

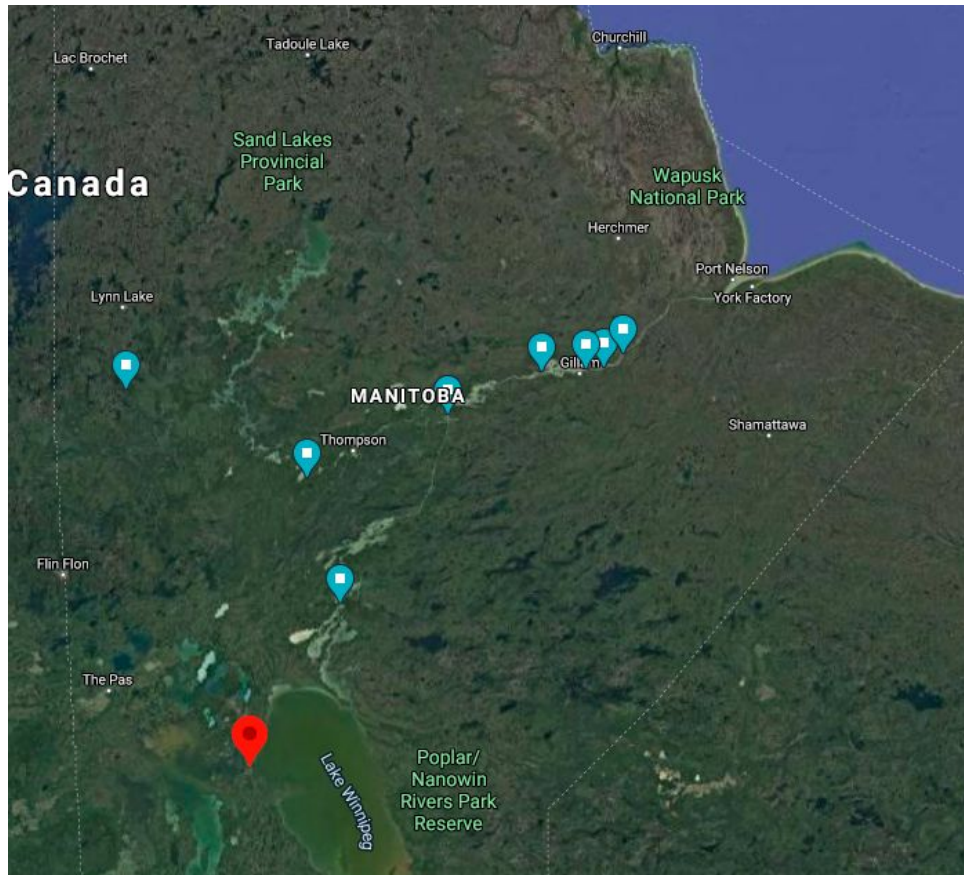


Protecting rivers and their communities by resisting megadams and their transmission corridors

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Fact Sheet: Hydro-Impacted Communities in Northern Manitoba, Canada

OVERVIEW: Hydro development on the Nelson River started in 1957. There are currently 8 generating stations operated in Northern Manitoba with another major project, the Keeyask dam and generating station, under construction. Some First Nations in Northern Manitoba have become partners in hydro development projects. Nonetheless, there is continued resistance to the dams for their destructive impacts on Indigenous culture, ways of life and the environment.



5 dams have been built along the Nelson River with one more under construction. In Northern Manitoba, the Burntwood River, Saskatchewan River and Laurie River have also been dammed for hydro power.

NORTHERN FLOOD AGREEMENT

- In 1977, the Northern Flood Agreement was signed by the First Nation communities of Norway House, Cross Lake, Split Lake, York Landing (now York Factory) and Nelson



House, which included South Indian Lake at the time, and Manitoba Hydro, the Manitoba government and the Canadian federal government.

- The signatory communities were impacted by the diversion of the Churchill River into the Nelson River at South Indian Lake and by flooding along the Nelson River from the Jenpeg dam and generating station, which was in operation starting in 1976.
- The NFA promised the eradication of mass poverty and of mass unemployment for the signatory First Nation communities, and was meant to define compensation for the damage that had already been caused by Manitoba Hydro.
- At the time of signing the NFA, governments were not required to consult with First Nations regarding resource development, and impacted nations had significantly less negotiating power than the governments and utility companies.
- Also included in the NFA was an open-ended commitment by the Canadian government to provide safe drinking water, which the federal government later sought to renegotiate. (As of December 1, 2020, the Canadian government is reporting that 59 long-term drinking water advisories are still in effect on reserves across the country.)

IMPLEMENTATION AGREEMENTS

- Implementation agreements with individual First Nations signatories to the NFA were negotiated in order to clarify the compensation that was promised in the NFA.
- The agreements effectively extinguish any obligation that the federal and provincial government and Manitoba Hydro had to impacted communities under the NFA, replacing promises to eradicate mass poverty and unemployment and provide a supply of safe drinking water with cash settlements.
- Cross Lake First Nation is the only NFA signatory that has not signed an implementation agreement.

IMPACTED COMMUNITIES TODAY

- Pimichikamak (formerly Cross Lake) asserted their right to sovereignty by declaring their own self-government, rather than continuing to use the band council government structure imposed and recognized by the government of Canada. Pimichikamak continues to negotiate compensation for hydro impacts on the basis of the 1977 NFA.
- Fox Lake Cree Nation has been impacted by the Kettle (1975), Long Spruce (1978) and Limestone (1979) generating stations and in 2004 signed an Impact Settlement Agreement with Manitoba Hydro and the provincial government. FLCN is a partner in the Keeyask Generating Station Project, currently under construction on the Nelson River, however Manitoba Hydro is the sole shareholder on the project. The Keeyask project is currently running overbudget, leading to rate increases in Manitoba, and concerns have been raised over community safety during the COVID-19 pandemic as workers have continued to travel to and from the site. Flooding from Keeyask will



destroy forest and fish habitat, increase mercury levels in fish, contaminate drinking water and flood burial sites.

- Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (formerly Nelson House) signed an Implementation Agreement in 1996, which clarifies promises for compensation made in the NFA and also gives NCN rights over future resource development in the area. As a result of this agreement, NCN became a partner in the Wuskwatim dam project on the Burntwood River. Wuskwatim was the first hydro project developed in partnership with a First Nation in Manitoba, with goals of conducting comprehensive environment and social impact assessments and incorporating Traditional Knowledge in project planning. While initially promising, the Wuskwatim project offered inadequate opportunities for community participation and has had adverse socio-economic effects for the community, as NCN has fallen into debt over the payment of their 33% share of the project, due in part to decreasing energy export demands.
- South Indian Lake residents were forced to relocate when the Churchill River Diversion flooded their homes, and were provided with houses that were not built to withstand northern winters. South Indian Lake's substantial whitefish fishery was destroyed and the relocated community of South Indian Lake continues to experience the most severe fluctuations in water levels due to the Augmented Flow Program, causing massive shoreline destabilization and habitat destruction.
- York Factory First Nation signed an Implementation Agreement in 1995. The community continues to be impacted by the adverse effects of hydro development. York Factory First Nation is now a partner in the Keeyask generating station project, in the hopes that, despite the cultural impacts, their involvement in the project may bring benefits for the community.
- Norway House First Nation signed an Implementation Agreement in 1997. The money that was received from that agreement has been invested in the community, but Norway House continues to struggle against the adverse impacts that flooding has had on the community. Hydro development creates unsafe conditions for boating or travelling on the ice, compromises fisheries, causes shoreline erosion and makes the water unsafe for drinking or swimming.
- Tataskweyak Cree Nation (formerly Split Lake) signed an implementation agreement in 1992. The community continues to be impacted by hydro development. TCN is a partner on the Keeyask generating station project, however projections now indicate that the dam will not be as profitable as initially thought, meaning the community may suffer the impacts of flooding without seeing the anticipated payoff.

RESOURCES

- Wa Ni Ska Tan. An Alliance of Hydro-Impacted Communities. <https://hydroimpacted.ca/>



- The Northern Flood Agreement.
<https://hydroimpacted.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/northern-flood-agreement-1977.pdf>
- Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation. Wuskwatim Project.
<https://www.ncncree.com/business-and-economy/wuskwatim-project/>
- York Factory First Nation. The Keeyask Generating Station Project.
<http://www.yffn.ca/kawechiwasik/future-development/>
- APTN National News. 'We have to live with these changes everyday': Norway House still struggling from hydro development.
<https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/we-have-to-live-with-these-changes-everyday-norway-house-still-struggling-from-hydro-development/>
- Manitoba Hydro. Generating Stations.
https://www.hydro.mb.ca/corporate/facilities/generating_stations/
- Keeyask. Project Description.
https://keeyask.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Keeyask_EIS-Project_Description_SV-1of6.pdf
- Government of Canada. Ending long-term drinking water advisories.
<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1506514143353/1533317130660#dataset-filter>
- Aaron Vincent Elkaim, The Narwhal. State of erosion: the legacy of Manitoba Hydro.
<https://thenarwhal.ca/state-of-erosion-the-legacy-of-manitoba-hydro/>

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