



NORTH AMERICAN MEGADAM RESISTANCE ALLIANCE

www.northeastmegadamsresistance.org

Open Letter to Northeastern Governors and Eastern Canadian Premiers
on Urgent Need for a Mandatory Session on the Human and Ecological
Impacts of Canadian Hydropower at your
September 2019 Conference

August 16, 2019

Northeastern Governors
Eastern Canadian Premiers

Jay Lucey, Executive Director
Conference of Northeastern Governors and
Secretariat to the Conference of
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51 Melcher St., 1st Floor
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Dear Governors Charlie Baker, Philip Scott, Christopher Sununu, Janet Mills,
Edward Lamont, Jr., Andrew M. Cuomo and Gina Raimondo and Premiers Dwight
Ball, Dennis King, Stephen McNeil, Blaine Higgs, and Francois Legault

North American Megadam Resistance Alliance (NAMRA) is an international network of individuals and groups concerned about the environmental and social justice impacts of Canadian hydropower. We are concerned that your Conference of Northeastern Governors (NEG) and Eastern Canadian Premiers (ECP) on September 8-10, 2019 lacks a human and ecological rights perspective on this issue. At a time when Indigenous and non-Indigenous land and water defenders here and around the globe are struggling with the negative impacts of large dams such as those of Canadian Crown corporations Hydro-Quebec and NALCOR Energy, it is imperative that the voices of those impacted by your energy policies be heard.

For this reason we are writing to request a mandatory session on September 9 with you and other conference attendees in which you will hear directly from the voices of communities negatively impacted by Canadian hydropower. In this session you will hear about these topics:

- Indigenous rights under the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), in particular the core principle of free, prior and informed consent;
- The loss of livelihoods and resultant economic catastrophe in local Canadian communities caused by Hydro-Quebec and NALCOR hydropower development, including flooding, the loss of cultural traditions, ways of life, treaty lands and historical sites;
- The history of cultural genocide resulting from violations of the rights of Indigenous peoples to their lands and resources by Hydro-Quebec and NALCOR;
- Ongoing ecological catastrophe in Canada caused by destruction of forests, wetlands, biodiversity, and free flowing rivers;
- The contribution of megadams to the climate crisis, including causing the loss of carbon sequestration capacity by forests, peat lands and wetlands and greenhouse gas emissions including methane;
- The myth that large Canadian hydropower is “clean and green” and deserving of preferential treatment under ratepayer and taxpayer subsidy programs.

Your conference is promoted as an opportunity for attendees to “learn how government policies and innovative solutions impact one another and how the region benefits from shared expertise” and as a “unique opportunity to further trade, investments and partnerships in a region home to 25 million people and combined GDP of \$1.4 Trillion dollars.” The mission of the Coalition of Northeastern Governors (CONEG) “encourages intergovernmental cooperation on issues affecting the economic, social and environmental well-being of the Northeast.” Despite this lofty mission, support by CONEG’s members for Canadian hydropower imports to the Northeast U.S. *ignores* many significant and life-threatening economic, social and environmental aspects of the well being of the region’s inhabitants, both in the U.S. and Canada.

Quebec Premier Francois Legault is actively promoting Hydro-Quebec’s exports, saying in May 2019, “We can double what we are sending to Massachusetts and New York, with current capacity.” Premier Legault was speaking about energy policy to the

Canadian American Business Council. He “commended Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker for his engagement and partnership on promoting hydro, as well as a recent announcement with New York City Mayor Bill De Blasio on a potential deal. Legault drew the correlation between hydropower, putting a price on carbon emissions and addressing the crisis of climate change. “The number one thing Quebec can do to fight climate change is provide the Northeast US with more hydro,” Legault affirmed.” www.coneg.org/uncategorized/quebec-premier-stresses-energy-relationship-with-northeast-us/

Governors Baker and Mills support Canadian hydropower imports to Massachusetts via the New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC) corridor through Maine. Governor Cuomo supports the Champlain Hudson Power Express. These corridors and the New Hampshire Granite Link and Vermont Clean Energy Link will cost U.S. taxpayers and ratepayers billions of dollars and undermine local renewables and the green energy economy in the Northeast U.S. In addition, corridors have environmental impacts in the U.S. --- the 145-mile NECEC line will carve a corridor through many miles of Maine’s northern forest, over many dozens of wetlands, and cross the iconic Appalachian Trail.

Behind the lovely window dressing of the discussions by the NEG and ECP about Canadian hydropower are compelling and urgent issues that we feel can be addressed in dialogue and the spirit of open inquiry. Information about the impacts on local communities of Canadian hydropower production and distribution is critical to your decision making about energy policy. To date, such decision making has not taken into account life and death issues for humanity and the planet related to Hydro-Quebec and NALCOR hydropower --- from the failure to seek and obtain free, prior and informed consent of all Indigenous peoples --- to the scientifically-supported data on the devastating impact these megadams have on the intricate webs of life that have coexisted since time immemorial. Indeed, water and all it provides is seen by supporters of Canadian hydropower as a resource to be exploited instead of as the sacred basis for life, a precious and vital part of the ecological web that has sustained us from the beginning of time but which continues to become ever more polluted and degraded. Energy decisions by the NEG and discussions with the ECP will be one-sided and not fully informed if your attendees do not have the opportunity to hear from the frontline communities who seek the chance to speak with you about hydropower impacts.

We want to explain to you and the conference attendees aspects of the situation in Canada that are not often made transparent in policies that promote Canadian hydropower. For example, we will explain that:

- Hydro-Quebec and NALCOR are responsible for methyl mercury poisoning of traditional country food webs across Quebec and Labrador, which undermines food security for those relying on wild foods for survival;

- The NALCOR and Hydro-Quebec Upper Churchill Falls dam in Labrador currently delivers hydropower to U.S. and this dam, one of the largest in the world with a reservoir the size of Switzerland, in the 1960s flooded 2,000 square miles of Innu First Nation hunting grounds displacing communities that continue to suffer the impacts today;¹
- Megadam projects for hydropower to export to the U.S. continue to be built and planned including Hydro-Quebec’s Romaine River dams and NALCOR’s Gull Island dam, and contrary to Hydro-Quebec’s representations, U.S. exports are “dam forcing” meaning they result in the construction of new dams even though today those dams would never be allowed to be build in New England;
- Canadian megadams are exorbitantly expensive –NALCOR’s Lower Churchill Muskrat Falls project will cost at least \$12.2 billion - \$6 billion over budget and years behind schedule; project mismanagement and fiscal irresponsibility has resulted in a government inquiry that itself has cost the people of the Province about \$32 million.²
- Study after study documents the negative consequences of Canadian megadams, yet these are ignored; on August 7, 2019, in direct contradiction to the recommendations of two Harvard University studies,³ NALCOR Energy began flooding the Muskrat Falls reservoir *despite* the fact that it missed the deadline to cap wetlands to partially mitigate the impacts from methyl mercury contamination of wild foods and people, which was recommended.⁴ The local community, including members of Indigenous groups, held a funeral for the river and a last supper of wild foods before they become contaminated.

Ironically, the increasing urgency among several Northeast U.S. states to move rapidly to cleaner power sources has opened the door for false choices such as so-called “clean and green” hydropower. Many decision makers blindly accept the rhetoric of “clean power” from those promoting hydropower. Canadian hydropower is like the Blood Diamonds of Africa – these “Blood MegaWatts” inflict great harm on the Indigenous peoples and others to satisfy the hunger for so-called “clean” energy. In contrast to most wind, solar and micro-hydropower project, dams cause severe

¹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/energy/2011/08/110824-innu-nationhydroelectric-new-dawn/>

² www.muskratfallsinquiry.ca <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/muskrat-falls-inquiry-public-consultation-session-1.5231263>

³ <https://www.seas.harvard.edu/news/2016/11/human-health-risks-from-hydroelectric-projects>.

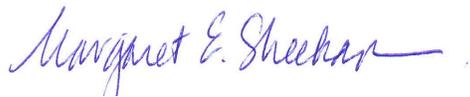
⁴ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/nunatsiavut-asks-premier-to-stop-flooding-1.5220209>.

and other irreversible damage to critical ecosystems and unlike wind and solar power, hydropower is no longer an innovative technology. We urge you to hear first hand from front line communities about the longstanding and ongoing negative impacts of Canadian hydropower so that you can fully understand the impacts of supporting this destructive form of energy.

We trust that you will understand the importance of bringing the voices of those most negatively impacted by your energy decision to the forefront of the conference. As the United Nations increasingly warns, time is running out for our survival as a species. This is a golden opportunity for conference attendees to listen to those whose knowledge of how the natural world works has for far too long been ignored.

Please contact me as NAMRA's coordinator, coordinator.namra@gmail.com or 508-259-9154 (US) as soon as possible so that we may arrange to have appropriate speakers in place for this proposed session on September 9.

In hope for a better future,



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