

Comments for May 10th deadline: Talston Hydro Expansion and Transmission Line

From: Dave Olesen, Pilot, Guide, Owner/Operator: Hoarfrost River Huskies Ltd.

Att: Alan Ehrlich

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Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board

By e-mail as attachment, sent May 10 2010

Good Morning:

Below are comments for this May 10 deadline, in Point Form:

1) The drought continues. Lake, stream and river levels all around the east end of Great Slave Lake and the upper Taltson River are extremely low. I know this not by measurements, but by looking with my eyes. It is obvious. I have lived here year-round for 23 years. This winter was the driest we have ever seen in that period; total snowfall was considerably less than half of what we would consider “normal.” The climate is in a time of rapid change. No matter what the various factors causing this, it will have big and unpredictable effects on water flow in this region. A project that depends on water flow should be given serious scrutiny with this aspect in mind. I have heard very little reference to this in the discussion of this massive project.

2) This project is too big and potentially disruptive – not to mention financially risky, with the risk eventually shouldered by taxpayers – to be built on “spec,” i.e. built as an incentive to *potential* developments, somewhere and sometime, which *might* use the electricity provided. If the project goes ahead at all it should deliver electricity to known, already-existing, long-term users. I realize this is not an “environmental” concern, but if the project fails, its physical existence as a stark reminder of folly will be there as a part of the environment.

3) The proposed transmission line route around the east end of Great Slave Lake passes through the center of an area under very serious consideration to become a National Park. Given points 1 and 2 above, this is not acceptable. If this project to expand the Taltson power production and build a new power line goes forward, the line should follow cutlines, roads, and bridges that already exist. If it is routed to “piggyback” along on the lines of existing infrastructure, it will be more accessible for upkeep and repair. Its addition to the cumulative effects on the region will be minimized, and it can more efficiently supply power to existing grids, cities, and developments: grids such as the existing Snare Hydro grid; cities such as Yellowknife; and developments such as Avalon at Thor Lake.

4) This is the thin edge of a wedge. The proponents of this project want more. They want to involve other rivers and streams and watersheds in this project. With an eye to a transmission line around the east end of Great Slave Lake, the NWT Power Corp. is

already assessing the potential of other rivers – all of them smaller than the Taltson, all of them pristine and wild, several of them within the proposed National Park – with an eye to feeding the main “artery” once it is established. This does not stop here, with one skinny little line snaking north to supply power to one yet-to-be-opened diamond mine and several soon-to-be-closed diamond mines. We have been down this road (i.e. a proposal to combine damming and disruption of a series of low-volume marginal water flows, in order to achieve a viable output of electricity) with Glacier Power’s simplistic and poorly-thought-out proposal in 1997. The NWT Water Board was wise enough to reject that proposal *before* its proponent wasted millions of his investors’ dollars attempting to evaluate it. Deze Energy, on the other hand, is trying to sell us a version of the same idea. Their political backers have pointed out that “a huge amount of money has already been spent” looking at the expansion and the transmission route around the east end of the lake – implying that such expenditure should somehow justify continuing with the plan they propose. “Throwing good money after bad” is the phrase my grandfather might have used here.

5) I realize I am being a NIMBY (Not In My Backyard). Take it elsewhere, I say... while merrily using the luxuries of our modern, electricity-infused civilization. To that charge I plead guilty. However, I look out the window day after day and I see no one – no remaining full-time, year-round human residents. Year by year, the far east end of McLeod Bay is eerily quiet, and becoming more so. My loyalty and my duty in this situation is clear – to try to give a human voice to this wild, pristine and virtually untouched part of the world.

6) There is so much wild country here that one can easily begin to think that no project, no matter how massive, could ever have a serious, long-term impact on it. That sort of thinking is a version of the “there are so many cod they will never run out” or “there are so many passenger pigeons, or bison, or whales, that we can never shoot them all.” **The hills, forests, tundra, and watersheds of the upper Taltson, the Snowdrift, the Lockhart, Hoarfrost, Barnston, and Waldron Rivers are a massive reservoir already – a reservoir of silence, of timeless wilderness, of free-flowing water and shorelines not marred by the “bathtub ring” of fluctuating, artificially-controlled water levels. But this reservoir can be drained, and once gone it will be lost forever.**

With that I will close.

Thank you for considering these comments and adding them to the public record.

Sincerely,

Dave Olesen