

Grassy Narrows First Nation  
Environmental Committee, (GNFNEC)  
General Delivery  
Grassy Narrows, Ontario  
POX 1B0

June 17, 1999

Honorable Norman W. Sterling  
Ministry of the Environment  
135 St. Clair Avenue West  
Suite 100  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4V 1P5

Subject: Approval of the 1999-2019 Whiskey Jack Forest Management Plan.

Dear Minister,

On June 4, 1999, we received your decision to approve the 1999-2019 Whiskey Jack Forest Management Plan, (WJFMP). The purpose of this letter is to express our concerns with your decision to approve the WJFMP, and the condition you attached to the denial of our bump-up request regarding the 2000-2001 Annual Work Schedule, (AWS). It is our hope that you will either reconsider your decision to approve the WJFMP or strengthen the condition so that the mediation process will bring resolution to the issues rather than the application of best efforts to resolve the issues.

Our primary concern is your finding that reasonable efforts were made by Abitibi and the MNR to involve the GNFN community in the forest management process. These efforts were to include Native participation and the identification of Native values. It is still our belief that the reasonable efforts made by Abitibi to involve the GNFN community in the process were superficial and demonstrated a lack of understanding for the Native values that the efforts were to uncover.

Your letter recognized that a meeting had taken place between GNFN and Abitibi with the intention of identifying and clarifying issues with the forest management planning process for the Whiskey Jack Forest. The other participants to that meeting were representatives from the MNR and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.



Specifically, the parties had agreed to work with a professional facilitator to articulate their differences on forest management and to develop a formal process that will lead to the resolution of the socio-economic and environmental issues raised by the community. It was anticipated that this would lead to specific plan amendments that would reflect the agreements resulting from this joint initiative.

Your recognition of the mediation process and the identification of the issues to be resolved clearly demonstrates and supports our original position that the efforts taken by Abitibi and the MNR to involve the GNFN community in the forest management process were superficial, lacking in substance and do not reflect the good faith required of governments when they deal with aboriginal and treaty rights. It is still our contention that dealing with a handful of band members on the important issues identified in your letter does not constitute meaningful consultation by Abitibi and the MNR.

In recognition of the important values and traditions that the GNFN community will want to protect with respect to the Whiskey Jack Forest you applied the following condition to the denial of the GNFNEC bump-up request. That before MNR approves activities in the 2000-2001 AWS, they must be satisfied that best efforts to understand and deal with mutual concerns have been put forward by both Abitibi and GNFN.

It is our belief, that this condition is no different in substance than the requirement that Abitibi was to submit a meaningful Native Values Background Information Report (NVBIR) before receiving MNR approval of the WJFMP, on February 23, 1999. The MNR should have ensured that best efforts to understand and deal with the mutual concerns of Abitibi and GNFN were an integral part of Abitibi's NVBIR. As a result, Abitibi is allowed to proceed with the forestry activities in the 1999-2000 AWS without the identification and resolution of the important mutual concerns recognized by your letter. Furthermore, we have no guarantee that the same process will not be followed for the 2000-2001 AWS.

The impact on the GNFN community by the forestry activities associated with the 1999-2019 WJFMP has not been properly addressed by Abitibi or the MNR. However, we believe that the community will suffer considerable hardship for many generations to come with very little benefit flowing to the band from Abitibi forestry activities. This is a situation that we find both offensive and intolerable.

If you wish to comment on any of the above or require further information we can be reached at the address provided.

Sincerely,



J.B. Fobister, on behalf of the GNFNEC.

cc.

The Honourable John C. Snobelen,  
Minister of Natural Resources  
Shawn Stevenson, MNR  
G.G. Pyzer, MNR  
Jane Stewart, INAC  
Jim Barry, DIAND  
Ovide Mercredi, LLB  
Phil Fontaine, AFN  
Frank Miclash, MPP  
Robert Nault, MP  
Francis Kavanaugh, Treaty #3  
Darlene MacGillivray, Abitibi Consolidated  
Mike Bryan, CBC Radio  
June Bland, Kenora Daily Miner & News  
Bryan Phelan, Kenora Enterprise  
Don Sullivan, Taiga Network  
Dan Burman, Aboriginal Rights Coalition  
Jerry Demarco, Sierra Legal Defense Fund  
Clark Anderson, Kenora Local Citizens Committee  
Ed Imbeault, Red Lake Local Citizens Committee  
Julian Holenstein, Environment North