

## **NAFA**

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release**

### **NAFA lobbies Canadian Council of Forest Ministers to update its forest management criteria to include section addressing Aboriginal rights**

**July 12th, 2002, OTTAWA** - The National Aboriginal Forestry Association (NAFA) is hoping to change Canada's approach to forest management and improve the way it deals with Aboriginal peoples in forest based communities. NAFA is lobbying the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers (CCFM) in an effort to change their Criteria for sustainable forest management.

The CCFM Criteria and Indicators ( C & I) were endorsed by the provinces in 1995 as Canada's response to promoting sustainable forest management following the UN Conference of Environment and Development held in 1992 at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The CCFM C & I define sustainable forest management in Canada and sets the overall direction for forest stewardship, facilitating the development of policies and initiatives in the Canadian forest sector.

In 1995, NAFA strongly recommended to the CCFM that a specific seventh criterion be added to address Aboriginal interests and values solely. At that time, there was no support to have this criterion included and it was suggested that Aboriginal interests could be handled under a general criterion, now Criterion Six, Accepting Society's Responsibility for Sustainable Development. The CCFM Indicators at this time are currently under national review and NAFA is once again lobbying to have a seventh criterion introduced.

"Aboriginal peoples in Canada are forest dependent with 80% of Aboriginal communities located in forest areas. All forest related policies impact on Aboriginal peoples. Forest policy should at the very least address the issue of constitutionally protected Aboriginal and Treaty rights. Aboriginal and Treaty rights are basically forest rights, a form of forest tenure, that have to be appropriately reconciled in how we manage forests," says Harry Bombay, Executive Director at NAFA.

Because of the long enduring relationship with the land and the unique legal status, Aboriginal peoples' forest interests warrant a specific focus if they are to be addressed. Canada has an

obligation both morally and in the context of its national and international commitments to ensure that the needs of Aboriginal peoples are met through sustainable forest management, says Bombay.

"A lot has changed in approaches to sustainable forest management since 1995. There have been a number of significant advances in legal requirements for how Aboriginal people are treated in forest management, stemming from court decisions and interpretations which substantiate Aboriginal and Treaty rights. It's time for the provinces to reflect this," says Bombay.

The C & I encompass six areas including items such as providing multiple benefits to society and accepting society's responsibility for sustainable development. They are subdivided into 22 elements and 83 indicators which set out the essential components of sustainable forest management and provide a framework for assessing national progress toward this goal.

Bombay says it is extremely significant to Aboriginal people because it provides a scientific reference point for the development of policies on the conservation, management and sustainable development of forests. The indicators represent a scientific basis for assessing the state of Canada's forests and management practices at the national level. A seventh criterion would provide for a more effective means in assessing Canada's progress in how it treats forest based Aboriginal communities. It would also give comfort to the Aboriginal leadership that Canada is serious in providing practical approaches to long standing grievances over resource exploitation.

"This is an important issue for us because the CCFM C& I are used as the basis for other policy frameworks at the provincial and industrial level. Even the Canadian Standards Association has adopted the CCFM C & I as the broad direction for their forest certification system."

At the national level, the CCFM C& I are intended to provide guidance for the development of regional and local level indicators. For example, Quebec has developed a framework of 60 indicators, based on the CCFM framework, that is expected to be implemented over a three-year period. Ontario has drafted a comprehensive set of indicators for use in evaluating and reporting on forest sustainability. In both of these provinces, the C&I have been integrated into forest legislation and policies.

In the meantime, NAFA will continue to lobby the CCFM for a change in its approach and hope for an updated version appropriate to the needs of Aboriginal communities said Bombay.

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