



O-PIPON-NA-PIWIN CREE NATION



News Release

For Immediate Release

Canada's Newest First Nation – O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation Created at South Indian Lake, Manitoba

WINNIPEG –*December 23, 2005* – Officials with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, leaders of the community of South Indian Lake, and representatives of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation signed and witnessed final agreements on Dec. 22 to activate Canada's newest First Nation, O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation (OPCN), at South Indian Lake in northern Manitoba. The First Nation's reserve lands include over 28,000 acres, strategically located in more than 20 separate parcels throughout OPCN's territory.

The signing followed a Nov. 25 Ministerial Order and Umbrella Agreement creating the new First Nation signed by Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians Andy Scott.

"I'm proud of the people of our entire community for the fortitude and patience they have shown for something that rightfully should have been ours at the time of our Treaty adhesion at Nelson House in 1908," said OPCN's first Chief and champion for First Nation status, Chris Baker.

"I'm honoured to lead our community into a new era of growth, development, and prosperity built on the solid foundation that Canada's recognition of the O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation will provide."

Most residents of South Indian Lake were Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation members. These and members of other First Nations who live there have formally transferred their membership to OPCN. In total, there are about 1,100 members of the new First Nation.

“On behalf of Chief and Council of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation I want to say how pleased we are to share in the joy of our brothers and sisters of O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation as they finally gain official recognition as an independent First Nation, following a century of discussions and negotiations,” said Nisichawayasihk Councillor W. Elvis Thomas, who attended the signing with other NCN Councillors Jimmy Hunter-Spence and Agnes Spence.

With the creation of OPCN, members will have the same rights and privileges as all other First Nations across Canada with access to funding and services beyond what was previously available. The signed agreements cover municipal development and services, funding for community upgrading, arrangements for primary and secondary education, Canada’s financial and program commitments, Health Canada programs and funding of a new health facility, land transfer and transition agreements.

With the community’s agreement South Indian Lake Headman Chris Baker and Transitional Council consisting of Victor Moose and Thomas Spence have become the Chief and Council until full elections are held in late August 2006.

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