

SACRED CHAUDIERE SITE/Domtar file

From Email correspondence to Minister Fortier, PWGSC, and copied to MoE, Ont. And PMO dated August 7, 2007

Attachments included MoE BN and BN on Vision for Asinabka

Part Two: July 11, 2007 BN to MoO Ont.

PART ONE: A Message to Minister Michael Fortier from Elder William Commanda, regarding the Domtar Project at Chaudière Island

Dear Honourable Minister Michael M. Fortier:

Re: Correspondence Dated May 03, 2007

On May 3, 2007, you wrote to me regarding my vision for the Sacred Chaudière Site, further to both my request for an Individual Assessment of the Domtar Project to expand the Hydro Electric facility at the Chaudière Site, and my proposal for the entire sacred and historic site, as referred to you by the Office of the Prime Minister. I was of course disappointed with your response.

In July, my assistant was contacted by the Ontario Ministry of Environment with respect to their Algonquin First Nation Backgrounder and comments were requested. Input from Public Works and Government Services Canada constituted a significant portion of the Backgrounder, and we were obliged to comment on the input from your department and on your letter to me, amongst other things.

I am forwarding this correspondence for your information and I request clarification on the following paragraphs from within that correspondence:

[PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES CANADA \(Addressed to Mr. John Westlake\)](#)

[We note several references to Public Works and Government Services Canada in your note, and in our discussion, you indicated you did not have further clarifying information on their input.](#)

[I indicated that Elder Commanda had stated in his initial letter to the Prime Minister, that he realized that the work for the *Asinabka* initiative spanned many departments, and initially, he was pleased to see the Prime Minister's office identify the key ones for action. However, thus far, he has only received several](#)

polite, superficial, non-committal letters from various federal and also provincial ministries, and he has not engaged in recent dialogue with them.

However, we note that the letter from the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, in addition to reflecting a very superficial understanding of the issues Elder Commanda had raised in his correspondence on this file, also contains some confusing information. Since you refer repeatedly to input from this department, we are now obliged to comment on this letter.

Specifically, the Minister states that “Domtar Inc., pulp and paper company, already owns most of the Chaudières Island”; Domtar Inc. itself has stated that it holds the lease to land on the island in perpetuity, and even this is not clearly documented.

Further, the Minister states, “As the federal custodian, in collaboration with the National Capital Commission, my department has studied the Domtar Project to ensure that it will preserve and enrich the character of the Chaudières Island and its natural features for the benefit of the general public.”

Frankly, in light of Elder Commanda’s vision for the area, some consider this a condescending, patronizing and dismaying comment. (I might add that this response from the Minister has been sent to other non-Aboriginal people who support Elder Commanda’s vision, and they too have expressed concern.)

The next paragraph is erroneous: “Domtar officials indicated that they have had the opportunity to meet with you to discuss your vision for Asinabka, the Sacred Chaudières Falls’ Site. We have learned from Domtar Inc.’s officials that several of your suggestions concerning Sacred Chaudières Falls were taken into account by the company. For example, access to the falls will be provided so the public can enjoy their beauty.”

We registered concerns that the Domtar response failed to address Elder Commanda’s concerns, and we have seen no evidence that several of his suggestions were taken into account by the company, and that there was any modification of the project, including concerning public access. The bicycle path mentioned in Domtar’s response was part of the original proposal, and certainly it does not facilitate ceremony for Aboriginal Elders.

Finally, we note that the Minister then referred the file to the Minister of Transport, who in turn referred it to the National Capital Commission, who in turn informed us that “ A briefing regarding this important project will take place upon the new Chairman’s arrival”, and we are to rest assured that we will be contacted “to set such an appointment as soon as possible after the Chairman’s installation in his new quarters.”

(I would like to add at this time, that almost exactly a year ago, during Elder

Commanda's annual international Circle of All Nations Gathering, the former Chairman of the National Capital Commission expressed in public, full support for the Indigenous Centre, and a year later, nay in reality more like two decades, we are no closer to its manifestation. The June 29 2007 First Nations National Day of Action across the country, held at Victoria Island in the National Capital Region, was called to draw public attention to injustices such as this one. Given his age (ninety three), this is particularly disheartening to Elder Commanda, and the countless people whose lives he has touched.)

We shall be bringing these comments to the attention of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.

My assistant was also urged to attend a meeting organized by the Ministry of the Environment with Domtar and Ontario Algonquin representatives.

There she learned something that we had not been privy to before - despite our interest in the Sacred Chaudière Site over the past four decades, and in particular over the past decade, and even more recently since November 2006 - she learned that Domtar holds the lease in perpetuity, in 20 year leases, for Chaudière Island, for \$100 a year. Needless to say, I find this shocking, and another expression of federal irresponsibility in the management of the unsundered, unceded and unconquered territory of Algonquins of the Ottawa River Watershed. It is hard to deny today that everyday and everywhere we see the devastating ramifications of unbridled development that benefit the few, and that now governments are challenged to address. I believe strongly that this approach must change.

We have been voiceless and impoverished for a long time, but, as I have said before, Mother Earth, and in particular, the much abused and polluted ancient sacred meeting place of indigenous peoples across the continent, oblige me to I raise a voice of protest against this continued abuse of our rights and heritage. In raising my voice at this time, I hear both the voices of my ancestors, and the voices of my descendants, and many others who now call this place home.

You will recall that the vision for the Sacred *Asinabka* Site, comprising the Chaudière Falls, Chaudière and Victoria Islands complex calls for a *fully inclusive* City Park, Historic Interpretative Site, Conference Centre and the Aboriginal Centre. I am attaching our bilingual note on the file for your easy reference.

I carry the Sacred Three Figure Wampum Belt, created in 1700s when my ancestors welcomed to this continent the newcomers, then the French and English, agreeing to share the grand natural resources and our values with them in three equal parts.

On June 21, 2006, I was presented with the Key to the Capital City on Victoria Island, "*in recognition of my immeasurable contribution to the community, my formidable accomplishments and my positive influence*", and I saw this as much an expression of understanding of my own individual efforts to work and serve people, *all* the people who now reside on the land of my ancestors, as also an acknowledgment of the spirit of my ancestors and my Indigenous brothers and sisters.

Indigenous Peoples still stand in the centre between the original settlers and the newer peoples. For easily five thousand years the Sacred Chaudiere Site was always the significant meeting place of indigenous peoples from across the continent, and its establishment as the capital city was only another phase in its evolution. The vision for *Asinabka* is yet a further crucial step in the maturity of Canada as a nation.

On June 29, 2007, during the First Nations National Day of Action, I heard strong expressions of support for this vision from Aboriginal and Canadian political leadership. It is time for Aboriginal Peoples to take our rightful place on this land to bring true strength to the partnership envisaged and enshrined in the Sacred Wampum Belt, and we must begin this dialogue at all levels - with Aboriginal Peoples, federal, provincial and territorial colleagues and the public at large.

At this time, I am writing to request original documents pertaining to ownership/lease information for Chaudière and Victoria Islands.

I trust that open sharing of key information on this history will move us in time to transform the relationship between the First Peoples and newer Canadians to one that is respectful of us all and lights hope for our collective future together.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

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Algonquin Elder

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