

**Report regarding the Focus Group with women of the Cree  
Nation of Nemaska on the impacts of the Whabouchi Project**

**Presented to the COMEX  
on March 30, 2015**

**by Women who were present at the  
Focus Group held on March 3, 2015**

## **Introduction**

The following women met on March 3, 2015 in order to discuss the impacts of the Whabouchi Project on the Cree Nation of Nemaska from a women's point of view:

- Stella Moar
- Elizabeth Wapachee
- Noreen Moar
- Liza Wapachee
- Winnie Moar
- Kathleen Neeposh
- Mary Ann Blackned
- Roselyn Rabbitskin
- Evelyn Tanoush
- Mary Jolly
- Helen Mettaweskum
- Linda Orr
- Deborah Wapachee
- Seanna Wapachee
- Gertie Jolly
- Bella Jolly

Greg Jolly and Tanya Lamoureux, members of a work group that was created to prepare the members to the COMEX hearings were also present to facilitate the discussions and to take notes of the various comments and concerns.

We, the women present (herein after referred to as our Group) all agreed to compile the comments and concerns in a document to be submitted to the COMEX on behalf of the Group. These comments and concerns are our opinions and is not meant to represent the comments and concerns of all women of the Cree Nation of Nemaska. Our Group also decided to mandate Mary-Ann Blackned to present this report during the COMEX hearings to be held on 30 March 2015.

While discussing the impacts of the project, our Group often referred to the problems and issues that the Community encountered with other development projects such as the Hydro and the mining projects that have or are operating near other communities and how it affects them. Our concerns are based on past experiences that impacted the Community in such a negative manner that they should be prevented in all future anticipated development projects.

On many occasions the women expressed their concern regarding the closeness of the project to the Community. This is especially alarming because the project will affect all Community members and future generations not only the family of the Trapline where the mine will be situated.

For the purpose of this document, the comments and concerns are divided in the following topics:

- Consultations regarding the Whabouchi Project and the Chinuchi Agreement
- Land use / Culture / Cree Knowledge
- Water Quality / Air Quality / Environment / Communication / Safety
- Employment / Social / Business Development & Opportunities / Integration
- Closure / Remediation

## **Consultations regarding the Whabouchi Project and the Chinuchi Agreement**

During the Focus Group, we discussed the consultation process that took place from the beginning of the project to the signing of the Chinuchi Agreement in early November 2014. We understand that information sessions were given to the members during public meetings but these public meetings were held to discuss multiple topics and there was not sufficient time to cover this important topic. Also, these meetings are held during the day when members are working and cannot leave their employment to participate in these meetings. More importantly, we feel that there was no consultations prior to the signing of the Agreement specifically to address concerns regarding the agreement and to obtain the consent of the members. We request that more information be accessible to the members, information that is comprehensive and clear.

Many of us have repeatedly expressed our opposition towards this project and we feel that our opinion was not taken seriously. The majority of the women present at our Focus Group does not approve the project. Each meeting or information session held on this matter, people expressed that they did not approve the Whabouchi project and they do not feel that their voice was heard. So why are consultations being held if our concerns are not taken seriously?

Furthermore, the leadership that initiated the project and that approved the agreement should be present at all meetings and focus groups to respond to our questions. We want to know why they approved the agreement. When approving an agreement that has such a big impact on the wellbeing of a Community, the Council should always consult its members and ask for their consent. The Local Women's Association intends on requesting a meeting with the Council to obtain responses and to receive an explanation on why the leadership approved the agreement without first obtaining the consent of its members.

At the meeting held on the eve of the signing of the Chinuchi Agreement, a member asked if the Council would meet with the Youth before signing the agreement. The response was that it was too late and that all Parties would be present the next day for the signing ceremony. Also, when answering questions, the Council took a defensive approach.

We demand that a Council member explains or tries to convince us that the benefits of the project outweigh the negative impacts. We need to be convinced to better understand. We need to understand the pros and the cons of the project. Right now we feel that only the advantages were presented without properly demonstrating the negative impacts.

Moreover, during the Federal Review process, the women were asked to express their comments and concerns and to ask questions on the impacts of the projects. The women did so voluntarily and actively participated in discussions. Following the

hearings, we did not receive any follow ups to our comments, concerns or questions. We take this opportunity to request such a follow up and to request that this omission be avoided during this process.

We are sincerely hoping that this process that was initiated including holding focus groups and the public hearings does not become a process with a checklist of things to do and people to meet that are simply checked off once completed with no follow up. This process should be taken seriously and we expect a follow up.

We questioned the fact there are no representation for the women on the COMEX. Also, a member of the impacted Community should always be appointed to the COMEX when reviewing a project that directly impacts a certain community.

We also want to know if there is an agreement concluded between the family of the Trapline that is directly impacted by the project (Trapline R20) and the proponent. The Cree Nation of Nemaska as a whole will be impacted by this project and we should all be considered and consulted. Any benefits anticipated should be accessible to all members of the Community and not only the family of the impacted Trapline. Some members do not own any cabins on their Trapline because their Trapline was not affected by a development project. Some members have a whole Community on their Trapline since their Trapline was affected by development. The members are not treated equally. This creates conflicts between family members and Community members. These conflicts that are clearly caused by the development of projects on the Cree land are never addressed by the Proponents of the projects. The Community is left to deal with these conflicts.

We are requesting more information on the mining project and lithium in general. We are aware that it will be used to make batteries, but we have concerns as the types of devices these batteries operate can cause diseases such as Cancer. Is this caused by the lithium? We also require more information on mining itself. We suggest that the Proponent organize a visit to a Community or town where an open pit mine is operational. Most members will learn more by seeing a mine in operations than from reading about it on factsheets, especially Elders. The process involved from digging up the material to transforming it into lithium to making batteries should also be better explained to the members. A video of this process should be developed and translated in Cree. We would also like to be explained the different phases of the project. What is the first step, where and when do they start digging, when and where will they start blasting.

### **Land Use / Culture / Cree Knowledge**

Our Group does not accept the assumption that the members of Nemaska do not use the land and therefore it is okay to develop it. The Community of Nemaska was built on the land. This is where the members want to live and practice their traditional way of life. Not in the cities down south. We built the Community in the middle of our land and we are not going anywhere. People are still going to Old Nemaska on a yearly basis to

celebrate the traditional way of life and live on the land. Members of Nemaska still practice their cultural activities such as hunting, fishing and trapping. The Community of Nemaska is completely empty during Goose Break because the members are away at their camps hunting geese. The Youth are still practicing these traditional activities all year round.

This mine will affect the land that we feel so strongly about. The destruction of the land can never be compensated with money. It is our experience that when a development project goes through, the Proponent rarely respects agreements, the Community suffers loss and an increase in social issues and the Youth are impacted in a negative manner. This cannot be undone.

Our traditional land, including the Community is now surrounded by electricity poles and other hydropower structures and now there may be mine. What other projects will affect the Community. When will it stop?

### **Water Quality / Air Quality / Environment / Communication / Safety**

Our Group is particularly concerned about the impacts that the project would have on the health of the people and the animals, especially since the mine will be located so close to a highly used hunting and fishing camp site and to the Community of Nemaska. The physical, mental, social and spiritual health of the Nemaska population will be affected and this is more important to us than any sum of money received by the Proponent.

We are concerned about the physical health of all our members but more specifically we are worried about those who already have health issues such as respiratory problems or are vulnerable in light of their fragile state such as premature infants and elders. We are not convinced that these impacts on our health can be avoided. We want to know how the Proponent can promise that there will be no impacts on our health. Ideally, to prevent any type of health issues (physical, mental, social and spiritual) arising from this project, the mining project should not be authorized. But how can we stop the mining project?

We would like to see prevention programs initiated immediately to prepare the members to the possible health and social issues that could arise from the project.

We are convinced that the dust will travel to the camps. The Camps are situated in close proximity and will be affected by the dust. For example, we understand that the dust from the Troilus mine travelled a 25 miles radius and did affect the nearby community.

We want to know how the Proponent intends on protecting the members who live at the camps located on the shores of Mountain Lake from contamination of water, dust, contaminated fish that are harvested.

We would like to know exactly what type of Emergency Measures the Proponent intends on putting in place in case of any emergency. These measures should be presented and explained to the members. The emergency plan and its communication to the members should be paid by the Proponent.

How do they plan on helping the Community if certain members become sick due to the operations of the mine? If the air, the water and the land become contaminated, do they have a plan to remediate?

The Route du Nord, which condition is already questionable, will be worse due to the dust created by the increase in traffic and to the operation of the mine. We want the Proponent to use alternative measures to transport the spodumene concentrate to Chibougamau such as building their own road or a train track. Or, if an alternative cannot be possible, the Route du Nord should at least be paved in order to make it safer for travellers. Because of the heavy machinery operating on the mining site and the trucks transporting the spodumene concentrate on the Route du Nord, the dust will always be an issue and the road will be damaged.

We understand that the Cree Nation of Nemaska has hired experts to review the impacts of the project on the aquatic environment, we are requesting that a similar study be completed on the impacts to the air quality since it is an open pit mine. We want to know what will happen to the trees that are on the site and that surround the mining site.

We are very worried about the children who attend Bible camp during the summer. The Bible Camp is situated on the shores of Mountain Lake and is a very popular summer camp for the children of Nemaska. Will the noise, quality of water and air affect their activities and their health?

Our Group is also worried about the health of the animals, especially the animals that we hunt to feed our families. The water quality will be affected and the contaminated water will then flow to Nemaska River. The water will no longer be safe to drink and will affect the fish that we eat.

In or around 2007, following the commencement Eastmain-1-A/Sarcelle Powehouses/Rupert diversion project (the EM-1-A project), fourteen pregnancies resulted in miscarriages or babies stillborn. Although, the link between the Hydropower development project and the deaths was never established, we believe that this was not a coincidence.

What are the unknown impacts of the project, the impacts that cannot be anticipated and how will the Proponent deal with these impacts. For the EM-1-A project, we were told about the Rupert Diversion but we were unaware of the all the poles that would be installed all over the place.

Can they determine the level of impact this project will have on our health (skin problems, respiratory problems, etc.) due to the pollution of the environment. Can this be determined health specialists and will there be health specialists available to answer our concerns throughout the mining project.

Furthermore, when it comes to medical services, the CBHSSJB should not be asked to provide general medical services to the outside workers. The proponent should provide general medical services to their workers. But for emergency purposes, the Nemaska clinic could provide assistance but will required additional resources. The cost for the additional resources should be covered by the proponent.

### **Employment / Social / Business Development & Opportunities / Integration**

Our Group wants training programs to be offered immediately to the members of Nemaska to ensure that the members are able to access the employment opportunities as soon as they are offered, as soon as the mine is opened. Also, training programs should be offered for all the positions.

We often encounter situations where Nemaska members are trained for a specific skill but then not hired. We do not want this to happen in this case, the members that are trained and become qualified should be guaranteed employment following the successful completion of the training program.

Our Group discussed the Eleanor project in Wemindji and many women expressed their concerns regarding the multiple lay-offs that occurred following the completion of the construction phase. Many local employees that were hired for the construction phase by Tawich Construction were laid-off when Gold Corp began operations. Nemaska should learn from this experience and ensure that all employees are protected throughout all phases of the project.

We wants the Certificate of authorization, if issued by the provincial administrator to include a condition requiring the Proponent to engage the services of local entrepreneurs and businesses for all subcontracted works (construction, catering, janitorial, etc.). We also request that the proponent uses the local facilities such as the hotel and the stores for all their needs. Should this project be accepted, it should create Business for Nemaska.

We established that should a project be developed on Nemaska traditional land (any project), it should be owned by the Cree Nation of Nemaska. We want to know if that would be possible and how much the project would cost. The Nemaska people are the curators of the land and we need to protect our land. We are asking if we could purchase the claims that are owned on our land and how much it would cost. If land can be claimed can water be claimed? Can we claim and protect the water sources?

Our Group is also very concerned about alcohol be an issue with the mine workers. The proponent should enforce a zero tolerance policy for drugs and alcohol. The

Proponent should require screening tests or at least require them to be sober for a reasonable amount of time (at least 72 hours) before working on the mine. This would avoid hiring people with alcohol problems.

We do not know the types of workers that will be hired and what they are capable of. We need to ensure the safety of the Cree workers and the Community members from these workers.

When Hydro-Quebec opened their camps (Nemiscau and EM1), the social issues increased substantially in the Community of Nemaska. At the camps, alcohol and other substances were accessible to all workers and was brought to the Community illegally.

We are concerned about the young women in the Community. Some girls were lured into trucks by HQ camp workers. We are worried that we will see this type of behaviour from the mine workers.

The possibility of creating local work groups was discussed. These working groups would ensure that the Proponent is aware of the concerns throughout the life of the mine.

### **Closure / Remediation**

We want to know what are the remedial measures that will be provided by the Proponent? Will there be a specific fund for that purpose and if so, who will manage this fund? Everybody should be treated equally. We will all be directly impacted by this project.

As for the closure of the mine, whatever the plan is, the impacts will always be seen and felt. As a wise man said: "when something happens to our land, we die a bit inside"

Once the land is destroyed, it is destroyed forever. This will particularly affect the Youth, that is why we should always include the Youth when considering such projects as they will be the ones that will feel the impacts the most.

### **Conclusion**

The majority of the women present at this focus group thought that the proponent should not be given the certificates authorizing the construction and operation of this mining project. They do not wish to live so close to a mining project that will affect their lives in such a negative way. They even expressed their intention of initiating a petition to have the mining project stopped.

However, should the certificates be granted, the Group requests that the following conditions be included in the certificate of authorisation:



- That the Proponent and the Cree Nation of Nemaska look into the possibility of relocating the Community to Old Nemaska, the Cree Nation of Nemaska could then charge a rental fee to the Proponent for the use of the existing Community; or
- That the Proponent be directed to look into building more houses for Community members;
- If trailers are used by the Proponent to lodge its personnel that these trailers be automatically transferred to the Cree Nation of Nemaska once they are no longer needed by the Proponent;
- That the Proponent build a building for the benefit of the women's association in order to have a place to go to discuss freely the impacts of this mining projects that are felt by the women and their children;
- That the Proponent initiate prevention programs immediately to prepare the members to the possible health and social issues that could arise from the project;
- That the Proponent presents and explains to the members the Emergency Measures that he intends on putting in place in case of any emergency. This Emergency Plan should be approved by the members;
- That the Proponent create a program to ensure the members that they will be protected against any negative impact on their health
- That the Proponent hire the services of health specialists to be available to answer concerns relating to health issues throughout the mining project.
- That the Proponent provide its own general medical services to its personnel;
- That, in light of the increase in social problems and emergency situations which will require the assistance of the Nemaska Clinic, the Proponent be required to pay for the additional resources needed by the Clinic to fulfill the additional responsibilities;
- That training be provided to the members immediately to prepare them for the employment opportunities to be offered by the Proponent;
- That a program be set up to protect the employees that are hired for the mining project (whomever the Employer may be) from termination of employment without cause;
- That the Proponent engage the services of local entrepreneurs and businesses for all subcontracted works (construction, catering, janitorial, etc.);
- That the proponent uses the local facilities such as the hotel and the stores for all its needs;
- That should the company wish to sell its claims to the land, that it offers the Cree Nation of Nemaska the possibility of purchasing and owning the Whabouchi Project;
- That the Proponent includes a screening test in its policies to ensure that workers hired do not have alcohol or substance abuse problems;
- That the Proponent performs a background test on all employees to protect the members of the Community from the presence near the Community of workers that possess behavioral issues;
- That the Proponent work with the Community in creating and funding local work groups to address impacts of the mining project as they arise.

On behalf of our Group, I would like to thank you for listening to our comments and concerns. We hope that you will thoroughly review each of our concerns and take them seriously. The health and safety of our Community as well as maintaining our traditional way of life is very important to us and our people. We are have suffered through the negative impacts created by the hydropower development projects that surround our Community and we want this sufferance to stop. The sufferance will not stop if this project, which will be so close to our homes, is allowed to proceed.

Meegwetch, Thank you, Merci,