

## URGENT URGENT URGENT



## A CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT GRANDFATHER WILLIAM COMMANDA'S VISION FOR THE SACRED SITE AT ASINABKA/VICTORIA ISLAND, OTTAWA, CANADA

NOVEMBER 27, 2006

Many of us from across the globe have been involved in the development of Grandfather (Elder, Doctor) William Commanda's vision for Asinabka/Victoria Island over the years.

It is a vision for the healing of indigenous peoples, the healing of relationships with all others, and the healing of our collective relationship with Mother Earth.

It holds a dream for a future where 1) the sacred Chaudière Rapids can run freely again and can symbolize reconciliation with Water; 2) where the concrete clad Chaudière Island can become a city park in the heart of the country, with both forested wild space and a historic interpretive centre; 3) where the First Peoples of this land can regain their strength and heritage in a centre dedicated to their development; 4) where they can then share their values and culture with all others in the spirit of peace-building in an international conference centre; and 5) where feet can once again pound their prayers and reverence on the sacred island of fire, and the communal spirit of pow wows of old ignite and inspire.

The human, environmental, cultural and economic fruits of this vision benefit Mother Earth, humanity, Aboriginal Peoples and the citizens of the National Capital Region.

IN LIGHT OF PLANNED EXPANDED DEVELOPMENT OF THE SACRED CHAUDIÈRE SITE, WE WISH TO RAISE AWARENESS AND CONSOLIDATE SUPPORT FOR GRANDFATHER'S VISION.

Attached please find Grandfather Commanda's correspondence to the Ontario Ministry of the Environment on this file.

You are likely aware of his passionate concern for Mother Earth. This is the foundation of his spirituality. We hope you will join the efforts of this extraordinary 93 year old indigenous elder and venerable statesman emeritus, and help develop a new blueprint for the capital city, one which will honour and celebrate its most spectacular natural treasure.

Send your message of support for Grandfather's vision and his request for an Individual Environmental Assessment of Domtar Inc.'s Project to the individuals primarily involved in this file: Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Premier McGuinty at [dmcguinty.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org](mailto:dmcguinty.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org), and Lieutenant Governor James Bartleman. Their email addresses are: [james.omara@ontario.ca](mailto:james.omara@ontario.ca), [dmcguinty.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org](mailto:dmcguinty.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org), and

[ltgov@gov.on.ca](mailto:ltgov@gov.on.ca)

And copy Dr. Commanda at [romolatrebilcock@sympatico.ca](mailto:romolatrebilcock@sympatico.ca) for our records.

Please distribute this message widely and encourage the participation of others. We hope you will understand the urgency of this matter and the need for your involvement and action as soon as possible. Grandfather believes this vision is the legacy we must leave all our children.

Thank you for your interest and support!

[www.circleofallnations.com](http://www.circleofallnations.com)

Attachment # 1

231 Pitobig Mikan

Maniwaki,

Quebec, J9E 3B1

819-449-2668

15 November, 2006

Mr. Craig Wood, B.Sc

Project Manager, Environment

GENIVAR

89 Don Quichotte Boulevard, Suite 9

Ile-Perrot, Quebec J7V 6X2

[domtar.ottawa@genivar.com](mailto:domtar.ottawa@genivar.com)

Dear Mr. Wood:

**Re: Domtar Inc.'s Project to Redevelop the Hydroelectric Potential of the Existing Chaudière Island Site in Ottawa**

I have recently learned about Domtar Inc.'s Project to Redevelop the Hydroelectric Potential of the Existing Chaudière Island Site in Ottawa, and I am writing to express my grave concerns.

I am a 93 year old Algonquin of the Ottawa River Valley and I consider this area unsurrendered Algonquin Territory.

For many years I have been working with Algonquin, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to develop an inclusive vision for what has been acknowledged as the sacred spiritual meeting grounds of my ancestors since 1613.

The following are the core elements of this vision, shared over the past several years with the National Capital Commission, the City of Ottawa, federal government ministers and provincial ministers, and available to the general public on the Healing Page of my website ([www.circleofallnations.com](http://www.circleofallnations.com)):

This is a vision for *Asinabka*, the Place of Glare Rock. It is a vision for the healing of the indigenous peoples, the healing for the relationship with all others and the healing of our relationship with Mother Earth. It is a vision for a place where all the world can find its home.

We believe it is a vision that incorporates a hope for Mother Earth and her children from all over the world in one tiny spot on the globe. It foresees a future where the sacred Chaudière Rapids can run freely again and can symbolize reconciliation with the waters; where the concrete clad Chaudière Island can become a forested wild space in the heart of the country and can serve as a messenger to the rest of the world that we can look for ways to offset urban concrete and unbalanced heating of the earth, as well as a historic interpretive centre; where the indigenous peoples can regain their strength and heritage in an indigenous centre on Victoria Island dedicated to their development; where they can then share their world, their culture, their food and dance with all others in the spirit of peace-building in an international conference centre; and where feet can once again pound their prayers and reverence on the sacred island of fire and the spirit of the pow wows of old ignite and inspire.

The human, environmental, cultural and economic fruits of this vision benefit Mother Earth, humanity and the citizens of this area, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you.

I request an urgent meeting with you before the end of the prescribed review period of November 20, 2006.

I suggest also that Domtar Inc. voluntarily extends the review period beyond the November 20, 2006 deadline, to preclude the need to request that the Ontario Ministry of the Environment elevates the Project to either an Environmental Review or Individual Environmental Assessment.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Algonquin Elder (Dr) William Commanda

Circle of All Nations

506 Stratas Court

Kanata, Ontario

K2L 3K7

613-599-8385

cc Eric Advokaat, Senior Program Officer, Canadian Environmental  
Assessment Agency – [eric.advokaat@ceaa-acee.gc.ca](mailto:eric.advokaat@ceaa-acee.gc.ca)

Francois Jette, eng., Director, Energy and Chemical Recovery, Domtar  
Inc. – [francois.jette@domtar.com](mailto:francois.jette@domtar.com)

Attachment #2

William Commanda

231 Pitobig Mikan

Maniwaki,

Quebec, J9E 3B1

819-449-2668

20 November, 2006

Mr. James O'Mara

Director of Environmental Assessment and Approvals Branch

Ministry of the Environment, Ontario

2 St. Clair Avenue West, Floor 12 A

Toronto, Ontario M4V 1L5

Dear Mr. O'Mara:

**Re: Domtar Inc.'s Project to Redevelop the Hydroelectric Potential of the Existing Chaudière Island Site in Ottawa**

I have had an opportunity to undertake a cursory review of:

1. The Environmental Screening Report for Domtar Inc.'s Project to Redevelop the Hydroelectric Potential of the Existing Chaudière Island Site in Ottawa as prepared by Genivar and

2. The Ontario Ministry of The Environment's Guide to Environmental Assessment Requirements for Electricity Projects.

As stated in my correspondence of November 15, 2006 (attached) on the above captioned topic, I have only recently become aware of this proposal. In its response to me of November 17, 2006, Domtar Inc. informs that it is not prepared to extend the public consultation/review period beyond the November 20 deadline as I had suggested.

Since I do not believe **Algonquin Peoples both on and off reserve, Aboriginal Peoples, and others** have been adequately afforded an opportunity to be briefed about and to respond to this "self-assessed" project proposal in such a prime location within the capital city, and especially one that lies within the heart of the unsundered land of the Algonquins of the Ottawa River Valley, since it appears unaware of other proposals and visions for this historically significant sacred site, **I am writing to request that the project be elevated to an Individual Environmental Assessment.**

Certainly I, who am generally acknowledged as senior elder of what is acknowledged in Ottawa as being unsundered Algonquin Territory by federal departments and others, and who has been in direct communication with the government departments that Domtar has consulted with in preparing its Report (National Capital Commission, Public Works and Government Services Canada, and Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development - who have been apprised over the course of several years of my vision for development the area), certainly I have not been contacted regarding this Proposal.

On the following pages you will find the key items in the Guide to EA Requirements for Electricity Projects and in the Genivar Report upon which I base my concerns.

I have not had an opportunity to review the technical assessment and the sections pertaining to fish, wildlife and plant material with any great depth,



but having experienced the devastation to plant and animal life since the unchecked, unbalanced and unprecedented growth in industrialization and technological development over the course of my life time, and in particular over the past sixty years, and the escalation of the scale of irrecoverable damage with accompanying impact on health and environment over the past decade, I have grave concerns here too, and I believe these areas demand extensive examination.

Finally, the significance of the archaeological legacy of the area is not adequately examined. Amongst the earliest places inhabited in the continent, if not the earliest, I believe every fragment of information about our indigenous and human history in this central area is of crucial importance.

In light of these concerns, I request that **the project be elevated to an Individual Environmental Assessment.**

Thank you for your attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,

Elder (Dr) William Commanda

Traditional Algonquin Elder, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg

Honorary Chair, Ottawa River Designation Committee

Honorary Elder, 2004 Boreal Forest Rendezvous

2004 Recipient of the Bill Mason Conservation Award

506 Stratas Court

Kanata, Ontario

K2L 3K7

613-599-8385

(I identify credentials which confirm my deep involvement in issues related to this proposal; for more information about my work, please view my website.)

[www.circleofallnations.com](http://www.circleofallnations.com)

cc

Mr. Craig Wood, B.Sc

Project Manager, Environment

GENIVAR

89 Don Quichotte Boulevard, Suite 9

Ile-Perrot, Quebec J7V 6X2

[domtar.ottawa@genivar.com](mailto:domtar.ottawa@genivar.com)

Please note that I shall be submitting this correspondence to other parties as well.

Attachment #3

## **BACKGROUND:**

### **SECTION A.**

#### **Key Items in the Guide to EA Requirements and the Genivar Report**

The following are the primary concepts that constitute the substance of my petition, ensuing from the Guide to EA Requirements for Electricity Projects, and from portions of the Genivar Report. I reiterate them here, to provide a focus for the points I wish to raise in this request for elevation.

1. A primary requirement of the Environmental Screening Process (A.6.2.1) is Public Consultation, including to notify potentially interested and affected stakeholders. Further, the Guide notes that "Failure to carry out adequate public consultation to address public issues of concerns may result in requests to elevate the project"; and that "the proponent is required to maintain a record and mailing list of all participants in the consultation process, a record of public concerns and issues, and a record of how any concerns and issues have been addressed."
2. Further, "proponents should give particular consideration to the concerns of First Nations and other Aboriginal communities located in the vicinity of, or having a potential interest in, the project. First Nations and other Aboriginal communities are to be identified, notified and involved in an appropriate manner". (A.6.2.3)
3. Section A.6.2.4 notes that the proponent is required to notify affected government agencies and other potentially interested parties, even if they have not previously expressed an interest.
4. Section B.2.2 states that "Negative environmental effects may include, but are not limited to, the harmful alteration, disruption, destruction, of loss of natural features, flora or fauna and their habitat, ecological functions, natural resources, air or water quality, and cultural or heritage resources. Negative environmental effects may also include the displacement, impairment, conflict or interference with existing land uses, approved land use plans, businesses or economic enterprises, recreational uses or activities, cultural pursuits, social conditions or economic structure".
5. Genivar's Report notes that Public Works and Government Services Canada is the *owner* of lands on Chaudière Island that are leased to Domtar Inc. in perpetuity. (1.5) It also notes that, as per the National Capital Act, Federal Land Use Approval is required from the National Capital Commission when any person proposes to erect, alter, extend

or demolish a building or other work on public lands in the National Capital Region. (1.6)

6. Genivar's Report notes that there is no heritage designation for the Chaudière Island site, though these buildings are among the oldest in the area (2.12). It also states that "the fact that there are no sites registered on the Chaudière Island in no way precludes the presence of any archaeological resources being there" (2.12). Further, "several archaeological sites dating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and from the Amerindian pre-historic period have been identified in the vicinity of the proposed project on both the Quebec and Ontario sides of the Ottawa River (2.13).
  
7. First Nations (2.14): The Report acknowledges the need to consult with First Nations and other Aboriginal peoples.
  
8. Archaeology and Heritage (4.11): In this *self evaluation* report, Domtar diminishes the significance of the archaeological legacy of the area. Amongst the earliest places inhabited in the continent, if not the earliest, every fragment of information about our indigenous and human history in this central area is of crucial importance.

## SECTION B.

### Rationale for Request for Elevation to an Individual Environmental Assessment.

**Flowing from the Guide to EA Requirements for Electricity Projects, and Genivar's Report, I offer the following rationale for my request.**

1. The Ottawa River Valley has been inhabited for over 10,000 years. As with the Hopewell culture of the Ohio, so too here are found platform pipes, here dated back to 1450 B. P. The Pipe lies at the heart of our spiritual practices.
2. *From Time Immemorial, Asinabka* has been a special spiritual meeting place, a special island of fire, for indigenous peoples, The *Mamiwinini*, my nomad ancestors, gathered at particular places across this continent that they knew so well. The special meeting places were on the waterways that served as their highways, and the islands that served as their half-way houses. The four elements marked these special places – the thunder of the water, the rocks, the earth, and the wind marked these as place of power, places of passion. The Chaudière Falls were especially significant – they took the shape of the bowl of a pipe, in this place of glare rock, *Asinabka*, and the rising vapours were a reflection of the fire and smoke of prayers rising to the Great Mystery on the wings of the wind. This was even more blessed and expressive of the intimate union with Mother Earth and the Great Mystery than waterfalls that flow vertically. The *Mamiwinini* consecrated the place with prayer and tobacco and pipe ceremony, and this was noted in one of the earliest paintings of the area.
3. With the arrival of the earliest explorers, we have documented evidence that the Chaudière Rapids and the neighbouring islands served as a special site for sacred pipe and tobacco ceremony. In Champlain's Journal Records of 1613, he noted the following:

- a. "On 4 June 1613, Champlain came across a wide deep basin where "the water whirls around to such an extent, and in the middle sends up such big swirls, that the Indians call it *Asticou*, which means 'boiler' (Biggar 268).<sup>1</sup> He dubbed this feature the "Sault de la Chaudière", a name which still applies to the famous rapids between the cities of Ottawa and Gatineau. Champlain also described the traditional ceremony which he witnessed at the falls on his return journey a week later, as performed by the Algonquin canoe party which was accompanying him back to Quebec:

*i. Having carried their canoes to the foot of the fall, they assemble in one place, where one of them takes up a collection with a wooden plate into which each puts a piece of tobacco. After the collection, the plate is set down in the middle of the group and all dance about it, singing after their fashion. Then one of the chiefs makes a speech, pointing out for years they have been accustomed to make such an offering, and that thereby they receive protection from their enemies; that otherwise misfortune would happen to them, as the devil persuades them [...] When he has finished, the orator takes the plate and throws the tobacco into the middle of the boiling water, and all together utter a loud whoop.*

4. The painting depicting this observation consecrates the spiritual energy of the mighty cauldron falls and rocks and the inhabitants visually. It also underlines the other historic fact about this special place: it was a very significant meeting place on Turtle Island, the continent of North America – a place of council fire: if one looks at the three figures depicted in the painting under a magnifying glass, one notes that each of the costumes identifies a different tribe. It underlines the underlying premise of indigenous spirituality – that "*We are all connected*". Archaeological information establishes this area as the centre of ancient convergence: for trade, spiritual and cultural exchange.
  5. With the arrival of Philomen Wright in 1800, the sacred heartland of my ancestors of the Ottawa River Watershed, was quickly desecrated
-

and transformed as it became used as a place of “assembly, a market, an inn, a forge, a manufacturer, a distillery, a furnace and an mine”. It became a collecting spot for the lumber industry, the elimination of the pine trees, and the physical landscape was transformed by lumber slides, dams, and land displacement. A site of industrial and technological development, the advances have not been without tremendous cost – it is only now we begin to realize how fertilizers destroy our watersheds, how carbide conceived on Victoria Island has left its destructive mark across the globe in Bopal.

Mother Nature reacted to the transformations immediately; after the first damming of the Chaudière came the devastating cholera epidemic; with the endless tree cutting, came many, many destructive fires, one destroying the Parliament Buildings.

6. Things are no different today: this very year, communities along the Ottawa River have had to face several environmental and health dangers at the waters' edge.
7. This area, which my ancestors called *Asinabka* – Place of Glare Rock – has evolved from its ancient roots as a place of council fire to be the capital city of a multicultural country where the world seeks to make its home. We are just beginning to realize what a challenge now faces us all. We see this in global environmental crisis, and in strife, warfare, racism, health crisis and troubling youth issues. Many realize the future looks very bleak for our children.
8. I am now 93 years old. This is the land of my ancestors, and I believe I know it in a way that the newer people who see it as a commodity never can. The blood and bones of my ancestors are in this earth; that is why indigenous peoples believe that we do not own the land; rather, the land owns us. The land speaks to us in a language others do not hear.
9. The sacred site, *Asinabka*, has drawn Aboriginal peoples back over the past four decades, and we have begun again to honour the place with



tobacco and pipe and sweat lodge ceremony; we have reclaimed our right to bring ceremony and gatherings back to this land. Many individuals and groups, both Algonquin and Non Algonquin, have held meetings and sacred ceremonies on the island, retrenching the indigenous spirit in its soil. For the past decade, I have hosted countless sacred ceremonies at this place. The site has also become a place for sharing elements of Aboriginal cultural heritage and tradition with national and international guests. Now, other groups who wish to use the area (canoe clubs, etc.) are directed by the National Capital Commission to seek permission from me or other Aboriginal stakeholders.

10. I have also developed a vision for a healing and peace building centre at Victoria Island:

11. The following are the core elements of this vision, shared over the past several years with the National Capital Commission, the City of Ottawa, federal government ministers and provincial ministers, and available to the general public on the Healing Page of my website ([www.circleofallnations.com](http://www.circleofallnations.com)):

a. This is a vision for *Asinabka*, the Place of Glare Rock. It is a vision for the healing of the indigenous peoples, the healing for the relationship with all others and the healing of our relationship with Mother Earth. It is a vision for a place where all the world can find its home.

b. We believe it is a vision that incorporates a hope for Mother Earth and her children from all over the world in one tiny spot on the globe. It foresees a future where the sacred Chaudière Rapids can run freely again and can symbolize reconciliation with the waters; where the concrete clad Chaudière Island can become a forested wild space in the heart of the country and can serve as a messenger to the rest of the world that we can look for ways to offset urban concrete and unbalanced heating of the earth, as well as a historic interpretive centre; where the

indigenous peoples can regain their strength and heritage in an indigenous centre on Victoria Island dedicated to their development; where they can then share their world, their culture, their food and dance with all others in the spirit of peace-building in an international conference centre; and where feet can once again pound their prayers and reverence on the sacred island of fire and the spirit of the pow wows of old ignite and inspire.

12. I have shared this vision with the former Governor General, and Prime Ministers, Heritage Canada, National Capital Commission, Public Works and Government Services Canada, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Cities of Ottawa and Gatineau, amongst others.
13. I am disappointed that the National Capital Commission, Public Works and Government Services Canada and the Department of Indian and Northern Development in particular have not apprised you of this interest in the Sacred Site.
14. Thousands of people, nationally and internationally, have expressed support for this vision.
15. Many people are seeking a new blueprint for the future, one that includes the ideas I posit.
16. With specific reference to the sacred Chaudière Falls, in 1972, Clyde Kennedy, a historian with an incredible knowledge and love for the Ottawa River Valley, and Robert Legget, who reverence of the Ottawa Waterway: Gateway to a Continent is expressed in his book of the same words, amongst others, voiced the dream of restoring the Chaudière Rapids to its former glory.

17. Likewise, Ms Jean Pigot, former Chairperson of the National Capital Commission, also envisioned the potential power of an undammed Chaudière within this capital city.
  
18. Much more recently, in an article in the Ottawa Citizen dated November 8, 2006, Urban Planner Professor David Gordon, at a World Town Planning Day Symposium says "I think it would be cool to take the dam off the Chaudière and bring the falls back."
  
19. I think there are many others who would like to explore this option.
  
20. I also wear another hat. Over recent years, I have worked to support efforts to designate the Ottawa River a Heritage River. I now serve as Honorary Chair. Because the river has been so ravaged over the past two hundred years, it cannot achieve this status on the basis of pristine quality; It is assessed on its cultural and recreational relevance. Recently we learned that while Ontario is proceeding with the heritage nomination effort, Quebec has withdrawn from the process. This is the heritage river of my ancestors, and it is inconceivable to me how this can be done, when the world is beginning to realize how desperately we need to protect this precious life sustaining element, water. I and others have written in protest. Now, its cultural history, both prehistoric and historic, is being minimized. We are barely beginning to understand the implications of the industrial and technological transformations to the environment over the past centuries, and even this summer, we see the impacts on the newly reclaimed Petrie Island east of the Chaudière. It is wrong that such a significant invasive action as is proposed by Domtar Inc. be initiated at this time when a Management Plan is to be developed to overlook such development as part of the Heritage Rivers Program.
  
21. This approach to disjointed environmental management and stewardship is also reflected in Table 1 (1.11) under Environmental

Assessment in the Genivar Report, when we are told "The Province of Ontario requires an Environmental Screening Assessment and project approval is dependent on this review. Quebec has no jurisdiction on a project in Ontario." Yet Domtar Inc. proposes to harness what it calls "its" share of Ontario Ottawa River water to create hydro electric power to be transmitted to Quebec. There is no analysis of the financial viability, transactions involved and gains anticipated.

22. The Genivar Report identifies Domtar Inc. as the second largest producer of uncoated freesheet paper in North America and the third largest in the world. For countless years I have bemoaned the ceaseless logging and clear cutting through out my ancestral territory across North America, and the devastation of the Boreal Forest (I served as Honorary Elder for the Boreal Rendezvous, a national effort to raise awareness on this environmental crisis; while environmentalists would recommend 50 percent of the forests be protected, in Quebec, only 2 percent is afforded any protection.) Over recent years, we have seen the resultant devastation of massive tree cutting in floods, fires, soil erosion, air pollution across the continent; and these ramifications of nature cross provincial and national boundaries.

23. Dams dot the areas of tree cutting throughout Quebec. My wife's family was displaced from their home when the Baskatong Reservoir was built, and our lives have been impacted by this "advance" in civilization ever since. I recently observed a massive new dam at Pointe Fortune. What other plans for expanding or developing dams exist? Should these not be examined in unison and the cumulative impact examined? For the past decade, we have not been able to drink the water in my community in Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg. Now the entire country is becoming dependent on bottled water. This precious natural element, essential for all life, has been commodified beyond comprehension.

24. We need to take a step back and examine our impacts on the natural world more comprehensively. Surely in this age of global environmental crisis and battle for resources this is apparent to all?

25. We need to move toward a new definition of economics. As my friend Anne Pennington has suggested, developing Pierre Trudeau's thoughts on economics further, we need to think of Net Planetary Human Benefit.
  
26. Ideas such as I have expressed warrant much greater exploration and sharing. It is of crucial importance for us to explore new relationships with Mother Earth and each other, and I and many others believe we must start at this sacred site of my ancestors.
  
27. We also believe our future and the future of our children depends on this.
  
28. Again, I reiterate that I and others have a different vision for the National Capital city, and the ancient sacred site of my ancestors: a vision that embraces reconnection with nature and respect for the laws of nature at a microscopic symbolic level with potential to impact the world, and a vision for peace building for a Circle of All Nations.

Consequently, I request that **the project be elevated to an Individual Environmental Assessment.**

Elder (Dr) William Commanda

Founder: Circle of All Nations

Algonquin Elder, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg

Honorary Chair, Ottawa River Designation Committee

Honorary Elder, 2004 Boreal Forest Rendezvous

2004 Recipient of the Bill Mason Conservation Award

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