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Subject: Support letter about the construction of Forestry roads H-West and I

To Mr. Cossette,

Me, John Kitchen, as a former Chief of the Cree First Nation of Waswanipi and as a full fledged member of the Waswanipi community, strongly oriented on economic activities and projects, specially within the forestry sector, I wish to add my comments to the present discussions taking place regarding the construction of the forest roads H-West and I projects.

While I agree with the provisions within the JBNQA, section 22, that defines the necessity of Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) of major forest roads projects, as in the case of the present road network program under review by COMEX, I wish to comment on the SOCIAL aspects of such program, as well as on any other projects related to forestry activities and keeping in mind that the most important word SOCIAL is a primary and priority part of the anachronism ESIA.

Concerning the ongoing discussions taking place on these important road construction projects, I strongly recommend that those responsible for making decisions on issues at stakes, aim at establishing a better equilibrium between the environmental and the social aspects and their relative importance to the well-being of the Community. I consider that the social aspects of such projects be given as much consideration, if not more, than is allowed to the protection and recovery plan of the woodland caribou. I consider that the timing of the road construction program, should not be consecutive and dependent to the completion of the other one, concerning the woodland caribou.

As such, I consider that postponing, as proposed, the construction of the roads until a recovery plan of the woodland caribou be adopted, is abusive and contrary to the economic and social development of the population of Waswanipi. Such recovery plan as discussed bears a medium to long term alternative horizon, short of addressing the immediate negative social aspects derived from multiple postponing, even to the level of procrastination, of forestry activities that can and will be beneficial to the development of our citizens, young and older, hence the entire Community as a whole.

I suggest that the COMEX committee talk to the hunters and trappers who in general, support the road construction program because it facilitates their frequent traveling within their trapline territories, while without observing any negative impacts on their catches.

An argument supporting my view is the growing of social welfare amounts paid to our citizens to a level never approached before of 1,2 million dollars per year. I agree that some citizens who cannot work for certain reasons, deserve some social benefits in order to subsist, but we have to realize that such welfare benefits are now paid as well to healthy citizens who are fit to work, but don't because of a lack of economic activities within the Community, forestry wide and of any other sort of economic activity.

Compared to the long term recovery plan of the woodland caribou, the social well-being plan of our Community is of an immediate perspective and deserves strong attention from our leaders and associated groups, be them environmental and/or governmental partners.

Let me remind you that when the Nabakatuk sawmill was in full operation, direct salaries paid to trained employees amounted to at least 1.5 million dollars per year. Adding to this amount, the indirect activities derived from the sawmill operation, by contracts to Cree entrepreneurs, such as logging, trucking of logs, of sawn lumber, chips, bark, etc., , forest technicians, etc., then the total salaries paid amounted to 2.2 million dollars per year. I am sure that the social welfare then paid to the Community must have been much less than of to-day, since the chore of our working force was active on forestry activities and within recognized employment.

Finally, I recommend that the road construction program be enacted within the shortest period, having in view positive economic impacts that will immediately benefit the social situation of families and individual Community members such as elders, students, young people, thus cementing the bond that must exist between all Community members.

I am convinced that both activities, the woodland caribou recovery plan and the road construction program, can be conducted simultaneously, along with a strong supervision of those activities as they are enacted.

At the same time, I recommend that a plan must be developed at the earnest in view of a rapid start-up of the Nabakatuk activities. Enough studies and evaluation have been done for joint ventures proposals and now is the time to move ahead without any further delay.

In respect and friendship,

John Kitchen