



August 30, 2023
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STATEMENT FROM MTI CHIEFS ON THE RELEASE OF GNB'S FOREST STRATEGY

'If the objective of the Forest Strategy was to ignore the Peace and Friendship Treaties, Minister Holland succeeded.'

Minister Holland's announcement of an updated Forest Strategy, made without full First Nations involvement, represents another unjustified infringement of Mi'gmaq rights, and a new low in this government's relationship with First Nations.

The Mi'gmaq first heard about the release of the Forest Strategy through a media advisory sent out on the afternoon of August 29th. The Mi'gmaq were not invited to participate in the announcement, and had to wait for details to be made public. The Minister has never met directly with First Nations leadership on this Strategy. We have yet to receive a final copy of the Strategy itself.

This is our unceded territory: we hunt, fish, and gather throughout our territory. The Peace and Friendship Treaties constitutionally protect our rights, provide a framework for how these lands will be used, and affirm a government to government relationship where both the Crown and Indigenous peoples have the ability to make important decisions.

We have an active lawsuit against the Province regarding the 2014 Forest Strategy, and have provided notice to the Province of our title area. The Province is well aware of our concerns about the significant impacts that forestry has on our rights. We have provided changes to forestry management that would address these infringements. The Province could have taken meaningful steps to address those impacts.

This government has ignored our proposals. Instead, they engaged in an inadequate "consultation" process where they claimed that forestry, the single biggest industrial activity on our lands and waters, has only a moderate impact on our rights. They unilaterally proposed an accommodation package that did not meaningfully address our concerns, and refused to consider negotiating any changes to it. In particular, they ruled out a shared decision-making structure, without providing any reasons for doing so.

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We know this provincial government is not interested in negotiating with First Nations. They continue to adopt a unilateral, paternalistic, “my way or the highway” approach in discussions with First Nations. They continue to mislead the public about Aboriginal Title, and the nature of their discussions with First Nations. It seems they want to avoid having meaningful discussions with us on plans that will have a lasting impact on our Lands. They can avoid the discussions, but they cannot avoid the law. If these unjustified infringements of our rights cannot be addressed at the table, they will have to be addressed in Court.

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