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TELEPHONE

1.306.665.1915

EMAIL

info@environmentalsociety.ca

WEBSITE

www.environmentalsociety.ca

MAIL

PO Box 1372 Saskatoon SK S7K 3N9

OFFICE

220 20th Street West Saskatoon

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Abhijeet Chauhan, Operations Compliance & Enforcement, Forest Service Branch, Ministry of Environment
319-800 Central Avenue, Prince Albert, SK, S6V 6Z2

Emily Poloni, Strategic Planning Analyst, Forest Service Branch, Ministry of Environment
319-800 Central Avenue, Prince Albert, SK, S6V 6Z2

Tracey Charabin, Director, Lands Management and Permitting (North and Central), Ministry of Environment
1600-1192, 102nd Street, North Battleford, SK, S9A 1E9

Via email:

Abhijeet.chauhan@gov.sk.ca

Emily.poloni@gov.sk.ca

Tracey.charabin@gov.sk.ca

Recommendations from the Saskatchewan Environmental Society to the Forest Service Branch and the Lands Branch Related to the Portion of the Nisbet Forest North of the North Saskatchewan River

Dear Abhijeet, Emily, and Tracey:

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with each of you on January 21, 2025. We very much appreciated the time you spent listening to our concerns.

Abhijeet, thank you for all you did to organize the meeting and for the special effort you made to travel to Saskatoon to meet with us in person.

Our goal at the meeting was to provide you with the concerns of the Saskatchewan Environmental Society (SES), but also to provide you with important perspectives from independent experts and ethical leaders with a great deal of experience in their fields. Hence, we facilitated an opportunity for you to receive a written brief from Dr. Michael Fitzsimmons (forestry expert), and to receive oral advice from Dr. David Meyer (archaeological expert) and Dr. Victoria Obedkoff (social ethics). We hope this was helpful.

The SES is pleased to submit the following recommendations for consideration by each of you.



Key Recommendations:

- 1. The Saskatchewan Environmental Society requests a moratorium be placed on all plans for logging of the remaining stands of intact, 60+ year-old forest that lie within the section of the Nisbet Forest north of the North Saskatchewan River.**
- 2. The Saskatchewan Environmental Society recommends that all remaining stands of intact, 60+ year-old forest within the portion of the Nesbit Forest that lies north of the North Saskatchewan River be placed in the Protected and Conserved Areas Network. This land provides important wildlife habitat and valuable ecosystem services. It includes culturally significant areas, and offers opportunities for recreation, education, and ongoing research. We recommend it be designated as a Representative Area Network Ecological Reserve.**

Our recommendations are based on the following observations:

1. The SES is concerned that if this area of the Nisbet Forest is subjected to a disturbance such as industrial forestry—combined with increased frequency and intensity of climate change impacts and disturbances—that the ability of the forest to adequately regenerate will suffer, resulting in a degraded ecosystem. This is fragile land. The sandy soils of the Nisbet Forest combined with the impacts of climate change will make it very difficult for this stretch of forest to ever properly regenerate again after being harvested.

Important ecosystem services will be lost if this area of the Nisbet Forest is logged. For example, this intact forest is providing important habitat for animals and is absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, a service the world urgently needs at a time when the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has reached a dangerously high level. This area of the Nisbet Forest will have a better chance to withstand fire and regenerate afterwards if it is never subjected to extensive timber harvesting.

2. There are currently no protected areas in the portion of the Nisbet Forest that lies north of the North Saskatchewan River. This is another reason for offering formal protection to the remaining stands of intact forest that have not been logged.
3. This area of the Nisbet Forest is an irreplaceable source of sustenance for local people, and it is an important resource for Métis Nation Local 66, Sturgeon Lake First Nation, Muskeg Lake First Nation, the hamlets of Crutwell and Holbein, and other relatively nearby First Nations and Métis communities that use this area for hunting, trapping, berry picking, and in some cases the harvesting of medicinal plants. If the area is harvested for timber, this important source of sustenance will be lost to these communities. Logging in earlier years has already removed other areas of the Nisbet Forest that were once a source of sustenance to many of these residents but is no longer. These communities do not want to lose the remaining forest lands they rely on.

Since this area is a place of cultural significance, hunting, trapping, and berry picking would be allowed in a Representative Area, as would the harvesting of plants by Indigenous peoples for use in their local pharmacies. No timber harvesting, road construction, mining, or other forms of industrial development would be permitted.

4. The Chief of Sturgeon Lake First Nation, speaking on behalf of her First Nation, has expressed opposition to logging in this area of the Nisbet Forest. So has Métis Local 66. This should be sufficient reason to declare a moratorium on timber harvesting in this area.



5. The Supreme Court of Canada is increasingly recognizing the legal rights of the Métis. Métis Local 66 has a high level of interest in this part of the Nisbet Forest and may, in the future, wish to initiate a land claim. This is another reason why forest harvesting plans should be put on hold. The area would have far less value to the Métis if it was extensively logged and did not properly regenerate. On the other hand, if it was designated as a protected area, transfer to the Métis would be a genuine option in the future. Perhaps there is an opportunity to explore an arrangement in which this becomes a protected area that is jointly managed by the Ministry of the Environment, Métis local 66, and surrounding First Nations? Naturally, the details of any stewardship structure should be based on consultation with Metis Local 66, Sturgeon Lake First Nation, and other First Nations that utilize these lands. The Ministry would benefit from drawing on the Indigenous knowledge of local First Nation and Métis people.
6. Highly regarded archaeological expert, Dr. David Meyer, noted during our meeting there are likely to be dozens of archaeological sites yet to be discovered within this portion of the Nisbet Forest. These sites need to be identified and preserved with funding by the Heritage Branch of the provincial government, using the local knowledge of the Indigenous peoples in the area. This is another reason why a moratorium on timber harvesting is strongly recommended. The entire area should be the focus of a comprehensive survey to identify archaeological remains. Some of these archaeological sites will date back hundreds of years; others will date back thousands of years.
7. This month's national news coverage of the historical importance of this area provides additional confirmation of its cultural significance. Sturgeon Lake First Nation has just announced the revelation of an 11,000-year-old pre-contact settlement (Âsowanânihk)—one of the oldest known Indigenous sites on the North American continent. It is located on the north side of the North Saskatchewan River and west of Prince Albert. Work by scientists and archeologists at the University of Calgary and the University of Saskatchewan confirms that highly organized societies existed in the region far earlier than previously believed. This news provides powerful additional evidence that logging the remaining intact forests in the Nisbet Forest that lies north of the North Saskatchewan River would be a serious mistake.

This area of the Nisbet Forest needs to be appreciated for the sustenance it provides, its habitat value, its cultural values, and the ecosystem services it provides. These outweigh the very limited economic gains that would come with extensive timber harvesting. The focus should be on maintaining forest health and diversity. Extensive timber harvesting in this area will undermine that goal.

Thank you, Abhijeet, Emily, and Tracey for considering our recommendations. We would be grateful if our letter could form part of the official record of your consultations and be kept on file for future planning purposes. We would appreciate a response to our recommendations.

Wishing you the very best.

Sincerely,

Peter Prebble, SES Board Member