



**Response by Chief Jerry Primrose and Councillor and Future Development Portfolio Holder W. Elvis Thomas to Peter Kulchyski's *Manitoba Hydro: How to Build and Legacy of Hatred*,**

**NELSON HOUSE, Manitoba – November 18, 2004 – *Manitoba Hydro: How to Build a Legacy of Hatred***, written by Peter Kulchyski, was first published in *Canadian Dimension*, and has subsequently been circulated by people opposed to the proposed Wuskwatim hydroelectric project planned to be built in Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation's Resource Management Area, in northern Manitoba.

Professor Kulchyski's view is that this hydroelectric development project should be stopped, primarily to protect our "ancient way of life" and "traditional hunting economy". In fact, we are no longer a hunter-gatherer society and cannot sustain ourselves with a hunting way of life.

We are a modern First Nation, with a fast-growing population of young people who want to maintain our Cree culture, but who also have dreams of successful lives as teachers, dentists, doctors, lawyers, engineers, artists, musicians, business leaders and trades people.

Kulchyski ignores this evolving story of our First Nation and the value of this new era of collaboration and cooperation with Manitoba Hydro to build a strong economic base for our First Nation.

This is building a brighter future, not a legacy of hatred.

If you do the research you will learn we have negotiated and structured a powerful partnership that will bring real benefits to our people (we did learn from the Churchill River Diversion and the Northern Flood Agreement and this time we have worked from a position of strength not ignorance and weakness).

Kulchyski does us no favour by demeaning what modicum of progress we have achieved within our community and what we have done to take charge of our destiny – getting beyond lawyers and consultants – to provide for the real needs of our people.

We are trying to build a new model for a sustainable First Nation economy that provides us with the resources to offer real opportunities for growth and development to our Members and other Aboriginal peoples of northern Manitoba. The [Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs](#) and many other Aboriginal groups, governments and associations, support our initiative.

We cannot be isolationists as Kulchyski suggests. For too long our people have been trapped within a 19th century standard of living. We want to catch up with the rest of Canadians.

Kulchyski on the other hand somehow thinks progress rests in hanging on to the past, fighting forever over the Northern Flood Agreement (NFA) and finding a way for thousands of our young people to make a living by hunting and fishing.

For many years we did fight for compensation, finally settling in 1996 when we signed the NFA Implementation Agreement. It provides compensation for damages caused by the Churchill River Diversion (CRD) and a framework for all future development in our Resource Management Area.

He refers to this 1996 Agreement as no more than a “cash buyout”, ignoring the obvious benefits to our community. In total we received about \$118 million in compensation from Canada, Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro, including \$65 million and other valuable benefits from the 1996 agreement. The compensation provides funding for our community trust, which in turn funds a variety of key community services and programs every year. Other valuable benefits include Hydro’s commitment to pay many thousands of dollars to maintain our arena over many years.

The 1996 agreement also improved on the NFA when it comes to land. Instead of four acres of land for each acre affected by CRD, we received 17 acres for each one, or a total of 55,000 acres. And most importantly it includes Article 8, which ensures no development can take place in our Resource Management Area without our consultation and involvement.

Three other northern Manitoban First Nations signed similar agreements. We are supportive of all other Aboriginal groups as they continue to pursue their own path to self-sufficiency, including the communities of South Indian Lake and Cross Lake (Pimicikamak Cree Nation).

Kulchyski also says the [Wuskwatim deal](#) we are currently negotiating with Manitoba Hydro is “deeply flawed” and should be more like the Peace of the Braves agreement the Cree of Quebec settled for. In fact, no meaningful comparison can be drawn with the [Summary of Understandings](#) (SOU) with Manitoba Hydro.

First, the projects are radically different in scope and in the magnitude of effects on the environment. For example, the proposed Wuskwatim Generating and Transmission Projects would cause less than 0.5 square kilometre of flooding, (less than 0.2 of a square mile) in the immediate vicinity of the dam, while around 833 square kilometres of flooding is anticipated by projects included in the Peace of the Braves agreement.

Secondly, the Peace of the Braves agreement is a government-to-government arrangement, which addresses a whole array of treaty issues, such as funding for government services, and a multitude of resource harvesting issues, including mining, forestry and hydroelectric.

Thirdly the SOU, published last year, isn’t an agreement as Kulchyski suggests. It is a non-binding document that sets the stage and provides a framework for negotiation between NCN and Manitoba Hydro for a binding Project Development Agreement (PDA). Even Manitoba’s independent Clean Environment Commission found the SOU and Peace of the Braves agreement could not be meaningfully compared.

In any case, to suggest we are unable to negotiate an agreement for ourselves is demeaning and paternalistic. We are not like an animal being “tossed a poison bone” as Kulchyski suggests.

In fact, we are confident the partnership we are negotiating with Manitoba is an excellent opportunity for our people. If the Project Development Agreement is democratically approved by a majority of our Members, it will mean we have an opportunity to own up to one-third of the generating station. In addition, we are also negotiating an adverse effect compensation agreement to address any impact on our treaty rights and interests as set out in Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution.

Kulchyski has also taken up the cause of a small group of political opponents in trying to discredit the legitimacy of the leadership of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, by suggesting there were some “irregularities” with the lawful democratic election of our Council. In any election, there are always winners and losers. In this case, the losers were less than gracious in defeat and mounted a legal challenge, which ultimately failed.

Our council is acting openly and responsibly in the best interests of our people. The bottom line is that the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation is committed to fulfilling our vision to exercise sovereignty that sustains a prosperous socio-economic future. Taking part in the proposed development of the Wuskwatim Generating Station and Transmission Projects is consistent with this vision.

We urge you to learn more about the Wuskwatim project and how we are building a legacy of hope by reviewing our website.

Sincerely,

Chief Jerry Primrose, Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation

W. Elvis Thomas, Councillor and Future Development Portfolio Holder  
*You can view the article by Peter Kulchyski on the [Canadian Dimension](#) website.*