

Hundreds join in support of Grassy Narrows River Run 2016

By Jayson Koblun

TORONTO – The people of Grassy Narrows have been waiting 40 years for Ontario to address and remedy the health crisis in their First Nations community's water supply, the Wabigoon river; a peaceful protest last Thursday showed the communities determination and hope that one day the government will decide to clean up this mess.

Community members from Grassy Narrows and other surrounding First Nation territories joined hundreds of protestors, concerned settlers and political activists June 2 at the steps of Premier Kathleen Wynne's office building in Queen's Park Toronto demanding that action be taken. After several speeches from chiefs and other prominent figures, the crowd took to a march throughout the streets of downtown Toronto waving banners, flags and signs representing the Wabigoon river and the fish that live in it.

In 1962, mercury pollution from a pulp and paper plant in Dryden Ont. started to make the animals and community members in Grassy Narrows visibly sick,



and it hasn't gotten any better despite constant reaching out to the government for action — as recently as 2014 a 17-year-old boy from the territory died from what is believed to be causes related to the 9,000 kilograms of mercury that has been disposed of into the Wabigoon river.

The government has responded in the past by saying that the environment will clean itself up and that the best solution is to let the pollution in the river run its course — clearly that is not the answer for those living in the community or those that just simply don't approve of the government's decision.

"The water needs to be cleaned and people are growing tired of the excuses and inaction," said Sigrud Kneve, from Six Nations territory. "Especially considering that a recent study has come out saying that it is indeed possible to clean the river — why are the people of Grassy [Narrows] still waiting?"

The new report claimed that the Wabigoon river can indeed be cleaned up, and the fish can become safe to eat again.

Chief of Grassy Narrows Simon Fobister said in a statement, "More

than 50 years after the dumping began it grieves me deeply to see absolutely nothing has been done to clean up our river and that our people continue to suffer."

At the rally, a group of youth from Grassy Narrows called N'we Jinan Artists sang an emotional song they wrote and produced on their territory called "Home to Me". A song about hope and change for their current situation. The crowd quickly picked up the song's catchy tune and chorus and sang together and of the same mind, with the same goal of convincing Premier Kathleen Wynne that cleaning up the Wabigoon river is worth the effort.

One of the performers at the rally said that those that don't support the clean up or want to see change in this situation are inadvertently supporting colonialism and genocide.

PHOTO: Fatimah Al-Toum, 23, stands proudly with her friend, Danait Mehreteab, 25, at the rally in support of the Grassy Narrows peaceful protest. **PHOTO BY JAYSON KOBLUN**