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Don't ignore aboriginals in resource plans

Roger J. Augustine
Assembly of First Nations Regional Chief N.B. and P.E.I.

A letter to Premier Graham.

Having recently returned to Miramichi after serving as chief of staff to National AFN Chief Phil Fontaine, I expected to find that at least the major trends that are improving First Nations rights nationally, would already be 'in play' here, because New Brunswick's tumultuous past has made it the epicenter of some of the most protracted and major resource disputes in recent times.

Instead, I returned to see a government that has just revamped the management of public forests - without soliciting First Nations' input in any way - thus I'm compelled to remind you: "How quickly your government has forgotten the traumas of the 'War in the Woods' and Burnt Church - only a decade ago!"

One Supreme Court of Canada ruling after another has emanated from around these disputes. As a result First Nation's here should expect, at a minimum, to be accorded the right to the 'duty to consult and the duty to accommodate' which applies to all government measures that impact our constitutionally protected treaty rights and our traditional lands.

The repackaging of forest management measures, the introduction of vast cranberry operations, pipelines and LNG projects all impact our aboriginal and treaty rights and we expect to be consulted as per the Supreme Court of Canada's directions to governments.

You should know that other premiers of resource-based provinces (your colleagues) are working overtime to implement these same rulings.

It's very strange that the jurisdiction where it all started would be so left behind!