

FRED FITZNER

Presentation to the Clean Environment Commission on Trapline 18
Tuesday March 23, 2004 in Thompson

Introduction

My name is Fred Fitzner. I am 51 years old and a member of the OCN First Nation. I was born in The Pas Manitoba and was raised in Wabowden. I have lived in Wabowden almost continually since 1986. I am the Vice President of the Trappers' Association for the area of Wabowden.

I am here to give a presentation about some of the statements being made about Trapline 18.

Background

I learned about some of the statements being made about Trapline 18 when I attended a Public Information Meeting on the Wuskwatim project. I have reviewed some of the statements made by the Trapline 18 witnesses. I do not believe the statements are accurate and they give people the wrong impression about hunters, trappers and fishermen in the Wabowden area. I met with Marcel Moody and he and NCN representatives asked if I would be willing to speak at the Clean Environment Commission.

Trapline 18 Knowledge

I am a commercial fisherman and I also trap and hunt near the Trapline 18 area. I have hunted and trapped in the Trapline 18 area for ____ years.

The land in and around Trapline 18 consists of forested area, creeks, lakes, rocky areas and swamp/muskeg. The land in Trapline 18 slopes down from the tip of Trapline 18 in the North to the Southern end. The water generally drains from North to South. If you go further North past the Northern tip of Trapline 18, then the land slopes down to the North and the water drains in the opposite direction (to the North).

The Northern tip of Trapline 18 is mostly swamp and muskeg. In years with a lot of snow or rain then creeks like Ferguson Creek will flood and the water will be moving very quickly.

In dry years, Ferguson Creek will be very low. The last couple of years have been drought years and much of the area is currently overgrown with wild rice because there has been very little water flow coming from the upper areas.

The water levels and conditions in the area change on a regular basis. In my experience, the conditions change with the weather. Hydro has nothing to do with the changing water levels in that area. The Trapline 18 area is higher than the area affected by the Churchill River Diversion so if there are changes in water flows in the area it is because of changes in precipitation levels and other natural conditions, not because of Hydro's operation of the hydro projects.

I have witnessed some of the conditions described in the Trapline 18 statements but these conditions are not caused by the hydro project. For example, I have seen hanging ice that occurs from changing water levels. In my experience, hanging ice is a natural occurrence and is not necessarily caused by hydro.

Hanging ice can be caused when water levels are raised due to higher precipitation levels in the Summer and Fall. In the late Fall and early Winter, the water then freezes on the surface and continues to drain away in the creek below the ice. This eventually causes an air space between the ice and the water which can be very dangerous.

Hanging ice also can be caused by other natural conditions such as beaver dams. I have trapped in areas where beaver dam the creek and cause the water levels to increase. In the winter after the water has frozen, otter will deliberately break the beaver dams to draw the beavers out to fix the holes. When the beaver come out, the otter kill the beaver. The beaver fail to fix the hole in their dam and the water drains away causing hanging ice.

In my experience, slush ice is also a natural occurrence. Sometimes slush ice occurs because water levels drop and hanging ice occurs causing ice to slope in the centre of the creek and crack. Water then comes up and forms on top of the ice and forms slush with the snow.

Slush ice also occurs when water levels drop and the ice drops along the edge of the creek and water comes over the top of the ice and forms slush.

It is my experience that conditions such as hanging ice and slush ice occur frequently and naturally in areas where there is running water such as Trapline 18.

Animal Population

I have not seen a drastic decline in the animal populations in the Trapline 18 area. There are many beaver in the area. In fact, Conservation Officers are always asking us to trap beaver because there are too many of them. The beaver numbers are high because nobody wants to trap them anymore because the price of their pelts is too low.

The number of animal in the area varies due to natural conditions. Woodland caribou are quite low in numbers. One reason is they are easy prey for wolves. This has been the case for many years. At one time they were endangered. But this is not because of hydro development.