

Grassy Narrows Clan Mothers block MNR enforcement team

Slant Lake, Asubpeeschoseewagong - The site of Grassy Narrows' high profile logging blockade will see action again today as grassroots women block passage for Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) enforcement officers interfering with back-road repair work by the northwestern Ontario First Nations community. The community was repairing washouts and beaver damage to nearby back-roads to facilitate their ongoing use and enjoyment of their traditional territory. The MNR has visited the repair work three times and have said to the workers they will be watching them closely, threatening to stop the work. This time the community has resolved not to allow that and blocked MNR access at Slant Lake, allowing repairs to proceed.

"We the Anishinabek have never given up jurisdiction on our natural territories," said Judy Da Silva, a Grassy Narrows mother, blockader, and traditional healer. "We agreed to share the lands with the newcomers, but we will never give up our inherent right to use and protect the land, water and the forests."

The roads require repairs because the MNR has not conducted maintenance on the back road network since 2002 when grassroots women and youth put their bodies on the line to block logging machinery from further destroying the forests their community depends on. Previously the back roads had been maintained by local contractors through Provincial subsidies provided to the logging industry.

The blockade, now in its eighth year is the longest running blockade in Canadian history. Logging trucks feeding Weyerhaeuser's Trust Joist mill, and Abitibi pulp and paper mills shifted their clearcut logging operations to other parts of the territory until June 2008 when AbitibiBowater bowed to pressure and surrendered their license to log on the Whiskey Jack Forest. However, Weyerhaeuser continues to seek access to wood clearcut on Grassy Narrows Territory and the MNR has threatened to resume logging as early as September.

The back roads are used by Grassy Narrows members to access hunting, trapping, wild rice picking and berry picking areas, and for access to the Ball Lake fishing lodge. For generations the lodge has been a key source of employment for the community, but since the mercury poisoning of the English-Wabigoon River System the lodge has had minimal economic development benefits for the small indigenous community.

"The MNR attempt to stop maintenance of the roads is an attack on our community's self sufficiency," said Roberta Keesick, a Grassy Narrows grandmother, trapper, and blockader. "It is another attempt by the Province to assert unilateral control over the Territory in violation of our inherent and treaty rights."

For more information, and to arrange interviews contact:

RiverRun2010@gmail.com