

Northern Métis Concerned about Province's Forestry Plan for Island Forest

For Immediate Release

A Community Consultation Report on the Island Forests 2021-2041 Forest Management Plan (Vol. III) has just been released by several Métis locals in Northern Saskatchewan. The report raises serious concerns by the Métis about the way forests are being managed. Under the plan, up to 64% of the trees will be harvested.

The consultation resulted from a *Duty to Consult* process -- a government obligation mandated through a Supreme Court of Canada decision that Indigenous people be consulted before actions that might impact treaty or Indigenous rights take place. As a result of this process, the five Métis Locals cited in the report agreed that the Island Forest Management Plan *not be approved* until there is clarity on how the plan threatens their rights and livelihoods, and, until community members' concerns are addressed in a substantive and meaningful way.

The Island Forests consist of four provincial forests in Saskatchewan: Nesbit, Canwood, Torch River, and Fort à la Corne. They are located at the southern edge of the boreal forest near the confluence of the North and South Saskatchewan Rivers.

Métis people have a long history and relationship with the lands and waterways within the Island Forests. Some still live on their family's historic river lots, while others have ancestors who settled in homesteads along the Saskatchewan River and its tributaries. The Island Forests have helped many generations of Métis people meet their needs for food, medicine, and shelter, and many families still hunt, fish, trap, harvest plants and medicines in the forest. During interviews conducted for this consultation, one Elder stated, "The forest was our breadbasket, pharmacy, and playground. So much so, that our existence was spiritually bound with the trees, animals, and plants without which we could not survive."

Métis people also have a long history of logging in the Island Forests, albeit using vastly different methods and scales of harvesting compared to those used by logging companies today. Sustainable and responsible management of forest resources is incredibly important to Métis people in the Island Forests, who want their children and grandchildren to similarly be able to use the forests to meet their sustenance, cultural, and economic needs.

The Community Consultation response prepared by Aboriginal Law Group goes into detail about concerns expressed by the five Méti locals involved. Key concerns include:

- Barriers to participation including, structural and procedural issues in how the Government of Saskatchewan is fulfilling *Duty to Consult* legislation;
- Loss of species and climate change variables that are not being adequately addressed;
- Lack of baseline and studies on indicator species that determine forest health;
- Lack of wildlife and species monitoring and management;
- The high percentage of land in past Island Forest clearcuts (33%) that are not regenerating sufficiently (NRS);

- Unsustainable forestry practices and short-term employment that goes with it leaving Métis people feeling abandoned;
- Foresight Consulting, who have significant interest in private forest industry, were the ones contracted to develop the Island Forest inventory; and
- The Métis locals felt misled at several junctures in the process.

The Métis are concerned that their efforts and the ensuing list of recommendations for accommodation that accompany the community consultation report will be disregarded by the government. To that end they wish to draw public attention to the report.

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