



York Factory First Nation

YORK LANDING, MANITOBA R0B 2B0

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**COUNCILLOR GORDON WASTESICOOT
PRESENTATION AT PUB NFAT HEARING
WINNIPEG FEBRUARY 27, 2014**

1. Good afternoon Members of the Panel. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Gordon Wastesicoot. I am a Councillor of York Factory First Nation. We are Cree from the Hudson Bay coast and our community York Landing is located in northern Manitoba. Here with me is my grandson Tyson Wastesicoot, a youth representative from our First Nation. We are honoured to appear and speak on behalf of our people, and especially our youth who will inherit the outcomes of hydro-development planned for our lands and waters.

2. In the coming weeks you will be undertaking an important task on behalf of the people of Manitoba: to evaluate the Needs for and Alternatives to Manitoba Hydro's Preferred Development Plan.

3. As you know, the Keeyask Generating Station is a key part of that plan. York Factory First Nation is a partner in Keeyask. Our First Nation chose to become a partner in 2009, following many years of study and discussions amongst our people. We decided to support Keeyask because we believe it is in our best interest to do so.



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4. As you know, the Clean Environment Commission recently concluded a public hearing that examined the environmental, social and economic effects of the Keeyask Project. York Factory was an active participant in that hearing as a Keeyask partner. At the hearing we spoke honestly about the effects of northern hydro development and we spoke about our hopes and expectations for Keeyask.

5. York Factory First Nation also submitted a report as part of the Keeyask EIS. That report is called *Kipekiskwaywinan*, which means Our Voices in our language. *Kipekiskwaywinan* is a very important document to our community because it tells York Factory's story of Keeyask and expresses the concerns, experiences and priorities of Members.

6. I understand *Kipekiskwaywinan* is going to be submitted as part of the evidence in this hearing. I strongly encourage you to take the time to read our entire report.

7. As we explain in *Kipekiskwaywinan*, the decision to support the Keeyask Project was not an easy one and was certainly not made quickly or without serious consideration. YFFN participated in hundreds of meetings and workshops related to the Keeyask Project,



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over more than 10 years. Members have had the opportunity to discuss and share their views, feelings, fears and hopes about becoming a partner in the Keeyask Project. There is much hope in the community regarding the benefits that the Keeyask Project will bring, but members understand there will also be negative impacts.

8. York Landing is physically isolated from the outside world. There is no all-weather road. We travel by ferry and boat in the summer, by ice road in winter, and by plane all year round. This isolation means there are major challenges to access health care, social services, education, employment, business and economic opportunities. We must work very hard to overcome such obstacles.

9. Our community was relocated from York Factory to York Landing in 1957. It was immediately after we arrived at York Landing that construction began on the Kelsey dam located just upstream on the Nelson River. We have been living with hydro development since then, for over half a century – and for all those years we saw few, if any lasting benefits. We have seen poverty, chronic unemployment, lack of education – while the people of Manitoba have benefited, and continue to benefit, from the electricity produced by the Nelson River.



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10. After carefully weighing the pros and cons, York Factory members made the decision to support the Keeyask Project and join the Partnership. The community chose to pursue the potential benefits that could result from the Keeyask Project for both the current generation and for generations to come. We made the decision to sustain and achieve respect for our Cree culture and to have a voice in the Partnership. It is also for this reason that we speak to you here today.

11. The benefits of Keeyask include training and employment opportunities that would not otherwise be available to our community. There will also be financial benefits from business opportunities and investment income. The increased capacity and income will empower York Factory to improve our community's socio-economic conditions, which will ultimately benefit generations to come.

12. When I talk with our community members about the future, we always end up talking about our children, grandchildren, and those not yet born. We want their future to be better. We want to produce immediate, sustainable, tangible benefits for our First Nation.

13. It will take many years to fully realize the benefits of the Projects. The combined Projects, Keeyask, Conawapa, Bipole III and



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Keewatinoow Converter Station will all have a detrimental impact to our way of life and infringe on our treaty rights to hunt and fish in our traditional territory. The equity model for the Keeyask Hydropower Limited Partnership is positive, but it has its limitations. For example, payments on dividends will take some time to accumulate.

14. At the same time we are hopeful that as one of the in-vicinity First Nations who will be most directly affected by the Conawapa Project we remain optimistic that we will be able to work through the many hurdles and obstacles that lay ahead for us with Manitoba Hydro and the Province of Manitoba to reach a mutually satisfying conclusion for the Conawapa Project for the benefit of all Manitobans.

15. Our members are concerned with what the Preferred Development Plan will mean for their electrical bills. Electrical rates are certain to go up. Between Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada approved rates and the National Housing Act where HVAC units run 24 hours a day 365 days a week our bills will go up. We experience this every spring when the weather warms up and Manitoba Hydro employees are in the community turning off electricity to some of our community members' houses. We as a First Nation are also concerned that we will not be able to pay for our infrastructure hydro bills. A cursory financial analysis leads us to



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conclude that we have paid for our own mitigation since our 1995 Comprehensive Implementation Agreement was signed. We will not allow this to occur any longer.

16. We hope that the grinding poverty experienced by our members will be alleviated by our agreements with Manitoba Hydro, the Province of Manitoba, and Canada, including the 1995 Comprehensive Implementation Agreement. We are the ones who suffer the most from hydro-electric development and experience the least benefits while Southern Manitoba enjoys the financial windfalls or record profits of Manitoba hydro through healthcare, roads and services generally. We will not allow this to occur any more. We require the same living conditions experienced by Manitobans generally including improvements to our quality of water, all weather road access, and improved infrastructure and housing.

17. Since the beginning of hydro-development, we have paid dearly through flooded lands, environmental degradation, destruction of habitat for all forms of wildlife and curtailed trapping and hunting in our traditional territory and Resource Management Area.

18. We are not going away. We have been on the Lower Nelson River since we can remember. We have a word in Cree: Askiy. It



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means the whole of the land, water, plants, people, the four legged and two legged and the winged ones, animals, and all the creatures on *Askiy*. We have always cared for *Askiy*. We care for *Askiy* today. And will continue to care for *Askiy* into the future.

19. I would like to thank the PUB for providing us the opportunity to share these comments today. I look forward to a respectful, and constructive hearing.

Ekosi.