

Roquet, V., D. Clément, A. Penn, J.-R. Proulx and A. Tessier. *Environmental Follow-up Assessment of the La Grande Hydroelectric Complex – Human Impacts Generated in the Eastern Sector – Main Report. Final Report.* Montréal (QC). Vincent Roquet et Associés, Archéotec, Carto-Média, for Hydro-Québec Production, January 2006. 242 pages.

Abstract

This follow-up study was originally planned to enable Hydro-Québec to comply with the conditions in the certificates authorizing construction of Brisay and Laforge-2 generating stations. After discussion with the Cree Regional Authority, the decision was made to extend the study to La Grande Phase 1 and the entire eastern sector—the part of the James Bay region upstream of Laforge-1 generating station. The study reviews all the human impacts on this sector by all types of facilities built during the project. The construction affected the hunting grounds of Chisasibi, Mistissini and Whapmagoostui. The three communities and the Cree Regional Authority were therefore invited to participate in this study, which was supervised by a steering committee that represented the various parties. In addition, a Cree coordinator was appointed by each of the three communities to plan meetings, contribute to the development of survey tools, and review the reports.

The study identified Cree land uses before and after completion of the project in the hunting areas affected and in control areas that were not directly affected. The land-use, visual, economic, social and cultural impacts on these areas were identified. One study component, suggested by the Crees, dealt with the economy of subsistence activities. The study also looked at the impacts (including economic and social) on land use by Southerners for recreation or mining exploration. In addition, the study assessed the efficacy of various mitigation measures. It identified the economic spinoffs in phases 1 and 2 for all the Cree communities, and the economic and social implications of construction site jobs for Cree workers.

The study revealed that reservoirs and roads generated far more impacts on Cree land use than the other types of facilities. Even today, for a number of reasons, the reservoirs are still not used much, although some trappers have begun to take note of the resources available there. Roads have had very significant impacts that are mostly considered beneficial, although several impacts are negative. From a cultural point of view, the flooding of hunting grounds, burial grounds and birthplaces is still considered a loss, particularly by the Cree elders. Caribou hunting by thousands of hunters from the South is perceived by the Crees as difficult to reconcile with Cree trapping, even when there are economic spinoffs. Other visitor activities (fishing, tourism, mining exploration) cause less disruption in the Cree way of life, although they are sometimes perceived as another sign of loss of control over the territory. On the other hand, the economic spinoffs have enabled the creation of local and regional Cree businesses. The spinoffs during the operation phase have played an important role in the creation of local companies. These businesses, however, will require greater support in the coming years, particularly for business management and planning. The participation of Cree workers in life on the jobsite has generally proved to be a positive experience.

The Candel diversion deprived the Grande Rivière de la Baleine watershed of an inflow of about 30 m³/s. However, the actual impacts of this diversion are difficult to assess because of the small volume diverted and complications like climate change and isostatic rebound.

Five reports resulted from this study: the main report, three community reports and a methodological report. The first four include maps.