

Churchill River Diversion – After Thirty Years

**Published in The Drum, February 22, 2010
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During 2009 Manitoba Water Stewardship and Manitoba Hydro started to move from interim to permanent water power licences for the Churchill River Diversion (CRD). Only interim water power licences are currently in place. Manitoba Hydro has now requested that current interim water power licences be combined into one permanent licence, for 50 years.

Manitoba's Clean Environment Commission (CEC) report after its Wuskwatim hearings recommended:

“The Government of Manitoba requires Manitoba Hydro to resolve all outstanding issues with regard to the Churchill River Diversion, the Augmented Flow Program and Lake Winnipeg Regulation. Following resolution of these issues, Manitoba Hydro should apply for the appropriate final licences for these three operations under The Environment Act and The Water Power Act as soon as possible.”
(From Recommendation 7.6 of the report.)

Currently Manitoba Hydro maintains that CRD generation stations do not need environmental licences. Independent environmental assessment of the CRD system has not been conducted.

Building the Churchill River Diversion

Eva Mary Linklater's University of Brandon thesis describes start of the CRD.

“In 1966, officials from Manitoba Hydro, the Canadian federal government and the Manitoba government under Premier Duff Roblin signed a formal agreement to proceed with the Lake Winnipeg and Churchill River Diversion Project. This was an ambitious and expensive (\$2.6 billion) program that would first divert the flow of the Churchill River into the Nelson River. Further supported by a regulated escapement from Lake Winnipeg and

associated "outlet lakes", the Nelson River would then have abundant and excessive potential for power generation upon demand.

While the Churchill River was recognized as having the capability for hydro-electric development with a discharge of 35,700 cubic feet/second, development had already begun on the Nelson River and it was seen as "economically more attractive to divert a major portion of the Churchill River flow into the Nelson River than to develop the hydro- electric energy potential of the Churchill River.

The Canadian federal government would also meet the expense of building a 560 mile long transmission line to southern Manitoba."

Augmented Flow Program and Lake Winnipeg Regulation

The Augmented Flow Program, which increases water levels, and the Lake Winnipeg Regulation, which channels water into the CRD, are both necessary for operation of the Churchill River Diversion. At this time Manitoba Hydro is only seeking permanent water power licensing for the CRD.

Manitoba Water Stewardship Web Site Says

"The CRD is used for the generating stations on the Nelson River, which account for about 75% of power generation in Manitoba.

In 1986, Manitoba Hydro began operating the CRD Augmented Flow Program to optimize CRD operation. The Augmented Flow Program involves deviating from the range of water levels and flows stipulated in the Interim Licence.

Hydro has requested and received annual approvals for the Augmented Flow Program from the Minister of Water Stewardship. Once approved, the Augmented Flow Program forms part of the operating regime set out under the Interim Licence."

Manitoba Water Stewardship also confirms the Augmented Flow Program will be part of permanent water power licensing.

Summary

For 35 years annualized water power licences have been the basis for water power permissions in Manitoba, especially for the CRD. For the last 24 years those annual permissions have included augmented (increased) water flows for the CRD. The CEC recommended that both environmental and water power licensing be updated for the CRD. Eight CRD generation stations have interim water power licences.

Many communities are affected by the CRD, especially First Nation communities. Manitobans are all affected because we own the utility and carry its debts.

Now a process has begun to put permanent water power licences in place. Augmented flow will be included in permanent licensing, but there is no word on review of the Lake Winnipeg Regulation.

The Southern Chiefs Office (SCO) passed a resolution in its November 2009 Summit resolving that the government of Manitoba and the government of Canada “conduct a full environmental audit of Manitoba Hydro to assess continuing environmental, cultural and economic impacts...of all current and future projects.”

Some Suggested Steps

The Manitoba government and Manitoba Hydro could take some steps to improve decision-making. We suggest:

- Make current water power licences public
- Fulfill CEC recommendations for both water power and environment licensing
- Hold public Open Houses regarding CRD, in Winnipeg
- Manitoba Hydro fulfill its sustainable development principles
- Provide public timelines for CRD and Lake Winnipeg process
- Set up and maintain ongoing public registry for all CRD and Lake Winnipeg steps
- Make all CRD studies since 1970 public
- Post for review CRD environmental management plans
- Do independent review for CRD environmental licensing

- Acknowledge SCO resolution, and provide work plan
- Make consultations standards for CRD permanent licensing part of new Manitoba Chiefs & Manitoba government consultation standards process
- Set mutual, clear CRD consultation standards for affected Aboriginal communities.