

**SUBMISSION TO
THE CLEAN ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION**

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

MAY 28, 2004

**PREPARED BY:
NINE YOUTH MEMBERS OF
NISICHAWAYASIIHK CREE NATION**

Chairman Lecuyer and Commissioners:

As you have heard over the past weeks, Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation is under pressure to meet the needs of a rapidly growing, young population. There is already a critical shortage of jobs, housing, infrastructure and funds to support higher education opportunities.

These challenges are felt directly by the youth of NCN, and we will inherit responsibility for meeting these challenges. Already, over 60 percent of our population is under 30 years old and our numbers are growing rapidly. We must have a way to address poverty, unemployment and other concerns by developing opportunities. To us, one of the best opportunities is the Wuskwatim project, which we strongly support, despite our First Nation's negative history with past hydroelectric projects.

Over the past few weeks you have heard representations by some elders of our First Nation who are opposed to the Wuskwatim project because of their experiences and memories of the Churchill River Diversion. They are our parents, grandparents and great grandparents. Ever since we were young, we've heard their stories of the untouched lands and waters that were able to provide for their spiritual and physical needs, and how they lived in harmony with mother earth as part of their traditional ways.

While we haven't always experienced their hardships, we feel their pain. We hear the anger and despair in their voices when they talk about Wuskwatim.

We deeply respect the concerns of our elders and we are thankful we did not have to experience the changes and disruptions they did.

Still, our elders need to appreciate that our generation no longer survives on the traditional economy of hunting and fishing. As our Chief Jerry Primrose has said in previous statements to the Commission, we live in the 21st century and that means we are more dependent on an economy that takes advantage of non-traditional knowledge, technology and industry. Because of the changes in our traditional economy and culture, Wuskwatim will not affect our lives in the same way our elders' lives were affected many years ago by the CRD.

We also know the CRD is not responsible for all the social and economic challenges facing our community. Many other northern communities face the same challenges and they did not experience any flooding.

Like so many other communities, the majority of people in Nelson House are on welfare due to the shortage of employment. We need training and jobs today, as well as investment to develop future employment opportunities.

We believe Wuskwatim offers us both short and long term opportunities to meet our immediate challenges and to address future concerns.

In conclusion, we support our Chief and Council and the Future Development Team as they work with Manitoba Hydro to develop a partnership that will have long-lasting benefits for our people. Like our elders, we are concerned about our environment, but feel the consultation and the Environmental Impact Statements have been meaningful and broad in defining the risks. We are confident that the impact will be minimal. We accept there are risks, but they are outweighed by the benefits.

Ultimately the decision to support Wuskwatim is up to the voting Members of NCN, who will have a chance to vote in a referendum on the Project Development Agreement later this year. We believe your recommendations to the Provincial Government will influence our community's decision to accept this project, because many of our people will not just accept the word of Manitoba Hydro or our Chief and Council. They will look to you for a thorough and objective assessment of the project and its impacts on our society and environment. Thank you for your consideration and your time in reading the personal statements that follow.

Sincerely, Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation Youth Members:

Geraldine Spence

Bonnie Linklater

Faith McDonald

James Warren

Darcy Bryon Linklater

Willie Moore

Tiffany Yetman

Shawna Linklater

Ryan Thomas

GERALDINE SPENCE, 23

Geraldine lives in Winnipeg where she attends the University of Manitoba. She is a third year science student and plans to apply to the Faculty of Dentistry in 2005. After graduation, she plans to return to Nelson House to set up her practice.

I lived in Nelson House all my life until I had to leave to attend University. Nelson House is where my childhood memories lie and it will be my home for as long as I live. The sad thing about being back home is having to see my community suffer from poverty. Many families don't have their own homes. They have to live with relatives or friends, which causes overcrowding in many households.

The majority of people in Nelson House are on welfare due to the shortage of employment. The lack of employment is because there are few economic opportunities available in our community. Without a stable economy how can we create jobs for our people?

I fear for my future and my children's future in Nelson House. Are the next generations going to have the opportunity to attend university to get an education? Is poverty going to get worse or better for our community? I am hoping we can start looking ahead and realize we need to try and resolve or prevent issues like these from happening. I am hoping the Wuskwatim project will help address some of the conditions we may have to face. I strongly believe that Wuskwatim is a good investment that our community will benefit from. I feel we should invest for the future as much as we can, so we can offer something to the many generations to come.

As a youth of Nelson House, I deeply respect the concerns of our elders. I know of the many hardships they had to cope with because of the damages CRD left behind. I may not know the amount of pain they suffered, but I can see it in their eyes and in the way they express themselves when they talk about Wuskwatim and how much they resent the idea of the project. The elders need to understand our generation lives a different lifestyle from theirs. If Wuskwatim goes through we will not be affected in the same way their lives were affected many years ago by the CRD. Wuskwatim is a great opportunity that our elders and other members of our community should take into consideration, if not for themselves then for the lives of the children today and for future generations to come.

BONNIE LINKLATER, 25

Bonnie lives in Winnipeg and she is enrolled in Arts at the University of Manitoba. She plans to study physiotherapy.

I can't speak for all of the elders of the community, but I know my grandparents are in support of the opportunities for advancement presented by Wuskwatim. They understand this project will provide opportunities for our people, which will promote self-reliance.

They have expressed support for our leaders who have been selected to speak for our people and make decisions. They have also expressed that they still grieve because of the damage to our land, but also understand that we must move forward. We cannot dwell on the devastation caused by the CRD.

I understand there are people who are opposed to the project. It may be because they cannot accept change and progression. They don't understand that societies change. Our people have advanced from hunting and gathering societies to industrial societies, because it's part of our growth and adjustment to these times. I also understand our people have been oppressed for many years and traumatized by past error and that's why they are concerned about the proposed project. We have to try to help them understand that mistakes have happened in the past, but we have to take risks in order for positive change to happen. I believe that this project has many benefits for our youth's future, and I am in support of it.

As a student, it has been difficult to survive with the limited funding provided by the government. I believe, that with this project, our educational privileges will be heightened.

We are all aware there is a high percentage of unemployment both on and off the reserve, and the majority of our people are on social assistance. When I think about this project, I think about how my son and his generation will benefit. If this project is successful, I hope the monies from profit will be allocated appropriately to benefit the community in the areas of education, health, housing and administration, for example.

FAITH MCDONALD, 24

Faith lives in Winnipeg and studies Arts at the University of Manitoba. She plays hockey and has played for the U of M Bisons.

As a child growing up on reserve, my grandfather, Alex Spence, a fisherman, would take us to his camp based on Wuskwatim Lake to live a traditional lifestyle.

Many people on reserve today do not live that kind of lifestyle anymore. Youth today are more interested in technological advances, over traditional living. The elderly people, as well as the older adults, need to understand the benefits the Wuskwatim project offers the youth of today.

If Wuskwatim does go through, I am sure the employment at the site will be a huge boost for our people's self esteem. As we all know the unemployment rate is excessive and poverty is clearly visible throughout the community.

JAMES WARREN, 25

James is enrolled in the Asper School of Business at the University of Manitoba. He plans to return to live in Nelson House to establish a business after he graduates.

I believe the Wuskwatim project is an excellent opportunity for NCN and its members. This partnership with Manitoba Hydro has the possibility of providing significant amounts of revenue and wealth that can be used to ensure the future of NCN is one filled with prosperity. For far too long Aboriginal communities have been forced to rely on government hand-outs (transfers) as their main source of revenue, but this first-of-its-kind partnership will allow NCN to generate financial capital to sustain our community and support its members for generations to come.

Past partnerships between governments and other organizations were one-sided without any voice by Aboriginal peoples on the development process. The negative effect of this has been that many projects have been a waste of money due to the lack of consultation and their insensitivity to Aboriginal needs. An important aspect of this agreement is that NCN has been an active participant in the negotiations. It also offers a long-term development strategy rather than short-term economic initiative disasters.

DARCY BRYON LINKLATER, 23

Darcy has a diploma in Business Management from Keewatin Community College in Thompson. He lives in Nelson House and would like to work on the Wuskwatim project in business/administration.

First I want to acknowledge the elders for showing a great amount of concern for all the current and future members of NCN in regards to the Wuskwatim Project.

For us to be more self-reliant we must support the partnership between NCN and Manitoba Hydro while they are in negotiations in regards to the proposed Wuskwatim Project. As a youth of Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation I strongly support the Chief and Council of NCN on the proposed Wuskwatim Generating and Transmission Project. I believe this project will provide NCN as well as other northern communities with long-term economic opportunities. Not only will this project create economic development it will create employment and training opportunities for the present generation and generations to come.

Since the 1996 Northern Flood Implementation Agreement, I have seen enormous development in our community, with the creation of our Community Wellness Center, Elders Care Home, Country Foods and the ATEC building. Just imagine all the other possibilities and opportunities our community can have if, or when the Wuskwatim project goes through. We must move forward and prosper as a Cree Nation.

WILLIE MOORE, 23

Willie studies Civil Engineering at the University of Manitoba/Red River College in Winnipeg. He plans to return to Nelson House to set up a business and work on the hydroelectric project, when he graduates.

Wuskwatim could bring considerable economic benefits to NCN through jobs, training, and business opportunities during construction and long-term benefits through sustainable income to NCN from power sales.

We often hear concerns from our elders about past damage caused by the Churchill River Diversion. Our elders say time and time again

that our ancestors developed a spiritual connection and respect for the lands and waters for their life-giving bounty from fishing, hunting, trapping and the traditional plants from the forest.

We know there is no single answer to our future, only an ongoing understanding that our relationship with the rest of the world must be based on respect and integrated with who we are and what we can be as First Nation people.

We are a young and quickly growing community. Over 60 percent of our population is between 13 and 30 years of age and we are striving to find ways to ensure the fragile gains we have made over the past years can move us forward in a positive direction.

Many more steps in negotiation and investigation will be required before a decision is made to proceed with the project. I think NCN is taking the right step with the Wuskwatim Project. NCN will be a role model for other First Nations for future developments in other First Nation communities.

TIFFANY YETMAN, 19

Tiffany is a second year Arts student at the University of Manitoba and plans to study physiotherapy.

I grew up in Nelson House and lived there most of my life.

Our community has its problems, but has been well taken care of by the previous leaders and the leaders of today. Our Chief and Council are working hard to provide a better standard of living for our community and improve our outlook for the future.

The Wuskwatim project has both pros and cons, but I think the pros definitely outweigh the cons. The economic advantages of this project are obvious. The big step our community is attempting is a great example of good leadership.

I think the benefits of this project are definitely positive, as they will provide a secure and prosperous future for youth of today and tomorrow.

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SHAWNA LINKLATER, 19

Shawna is NCN's Youth Chief and lives in Thompson, where she is enrolled in the Transition Year Program at Keewatin Community College. She plans to enroll in the Engineering Access Program in the fall and aims to get a diploma in computer/civil engineering. After she completes her program she plans to return to live in Nelson House and work for her community.

I am a youth speaker for my community and understand that there is a great deal of importance placed on whether or not I support the Wuskwatim project.

I thought about the issue for a long time and read all the information available. I asked a lot of questions.

Now, after much consideration I strongly believe the Wuskwatim project will be a positive step in our community's economic development. It will give the youth and community members of NCN a chance to pick themselves up and improve our social wellbeing.

While I support the project, I also have a deep respect for what my elders say about it. I share their concerns for our environment. They say we are the keepers of Mother Earth. It is our responsibility to protect it.

I know that we should not dwell on our past history of fishing and hunting to sustain us. We must think of our future, but still, our youth should never forget the way of our ancestors and how things are done.

If we can support Wuskwatim and hold on to our traditional ways, we will have succeeded in building a strong future for our people.

RYAN THOMAS, 21

Ryan is currently living in Winnipeg and enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts program at the University of Winnipeg.

I spend a lot of time outdoors and will always have a great deal of respect for the environment. I feel the earth has been made for us to enjoy, and in order for the earth to maintain its beauty we need to take great care of the environment.

As an Aboriginal youth from Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, I feel the future of our children is most important and we must seek ways to improve the quality of life for them. Education is what opens doors for youth and with the right tools they may explore endless possibilities. If we have more resources to work with, the better our people will be.

I am very supportive for the future of NCN and feel the Wuskwatim project offers a lot of positive benefits for generations to come. I am very concerned for the environment. However, if the flooding is minimal and the benefits outweigh the negatives, then NCN leaders are making the right decision for the future of NCN.

It is readily evident that the benefits of the Wuskwatim project are for both the short-term and the long-term. There is a strong focus on employment and training, business opportunities, and an opportunity to own up to one third of the generating station.

The benefits will definitely help NCN move forward as a community now and well into the future. So, for these reasons I strongly support the Wuskwatim Project.

We must remember the past, but we cannot dwell on the negatives of the past, for we must take care of the present and the future. We owe it to those who are currently living and for the generations yet to come.