

**SUBMISSION TO
THE CLEAN ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION**

**REGARDING
THE WUSKWATIM GENERATING STATION AND
TRANSMISSION PROJECT**

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Good morning, Mr. Chairman.

My name is Jimmy D. Spence. I am speaking on behalf of the 14 community consultants employed by the Future Development Office of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation to consult with our Members about the Wuskwatim Generating and Transmission Projects. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the Commission.

First, I'd like to call on the consultants to introduce themselves.

Our role is to carry out direct consultation activities with our Members throughout Manitoba, to keep them up to date on the developments regarding the proposed Projects being considered by the Commission.

We were chosen because we bring a range of skills to this important role. Some of us have lived a traditional life and have gone on to become graduates of university and other post-secondary programs.

Some have served the community in leadership and other capacities for the past 20 to 30 years.

Some of us are traditionalists and have an understanding of traditional knowledge. Some are fluent in Cree and some are regionally and generationally connected. All of us are trying our best to help our People understand the project and communicate their ideas and concerns.

We have approached this task with the utmost respect for the opinions and concerns of our Members.

The community consultants have been part of the Wuskwatim process since 1999. We've knocked on doors, attended meetings and open houses, distributed information and answered questions relating to the project. To give you a sense of the scope of our involvement, I'd like to give you examples of some of the specific tasks and accomplishments we've been part of.

In 2000, we undertook the major job of formally surveying Members in Nelson House, Thompson, South Indian Lake and Winnipeg. This involved another 28 NCN Members who acted as surveyors in the process and included a specialized team of Cree speakers for Elder interviews. The survey covered 813 residents in Nelson House, which was 68 per cent of NCN Members living there at the time.

As part of the Agreement in Principle process, the consultants first had to learn and understand the A-I-P and then organized open houses, community meetings and one-on-one discussions with Members over four months to help them understand the document before the vote in 2001.

We were also part of the two-year planning process to identify and compare alternative routes for the access road to the Wuskwatim site.

In this regard, we participated in joint NCN/Hydro committee meetings, offered our own Traditional Knowledge and helped collect Traditional Knowledge from others about sacred sites, use of the land and understanding of the environment near each of the alternative routes.

We played a similar role in the process of selecting a transmission line route through NCN's resource management area.

On the issue of managing future access to the Wuskwatim site, consultants also participated in the joint NCN/Hydro committee that looked at how to deal with access into the area.

We coordinated development of a resource harvest calendar by managing the collection of information over one year from resource harvesters about their resource use in the resource management area.

To gather Traditional Knowledge, community consultants undertook a formal process of interviewing Elders and resource harvesters about their Traditional Knowledge of the resource management area and recording the information on tape, on maps and transcribing it on paper.

We participated in the process of interviewing key persons on culture and other socio-economic topics; we identified key people, reviewed interview guides, helped conduct interviews and provided translation when needed.

We participated in the review of the Environmental Impact Statements for both the generation and the transmission projects.

For the public involvement process in Nelson House, Thompson, Winnipeg, and Brandon, the consultants helped organize and carry out open houses, community forums, small group meetings, one-on-one household visits, broadcasts of information on local access radio in Nelson House and distribution of materials to Members in all these centres.

And we helped organize and carry out site ceremonies at Wuskwatim Lake and Suwanee Lake for NCN Elders, Members and others.

As you can see, we've been a central, and we think important part of the project and are very proud of our involvement and commitment.

Needless to say, this has been a challenging job. First, we've had to learn about and understand the project well enough to explain it to our Members and answer their questions. A lot of this information as you by now appreciate is very complex.

We have the added responsibility to communicate this information in Cree and many of the concepts and words used to describe this project do not have any equivalent in Cree.

Second, despite our best efforts to meet with all our Members, we are not always welcome.

It has been especially frustrating to communicate to some Members who are completely opposed to any hydro development project before even knowing anything about it. Some people will not accept the information materials. They close the door on us. They won't attend meetings and will not visit our office. Then, some of them claim we have not consulted with them or offered information.

In reality, this is the most comprehensive and inclusive consultation ever undertaken by our First Nation. By any standards, anywhere, this has been an intensive process.

A further frustration is that some of these same people who will not accept our sincere efforts to bring them balanced information have generated damaging and divisive misinformation about the Project. And, those who have already made up their minds accept this misinformation as truth.

Despite this, we believe there is a quiet number who are looking at this project objectively and seeing the potential benefits that will be both economic and cultural. But, they remain silent in their support, partly out of respect for their Elders, who cannot move forward from their experiences and losses, and partly because they do not easily express their views in public.

Over the past five years, we have seen an increasing understanding of the Wuskwatim project by our Members, including some of the Elders who experienced the flooding of the 1970s.

They are looking down the road at the potential for the project to provide a sustainable income and opportunities for our People, our culture and environment.

We have also explained the project to our youth, who will be the primary beneficiaries of this proposed project. You heard from some of them last month.

I want to make clear we are not promoters for the project. This is not our role. We are trying to present the information in a balanced way. In fact, if you ask the community consultants, you will find many are still undecided themselves.

Everyone wants the right outcome for our community and we are all weighing the facts and the evidence as it is discussed. Like voters everywhere, there are those who have made up their minds and those who will only decide when they cast their ballot.

Overall though, we have seen something new happening in our community in the midst of the scepticism, and that is a growing hope there can be a brighter future for us in the north, not only the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, but other northerners.

And some people are planning for this brighter future. They are enrolling in trades and preparing for the jobs that will come with this project.

We are also receiving questions about the business opportunities, as this project sparks the imagination and entrepreneurial aspirations of our People. We can see that our People have a lot to learn about this because the opportunities for businesses run by our Members to this time have been few and far between – but our People are starting to believe they can do this – that alone is worth a lot.

In the days, weeks and months ahead, we will continue to meet with our Members to give them the best information we can as we approach the critical vote on the Project Development Agreement later this year.

Mr. Chairman and Commissioners, your objective and independent recommendations will have a role in determining whether the Wuskwatim Projects go ahead.

When it is public, we will make a genuine effort to convey the meaning, intent and recommendations of your report to our People. It will help shape their decision on whether to support this project.

Our future depends on the right decision and we are earnestly and honestly trying to help ensure our Members have everything they need to decide.

With respect, we would prefer not to answer questions.

Thank you.