

November 20, 2020

ATTENTION: ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND ADMINISTRATION SAKAW

My name is Sandra Svoboda and I am the Mayor for the Resort Village of Chitek. The reason for my correspondence today is to communicate my concerns and those of our Council and Chief Administrative Officer regarding the intended harvesting operations by SAKAW in Chitek Lake.

While studying various pieces of government sponsored literature, it would appear that harvesting operations are the very antithesis of Tourism Industry Funding and Program grants being offered this year in the province of Saskatchewan. According to the most recent reports provided by Tourism Saskatchewan, the most pervasive trend right now is Community Tourism. More specifically, documentation speaks to an ever-increasing demand for experiences and growth in experiential travel. Further, the reasoning behind this focus is the potential for increased economic benefits to the community through tourism, increased potential for local employment, community enhancement, and consumer-focused experiential travel opportunities, to name but a few.

If the map you have supplied is accurate, I have to wonder how disturbing an area where approximately 80% of snowmobile and ATV enthusiasts ride would benefit our local businesses (food, lodging, and sundry) and increase opportunities for experiential tourism? How would harvesting operations benefit or enhance the recreational, educational, and cultural value of activities such as berry picking, hiking, camping and wildlife observation that are enjoyed by members of the community and tourists alike? How would decreasing opportunities for our campers to see wildlife species in their natural habitats align with the mandate of Tourism Saskatchewan to increase opportunities for experiential tourism? Surely the irony here is not lost on persons in advisory and administrative positions within the SAKAW organization.

While considerations regarding the negative impact of harvesting operations on community tourism and the local economy are troubling, equally so are those substantial and diverse effects on the ecosystems. I am curious about your plan for maintaining adequate levels of deadwood for the preservation of ecological and habitat values? How will the integrity of the forest biodiversity as an invaluable source of food be sustained? Actions aimed at increasing timber yields not only affect the ecosystem but the biodiversity of that same ecosystem that houses many animal and plant species indigenous to this northern community. Just as harvesting will change significantly the structure of the forests, so too will there be a debilitating impact on habitat suitability and ecosystem functioning.

Boreal forests such as ours also provide a number of crucial ecosystem services such as climate regulations, water purification, maintenance of soil productivity and air quality regulation. What is the plan to reconcile the demand for increased timber production with provisioning of other ecosystem services and biodiversity? What is the plan for ongoing regulation to ensure compliance to guidelines of the regulatory bodies? And what about our wetlands? The existence of lakes and wetlands is dependent on specific geological settings that favour the ponding of water and on hydrologic processes that allow the body of water to exist in a given site. If you disturb the depressions, the flat areas and the slopes what then becomes of those species dependent on these sources of sustenance? Your documentation suggests this will be a "modified clear cut that is to emulate natural disturbances caused by severe weather/fire"

and “approximately 9% [will be left] undisturbed in the cleared area.” I am skeptical that this 9% will somehow maintain the geological integrity necessary for wetlands to survive let alone rejuvenate and will resemble more an environmental ravishing rather than a “natural disturbance”.

Environmental stewardship demands a careful balance between land sparing and land sharing which is a critical consideration in establishing a balance between environmental objectives and economic objectives. This balance must not allow the increasing demands on forest resources (the provision of a livelihood for workers in the forestry industry) to take precedence over public concerns over environmental issues (wildlife habitat, climate regulation, forest biodiversity, hydrology of lakes and wetlands). Significant changes in the existing forest structures increases the potential risk of unexpected negative ecological impacts, loss of natural landscape patterns, disturbance of existing wildlife habitats and the potential to provide viable habitat.

While forests provide numerous goods and services, they also have regulatory (climate, flood regulation, water purification) and cultural (spiritual, educational, recreational, experiential, aesthetic) benefits as well. The ecosystem health of our forests is dependent on all components interacting and functioning together. However, the only possible way this can happen is if there is continued ecological integrity, diversity of species, protection and maintenance of productivity and steady capacity for rejuvenation and renewal. The healthy functioning of an entire system is not possible with the continued extraction and consumption of natural resources. Forest biodiversity is an important source of food and habitat suitability as well as recreational and aesthetic values. Further, while those invested in the harvesting operation might argue that harvesting timber may be a primary means of structural diversity, I would counter that perspective by asserting that maintaining the biodiversity and abundance of native species and their inhabitants and providing a variety of opportunities for the use and enjoyment of the forests and wildlife, far surpasses the former. Hence, the need for responsible stewardship of living resources and the conservation of natural diversity and viability of indigenous species and wildlife population must remain the highest priority and I will assert without hesitation that harvesting operations are counter-intuitive to same.

I remain

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