

# Will block mining and logging, Natives vow

By Tom Blackwel

TORONTO (CP) - Aboriginal groups threatened Tuesday to block all new mining and logging in a vast swath of Northern Ontario, saying their concerns about future development there are being ignored.

Companies hoping to develop the region won't get far unless they have First Nation approval, Nishnawbe-aski Nation leader Charles Fox told a news conference Tuesday.

Their opening position is a 50-per-cent cut of any resources extracted from the land, Fox said.

"If you come in there uninvited, unwelcome, then you will feel our wrath," said Fox.

"We can hold up development for years just on injunctions and legal challenges alone ... If we have to tie ourselves to trees or

lay in front of tractors, we'll do that as a last resort."

His comments were echoed by leaders representing First Nations bands from across the province.

Their ire is directed at the provincial Lands for Life process, designed to come up with a plan for developing huge tracts of Crown land in Northern and eastern Ontario.

Fox's Nishnawbe-aski Nation, representing bands across 60 per cent of Ontario, was the only First Nation group to agree to take part in the process.

But he announced Tuesday his organization was pulling out after seeing a government letter outlining the priorities to be considered in the Lands for Life plan.

They include conservation and parks, tourism, mining and log-

ging - but not aboriginal and treaty rights, he said.

For more than a century, the province's north has been harvested by forestry and mining companies. But aboriginal people who claim the territory as their own have received virtually no benefit, said Fox.

"We're wallowing in third-world conditions," he said. "We've had enough of this."

A spokesman for Natural Resources Minister John Snobelen

said he was surprised by the aboriginals' action as the four priorities of Lands for Life have not changed since the process began more than a year ago.

And the leaders of the round tables discussions, who are now preparing recommendations for the province, are taking into account native viewpoints, said Snobelen aide Ryan Sword.

But the First Nations leaders say they are more than mere stakeholders. Their people have

an age-old claim to the land and a succession of Supreme Court rulings require that governments consult them on use of the area, said Tom Bressette, the Ontario grand chief.

Fox said he's not anti-development but believes aboriginals should profit directly from natural resources extraction.

He described the 50-per-cent cut as an opening position, but didn't elaborate.