

## Business and municipal leaders oppose power lines east of Great Slave Lake

By SHAWN BELL, SRJ Reporter -- 1/19/2010

Community leaders in the southern NWT have voiced opposition to plans for a 690 km power line extending from the Taltson dam around the East Arm of Great Slave Lake.

Yellowknife Mayor Gordon Van Tighem and Fort Smith Chamber of Commerce president Don Jaque are both calling for the Dezé energy corporation to reconsider plans to run power lines east around Great Slave Lake, saying extra power should be connected to existing grids to benefit residents of the NWT before spur lines are run to diamond or other mines in the territory.

"The people of the NWT have to come first, so our be all and end all is not sending a power line to the middle of nowhere with the hope somebody is going to come along and build a mine in a future that is impossible to predict," Jaque said.

Jaque believes the only two options for the expansion of the Taltson hydro plant are to either run power lines west around Great Slave Lake, connecting Fort Providence and Yellowknife before heading out to the mines, or to string lines from Fort Resolution across the lake to connect with Yellowknife before heading north.

Jaque argues this would in effect create a southern NWT grid, making it easy to connect other communities, such as Fort Simpson, in the future while tying the Snare and Taltson systems together. That would reduce power rates in the South Slave and in Yellowknife, lowering the cost of living and helping attract future mine workers to live in the North.

As for running lines across Great Slave Lake, Jaque believes the economic model makes sense because the line could connect with Avalon's proposed rare earth metals mine at Thor Lake south of Yellowknife, with an estimated lifespan of 100 years, then connect to the capital city.

Yellowknife Mayor Gordon Van Tighem has long made similar arguments against running power lines into the middle of nowhere without connecting communities first.

Van Tighem told *The Journal* he worries the power will end up being wasted on the tundra once the diamonds are gone. For that reason, he believes sending power through southern NWT communities before sending it to the mines makes sense in the long term.

The community leaders' views echo those expressed by the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation, albeit for different reasons.

At last week's public hearing on the expansion project, Lutsel K'e Chief Steven Nitah expressed his people's unequivocal opposition to any power line crossing the Lockhart River, considered one of the Dene's most sacred sites.

But the GNWT seems intent on getting power out east of Yellowknife to the Slave Geologic Province as quickly as possible. The NWT Power Corp claims if cheap hydro electric power is available to the mines, it will make them more economical and encourage future expansion of mining in the region.

Lew Voytilla, chairman of the Power Corp., told *The Journal* in Dec. 2008 that eliminating the variability of diesel prices will make it more attractive for future mines in the area.

The GNWT is a one-third shareholder in the project through the NWT Hydro Corporation, along with the NWT Métis Nation and the Akaitcho Tribal Council.

## Lutsel K'e opposition puts Taltson plan in jeopardy

By SHAWN BELL, SRJ Reporter -- 1/19/2010

The expansion of the Taltson hydro dam could be in jeopardy, at least in the form proposed, as the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation continues to express its unequivocal opposition to running power lines through sacred Dene territory east of Great Slave Lake.

Lutsel K'e voiced their resistance to power lines across the Lockhart River at the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board's public hearing on the Taltson expansion in Dettah on January 14.

"Lutsel K'e is opposing this transmission line route because of the irreparable cultural and spiritual damage it will cause to the Lockhart River and the Old Lady of the Falls," Lutsel K'e Chief Steven Nitah told *The Journal*. "There should be an alternate route considered."

The Taltson expansion is expected to create an extra 36 megawatts of power the proponents plan to sell to diamond mines north of Yellowknife.

Lutsel K'e concerns largely focus on how that power gets to the mines. The favoured GNWT approach is to run a 690 km power line from the Taltson dam, 56 km north east of Fort Smith, around the east arm of Great Slave Lake to connect to Ekati, Diavik and Snap Lake diamond mines.

The route would cut a swath through hundreds of kilometres of virgin Boreal forest in the traditional land of the people of Lutsel K'e, slice through the middle of the proposed East Arm National Park and build power line towers over the Lockhart River near Old Lady of the Falls, a site considered a sacred place by the people of Lutsel K'e.

"This area has long been known and identified as the most culturally significant area of the highest caliber to the people of Lutsel K'e," Nitah said. "It is spiritually sacred land and has been for time immemorial. It is not acceptable for transmission lines across the river. The Desnethche (Lockhart River) must not be touched or disturbed in any way."

Deze Energy Corp, the proponent of the Taltson expansion, includes as equal partners the NWT Hydro Corporation, the NWT Metis Nation and the Akaitcho Tribal Council.

Yet despite the Akaitcho involvement, Nitah believes the people of Lutsel K'e are being left out of the decision-making process as the government of the NWT pulls the strings on the project from the behind the scenes.

The Lutsel K'e Chief believes it is just another example of the territorial government trying to develop and or dam the Lockhart River and Old Lady of the Falls.

"This is a fight we have been involved in for 50 years," Nitah said. "Our position hasn't changed. But we feel our position has not been respected, even within our own people in the Akaitcho, and certainly not by the government of the NWT."

Nitah said the people of Lutsel K'e also fear the east arm power lines will be used as a pretext to build a transmission line to the Upper Thelon region of eastern NWT, where deposits of uranium have been discovered.

In 2008 Lutsel K'e blocked attempts by UR-Energy to explore for uranium in the Upper Thelon. Besides Lutsel K'e's concerns over the Lockhart River, there is also debate concerning what effect power lines would have on the proposed East Arm National Park. Plans to create the park are ongoing, with geologic surveys of the 33,000 square kilometer study area expected to be completed in early 2010.