



# *Keepers of the Water*

STEWARDS OF OUR GREAT ARCTIC OCEAN BASIN

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<http://www.keepersofthewater.ca>

## **Longstanding environmental issues raising Culture Camps around Alberta**

The Keepers of the Water congratulates the current Government of Alberta for working with the Chiefs of Driftpile and Swan River First Nations to start resolving longstanding issues in the forest. “(Past) governments have been working with industry for the mighty dollar and we can see the harm it’s done and how sick Mother Earth is” says Driftpile First Nation Councilor Rod Chalifoux. With Consultation staff Candice Desjarlais about Driftpile First Nation’s (DFN) Culture Camp, Rod explains that a lot of people have been hurt by Slave Lake Pulp’s continued clear-cutting as part of their forest management agreement. Three moose licks have been destroyed, an eagles’ nest, along with at least three hunters’ traditional tree stands, and a trap-line may be lost as the trapper will likely not make his quota this coming winter with all of the trees and animals now gone.

The DFN Culture Camp was set up on July 27, 2015, and their ceremonial fire is still burning. The Culture Camp teaches Youth, developing their knowledge and appreciation of traditional practices and sustainable living on the land, while camping on the Driftpile historic trail to the area being clear cut. They welcome visitors. Driftpile First Nation will negotiate for a larger buffer zone around their traditional territory and other outcomes including co-management of the forest. Other First Nations in Alberta are reported to have successful co-management agreements; Driftpile First Nation looks forward to a government to government relationship that will speak to their concerns.

Swan River First Nation set up their own Culture Camp on August 18, 2015 south of Kinuso, also instructing Youth, on a logging road, in order to express their concern about the cumulative effects of forestry practices and the impacts of these on Treaty rights, along with their concerns about the process of consultation they had gone through; a ‘traditional use preserve’ was proposed in 2009, and again in 2014, but this land use study was ignored by government. Alberta Plywood began logging in Nov. 2014, against requests to delay, as letters to the prior government went unanswered.

Cumulative effects from the industry accepted practice of ‘emulation of a fire’ (a modern term for clear-cutting without square blocks) include compaction, sedimentation, and lack of re-growth. In a different but related process, in January of 2006, Keepers’ member group the Society of High Prairie Regional Environmental Action Committee (REAC) took concerns to the government mandated Slave Lake Forest Public Advisory Committee, an industry run group that accepts concerns from the general public. The next year and a half was spent listening to experts debating pro’s and con’s until on April 30, 2007, REAC received a letter from Alberta Plywood, Tolko, and Vanderwell Contractors, stating that they had no intention of acting on the concerns raised.

Long standing, worsening environmental conditions along with past governments’ avoidance and inaction have led to this impasse. Keepers of the Water also stands with the Unist’ot’en Camp, and supports the Traditional care-takers of the land as they insist, for the benefit of future generations, that sustainable resource extraction must be the only kind, and must start now.

Jule Asterisk 780 805-1709

[keepers.communications@gmail.com](mailto:keepers.communications@gmail.com)