



Introductory Remarks from the Treaty #3 Territory

Lance Sandy¹

Boozhoo. On behalf of the 25 First Nation Communities in the Treaty #3 Territory, I welcome you to our homeland. Our territory covers 55,000 square miles of the Lake Winnipeg watershed in northwestern Ontario and southeastern Manitoba. These lands, forests, and waterways have sustained our people from time immemorial, and even today we continue to live in the forest. These lands are part of our spirituality. We, the Anishinabeg of Treaty #3, accept the responsibility from the Creator to protect these lands, and in the words of your conference, “sustain the land and its resources.”

Our role as protectors of these lands has been a frustrating one for us since the signing of our treaty with Canada in 1873. Since then we have witnessed, and continue to experience, the loss of our traditional land use, erosion of our rights, loss and impairment of the environment, societal breakdown, and impoverishment of our people. My people have been repeatedly evicted from the forest by non-Aboriginal governments and by private entrepreneurs. My people are marginal participants in the forest industry, the primary driver of the economy in northwestern Ontario. The views of my people were not heard when the exploitation of the forest was planned by provincial and federal governments. Now the provincial government has delegated the care of the forests to the forest industry, which is driven by economic objectives and the bottom line—not by long-term sustainability of the forest environment. We are not confident that this delegation of responsibility is a good thing for the future of our forests and the protection of our forest values.

We believe that we need to put the past behind us and direct our focus towards the protection

and sustainability of our homeland and its resources, and to become more involved in the sustainable economy of our forest. This includes taking a protective role in the development of our territory with the Trus Joist MacMillan hardwood mill, which presents a unique opportunity for sustainable economic and employment benefits—an opportunity we are currently pursuing.

I believe that your objective of utilizing and marketing non-timber forest products will be similarly constrained and challenged by the power of the timber products industry and that you face major hurdles in achieving an appropriate balance. Collectively, many of your objectives appear to be similar to those of my people: first, a recognition of a broad range of values and resources in the forest, and second, a recognition that use of these resources requires a respect for their sustainability and protection. I am pleased that your steering committee has put together such an exciting and international agenda, and I compliment the committee on the broad range of subject material to be covered. We are interested in hearing about successes in other parts of the world and about business opportunities that may have applications to our Treaty #3 community. I am pleased to see that representatives of Kagiwiosa Manomin will be in attendance. I believe that the efforts of Joe Pitchenese in creating a sustainable wild rice harvesting operation provide a path for others to follow within our territory. I know the conference attendees will benefit from this success story.

In closing, welcome to Treaty #3 Territory, and I wish you every success in your discussions over the next few days.

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