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CHIEFS OF ONTARIO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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ONTARIO REGIONAL CHIEF SUPPORTS GRASSY NARROWS FIRST NATION IN THEIR CALL FOR GOVERNMENTS TO DEAL WITH MERCURY POLLUTION

TORONTO, ON – Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse today expressed his full support for the Grassy Narrows First Nation as they demand that the Ontario and Canadian governments address the mercury pollution that has poisoned their peoples, the waters, and their lands for the past forty years.

“It is heartbreaking to hear the stories from the community members whose health has been affected by mercury poisoning,” said Chief Toulouse. “The people of Grassy Narrows have raised their concerns for forty years now, only to have them fall on deaf ears. The health of these people and the negative impacts on the environment cannot continue to be ignored. The demands of Grassy Narrows First Nation are simple and achievable --- it is time for the government to listen to the voices of the First Nation,” stated Chief Toulouse.

A peaceful protest called “A River Run” is taking place April 7th at noon beginning at Grange Park and continuing on to Queen’s Park where Chief Simon Fobister will deliver the community’s call to action on World Health Day. The ‘River Run’ will include men, women and children, First Nations and non-Aboriginal people in a show of support.

“The contamination of the waters must stop immediately,” said Chief Toulouse. He further indicated that there are numerous examples of waters being poisoned by industry along the Wabigoon River, such as spills into Lake Superior endangering the health of the Ojibways of Pic River. “Our people continue to witness the contamination of the waters and are demanding a stop to this destructive behaviour immediately. It is incomprehensible that governments continue to turn a blind eye to this situation,” stated the Regional Chief.

Both the Ontario and Canadian governments are currently reviewing the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement which is supposed to deal with the protection of waters in the Great Lakes Basin from contamination. Yet the governments have imposed impossible timelines and confidentiality requirements on the people involved which impedes collaboration on very important issues in developing plans to ensure the protection of the waters.

“The timelines that the governments are imposing do not allow for us to engage our people, nor the general public, to develop an agreement aimed at protecting the waters from contamination. Everyone needs to be aware of what the Ontario and Canadian governments are doing and how it will affect the waters --- both now and in the future,” said Chief Toulouse. Chief Toulouse indicated that the issue of clean water is of utmost priority to all people and

that we need to hold the governments to account for their action with respect to the protection of the water in Ontario, and in the country.

The Chiefs in Ontario office also released a water declaration titled “Water Declaration of the Anishinaabek, Mushkegowuk and Onkwehonwe” in 2008. The goal of the Water Declaration is to assist First Nation communities in dealing with the water challenges they face. The Water Declaration speaks to the relationship of First Nation peoples to the waters, the condition of the waters, water rights and treaties, and self determination. The Water Declaration is a tool that can assist all peoples in protecting the waters from contamination.

“Today, I state my unequivocal support for the people of the Grassy Narrows First Nation in calling on the governments of Ontario and Canada to finally act to do the right thing and address the mercury contamination that they have had to live with for too long,” stated Chief Toulouse.

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