

Boreal Boycotts are Back

Grassy Narrows renews boycott of Weyerhaeuser products

Grassy Narrows –Less than five months after some logging companies and large environmental groups declared a truce to the “war in the woods” a remote Ontario First Nation is calling for renewed boycotts against Weyerhaeuser Corporation, one of North America’s largest lumber producers. In an open letter today to loggers, retailers and investors Grassy Narrows Chief Simon Fobister states that “[w]e continue to call for the boycott and divestment of Weyerhaeuser Corporation due to their violation of our human rights as Indigenous Peoples.” The letter goes on to say that “[w]e will work with our supporters to promote, monitor, and enforce this position.”

Grassy Narrows is home to the longest running logging blockade in Canadian history, now in its 8th year. Grassroots women and youth put their bodies on the line and blocked logging trucks passing by their community after decades of petitions, letter writing, speaking tours, environmental assessment requests, and protests failed to halt the destructive clearcut logging of their traditional territory.

“We have never given our consent to any logging on our territory, and we have repeatedly said ‘no’,” declared Chief Simon Fobister. “Unwanted logging has a severe impact on our community’s ability to sustain our health, culture, and livelihood.”

In 2006, after Grassy Narrows members and supporters blocked the trans-Canada highway near Kenora, the Ontario government entered into negotiations with the community, and later appointed former Supreme Court of Canada judge Frank Iacobucci to oversee them. Since that time 3 major logging corporations have bowed to boycotts and committed not to log against the wishes of the community, and AbitibiBowater has surrendered their license on the forest. Logging has been suspended on Grassy Narrows territory as of July 2008, but under pressure from Weyerhaeuser the province has produced a 3-year contingency logging plan for the Whiskey Jack Forest allowing more than 27 clearcuts, including 17 that will be more than 260 hectares in size (500 football fields). The province has indicated that they intend to allow resumed logging as soon as this fall on Grassy Narrows territory.

The open letter explains that Weyerhaeuser’s actions threaten to derail any progress towards resolution by pushing for access to clearcut Grassy Narrows wood:

Far from respecting and supporting our process with the Province Weyerhaeuser’s actions have been a primary irritant preventing reconciliation of our long standing conflict over logging... The only way for Weyerhaeuser to correct this violation of our rights is to publicly commit not to log or source wood products from our Territory unless and until we give our free, prior, and informed consent, and outstanding conflicts are resolved.

Chief Fobister also urged companies to “take note that the recent Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement does not apply to Grassy Narrows Traditional Territory which is entirely outside the area covered by the agreement.” The agreement in no way absolves Weyerhaeuser of responsibility for ongoing violations of the human rights of Indigenous people in Grassy Narrows. No Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement signatory had an active boycott campaign against Weyerhaeuser.

In spite of numerous Supreme Court rulings, and international human rights instruments, provinces regularly ignore First Nations land rights when approving logging and mining plans. This injustice is giving rise to an escalating wave of conflict in communities including Grassy Narrows, Fish Lake, KI, Okanagan, and Barriere Lake.

“Before any logging in Canada can be considered ‘responsible’ companies must respect the right of First Nations to say ‘no’ to unwanted logging on their traditional territories,” said David Sone of Earthroots. “Any company that buys Weyerhaeuser products from Grassy Narrows is clearly in violation of Grassy Narrows’ human rights and may be targeted for protests and boycotts.”

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