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KIPEKISKWAYWINAN

Our Voices





Elders meeting in York Landing (Kawechiwasiik) (clockwise from bottom left): Marion Beardy, Thompson Beardy, Ken Saunders, Isaac Beardy, Flora Beardy, Modena Beardy, Stella Chapman, Ida Chapman, Douglas Chapman, Jimmy A. Beardy, Eric Saunders, Obediah Wastesicoot and Joan Saunders



Johnny Saunders, (above). Eric Saunders

KIPEKISKWAYWINAN TELLS OUR STORY IN AN HONEST WAY

 MARTINA SAUNDERS

“Kipekiskwaywinan tells our story in an honest way. It is very emotional because we listen to all the pain the people carry with them because of the relocation from York Factory, the promises that were made, the residential school experiences, and our experience with Manitoba Hydro. I have never experienced anything like this before we began working on Kipekiskwaywinan and recording these stories.”

 DONNA SAUNDERS

“Kipekiskwaywinan is our healing because our people have spoken truthfully. This has been very important for all of us.”

 WAYNE REDHEAD

“Kipekiskwaywinan is part of a healing and reconciliation process. It’s like crying; it’s part of healing (it’s good to cry). This is a good thing for our people. Sure, it says a lot that is negative. It’s part of healing and reconciling. Other pieces of our healing and reconciliation process still need to be pinpointed.”

 ANNETTE ELLS

“I don’t know whether or not our voices are going to be heard. I just hope Hydro respects our voices about the impact of the dams.”

AMELIA SAUNDERS

“This document is very sacred to me. It was really good to see the words of those who have passed and to see their perspective of the future. It is important not to forget these teachings that our people have provided. We need to tell our children about this work. I tell my grandson and he may not understand today, but some day he will. We need to keep moving forward and do the best for our people and the community.”



OUR TRADITIONAL WAY OF LIFE HAS BEEN ALTERED BY PAST HYDRO DEVELOPMENT

ERIC SAUNDERS

“Our traditional way of life has been altered by past hydro power developments. Our relationship with the land, water, and wildlife has been drastically eroded by these hydro power developments. The proposed development of Keeyask and Conawapa, and any other future developments will continue to erode our traditional way of life into the future. Our ancestors have always been conservationists and keepers of the land. Destruction of land and its resources is not a part of our tradition and this is what concerns me the most. We have to respect and uphold what our Elders taught us in terms of how we use the land and how to take care of it. It is important for our younger generations to be taught and learn the traditional ways of life, so that these teachings can be passed on to future generations.”



Douglas Chapman, (above). Edwin Beardy



Eric Saunders

WAYNE REDHEAD

“Hydro development has had an adverse effect on the fish and the animals, and it’s not just confined to certain regions, it’s far reaching. A lot of times we hear Manitoba Hydro [representatives] say that it’s isolated – I don’t believe that. It’s far reaching.”

TED BLAND

“Now we have to go further away [to fish], and the fishing isn’t as good.”

EVELYN BEARDY

“The environment is already in rough shape, with two more projects coming, what will be there after?”





Fred and Sarah Beardy

☞ YFFN YOUTH

"I feel that it is not fair for me and the people in my area to build a new dam because it's [going to] affect the fish around my town and that is not fair."

☞ DOREEN SAUNDERS

"It's like fooling around with nature."

☞ MARTINA SAUNDERS

"It scares me. We're not supposed to do things like that."

☞ JIMMY A. BEARDY

"Waters are our Brothers. We don't have the right to contaminate them or destroy them."

☞ YFFN YOUTH

"I just don't want that to happen because they're affecting our water and the animals."

☞ STELLA CHAPMAN

"I first moved to this community in 1968. There were a lot of Elders living then, today there is not that many. I think that the change in the lifestyle of the people is that they don't live on the land like they did when they were living in York Factory. The water quality has changed, loss of beaches – people have to go far to hunt for food. The fish don't taste as good as they did before the flooding."

WE HAVE TO DO CEREMONIES TO GIVE THANKS AND ASK FORGIVENESS

☞ WAYNE REDHEAD

"We have to do ceremonies to give thanks and ask forgiveness for our sins, and our sins are having these effects on the land."

☞ ROY REDHEAD

"Hydro is destroying the whole river system and we're becoming partners of that. I've struggled so hard on a personal level with trying to reconcile the destruction of the environment and our participation in destruction





Reeva Dantouze

of the environment as a partner. At many times I've wanted to walk away from the process. But we have to stay and get ready for the future."

FLORA BEARDY

"The laws of Munito need to be followed. If you cut down a tree, you need to make peace with Askiy."

TED BLAND

"We have this term called ohcinewin. If you do something to harm an animal, anything, anybody, it's going to come back to you. So, our Elders and our people were asking, 'what are we going to do? We're going to be harming the environment. How do we make peace, not only with ourselves but with the environment and the Creator? How do we balance that out?' Having ceremonies, having feasts, and giving thanks. The church plays a big role in that process too. It's not only a traditional way—it comes in different ways so people can feel their peace with what's happening."

FRANK WASTESICOOT

"In the past Manitoba Hydro hasn't been concerned with Aboriginal participation. As a partner we need to continue to make efforts. We will be living with the environmental and socio-economic impacts. The [York



Donald and Amelia Saunders





Viola Wastesicoot



Obediah Wastesicoot and Eric Saunders, (above).
Edwin and Flora Beardy

Factory] Future Development staff had to develop an approach so that our voices were heard. These gatherings and meetings we've had within our community with our Elders and younger members have been very important. I think this is going to be a historic document."

 MARTINA SAUNDERS

"That's another reason why we wanted to be a part of this. It would help with our reconciliation with the adverse effects of the hydro development. We want to be able to be a part of restoring that relationship with Manitoba Hydro. We want to see that relationship grow, especially for the young people who are going to inherit this project and we're setting out the path for them. That's why it's really important for us to be a part of this because we want Hydro to know who we are as York Factory First Nation. We want them to know where we came from and where we're going. I hope that we're going to continue to move forward together and when it's time for the young people to work with Manitoba Hydro they know where they stand with this project and as York Factory First Nation.

I WANT FUTURE GENERATIONS TO KNOW HOW THIS DECISION WAS MADE

 MARTINA SAUNDERS

"I want future generations to know how this decision was made. We decided to be in this partnership so we could have a say in what goes on in



some of the negotiations rather than not be a part of it at all. What I want most is something for the future. If there was nothing for the future, I couldn't live with myself today."

☞ NELLIE REDHEAD

"When I think about it, to me Keeyask is just one more thing that's forced on our people like everything else that has been forced on us – either way the dams will go up. But also, I try to see the pros and cons, like there is going to be some jobs and money for some, but not for everybody. But there's also the cons, like what's going to happen to our land, trees, medicinal plants, animals. We can hope for the best."

☞ FLORA BEARDY

"I had really mixed feelings about the agreement – voting yes or no. Listening to the Elders and hearing what they were saying about the destruction that will happen, and did they want to be part of it. They have experienced this in the past, so they know what will happen. But I hear of jobs happening for the people so there are some good points."

☞ AMELIA SAUNDERS

"I was involved in the JKDA [Joint Keeyask Development Agreement] voting process. We informed our people and they had several months to decide. I don't think we were forced. A majority of people voted in favour of the JKDA and AEA [Adverse Effects Agreement]."

☞ DONNA SAUNDERS

"We are the future of the community. The negotiations are new to us and we're learning how Manitoba Hydro does business. We're learning how to stand up for ourselves and have a voice. We're not going to sit back and let the dam be built without us. We decided to become a partner to make sure we have a voice in Keeyask. And we will continue to educate our people and give them opportunities in business development. This is a new way like self-government. We're working towards that and it's still new to us. We will never lose our culture. It's still in us and it will always be in us, passed down from generation to generation."

☞ RODDY OUSKAN

"When I read our document [Kipekiskwaywinan] I see a lot of distrust and apprehension in our members' voices. I have my own distrust with those we have partnered with. I didn't vote for the partnership and I think I was right. But I don't think that should stop our community from moving forward."



French Creek





York Factory children

 TED BLAND

"They're [Manitoba Hydro] making more of an effort to have a relationship. They understand that in order for us to be partners we need to improve our relationship. So they are making a bigger effort to come into the community and contribute in different ways."

I'D LIKE TO SEE A BETTER FUTURE

 ERIC SAUNDERS

"I'd like to see a better future. I'd like to see more benefits for our people. We need more opportunities for the future of our people, for our youth. I'd like to see them have jobs. I'd like to see more business development. We have very little in York Landing. We don't even have a restaurant. Sometimes I'd like to go and sit around in a restaurant and have somebody cook for me or have a cup of coffee, that kind of stuff. I'd like to see more health and wellness programs, because our community has really gone downhill. We need to start developing programs to heal our people. Training people to handle social programs. With Keeyask I hope that there is more training and more work for our people."

 TED BLAND

"It was hard negotiating this deal with Manitoba Hydro. We felt that we had a limited voice. When dealing with Manitoba Hydro we felt we had to take what was offered or leave it. Now we have this agreement [JKDA] and have to do something with it - no I don't want a bleak future. I believe there can be change if we really want it."

 FLORA BEARDY

"When we talk about our traditional values, our culture, it's so important to have our voices be heard. We need to train our people - they need to learn our ways. You have to start with our people. They [Hydro] need to know how our traditional values work, and what our culture is all about. So many of our people don't know where they come from, they don't know where they belong, they don't know their history and their language. We have to train and educate them, then we have to go to the regulators and we have to make them listen to us - explain how important Askiy is for us. We need this knowledge in the [Environmental Impact Statement] document, and we need to make our partners understand."





Sunset

☞ EVELYN BEARDY

"But when we stop and think for the future generations, they need all that – they need to be able to be supplied with good jobs for their family, so I guess that is one good thing. But like someone said here, I don't trust Hydro."

☞ ROY REDHEAD

"It's a hurtful experience because we're part of the [Keeyask] partnership. We have to find courage – the strength to move forward. I think we're up to that."

☞ DONNA SAUNDERS

"These changes are coming and hopefully the positives will be there in the end for our future."

☞ ANNETTE ELLS

"It is for the future of my children and grandchildren and for the jobs that will be available that I voted "Yes". This is my own opinion: I don't want my grandchildren to say "Grandma voted 'no' for our future." Even though we are small, we still want to be heard and respected."

☞ RODDY OUSKAN

"I am really concerned for our future generations. Yes, there is promise of jobs with Keeyask, but I am skeptical of these job opportunities for our



youth and future generations. I have seen how difficult it has been for our members with Kelsey, Limestone, and Wuskwatim.”

☞ JIMMY A. BEARDY

“I’m hoping for our children and even the teenagers to grab onto training opportunities. There was a golden opportunity to take advantage of training leading up to the construction of Keeyask. They could sharpen their skills and use the tools you were taught with Keeyask. That’s one thing I really like and thought would be really good for our people: the education, the training, the programs. Like what we got out of it with the cross-cultural training and retention and catering [Direct Negotiated Contracts].”

☞ VINCENT OUSKAN

“The reason why I voted “yes” was for the jobs, for the community, the younger people coming up. There’s not very many jobs around here. It’s good to go out of town and work. I just got back from work myself. I was working out of Gillam [with the] environmental studies. I’ve been doing that for the past 7 years now.”

☞ EMILY KEMATCH

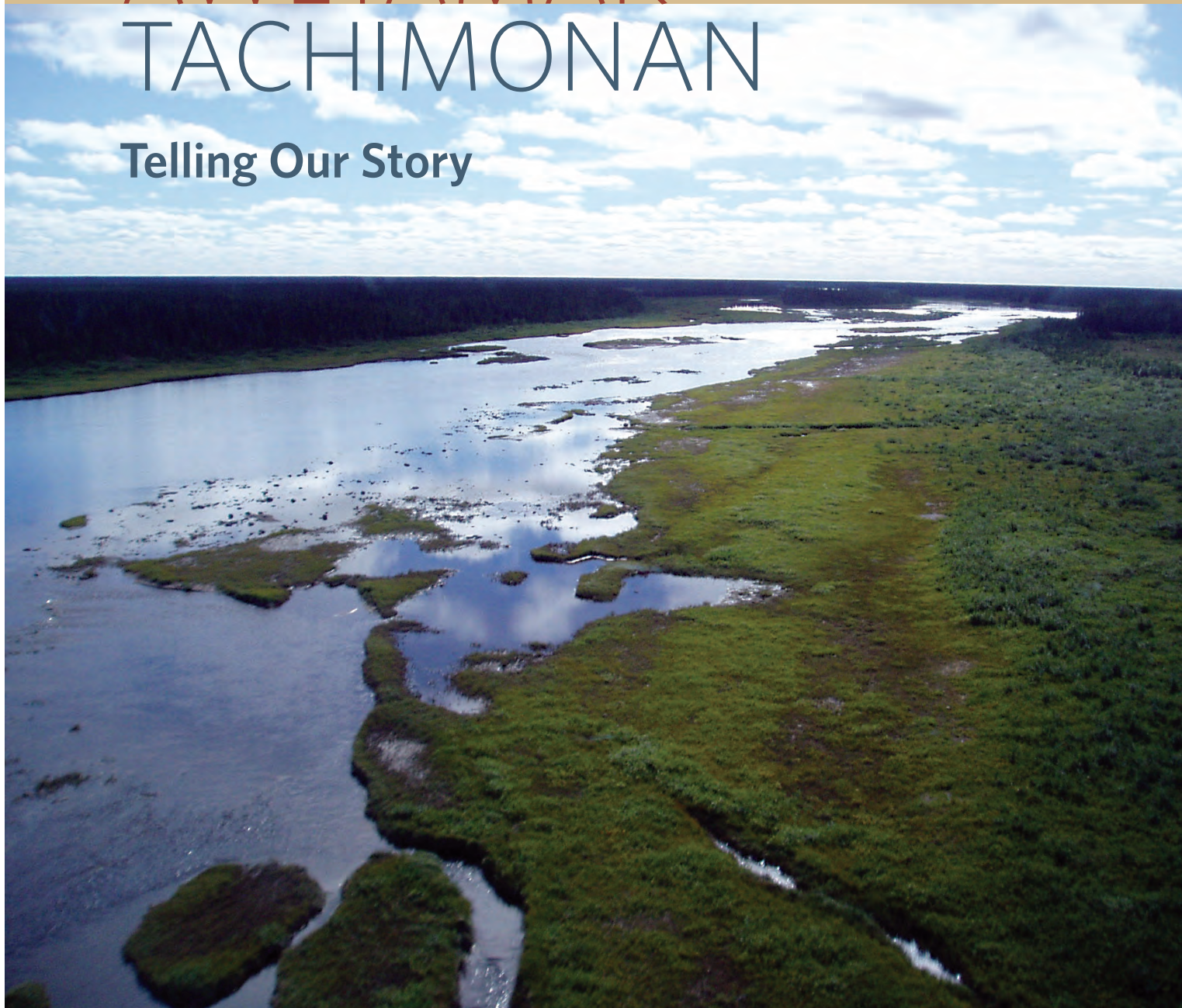
“It is time. It’s time to move forward. We’ve been stuck too long.”



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AWETAMAK TACHIMONAN

Telling Our Story



Kaskattama River.



From left to right: Reggie Ponask, Edith Saunders, Taleah Saunders and Franklin Ponask

TELLING OUR STORY

We are a people with an oral tradition. We did not traditionally write about how we live; how we learn, share knowledge, experience our culture, take decisions and act out our lives. Rather, we have learned from our parents and our community Elders. They have taught us about the land and waters: how to live with and survive on the animals and plants of the land and travel safely through the forests, muskegs, waters, ice and snow; how to respect the land for giving us everything we needed to live and raise our families; how to live respectfully and share with one another, living difficult but good, meaningful lives in our families and communities, celebrating our Cree culture and who we are as a people. We were told about these things, shown these things, listened, learned and did these things.

Our purpose here is to tell our story, of how we have come to this crossroads in our history. In the rest of the Keeyask Environmental Impact Statement we see a great deal of technical information and description by professional, technical, western-trained biologists, social scientists, Manitoba Hydro officials, lawyers and consultants. Our aim here is to return to our oral tradition and give voice to how we feel about Keeyask; what it means to us. By telling our story in Kipekiskwaywinan (Our Voices) we are continuing our oral tradition in a new way.

 FRANK WATESICOOT

“In the past Manitoba Hydro hasn’t been concerned with Aboriginal participation. As a partner we need to continue to make efforts. We will be



Cecilia Keeper (above photo) From left to right: Renee Redhead, Andrea Morin, Isaiah Saunders, Erin Wastesicoot and Travis Morris





Sunset on Split Lake.

living with the environmental and socio-economic impacts. The [York Factory] Future Development staff had to develop an approach so that our voices were heard. These gatherings and meetings we've had within our community with our Elders and younger members have been very important. I think this is going to be a historic document."

Our voices do not make for a tidy, coordinated written account, that tries to make everything sound objective, balanced, certain, predictable and manageable. Rather, they are full of many contradictions, uneven treatment, bias, fear, anger, wariness, resignation, yet hope. We aimed to set down the impact of the Keeyask Project and Partnership on who we are as a community and people. This has not been an easy process, to put down our oral sharing and feelings about the Keeyask Project and Partnership in writing. We have differed with each other in meetings and workshops; some of us have come to tears as we tried to describe the pain of changes to our way of life and the threats to our cultural survival. We are deeply anguished about what our partnership decision means to our sacred, respectful relationships with the land and how we are now party to adding to the damage to the land and water.

We asked our consultants to help us write down our words. But, they too are outsiders and cannot begin to feel what we feel. Yet, we insisted in this report that our voices come through, as varied and conflicted as they truly are. We know that there are responsibilities as a project partner and we conclude this

*Our aim here is to...
give voice to how we
feel about Keeyask*



Councillor Jimmy A. Beardy, Councillor Phyllis Contois, Chief Johnny Saunders, Councillor Jeffrey Beardy and Councillor Gordon Wastesicoot at JKDA signing ceremony.



We conclude this account with our intention to try and make this partnership work

account with our intention to try and make this partnership work for our community and realize the hopes, aspirations and expectations that led our community to sign the Joint Keeyask Development Agreement (JKDA).

We want to first tell our story of what this has meant to us as a Cree community; what it will continue to mean throughout the long period of partnership that lies ahead. We want the regulatory bodies, the public, and our future generations to understand the deep social and cultural impact of this project and partnership decision upon us. We want this accounted for in the terms and conditions of the environmental license for the Project. We want our partners and ourselves to be held accountable for environmental changes and management; that there must be a continuous, ongoing commitment in this partnership to monitor, learn, adapt, manage and both culturally and spiritually reconcile with the inevitable and unpredictable environmental changes that we will be party to unleashing through this development.

OUR WORLDVIEW AND VALUES

 ERIC SAUNDERS

"One of the things really important to me is the Cree worldview. I think it's important to have it in the Environmental Impact Statement because there was a lot of misunderstanding before we started working with Hydro. There was a lack of understanding of the Cree worldview, the things that we do, and why we do them. They are our beliefs, what we were taught when we were growing up. We learned that from our ancestors, our Elders, our parents. But a lot of times it wasn't done orally. A lot of times you learned by observation and that's how I learn a lot of my stuff, just observing what the Elders do. Or when they take you out, they'll say something that you're not supposed to do. That's the only time they'll tell you and you're supposed to learn from this. But a lot of times that's not really understood, where we come from, and I think it's important to have some definition for words that we use. That's why we want Hydro or "White" society to know and understand the Cree view."

"One of the things really important to me is the Cree worldview... there was a lack of understanding of the Cree worldview, the things we do, and why we do them."

-Eric Saunders





York Landing (Kawechiwasiq).

ᐱᓕᓴᓴ - Askiy - **Land, water, people, plants, animals and all things**

Askiy is the whole of the land, water, people, plants, animals and all things. We are part of Askiy and we have relied on Askiy since we have existed. We respect Askiy and we are affected by even the smallest changes to Askiy. Askiy is beyond value.

ᐱᓕᓴᓴ ᐱᓕᓴᓴ ᐱᓕᓴᓴ - Kiskinohamakaywina - **Teachings**

Cree teachings have been handed down through the generations, and continue to be passed on today. These teachings embody the values of our ancestors and today's Elders giving us daily guidance. These teachings are relevant and applicable to the Keeyask environmental assessment process and the planning, construction and operation of the Keeyask dam.

ᐱᓕᓴᓴ ᐱᓕᓴᓴ ᐱᓕᓴᓴ - Kistaynitamowin - **Respect**

It is very important to show respect when speaking and acting towards Askiy, including the land, water, plants, animals and people. This means understanding that everything of Askiy has a place and role to play.

Seven Sacred Teachings:

- Respect
- Humility
- Courage
- Wisdom
- Honesty
- Truth
- Love



It is important to honour life and Askiy.



Eric Saunders on the Pukituhokansik Sipi.

If you harm anything, including the land, water, people, plants, and animals, you will experience equally harmful consequences.

ᑭᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ - Kistaynitakosewin - **Honour**

It is important to honour life and Askiy. These are special gifts that must not be forgotten. We honour life and Askiy through ceremonies.

ᑕᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ - Tapwaywin - **Truth**

It is very important to us that we speak truthfully based on our knowledge and experience. The truth isn't always pleasant, but when we acknowledge what we feel to be true it is possible to move forward and build trust with others and come to terms with our actions and feelings.

ᑕᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ - Aspehniwin - **Trust**

Trust is important to our relationships with family, friends and working partners. Trust is developed over time through experience with other individuals or groups of people.

ᑕᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ - Ohcinewin

Ohcinewin is a very important Cree concept, which is not easily translated into the English language. Because of the interconnectedness of Askiy, if you harm anything, including the land, water, people, plants, and animals, you will experience equally harmful consequences. These repercussions can also come back to those around you, your children or your children's children. This concept applies to all aspects of life. This is a powerful thing, so it is very important to be careful and respect even the use of the word.

ᑕᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦᑎᑦ - Ayakohmisewin - **Caution**

It is important to consider one's actions carefully because of the possible consequences of those actions. When caution is not exercised, mistakes are made. Caution is important so that individuals and our community can avoid disrespectful and harmful actions to others and Askiy.





Wayne Redhead, Eric Saunders, Sam Cook and Isaac Beardy Boating up the Aiken River.

ININIWI- KISKÉNIHTAMOWIN (TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE)

 ERIC SAUNDERS

"Traditional knowledge means that which is passed down from generation to generation, but learned when growing up about how to survive and take care of the land. Like when you go camping you can't litter. You respect people and take care of people. It is our forefathers who have taught us, and we have to honour that. Every culture has their traditions and their way of doing things. We aren't the same as the white people, so there are lots of misunderstandings."

 LOUISA CONSTANT

"Traditional knowledge is in our language and our traditions. It's a way of life. It's who we are as Ininiwak, and who we are is built on our identity as Cree people, on our relationship to the land, water, and all of creation. Even with everything that happened to us, like residential school, we still educate our young people that way."

Ininiwi-kiskénihtamowin is absolutely fundamental and central to who we are as a people and culture. Our traditional knowledge is held by our Elders and passes from generation to generation. It is a dynamic, living process that is added to and adapted in the



Freshly picked strawberries

*Ininiwi-
kiskénihtamowin
is absolutely
fundamental and
central to who we
are as a people and
culture.*



lives of successive generations of Cree people. It lives within our way of life and it includes many aspects:

- Traditions
- Cultural identity and activities
- Language
- Stories, teachings and legends
- Humility and listening
- Spirituality
- Respect for Askiy (land, water, people, plants, animals and all things)
- Maintained by older generations (Elders) and taught to our younger generations
- On-going process of learning and applying our knowledge and teachings

 ERIC SAUNDERS

"There is so much stuff in traditional knowledge. How can you put it in a few words in the EIS? There is an issue explaining it in a way that people can understand, to explain this to white people. I guess the main thing that is important is that they understand that we have our knowledge, and they believe us."

 ERIC SAUNDERS

"I find it funny that when you ask the Elders something they would always respond with a joke. Humour is part of the teachings. When talking, that was one way they would teach. For example, they would tell you how to do something, but the wrong way so that you would go and learn. The reason the Elders tell us these things is so that people listen. You will remember the teachings with humour."

 MARTINA SAUNDERS

"We don't share our knowledge easily because we are taught to listen and respect others."





Albert Saunders

 OBEDIAH WASTESICOOT

"Our traditional knowledge is still happening today. It isn't just from long time ago (kayas). Traditional knowledge is from the past, but it continues on."

Today, our community Elders, members and resource users are maintaining our traditional knowledge, and one way it is expressed is through Kipekiskwaywinan (Our Voices). This document doesn't represent all of our traditional knowledge, but it is based on our traditional knowledge, cultural values, and worldview. Our traditional knowledge informs and adapts along with the Keeyask Project.

However, our knowledge isn't just information to be recorded and included in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS); rather it is an ongoing process of sharing and participating in the Partnership. Because traditional knowledge lives within our way of life, the process of engaging our community Elders, members and resource users is the most important way our traditional knowledge, values, and worldview enter the Keeyask Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). For this reason, it is important that our community representatives, Elders, youth, resource users, and knowledge holders continue to participate in the Keeyask Project's next phases including construction, operation, environmental monitoring and adaptive management.

"Traditional knowledge is from the past, but it continues on."

-Obediah Wastesicoot



Ripple River Falls.





Maryann Sinclair, Rev. Martha Spence, Flora Beardy, Edwin Beardy and Obediah Wastesicoot (behind Edwin). 48th Wedding Anniversary Vow Renewal Ceremony, York Factory.

We are inherently spiritual people. We believe that everything we have in life comes from Munito.

SPIRITUALITY

We are inherently spiritual people. We believe that everything we have in life comes from Munito.¹ We come from Munito and all things come from Munito. We believe that we must respect all things in nature – that our relationships with living and non-living things are two-way relationships. To live a good life we respect and care for Askiy, other people, and all things in this world for our ancestors and for future generations. We call this minopimatisiwin.

With the arrival of Europeans many of our people accepted Christianity and Christian beliefs into our lives. Today, diverse spiritual beliefs and practices are found among our people that could be called traditional, Christian or more blended forms of spiritual belief. Regardless, spirituality is very important in our culture and in our world view. Our spirituality informs our stewardship of the land and we must fully acknowledge spirituality through our participation in the Keeyask Project. It requires respect among our partners and respect for everything in nature.

 LOUISA CONSTANT

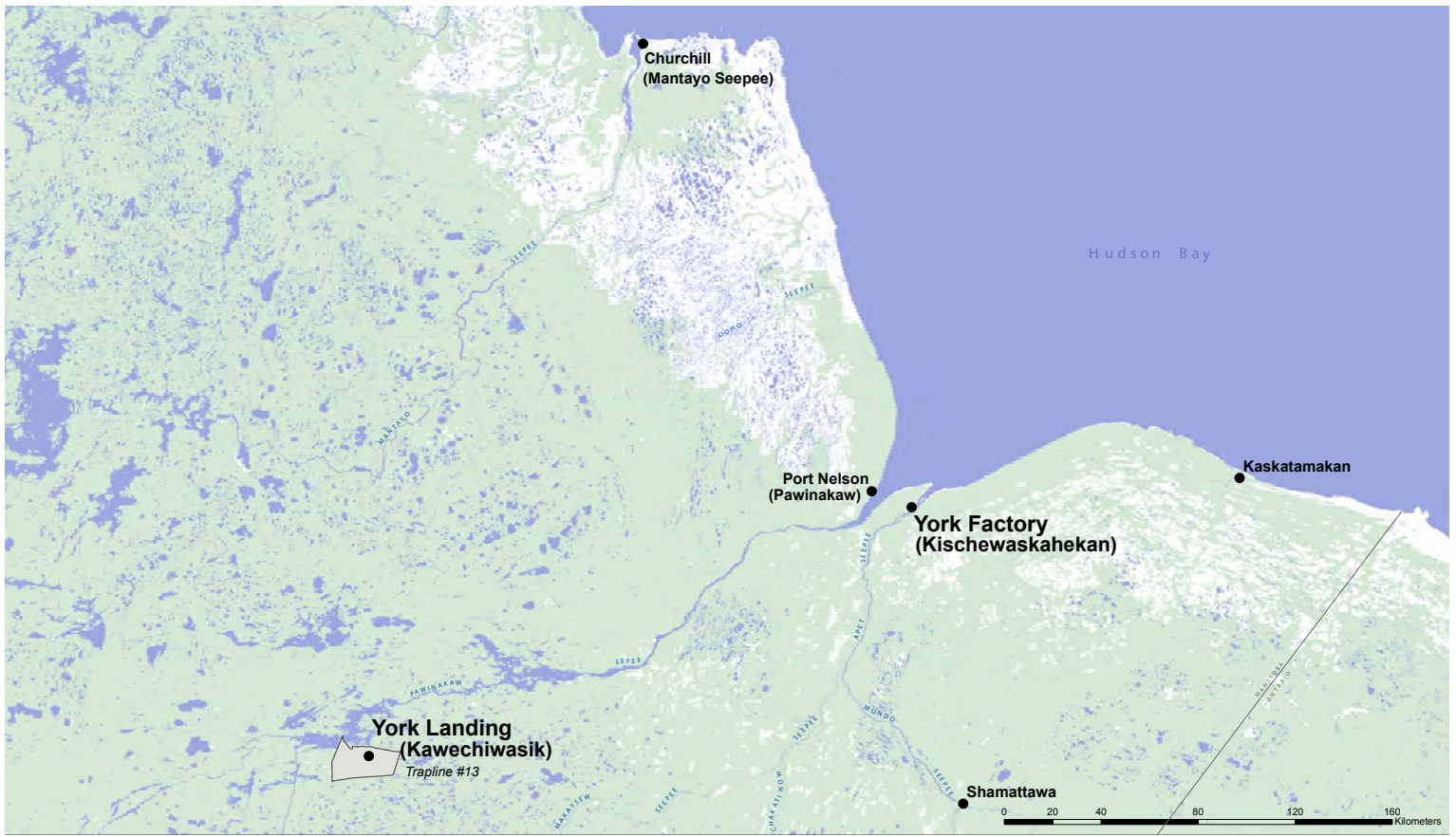
“When you connect to the land, spirituality is more than the church. It is about having relationships to animals, praying to the land, and practices and protocols. For example, just taking what you need and handling an animal carcass that you have killed properly and not throwing them in the dump. This is who we are as a people.”

 EMILY KEMATCH

“With our teachings today, I have heard you have to offer tobacco to Mother Earth (Askiy). Say you kill a moose, you offer tobacco, or give tobacco to water as thanks for what it gives. For example, you wash your clothes with water. I know there are ceremonies. Some people practice the sweat. That’s how you connect to your spirituality.”

¹ Munito can also be referred to as “Kisci-Munito”





York Factory First Nation Traditional Territory

OUR COMMUNITY AND CULTURE UNDER THREAT

Over the last several generations, we have been resilient to the forces of colonialism, the introduction of western religion and a trade economy into our communities and traditional territories. We adapted to these changes and still retained much of our way of life, culture and traditions. Then, in 1957, we were moved from our traditional territory on the Hudson Bay lowlands, and relocated to the southeast corner of Split Lake, which became the community of York Landing (Kawechiwasiak). This is a very short time ago in the history of our people being on the land since time immemorial. Yet, we have experienced profound changes over this short time. Where in the past we lived on a vast territory and moved with the seasons, we are now assigned to a small community trapline (Trapline #13), within the jurisdiction of others, defined largely by the Manitoba registered trap line system.

 ERIC SAUNDERS

"The problem I have around York Landing is the land. The minute you



York Landing (Kawechiwasiak), Manitoba.



Kelsey Generating Station.



"We want our voices heard in the Environmental Impact Statement"

-Eric Saunders



Lindsay Laliberty, Talia Saunders, Sarah Wastesicoot and Tabitha Brightnose

go out on the land you're feeling like you're intruding into someone else's territory. Out at York Factory you don't feel that - it's wide open. Out at the coast, you see a lot of moose out on the land and no one is hunting them. I really want our youth to learn to hunt and trap. That's what I'm talking about when I talk about cultural programming. One of my main concerns is the size of the Resource Management Area around York Landing [Trapline 13]. There are many hunters in this area, sometimes it gets dangerous. I don't feel the same here that I do out there - I feel free at York Factory. I don't even have to be hunting, I just feel free because that's our traditional territory. That's where I was born. We want our voices heard in the Environmental Impact Statement so they will know that not everything is how Hydro sees it. A lot of people are against the project. I think it's important to teach the youth those things - how to survive on the land."

We no sooner were re-settled on the Aiken River at Split Lake when the first hydro-electric dam at Kelsey was built. Our new homelands and waters were changed, before we had barely begun to understand and learn about them. Then, the Churchill River Diversion (CRD) and Lake Winnipeg Regulation (LWR) soon followed, reversing the seasonal water levels on the Split Lake basin where we live. Our water was made bad, the shorelines were flooded and eroded, and the fish and animals became poorer in health and abundance. We became defined as a Northern Flood Agreement (NFA) community by outsiders, rather than a proud Cree community that shared vast territories, history and culture with Cree people now living in different places like Shamattawa, Churchill (Mantayo Seepee), Gillam (Akwayskimakuk), Bird, Fort Severn (Wasahoo), Split Lake (Tataskweyak) and Ilford (Moosokootchisik). We became a community under threat; under siege from outside forces, especially hydro-electric development.

 ARCHIE REDHEAD

"The water is no good now. The fish are not good. But, the water and the fish were good when we came here. When the water flowed it was good but when you dam it, stop it, back it up, water goes bad. Every year the water has got worse with the dams."

And today, more hydro-electric dams are on the way and we find ourselves in a new partnership relationship with Manitoba Hydro and our neighbouring Cree communities. We voted in favour of becoming a Keeyask equity partner through the Joint



Ashley Beardy and Talia Saunders





Schematic of development on the Churchill and Nelson Rivers, 1977

Keyask Development Agreement (JKDA) in March 2009. We have become a co-proponent and now seek to obtain, with our partners, the required licenses, including an environmental license from regulatory authorities, so the Keyask Project and Partnership can proceed as planned.

WHY WOULD YFFN BECOME A PARTNER IN KEYASK?

We want to address, up front, a logical question our statements must pose in the minds of those who read and try to understand them: "Why would York Factory become a partner in hydro-electric development and the Keyask Project when you feel this way; when you feel these impacts?"



Youth Workshop, 2010



Felicia Beardy, Nicole Saunders and Ameer Saunders





Ted Bland, Senior Negotiator with son Rylan.

Our decision to become a partner in the Keeyask Project was not an easy one. Leading up to the JKDA vote, we looked at future hydro-electric development, our experiences with past hydro-electric development and what hydro-electric development means to Manitoba as a whole. Based on the many negotiations and our relationship with Manitoba Hydro as a corporation, we felt it was important to become a partner and have a voice in the Keeyask Project, rather than let it move forward without us. When we held our vote to decide whether or not to sign the JKDA, Tataskweyak Cree Nation and War Lake First Nation had completed their vote. A majority of TCN voters voted in favour of their Chief and Council signing the JKDA, thereby establishing sufficient support among the Keeyask Cree Nations, as defined in the JKDA as the 'KCN Majority', for the Project to proceed to its next phase and the preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement.

 TED BLAND

"I never felt comfortable with the situation we went into, where Tataskweyak Cree Nation (TCN) was the main First Nation negotiating with Manitoba Hydro. We were put in a situation where we felt that we were either a part of it, or we were out of the deal. A lot of people didn't [still don't] understand that this thing was going to happen whether we liked it or not. You either watch it happen, or become a part of it. With us being partners, we have a limited voice. Our only real benefit is for our children, and their children after that. We did this for our children and future generations."

While the conditions at the time of the JKDA vote substantially influenced how our community members felt about our own vote, we considered the Keeyask Project very seriously and decided to partner with Manitoba Hydro, TCN, WLFN and FLCN so that we could contribute to the Keeyask Project. We said to ourselves, "we can stand by and watch this happen, or we can try to have a say in the governance and management; to share in the potential benefits of revenues, jobs, training, capacity-building and community empowerment".

Many of our community members were equally torn with our decision to become a partner because of our past history with Manitoba Hydro. We have come to know and respect many individuals working for Manitoba Hydro in these processes; but some of our community members do not trust Manitoba Hydro





From left to right: Zack Redhead, Lauren Spence, Alex Redhead, Adrian Saunders, Southwind Redhead, Derek Beardy and Chelsea Beardy

as a corporate entity. This was especially the case during the JKDA and AEA negotiations.

 TED BLAND

“With Hydro, we needed to be on their case, keep on top of them with all their research and everything. Historically they [Hydro] didn’t seem to really care what was going to happen to the environment.”

 EMILY KEMATCH

“Hydro said there will be minimal impacts. It’s not true because we have seen changes with our eyes.”

 RODDY OUSKAN

“When I read our document [Kipekiskwaywinan] I see a lot of distrust and apprehension in our members’ voices. I have my own distrust with those we have partnered with. I didn’t vote for the partnership and I think I was right. But I don’t think that should stop our community from moving forward.”

 TED BLAND

“They’re [Manitoba Hydro] making more of an effort to have a relationship. They understand that in order for us to be partners we need to improve our relationship. So they are making a bigger effort to come into the community and contribute in different ways.”

“Hydro said there will be minimal impacts”

-Emily Kematch





Ice Fishing.

"There's a deep moral dilemma that we experience"

-Martina Saunders

We want to be at the table with Manitoba Hydro every step of the long way ahead, building trust and a better relationship. Some community members will never trust Manitoba Hydro, and others will continue to question if our community made the right choice to join the Keeyask Partnership. However, as a community our decision to sign the JKDA and become a partner in the Keeyask Project means taking some control over our own destiny, having a voice and influencing the Project with our knowledge and values, and seeking tangible benefits and self-determination for our community.

As a partner in the Keeyask Project, this is a deep moral dilemma for us; to effectively add to the destruction of Askiy; to change our respectful relationships with the land, water, plants and animals that have sustained our people, our culture and that are entrusted to us to pass on to future generations so that they too can live meaningful, fulfilling lives and nurture their culture. We think, if we work hard with our partners, we can achieve the benefits of Keeyask while retaining our values and sustaining our community.

 MARTINA SAUNDERS

"There's a deep moral dilemma that we experience. I experience that on a daily basis when I sit back and think about being a part of this Keeyask dam. Like, in the future, what is going to be left in the future? But, at the same time, when we were making the decision about what we wanted and what we didn't want, we needed to think about the future for our children, our future generations in terms of the benefits."



 VINCENT OUSKAN

"The reason why I voted "yes" was for the jobs, for the community, the younger people coming up. There's not very many jobs around here. It's good to go out of town and work. I just got back from work myself. I was working out of Gillam [on the] environmental studies. I've been doing that for the past 7 years now."

 AMELIA SAUNDERS

"They said "yes" because they wanted better jobs, better housing and better training for our community. We have the arena, but we are looking for more business opportunities in our community. Our children in the future will have something. That is the main issue. There's going to be training for them; there's going to be jobs for them; there's going to be a better future for them than what we have today."

 JOHNSON SAUNDERS

"We thought it was important at the time. We should try to get something for our children, the future. We tried to get the best that we could for them."

 TED BLAND

"The opportunities that are coming are good opportunities—employment, training, developing of our membership and, like I said earlier, the partnership side and the ownership. But, when everything came down to the final decision, I thought it was important that we look after our future generations. I always said that we're never going to see the benefits in our lifetime. Not in my lifetime. The real revenue and the benefits are going to come maybe in 25 years. After the completion of the dam, we will pay back our loans and then the revenue will start coming. So, in essence I'm looking at my children, my grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren."

We must somehow continuously reconcile our participation in this partnership with our relationships and obligations to the natural and spiritual world - and to our future generations. If we do not, our Elders and their teachings tell us we will not survive as a people. This is the central, core message and impact for us as a people in this deal. We want everyone to understand this.

"I thought it was important that we look after our future generations."

-Ted Bland



*We want our
partners to respect
and work with us*

We want our partners to respect and work with us to continuously reconcile our role as partners, as well as heal and build trustworthy relationships, through processes, programs and decision-making, throughout the life of the Keeyask Project and Partnership. We especially want our children, their children and all who follow to know that we entered into this partnership with these feelings and deep misgivings, insisting on a long term, ongoing commitment to healing, reconciliation, mutual respect and self-determination. We seek to sustain our Cree values and culture in the process. We are cautious and uncertain for what lies ahead (Ayakohmisewin: meaning a person must be cautious of his/her actions when there is uncertainty) but as we have had to do many times since first contact with European colonizers, we must continue to adapt and keep our place as Cree people.

So, we approach this partnership with hope and determination to keep our values, control our destiny and provide opportunities for our young people. It is the future generations who will inherit the outcomes of the Keeyask Project and Partnership.

