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The Algonquin First Nations Meeting Backgrounder on The Domtar Inc.'s Project to Redevelop the Hydroelectric potential of the Existing Chaudière Island Site in Ottawa.

1. THANK YOU for providing us with a copy of the Backgrounder.

Thank you also for inviting Elder Commanda to attend this meeting. However, as I advised last week, Elder Commanda has had to undergo some medical work this week, and he is unlikely to be in a position to attend this meeting. In any case, as you will recall, he had been anticipating a meeting with Mr. James O'Mara, over the past several months, to discuss the vision for the area on site.

2. PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA

We note several references to Public Works and Government Services Canada in your note, and in our discussion, you indicated you did not have further clarifying information on their input.

I indicated that Elder Commanda had stated in his initial letter to the Prime Minister, that he realized that the work for the *Asinabka* initiative spanned many departments, and initially, he was pleased to see the Prime Minister's office identify the key ones for action. However, thus far, he has only received several polite, superficial, non-committal letters from various federal and also provincial ministries, and he has not engaged in recent dialogue with them.

However, we note that the letter from the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, in addition to reflecting a very superficial understanding of the issues Elder Commanda had raised in his correspondence on this file, also contains some confusing information. Since you refer repeatedly to input from this department, we are now obliged to comment on this letter.

Specifically, the Minister states that “Domtar Inc., pulp and paper company, already owns most of the Chaudières Island”; Domtar Inc. has stated it holds the lease to land on the island in perpetuity, and even this is not clearly documented.

Further, the Minister states, “As the federal custodian, in collaboration with the National Capital Commission, my department has studied the Domtar Project to ensure that it will preserve and enrich the character of the Chaudières Island and its natural features for the benefit of the general public.”

Frankly, in light of Elder Commanda’s vision for the area, some consider this a condescending, patronizing and dismaying comment. (I might add that this response from the Minister has been sent to other non-Aboriginal people who support Elder Commanda’s vision, and they too have expressed concern.)

The next paragraph is erroneous: “Domtar officials indicated that they have had the opportunity to meet with you to discuss your vision for Asinabka, the Sacred Chaudières Falls’ Site. We have learned from Domtar Inc.’s officials that several of your suggestions concerning Sacred Chaudières Falls were taken into account by the company. For example, access to the falls will be provided so the public can enjoy their beauty.”

We registered concerns that the Domtar response failed to address Elder Commanda’s concerns, and we have seen no evidence that several of his suggestions were taken into account by the company, and that there was any modification of the project, including concerning public access. The bicycle path mentioned in Domtar’s response was part of the original proposal, and certainly it does not facilitate ceremony for Aboriginal Elders.

Finally, we note that the Minister then referred the file to the Minister of Transport, who in turn referred it to the National Capital Commission, who in turn informed us that “A briefing regarding this important project will take place upon the new Chairman’s arrival”, and we are to rest assured that we will be contacted “to set such an appointment as soon as possible after the Chairman’s installation in his new quarters.”

(I would like to add at this time, that almost exactly a year ago, during Elder Commanda’s annual international Circle of All Nations Gathering, the former Chairman of the National Capital Commission expressed in public, full support for the Indigenous Centre, and a year later, nay in reality more like two decades, we are no closer to its manifestation. The First Nations National Day of Action across the country, held at Victoria Island in the National Capital Region, was called to draw public attention to injustices such as this one. Given his age (ninety three), this is particularly disheartening to Elder Commanda, and the countless people whose lives he has touched.

We shall be bringing these comments to the attention of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

3. ARCHAEOLOGY Your backgrounder also makes reference to archaeology. I am attaching a note prepared by Bill Allen, Avocational Archaeologist. He has supported Elder Commanda's research at the Chaudière Site since the beginning of 2006, and the National Capital Commission has been aware of this and supportive. (Attachment 1)

In light of his comments, we request that the conclusions with respect to Domtar Inc.'s position on archaeology be reexamined.

As in previous correspondence, we also reiterate that since this is one of the oldest sites of human inhabitation in at North America, we should awaken to the need for reclamation and preservation of the unique site of human history and heritage.

4. PUBLIC CONSULTATION Originally, we had requested that Domtar Inc. voluntarily engage in broader public information and consultation on their proposal. It is noted that several times in the past, others have called for the undamming of the falls, and for freeing it from its industrial chains, especially given its very unique location. In Elder Commanda's informal outreach, several hundred people have added their voices in support of his vision, over and beyond the thousands who had endorsed the project in the past.

While your meeting is focused on the position of the Algonquin First Nations, we also note that many non-Aboriginal peoples are also enthusiastic about Elder Commanda's vision for the capital, in their own right, and in support of the indigenous vision. Consequently, I am also attaching Bill Allen's comments and questions on the Backgrounder, and we request they be addressed and responded to. (Attachment 2)

5. RESPECT AND REVERENCE FOR NATURE and RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

This brings us to a core reason for this review in the first place – the reverence of nature.

From *Time Immemorial*, the Chaudière Site has been a sacred site for Native Americans from across the continent. Elder Commanda refers to their history since 1493 in his June 29, 2007 National Day of Action Remarks (Attachment 3). Their spirituality was also forcibly eradicated, but despite this shameful effort, Aboriginal Peoples, followed now by countless others, are tracing their path back to a spiritual connection with Earth, and many like Elder Commanda, believe this is *both a sacred right and a responsibility*.

We have several photographs of Elder Commanda at the Western End of Victoria Island, offering his prayer and tobacco at the site of the Devil's Hole (Please see attached also a note prepared by Bill Allen on this sacred spot (Attachment 4), and at an obscured waterfall on the south west end of Victoria Island. One can only imagine how cruel and unjust it is that he and his people cannot consecrate their special ceremonial site at the Falls, in a country that celebrates religious freedom for all others. I attach the one at the waterfall at the end of this note.

Now, I refer to the words of Elder Commanda to the consultation on the Eel as a Species at Risk, supported by Bill Allen's Paper on the American Eel (Attachment 5 – Elder Commanda's intervention appears on page 16). Further, Mr. Allen refers us to rob.macgregor@ontario.ca for an Ontario Ministry position on this topic.

Another one of Elder Commanda's colleagues, Eric Lloyd Smith, has prepared for him a Discussion Paper entitled "River Restoration Through Dam Removal Efforts, with a Particular Focus on the Ottawa River at Chaudière Island". Amongst other things, it alerts us to the problems inherent in the effort underway to designate the Ottawa River a heritage river without the participation of Quebec, a matter we have referred to previously. I attach this paper, and we wish it to be a part of your discussions, and we look forward to responses. (Attachment 6)

6. CURRENT ACTIVITY AT CANAL AT VICTORIA ISLAND Now, separately all together, some of Elder Commanda's non -Aboriginal colleagues commenced developing a landscaping Greenfund project on Victoria Island in support of his environmental efforts, and Elder Commanda visited the site on Friday, July 6, 2007 to review the plans. *He found major construction work being undertaken on the canal on the south side of Victoria Island, and the little waterfall in the photograph dehydrated.* He has written to the National Capital Commission to ascertain what is happening there, but we have heard nothing yet.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL GUIDELINES Finally, we must say, being engaged in several other efforts focused on environmental protection in both Ontario and Quebec, that provincial environmental guidelines developed over past decades reflect a strong disposition to support development companies, business and industry; and certainly Elder Commanda has lived the painful consequences of this history in the context of rights, environmental destruction and health; we note further that the world is awakening to the tremendous global cost of this devastating, unchecked exploitation of natural resources, and to the costs of compromised relationships between government and business. It would seem timely to revisit such guidelines. Governments are entrusted with a deep responsibility with respect to peoples, resources and development, and perhaps if they were more rigorous in the exercise of these responsibilities, individuals like Elder Commanda, with no particular staff, resources or background, would not be obliged to engage in such a massive and draining effort as this one on the Domtar Inc. file has been.

7. FINALLY Quite frankly, Elder Commanda had been aware that the dams at the Chaudière were reaching the end of their life span, had believed that Domtar Inc. was seriously intending to terminate its operations at the site, and had believed that his vision for the area would reach fruition with general enthusiasm and support from a wide range of Aboriginal and non Aboriginal parties, and contribute to true reconciliation and global leadership in peace and environmental issues, without controversy. He is sorry that this has ended up being such an expensive and stressful experience. He trusts that there will be a new level of cooperation in future resolution of files such as this one.

John, I apologize that this is such a lengthy document. Thank you for your patience.

We wish to ensure that these comments are a part of the record of this review, and we hope they will all be given full and sincere consideration by all parties.

Sincerely,

Romola Trebilcock

On behalf of Elder William Commanda

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Six Attachments