



NATIONAL ABORIGINAL FORESTRY ASSOCIATION

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PRESS RELEASE

Canadian Council of Forest Minister Not Addressing Aboriginal and Treaty Rights In National Forest Policy

Quebec City, September 2003 – The release of the Canadian Council of Forest Ministers' (CCFM) Criteria and Indicators of Sustainable Forest Management framework document is indicative of the lax approach that Canadian governments are taking towards addressing Aboriginal and treaty rights in Canadian forest policy.

Since 1995, the National Aboriginal Forestry Association (NAFA) has been trying to convince Forest Ministers across the country to incorporate a specific Criterion dealing with Aboriginal and treaty rights and other Aboriginal issues into its sustainability framework. The CCFM however has indicated an unwillingness to do this.

In the past year, NAFA attempted again through the C&I revision process, to have the CCFM make significant changes to the C&I framework that would take into account the legal status of Aboriginal and treaty rights in natural resource management.

"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 accommodated in the management of forests," says Harry Bombay, Executive Director at NAFA.

Bombay is worried because long term sustainable development of Aboriginal communities is dependent on access to natural resources, particularly forest resources. For most First Nation communities economic development is dependent on achieving a larger stake in the forest sector and becoming active players in all aspects of forest-based development. Aboriginal people can't do this with forest policies that systemically exclude them.

NAFA has been arguing for inclusion and has asked the CCFM to honour international commitments made in the UNCED Forest Principles and the Convention on Biodiversity and in Agenda 21, Chapter 26. The CCFM's response was to remove the only Indicator in the document that dealt with measuring how Aboriginal and treaty rights were accommodated in forest management processes.

“The federal government has made grandiose statements in the international community about its commitments to dealing with the rights of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, however these don’t translate into national or provincial policy initiatives. The Forest Ministers do not agree at home to recognize that Aboriginal and treaty rights are forest rights and that they must be given contemporary interpretation and operationalized in national and provincial forest policies,” says Lorraine Rekmans, Communications Officer at NAFA. “The CCFM Criteria and Indicators for Defining Sustainable Forest Management need to give priority to this issue,” says Rekmans.

To address Aboriginal Peoples’ involvement in sustainable development, special measures will be necessary as was contemplated in the 1987 Bruntland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development). NAFA believes that it is inconceivable that Canada will make significant progress towards its international commitments on this matter without promulgating special policy and programming initiatives. To date, governments in Canada have not acknowledged that policy change is necessary to fulfill the existing commitments and ensure that Aboriginal Peoples have a recognized role in sustainable development. At the recent World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) last year, the Johannesburg Declaration reaffirmed “the vital role of Indigenous peoples in sustainable development.”

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