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Re: Comments on Deze Energy Corporation Ltd's proposed Taltson Hydroelectric Expansion Project.

The following concerns are being raised about the proposed routing for the **Deze Energy Corporation Ltd.'s proposed Talston Hydroelectric Expansion Project** proposed for construction in the traditional territory of Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation. Based on my scholarly review of the literature related to health, and resource development, knowledge of the socio-economic, cultural and political context of resource development in the proposed region, I am concerned that the project will have a significant impact on the well-being of Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation. Among my concerns are the potential effects of the project on youth from the community.



1. Between 1996 and 2001, I worked with Lustel K'e Dene First Nation on a scientific study, funded by the West Kitikmeot Slave Study Society, focused on the socio-economic and cultural effects of diamond mining in the region; unlike other studies for environmental assessment and government purposesⁱ, the work was a community-based project involving definition of locally meaningful indicators/measures of well-being and the use of those indicators in a longitudinal study.
2. Given the community-based orientation, the project resulted in numerous reports and studies including effects not scoped or considered in current permitting or environmental assessment processes nor in censuses/monitoring carried out through the government of the Northwest Territories or federal government.
3. From our research, we concluded that community members perceive there to be an intrinsic link between the health of the land and the health and well-being of the community. The land is considered to be alive with anthropogenic (human) qualities which require care and respect. The greatest evidence of this worldview is the oral history, contemporary beliefs and pilgrimages to the "old lady of the falls" on the Lockhart River northeast of the community. Such beliefs in the anthropomorphic or qualities of the land are not uncommon among First Nations people in Canada and have been well documented in other academic studies; Cruikshank (2009) describes this worldview as one of "sentient landscapes". Others use the term "cultural landscape" (Davidson-Hunt and Berkes, 2003ⁱⁱ).
4. I understand the community has lived on the region since time immemorial. The relationship between the Denesoline and other local First Nations communities to the landscape has developed over many generations. Anthropologists and archaeologists have dated hunting activity in the region back to 10 000 years or following the little ice-age. Oral histories from elders Zepp Casaway (deceased), Jonas Catholique (deceased) and Maurice Lockhart are rich in references to landscapes and wildlife (large beavers) known to have lived in the area thousands of years ago (Hanks 1997)ⁱⁱⁱ. As a result of this diachronic relationship, the Denesoline have develop systems of "managing" resources that have ensure the health and sustainability of the land, water, wildlife as well as their communities. This management system, like many other First Nations resource management practices, strategies, and systems is structured around notions of respect and reciprocity.
5. I've come to understand that the community has a very close relationship to the land; caribou, fish and other species still contribute significantly the diet. Hunting, trapping, fishing and berry picking are still fundamental elements of the culture and livelihood of the community. Even for young people, for whom the land does not represent significantly in the subsistence accounting of day to day life, the "land" remains fundamental to their personal and cultural identities.
6. Over the last thirty to forty years, a literature has emerged to explain the effects of large scale development activity on Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Many are in depth qualitative case studies with First Nations and Inuit communities^{iv}. In addition, several new epidemiological studies emerging around the importance of self-government to the

mental health and well-being of First Nations communities are instructive, and are discussed below.

7. Among the most well developed literature on the effects of resource development relates to the quality and availability of traditional food and the viability of traditional harvesting practices. The research on the James Bay Hydro-electric Project is among the most well referenced^v.
8. General anxieties and insecurities in the Community: “People living directly from the land and water around them are acutely aware of indicators that things are right or wrong with the natural world... Unnatural disruptions – for example river impoundment are regulations, or environmental contamination – are profoundly disturbing and give rise to deep seated anxiety and insecurity” (Usher et al. 1992: 114)^{vi}
9. Much research on the importance of the land to First Nations peoples has been qualitative in nature. Arguments have also been made about Aboriginal rights and interests in land and resources through jurisprudence and on a case by case basis. Few studies have endeavoured to quantitatively or statistically correlate changes in health and well-being with factors beyond those conventional determinants of employment, education, and income.
10. The exception is a quantitative study from the University of British Columbia. Chandler and Lalonde (1998) over many years examined why some First Nations communities experience dramatically higher rates of social illness (suicide) than the national average (150 times higher) while other First Nations communities in British Columbia experience virtually no suicide. After examining all available statistical data on the socio-economic conditions of communities, they were surprised to discover that income, employment and education did not matter or were in some cases inversely related to suicide outcomes. What mattered instead was the level or extent of cultural continuity or self-determination in the community. Their research, it is established that:

“bands that ... have met with measurable success in recovering community control over their civic lives (ie. that, in addition to having taken concrete steps to preserve their cultural past, have achieved a measure of self-government, have effectively militated for aboriginal title to traditional lands, and have gained a measure of control over their health, education, child protection and rural systems) suffer no youth suicide, while those who fail to meet all or most of these standards of self-determination have youth suicide rates more than 150 times the national average” (Chandler and Lalonde 2004: 2).
11. The work is significant in its dismissal of conventional indicators of “development” (employment, education, income) as important to health. Due to large number of communities involved, the length of time in which the study was undertaken and the quantitative (epidemiological) approach of those involved, the study also goes beyond the case study scale of understanding of health and self-determination. The study is particularly significant in its affirmation of First Nations efforts to assert their rights to lands and resources.

12. Based on my knowledge of the study, and my knowledge of the factors influencing the health and well-being of northern communities and specifically Lutsel K'e, I believe the results are generalizable to the context of Lutsel K'e and similar communities attempting to assert control over the way in which development takes place on their traditional lands.
13. In my opinion, should the proposed project be allowed to proceed in the traditional territory of Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, without their consent, it amounts to a contradiction in the efforts of the community to assert their rights and self-determination and maintain the cultural well-being of the their community. In that context, an approval of the proposed project is likely to have an impact on the community similar to those identified by Chandler and Lalonde
14. Among the members of the community particularly at risk from these efforts to undermine local self-determination are the local youth. As noted by Chandler and Lalonde, youth of any culture are at risk for problems such as suicide and other high risk behaviors due to the emotional and mental health sensitivities associated with adolescence. It is for this reason that the statistics on suicide are so high among youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Chandler and Lalonde (1998) follow by suggesting that Aboriginal youth may be doubly at risk for suicide due to the discontinuities (disruptions) that have historically and continue to take place in their socio-cultural worlds (e.g. residential schools, disconnect between media images and local realities).
15. In my opinion, many Aboriginal youth in the north may also be in a position of triple jeopardy due to the fact that their identity, is not only linked to their personal and socio-cultural worlds but is also closely linked to the health and sustainability of their land and resources. Many youth, particularly young men, identify closely with caribou and caribou hunting, even if they themselves are not practicing caribou hunters. If disruptions in self and community (culture) can manifest in the kinds of health problems described by Chandler and Lalonde (1998), a disruption or threat to the 'land' (for example caribou) can compound such vulnerability in many devastating ways including suicide, drug and alcohol use and other high risk behaviours. The quote below from a community member from 1998 provides additional perspective:
16. "The Treaties are not being followed. The land is not being protected ...there has been no consent from us yet the mining goes ahead. This ends up with the community being upset. We try and talk about it but some people feel they can't do anything about it. They get used to not having control so they don't come to meetings or don't learn what is going on. They don't want to think about it (not having control) – they keep it inside" (Lutsel K'e Community Member quoted in Parlee, O'Neil and Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation 2007)^{vii}.
17. I am aware of the arguments that such negative (potential) social effects, while sad, are offset by benefits of employment and business development. Mining companies and government bodies have argued that resource development will contribute to the well-being of Northern communities through employment and business development. Based

on research in Lutsel K'e from 1998-2001, some of the main concerns that I have with these assertions include:

18. The empirical evidence on youth suicide among First Nations communities in British Columbia demonstrates that employment and income are not protective factors against youth suicide. (Chandler and Lalonde 1998)
19. Employment in the mining industry while providing individual benefits may have a negative net impact on the community. This perspective is illustrated in the following quote from a community member from 1996.

“Overall I think that the mining development are having a negative effect on the community. The whole thing is short-sighted. There may be instant financial gratification but it is only short term. There is not enough understanding of what impact it is having on families. And the benefits are not happening for everyone. There is not enough training and no daycare for families. If you look at it that, the benefits don't measure up to all the problems. Some employment has been created but at what cost? (Community Member 1996 quoted in Parlee, O'Neil and Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation 2007).

20. One of the biggest issues is the misconceptions around training and employment. Although many promises are made to increase employment in the community, this does not happen to any great extent. What happens instead is that: trained and gainfully employed individuals from the community are lured away from community jobs on the promise of higher wages; the unemployed remain unemployed. This employment pattern has additional, and destabilizing effects on the community arising from
 - (a) a “brain drain” as skilled labour moves into the resource sector, resulting a decrease in the quality and availability of local services;
 - (b) a decrease in social cohesion due to an emergent gap between those employed in the mining industry and those unemployed.
 - (c) Those employed in the mining industry (2 week rotations) are not able to hunt, trap and fish as before due to the changed availability and structure of time. This has meant a decrease in their ability to provide traditional food for the family as well as contribute to the traditional economy of the community);
 - (d) Those employed in the mining industry (2 week rotations) are not able to volunteer in the community as before due to the changed availability and structure of time with consequent effects on the social and cultural well-being of the community, particularly youth (e.g. sports activities etc).
 - (e) The families of those employed in the mining industry tend to experience an increase in stress and anxiety (particularly women/mothers) as they must provide for and manage the family and household during the 2 weeks rotation;
 - (f) General increase in drug use and related crime;



21. At the outset of the projects, these (above) were described as the short term effects of the development and were expected to dissipate over time. It has been 10 years since the development of the first diamond mine and these effects have not dissipated but have arguably increased in significance due to the increasing number of mining exploration and developments projects that have been proposed and/or have come into operation.

Please include these comments in your decision about Deze Energy Corporation Ltd's proposed Taltson Hydroelectric Expansion Project. Please let me know if you require additional information.

Sincerely,

Brenda Parlee, PhD

ⁱ Government of the Northwest Territories. 2007. Communities and Diamonds—Socioeconomic Impacts in the Communities of: Behchokö, Gamètì, Whatì, Wekwèètì, Detah, Ndilo, Łutsel K'e, and Yellowknife (2006 Annual Report) http://www.itl.gov.nt.ca/industrial_benefit/pdf/August%2007%20Com%20and%20Dia%20complete%20web.pdf

ⁱⁱ Davidson-Hunt, I. and F. Berkes. 2003. Learning as you journey: Anishinaabe perception of social-ecological environments and adaptive learning. *Conservation Ecology* 8(1): 5. [online] URL: <http://www.consecol.org/vol8/iss1/art5/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Hanks, C. C. (1997). Ancient knowledge of ancient sites: Tracing Dene Identity from the late Pleistocene and Holocene. *At a Crossroads: Archaeology and First Peoples in Canada*. (Nicholas, G.P. and T.D. Andrews eds.) Burnaby, BC: Archaeology Press.

^{iv} Archibald R. & Ritter, M. (2001). "Canada: From Fly-In, Fly-Out to Mining Metropolis." *In Large Mines And The Community: Socioeconomic and Environmental Effects in Latin America, Canada, and Spain*. IDRC/World Bank.

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^v Kuhnlein HV, Receveur O. (1996). Dietary change and traditional food systems of indigenous peoples. *Annual Review of Nutrition* 16:417–42.

^{vi} Usher, P.J., P. Cobb, M. Loney, and G. Spafford. (1992). Hydro-Electric Development and the English River Anishanabe: Ontario Hydro's Past Record and Present Approaches to Treaty and Aboriginal Rights, Social Impact Assessment and Mitigation and Compensation. In *Report for Nishanawbe Aksi Nation: Grand Council Treaty #3 and Tema-Augama Anishanabai*. Ottawa: PJ Usher Consulting.

^{vii} Parlee, B., John D. O'Neil and Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation. (2007) "The Dene Way of Life: Perspectives on Health from Canada's North". *Journal of Canadian Studies* 41(3): 112-133.