

NATIVE AFFAIRS

Environmental 'observation post' erected on Grand River island

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A tent stands on the island where native and environmental protesters camped in the winter of 1994 to keep a sewer pipeline out of the Grand River.

But the man who erected the small structure as an "environmental observation post" said Friday it does not mean the protest has resumed.

John Hanselman, an Eagle Place resident and environmental researcher, set up the tent with permission from traditional Six Nations Confederacy chief Arnold General, he said.

Hanselman canoed the Grand River to the west Brantford island and camped in warmer weather while studying bird migrations.

The tent is still modestly equipped for an overnight stay but no protest vigils are planned, Hanselman said.

→ "It's an environmental observation post right now. That's all it is," he explained, responding to rumors that demonstrators had returned.

→ Hanselman was a key figure when protesters occupied the island in January and February 1994 to derail city

plans to install a concrete-encased sewer pipeline below the Grand River. The pipeline was intended to serve the northwest industrial zone on the other side.

Hanselman and native protesters expressed concern the pipeline could rupture and pollute the water. Drinking water for Six Nations and Brantford is drawn from the river.

→ Native demonstrators also pointed out that the land and river are under claim as aboriginal territory.

The pipeline is considered vital to the city which is critically short of serviced industrial land needed for economic growth.

IMPASSE

Months of private negotiations between the city and Six Nations elected band council have failed to solve the impasse.

Mayor Chris Friel said Friday that he plans to resume those efforts after newly-elected chief Wellington Staats takes over from Steve Williams later this month.

Staats declined to comment until he is more familiar with the issue.

Delays have boosted the cost of the sewer installation by at least \$539,000

to an estimated \$2.6 million.

On Friday, part of the pipeline still sat on the farmer's land where it was to be inserted before the dispute halted construction. A sign says: No Trespassing on Mohawk Territory. This Land was Never Surrendered, Ceded or Sold.

The island tent can be seen from that location, but the area has been quiet recently, Hanselman said.

"There hasn't been much action down there with the (cold) weather."

Still, those involved in the 1994 protest would likely swing into action if the city brings back equipment to continue the project, he added.

Hanselman and other researchers are studying alternative, more cost-effective sewage treatment methods that may be presented to city council, he said.

→ Although he is opposed to the pipeline crossing, Hanselman is not against development, he emphasized. He believes the land surrounding the river island is environmentally sensitive and should be fully assessed.

"My main concern is that future development be environmentally compatible and responsible. For the future generations." *