

Joint Statement

7 October 2010

No logging at Grassy Narrows without consent

Government and industry must respect the right of the people of Grassy Narrows to say “no” to clearcut logging on their traditional territory.

Despite ongoing talks with the Grassy Narrows First Nation, the Government of Ontario has prepared a contingency plan that would allow more than 27 clearcuts in the Whiskey Jack forest, including 17 that will be larger than 260 hectares in size. Most of these planned clearcuts are on land that the people of Grassy Narrows have traditionally used for vital cultural and subsistence activities such as hunting, trapping and fishing. It has been reported that the province may allow logging to resume this fall.

In a public statement issued yesterday, Grassy Narrows Chief Simon Fobister said, “We have never given our consent to any logging on our territory, and we have repeatedly said ‘no’. Unwanted logging has a severe impact on our community’s ability to sustain our health, culture, and livelihood.”

Our organizations are urging the Government of Ontario, the forest company Weyerhaeuser and other corporations to respect international human rights standards that require the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous peoples for decisions that affect their land and resource rights.

We are calling on Ontario to commit that it will not allow logging against the wishes of the people of Grassy Narrows. We are also calling on Weyerhaeuser to voluntarily agree not to seek such a license, or source Grassy Narrows wood from other licence holders, so long as the people of Grassy Narrows maintain their moratorium on clearcut logging on their traditional lands.

The people of Grassy Narrows have maintained a blockade against clearcut logging for eight years. Since 2007, Ontario has been engaged in negotiations with Grassy Narrows over management of the community’s traditional territory. A number of prominent forest and forest product companies have agreed not to log, or purchase wood products logged without the community’s consent.

The conflict over clearcut logging is only the latest threat to the well-being and way of life of the people of Grassy Narrows.

In the early 1970s, the community was the site of what has been called one of the worst environmental and health disasters in Canadian history after an upstream pulp and paper mill dumped massive quantities of organic mercury into the river system. Earlier this year, a study by a Japanese mercury contamination expert –

translated into English for the first time – raised concerns about ongoing chronic health problems at Grassy Narrows. At the time, Premier Dalton McGuinty promised he would look into the study and admitted that the province had a “heavy responsibility” to get to the bottom of this issue.

The harm already experienced by the people of Grassy Narrows adds to the urgency of ensuring effective protection for their rights.

For the people of Grassy Narrows, access to a healthy environment is essential to fulfilling a wide range of internationally recognized and protected human rights, including rights to culture, health, water, subsistence, livelihood and an adequate standard of living. International human rights standards, including the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, affirm these rights and require governments to seek the consent of Indigenous peoples before allowing development activities that could interfere with or prevent Indigenous peoples’ use of their traditional lands.

Canadian courts have ruled that the Constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and treaty rights requires Indigenous peoples’ involvement in decision-making including meaningful, good faith consultation. In at least the most serious cases, the Supreme Court of Canada has said that the consent of the affected Indigenous peoples is required.

Our organizations will continue to monitor the situation at Grassy Narrows, inform our members and speak out for the protection of human rights.

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