

# Chiefs say proposed Algonquin land claim deal illegal, fraudulent

## Even PM could qualify as Algonquin under criteria set to determine eligibility for ratification vote: chiefs

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A historic land claim agreement in principle struck by the Algonquins of Ontario with the federal and provincial governments is being denounced as fraudulent and illegal by chiefs of a number of Iroquois and Algonquin First Nations.

They charge that the vast majority of the Algonquins of Ontario (AOO) are not actually Algonquin or even aboriginal.

Indeed, the chiefs say even Prime Minister Justin Trudeau could technically qualify as an Algonquin under the loose criteria set to determine eligibility to participate in a ratification vote on the proposed deal.

While non-indigenous people are entitled to vote on and benefit from the deal, the chiefs say other legitimate First Nations, whose traditional territory overlaps with the AOO land claim, have been ignored while their rights were bargained away.

The claim, the largest being negotiated in Ontario, covers a territory of 36,000 square kilometres in eastern Ontario, including Parliament Hill.

Among other things, the proposed deal would transfer 117,500 acres of Crown land to Algonquin ownership and provide a \$300 million settlement.

If successful, it would become the province's first modern-day, constitutionally protected treaty.

The agreement in principle, which is in the midst of a ratification vote, was denounced Thursday by the chiefs of four Algonquin First Nations, who said the land claim overlaps almost 900,000 acres of their territory.

Lance Haymond, chief of the Kabaowek First Nation, said "the vast majority" of the Algonquins of Ontario "are not Algonquin at all," but non-indigenous people who claim a loose connection to an Algonquin "root ancestor." In many cases, those eligible to vote on the land claim deal have not had any intermarriage with Algonquins for more than 200 years, he said.

According to a genealogical analysis done for the chiefs, Trudeau could technically trace his ancestry to an Algonquin woman eight generations ago. The process for eligibility is so convoluted and "ludicrous" that Trudeau could declare himself to be an Algonquin of Ontario, Haymond said.

"The Algonquins of Ontario do not have the moral or legal obligation to negotiate away all the rights of the Algonquin people," he said.

Haymond said Trudeau's fledgling government is not to blame for the situation but, given Trudeau's vow to create a new, respectful, nation-to-nation relationship with First Nations, has an obligation to fix it.

The deal was also denounced by the Iroquois caucus, which represents seven Iroquois communities in Ontario and Quebec.

"What has happened is, I will call it, fraudulent," Kahnawake Grand Chief Joe Norton told a news conference.

"An illegal deal has been made, has been struck to bring in people who are not Algonquins, who are not in any way attached to the land, who have not strived and struggled for centuries to try and maintain the integrity of the lands within Ontario."

Norton said the claim involves lands "continuously occupied" by the Iroquois, yet they have "more or less been pushed aside for people who have no right to any of this territory."

The Algonquins of Ontario consist of the federally recognized Pikwakanagan First Nation and nine other communities where people claim Algonquin ancestry.

AOO principal negotiator Robert Potts has said the inclusion of non-status descendents of Algonquins is intended to correct "a historic injustice" wherein many bands were never recognized under the Indian Act. He has also said the criteria for determining descendents has been stringent, involving a genealogist, a ratification committee and a retired judge.

Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.