

Manitoba Clean Environment Commission

Public Hearings

Manitoba Hydro – Bipole III Transmission Project



**Councillor Philip Dorion on behalf of
Chief Michael G. Constant & Council
Opaskwayak Cree Nation
October 18th 2012**

The Opaskwayak Cree Nation (OCN) has a longstanding relationship with Manitoba's Crown Corporation, Manitoba Hydro, as a result of hydroelectric generating projects. Bipole III signifies one more development intent upon traversing our reserve lands and traditional territories. There are many concerns regarding the proposed project, which includes consideration that government is essentially licensing and standardizing itself through a Crown corporation such as Manitoba Hydro and is doing so through a process that is fundamentally flawed.

Manitoba Hydro has expressed the need to increase the reliability of its High Voltage direct current (HVdc) transmission system during peak capacity. To do so, Manitoba Hydro intends to construct a new transmission line, Bipole III, along the western corridor of the province. The installation of a third Bipole is intended to safeguard the transmission of power in the event that Bipole I and II failed.

Manitoba Hydro has also indicated that it intends to increase its forecast loads in order to export power to Ontario and the United States, necessitating the need for greater reliability. What Manitoba Hydro has not said is that the risk of losing Bipole I and Bipole II will result in reduced profits. Profit losses will come as a result of having to pay for alternate forms of fuel sources to provide energy

during outages. Bipole III essentially represents financial security to meet export demand and realize greater profits.

OCN has an inherent and legal interest given that a portion of the proposed corridor is within OCN traditional territories. These territories serve the cultural and subsistence needs of our members in addition to serving the commercial interests of OCN fishermen and trappers. The proposed corridor will transect 83 kilometers of our traditional territory, intersecting with traplines and traditional use areas. The project will require the installation of an estimated 145 structures; similar to that required of the most recent Wuskwatim Transmission line.

The relationship between OCN and Manitoba Hydro was initiated in the 1960's when construction began on the Grand Rapids Generating Station. The Grand Rapids Generating Station is known to be one of the most environmentally devastating projects in Manitoba Hydro's history. It flooded an expansive landscape, compromised the ecology of one of the world's largest inland delta's and contributed to the cultural genocide of our people because it compromised our ability to transfer our Aboriginal knowledge to our children and grandchildren.

OCN cannot conceivably consider hydro projects as independent of each other because each project has led to long lasting adverse, incremental and unanticipated effects on the landscape and waterways that serve as OCN's lifeblood. Hydroelectric based activity in the traditional territories of the OCN has left devastating effects on the lands, waterways and well-being of the people who have long relied on these gifts as contributing to both our identity and way of life. Each act that is considered and taken by Hydro has been for the purpose of enhancing the electricity-generating potential of the Province at the expense of the natural resources held sacred by our people.

Manitoba Hydro has approached each initiative in a manner that has subtly considered our people as an obstacle to be conquered in order to achieve the 'greater good' for profit. We are looked upon as being easily coerced with minimal monetary compensation and mitigation schemes.

Our relationship with Hydro and the devastating effects of hydroelectric generation were minimally compensated with the signing of the 1991 Settlement Agreement. However, the monetary benefit failed to provide for the restoration of the lands and waterways in our territories. The agreement also lacked the meaningful engagement of our community in the process of monitoring and

evaluating both the unanticipated or incremental effects of hydroelectric activity on our waterways. Instead, we have been left with significantly altered ecosystems and fragile waterways that no longer sustain us or allow us to engage meaningfully in our cultural way of life. .

Our attempts at assessing the effects of the Grand Rapids Generating System on OCN rights and interests have not been fully respected by Manitoba Hydro. There has neither been any reliable or current research conducted to properly assess the level of impacts on the waterways, nor have there been any long term studies to assess the cumulative effects of multiple Bipole structures.

In 2010, the Wuskwatim Transmission line, originating from the Wuskwatim Generating Station between Thompson and the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation and terminating at The Pas, was completed. The Wuskwatim Generating Station required new transmission lines and substations to deliver electricity into Manitoba Hydro's existing system. The Wuskwatim transmission line spans the same distance as the proposed Bipole III, which will be located directly adjacent to the existing line and require an additional 60 feet of right-of-way.

Manitoba Hydro has attempted to assess the anticipated environmental impacts of Bipole III as it is required to do so. However, this assessment has not fully

considered the long term cumulative effects resulting from the installation of a transmission line within close proximity to existing lines. The potentially adverse effect on all living organisms, plant and wildlife species as a result of multiple projects can only be determined over time.

Unlike the biophysical considerations, the social and cultural impacts are much more visible and immediate. The improved quality of life in Canada and North America resulting from the development of our natural resources has come at the expense of the people of OCN and our future generations. Our people, both young and old, have become weakened by the depletion of our resources as a result of industrial-based development. The ability to impart our knowledge of the interrelationship between us and the environment and our responsibility to protect our lands, waterways, animals and resources has been challenged because the Creator's gifts are no longer as visible and vibrant as they once were.

The demise of our territories has left a scar, not only on our physical landscape, but on the transformation of our culture, our language, our way of life – how is this transformation to be evaluated or compensated? As with all western science-based initiatives, assessments and evaluations are at best proven with some degree of bias toward an anticipated result. What anticipated result is

being considered as a result of a disconnect of the transmission of our knowledge in a scarred and non-productive landscape?

The OCN government hereby recommends:

- 1). A comprehensive cumulative effects study on Bipole III with consideration given to the post-project evaluation of the Wuskwatim Transmission line;
- 2). Development of an inclusive engagement process, reflecting Aboriginal knowledge, for all projects;
- 3). Requirement for long term studies for the purpose of assessing cumulative effects and ensuring that affected First Nations communities be party to the process throughout the life of the study;
- 4). Requirement for rehabilitation and reclamation to affected landscapes and waterways for the purpose of ensuring sustainable management practices and;
- 5). The denial of Bipole III until such time as OCN has had a meaningful opportunity to reconcile outstanding issues OCN has had with Manitoba Hydro.