

Kwey Kwey,

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We are writing to you on behalf of several Algonquin communities who remain outside of the comprehensive land claims process and thus have not been consulted about the proposed development in the South March Highlands. The Beaver Pond Forest is one of the only remaining stands of forest in southern Ontario that contains old growth trees. Most of the original forests that existed here have been lost because of unsustainable logging practices and settlement of Indigenous homelands by Europeans and their descendants. As retired Chief Robert Lovelace has brought forward, Philemon Wright was the beginning of sustained British Settler colonialism in the Ottawa Valley. Soon after his arrival in 1803, he was caught attempting to cut down an entire sugar bush by a group of Algonquin people. At that time, they stopped him and questioned his actions and why they had not been consulted about the changes he was in the process of bringing to their homeland. Wright told them that he had authority to do so by the Colonial Office. We now know that this was a lie and that Wright had no such authority from any British officials, and even if he had, he did not have the authority from the Original People who have the ultimate responsibility for maintaining balanced relationships within this homeland. Wright did not consult with Algonquin people who would be impacted by his development. In fact when confronted, he dismissed Algonquin concerns about the forest and their relationships with the forest as superstition. He informed them that they needed to “be sensible” and abandon their way of life in favour of the “gift of civilization” that came with English settlement and development.

Wright’s actions were a direct violation of the Proclamation of 1763 which guaranteed Algonquin people that third party interests such as developers would be prevented from appropriating Algonquin lands without those lands being first sold to the official British government operating through the Colonial Office. Algonquin people received this guarantee by John Johnson, then Indian Agent, who signed a copy of the Proclamation and gave it to them to keep in their possession. Historical evidence shows that Algonquin people carried this with them and mentioned it in various petitions to the British government concerning Algonquin lands.

Two hundred and eight years later, we are very aware as Algonquin people that these ancestors were right to question Wright and his actions that day. In that period, the great forests were still mostly intact; there was little damage from

mining, or forestry on the land, and there were few toxins or contaminants in the soil and water. All of that degradation has happened as a result of settlement that came subsequent to Wright. He and his sons built all of the “colonization” roads in and around Ottawa, which aided the intense settlement in the area after the War of 1812 by British Loyalists. This settlement across what is now southern Ontario and Quebec led to the establishment of a resource extraction industry, which fueled the economic and political development of Canada as a nation-state. In a contemporary sense, Canada’s economy is still based upon resource extractions. This is why Canada, under the Conservative government, had refused to ratify the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. To do so was seen as a possible threat to the economic and political longevity of Canada as a nation-state. Even now the acceptance of the Declaration by Canada happened only with “conditions” attached to it that would prevent Indigenous communities from articulating the rights that are embedded in international law. Canada continues to maintain its colonial legacy with Algonquin people so that it can maintain its status as a nation-state.

The Algonquin homeland, the Kiji Sibi, has suffered great ecological degradation as a result of settler colonialism over the past two hundred years. The land and waterscapes have been so altered that we are not sure our ancestors would recognize it any longer. Their fears about the actions of developers such as Wright have been realized across the expanse of our homeland. Not to mention in every other Indigenous homeland on the planet. Settler colonialism has also had catastrophic impacts on our identity as Algonquin people. Not just because of the Indian Act and residential schools, but because of the specific ways that these policies and legislation have impacted our minds, bodies, and spirits. As a result of this destructive colonial process we struggle to know ourselves as people and we struggle to restore in ourselves the comprehensive understanding of our relationships within our homeland that our ancestors enjoyed and which Wright witnessed.

While we have begun the journey to reclaim our humanity and our dignity as distinct human beings, it is a hard journey filled with continual obstacles because of the colonial consciousness that has been created and perpetuated in Canada. That consciousness relegates the Natural World to a subservient position to human beings where those spiritual beings are seen as nothing more than resources that can be extracted for the economic and political benefit of Canada. Every day we struggle as Algonquin people to find comprehensive ways to reconnect ourselves culturally and spiritually to those spiritual beings in our homeland. Mining, clear-cutting, and numerous other development projects impact our ability as people to make that reconnection and to sustain it into the

future. “We are the land and the land is us”. Many Elders and Knowledge Holders have said this in all parts of the World, and it is true for the Original People of the Kiji Sibi.

The Beaver Pond Forest contains over ten thousand years of history and relationships in our homeland that has survived settler colonialism. It is a place where we can go as human beings and connect (or reconnect) with our ancestors and the spiritual beings that still exist there. It is a place where we can gather as people and heal from the destructive processes we have had to endure over the past four hundred years. It has been argued as well by various anthropologists and archaeologists that this forest is a national heritage site that should be protected from development because of this very history and the added bond that settlers have developed with this landscape.

Many people now see the Algonquin homeland as their home and also want it to be protected. It has also been noted by various scientists that Beaver Pond Forest has hundreds of diverse species with respect to animals, birds, amphibians, insects, trees, plants, to name just a few categories that will be directly impacted by the proposed development. For Algonquin people, there is the additional knowledge that comes from Pimaadiziwin that recognizes these beings as spiritual beings who have specific roles and responsibilities that must be maintained within the forest. Our responsibilities and their responsibilities working together maintain the ecological diversity and longevity of the Natural World. The compounded loss of these spiritual beings within our homeland as well as the continued colonization of Algonquin people jeopardizes the entire ecosystem. As human beings, it is our responsibility to make sure that we act in balanced ways so that these spiritual beings can maintain their responsibilities. In other words, it is not the Natural World that needs to be managed; it is the interactions of human beings with the Natural World that need to be managed. When we think about development today as Algonquin people, we look at it comprehensively based on the fact that our homeland has already had 200 years of impacts as a result of settler colonialism. Given this reality, we have to consider the compounded impacts on lands and watersheds from any proposed project. We also have to consider the social and cultural impacts on our identity as people because of the ways in which development and resource extractions impact our relationships with the Natural World and thus our ability to develop positive identity into the future as distinct human beings.

These complex relationships make it vitally important that all Algonquin people be

consulted so that we can discuss and decide for ourselves whether or not a particular project should go forward. These decisions must be based upon more than western scientific paradigms. Western scientific thought within our homeland is very young in its development and thus limited when it comes to true comprehension. Our knowledge system and ways of understanding the Natural World, however, are much older because it emerged over thousands of years through ongoing direct relationships with all components of the Natural World. This process enabled Algonquin communities to develop complex social and political structures that guided both individual and collective behavior in ways that promoted balance and the continued sustainability of the entire ecosystem.

Our ability to maintain these responsibilities within our homeland are continually under assault by the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec which have assumed control of our lands as a result of The BNA Act and Canadian Confederation. British and then Canadian Law created an artificial border that continues to separate Algonquin people from each other and to limit our ability to work together to maintain our relationships and responsibilities within our homeland. Algonquin people in what is now Quebec are never consulted about development or resource extractions within what is now Ontario, and we are never consulted about development or resource extractions within the Algonquin homeland in Quebec. We are forced to deal with Ontario and they are forced to deal with Quebec. The Algonquin people on both sides of this colonial border need to be able to come together to discuss and make decisions about all development and resource extractions throughout the entirety of our territory. These decisions need to be made based upon our collective directive based upon our customary law that was developed by our ancestors. We need to come together in a united fashion to reassume jurisdiction within our entire homeland collectively based upon our own principles set out to us in Algonquin Law.

The history of the present land claims process in Ontario is evidence of this urgent need. When issues around development or resource extractions emerge, the province makes very limited attempts to consult with the AOO (Algonquins of Ontario). The title of the organization working with the province and federal government to extinguish Algonquin title and jurisdiction is misleading, however, because the AOO does not represent all Algonquin people in Ontario. There are other Algonquin communities who choose to remain outside the comprehensive land claims process because they consider it to be fraudulent and not in keeping with Algonquin Law and the responsibilities that we have to maintain balanced relationships within our homeland. For twenty years community leaders outside the claims process have consistently reminded the province and the federal government that there is a duty to consult with all Algonquin people not just the

communities who sit at the claims table. As communities outside that process, we MUST be consulted about proposed development within our homeland. The AOO has shown through past actions that they cannot be trusted to represent the interests of all Algonquin people with respect to decisions about development and resource extractions. The AOO has not and does not consult with us about their decisions. Therefore their interests are not ours, and do not take the place of free, prior and informed consent for development projects or resource extractions within the Algonquin homeland. This fact became evident to us as we struggled through the uranium exploration project and resulting conflict beginning in 2006. Our struggle to stop that development was undermined by the AOO who signed an agreement to allow uranium development on Ardoch lands without any consultation whatsoever having taken place with Ardoch leadership. In fact the province refused to consult with Ardoch leadership about the project and instead helped to facilitate the deal between the AOO and FVC. We consider this to be a betrayal of Ardoch Algonquin people by the AOO and also the thousands of local residents who worked tirelessly to support our efforts. It is also a betrayal of the duty that the province and the federal government has to us as the Original Peoples of this homeland.

The truth we came to realize is that the current claims process with the AOO does not represent the majority of Algonquin people and therefore cannot take the place of comprehensive consultation with all Algonquin people. In each of the areas, claimed by the table, and represented by an ANR (Algonquin Nation Representative) there are other Algonquin communities who have chosen not to participate in the process to extinguish Algonquin title and jurisdiction. This does not mean they have given up their right to be consulted, each community outside of the process has asked for direct consultation on various issues, but the Crown has refused to fulfill its fiduciary responsibility. Unlike what happened in previous historical treaty processes, this particular table has not been particularly successful in hiding the true colonial nature of the process or the ongoing documented opposition to it by a majority of Algonquin people, including those in Quebec. As communities, we continue to fight against it and to bring attention to the fact that we are not surrendering our interests as Algonquin communities in our homeland. **Algonquin Law is still in effect in our homeland and we remind both the Province of Ontario and Canada that you have a fiduciary responsibility to consult with us as Algonquin communities about any development that has been proposed to happen. Consultation with the AOO is not consultation with our communities.**

We have not been consulted about this project as Algonquin people and we demand that you to begin that process now. This is our homeland and we have

no other place that we can connect to as human beings. We will utilize Algonquin Law and international law to protect our homeland as we have been instructed to do within our Original Instructions and by our Elders and Knowledge Holders. **We call on you now to honour the responsibility that you have under the Proclamation of 1763, the Constitution Act of 1982, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.** We do not support this development and call on you now to stop it and to meet with us to discuss the larger issue of Algonquin title, rights and jurisdiction.

We also call on the Algonquin people and communities presently working within the AOO process to take a step back and consider the impacts of this process on our people and on the Natural World. We urge you to abandon participation in the present claims process and return to Algonquin Law and work with us to develop a collective unified Nation that can work locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally to restore autonomy within our homeland.

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