director of land claims research for Six Nations, also welcomed the deal.

"I think it's a very important step. There are going to be user fees applied to groups using lands in areas where claims are pending." He said the band is looking at ways to make similar deals for other areas under claim.

"Basically, the Indian isn't going to sit back and take things any more, so you've got to make interim agreements" when work is proceeding on disputed land, said Mr. Monture.

Chief Coun. Montour also suggested the province consider renaming Highway 54 to "the Six Nations Parkway," to recognize the aboriginal inhabitants of the Grand River valley.

Mr. Philip said he would consider the proposal.



Six Nations Chief Coun. William Montour and Transportation Minister Ed Philip signed a land-use agreement Friday which bring \$445,000 to the Indian band.

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