



# MANITOBA ECO-NETWORK

---

Second Floor – 70 Albert Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 1E7  
Ph: (204) 947-6511 Fx: (204) 989-8476 mbeconet@mts.net www.mbeconetwork.org

March 23, 2007

Via Facsimile

Steve McKechnie, Chair  
North Sask River Water Resource Committee  
1202-101<sup>st</sup> Street  
North Battleford, Saskatchewan S9A 0Z0

Jim Vollmershausen, Chair  
Prairie Provinces Water Board  
Prairie & Northern Region  
Environment Canada  
Twin Atria #2 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor 4999-98 Avenue  
Edmonton, Alberta T6B 2X3

Honorable John Nilson  
Minister of Environment and  
Minister Responsible for the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority  
Room 361 Legislative Building  
2405 Legislative Drive  
Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0B3

## **RE: North Saskatchewan Water Supply Feasibility Study**

Dear Sirs:

The Manitoba Eco-Network is an environmental non-governmental organization (ENGO) whose objectives are to carry on education activities to develop awareness in the community concerning the conservation and enhancement of the environment. The water caucus is a project of the Manitoba Eco-Network, and provides a mechanism for Manitoba ENGO's to communicate with each other, formulate joint briefs and submissions, participate in consultations, prepare educational resources, and undertake various activities pertaining to specific water issues.

At our last water caucus meeting, it was brought to our attention that the Government of Saskatchewan and Government of Canada is assisting an entity known as the "North Sask River Water Resource Committee" in an investigation of the feasibility of building the Highgate Dam on the North Saskatchewan River. Our assumption is that this area of Saskatchewan is currently experiencing water supply shortages or there is anticipation that water scarcity will become more prevalent in the region due to climate warming.

You may be aware that the Rosenberg International Forum on Water Policy held in Banff last fall, showcased some of the difficulties we face on the prairies, and in particular, the

Saskatchewan River. At that forum, Dr. Sauchyn, of the University of Regina, stressed that *“water conservation will continue to be a major adaptation to climate change”* and, *“public policy in western Canada has to be strengthened with respect to the development of anticipatory integrated watershed management approaches that will able to embrace the very real threat of droughts of much longer duration than have occurred in the past century.”*

At the same forum, Dr. Schindler added, *“new agricultural and industrial development activities should be approved only if they do not require a great deal of water especially during the dry summer months”* and *“population growth in the dry portions of the Saskatchewan River Basin should be kept at minimal levels to avoid intensifying water scarcity further...”*

It is with this background understanding that we seek clarification on the rationale or justification of the Highgate Dam project and feasibility study. If the project’s intent is to secure an additional supply of water in times of anticipated drought to meet the current needs of the region, we suggest the study focus its review on alternatives that can meet this demand. For example, technological efficiencies can be made to improve water availability in the existing region for current irrigation, industrial and municipal uses. Alternative livestock production methods, such as straw-based systems, can increase the availability of water in the region. Emergency sources of water for community use may be sourced from bedrock aquifers, utilizing desalinization membrane treatment technologies.

We ask that this study take into account existing planning schemes currently in place for the region and in particular, how this proposal fits within these schemes and the overall vision of basin planning as exemplified by entities such as Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River and the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority planning process. We question whether this project fits within the framework of Saskatchewan’s Water Conservation Plan?

As you are aware, the Saskatchewan River is an inter-jurisdictional river and Manitoba Hydro relies on a reliable flow crossing the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border. Saskatchewan’s full entitlement of water on the Saskatchewan River may cause undue economic hardship for Manitoba Hydro and the province of Manitoba. Decreasing flows on the Saskatchewan River may increase the concentration of nutrients, and in particular phosphorus in Lake Winnipeg, and exacerbate the growth of blue-green algae.

Building new dams may have larger environmental and economic impacts than was previously understood. Reservoirs can increase the concentration of mercury in the water and increase CO<sub>2</sub> and methane release into the atmosphere. In periods of prolonged dry weather and drought, reservoirs may actually decrease the availability of water on the North Saskatchewan River due to an increase in evaporation.

In conclusion we offer a key finding from the Rosenberg International Forum on Water Policy.

*“Canada is not as advanced as it might like to believe in terms of public policy relating to water supply and quality assurance. There are issues of equity; inefficiencies associated with jurisdictional fragmentation of responsibility and accountability; an absence of reliable and commonly useful data and widespread examples of inadequate foresight and management of water in the context of other forms of resource development. There are many gaps in federal and provincial water management policy that need to be filled. The country needs to move past its own myths of limitless water abundance to create a new water ethic based on conservation and different formulae for valuing water as a resource in its own right.”*

As an organization that operates downstream of the proposed project and one that must be responsive to public concerns, we respectfully await your response to our inquiry.

Sincerely,

Glen Koroluk  
Water Caucus Coordinator  
Manitoba Eco-Network

Cc

Honorable Christine Melnick, Minister of Water Stewardship  
Bob Brennan, President and CEO, Manitoba Hydro  
Partners FOR the Saskatchewan River

An Environmental Resource for All Manitobans  
100%  recycled paper