



DEH CHO FIRST NATIONS

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May 1, 2003

Alan Ehrlich

Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board

Re: Response to Information Request issued to Deh Cho First Nations

Deh Cho First Nations have undertaken a unique process in achieving certainty regarding lands and resources within Denendeh. Deh Cho leadership determined in 1990 that the existing processes to "settle" lands and resources were inadequate, as they did not allow for recognition of a Dene cultural and spiritual expression. Western, Euro-Canadian thought compartmentalizes and quantifies data and natural systems, as opposed to Dene systems which are inclusive, holistic and reflect the intricate relationships between Dene culture and nature.

Information Request: What portion of the Mackenzie River is important to the spiritual well-being of the DCFN?

While the above question asks, "What portion of the Mackenzie River is important to the spiritual well-being of the DCFN?", the question itself is culturally inappropriate. The whole of the Mackenzie River (Deh Cho) is important to the spiritual well-being of the Dene and Métis of the Deh Cho region. Portions cannot be fragmented away as spiritually unimportant.

Creation myths of the Dene outline the significance of water and the creation of the Deh Cho as a central theme. Yamoriah was instrumental in forming and defining the water systems of the region. Altering or tampering with the Deh Cho will be perceived as sacrilegious. As reflected in the Land Withdrawals recently negotiated with the Federal Government, watersheds and natural systems are central to the maintenance of a healthy, sustainable environment and the long-term viability of Dene culture. The name of our region, the Deh Cho, translates into 'Big River'. The core of our identity is the Deh Cho. If the river were to be altered, it would alter the identity of our people. As such, the Deh Cho is integral to the culture and spiritual well-being of the Dene and Métis people of the Deh Cho territory.

Deh Cho fish have been a critical food source for the Deh Cho Dene since time immemorial. For the Dene and Métis of the Deh Cho, the whole of the Deh Cho is a traditional fishing river that provides crucial subsistence fishing, wildlife

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habitat, river transport, traditional homesteads, and medicines. Thus, the Deh Cho holds immense spiritual and cultural importance for the Dene and Métis. Therefore, any proposed activity on the Deh Cho affects all Deh Cho communities, not just those communities located directly on the river.

We have stated that the Deh Cho is the life and core of our culture. In the purification process, air, water, earth, and fire have healing powers. The Deh Cho waters have spiritual significance in that the waters have the power to heal, to purify and to cleanse oneself. We have also stated that we feel gratitude at drinking the waters of the Deh Cho and that the whole of the River is the lifeblood of the culture and sustains us.

Information Request: Is the spiritual value of the Mackenzie River diminished or altered by river seismic exploration in a manner different from existing river traffic? If so, how is the spiritual value changed?

Dene people have stated that the spiritual value of the Deh Cho will be diminished by seismic exploration. Existing river traffic is predominantly for subsistence fishing and for the transportation of people or goods. Seismic exploration differs in its intent, as it is using the waters of the Dene in an intrusive way. The intent of seismic is also to take information about the subsurface lands, for monetary gain. Dene people have also expressed concern that the cumulative effects of seismic will have an adverse effect on Deh Cho fish, a traditional and critical food source for their people. Many Dene have also expressed that the purification and healing powers of the water will be made unusable and that seismic on the Deh Cho offends Dene values and may destroy the lifeblood of the river. We have also expressed that Dene values are more important than money; values are a way of life and we must look toward the future generations, not today.

Mahsi Cho,
Deh Cho First Nations



DEH CHO FIRST NATIONS



HEAD OFFICE-HAY RIVER DENE RESERVE (ADMIN BUILDING)

BOX 38, HAY RIVER RESERVE, N.W.T X0E 0R0

BRANCH OFFICE-BOX 89, FORT SIMPSON, N.W.T. X0E 0N0

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 1:05 pm KB
 MAY 12 2003
 MACKENZIE VALLEY
 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
 REVIEW BOARD

Facsimile

Date: MAY 8/03
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 From: LAURA PITKANEN
 Operator: RMC
 Number of pages including cover sheet: 3

*I.R. Response for Western Geco file.
 Thank you for waiting, I had to get
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