

Grassy Narrows Environmental Group, c/o Judy DaSilva,  
Grassy Narrows Band Office, Grassy Narrows First Nation,  
Grassy Narrows, Ontario, Canada POX IBO

January 1, 1999

The Washington Post,  
1150 15th Street N.W.,  
Washington, D.C.  
U.S.A.  
20071

Dear Editor,

We are members of the Grassy Narrows band of Ojibways of Northwestern Ontario, Canada. Our community numbers about 800 people. We have a history of thousands of years of living on and relating to the land; of hunting, fishing, trapping, and berry and rice picking. To this day we still hold onto these values and also retain our language and spirituality.

We are incorrectly referred to by many other people as "Indians". This of course is a misnomer, going back to 1492 when Christopher Columbus became hopelessly lost and thought that he was in India. We are "native" or "aboriginal" or "indigenous" people. The word we use to refer to ourselves is "Anishnabag" (plural of "Anishnaba").

We also have a history of several generations of cultural oppression, imposed on us by the Canadian government. Also, in the early 1970's our reservation was ravaged economically, socially, and physically by mercury pollution of the English River System. Mercury levels are still high, and many of our people still suffer the effects of it.

During the past several years there has been yet another threat which is likely to complete the process of tearing us from the last shreds of our ancient, land-based culture.



We are a community increasingly surrounded by huge clearcut areas of former forest. A major assault is now under way by a huge transnational corporation against the remaining lands being used to sustain us in both economical and cultural ways. This assault is comparable in every way with the pattern prevalent in the Brazilian rainforest. This is a pattern of cultural genocide against the native people and of irreversible damage to the bio-diversity of the natural forest.

The area referred to is called the Grassy Narrows Traditional Land Use Area. It is the area immediately surrounding our comparatively small reservation. This is the area we have traditionally used since time immemorial. We are supposed to share this area with all other people, including non-native hunters, fishermen, etc.. However, this huge corporation is taking it all.

The name of this corporation is Abitibi Consolidated, and that is the reason for this letter to your newspaper, for we have learned that your newspaper is one of their largest customers in the purchase of newsprint.

We are unable to suggest any kind of a solution to this, for the onus to do so should not be on us. We, our people and our culture, are the victims. Our lands are supporting this massive resource extraction, and without a healthy forest we will have no culture and we will be further destroyed as a people. This is the reality. As indigenous cultures around the world are destroyed one by one, so too will all other people see social economic, spiritual, and moral degradation (it's already happening). This includes the culture which is carrying out the destruction, for as native people one of our most important teachings is that everything on the earth is connected in some way. This is not just our issue, this is an earth issue. Being a living part of Mother Earth, we cannot harm Her without hurting ourselves.

Hopefully this letter will raise an awareness among your readers to the price that they pay for reading their morning newspaper. It's a very high price which can't be paid for too much longer.

We would also like to invite some of your reporters to our community in order to see first hand the devastation here. As a start we are enclosing some newspaper articles about our area.

For their part, Abitibi has refused to deal with us in a reasonable manner. They continue to engage in multi-million dollar campaigns to make themselves appear humanitarian and caring and good corporate citizens. In the meantime, however, they are clear-cutting our traditional area, refusing to admit that it has any adverse effect on wildlife, much less our traditional activities on the land. Most of all, they remain silent about the psychological effects of clear-cutting on those individuals who are on the land.

We feel that the publishing of this letter in your newspaper will do much to raise awareness of the situation here. Please contact us at the address or numbers above, and we hope to have a chance to welcome your reporters to our community.

Yours Truly,

for the Grassy Narrows Environmental Group



# *Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishnabek*

Grassy Narrows, Ontario POX 1B0

Phone: 1-800-668-1790

Fax: 807-925-2649

January 8, 1999

John C. Snobelen,  
Minister of Natural Resources,  
Room 6301, Whitney Block,  
99 Wellesley Street W.,  
Toronto.  
M7A 1W3

Norm Sterling,  
Minister of Environment,  
135 St. Clair Avenue W.,  
Ste. # 100,  
Toronto.  
M4V 1P5

**Dear Minister:**

**We would like to bring to your attention the grave concerns we have regarding the 1999-2004 Forest Management Plan for the Whiskey Jack Forest, and lack of response to these concerns, by both the Ministry of Natural Resources and Abitibi Consolidated Corporation.**

**We are a community increasingly surrounded by huge clearcut areas of former forest. This is taking place within the Grassy Narrows Traditional Land Use Area. The soon-to-be-approved plan for the next five years calls for even more of this type of resource extraction to take place within our territory. This is comparable in every way to the massive resource exploitation and cultural genocide which took place in the Amazon Basin during the 1980's.**

**For their part, Abitibi Consolidated Corporation has continued to not deal with many of our concerns in a fair and honest manner. As a good example, recently a letter was received by one of the young women here at Grassy Narrows. This letter was sent by a member of the Kenora Abitibi staff as a response to concerns voiced at a recent Information Centre held here at Grassy Narrows. ( June 9, 1998 letter from Darlene MacGillivray, plan author and planning team chairperson, to Ms. Chrissy Swain of Grassy Narrows).**



The person who wrote this letter, by the twisting of facts and manipulation of wording, denies the existence of clearcutting methods or the spraying of herbicides. In fact she states that the devastation of the land by the large-scale industrial forestry activities taking place is actually necessary and beneficial to the forest. This letter concludes by the author claiming a spiritual tie to the land. Many of us here at Grassy Narrows are offended by this letter.

This is a prime example of the propaganda being carried out by Abitibi as they destroy the natural forest and replace it, ever so slowly, with an artificial tree plantation.

It has also come to our attention that there are at this time several unanswered letters to Kenora M.N.R. staff from a number of people in our community in regards to forest "management" plans:

sent by:	date of letter:	addressed to:
Joe B. Fobister	April 21, 1998	Heather Barns
Lois Stoll	April 20, 1998	Gord Pyzer
Bill Fobister, Sr.	August 6, 1998	Gord Pyzer
Don Hamlin	May 5, 1998	Shawn Stevenson
"	April 3, 1997	Heather Barns

We expect the M.N.R. to live up to it's committment of public consultation, especially considering the accelerated rate of clearcutting taking place within our Traditional Land Use Area.

One individual, Don Hamlin, who holds a trapper's helper's license on band member Andy Keewatin's trapline, is in the process of attempting to stop this trapline from being totally logged over. In February 1997 he was given permission to proceed with a request for an amendment to previously approved logging plans. Following instructions given to him by Red Lake M.N.R. officials (including the Red Lake district manager) he followed the amendment process by writing the appropriate letter (February 13, 1997) to Kenora M.N.R.. A March 10, 1997 letter was then recieved, stating that there would be no further wood harvesting on this trapline until the amendment process was approved. In spite of that, harvesting plans were approved for April 1, 1998.

On April 14, 1998 a letter was sent out to Mr. Hamlin claiming that the March 10, 1997 letter was a "misunderstanding". (Kenora M.N.R. claimed to have no knowlege of the February 13 letter from Mr. Hamlin.) He was then instructed by Kenora M.N.R. to re-apply for the

amendment, which was done through an April 15, 1998 letter to the Kenora M.N.R. district manager. However this request was further ignored by Kenora M.N.R.

Personal contact with both the district manager and the Kenora east area supervisor (October 15, 1998) and two voice-mail messages to the office of the Kenora east area supervisor (October 26, 1998) have achieved no results to date. Some of the concerned blocks have since been harvested, and more are most likely being cut as this letter is being prepared.

Apparently this is not the only case of correspondence being misplaced by Kenora M.N.R.. It is certainly typical of our concerns being pushed aside as the government bows to the desires of a huge corporation.

We as First Nations people have a legitimate claim to use our Traditional Land Use Area for the continuance of our land-based culture.

M.N.R. portrays itself as neutral player. It is obvious to us that this is not the case. We intend to pursue our right to use the Grassy Narrows Traditional Land Use Area to sustain our culture and our ties to the land.

Our community has already lived through the devastating effects of more than one environmental disaster (mercury pollution and hydro-electric flooding). We don't intend to sit back and let it happen to our people again.

Signed,

Grassy Narrows First Nation Chief and Councilors



**c.c. Nathan Wagamese, Treaty Three**

**Mike Bryan, C.B.C. Radio Thunder Bay**

**Bryan Phelan, "Kenora Enterprise"**

**Phil Fontaine, A.F.N.**

**Chiefs of Ontario**