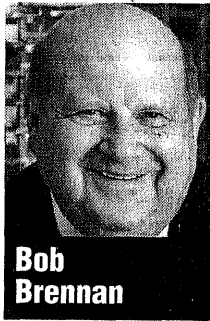


# \$100 million is not 'nothing'

## *Manitoba Hydro provides plenty of financial help to Cross Lake*

**P**ETER Kulchyski's recent article *Why U.S. should interfere, Free Press, June 8*, continues his pattern of romanticized and all-too-often factually incorrect commentaries on northern hydro development. Your readers deserve better.

Northern hydropower development undertaken 40 years ago did impact the people and waterways. That is why Canada, Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro and five First Nations entered into the Northern Flood Agreement in 1977 to address interests and concerns of these impacted First Nations.



**Bob  
Brennan**

Contrary to what is stated in the article, the NFA is being taken seriously. There has been success in reaching comprehensive implementation agreements with four of the five NFA First Nations. Only Cross Lake First Nation, which also refers to itself as Pimicikamak, is proceeding with implementation of the NFA as written and without any clarifying supplemental agreement. This is at the band's request and we respect their choice.

There have been challenging differences in viewpoints regarding NFA implementation between Manitoba Hydro and the federal and provincial governments on one hand, and the Cross Lake First Nation, but the record shows that the article's claim that "nothing gets done" is totally untrue. To date, Manitoba Hydro alone has spent more than \$100 million for programs, compensation and mitigation to address adverse effects of the project at Cross Lake. While we can't always measure progress and equity in dollars and cents, surely it stretches credulity to state that \$100 million is "nothing."

When NFA issues arise, we are willing to work with Cross Lake to find solutions within the pro-

visions of the NFA. Regrettably, late last year, Chief John Miswagon advised us that the NFA implementation process was suspended "until further notice."

Evidence of our commitment to the NFA continues to be visible in the community every day through programs that employ many Cross Lake band members. These programs are designed to ensure safety, to assist in continuing traditional hunting, fishing and trapping activities and to address the direct effects of our operations.

These include the safe ice travel program, the safe water travel and portage program, personal property damage claims, the domestic fishing program, the school hot lunch program, the alternative foods program, the elders fuel wood program, the debris management program, the dock replacement program, commercial fishing and trapping programs and maintenance of the arena. Annual expenditures on these programs are typically in the range of \$5 million to \$6 million.

Another example that responds to the community's economic development priorities is Manitoba Hydro's \$500,000 contribution to assist in the Cross Lake First Nation's purchase of the Ponton restaurant and gas station.

It is disheartening to see these programs negotiated with and agreed to by community leaders and then subsequently derided and characterized as "nothing."

Kulchyski incorrectly states that work at Sipiwek Lake has been halted. Much of the work is seasonal and only occurs in the summer and fall. Preparations are underway to complete important archaeological work with the community and provincial historic resources branch and, as in previous years, boats will patrol the lake on a daily basis addressing safety concerns.

Managing shoreline debris at Jenpeg Forebay will continue this year, but both Hydro staff and the community-based contractor hired to complete the works have recognized that most of the debris has been dealt with and work oppor-

tunities are diminishing.

The Minnesota legislation trumpeted in the article has the potential to interfere with Manitoba's long-standing and mutually beneficial trade relationship with Minnesota. Other Manitoba First Nations who are participating in new hydro projects have made it clear that interference with sales of clean, renewable hydropower to Minnesota would harm their interests and their efforts to build a brighter future for their communities — not to mention the interests of all Manitobans.

The legislation is also unnecessary. It does nothing to further the resolution of impacts of northern hydro development. The NFA provides a claims process for compensating the First Nation and their members adversely affected by the project and, when disputes arise, allows for resolution of issues through an arbitrator. The Minnesota Court of Appeal recognizes this, having concluded "The environmental and socio-economic impacts caused by the Manitoba Project are capable of being addressed under the NFA."

Regardless of these facts, Cross Lake and its supporters continue to pursue public relations and media campaigns in an effort to enhance their position in NFA implementation. Any issues they have can be resolved here in Manitoba, through legal means at their disposal. All the lobbying in Minnesota and elsewhere must be seen for what it is: an attempt to circumvent the dispute-resolution processes available within the NFA.

It is important to understand that today, Manitoba Hydro's approach to hydropower development ensures aboriginal peoples benefit from development and recognizes the special relationship they have with the land and waterways.

Today's approach is clearly demonstrated in the partnership between Manitoba Hydro and Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation in the 200-megawatt Wuskwatim generating station.

In addition, Manitoba Hydro is also in negotiations with several First Nations on a joint development agreement for the Keeyask hydroelectric project on the Nelson River. Again, the First Nations have been involved from the earliest stages of the project and many have already been employed in field studies related to the project.

These are positive stories arising out of the NFA — two of many ignored in the article.

*Bob Brennan is president and CEO of Manitoba Hydro.*