

**Presented by Lorna Kopelow**  
**on behalf of the communities along routes 201, 202, 203 and 204**  
Public Utilities Board on May 12, 2014

Good morning, everyone.

My life, and the lives of my neighbours, changed in April. I remember the moment in the way most of us remember where we were when Kennedy was shot – a big, unexpected, and horrifying thing. Hydro was proposing to build 2 big dams, and send the power to the U.S. via a large 500kV transmission line, possibly through our land. Since then, my neighbours and I have gathered our energy, squeezed out some time from lives that are already overloaded, and informed ourselves about Keeyask, Conawapa, and the MB MN Transmission Project.

In our view, the plan to construct the dams and to transmit power to the U.S. is a mistaken one. Some key ideas I'm going to share with you have to do with:

- Damage to our heritage
- Financial impact
- Unfairness to our community in particular
- Damage to our ecosystem
- Experimentation with our health
- Threats to our security
- Hydro's flawed route selection process
- Misuse of the concept of expropriation

**Damaging the legacy of generations before us  
and hurting generations to come**

Our reactions to the bad news had several common themes. We saw our plans for the future disappearing. Many of us had planned on building other dwellings on our land for children and grandchildren; if the planned transmission line goes through, those sites will be occupied by 200 ft. high towers and terrain sprayed bare. This is Linn and her family, who says "This has been my home for 26 years. I have raised 6 children and many foster children here. My older son has blueprints drawn up to build and live here



with his family. The build site would now be impossible.” Linn also runs a retreat and healing program for troubled youth, many of them Aboriginal. She teaches them to track, hunt, gather healing plants, and live in the woods. In his book “Last Child in the Woods,” Richard Louv writes, “A growing body of research links our mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to our association with nature...Several of these studies suggest that thoughtful exposure of youngsters to nature can even be a powerful form of therapy for attention-deficit disorders and other maladies.” As well, Linn and her family supplement their diet with bear, deer, and berries from the forest. Other neighbours have had their land passed down to them through several generations, and they are deeply rooted in the heritage they have received.

### **Dramatically reducing the value of our biggest investment**

As we absorbed the bad news, we saw the largest investment one usually makes in life slashed. Who would want to buy a property with this gigantic transmission line going through it?

### **Unfairly exploiting our communities in particular**

Many of us already have a Hydro line running through our land; we have already done our civic duty and helped provide the means for Manitobans to receive electricity. The idea of building another larger and more powerful line alongside the first one is similar to running someone over, and then backing

up and running over them again, only this time with a steamroller. Along the Hwy. 15 portion of this route, the MB MN corridor would be a third line, resulting in a gigantic right-of-way about 700 ft. wide – a Hydro wasteland.

### **A huge blow to our wildlife**

We keenly feel the threat to the loss of our wilderness. We chose our locations because we love the plants and animals, the peace and quiet there. This is Jim and Donna, who have designated a portion of their land as a conservation area. You can see a beaver dam in the background. My next-door neighbours, Ron and Deb, took these photos of Sandhill Cranes on their property. Deb says, “I am of Metis descent, and nature and what it has to offer is very important to me. We enjoy the abundance of wildlife that we see on our property and the natural habitat that we have surrounding us. We do not want to look out our front window and see large steel towers in front of our home.”





### **The crucial role of wetlands**

Much of our area is wetland, like this neighbour's yard, and we all know that wetland plays an important role in preventing flooding and soil erosion, storing, filtering and purifying water, and providing exceptional biodiversity. In fact, during spring and fall migration, I often hear flocks of geese and ducks settling down for the night in the woods near my house.

### **Our rich ecosystem**

Other wildlife in our area are black bears, deer, coyotes, cougars, foxes, beavers, muskrats, mink, otters, skunks, wolves, fishers, woodchucks, squirrels, chipmunks, snowshoe hares, salamanders, frogs, toads, snakes and many, many more.

Our woods and meadows are full of a huge variety of wild plants. Much of the land in our area has never been cleared, and the forests are populated by Tamaracks, Poplars, Cottonwoods, Spruce, Pine, Oak, Highbush Cranberries, Wild Plums, Saskatoons, Chokecherries, Pincherries, Dogwood, Willows – and again, many more.



A great variety of birds live in our area – among them, Bluebirds, Catbirds, Thrushes, Cedar Waxwings, Ravens, Bald Eagles, Great-horned Owls, Screech Owls, Great Grey Owls, Killdeer, Sandpipers, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Pileated Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, and Northern Shrikes, to name only a sampling. Near me there are at least 5 nesting pairs of Whip-poor-wills, a species which is on Manitoba's Threatened list. Now comes the only part of this presentation where there will be some humour – the morning traffic report on CBC radio last month included a warning to watch out for the large flock of wild turkeys who were occupying Hwy. 15. And the Hwy. 15 portion of the proposed route that I've been describing is in a far less wooded area than the rest of the proposed corridor's path. As you can imagine, the soundtrack that accompanies our lives is very pleasant, ranging from near-silence to full birdsong. You can gather how we feel about the addition of a constant drone from a high-voltage power line.

As for plants, in our neck of the woods you will find pitcher plants, the rare pink lady's slipper, many kinds of asters, goldenrod, marsh marigolds, Culver's root, which is on Manitoba's list of threatened plants – and others too numerous to name. This slide shows some pictures taken by a resident who says "The pictures contain just a small sampling of the wildflowers on my property, all in a little spot right where the hydro line would go." Hydro has not assessed the huge environmental impact that would be caused by a transmission line along this route.



## **Treating Manitobans like guinea pigs**

Of course we also thought of our health. While Hydro maintains that a definitive link has not yet been proven between illness and proximity to a Hydro line, who wants to be a guinea pig for this experiment? This is a photo from Ian who says “We have gone to great lengths to ensure that our daughter grows up in a very healthy environment and we are worried about the impact on our family. “ Ian is also concerned about the use of herbicides on the right-of-way. As he says, “With such a high water table around here, these things can get into the water very easily. We have animals, livestock, and run an all-natural product business that can all be compromised from this line.”



## **Hydro is threatening our security....**

Hydro corridors in the country quickly become routes for off-road vehicles and snowmobiles. With a Hydro corridor going through our land, an intact, private and beautiful space becomes a noisy, public roadway, bringing trespassers, vandalism, crime, theft of firewood, litter, illegal hunting on our land, and partying. Forest fires are frequently caused by a spark from an all-terrain vehicle igniting vegetation. One of our neighbours has been a rural fire

chief for 30 years, and has fought many a fire that travelled rapidly down the cleared Hydro corridors.

### **And ironically, our ability to heat our homes**

As well, many of us heat our homes with firewood, and losing a large swath of forest would have a direct impact on our ability to provide ourselves with heat.

### **A flawed route selection process**

I would also like to let this panel know my view on Hydro's process in choosing potential routes. While they claim to (I am quoting here) "involve the public throughout the route selection and environmental assessment processes", "provide clear, timely, and relevant information and responses" and "deliver a public engagement process that is adaptive and inclusive", in fact I was unaware that Round One of route selection was even going on. Some people in our area received notices in their mailboxes, and some did not. The route that would go across my land was not even among the routes considered in Round One. Suddenly, as I described at the start of this presentation, I got a notice in my mail stating that Hydro had narrowed their choices for routes down to two (without input from people living along those 2 routes), and that one of them would go across my property. This, to me, is neither logical nor transparent. Furthermore, I feel that every landowner along a potential right-of-way should be informed by phone. The cost of doing this is nothing compared to the financial penalty that this project would apply to landowners. If Hydro cannot deliver on their commitment to a transparent process, how can we trust them to do the right thing for Manitobans?

### **An abuse of power**

We are well aware that the state has the legal ability to expropriate private property for public good. However, Hydro's view of what is in the public interest is dramatically misaligned with the view of our community and, I believe, most Manitobans. Hydro's chief motivation for building the MB MN transmission line is to sell power to the U.S., not to provide electricity to Manitobans. They are making risky gambles with an extreme footprint, all in the name of endless growth.

## **The need is not there...**

Hydro claims a secondary motivation in this project, providing energy security for us citizens. However I am absolutely certain that power to abundantly meet our needs could be accomplished through energy conservation. I am in favour of Hydro's current conservation ideas – its Power Smart initiatives, the amazing new Hydro building downtown, or the notion of charging customers at higher rates for energy consumed beyond a certain threshold. However I **know** that these initiatives are just a drop in the bucket of what could be done. For example, there is real innovation happening on the demand reduction side, such as new advances in sensor and reporting technology which allow homeowners to make more informed choices about how and when they use electricity. We (and the energy-hungry American customers) have merely scratched the surface of demand-side management.

## **But there's plenty of risk**

I would like to talk about risk. Energy conservation is a sure thing while mega-dams like Keeyask and Conawapa and the Hydro lines that accompany them not only damage living beings and ecosystems, they are financially risky. The proposed expenditure is enormous and it seems that the plan is based on hope – hope that the price of gas and other sources of energy will go up (while in fact, they are going down), hope that our energy needs will grow (which they will if we do not conserve.) If Hydro's hopes turn out to be unfounded, it is the citizens of Manitoba who will pay for their mistaken forecasts and decisions. This does not seem like a healthy plan to me.

## **Recommendations**

What I would like to see is for Hydro to step out of its traditional way of thinking – mega dams, big power lines, money-making deals with the U.S. that, to be blunt, would make money on the backs of landowners like me – and to step into a healthier, more modern mindset. Diversifying energy sources, taking a serious look at solar, wind, and geothermal energy, creating a really strong thrust towards conservation, working to shine as a world leader in demand-side management – this, to me, is clearly the way to go and the good path to follow. Ordinary citizens are increasingly aware of the value of



conservation and alternative energy sources; these measures are appreciated and approved of by most people, at a time when we are looking great planetary changes in the face. On the other hand, ordinary citizens, especially those living on marginal or fixed incomes, would be extremely upset by the increasing Hydro bills that would follow on the heels of this project.

As you can gather from this presentation, life for me and my neighbours since April has not been good. We feel sad and worried and we have nightmares.

Our main source of hope, panel members, is you. We hope that you, as an independent body, will listen to our views and ideas with your hearts and your heads; we hope that you will act as conscientious gatekeepers to protect our province from the numerous and negative consequences of Hydro's plan; we hope that you will oppose this project. Finally, of course, we trust that the Manitoba government will be guided by a wise and just verdict on this project. That verdict would be a resounding "No!"

Thank-you very much for listening.