NSRWRC Stakeholder Meetings – September 13, 2007

Turtleford Agricultural Centre (Turtleford, Saskatchewan)

Project History (Bob Collier)

To give a brief history of where we got started on this and bring you up to date on where we are today, in spring 2004 the Economic development officer in the city of North Battleford dusted off the PFRA report on the Highgate dam. During that summer there were 13 or 14 meetings to gauge interest and later that summer had 80-90 people who met and elected a steering committee at the meeting. In mar 05 we held our first annual meeting after the steering committee put together a set of bylaws and incorporated with the national non-profit organization. At this meeting elected a board of Directors who submitted a proposal to Can Sask water supply program to further study water management options on the North Sask River. In just 2006 received confirmation of the funding and over the next few months worked to raise the 10% that the board was required to contribute. In December 2006, Golder Assoc was awarded the consulting contract, in Feb the first round of stakeholder meetings was held and this set of meetings is the conclusion of phase 1 of the study.

Vision: to optimize the socio-economic opportunities arising from the water resource of the North Saskatchewan River

Mission: to explore, research, and recommend action and studies to determine the feasibility and viability of a sustainable multi-use water storage development along the North Saskatchewan River.

Presentation by Golder Assoc.

Results of Question and Answer Period

They say they are going to have to lift the bridge to the West about 2 feet, but according to the map that bridge would basically be an island, it looks like the water would channel on either sides around it.

Yes, a new bridge would have to be built. Sask highways provided us with a cost estimate of the bridges that would have to be replaced. Based on the map, the water would rise approximately 25 metres in that location.

I understand there was a First Nations man who had been involved in these cases before who spoke at the North Battleford meeting – can you tell us what he said in regards to how this process has been flawed from the beginning?

Questions were asked about the public consultation process and what he brought up was that when you have a project that affects traditional land use or First Nations in an area there is a duty to consult. So if a proponent is going to build something, before any project could proceed it needs to go through a regulatory assessment and a big part of that is a duty to consult. What we stated at that time was that we have identified these consultations as issues that could impact these 4 alternatives. That process would need to occur if a project were proposed, at this point, this is just a scoping study, there isn't actually a project under consideration. Once a project was chosen there would need to be a significant amount of consultation.

This has been going on since 2004 and I was just reading an article from Pat Atkinson that our debt is $10.4 B at present and yet she says we have to be mindful of the needs and priorities of the other Saskatchewan people. Is this dam a need or a priority? Can it justify the loss of hundreds of agricultural families and the loss of their land? These people will leave the area and millions of more dollars will have to be spent to lure them back here.

These are the types of things that would require a great deal of investigation and consultation at a project stage. The province and federal government will look at a $4B investment and consider how it provides returns to taxpayers – these are all really issues that must be addressed when you are looking at a specific project. And there are regulatory systems and legislated requirements to make sure that that kind of consultation is done properly.

Those numbers presented for economic benefit are based on how many years?

They were based on paying off the debt over 50 years and the life of the structures and the dam expected to be more than 100 years. The financial calculations were based on 50 years.

So if you used 100 years the economics would look much better?

They would look different. But you would need to spend more money on the dam infrastructure after 50 years because that is its lifetime. So the additional benefits of those extra years would come with additional costs.

Stakeholder Comments:

I feel this whole area is not suitable for damming our river, what better plan has been made than the way the river flows now. This is more ranching hilly country and you spoke about irrigation a lot and this area isn't suitable for that. The ranches or farms around here can manage both dry and wet years. There is a lot of wildlife and historical sites that would be affected.

I don't see a dam being realistic, but see advantages with something like a weir that helps control water volume.

These are really intermediate options that fall somewhere between a large dam and a status quo approach. There are still options in the middle that the committee can consider.

Assume the money spent will be taxpayer money, so it would have to be spent wisely.

There has been no proponent identified who has money to build any of these options at the moment, that is partly why finance charges are included in the analysis.

Just read an article on the internet this morning – other countries are very envious of our fresh water, and wonder if we are letting all of the water flow into the ocean we may be losing water that could be used in other ways. Fresh water storage is very valuable around the world.

But once fresh water is stored it becomes stagnant.

Has there been any discussion at the prior meetings about what happens when the glaciers are no longer providing fresh water?

Yes there were comments. The amount of water in the River in Saskatchewan is virtually the same amount that is in Edmonton; there is virtually no contribution in the prairies, so most of it comes from 3 sources: base flow which occurs fairly constantly driven primarily from groundwater discharge; glacier melt water which occurs in the summer time and adds to base flow; the third is

snow melt and rainfall runoff that forms the peak flows in the summer. Primarily these three come from the Rockies and the foothills. If the glaciers were to melt away you wouldn't have glacier melt water, but the river would not be dry because there are still other components. There has also been a study done for the National Parks it addressed potential changes to the park system due to climate change and it concluded that with future climate change the snowfall and rainfall in the national park areas would increase, so some of those water sources would increase while the glacial melt decreased. Having said that there has been a trend over the last 100 years to lower trend in the water, but that doesn't mean you can take that trend line and some day end up with zero flow.

My understanding is that glacial melt water is actually a small contribution to the flow – somewhere around 10%.

Committee Comment: (committee comments in italics, questions in regular font)

First of all thank you all for coming out tonight, this is my third night and every presentation I have learned something., I want to acknowledge that there are other members of the committee here tonight.

The committee is elected by the membership at the annual meeting. We have an executive with a maximum of 14 and a minimum of 8. There are 4 reps from RMs, 2 from towns, 2 from villages 2 at large and 1 member from Vermillion River County. Outlined the list of committee members to participants.

At 10am on Monday we will meet as a committee to discuss where we go from here. We have to have this whole study wrapped up by March 31, 2008 as that is when the funding runs out so we need to continue to move ahead. This is just the first phase and we will continue on from here.