

 $Traditional\ fishing\ using\ hand-woven\ nets\ and\ birch\ bark\ canoes.$

is one of a series of studies being used in the planning of hydroelectric development on the Birthday/Gull reach of the Nelson River. It forms part of the Post Project Environmental Review as described in Article . . (b) of the Split Implementation Lake Cree Agreement. Manitoba Hydro provided the funding and technical equipment required for the development of this study, as part of its responsibilities under the Agreement. By mutual agreement, Split Lake Cree First Nation has taken lead responsibility for the production of the paper, with periodic review and comment by Manitoba Hydro representatives.



Dedicated to the memory of Elder Samuel Garson, Split Lake Cree. is largely based on interviews conducted in the Cree language with Split Lake Cree Elders and adults, in which testimony was provided about many important developments in the life of the people. Video tapes of these interviews are

available at the Tataskweyak Trust Secretariat Office in Split Lake.

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The views and interpretations in this report are exclusively those of the Split Lake Cree. While Manitoba Hydro funded this report and contributed photographs and maps, the Corporation does not necessarily agree with, nor is it bound by all of the historical interpretations contained in it.

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Split Lake Trading Post.

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Boys at the beach, Split Lake. 1929.

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Representing Split Lake Cree

- Victor Spence
- Michael Garson
- Lazarus Kitchikeesick
- Samuel Garson †
- Joseph Morris

Representing Manitoba Hydro

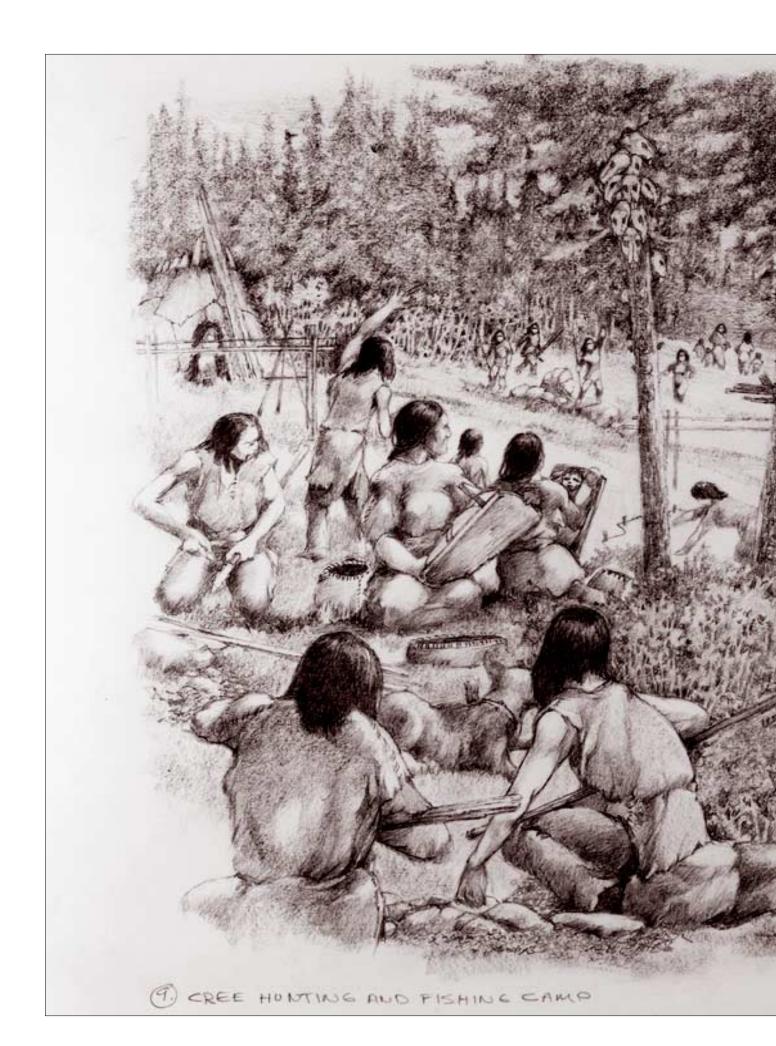
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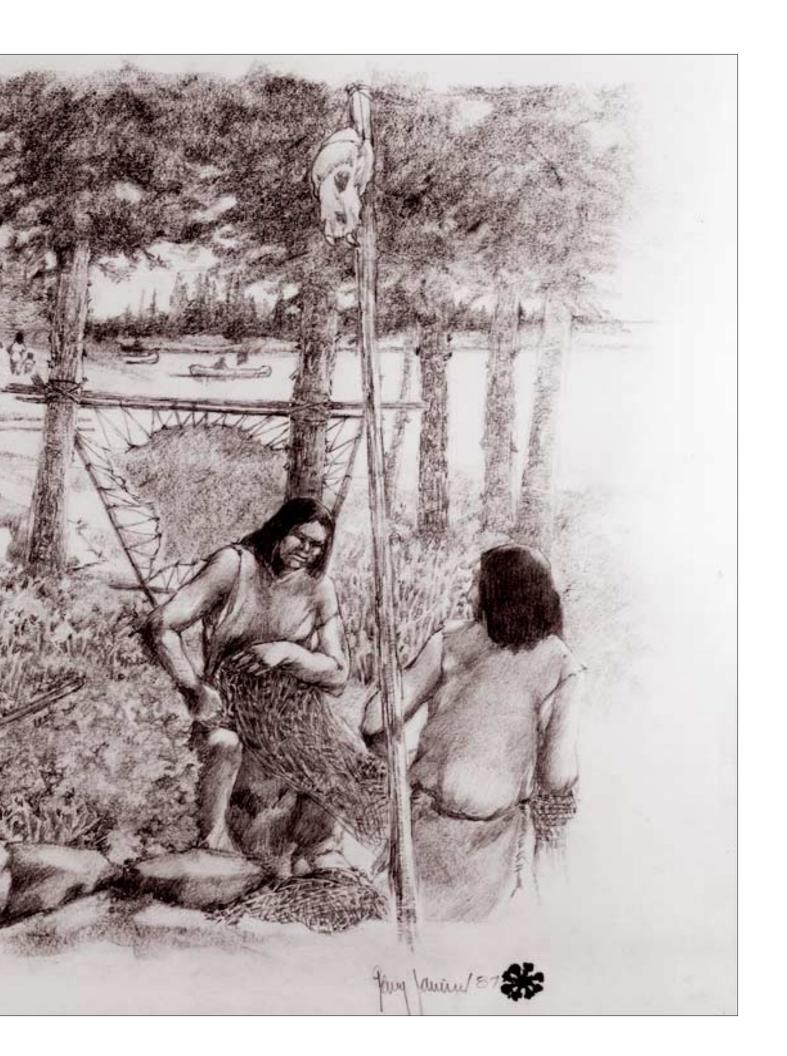
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†(deceased 1995)





HE SPLIT LAKE CREE representatives on the Birthday/Gull Joint Study Group suggested that a people's account of their history should be prepared. The initial idea was to consider developments since the start of hydroelectric development in the s. Manitoba Hydro supported the concept. Consultants to the Study Group were asked to prepare a workplan for the incorporation of such a study into the Post Project Environmental Review process. At the initial meeting on January , Study Group agreed to proceed with a study that identified and analyzed the changes that had affected the Split Lake Cree since the start of hydroelectric development in the study area.

At that time it was proposed that the analysis be broken down into ten year time frames, beginning in s and s. Recognizing that hydroelectric development was not the only agent of change that had affected the Split Lake Cree over the period, it was agreed that other interrelated factors would also be considered. These included trapping and fishing changes, the emergence of the wage economy, population movement and growth, community characteristics, diet/health, transportation, education, social issues, and other outside development pressures. An initial list of major community changes was provided by Elders at the January

meeting. This list was later used as the basis for two questionnaire survey instruments, one for Elders and another for adults.

An interview team of Split Lake Cree personnel was trained in interview techniques. Manitoba Hydro provided audio and video tape equipment and a television set, in order to document and view the interviews. In total, Elders and adults were interviewed and about

hours of interviews were taped, most of them in the Cree language. Two to three people were involved in each interview and each of the sessions lasted about three hours. Initially, a long questionaire was used to guide the interviews. However, this proved too cumbersome so the interview team abandoned it in favour of a more flexible, thematic approach. This contributed to a freer flow of information while maintaining some structure in the interview process. Interview team members transcribed several of the interview sessions into English and these became the raw data upon which this document was based. In addition, the interview team met with the consultants after the interviews to ensure the writers had a complete picture of the information collected.



Albert Garson catching trout at Waskaiowaka Lake.

Additional complementary research was carried out by members of the Study Group and by the consultants to the Post Project Environmental Review process. Statistical information was obtained from a variety of sources, including the Manitoba Department of Natural Resources and Statistics Canada. Community profile information was compiled for surrounding communities such as York Landing and Ilford. Information from Split Lake community plans was also used and incorporated. Given the intention to focus and report on the experience and knowledge of the people, no thorough review was conducted of the primary archival sources or secondary literature. A complete history of the Split Lake

Cree would require a marrying together of the present oral testimony, more interviews and materials from other written sources.

After the material in this document was initially presented to the Chief and Council in June they requested that information from the treaty signing time and earlier be included in the study. This was accomplished by undertaking some additional research into historical documents and by going back to the interview team for additional Split Lake Cree historical information. Old photographs for the document were provided from a variety of sources, mainly Split Lake Cree and Manitoba Hydro, as well as a former teacher who spent time in Split Lake in

As various drafts of the *Analysis* of *Change* report were prepared, they were reviewed by members of the Split Lake Cree interview team and the Study Group. Helpful comments and feedback were received and many changes made as a result.

HIS DOCUMENT describes part of the historical experience of the Split Lake Cree. It identifies and analyses key changes in the First Nation's history, noting factors that have caused such changes, particularly the impacts resulting from hydroelectric development. It provides an overview of the Cree presence in northern Manitoba from pre-European times up to the present. However, the study's focus is on the century, describing traditional life before , followed by an account of the development of the community within relevant eras, with special emphasis on the years after

The purpose of this study is to identify and understand the major changes in the First Nation's growth and evolution, based directly on the people's experience. Many of the subjects covered here in a general way are deserving of their own detailed historical analyses, considering both the oral and written records. This analysis of change has drawn upon existing studies, reports and other documents and upon consultation with certain knowledgeable individuals who have clarified particular matters. However, its most important source has been detailed interviews with Split Lake Cree Elders and adults.



Treaty party. Indian agent and guides. Split Lake 1927.

Background

By far the most significant development that irreversibly changed the way of life of many of the Cree of northern Manitoba, including the Split Lake Cree, was the Lake Winnipeg Regulation -Churchill River Diversion (LWR-CRD) hydroelectric project. The area it impacted is the permanent tribal homeland of the Cree, consisting of a significant portion of Manitoba below the tundra in the boreal forest region. The First Nations most affected were Split Lake, Nelson House, Cross Lake, Norway House and York Factory.

Concerned about what was happening to their lands and waters the five First Nations began to meet together in the early Lake Cree leaders and Elders quickly became major supporters and proponents of the idea of working together to oppose Manitoba Hydro in an effort to stop the project. Split Lake Cree, more than any other of the First Nations, had already suffered from its adverse effects. The people had seen its impacts on their traditional lands and waters, above and below the Kelsey generating station. Split Lake Cree leaders urged the other four First Nations to

join them in trying to stop the project, in order to avoid further such consequences. To this end, the five First Nations established the Northern Flood Committee in

Northern Flood Agreement

Despite their best efforts, the First Nations were not able to stop the Manitoba Hydro project. Nevertheless, the Northern Flood Committee fought to have its concerns heard and was able to convince Canada to support it in negotiating additional land rights and compensation for the impacts of the Lake Winnipeg Regulation -Churchill River Diversion upon the lands, lives, and livelihood of its member First Nations. Using the James Bay Agreement as a precedent, it negotiated the Northern Flood Agreement (NFA) with Canada, Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro. This agreement, the first in the history of northern Manitoba in which Cree First Nations had the ability to represent themselves independently, was signed in December ratified by all parties in . For the Cree people, the NFA had two purposes: to compensate them for the adverse effects of the Hydro project; and to assist in the development of a viable and sustainable livelihood in their traditional homeland.

With regard to Split Lake specifically, the NFA granted Manitoba Hydro an easement for the storage of water on reserve lands below approximate elevation feet above sea level and contiguous to Split Lake. Furthermore, Hydro was obligated, to the extent possible, to control the flow of water so as not to exceed elevation feet above sea level on Split Lake.

Implementation

However, once the NFA was signed, its effective implementation became a matter of dispute, with the other parties interpreting in the narrowest way its broad contractual undertakings. Although greatly disappointed by this turn of events, the five First Nations took up the struggle to get it implemented. It was not until an arbitrator was , and claims began appointed in to be filed, that some real prospect of serious implementation appeared. Progress was, nevertheless, painfully slow, and by the NFA First Nations had decided to pursue a more vigorous and comprehensive approach to getting the agreement implemented.

, prior to any acceptance of the global process proposed by the First Nations, Split Lake Cree were informed that Manitoba Hydro wished to negotiate an upward adjustment of the on-reserve setback line to accommodate potential hydroelectric development of the reach on the Nelson River between Birthday and Gull Rapids, kilometres downstream of the community. This announcement about potential future flooding produced a profound level of anxiety throughout the community, which was still shaken by the continuing, uncompensated adverse effects of past hydroelectric development, particularly the Lake Winnipeg Regulation - Churchill River Diversion.

Manitoba Hydro projects had already flooded Split Lake Cree waterways and lands, including campsites, hunting grounds and traditional use areas, had interfered with transportation, adversely impacted wildlife and fish habitat and populations, and negatively affected the traditional way of life. In addition, it was evident that Birthday/Gull project planning had been initiated without any consultation with the First Nation. Community leaders and members had little understanding of the potential impacts of the possible development. The people were also determined that future stages of hydroelectric development would not occur until full compensation had been received in the form of the comprehensive implementation of the NFA. Fortunately, in response to First Nation concerns, Hydro called off the proposed negotiations at that

Showing patience and skill, the NFA First Nations, represented by the Northern Flood Committee, gradually succeeded in moving discussions with the other parties into full-scale negotiations. By the other parties - Canada, Manitoba, and Manitoba Hydro had agreed to try to negotiate an agreement for an implementation mechanism for the NFA and by the spring of had agreed on a Proposed Basis of Settlement of Outstanding Claims and Obligations. Initially, this was accepted by four of the five Northern Flood Committee members. The summer of

was spent trying to work out an accommodation with Norway House First Nation, which did not find the proposed basis of settlement acceptable. However, agreement was not possible and at a meeting on August , , three of the five NFA First Nations, with Cross Lake abstaining, decided to put the implementation negotiations on hold.

Meanwhile, during the summer , Split Lake Cree First Nation of held several workshops with its membership, for information, communication and direction. The direction was clear - to get on with the next phase in trying to work out an implementation agreement based on the proposed basis of settlement. As a result, Split Lake Cree Chief and Council indicated to their Northern Flood Committee partners that they had a mandate from their people to proceed with the negotiation of a comprehensive implementation agreement, and that they did not have the authority to do otherwise. At that time the other four First Nations voted to cut their ties with Split Lake Cree First Nation. At a later date, in April , they attempted, by resolution, to formally oust Split Lake Cree First Nation from the Northern Flood Committee. On principle, this position was never accepted by Split Lake Cree First Nation.

In September , Split Lake Cree First Nation began negotiating the implementation of the Northern Flood Agreement with the other parties. A precondition placed on these negotiations was the understanding that the eventual implementation agreement would do nothing to harm the position of the other First Nation signatories of the NFA. Negotiations continued from November until May . The very challenging work undertaken during that period by Split Lake Cree, both internally and with the other parties, resulted in a comprehensive agreement, which was ratified by the Split Lake Cree membership in the spring of The final signing took place on June

The negotiation of the NFA Implementation Agreement by Split Lake Cree First Nation was a pioneering step in the implementation of the Northern Flood Agreement. It demonstrated the determination of the people to get fair compensation for the adverse effects of the Hydro project upon their lands, lives, and livelihood, as promised in the NFA. It was the culmination of a year long struggle by the Split Lake Cree and also marked a path which the other NFA First Nations have since followed.

The agreement provided Split
Lake Cree First Nation with
, , over a period of time,
approximately , acres of new
reserve lands, and , acres of
titled lands. This was in addition to
the , , paid to the Split
Lake Cree by Canada, Manitoba, and
Manitoba Hydro between and

. In return, the First Nation waived all past, present and future claims and outstanding NFA provisions, except for some very specific Hydro-related liabilities.

More details on the agreement are included in Appendix .

Joint Study Group

Since October , Split Lake
Cree and Manitoba Hydro,
represented by the Joint Study
Group, have together been
conducting a study program to
facilitate planning associated with
the Birthday/Gull hydroelectric full
development option, which could
have the effect of altering the water
regime agreed to in the NFA and the

Implementation Agreement. Both parties identified three areas of study which will assist in each side's understanding of the impacts of any future construction of dams and generating stations. The three areas are: a Split Lake Community Planning and Impact Study, completed in November , which assessed Split Lake's community development requirements both with and without impacts from Birthday/Gull; a Post Project Environmental Review which is currently underway; and a Birthday/Gull Resource Impact

Environmental Review

The Post Project Environmental Review is a requirement of Section . of the NFA Implementation Agreement, which sets out the resolution process governing deviations from the Split Lake water regime and any amendment to Hydro flooding easements. As part of the resolution process to amend the easements, paragraph (b) of subsection . . requires Manitoba Hydro to implement, cooperatively with Split Lake Cree First Nation, a review of the existing environment in the Split Lake resource area. Specifically, the paragraph requires Manitoba Hydro, "at its own expense and with the cooperation of Split Lake Cree", to:

implement...a review of the

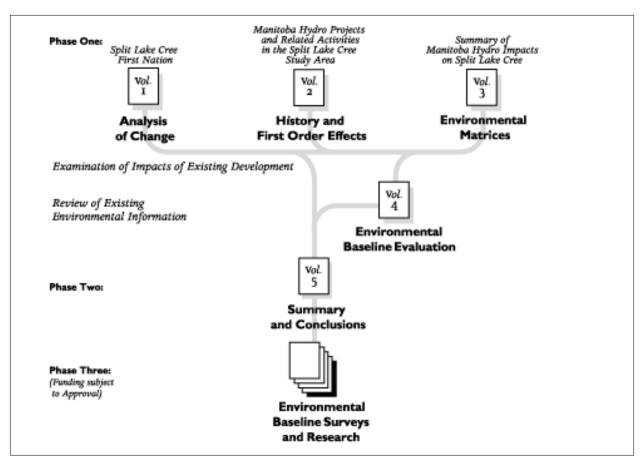


Figure 1 – Components and Phases of the Post Project Environmental Review

existing environment including the impacts of that part of Existing Development which impact on the Resource Area, and of future environmental impacts on Split Lake Cree anticipated to result from such Future Development, as such relates to Split Lake Cree.

The original terms of reference for the Post Project Environmental Review were approved by Split Lake Cree and Manitoba Hydro in November . Hydro's wish was to begin with the Community Planning and Impact Study, the first report in the joint study process. Its completion served to foster a more harmonious working relationship between Split Lake Cree and Manitoba Hydro. The terms of reference of the Post Project Environmental Review were revised with joint agreement. Figure

(above) shows the components and phases of the Post Project Environmental Review.

Phase One

It was agreed then that the future stages of the review would consist of three phases of work. Phase One involves four studies. The first study is this history of the First Nation, focusing on the century, and identifying those changes, particularly the effects of hydroelectric development, which have affected the traditional way of life in the resource area. The second study is a history of hydroelectric development in the study area including a description of first order physical impacts. Figures which follow page , show principal Manitoba Hydro projects and related activities in the study area. The third study will be the

Environmental Matrices summarizing Manitoba Hydro impacts on the Split Lake Cree, and the fourth, the Environmental Baseline Evaluation.

Phases Two and Three

Phase Two will entail a synthesis of the findings of the Phase One studies in a report that will concentrate on the meaning and significance of hydroelectric development to the Split Lake Cree. While it will not produce a detailed evaluation of the physical and biological impacts of individual Hydro projects, it will show what the impacts mean to the people. This is a dimension of environmental assessment that has not been addressed sufficiently in past environmental reviews and studies. Phases One and Two also involved an environmental specialist to

develop terms of reference for Phase Three, to provide additional environmental baseline data and environmental monitoring information.

It is hoped that this Analysis of Change report will give the reader an appreciation of the Split Lake Cree's profound attachment to the lands and waters, and of the changes which, although they have altered the nature and extent of this attachment, have never severed it. The First Nation continues to be intimately associated with its natural environment despite the assaults of modernization. Split Lake Cree appreciate the natural gifts that the Creator has provided to the earth and to them. This Aboriginal appreciation was described, albeit in another circumstance and time, most eloquently in a statement attributed when, in to Chief Seattle in response to the American government's offer for a large area of Aboriginal land and the promise of a reservation, he said:

Every part of this earth is sacred to my people. Every shining pine needle, every sand shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people. The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man...

This shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred, and you must teach your children that it is sacred and that each ghostly reflection in the clear water of the lakes tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father.

The rivers are our brother, they quench our thirst. The rivers carry our canoes, and feed our children. If we sell you our land, you must remember, and teach your children, that the rivers are our brothers, and yours, and you must henceforth give the rivers the kindness you would give any brother...

The air is precious to the red man, for all things share the same breath - the beast, the tree, the man, they all share the same breath. The white man does not seem to notice the air he breathes. Like a man dying for many days, he is numb to the stench. But if we sell our land, you must remember the air is precious to us, that the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports. The wind that gave our grandfather his first breath also receives his last sigh. And if we sell you our land, you must keep it apart and sacred, as a place where even the white man can go to taste the wind that is sweetened by the meadow's flowers...

You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandfathers. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children what we have taught our children, that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth.

Figure 2: Map to Split (Ta tas que) Lake, drawn by Cha chay pay way ti, May 1806. Redrawn by Peter Fidler in one his journals, it is now housed in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives. Figure 3: Principal Manitoba Hydro

Figure 3: Principal Manitoba Hydro Projects Affecting the Split Lake Cree Study Area.

Figure 4: Manitoba Hydro Projects and Related Activities in the Split Lake Cree Study Area.

Context

The devastating effects of the Lake Winnipeg Regulation – Churchill River Diversion hydroelectric project seriously disrupted and altered the lands and waters which had been the lifeblood of the Split Lake Cree since time immemorial. In , Joseph I. Keeper, then Executive Director of the Northern Flood Committee, spoke at a conference on the environment in Montreal. As part of his paper on the NFA, he spoke about these impacts from the perspective of the Cree people of northern Manitoba, and put them in the historical context of the rapid social and economic change experienced by the Cree in the second half of the century. His comments are a fitting opening for this study.

In order to put the socio-economic expectations from the NFA into perspective, it must be realized that the Cree of Northern Manitoba have been experiencing a period of rapid social and economic change since the end of World War Two. Up to 50 years ago, prior to World War Two, the Cree of Northern Manitoba lived in a trapping, fishing and hunting economy in a manner that allowed them to exploit fully the natural resources which they had utilized in a particular way for centuries. Certainly, white contact with its superior technology, the fur trade, and its diseases had impacted the Cree but they had adapted to it within the continuing context of their own culture.

Figure 5 (opposite): Split Lake Cree Land Use Calendar – prepared by Natural Resources Secretariat.

Post World War Two conditions brought about changes which created a severe disruption to the traditional culture. The necessities of education, the new phenomenon of family allowance, and other social and economic factors did not allow the Cree to disperse into the various sections of their traditional resource areas as they once had for the greater part of the year, from early fall until late spring. The Cree were forced by circumstances beyond their control to live in one central location all the year around. This new pattern caused a drastic impact and change not only in how the Indian people trapped, fished and hunted in their traditional resource areas, but it also created new dynamics for social interaction, for local government, for housing, for the planning of their lives, and all the other problems associated with moving into a new physical, social and economic environment. It created new pressures upon the natural resources within the home community area. Such a prosaic item as the acquisition of sufficient firewood has become a problem for most of the Bands.

This was not change planned by government for the Cree nor was this change planned by the Cree for themselves. It was change caused by changes in the social and economic fabric of Canada as a nation. The Federal Department responsible for Indians and Indian lands struggled to adapt itself to change but because the political dynamics which could have led to a more meaningful and productive change was lacking, a period of social and economic breakdown was set into motion for the Cree. The policy of unaware or uncaring neglect by the Canadian body politic remained in existence as it had in the pre-war era. While this policy did not have an apparent

effect in the pre-World War Two era, it created conditions leading to disastrous consequences for the post-World War Two era. Neither the Federal Government, the Provincial Government nor the *Cree people were prepared for the* forces of change that were engulfing the Cree. Many other factors, such as increased access to the media and to the outside world of the dominant society, had the effect of creating new and different expectations for the young people. A number of large mining projects in the fifties and early sixties produced outside employment for many young Cree. Increased and better health services were having a positive effect in decreasing the *Cree mortality rate particularly* for infants and children but this also had the effect of increasing the pressure on decreasing resources in a rapidly changing environment. The only continuing and sustained solution that governments found for this emergent situation was welfare and more welfare and by the late sixties the majority of the Cree on the five Northern Flood reserves had become welfare recipients. Through no fault of their own the Cree in the Northern Flood Area had become casualties of change. The social and economic basis for their existence and survival which had sustained them for centuries was being severely disrupted.

The announcement by the Province of Manitoba of a giant hydro project in Northern Manitoba in the mid-1960s brought a promise of hope which changed to despair when the Cree people discovered that the land upon which they lived and from which they had drawn their sustenance would be changed physically and their traditional livelihood from hunting, fishing and trapping would be very adversely affected, and in some

cases destroyed, by changes caused to the land and natural resources by new and different water regimes caused by dams and river diversions . . . Concerning the Cree and the hydro project, one often hears the arguments that the Indians were in a bad position anyway. Comments such as "The project will probably help them" or "One can't stand in the way of progress" are often heard, reflecting misconceptions and misinformation about the actual state of affairs. If we look at the total impact of the hydro project upon a people already suffering the effects of rapid and debilitating change, we find that the effect of the project upon the Band communities has not lessened the horrendous symptoms of rapid change. Examining the statistics we find no evidence of positive social and economic change, rather we find some rather frightening indicators that the project may be exacerbating and accelerating the already devastating effects of social and economic damage in the five Northern Flood Communities. Statistics validating the increase in alcoholism, unemployment, child and family abuse, violent crime and suicide are available.

What is the specific nature of the changes that the project has introduced into the already serious situation of existence for the Northern Cree?

Mr. Keeper then detailed the following five broad categories of impacts and damages: destruction of many components of the resource base; disrupted economic linkages; damage to community infrastructure; new costs; and diminished aesthetic values. He continued:

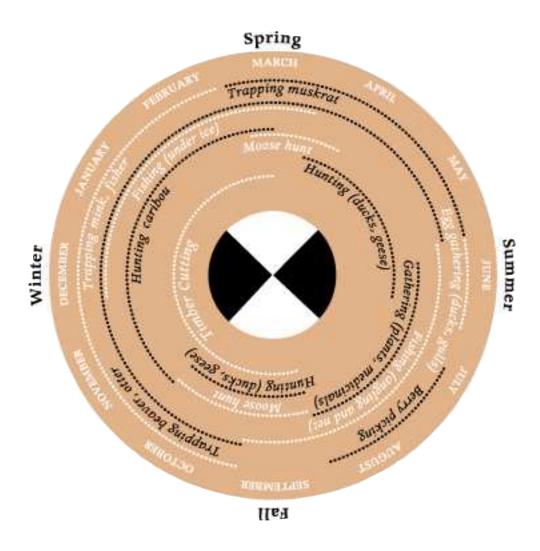
It is difficult to quantify the costs of damages described above and the total impact is much greater than the sum of its parts because what has happened cumulatively to the Cree people from the hydro project is a separate and conceivably the most deadly of impacts because it could be just the added pressure which could cause the dam to break, to put it metaphorically.2

The testimony of the Elders interviewed for this study, who remember the life the Split Lake Cree once enjoyed in their tribal homeland, shows that they, more than anyone else, realize what they have lost.

They speak of a life of freedom and of fulfillment in an environment that they knew and cherished. Many of the Elders recall the time when there was no need for money because the very concept of money was not a part of the Indian way of life. Their life in their resource area was not nomadic, but was an accommodation and an arrangement with nature and her rhythms. The people had everything they required – food, shelter, clothing, recreation, medicine, and their relationship with their Creator.

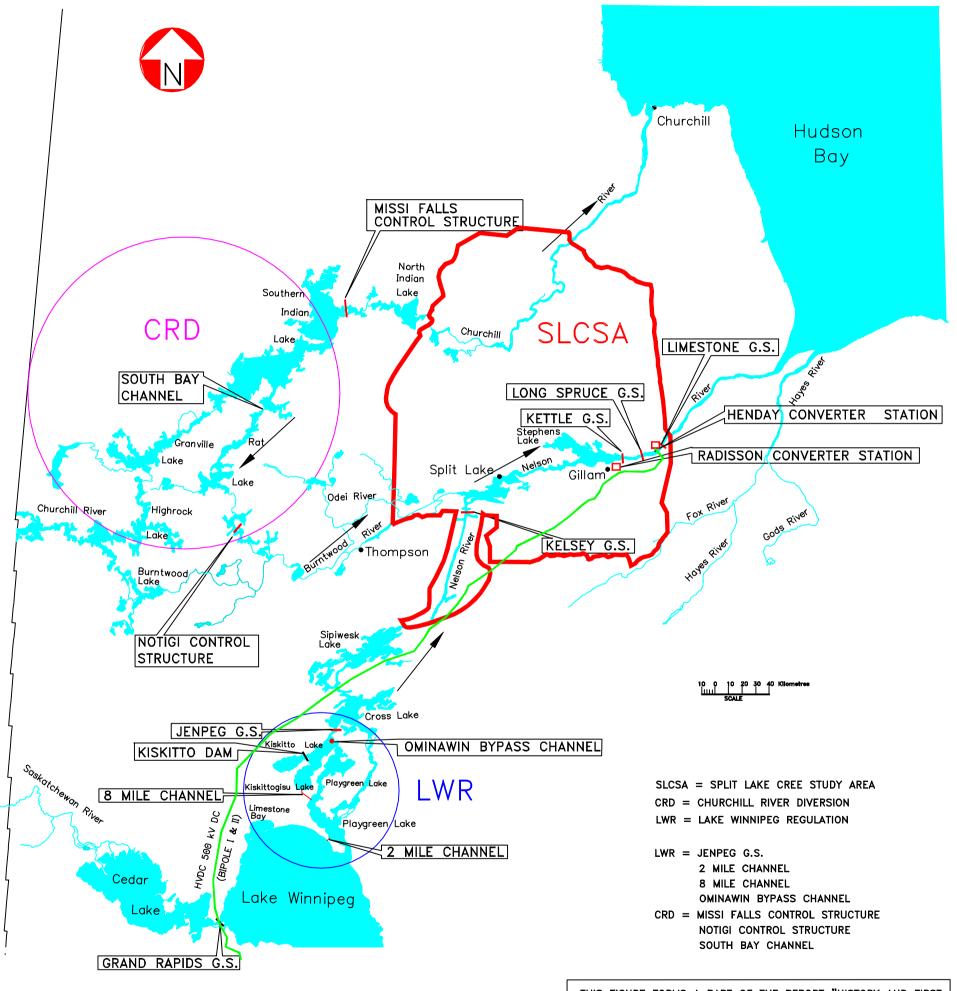
More than anything else, the Elders speak of the water as the lifeblood of their existence. Water, before the hydroelectric project, was always clean. People could get water from the lake and know it was safe. They could fish in the lake near their homes and know that they need not fear the possibility of poison from the fish. Their nets would not be filled with algae and debris. They could land anywhere along the banks of the lakes and rivers; the shorelines had not yet been destroyed and desecrated. They could navigate the lakes and rivers in safety and know what to expect. In the winter time they would know where to travel, where the ice was safe. These things are no longer possible.

The Manitoba Hydro project has so changed the natural environment that the Split Lake Cree have lost their faith and their trust in the land and waters which have always sustained them. The Churchill and Nelson River basins, which were the basis of their homeland, have been radically altered and their resources damaged. Based on their travels throughout the resource area, the Elders and adults also believe that, in the interior, the wildlife and very nature of the land itself have been affected, particularly the low-lying areas near the streams and rivers.



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Principal Manitoba Hydro Projects Affecting the Split Lake Cree Study Area



THIS FIGURE FORMS A PART OF THE REPORT "HISTORY AND FIRST ORDER EFFECTS OF MANITOBA HYDRO PROJECTS AND RELATED ACTIVITIES IN THE SPLIT LAKE CREE STUDY AREA — 1996"

