

## **Summary of Lutsel K'e Community Scoping Session Friday, March 7, 2008**

A scoping session for the proposed Taltson Hydroelectric Expansion Project was held in Lutsel K'e at the Zah Lockhart Community Hall from approximately 2:00 pm to 7:30 pm. The scoping session was attended by approximately 40 persons, mostly community members.

Following an opening prayer and introductions, Chief Addie Jonasson welcomed the visitors and gave opening statements which reflected upon her childhood and her community's experience with the original Taltson Dam development.

Representatives from Dezé Energy Corporation gave a presentation of the proposed development. Following the presentation, the remainder of the session took the form of a general discussion where participants spoke about their concerns and asked questions that were directed to both the developer and to Review Board staff. The following items are summaries of the concerns and questions brought forward during the session.

### **Contamination and Construction**

- How do you recover a winter road, such as the one being built between Ft. Smith and Nonacho Lake?
- Will there be money available for reclamation of the project and what will happen to the transmission line at the end of the project?
- The camps on the barges need to be addressed as part of the overall project, including waste (solid and water) management from those camps.
- Will waste (both solid and liquid) be deposited in the local waters, as experienced by some local land-users?

### **Land Withdrawal**

- How will the Expansion Project affect or be affected by the recent land withdrawals in the Akaitcho territory?
- Lutsel K'e has negotiated land withdrawals with the government in order to help protect the land that will be included in the proposed East Arm National Park. What impact will the project could have on the park expansion? The people of Lutsel K'e are concerned that this project will negatively impact the potential park.
- How can the developer fit in with land withdrawals in order to build its transmission line?
- The developer noted that they have received exemptions to the land withdrawals to accommodate the transmission line route.

### **Economic Feasibility**

- What is the rationale for this project given that there are no confirmed customers signed up for it?

- Could Pine Point be served with existing electricity instead of pursuing this project?
- The rationale for choosing the eastern route (transmission line) seems to be routed in economic feasibility rather than environmental best practice or cultural sensitivity.

### **Consultation**

- Will Lutsel K'e be involved in negotiations between Dezé and the diamond mines?
- Some traditional knowledge studies have been conducted and Dezé Energy Corporation noted that they are looking to the local aboriginal groups for guidance on the final routing of the transmission line.

### **Transmission Line**

- What is the potential impact of the project to Great Slave Lake?
- Numerous participants spoke of their concerns regarding the transmission line running through the traditional land use area of Lutsel K'e, or their "backyard"
- Will the line may make a noise when the wind blows? It is so windy on the barrenlands that it may make noise and disturb animals
- What sort of information is Dezé gathering about pole design?
- Will Dezé have to construct towers in the muskeg, and if so will thermal siphons be used?
- Has Dezé gathered information from elsewhere about environmental issues regarding transmission lines crossing barren, permafrost terrain from elsewhere in Canada or in from other polar regions?

### **Aquatic and Fish Issues**

- Will there be potential flooding occurring as a result of the Expansion Project?
- Some participants expressed concerns about fish relocating below the dam, but Dezé undertook to design the spillway channel to be repellant to fish
- Participants underlined the importance of preserving the water quality in the area to keep it clean for generations to come
- People spoke of problems with poor quality fish being harvested in Nonacho Lake, occurring since the dam was originally constructed
- There are concerns related to mercury levels in the biomass of fish and aquatic life
- Participants are very concerned about fish health due to a local reliance on fish as an alternate food source in years when caribou stocks are lower.

### **Wildlife**

- Increasing access because of winter roads and other trails could increase hunters in the area and therefore additional stress to harvestable wildlife populations
- In addition to caribou, participants expressed their concern for fur-bearers and moose. Moose are an important alternate source of meat when caribou are scarce and trapping fur-bearers is a source of income for local people.

- Could birds, particularly ptarmigan, run into the line or transmission towers?
- Will the transmission corridor impact migration of birds?

### **Caribou**

- The impact of this development on caribou is of high concern to the people of Lutsel K'e, because of the local reliance on caribou for food and other resources.
- Caribou have recently returned to the area after a four-year absence. There was a great level of concern that this project may create the same pressures as whatever may have driven the animals away recently. This could potentially create another long period with a lack of an important resource for the community.
- Will the caribou run into the transmission poles, particularly during the rutting season?
- The community is worried that the line will create a fence-like structure for the caribou, either corralling or leading them in a way that is unnatural for the herds.
- Increasing access could allow people from elsewhere to come and hunt the caribou using the winter road. People from other communities already come to hunt caribou in the area
- People voiced concerns that this project could add to the negative impacts that the diamond mines have had on the caribou, creating even more stress on the already fragile herds
- There was concern over the potential noise disturbance from helicopter activity during the construction phase

### **Cumulative Effects**

- Participants stated that there is a great deal of development activity in the region at present, such as uranium mineral exploration and tourism activities. There were fears expressed that the provision of cheap power would increase these development activities on the land.

### **Legacy Issues**

- A number of participants spoke about the impacts that had occurred to Lutsel K'e as a result of the original dam project, in particular regarding the deaths of two local trappers. The community feels that the deaths were due to unfamiliar and unsafe ice conditions caused by the flooding of Nonacho Lake.
- It was noted that compensation for past impacts has not ever been settled.
- The impacts of flooding were discussed, including how difficult it is to travel in the region due to changes in the water level. Also, the community noted that the shoreline of the lake was completely altered by the flooding.

### **Cultural Concerns**

- The proximity of the transmission line to the sacred site *Our Lady of the Falls* (the Old Lady, where the Old Lady sits) was mentioned a number of times as an issue of great concern.

- The site is the destination of a yearly pilgrimage undertaken by the community of Lutsel K'e and others. In addition, the Old Lady is believed to hold healing properties and many people visit the area to be cured of diseases.
- The community is opposed to the transmission line crossing the Lockhart River. The people believe any disturbance (physical or visual) to the Old Lady will harm the spiritual site and perhaps destroy the healing powers of the site.
- Some elders said that the Dene know what is best for their lands and that this project will not be good for the land.
- Lutsel K'e residents often use the Ft. Reliance and Artillery Lake areas for teaching traditional skills to their children. Participants noted that this land use activity could be negatively impacted by the project.

### **Impacts to Wilderness Character and Tourism**

- The expansion project could negatively impact tourism ventures on the East Arm. The area is a popular location for fishing lodges, hunting outfitters and canoers.
- "This transmission line will change the beauty of the land"
- Local people see the East Arm and the Thelon region as a last frontier of wilderness. Residents want to keep it as clean as possible, for tourism and for their own use
- Participants felt that there has already been too much development in the area.

### **Alternatives**

- Why hasn't Dezé Energy considered using a western route, following the Mackenzie Highway up to the diamond mines?
- Has Dezé considered providing electricity through wind power? Why don't the diamond mines develop windmills and pull them out after they are finished?

### **Socio-Economics**

- Will there be compensation or IBAs for this project?
- What will be the benefit from this hydro project, and how is Lutsel K'e going to be involved?
- Lutsel K'e lacks economic development and everyone has to work together in order to benefit all parties.
- Is there a possibility of compensation for the legacy issues?
- Although the minds have not absolutely committed to purchasing power from Dezé Corp., it was suggested that hydro power will be better for the environment and more secure than power provided by hauling fuel via the Tibbitt-Contwoyto highway to the mine sites
- There will be little short-term profits from the project, but the long term profits will ensure a stable revenue stream that may be used for future community development. This observation refers to the benefits seen by Dezé Energy, and not to the short-term employment opportunities that the construction phase will offer to the community.

### **Community Capacity**

- The elders stated that decisions related to their lands should be made by themselves (ie. local people) and not by others.
- Participants requested that more help be given to communities in participating in environmental assessment and in reviewing technical documents. Their ability to do this is currently hampered by a lack of funding and capacity issues.