

Algonquins set for long, cold winter at Sharbot Lake mining blockade

First Nations group pulls out of court hearing; says they could stay at site 'forever'

Ciara Byrne, The Ottawa Citizen

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An Algonquin community has pulled out of a hearing on a dispute over uranium mining, and is preparing to weather a cold winter at a blockade near Sharbot Lake.

"It's really a powder keg," said Art Cota, an elder with the Ardoch community who, along with Shabot Obaadjiwan Algonquin First Nations, has been embroiled in a standoff with Frontenac Ventures over a potential uranium mine since June.

The company had staked more than 5,000 hectares and was about to start drilling for core samples when the Algonquin community and supporters set up a perimeter around the staked land.



From left, Earl Badour, Paula Sherman and Harold Perry hold down the Algonquin blockade near Sharbot Lake where Frontenac Ventures wants to open a uranium mine. Members of the Ardoch community and the Shabot Obaadjiwan Algonquin First Nations have been involved in a standoff with the company since June.

Photograph by : Chris Mikula, The Ottawa Citizen

The Ardoch community is now preparing to build wooden structures and bring in more trailers as a permanent camp is established.

Christopher Reid, a lawyer for the Ardoch Algonquins, said his clients are no longer going to participate in the case, which is looking into a request for a permanent injunction to have the blockade removed.

Last week, Superior Court Judge Gordon Thomson issued an order, which said that all signs, vehicles, buildings and other materials erected by protesters must be removed.

But Paula Sherman, co-chief of the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation, said the order suggests even the judge is having a difficult time with the case.

"The order does not specifically say that Algonquins are to leave, she said.

Lawyers for both sides were called into court Thursday to clarify the order.

"His honour's previous order was clear: all paraphernalia, tents, trucks, trails was to be removed some time ago. That's not been done," said Neal Smitheman, a lawyer for Frontenac Ventures, who said the situation could get violent.

Mr. Reid said the community wanted a peaceful resolution, but added they would resist force.

"There are hundreds of volunteers ready to come out," he said.

The OPP are also being cautious during the tense situation.

"It's a difficult role for us to have as gatekeeper, so we're just going to continue to keep the peace," said Const. Paige Whiting.

But at the blockade yesterday, many people sat quietly, slouching in chairs and laughing as visitors stopped by to drop off food and water at the gates.

"We probably had 20 people show up with food today," said Ms. Sherman of her makeshift home.

"It's been difficult to be away from families, but it always comes back to what's important and it's the land and the water."

Ms. Sherman has been away from her family in Peterborough since late June.

The Algonquin community will still fight the \$77-million lawsuit Frontenac Venture has put forth.

They have also sent a letter to Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, seeking his intervention.

Ms. Sherman pointed to the Ipperwash Inquiry into the Dudley George shooting incident as an example that favoured negotiation over litigation.

"We're looking at this as being a long-term occupation," said Ms. Sherman. "So, if it means we're staying here forever ... we will."

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