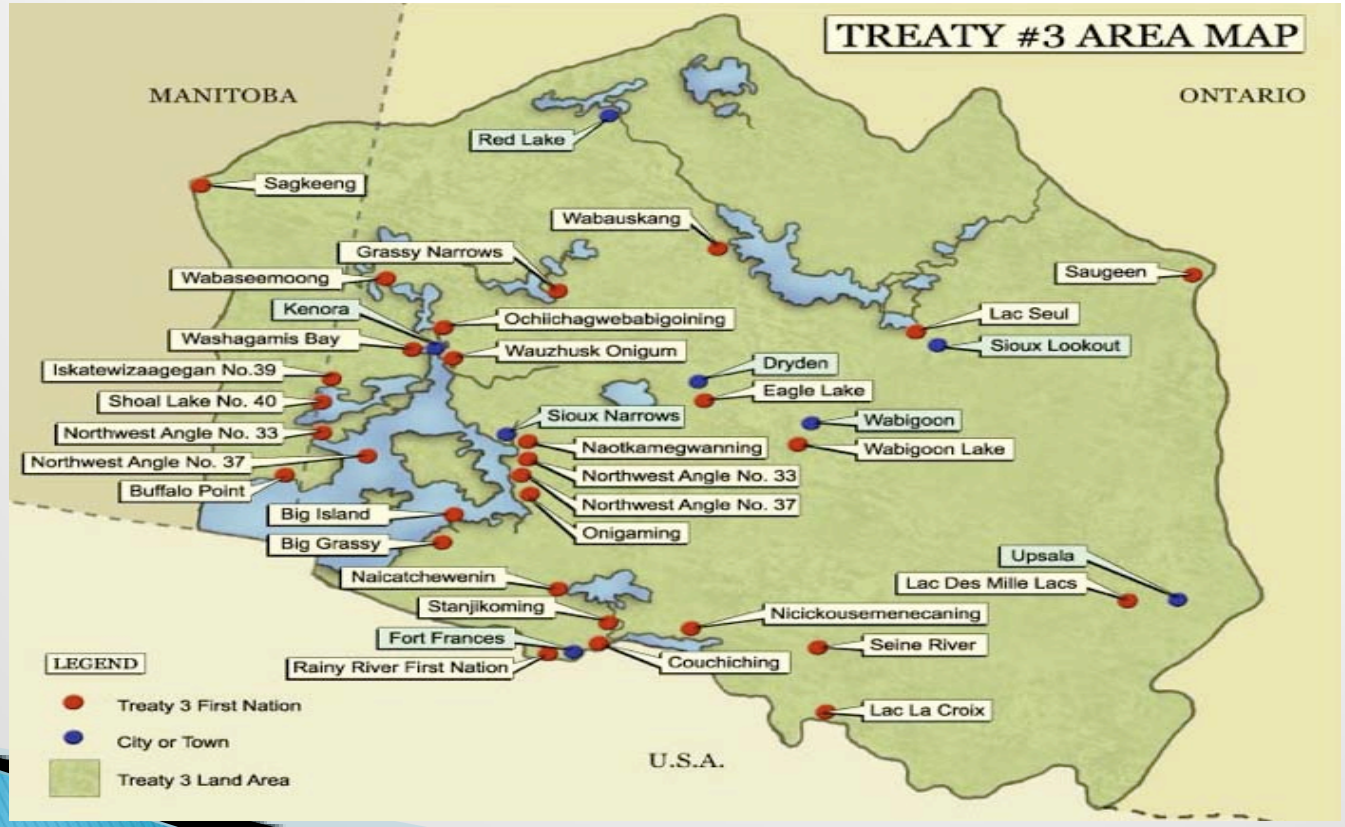
Asubpeeschoseewagong Anishinabek Surviving with Mercury Poisoning 1952-2013 (61 years)

BACKGROUND, GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF GRASSY NARROWS

- Grassy Narrows is Asubpeeschoseewagong in Anishinabemowin (indigenous language). We are located in the northwestern part of the province of Ontario in Canada. We Are geographically located close to the centre of Canada and our village population is about 800.

20,000+ Anishinabek Treaty #3

- We were named the Ojibway by the missionaries in early colonial times when the Europeans first came on to north America. We are correctly called Anishinabek. We are a people that number 100,000 plus in north America called the algonquins. We are one of the larger population of indigenous nations in north America. In the treaty #3 area, surrounding Kenora Ontario, there are 28 villages of my people the anishinabek numbering 20,000 plus



Late Elder Robert Kejick Residential School Survivor

We have gone through many traumas with the encroachment of our traditional territories by the European societies that invaded. The colonial history of European contact and effects on the anishinabek of Grassy Narrows has been horrific

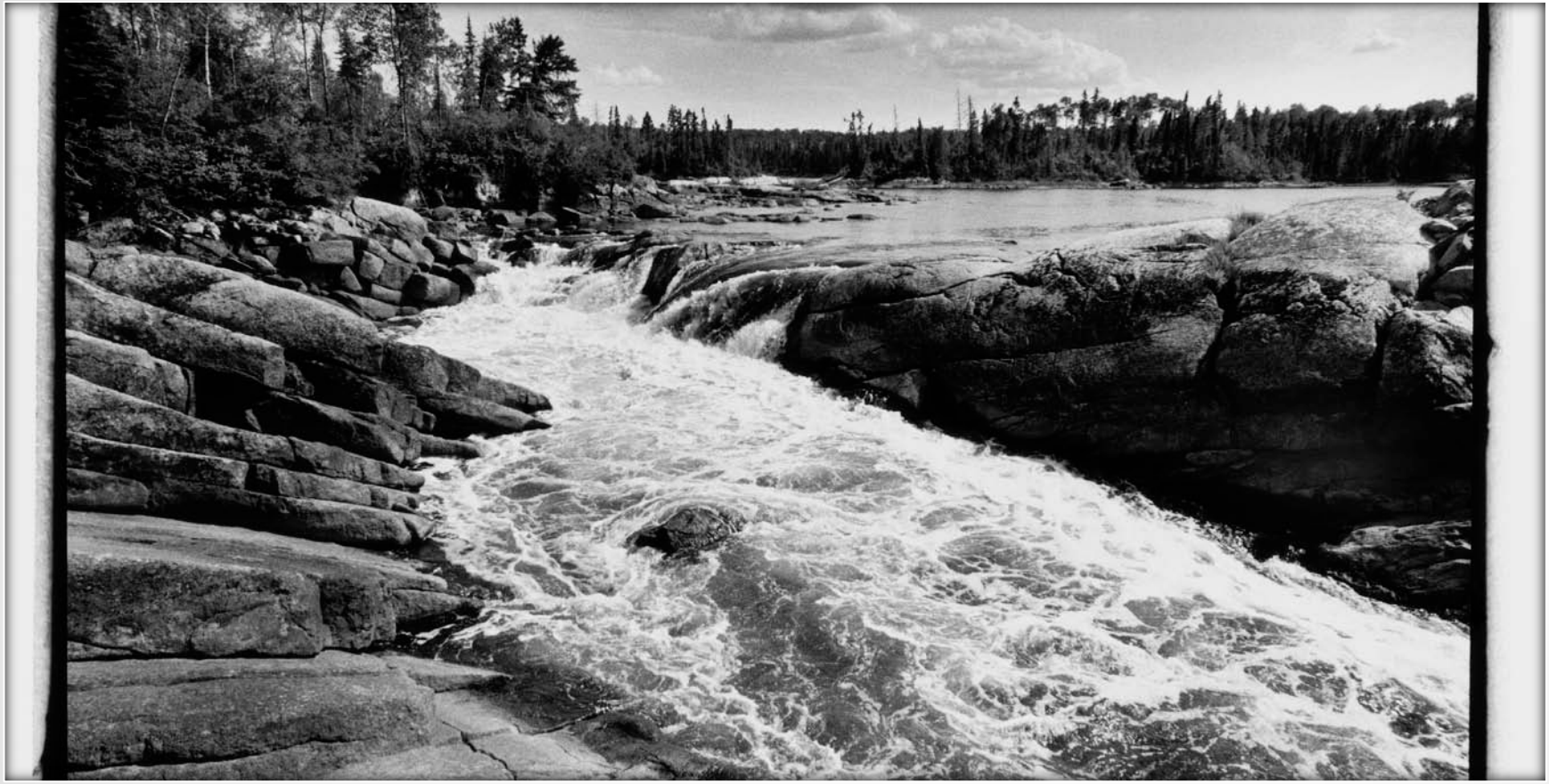
Asubpeeschoseewagong Forest

Consumerism

Natural Earth Vision?

MERCURY POISONING IN GRASSY

- In the early 1950's a paper mill was in full operation in the town of Dryden Ontario located 200 kms upstream from Grassy Narrows. It wasn't until 1972 that our community reacted as they saw dead fish popping up in different parts of the English Wabigoon River system. First a few fish was not too alarming, but as the summer months wore on, more and more fish were dying and started an alarm to community members. It was not long before scientists heard about this catastrophe. Dr Masazumi Harada Japanese mercury scientist was one of the people that got interested in our community in 1975



English Wabigoon River system

At this falls site, one of our late trappers “Poosh” caught wild animal samples that had mercury level readings, which we had thought were safe to eat.

Wild meat contaminant study 2010

CONTAMINANTS STUDIES 1999-2010
Dr Leanne Simpson & Dr Patricia Sellers

- In 1997 a Health Canada official came to the clinic in Grassy Narrows to report on the mercury poisoning condition in our community. He stated that there was no more mercury in the water based on ongoing hair sampling they have done for the many years.
- The nurse at the time asked him, “then why are you warning in the sportfishing guide for the sports fishermen to only eat so many ounces safely”. He stuttered enough to bring our minds to alarm that he may not be speaking the whole truth. Because of his comment, we eventually did four wild meat contaminant studies and found mercury.

Living with Mercury

- 9000 kg of methyl mercury was dumped into the English Wabigoon River system. In any other community, even a small liquid measurement of methyl mercury would cause a great alarm and evacuation.

- We live with mercury every day, while other communities would not live with this toxic chemical for a day. Here in Grassy Narrows, we have done four gnfn community led contaminant studies, and have found there is still mercury in our wild foods.

Living with mercury 1952-2013

- The Reed Paper Mill from Dryden, Ontario compensated the band for 6 million dollars, later developing the Mercury Disability Board to compensate those who show signs of mercury poisoning; the important part of this is the Province hasn't fully compensated the community and walked away from talks with GNFN in 1990's.
- Many of the people attempting to apply for the Mercury disability are denied the disability pension even if they have appealed or had lived most of their lives as commercial fishermen, fishing guides or fed their families fish as a main food source.
- The community members that have applied for mercury disability feel much disrespect by the process of the testing that is done on them by the mercury disability board doctor. They feel the process of testing the people is not an accurate or through way of testing as compared to what they have experienced with the Late Dr. Harada's Team from Japan

Living with Mercury, cont.

- The total band members of Grassy Narrows First Nation need to be awarded the mercury disability compensation as all have been exposed to the extremely toxic poison of methyl mercury going into the next generations. This denial of compensation must not go on any further.
- There has been two River Rally Runs (2010 & 2012) in Toronto, Ontario to create awareness, get outside support and also to have our voices heard by the Government in regards to the prevailing mercury poisoning issues. The year 2012 marked the year when Kathleen Wynne (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs at the time 2012) decided to form a Mercury Working Group with a team comprised of low level bureaucrats from the offices of Ministry of environment, aboriginal affairs, natural resources and two community representatives (judy da silva & rudy turtle).
- We want to do a door to door Survey of all people and households regarding current health conditions (last one was done in the early 1990's according to Gloria Kejick)
- There are intergenerational effects of mercury poisoning in our community and there needs to be justice to Grassy Narrows anishinabe community members

Justice for Mercury Survivors in Grassy Narrows

RECOGNITION:
Acknowledge Minamata Disease in Grassy Narrows, apologize, and accept responsibility to resolve the damage done and fix the damages.

COMPENSATION:
Compensate all people diagnosed by the Japanese doctors, and retroactively index the compensation to inflation. Bring diagnostic procedures and compensation rates in line with Japanese standards.

SAFETY:
Fund a permanent Grassy Narrows run environmental health monitoring center in Grassy Narrows. Use precautionary principle to ensure that logging/clear-cuts does not add to the mercury burden on Grassy Narrows territory.

Justice for Mercury Survivors in Grassy, cont.

HEALTH:
Establish a mercury treatment center in Kenora. Pay all expenses for Grassy Narrows people traveling to medical appointments. Strengthen Health Canada mercury safety guideline to protect all people.

RIGHTS:
Ensure that Grassy Narrows people are able to meaningfully exercise our right to fish on our territory – a treaty protected practice that is central to our culture, spirituality, and sustenance. Fund the Grassy Narrows Traditional Skills Training Program to enable our people to rebuild the cultural skills eroded by the mercury, and to access lakes and rivers that are less impacted by the mercury.

RESTORATION:
Clean and restore the English-Wabigoon river system. Stop the mills from polluting the water and air.

JUSTICE:
Restore Grassy Narrows control over Grassy Narrows Territory. End destructive industrial logging/clear-cuts on Grassy Narrows land.

FACT SHEET:
Clearcut Logging and Mercury Poisoning: Linked Threats to Grassy Narrows

1. Clearcut logging releases mercury into boreal lakes and rivers

"boreal Canadian Shield forest watersheds serve as large reservoirs of Hg that shed their metal load when the soil and the land hydrology are disrupted by timber harvesting." [Desrosier et al., 2006]

"clear-cut logging increases the export of dissolved organic carbon (DOC) and Hg [5,6] and can stimulate the bacterial production of methyl mercury (MeHg)." [Garcia et al., 2005]

"a concurrent increase in Hg levels in aquatic organisms is typically observed in lakes after logging (Rask et al. 1994; Garcia and Carignan 1999, 2005)" [Desrosier et al., 2006]

2. Mercury makes the fish unsafe to eat

"Hg concentrations exceeded the advisory limit for human consumption (0.5 µg/g wet wt) from the World Health Organization in all top predatory species (northern pike, walleye, and burbot) found in cut and two partially burnt lakes." [Garcia et al., 2005]

"This limit was surpassed in only 18% of piscivorous species populations found in reference lakes and in no species from completely burned lakes." [Garcia et al., 2005]

"Average Hg level in standard 560-mm northern pike, on a dry weight basis, was significantly higher in logged lakes (3.4 mg/g) than in reference lakes (1.9 mg/g)." [Garcia et al., 2000] (N.B. 79% more Hg)

3. Mercury in fish hurts Grassy Narrows

"it is an undoubtable fact that Minamata disease occurred in [Grassy Narrows and Whitedog], based on our long-term investigation result." [Harada et al., 2011]

59% of the 160 people tested in Grassy Narrows (GN) and White Dog (WD) in 2010 were impacted by mercury (diagnosed with Minamata Disease (MD) or suspected MD (SMD)). [Harada et al., 2011]

44% of people tested aged 21-41 had MD or SMD. All these people were born after the mercury dumping was stopped in 1970. [Harada et al., 2011]

74.4% of impacted people (with MD or SMD) were not receiving any compensation. [Harada et al., 2011]

4. Ontario planning another decade of clearcut logging in Grassy Narrows

In December 2011 the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources released a new plan for another decade of clearcut logging on Grassy Narrows territory. [Long-Term Management Direction Whiskey Jack Forest 2012-2022 Forest Management Plan]

"This document was developed without our participation or consent, and entirely outside the good faith negotiations we have undertaken with MNR since the 2008 Process Agreement," said Chief Simon Fobister. "It sets the stage for more clearcutting throughout our traditional lands, contrary to our Treaty and inherent rights. And we have not given our consent." [Grassy Narrows Chief and Council press release December 21, 2011]

"This logging plan will ultimately place our Anishinabe way of life at risk and seeks to undermine our existence on the land." [Grassy Narrows Chief and Council press release December 21, 2011]

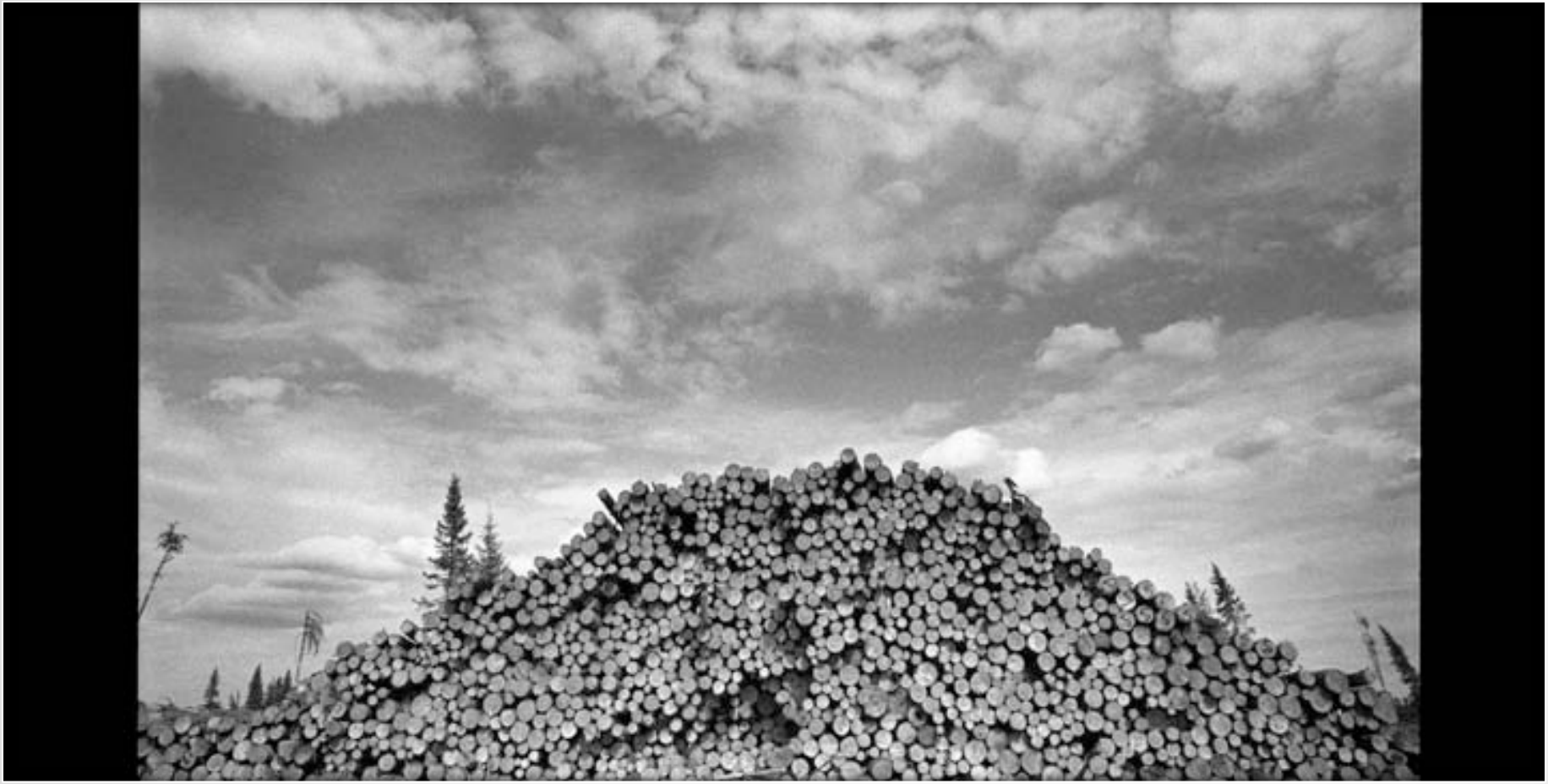
REFERENCES

Desrosiers, M., Planas, D., and Mucci, A. 2006. Short-term responses to watershed logging on biomass mercury and methylmercury accumulation by periphyton in boreal lakes. Can. J. Fish. Aquat. Sci. Vol. 63, 1734-1745.

Garcia, E., and Carignan, R. 2005. Mercury concentrations in fish from forest harvesting and fire-impacted Canadian boreal lakes compared using stable isotopes of nitrogen. Environ. Toxicol. Chem. 24: 685-693.

Garcia, E., and Carignan, R. 2000. Mercury concentrations in northern pike (Esox lucius) from boreal lakes with logged, burned, or undisturbed catchments. Can. J. Fish. Aquat. Sci. Vol. 57(Suppl. 2).

Harada, M., et al., 2011. Mercury pollution in First Nations groups in Ontario, Canada: 35 years of Canadian Minamata disease. Journal of Minamata Studies 3: 3-30.



Whiskey jack forest-asubpeeschoseewagong territory

In 2002, a logging truckload of trees was worth 4,000 dollars. Contractors would need to make 300,000.00 per month to break even to pay for their equipment that is worth 1,000,000 dollars for one machine. What are the numbers now in 2013?

Photo: By Jon Schledewitz


Idle No
More!

Faces of grassy narrows

Baby Julia

Cheryl & nowanriver digo & ashenokwe

River run rally 2012

shanice »

Indigenous waves radio river run rally 2012

Barbara & amara

Making posters for river run rally 2012

Brooklyn making cardboard fish with grandma

River run rally 2012

River run rally 2012

Dr. Hanada visits Robert Kejick with yukari

River run rally 2012

“protecting our planets & waters for future generations”

Thank you!

for more information:
freegrassy.net