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APC Chiefs welcome Supreme Court Crown land decision

Dartmouth, NS - Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and Passamaquoddy Chiefs and their communities have welcomed a Supreme Court of Canada ruling in the *Sappier and Gray* case, which reaffirms Aboriginal rights to harvest wood on Crown land for personal use.

"The case and the rights affirmed by the court are viewed as the next step towards the ongoing recognition of the Aboriginal rights of our people in Atlantic Canada and Eastern Quebec," said Co-Chair of Atlantic Policy Congress, Chief Lawrence Paul. "We expect the Federal and Provincial governments now act in a fair and just manner to implement the decision in a collaborative approach with all our First Nation citizens," he added.

Chief Paul says this decision may provide the momentum to develop a long-term sustainable solution to a serious housing need of 7500 units in all First Nation in Atlantic Canada.

But Chief Paul noted: "We need to ensure implementation is done in a manner to ensure the sustainable development and use of the forests, including co-management for the next seven generations and beyond."

Fellow Co-chair of APC, Chief Noah Augustine said: "Chiefs will move quickly in establishing a process to consult with our citizens to address a short and long term approach toward implementation of these rights for all our people."

"Right now we have to get ourselves organized and develop a workable approach with all stakeholders and ensure all our people clearly understand the great responsibilities that come with sacred rights based on who we are Canada's first people."

Both chiefs said today's decision marks another positive turning point in the future of all First Nation communities and citizens, not unlike the Marshall decision of 1999.

The Chiefs, in collaboration with their communities, will help develop a practical and manageable approach to allow timely access to work for the benefit of all First Nation.

"We have learned a great deal since the Marshal decision on fisheries in 1999. Our people will again work with government and all stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition over the next year," said Chief Lawrence Paul.

The Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nation Chiefs Secretariat is a policy, research and advocacy organization that reviews, analyzes and develops culturally relevant alternatives to federal policies that impact Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and Passamaquoddy First Nations communities.

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