

FIRST NATION LEADERS WILL NOT CONSENT TO TIMISKAMING FOREST PLAN

(New Liskeard, ON) – First Nation communities in the Timiskaming region are unanimous in their disapproval of the proposed 10-year Timiskaming Forest Management (TFM) plan.

After multiple efforts to work with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forests and the Timiskaming Forest Alliance Inc. (TFAI), it has become clear that legitimate efforts to improve the plan, and ensure that First Nations share in the economic benefits of the forest, were not taken seriously. Many serious issues remain unresolved.

MNRF Regional Director Grant Ritchie unilaterally cancelled a scheduled Issue Resolution meeting on Friday, January 15, 2021 saying that the First Nations did not provide new information for his consideration. As a result, the First Nation communities of Temagami, Matagami, Matachewan, Teme-Augama Anishnabai, Beaverhouse, and Timiskaming, will not support or consent to the plan, as it now stands.

"Our representatives participated in the forest planning process in good faith, bringing our concerns repeatedly to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, but these concerns have not been addressed in a meaningful way," says Chief Sacha Wabie of Timiskaming First Nation.

Chief Wabie says that the MNRF and the companies do not take their legal obligations to First Nations seriously. "There are literally millions of dollars being made off the Timiskaming forest by companies like Georgia Pacific and Eacom. First Nations receive nothing. The Crown has a legal duty to both consult and **accommodate**. In this plan they have failed at both."

Chief Chad Boissoneau stated that many ongoing issues related to herbicide spraying, how communities are engaged in the process especially with the government-imposed restrictions during this Pandemic, and respecting values and active land use within the Plan. *"The impacts occurring on our traditional land base are drastically decreasing the useable land base, traditional food sources, traditional medicinal plants and further depleting the relationship the First Nations have with the Crown."*

Chief Jason Batisse of Matachewan says legitimate concerns and questions about the impacts of herbicide spraying and the size of clear cuts could not be resolved.

"We are strongly opposed to the use of herbicide in the forest, the size of clear cuts, and the lack of adequate protection for moose. Our communities rely on the forest for our food and medicines. We have attempted to share our traditional knowledge with the timber companies and the MNRF, but they do not take it seriously. They have to realize that Western science isn't the only knowledge system. Our Elders tell us they can no longer find the quality of birch they need. The massive clear cuts near our community are just heart-breaking."

Beaverhouse Chief Wayne Wabi says, *"Our communities try to participate in good faith in the MNRF planning process but it is demanding and time-consuming. It is a serious burden for First Nations, yet the MNRF refuses to provide financial support to enable meaningful participation."*

MNRF have also refused to adjust the pace of the process even though the CoVid-19 pandemic has made it impossible for us to get feedback from our community members. That puts us at a real disadvantage."

Chief Shelly Moore Frappier, Temagami First Nation, states, "There are very clear indicators that we should be alarmed about the health and wellbeing of our forests. Our community members continue to witness and experience first-hand the effects of climate change within our territory. At the same time, we struggle to uphold our ethics and stewardship practices based on our understanding that the land must be cared for as our relative. This government continues to ignore both the forest management issues we collectively bring forward and yet state they are committed to relationship-building. Well, this relationship should be based on the knowledge that we have centuries of prior experience in sustainable forest management. Unfortunately, this government is choosing to bulldoze its way to a plan that we know will intensify the damage to our forests and increase the threat posed by climate change."

The First Nations have met with the MNRF and sought solutions to these important issues for decades. Teme-Augama Anishnabai Ogimaa (Chief) Leanna Farr says the MNRF and the companies need to respect the forest and its original people. *"The Crown has stated to us that they do not need our consent to push the plan forward. This speaks to their dismissive attitude and disregard toward First Nations people. Currently, many First Nations receive no economic benefits from the degradation of our homeland territories which threatens our cultures, our Aboriginal rights and our ability to meet our obligation to provide for future generations. We will not walk away from our sacred duty to protect the land and waters, our inheritance. We will protect our homeland and its biodiversity which has sustained since time immemorial."*

The Timiskaming regional First Nations are insisting that the Crown fulfill their fiduciary obligations to meaningfully consult and accommodate with First Nations.

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