



NORTHWEST TERRITORY MÉTIS NATION

November 20, 2012

Gahcho Kué Panel,
Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board,
Box 938,
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2N7

Gahcho Kue Mine Project Values, Interests, and Issues Identified at NWT Métis Nation Community TK Study Sessions

Introduction

The NWTMN held community sessions in Hay River, Fort Smith, and Fort Resolution to review and discuss traditional knowledge (TK) and traditional Métis land use information relevant to the Gahcho Kue Mine Project assessment area, which includes the areas in and around the winter access road, the mine site, and the mine's drainage area. At these sessions, elders and harvesters shared information about their land use in, around, and to the north of the East Arm of Great Slave Lake.

These elders/harvesters viewed video footage of the landscape along the proposed winter access road, Kennady Lake, and the drainage area flowing northward from the mine site. They also viewed the Chipewyan language version of a DeBeers video of the proposed mine construction/operation process. They then identified Métis values and interests associated with this landscape, both social and environmental, discussed potential impacts to these values and interests, and raised issues that the NWTMN feels must be addressed by DeBeers and/or regulatory agencies before the mine is permitted.

A detailed description of the values, interests, and issues associated with the proposed mine development will be contained in the NWT Métis Nation Traditional Knowledge Assessment of the Gahcho Kue Project report, but this interim summary has been prepared to help inform the Panel and DeBeers Canada Ltd. of the values and interests associated with the mine and the issues that need to be addressed during the pending public hearing phase of the mine's current environmental impact assessment (EIA) process. This summary also includes information and perspectives derived through a literature review prior to the community sessions.

NWTMN Indigenous Métis Values and Interests

Based on a review of historical literature that was expanded upon and corroborated through the community sessions, there is clear evidence of significant and sustained use by NWTMN indigenous Métis of the landscape north of the East Arm of Great Slave Lake since the late 1700s for traditional harvesting purposes, particularly for the harvesting of caribou, as well as some musk-ox, during the winter months, but also for subsistence fishing, trapping, and plant harvesting for tools. The knowledge gained during these harvesting activities -- coupled with the Métis knowledge of and fluency in the Chipewyan, English, and French languages -- led to the Métis being sought after and engaged as guides and interpreters for explorers and adventurers traveling into that country during the 1800s and early 1900s.

There is considerable evidence of Métis hunters and their families, particularly the Beaulieu and Mandeville families – which are interrelated to most NWTMN indigenous Métis families today – traveling, hunting, and camping in and around the major lakes in the general area encompassed between the Yellowknife River / MacKay Lake to the west, Aylmer Lake / Lockhart River to the north, Artillery Lake to the east, and Great Slave Lake (McLeod Bay and Hearne Channel) to the south. This area encompasses the Gahcho Kue Project assessment area identified by the NWTMN.

There is further evidence that Métis use of this and other barren-land areas for hunting and trapping purposes extended throughout the 1800s and continues to this day. During the early to mid-1900s, Métis harvesters continued to travel by dog team, and later by skidoo, to the barren land east of Artillery Lake and north of McLeod Bay for caribou and white fox. Within the past decades, NWTMN indigenous Métis harvesters have traveled from Yellowknife, Fort Resolution and Fort Smith by truck and/or skidoo north along the Contwoyto Lake winter access road as well as east and northeast along Great Slave Lake as far as the borders of the Thelon Game Sanctuary, mainly for caribou, but also hunting wolves and trapping some furbearers. Subsistence fishing has occurred continually in the East Arm of Great Slave Lake.

There have been some shifts in historic land use patterns, particularly in relation to caribou harvesting, but these have been based primarily on two factors: location of the caribou herds (which have changed over time) and ease of access to herds for hunting purposes. There appears to be less caribou over-wintering in the area north of McLeod Bay than there was in the 1800s and 1900s. Furthermore, for a large part of the 1900s, caribou regularly came into the East Arm of Great Slave Lake, often as close to Fort Resolution as the Simpson Islands, so harvesters did not have to travel far to get meat and hides. Caribou were also plentiful in and around Gordon and McKay Lakes, north of Yellowknife, up until a few years ago, and were readily accessible by truck and/or skidoo from Yellowknife.

However, shifts in the movement of caribou herds, and therefore of harvesters, are essentially temporary as caribou habitat changes and regenerates, so maintaining as much potential caribou habitat as possible is essential to ensuring that these animals can adjust in the future to environmental and climate changes and continue to provide food for NWTMN indigenous Métis families. The barren-land area north of McLeod Bay continues to be an important active and

potential caribou over-wintering area. It remains accessible by winter routes leading north and northeast from Taltheilei Narrows, the location of a historic Métis hunting encampment referred to as Fond du Lac, as well as by road and trail access northeast of Yellowknife.

Although caribou are of primary value and interest to the NWTMN indigenous Métis within the Gahcho Kue Project assessment area, NWTMN indigenous Métis elders and harvesters have also expressed concern about maintaining eskers, water quality, and fish populations in the area, all of which have been identified as important values and interests in the assessment area. The specific issues associated with these values/interests arising from mine operations are discussed below.

Preliminary NWTMN Issues Regarding the Gahcho Kue Mine Project

Caribou

As noted above, NWTMN indigenous Métis harvesters are most concerned about the potential impact of the Gahcho Kue Mine Project on the migration and over-wintering patterns of barren ground caribou in the area north of McLeod Bay and Hearne Channel. Historic records indicate that this area was used extensively during the winter months by Métis hunters. NWTMN indigenous Métis hunters travelled north along the Contwoyto winter road and hunted caribou in and around Gordon and McKay Lakes. Access to the traditional hunting area has also been maintained via McLeod Bay and through Artillery Lake. The herds in these areas would have traveled in a south and southwesterly direction across the barrens to the boreal forest during the fall time and then returned in a north and northeasterly direction across the barrens in late March. Alymer Lake was and is known as being on a traditional caribou migration route. NWTMN indigenous Métis elders who have visited the Gahcho Kue Mine site noted that caribou trails were embedded in the landscape around Kennady Lake.

The expansion of the winter access road system north of Yellowknife to serve the diamond mines is thought to have impacted on caribou use of the area, given the caribou's apparent reluctance to cross roadways on lakes and with high traffic volumes. An additional winter access road extension from McKay Lake to Kennady Lake may have cumulative negative impacts, even though it is acknowledged that caribou would normally cross through this area in September-October on their southern to below the tree line, and would normally return through the access road area toward the end of March/early April. This concern about the impact of the access road has increased as there is recent evidence that some caribou are over-wintering above the tree line rather than below it, which would make them more vulnerable to impacts from winter road traffic.

Recommendation #1:

Given these concerns, the NWTMN and indigenous Métis harvesters expect that a thorough assessment of the potential specific and cumulative impacts of the winter access road on caribou migration and over-wintering patterns must be carried out as a component of the current environmental impact assessment process.

Eskers

Eskers have both cultural and environmental importance. From a cultural perspective, they were used as travel routes through the barrens, as they provided a harder ground to travel on, good visibility for hunting purposes, and, in the summer months, some relief from insects due to wind exposure. This traditional use means that eskers are good locations for archaeological research. As well, eskers have a high frost content, which means that any major disruption to them can cause permafrost melt and slumping.

Recommendation #2:

It is not clear to the NWTMN whether and to what degree De Beers will be utilizing eskers for travel or for granular resources. *Information on any such plans for use must be provided to the NWTMN to allow them to better assess what impacts might occur and whether such use is appropriate.*

Water Quality

Given that Kennady Lake drains northward through Alymer Lake and then via a circuitous route through Artillery Lake into Great Slave Lake, NWTMN indigenous Métis members are concerned about the quality of the water being discharged from the mine during operations and the quality of water that will result in Kennady Lake following mine closure. It is understood that the water treatment process is intended to remove most contaminants from the ore-processing and camp water discharged into the water management pond at Kennady Lake, but it is not clear whether waste rock, processed kimberlite waste, and exposed rock in the abandoned pits will result in increased toxins, particularly acids, leaching into the watershed over time. This matter needs to be addressed by De Beers.

Recommendation #3:

It is not clear whether waste rock, processed kimberlite waste, and exposed rock in the abandoned pits will result in increased toxins, particularly acids, leaching into the watershed over time. *Information on this should be provided to the NWTMN and this matter must be addressed by De Beers in an appropriate manner.*

Fish Populations

NWTMN members are aware of two potential impacts to fish. The most obvious is the draining of portions of Kennady Lake and the resulting need to harvest and kill all of the fish in these areas before draining occurs. The NWTMN understands that De Beers plans to involve the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and communities so that the process of harvesting and killing is documented and so that edible fish is utilized.

The second potential impact is longer term and is associated with changes in hydrology and water quality. It is clearly understood that Kennady Lake will effectively be sealed off from the rest of the watershed and that water collected in the water management portion of the lake from

pumping the pits and from mine operations will be pumped northward to lake N11, from which it will flow northeastward to eventually meet up with lake 410, which then follows the normal drainage into Kirk and Alymer lakes.

But it is not clear how the sealing-off of Kennady Lake will affect the water that would normally flow into the lake – ie. where this water would flow once the lake is sealed off – and how fish migrations and/or spawning patterns associated with current, natural hydrological flow would be affected. There is concern that significantly altering the water flow into and out of Kennady Lake, given that it is fish habitat and may play a role in the overall sustainability of fish populations in the watershed, will have a long-term impact on the health of watershed fish stocks, which are likely inter-connected with major lakes and rivers in the region. This matter needs to be addressed by De Beers and by DFO.

Furthermore, once the mine is abandoned, the bottom of Kennady Lake will be affected for a long time. It is likely that it will no longer be suitable fish habitat. Again, given that the current fish population is likely linked to the larger population in the watershed, it is not clear how the loss of habitat in Kennady Lake will affect that overall population. The Métis would like this matter to be discussed and clarified.

Recommendation #4:

While the NWTMN recognizes that the mine cannot operate without killing fish currently in the lake, *the NWTMN recommends that they be included in any plans to observe/document the fish kill and to use the edible fish.* The NWTMN further requests a commitment from De Beers in this regard.

Recommendation #5:

Given that the current fish population is likely linked to the larger population in the watershed, it is not clear how the loss of habitat in Kennady Lake will affect that overall population. *The NWTMN recommends this matter to be further discussed, clarified and addressed in an appropriate manner.*

Recommendation #6:

The NWTMN and the Fort Resolution Métis Council (as a constituent member of the NWTMN) request that the Panel schedule an informal public hearing in Fort Resolution as part of the Panel's review process.

Recommendation # 7

Due to the overall concerns and impacts to the NWTMN, the NWTMN is requesting that DeBeers agree to negotiate an impact and benefit agreement to mitigate the impact of the project on the NWTMN.

Sincerely,

Betty Villebrun, President

Recommendation # 7

Due to the overall concerns and impacts to the NWTMN, the NWTMN is requesting that DeBeers agree to negotiate an impact and benefit agreement to mitigate the impact of the project on the NWTMN.

Sincerely,



Betty Villebrun, President