

Sustainable Colonialism® in the Boreal Forest

by Russ McSpadden

What do you get when the world's largest environmental organization and the world's largest "sustainable" logging company shake hands? Answer: a half dozen press releases that'll increase donations to the eco-bureaucracy, a green-washed face lift for a rapacious industry and a good old fashioned guilt-free feeling white America is willing to pay extra money for.

Oh yeah, that and the continuation of deforestation and the kind of genocidal colonial land use policies North America is founded on.

Resolute Forestry Products, on the heels of a big fat congrats last month by the World Wildlife Fund for its role as the world's largest manager of Forest Stewardship Council® certified forests, has begun illegally logging on unceded indigenous land in the Boreal forest. Despite very clear stipulations spelled out in the UN Resolution on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and a ruling by the supreme court of Canada that first nations must be notified of any intent to log

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on their land, Quebec's liberal party government, under the leadership of provincial premier Jean Charest, sidestepped any negotiations with the original and sovereign inhabitants of the land and permitted the operation.

There is an on-the-ground indigenous resistance effort—an indigenous occupation of colonially occupied land—that has the potential to stave off the clearcuts and bolster the cultural life of a First Nation. They need supplies and funding for legal support and camp logistics. They need coffee and food staples. But maybe you had better just close your eyes and give that money to a large environmental organization. I doubt the Barriere Lake Algonquins will send you a bumper sticker for your Prius or an eco-friendly tote bag in return. No, they have far more at stake than the value of their eco-brand.

Tomorrow, they might arrest community members. We don't have any other choice. My grandchildren will ask me, "why didn't you try to protect the sacred site," and my words will be worthless because it's not there, that's what we are facing, what we will lose for our grandchildren, but at least we are going to show that we stood our ground and the spirit was there with us.

That's Michel Thusky, an elder of the Barriere Lake Algonquins in southern Quebec and a survivor of the culturally devastating Canadian Indian residential school system. Known to themselves as the Mitchikanibikok Inik, they are yet another tribe of Algonquins in the region, along with the Attikamek, the Wemotaci and the Manawan, who have resisted illegal logging practices on their land, through camps and blockades, in the past few months.

The First Nation community is about three and a half hours north of Ottawa, the capital of Canada, along highway 117, in the middle of the La Vérendrye Wildlife Reserve—a part of the Boreal forest. Resolute Forest Products began logging, but has since been stopped by a series of round-the-clock camps occupied by elders, youth and children. I spoke with Mr. Thusky two days after members of the camp were read their rights by Sûreté du Québec officers, and were warned of impending arrests if they did not allow logging to proceed.

Russ McSpadden: Can you tell me about the situation that exists between the Algonquins of Barriere Lake, the provincial government of Quebec and Resolute Forest Products?

Michel Thusky: On July 4, 2012, we issued a letter to provincial premier Jean Charest, the liberal government, regarding our disappointment regarding the way his ministry is managing forestry issues in our traditional territories. They failed to consult us, the community affected by their operations. It's a total breach of the highest court ruling, the supreme court of Canada ruling that they must consult First Nation communities.

We asked them to cease their operations.

Another letter went out to the forestry director within the region asking for a copy of the cut plans for two years. We are concerned they will cut our sacred area and destroy our identity; our relationship with the land would be destroyed as well as the animals' habitat, all significant to our survival needs. They have



mapped out their plans but have failed to consult us.

At the same time the provincial government has sent in a police force, about 30 officers, a riot squad really, two paddy wagons, to arrest the elderly and the youth.

We were never informed that they were cutting. When we found out the elderly were crying and the children were crying and witnessing the elderly crying. It's really emotional.

We dare the provincial government, Premier Charest, to take his flag, the Quebec flag, and burn it in front of his children, to burn it in front of his grandchildren.

RM: Because that's what you feel he is asking you to do?

MT: That is what he is doing to us by destroying our sacred sites. That is our identity. All the traditional knowledge has been passed on by generations, long before Quebec's existence in this territory. We have retained it despite the interruption by the outside society. We have managed to preserve our language, spiritual and moral values, social and community structure and the sharing of our resources.

We have informed the premier himself that they have done cuts where families had to be accommodated by us because of what those cuts have done.

What is happening is against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the highest supreme court of Canada.

RM: Have you had any contact with Resolute Forest Products, the company doing the logging?

MT: The only contact we've had with them is last month when they charged one of our youth leaders, Norman Matchewan, with financial damage—millions of dollars. They launched a lawsuit against him, accusing him of blocking the road. A foreman of the company was caught lying before the provincial court and they lost that court case last month. This is the same company, Resolute Forest Products,



our language. That is what gives us the strength to sustain ourselves, our connection with the land. The government is trying to disconnect us from our use of the area. We have preserved our Algonquin place names, names of the lakes, animals, the language is strong. The area they are going to be cutting is... In English, the foreign language, it is called Poigan Bay.

That is the birthplace for many of our elders. It is the place they are going to be destroying.

RM: Have they begun cutting?

MT: They cut last Tuesday and we interrupted them. We asked them to stop until we have a meaningful consultation. We extended our respect but they failed. On July 9 they sent a riot squad and many police officers, what they call Sûreté du Québec, security of Quebec.

They put conditions on us. They put a blockade on us, in the Algonquin birth place. If we go past a certain line, they say they will arrest us.

RM: Tell me about the camp?

MT: There are several camps hoping to put pressure on the government and to get public support, to listen to our concern.

RM: How many people are present?

MT: There is a rotation. The logging site is about an hour and 15 minute drive from our community. And about 50 people are on site, with about 20 rotating, permanently there since July 4. They are all from the commu-

nity.

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To directly support the Barriere Lake Algonquins, visit www.barrierelakesolidarity.org/ for updated news.

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that is coming into our territory now. And the worst thing about it is they have gotten the Forest Stewardship Council Certification for their products. That is a total shame.

Come see it for yourself; this very strong community and forest is under attack.

We rely on the land for our subsistence. We harvest our animals with respect to the populations; we harvest fish and our trees; we use our medicinal plants. We have a spiritual, emotional, physical connection to our land, what we call *kikeegan*. That's in