



SAGKEENG O-PIMATIZIWIN 2

TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE STUDY

Manitoba-Minnesota Transmission Line Project

Supplementary – March 2016

SAGKEENG FIRST NATION MAPPING AND COMMUNICATIONS

In July 2015 O-Pimatiziiwin 2, a Traditional Knowledge document, was completed by the Sagkeeng First Nation. The report was based on discussions and information with members about issues, concerns and the use of lands along the route of the proposed Manitoba Minnesota Transmission Line Project.

The Manitoba Minnesota Transmission Line Project (MMTLP) involves the proposed construction of a transmission line that will allow Manitoba Hydro to export more hydro-electricity to the United States. The proposed route for the line runs through Treaty 1 territory.

To supplement the information in O-Pimatiziiwin 2, additional work was undertaken by Sagkeeng.

Mapping

On February 5, 2016 a meeting was held in Sagkeeng with resource users in the community. The intent was to identify and map sites along the proposed transmission line route that have traditionally been and are still now being used to practice cultural activities and exercise Treaty and Aboriginal rights.

While resource users that participated in the February 5/16 meeting provided information based on their personal use and knowledge of the area, there are definite limitations that need be recognized and acknowledged in regard to the mapping exercise.

Maps were used to facilitate discussions and to allow individuals to mark areas used for hunting, harvesting medicines and other activities. The accuracy of locations depicted on the map is approximate. Some individuals felt it would have been more beneficial to visit the proposed route so more accuracy could be provided.

We were cautioned in the discussions that harvesting activities were not confined to just a few areas and were prone to change from year to year based on the type of plant and the way nature allows for its regeneration.

Through discussions about cultural practices, harvesting activities and Treaty and Aboriginal rights, members shared information about land use along the proposed transmission line route. It was pointed out that there has been significant encroachment on the lands in Treaty 1 territory. This has put restrictions and limitations on cultural and traditional activities in the area.

The end result of the discussions was the attached map. While a group of approximately 30 members participated in the exercise not all chose to provide input. Decisions of individuals not to share their information have been respected.

Communications

On February 12, 2016 a meeting was held to discuss communications and to begin to formulate recommendations as to how communications between Manitoba Hydro and the community could be handled. While the work done on communications is through the MMTP, the recommendations from members may also be useful to guide communications with Manitoba Hydro on other projects.

Approximately 30 individuals participated in the exercise including youth from the High School.

An overview of the MMTLP was provided to allow participants to understand the context of the discussion. Given the number of people, the group was divided into three subgroups to provide members a greater opportunity to give their input. A series of questions was used to facilitate the discussion and to gain input from the members.

Members are aware that there is consistently a number of activities and projects that are planned or underway in the Sagkeeng traditional territory and on its ancestral lands. The flow of information about all projects and activities is through the band office. This is logical as the elected leaders and the administrative arm of Sagkeeng represent the interests of the members and consequently, the band office is the recipient of information from outside parties. The challenge appears to be getting the information to members in a manner they see as timely and accurate.

In discussing what is meant by “communications” there was a general consensus across the three groups that quite simply it’s about sharing information. The challenge, it appears, is getting information out in a clear, timely manner that allows for understanding on the part of individuals.

A discussion around how communication currently occurs in Sagkeeng identified a number of mechanisms including newsletters, social media, community events, community meetings, radio, posters and person-to-person sharing. While there are a wide variety of ways used to share information with members, it became clear that the confidence in the communications processes likely need to be improved upon.

In addressing what the best way to communicate information to members about what is happening in the Sagkeeng territory, members generally felt that the mechanisms now in place were good for the most part. One member recalls that in the past Sagkeeng had an “independent” reporter that would provide information about what was happening in the territory. There seemed to be some comfort that information from an “independent” party (independent of the band office) would provide unbiased information to members. The pros and cons of this were not discussed however one suggestion that might assist with the perception of filtered dissemination of information involved having a member attend meetings with Council so that person could provide reports back to members.

Community meetings still seem to be one of the preferred mechanisms for sharing information. It was pointed out that not all members had a vehicle or a reliable means of transportation, which impacts their ability to attend meetings held at the community hall. A suggestion was made that transportation should be provided for individuals to allow them to attend meetings.

In between meetings, members appear comfortable with conveying information through newsletters and social media or radio updates. An additional mechanism that could be used to convey information between meetings is by the delivery of flyers either house to house or in the post office boxes of individuals. The method of delivery would depend on the nature of the information. In the case of time sensitive information home delivery would be best.

Members feel that the flow of information could be improved if Council were to engage a Communications Officer. The primary role of this position would be to assist Council to get information out to members in an efficient, timely manner. The Communications Officer could also be tasked with developing a communication process that members can understand and feel comfortable with. There was a clear understanding that there are financial considerations with this suggestion. To address this, members felt that programs within Sagkeeng could be asked to make a financial contribution to allow for this position to be put in place.

When asked what members need from Manitoba Hydro in relation to proposed and planned activities in the Sagkeeng territory there was mixed response. The discussion at this point did not remain confined to communications.

The presence of Manitoba Hydro on the Winnipeg River system continues to be a contentious issue for members particularly in view of the visible impacts on the lands within the community.

The inability to reach an accord on compensation has an influence on all discussions that involve Manitoba Hydro. Members would like to see Hydro and Sagkeeng engage in discussions around matters that involve compensation, the high cost of power, contracting opportunities and shoreline protection. As well, the use of chemicals for managing vegetation along the transmission lines is of continued concern to members. These are not new and have been expressed in various points over the course of time.

With regard to communication, members do not want to be considered just another stakeholder by Manitoba Hydro. The sharing of information about planned and proposed projects needs to demonstrate to members that Manitoba Hydro is actually willing to listen and hear their concerns.

In terms of the MMTLP, members are open to having Manitoba Hydro provide an update on the status of the project.

On other Manitoba Hydro projects and other activities undertaken in the territory such as upgrades to facilities, vegetation control programs, etc. there needs to be a mechanism that provides notice to Sagkeeng beforehand so members are not left guessing at what is going on.

A suggestion that should be given careful consideration involves regular information meetings that would have Manitoba Hydro representatives providing updates to members on activities and projects – both planned and proposed. Members would establish the agenda for the meetings. An invitation to Manitoba Hydro would be sent through the band office.

In addressing concerns about chemical use, where Manitoba Hydro is planning a vegetation control program members would like to be given advance notice. This would allow for feedback to be provided. Additionally, members that use the designated area for harvesting medicines can plan alternative locations for their activities, assuming the medicines can be found elsewhere.

Recommendations

Based on discussions the following are the main recommendations for Chief and Council and Manitoba Hydro.

For Chief and Council:

1. Transportation should be arranged for members to attend community meetings.
2. A Communications Officer should be hired to help facilitate the flow of information to members. Programs should be asked to make a financial contribution toward such a position.
3. A communication process should be developed and conveyed to members so there is an understanding about how information flows.
4. Chief and Council should get legal advice on what the First Nations rights are in regard to the proposed transmission line. Members should be made aware of what the lawyers say.

For Manitoba Hydro:

1. Regular meetings with Sagkeeng members to share information about projects and activities being undertaken in the territory.
2. Hydro should reengage with Sagkeeng to discuss licensing of projects in the Sagkeeng territory and on its ancestral lands.
3. Notice of upcoming vegetation control programs with an opportunity for members to provide feedback.
4. Manitoba Hydro look to providing financial support for a Communications Officer position at Sagkeeng.

Traditional Hunting & Medicinal Plant Areas of Sagkeeng First Nation



