

April 18, 2012

Mr. Albin Tremblay
Chairman
Cree-Québec Forestry Board
Édifrice Le Delta
11th Floor, Suite 1180
2875, boulevard Laurier
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Dear Sir,

At the Minister of Natural Resources and Wildlife's request, I am writing in response to your March 1, 2012 advice on the modifications to the general forest management plans (GFMP) for forest management units (FMU) 086-64 and 086-65. I would like to stress the quality of your analysis and the conscientious work the Cree-Québec Forestry Board (CQFB) does to produce enlightened advice.

However, I need to explain the context in which the Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune (MRNF) must deal with the various land use issues—woodland caribou, protected areas and infrastructures subject to the impact assessment procedure—in fulfilling its mandate and obligations.

The woodland caribou issue involves a long history of discussions between the Crees and MRNF representatives. On several occasions, the provincial woodland caribou recovery committee has talked about the approach to adopt on the territory covered by the Agreement Concerning a New Relationship between the Government of Quebec and the Crees of Québec (ANRQC). The MRNF and the Crees have also discussed ecosystem-based management, which seems to be a management approach that is better adapted to the caribou than mosaic cutting.

However, this process has not enabled the parties to reach a consensus and establish sustainable solutions for the woodland caribou.

The tabling of the report by the expert committee mandated to study the woodland caribou's status will offer another opportunity for the parties to start discussions again. In the meantime, the MRNF must meet its legal obligations vis-à-vis the forest industry and under the ANRQC.

The protected areas projects tabled by the Cree communities of Waswanipi and Némaska are not currently covered by a request for provisional protection issued by the Ministère du Développement durable, de l'Environnement et des Parcs (MDDEP). Until study of these protected area projects is sufficiently advanced for the MRNF to set these areas aside as reserves, they cannot be taken into account for forestry planning purposes.

Finally, with regard to the infrastructures subject to the impact assessment procedure, the MRNF has already made the commitment to the Grand Council of the Crees to delay their authorization until the authorization certificates have been issued. In keeping with the spirit of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA), this commitment does not, however, extend to logging activities.

In short, given that the GFMP (FMU 086-64 and 086-65) modifications proposed comply with Chapter 3 of the ANRQC, with CQFB analysis criteria and with the conditions identified by the joint working groups, I am informing you that they will soon be approved. It goes without saying that, as a responsible manager, the MRNF will consider any new information, including the findings of the caribou expert committee, when issuing or modifying the annual permits.

In concluding, we expect the CQFB to share its comments on the GFMPs in keeping with its mandate and within the analysis framework it has adopted. This framework should not, therefore, depend on the findings of studies related to the woodland caribou, protected areas or infrastructure impact assessment procedure, given that they fall under the jurisdiction of other authorities.

The precautionary principle is not designed to hinder a project but rather to orient it toward the wisest route possible based on the information available.

Sincerely,

Jean-S. Lebel, F. Eng.
Associate Deputy Minister,
Regional Operations