

“Becoming Onîkânîwak: Defending Nehithaw-Askiy from Saskatchewan’s Uranium Industry”

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We accept this community governance project as conforming
to the standard required.

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Preface

My Community Governance Project took place in northern Saskatchewan, in my home community of La Ronge. My project focused on uranium mining as one of the most pressing injustices on our homelands. With this Community Governance Project, my goal was to explore which resistance strategies would be most effective in defending against the uranium mining industry in order to protect our homelands and become increasingly independent of the Canadian state.

I chose uranium mining as the subject for my Community Governance Project because as a resident of northern Saskatchewan, I can see that it is one of the most pertinent issues affecting our nation. Located beneath Denesuline and Nehithaw territories in this region are some of the largest known and highest grade uranium reserves in the world, which have long been the exclusive source of uranium for the Canadian nuclear industry. Uranium exploitation threatens not only the lands and waters of northern Saskatchewan, but is also connected with environmental, health and security concerns globally. With this in mind, I write in solidarity with those affected worldwide by the flow of uranium from the traditional territory of my ancestors.

Through the process of completing my Community Governance Project, I learned a wealth of knowledge about the beautiful traditions and teachings that guided the lives of our ancestors. I discovered that resistance to colonialism must be grounded in the resurgence and revitalization of these teachings and governance traditions. The resurgence of Nehithaw governance is a fundamental step in healing our nation from colonialism. Carrying out the responsibilities outlined by our ancestors is a key component of defending against uranium mining and beginning the process of decolonization on our homelands.

Introduction

My name is Kirstin Scansen. I am a Woods Cree woman from northern Saskatchewan. In Nehithaweewin, we refer to ourselves as Nehithaw or the Nehithawak¹. I am not a Canadian. Instead, like my ancestors before me, I am a part of the Nehithaw nation. I identify as a member of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, though I am aware that this entity was originally established as a way for colonizers to better oversee and regulate our people. My mother is originally from La Ronge and my father is a Settler from Maple Ridge, British Columbia. I come from the Isbister family of La Ronge on my Kohkum's side and on my Moshum's side, the Eninew family of the Numepith Sipi (Sucker River) reserve, thirty kilometers north of La Ronge. Having both been raised on their family traplines, it is probably more accurate to say that both of my grandparents are from the pikwâcasîhk. The Nehithawak traditionally resided throughout the boreal forest region of northern Saskatchewan. Located on the pre-Cambrian shield, its complex network of waterways and islands is not what most people imagine when they think of Saskatchewan. Historically, our lives were structured according to what was offered by the land. In the winters, individual family units travelled long distances to hunt, trap and fish. In the summer times, when food sources were plentiful and easier to gather, Nehithaw families met and camped along the shores of lakes and rivers for ceremony and celebration. It was during these gatherings that affairs of the Nehithaw nation were discussed, and individual clan leaders met to share news and make plans for the future. It was at this time also that international affairs were

¹ Depending on familial dialect differences and whether or not Standard Roman Orthography (SRO) is used, the Woods Cree are also referred to as Nehethow or Nihithaw. For the purposes of this paper, I will refer to my people as Nehithaw or the Nehithawak (with the suffix "ak" indicating plurality), since it is this spelling that is used in my community of Sucker River. In contemplating the many different forms of the Cree language, I have chosen to honour the particular dialect of my community, though I do recognize that others may choose a different spelling. Ultimately, each of these words is pronounced in the same way, reflecting the fact that our language was until recently, an oral, rather than a written language.

discussed; specifically, our relationship with our neighbouring Dene, plains Cree and Swampy Cree nations.

Beginning in the late 1700's, and accelerating into the mid 1800's, European settlers began arriving on Nehithaw-askiy. It was during this time that the process of treaty making began between our nations. The way that our Elders understood treaties differed greatly from the way that the British Crown and the Canadian state viewed them. I will explore these differences in the second section of this report. For now I will say that treaties were understood by our people to be ceremonies where healthy relationships built on mutual respect and understanding were borne. They were traditions deeply embedded in Indigenous worldview prior to contact.

Our ancestors signed the adhesion to Treaty 6 with settler-colonists on February 11, 1889 on the north end of Montreal Lake at Molanosa. The site of signing is approximately 80 kilometers south of La Ronge. Treaty 6 encompasses a region that was primarily Nehiyaw (Plains Cree) traditional territory, while the adhesion to Treaty 6 covers a territory primarily inhabited by the Nehithawak, although Cree territory does extend north into Treaty 10 territory. My family is rooted both on Treaty 6 territory and on the southern-most edge of Treaty 10 territory to the north. Most Nehithawak reside on traditional Nehithaw-askiy, with many people living in the La Ronge area, located 250 kilometers north of the next largest town. We are a network of small northern communities that have remained relatively isolated from the urban south and have maintained strong relationships with the land as hunters, fishers, trappers and gatherers.

However, our Nation is under threat from a force that seeks to eliminate our existence as Indigenous peoples. Our governance principles, ways of knowing, language and identity as

Nehithawak stand in the way of a colonial agenda that requires access to land for its survival. In the context of northern Saskatchewan, the Canadian state and the Province of Saskatchewan require access to uranium ore underneath traditional Nehithaw and Denesuline territories for the development and maintenance of the nuclear industry, one of the key components of the capitalist framework in Canada. This is the latest form that colonialism has taken in northern Saskatchewan and is one of many in a long history of threats which our people have had to respond to and protect ourselves from.

In recent decades, we have become a people deeply implicated in Canada's nuclear industry. Many of the world's largest and most profitable uranium mining and milling operations are located on or just north of our traditional territory, as well as the territory of our northern neighbours, the Denesuline. The Denesuline bear the brunt of contamination as they live and work in close proximity to the mines. Milled uranium ore is transported south through Nehithaw and traditional territory and Métis communities², putting our lands and waters at risk. Millions of dollars in revenue are generated annually by northern Indigenous communities through direct and indirect collaborations with the uranium mining industry. Due to the fact that most of us in the community work and reside far from the visible scars of the uranium mining industry to the north³ and given that we are told only partial truths by the nuclear industry, it can seem as though uranium mining is ethical or benign. Upon further research, however, it is clear that the uranium mining industry in Saskatchewan has serious health and environmental costs both locally and worldwide. From radioactive effluent and tailings at uranium mines on Nehithaw and Denesuline

² There are a number of communities in northern Saskatchewan that identify as Métis. I would like to take this time to acknowledge the crucial role that these communities have in building a movement of resistance against uranium mining in Saskatchewan. When I refer to Indigenous peoples of northern Saskatchewan in this report, I am referring to Nehithaw, Denesuline and Métis peoples.

³ See Figure 1, "Uranium: Uranium in Saskatchewan" on page 13 of this report for more information on the location of uranium mines in relation to northern Indigenous communities.

territories, to the dangers associated with processing and transporting uranium, health and safety concerns at nuclear power facilities, including accidents like the one at Japan's Fukushima Daichii plant, the manufacture of depleted uranium weaponry and the insurmountable dilemma of low, medium and high-level nuclear waste, the costs of Saskatchewan's nuclear industry are high.

Aside from uranium mining, our people continue to face a number of other obstacles to collective healing and resurgence. Though the residential schools have closed, curriculum that favours the English language and Settler teachings continues to dominate the school system. The loss of Nehithaweewin as our primary form of communication has meant that our teachings are more difficult to come by than ever before. Our traditional governance structures and teachings regarding leadership and accountability have been replaced with the colonial Indian Act system of bureaucracy. The intergenerational trauma introduced into our communities through the state sponsored and church run residential school system has left our nation with systemic social ills that were unheard of prior to contact and it can often seem as though our communities are in a constant state of crisis. In the midst of all of this, foreign corporations have entered our territories claiming to bring "solutions" to end our collective suffering: economic development through the exploitation of uranium ore. The Province of Saskatchewan and the Federal Government of Canada support this claim. But since when has the colonizer ever cared about our collective well-being and our future? Why now? Why uranium? Who is really benefitting from the uranium mining industry?

With these questions in mind, I began my Community Governance project by researching Saskatchewan's uranium mining industry, including its history and how it plays a crucial role in Canada's nuclear industry. I began to understand how important Saskatchewan's uranium is to

Canada's economic structure and energy security. An overview of this research can be found in the first section of this report. I continued my research by exploring some of the environmental hazards of uranium mining, including tailings ponds, mining effluent, uranium ore processing, power plants and nuclear waste. Much of what I found was deeply disturbing and appeared to be information that was not readily available to community members in northern Saskatchewan. I have chosen to summarize this research in Appendix A at the end of this report, as well as provide a list of online resources that interested readers can access to find out more about the environmental and health impacts of uranium mining through the nuclear fuel cycle. The critical work of meticulously documenting these impacts is already being done elsewhere by individuals and groups much more qualified than I to do so, so I won't be documenting these impacts in depth for this report.

Once I had completed this research, I began to realize the enormity of the threat posed to the Nehithaw nation and others by uranium mining. As a result, over the course of my Community Governance Project, I sought to discover which strategies would be most effective to challenging uranium mining in northern Saskatchewan. In the summer of 2013, I began exploring what methods had been employed to date to resist uranium mining. I found that numerous individuals and organizations had expressed opposition toward the mines for many decades already, engaging with the industry via participation in numerous hearings and inquiries, in addition to directly challenging the flow of resources out of the territory itself. When the opportunity arose in 2013, I presented at the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission hearings in La Ronge regarding the relicensing of several mines in northern Saskatchewan. My experience as a presenter at these hearings helped me to better understand the limitations of engaging in the regulatory process as a means of expressing opposition to the uranium industry and colonialism

more broadly. I also came to understand the centrality of the Indian Act band council system to the functioning of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission regulatory regime. If our ultimate goal is the protection of future generations and the liberation of our people from the colonial structure, the impact of resisting uranium mining through the regulatory process is minimal. The second section of this report is an exploration of this form of resistance to uranium mining, and why I believe that although it is an inherently colonial and unjust process, it can still be useful as an opportunity for truth-telling and as an educational tool at the community level.

This practical component of my Community Governance Project revealed to me the deep-seated complexities that our nations will face as we go forward defending ourselves from the onslaught of uranium mining and colonialism. Traditionally, our Nation was much better equipped to make difficult decisions for ourselves and our future generations because our governance systems and leadership principles were intact. With the implementation of the Indian Act band council system of government, the colonial government of Canada has been able to hijack the decision making process at the community level and greatly influence the future of our communities as Indigenous peoples. The third section of this Community Governance Project report is an exploration of how direct action and the resurgence of traditional Nehithaw forms of governance and leadership principles can help us to become more independent of the Canadian state and its agenda of uranium mining on our traditional territories. In doing so, we will protect the land from contamination and ensure our future as a nation.

I hope that this report will be used by community members and groups interested in decolonizing our traditional territories as a pedagogical tool to understand why we must protect the land from uranium mining and how a conscious resurgence of Nehithaw governance principles will help us achieve this. I hope to share with readers how the current regulatory

structure relies on both the political/economic framework of colonialism and the psychological attachments that so many Indigenous communities have to the institutions of colonialism to function. The first section of this paper will provide a brief overview of Canada's nuclear industry, and the connection between Saskatchewan's uranium to the global nuclear industry. This research was crucial for me to undertake in order to even get to the point of understanding the importance of resisting uranium mining, so I have found it important to include in this report. I also thoroughly researched the environmental hazards of uranium mining and why it is necessary for us to rethink our involvement in this industry. I found this process to also be very crucial to my journey through my CGP. I have included a brief summary of this research, as well as a resource guide for community members seeking to begin their own research at the end of this report, in Appendix A. In the second section, I will be reflecting on my experience as a presenter at a Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission hearing in my home community which served as the practical, on-the-ground component of my Community Governance project. This second section examines how the regulatory process relies on the dispossession of traditional Indigenous forms of governance and the denial of the treaty relationship to achieve its mandate. This section also explores the myth of consultation in the nuclear regulatory process and the inherent limitations of the regulatory process as a site of resistance in the protection of Denesuline and Nehithaw homelands. I seek to emphasize that although this process is profoundly colonial in that it relies on the Indian Act imposed Band Council system and the myth of consultation in order to function, it is still a useful way of publicly exposing the rhetoric of the nuclear industry. With this section, I seek to document the ways that this process is used by the colonizer to legitimize the dispossession of Indigenous territory while simultaneously reaffirming the colonial relationship. In the third section I will explore how a resurgence of

traditional Nehithaw governance and leadership principles (including the recognition and ratification of treaty relationships and responsibilities) can empower us as individuals, communities and as a nation to begin to heal from the dehumanizing effects of colonialism and defend Nehithaw-askiy from uranium mining. This final section explores how direct action can act as a catalyst for our people to address both the economic aspect of colonialism on our territories, as well as the psychological attachments that so many in our communities have in regards to seeking justice within mechanisms centered in the state. I will be concluding this report with a list of recommendations for action going forward into the future. I have included a few shorter term organizational goals for grassroots groups and individuals as well as long term strategies that will help us achieve independence from the Canadian state. In all of this, I want to emphasize that resisting uranium mining and reimagining our future as a nation is a key commitment in the fight to decolonize our traditional territory.

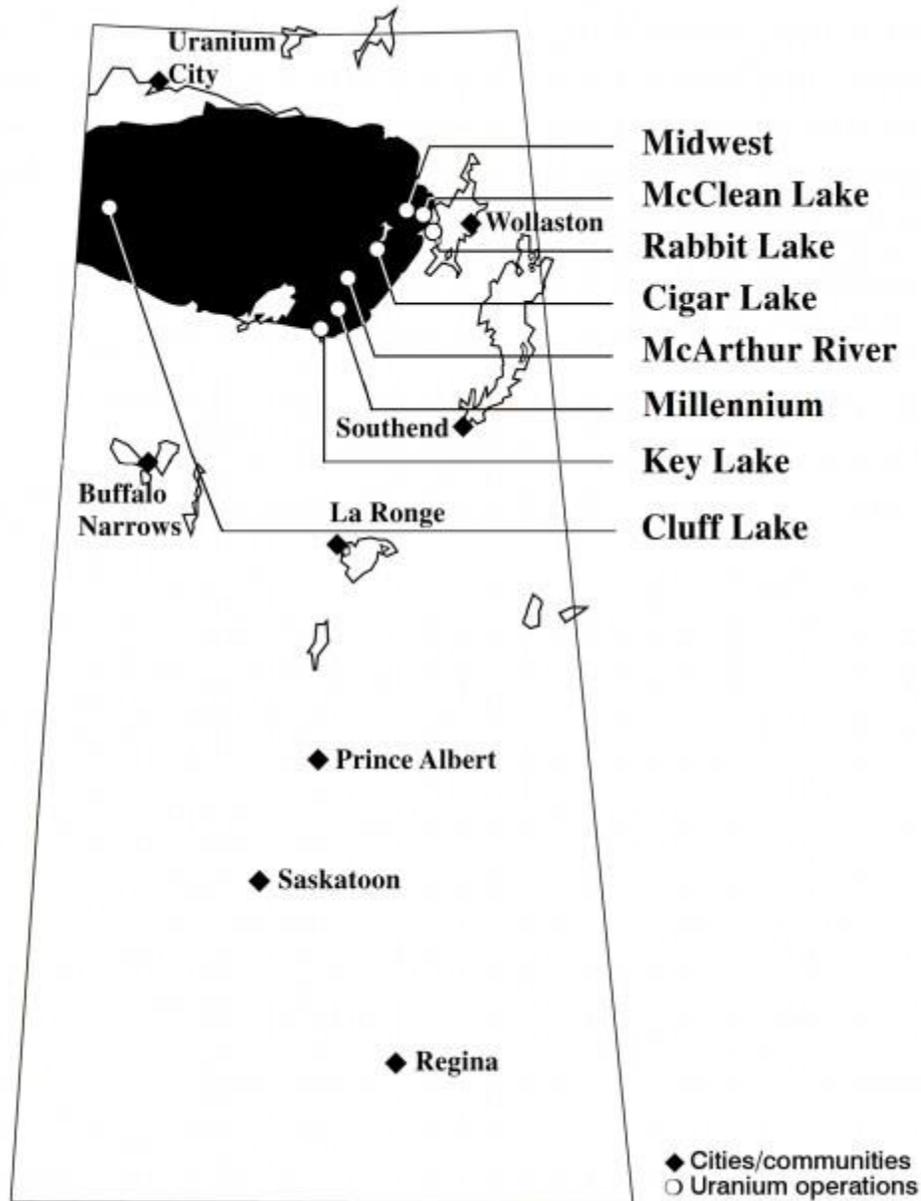


Figure 1. Uranium: Uranium in Saskatchewan. Originally intended for strictly military purposes in the form of nuclear weaponry, nuclear technology became a viable civilian fuel source beginning in the 1970's and into the 1980's. Uranium mining became centered in Saskatchewan where easily accessible, high-grade ore was found to be in abundance. It was during this time that many of the mines identified on the map above were first opened on Nehithaw and Denesuline territory (Saskatchewan Mining Association, 2014).

The Canadian Nuclear Fuel Chain: From Uranium Ore to Nuclear Waste

The Canadian nuclear fuel chain begins with the uranium mines on Denesuline and Nehithaw territories in northern Saskatchewan. A number of mills close to the mines process the extracted uranium ore, which, in its natural state, is highly radioactive and toxic. Two of the three world's largest uranium mining corporations, Cameco Corporation and Areva Resources, are the primary operators of the uranium industry on our traditional territories. These corporations and their predecessors, the most prominent of which is Eldorado Nuclear Ltd., have been in operation in northern Saskatchewan for more than 60 years. Cameco, with headquarters in Saskatoon, is the world's largest publicly traded uranium company. Areva Resources is a French owned corporation, with most of its other mine holdings and exploration permits in the former French colonies of Niger and Gabon as well as Kazakhstan.

Both Areva and Cameco are intensely engaged in public relations strategies targeting primarily Indigenous communities in northern Saskatchewan in order to gain and maintain community support for uranium mining and milling operations. Without a high level of support at the community level, and especially at the level of elected Indian Band leadership, both Cameco and Areva would lose their social license to operate. In order to achieve this support, the uranium mining industry manipulates information about their operations by withholding scientific evidence about environmental hazards. It also promotes its image and messaging in all areas of the community. Corporate logos and names dominate community meetings, sporting events, radio commercials and billboards. Cameco and Areva sponsor Elders' gatherings, culture camps, scholarships, youth recreation activities and many family events.

From northern Saskatchewan, the processed uranium ore- referred to as yellowcake - is transported to Ontario for refining and processing to nuclear fuel material. From refineries and processing facilities in Ontario, the material is either transported for use in any number of nuclear power facilities throughout Ontario or to foreign markets in the United States, Japan, India, Europe, China and Russia, among others. In the province of Ontario, nuclear power accounts for as much as half of power generated and consumed within the province. Currently, the Canadian uranium industry produces approximately 25% of the world's uranium, with corporations seeking to increase production in future years by both increasing the production output of existing mines in Saskatchewan and expanding uranium mining into Indigenous territory in Québec and Nunavut.

After nuclear fuel has undergone the fission process necessary for the generation of electricity, it becomes nuclear waste. Through my research into this issue, I came to understand more about the properties of high-level nuclear waste and its unfathomable toxicity. At present, Canada has accumulated more than 2 million spent fuel bundles of highly radioactive wastes due to the generation of nuclear power in the province of Ontario. Because this material must be isolated from the biosphere indefinitely, holding such wastes at ground level is not a viable method of disposal and in recent decades, a deep geological high-level nuclear waste repository has become the chosen method of “disposing” of nuclear waste. Although no jurisdiction in the world has devised a reasonable solution for the long-term storage of high-level nuclear waste, the Canadian state is pursuing plans to site nuclear waste beneath either Saskatchewan or Ontario, with many potential sites located adjacent to Indigenous communities. When I began my Community Governance Project, Canada's Nuclear Waste Management Organization had identified three potential sites in Saskatchewan for this high-level nuclear waste storage. Due to

the concerted efforts of numerous community organizations in northern Saskatchewan, only one of these sites, Creighton, has been short-listed as a potential repository site.

Founded in 2000 under the Nuclear Safety and Control Act, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) is the federal regulatory body for the nuclear industry in Canada. The CNSC Executive carries the task of licensing and regulating uranium mining and processing corporations, implementing international safety measures and the dissemination of (biased) scientific, technical and regulatory information relating to the nuclear industry in Canada. The CNSC Executive Committee is comprised of seven permanent members and as of writing, three temporary members. The Committee oversees the nuclear industry from its roots in northern Saskatchewan to nuclear power facilities in Canada and the sale of processed uranium to partnering jurisdictions, some of which use them for military purposes such as for the production of nuclear warheads and depleted uranium weaponry. The CNSC is accountable to the federal government directly; its Executive membership is appointed by the Governor General, on advice of the Queen's Privy Council of Canada (i.e.: the Cabinet). As a direct representative of the Canadian state in relation to the public, including Indigenous peoples, the CNSC is truly a direct agent of state interests. It was to this Commission that I presented to in the fall of 2013. My reflection on the efficacy of this method of resisting the uranium industry can be found in the next section of this report.

Engaging the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission

As soon as I had completed enough research on the subject of uranium mining to be convinced that it was not only morally and ethically unjustifiable, but an assault on our wellbeing as Indigenous peoples and our independence from the Canadian state, I began seeking ways to resist it. For the practical component of my Community Governance Project, I chose to participate in resisting the uranium industry in whatever ways were available to me. When the opportunity arose, I presented at Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission hearings in my home community of La Ronge in regards to the relicensing of three mines in the north. From October 1-3, 2013, the CNSC Executive came to my community of La Ronge to hold hearings on the relicensing of the McArthur River, Rabbit Lake and Key Lake mine and mill. The operating licenses for these facilities were to be renewed for ten years. The hearings were held at the local Friendship Center, and were open to all community members. Any individuals or groups seeking input into the relicensing decisions were able to present at the hearings, provided they submitted a summary of their presentations in advance and that they were approved to present by CNSC staff. In August of 2013 I submitted a request to intervene and was scheduled to present on October 3. My presentation became a YouTube video, the link to which can be found in Appendix B of this report. This video, as well as the videos of my peers who also presented at these hearings can serve as educational tools for community members who would like to become more informed on the relationship between uranium mining and colonialism in northern Saskatchewan.

Prior to my presentation, I sat and observed the hearings. Numerous individuals from northern Saskatchewan presented before me, many of them voicing concerns about the impact of the mines on the environment, with some presenters also concerned about the impact that the

uranium mining industry was having on basic freedoms and rights. It became clearer and clearer to those of us in the audience that the CNSC executive was really not engaging with the concerns of the Indigenous peoples they were interacting with. Rather than responding with mutually respectful dialogue, the Commissioners behaved as though the whole hearings process was a grave inconvenience to the regulatory process on the whole. In fact, it was obvious that the CNSC executive believed it was benevolent in even providing these hearings for community members to voice their concerns at all. As Commissioners sat through well thought out and heart felt presentations delivered by the list of interveners concerned with ensuring the safety and security of their families in the face of a growing uranium mining industry, it became clear that none of our words were gaining any real traction. I sat and watched as the legitimate concerns of Indigenous and Settler peoples whose lives were clearly impacted by uranium mining were disregarded without hesitation. My blood boiled watching the process unfolding before my eyes.

In response to the paternalism and arrogance I observed dominating the hearings process, I rewrote my speaking points in the hours before my presentation. I was furious. I set out to address the lies I had heard so clearly spoken by industry and the CNSC. I wanted to establish to the Commission as well as local leadership and the general public that there was, in fact, significant grassroots opposition to uranium mining in Saskatchewan, and that there was good reason for it too. I wanted to situate the regulatory process in the colonial context as much as possible. Most of all, I wanted to let the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission know that they are not welcome in northern Saskatchewan.

The Indian Act, Okimâhkânak and the CNSC

One of the things I began to understand over the course of the hearings was that the colonial Indian Act system works in collusion with the CNSC to coerce certain decision-making

processes in Indigenous communities. In order to address this, I began my presentation by making the connection between the nuclear industry regulatory regime and the imposed Band council system. I wanted to bring attention to the fact that the federal government of Canada maintains financial control of Indian Bands through Indian Act legislation and that this control lends itself to coercing certain decisions out of Indian Act chiefs. More often than not, Chief and Councils can be relied upon to act on the necessity of working to ensure the short-term survival of membership. In the face of coercion and harassment by the federal and provincial governments, financial planning for many Indigenous communities involves opening their lands and territories to resource extraction industries in order to be able to afford basic costs like housing, education and healthcare.

At the hearings in La Ronge I explained to the CNSC panel and to all audience members listening how “modern Indian Bands, created through the Indian Act, are administrative bodies confronted with the contradictory task of representing a Nation of people that have been devastated by colonialism, while remaining tied up in the oppressive, unjust regime of the colonial framework.” I continued by arguing that “although our nations signed binding spiritual treaties with your ancestors⁴, Chief and Council leadership is trapped and coerced into a relationship of forced dependency with the provincial government of Saskatchewan and the Federal government of Canada.” Referencing my own community in particular, I explained how “as a Band, we have our own businesses, yet the majority of the revenue is confiscated by the provincial and federal governments. Because of this injustice, in order to provide basic social necessities such as health, education and housing, we are becoming increasingly forced to make

⁴ Treaties are of course, more than spiritual, as they outline the practical blueprints for how Nehithawak and Settlers will live together in a Nation-to-Nation relationship according to our traditional laws. At their core, however, treaties are inherently sacred; they are ceremonial relationships that entail responsibilities to all of the natural world.

our lands readily available for resource exploitation.” (Coalition for a Clean Green Saskatchewan, 2013). Our Nations face an uphill battle when it comes to establishing our financial independence from the state; our revenue streams are highly taxed and our means of generating revenue are strictly regulated through both constitutional law as well as federal and provincial legislation.

Annual funding arrangements and 5-year block funding arrangements between Indian Bands and the federal government are key components of this system of control. When Indian Band leadership are posed to defend themselves from government-legitimized oppression (including state-sanctioned resource development), the Federal government can threaten Band council leadership with the withdrawal of millions of dollars in annual or multi-year block government funding available through these arrangements. Given that most Indian Bands have not yet developed economic systems to sustain themselves without the federal government, this can be a difficult decision for Indian Band leadership to make, especially without significant support from community members. Modern Chief and Council systems are eternally caught up trying to fund short-term survival at the expense of long-term intergenerational wellness and unity. It is this system of economic control that plays an important role in how regulatory boards like the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission interact with Indigenous leadership. I am also convinced that this economic manipulation by the Federal government has had a great deal of success in ensuring that Indian Act leadership in northern Saskatchewan are too focused on fighting to feed, house and educate their membership to be in any position to defend generations yet unborn from some of the more lasting harmful effects of uranium mining on their territories as well as the territories of their Denesuline neighbours to the north.

The idea that modern Chief and Councils are not in a position to represent the needs of the Nation and that they are clearly accountable to Settler governments is not a new one. The disconnections between traditional notions of Nehithaw governance and the imposed Indian Act system of Chief and Council government has long been recognized. In the years following contact between our ancestors and the Indian Agents, modern Band council systems were implemented in place of traditional Nehithaw governance structures. Acknowledging that this new political structure was unrepresentative of actual Nehithaw governance structures, Elders referred to the new Indian Band leaders as “okimâhkânak”. From the root word “okimâw”, or boss/leader, okimâhkân is a term that recognizes the inability of Indian Act leadership to make decisions and act on behalf of the Nation under traditional governance structures. The suffix “hkân” is used to denote that something is not real or is false. For example, a maskohkân is a teddy bear (from the root word “maskwa” for bear) and an awâsisihkân is a doll (from the root word “awâsis” for child) (Ratt, 2001, p. 7). An ohkimâhkân then, is a false Chief. It is a term that continues to be in use today, but it appears that the true meaning satirically intended for the word has been lost⁵.

The original okimâhkânak acted more or less as direct liaisons between band members and Indian agents. An okimâhkân was an individual who represented the colonial order; he (there were no women historically who were okimâhkânak) brought the concerns of membership to the colonial authorities, who was then expected to relay these concerns further up the chain of command. They were not decision makers, at least in matters affecting the independence of our Nation. In many ways, this relationship has changed very little. Modern Chief and Councils are tasked with the responsibility of administering colonialism and hold no real power, especially

⁵ Ironically, “okimâhkân” is the title on the door of the Chief’s office in the Band Office in La Ronge.

when it comes to decisions about the land. This fact is no coincidence: the implementation of the Band Council system as a method of dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their governance structure was a strategic tool to disempower Indigenous nations and dispossess us of our territories. As a result, no Chief and Council in northern Saskatchewan has the ability to “veto” resource extraction; withdrawal of federal funding and the criminalization of resistance are the punishments associated with standing up to the uranium mining industry. The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission’s regulatory process relies on the fact that Indian Act leadership (ohkimâhkânak) are in no economic position to deny the uranium industry access to land in northern Saskatchewan. Faced with financial pressures from the federal government, ohkimâhkânak are accountable primarily to the federal government and its agenda. Long-term thinking, concerned primarily with the holistic health of our people and the liberation of our Nation, has given way to concern over fiscal years, comprehensive budgets and bottom-lines. The Elders who recognized that the newly created Chief and Council held no real power were making a very astute observation which would unfortunately continue to hold true for generations to come.

“Onîkânîw”, on the other hand, is the term that signifies a traditional concept of leadership. This concept of leadership is a much more empowering and loving one. It is a notion of leadership with a focus specifically around building relationships with family and community. As one knowledge keeper of the Nehithaw nation explains,

“The word itself conveys a responsibility for the one who holds the title, and that responsibility was taken seriously. These people were chosen for their skills. For example, a skillful hunter would be asked to lead a hunting party; he would be the “onîkânîw” for that particular hunt. This same man would not necessarily be the

same person who would lead the community in their governmental affairs. Others skilled in the art of government would lead on those occasions” (Ratt, 2001, p. 7).

In the traditional way then, leadership roles were shared between members of the nation according to the skillsets they could offer. It wasn’t in our teachings for one person to act as onîkânîw in all roles, at all times. The responsibility of keeping our communities healthy and vibrant was shared. The responsibilities of traditional Nehithaw onîkânîwak were centered on family and caring for one another. The literal translation of the term onîkânîw is “the one who is to provide a safe haven in which the people of the community can grow and prosper and get nurturing” (Ratt, 2001, p. 7). In this way, traditional leadership was expected to be accountable directly to community members. These individuals would lead with long-term community wellness and prosperity in mind, and were answerable to the Elders and the women of the community.

It wasn’t until colonialism and the implementation of the Indian Act form of Chief and Council governance that the concept of Indigenous leadership became bureaucratized, centralized and focused more directly toward the relationship with the federal government. Our traditional system of organization, which ensured our strength and freedom, proved to be inconvenient for the Indian agents. What the government agencies required was a hierarchical system of bureaucratic government that would satisfy the colonial needs of efficiency, administration and coercion. The Band Council system proved highly effective in structuring the relationship this way between the colonizer and the colonized. It continues to be an advantageous arrangement for the colonizer, and one that has had the lasting effect of disempowering our people from making the difficult decisions necessary to ensure that current and future generations can grow, prosper and get nurturing on an uncontaminated landscape.

Treaties and the CNSC

Another reason that the regulatory regime of the uranium mining industry is an unsuitable avenue through which to pursue justice is its insistence on the supremacy of colonial law as opposed to the roles and responsibilities of Settlers established through the numbered treaties of northern Saskatchewan. Northern Saskatchewan is subject to three treaties: Treaties 6, 8 and 10. Indigenous interpretations of treaty vary significantly from the Canadian state's interpretation of treaty. According to numerous Elders, treaties provide blueprints for a just relationship between Indigenous and Settler peoples on the lands of northern Saskatchewan⁶. Not only do our traditional teachings on leadership and governance give us a clearer picture on what our responsibilities are as Nehithawak, but the teachings around treaty can also guide our understanding of the way forward for northern Saskatchewan. There are certain responsibilities that both of our nations are entrusted with upholding and treaties are not, as the state would like to claim, an example of colonial conquest over Indigenous peoples. Rather, treaty respected the right of each Nation to be independent and sovereign. The practice of treaty making predates colonialism; our people have always found a need to develop peaceful relationships with other human and non-human nations. Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson describes treaty teachings as originating in the family, in much the same way as Nehithaw teachings around what it meant to be onîkânîw begin in the home and the community. Breastfeeding, she says, was the first treaty. This process of relationship-building between mother and infant holds the teachings

⁶ Many of the original teachings on the spirit and intent of treaty have become entangled with the colonial meaning of treaty, even among our own people. Many people derive their understanding of the meaning of treaty from the colonial context, such as the spring "treaty day" celebration for example, when each band member is able to receive an annual payment of \$5.00 and a bag of flour from the government. When our people refer to this as treaty, it can more accurately be referred to as "Tipahamâtowin". Tipahamâtowin refers to annuity payments that are a part of the signed adhesion agreements, and does not reflect treaty teachings that have to do with developing and maintaining good nation-to-nation relationships between Settlers and Nehithawak. "Wâhkôhtowin" on the other hand, refers to a good kinship relationship and is a closer interpretation of the spirit and intent of treaty as ceremony; similarly, "Âsotamâtowin" refers to treaty as a promise or mutual agreement.

necessary to understand the treaty making and maintaining process. Simpson explains the connection between the act of breastfeeding and the political tradition of treaty making for Indigenous peoples:

“Nursing is ultimately about a relationship. Treaties are ultimately about a relationship. One is a relationship based on sharing between a mother and a child and the other based on sharing between two sovereign nations. Breastfeeding benefits both the mother and the child in terms of health and in terms of their relationship to each other. And treaties must benefit both sovereign independent nations to be successful” (2011, pp. 106-107).

Teachings meant to encourage sharing are an important part of the Indigenous understanding of treaty in northern Saskatchewan. The sharing of resources, food sources and territory is a treaty teaching that enables all parties involved to live in balance with the world around them. As with sharing, balance is a crucial component of treaties. Simpson explains that just as in breastfeeding, “in treaties, the relationship must be one of balance. One nation cannot be dominant over the other. One nation cannot control all of the land and all of the resources” (2011, p. 107). In no way were treaties about relinquishing freedom. They were in fact, the opposite, ensuring the freedoms of Indigenous and Settler peoples to live on the shared territory in a balanced relationship, with no one party having complete decision making authority over the other.

Indigenous interpretations of both the adherence to Treaty 6 and Treaty 10 contain teachings that deal directly with maintaining healthy relationships between Nehithaw, Denesuline and Settler nations, as well as environmental concerns and protection of the

traditional northern way of life. No one group was meant to have control over another group in northern Saskatchewan, and neither party could dominate or disrespect the non-human world. In this way, the treaty relationship acts as a mechanism of accountability for Settler people coming into northern Saskatchewan, including the uranium mining industry. Harold Johnson, in his account of oral interpretations of Treaty 6 passed through his family, relates how the treaties were not representative of the surrender of land. Rather, treaties were ceremonies of adoption. Settlers were in fact adopted as cousins, or “kiciwamanawak” (Johnson, 2007, p. 13). While settler people were welcomed to the territory, it was generally understood that they would maintain certain responsibilities, including respecting the people and the territory they were granted stay on. It was expected that incoming settlers would adopt Indigenous ways of life that came about from generations of living in partnership with the territory. This has played out in northern Saskatchewan to an extent, as Settlers often do share the territory with Nehithawak and Denesuline as neighbours, family and kin. This is one of the more wonderful qualities about living in northern Saskatchewan; both Indigenous and Settler people live in a close relationship with the land.

In his book entitled “*Two Families: Treaties and Government*”, Johnson (2007) reminds Settler people of their treaty responsibilities to the land:

“You were given the right to live here and enjoy the benefits of the land, but you were not given the right to waste, pollute and destroy. My ancestors could not give you that right because they did not have it themselves, and you cannot give away what is not yours” (p. 25).

With all the environmental destruction associated with uranium mining, it would seem then that according to Nehithaw understandings of the treaty relationship, these responsibilities have been abandoned by Settler governments. Similarly, according to Denesuline oral interpretations of Treaty 10, the recent actions of the settler-colonial governments of Saskatchewan and Canada and the uranium mining corporations they work in collaboration with are in defiance of principles agreed to during treaty negotiations. Treaty 10, signed in 1906 between the Lac La Hache Band and the Crown of England ensures, among other things that Indigenous rights to hunting fishing, trapping and gathering are maintained in the face of encroaching settler presence on their territory. As the threat to a traditional Denesuline life increases, it is clear that the uranium mining industry has operated in violation of these treaty promises. One Elder from Wollaston Lake, the community closest to the mines, explains her understanding of the tenets of Treaty 10 as well as her frustration with the uranium mining industry's lack of accountability towards these agreements,

“I was there when the treaty was signed and there were discussions for a week and we were told, “We’re coming to you to sign the treaty, not to harm you in any way. By signing this treaty we are agreeing to help and take care of you people. We are in no way going to harm the way you live.” Why are they doing this now? We made agreements. If they are going to do these things to us why did they get us to sign the treaty in the first place?” (Goldstick, 1987, p. 37).

For the Canadian state, recognizing and acting upon treaty responsibilities around environmental protection stands in direct contradiction with their mandate. The CNSC relies heavily on the Indian Act as the legitimate template for the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the federal government, rather than the original intent of the treaties because there

are responsibilities outlined in the treaties that the uranium mining industry, with its detrimental environmental impacts, simply cannot adhere to. The process of uranium mining violates Settler responsibilities towards the environment and the complete lack of respect for the rights of Indigenous peoples to have decision making authority over their traditional territories violates the treaty responsibility to respect the independence and nationhood of Indigenous peoples. The treaty teachings around balance and sharing have been disregarded by the Canadian state. Rather than acknowledging the crucial importance of upholding these responsibilities towards the land and towards Indigenous peoples, the CNSC reiterates the terms of Canadian colonial laws, and justifies its dismissal of its responsibilities according to the treaties. Instead, the Canadian colonial laws surrounding consultation are evoked throughout the regulatory process in order to legitimize the dispossession of Indigenous territory. It is to this aspect of the regulatory process that I now turn.

The Myth of Consultation

In order to obscure the fact that the entire regulatory system is essentially a streamlined process of dispossessing Indigenous territory, the Canadian state, represented by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, is required to consult with Indian Act leadership on matters relating to uranium mining licensing in northern Saskatchewan. CNSC hearings and meetings such as the one in La Ronge in the fall of 2013 are opportunities for the state to “consult” with Indigenous peoples on uranium mining on their territories. The Supreme Court of Canada is clear that governments in Canada have a duty to consult with Aboriginal groups when making decisions which may adversely impact lands and resources subject to Aboriginal claims⁷. Because uranium

⁷ According to the Supreme Court of Canada, the duty to consult “stems from the Honour of the Crown and the Crown’s unique relationship with Aboriginal peoples” (AANDC, 2011) and is meant to act as a limit of the

mining and milling is considered to have the potential to adversely affect the environment, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission must consult with Indigenous peoples when dealing with matters directly concerning the land.

According to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2011), federal officials need to complete four phases in order to fulfill the Duty to Consult: Pre-Consultation Analysis and Planning, Crown Consultation Process, Accommodation and Implementation, Monitoring and Follow-Up. It is to these four phases that CNSC consultation activities claim to generally adhere to (Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, 2011, p. 1). The Pre-Consultation Analysis and Planning process outlines the research and preparation that corporations and regulators must complete prior to the consultation process. This includes identifying whether or not their activities have any potential adverse impacts, which groups may be affected, and whether or not the duty to consult applies. The second phase, the Crown Consultation process, involves notifying Aboriginal groups of Crown activities, as well as providing them with relevant information, considering their concerns and following dispute resolution mechanisms if conflicts should arise. According to the information on this phase, consultation appears to be a process where Indigenous people are informed about an activity, and their opinions about it are (theoretically) *considered* (AANDC, 2011, Part C, parentheses and emphasis added). The third phase, accommodation, indicates that the Crown must “where appropriate, accommodate when the Crown contemplates conduct that might adversely impact potential or established Aboriginal or Treaty rights” (AANDC, 2011, Part C). For each governmental agency, accommodation will look different. For the CNSC’s regulatory mandate, accommodation measures “will likely flow

legislative power of the Crown when it comes to development that affects Section 35 rights of Aboriginal peoples as set out in the Constitution. The duty to consult is codified in cases like *Sparrow*, *Delgamuukw* and *Haida*. In each of these cases, the decision rendered always emphasizes that there are limits to what Aboriginal rights can be protected and that the economic wellbeing of the Canadian state supersedes Indigenous claims for justice.

through licensing requirements on licensees subject to the CNSC's authority" (CNSC, 2011, p. 2). Note that it is *licensing requirements* that are offered by the CNSC as the solution to Indigenous resistance, rather than a denial of a corporations' license to operate entirely. The CNSC is under absolutely no legal obligation to reject a license application should Indigenous leadership or community members demand it. Rather, it is the mitigation and reduction of impact on the rights of Indigenous peoples that is within their mandate, including such *generous* measures such as allowing trappers to maintain trap lines close to mine sites, for example. The fourth phase, Implementation, Monitoring and Follow-up, basically involves letting Indigenous peoples know of their decision.

The government of Canada does not hide the fact that it does not support meaningful decision-making capacity for Indigenous peoples, especially concerning resource development. In its interpretation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), for example, the Canadian state makes clear that a document that allows Indigenous peoples to have decision making powers over their traditional territories is overruled by existing Canadian law around consultation. In Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's guidelines for consultation, its reference to UNDRIP explicitly states that "Canada has concerns with some of the principles in the Declaration and has placed on record its concerns with free, prior and informed consent when interpreted as a veto. As noted in Canada's Statement of Support, the Declaration is a non-legally binding document that does not change Canadian laws. Therefore, it does not alter the legal duty to consult" (AANDC, 2011, Part A). It is obvious that for the Canadian state, the duty to consult and an Indigenous veto on resource development projects are mutually exclusive. For Canada, the duty to consult takes precedence over other

potentially legally binding documents that allow Indigenous peoples the power to reject resource development on their traditional territories.

In the fall of 2014, the Government of Canada elaborated on why promoting and protecting the rights of Indigenous peoples through international law runs counter to Canadian law. In response to the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples Outcome Document reiterating the commitment of nation-states to Indigenous rights, the Canadian government stated its opposition to the concept of free, prior and informed consent concerning development affecting Indigenous nations. “Free, prior and informed consent, as it is considered in paragraphs 3 and 20 of the WCIP Outcome Document”, it argued, “could be interpreted as providing a veto to Aboriginal groups and in that regard, cannot be reconciled with Canadian law, as it exists” (22 September, 2014, para. 4). Canada’s response outlines its colonial agenda even more explicitly, however, when it states that integrating the principles of free, prior and informed consent into its processes would “run counter to Canada’s constitution, and if implemented, would risk fettering *Parliamentary supremacy*” (22 September, 2014, para. 5, emphasis added). Clearly and unsurprisingly, Canada aggressively defends its agenda of territorial dispossession even in the international arena. Protecting what Canada believes is the supremacy of its law over the rights of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous law is a key component of its system of control and domination.

In this way, we see that the duty to consult is an effective tool of dispossession in that it offers the illusion of dialogue and choice, while at the same time creating a situation where corporations and governments enjoy a streamlined path to the accumulation of wealth. By legally entrenching consultation as a mechanism for dispossession under the guise of “the honour of the Crown”, the Canadian state has essentially sanitized the economic project of colonialism.

Without a critical understanding of the mechanism of consultation, what we as Indigenous nations are left with is an unclear picture of where justice might come from, especially when it comes to the uranium and nuclear industry's federal regulatory body.

When I presented to the Commission, I wanted to learn more about whether or not the consultation process ever respected and honoured Indigenous resistance to uranium mining and if accommodation measures ever took the form of license rejections. I wanted to know whether or not there had ever been cases where licenses were denied to corporations on the bases of recognition of their actual adverse impact to lands and resources subject to aboriginal claims or on the basis of resistance or opposition at CNSC hearings. This question is integral to the concern of whether or not CNSC's consultation process is an effective site from which to demand justice. I approached the subject during my presentation and asked Commissioners to describe a time when they had rejected a license. In addition, I asked them to speak about the approval of the Matoush exploratory project on Cree territory in Québec, despite having faced significant resistance from the Indigenous people in that region. The resistance to uranium mining there was overt and clearly expressed at CNSC's 2012 hearings into the uranium exploration project. The Chief of the Cree Nation of Mistissini, for example, made clear of his rejection of uranium outright, stating at CNSC's public hearings that "We want to put an end to the question of uranium development once and for all, right now. We know where this is going and we don't want any uranium mining at all" (Cree Nation of Mistissini, 2012, para. 1). The response I received from Commissioners and CNSC staff to my concerns was a reiteration of its commitment to safety. They also pointed to certain situations when there had been an accident such as a leak at a nuclear plant, and operations were stopped for a period of time, only to be reinstated. The Commission refused to discuss with me the recent decision regarding Matoush

specifically, except to say that Matoush met the regulatory requirements of their organization and had been deemed safe. In a summary of the Matoush decision, the CNSC acknowledges the clear messaging received at the Matoush hearings in 2012 regarding the rejection of uranium mining on Cree territory in the province of Québec, but argues instead that,

“the decision to impose or not impose a moratorium on uranium mining is outside of the Commission's mandate and not within its authority. While social acceptability is outside the Commission's mandate, social considerations may fall within the Province of Québec's jurisdiction” (CNSC, 2012, p. 2).

In this way, the CNSC essentially justifies the dispossession of Indigenous territory. As I discovered by pressing CNSC staff during my presentation, the mandate of the CNSC is focused directly around safety, while the social acceptability of projects and the moral and ethical feasibility of Canada's nuclear industry lie outside of their mandate, despite the legal commitment that the CNSC has to consult with Indigenous peoples. As a result, Indigenous resistance to uranium mining must focus explicitly on the safety of uranium mining in order to pass as a legitimate consideration to the Commission, and even then is surpassed by the need to maintain the inertia of the nuclear industry in Canada. The CNSC decision on the Matoush exploratory project on Cree territory in Québec is a clear example of the reason why the federal regulatory body is an inappropriate avenue from which our Nations might seek justice in relation to uranium mining. In spite of large-scale organized resistance to further nuclear development, licenses pertaining to nuclear development are rarely, if ever, denied. For our people, this is one of the things that make the regulatory process so ineffective for the purposes of land defense and the overthrow of the colonial structure.

During my presentation, I wanted to delegitimize the regulatory process and call attention to the inherent injustice of the consultation process by exploring how consultation would look if it was based on mutual respect. I found it important to highlight that this wasn't being done by the CNSC and to acknowledge for all to hear that our communities recognized that the regulatory process was a farce. Reflecting on how consultation would function in the absence of a colonial relationship of domination and control, I began by explaining how "in the true sense of the term, consultation implies a dialogical process, whereby one party works in partnership with one or more other parties to develop some sort of product, a plan, or a decision. In the case of the relicensing process that the CNSC undertakes, for example, true consultation with Indigenous peoples would involve meaningfully engaging with these groups, while remaining cognizant and sensitive to the asymmetrical power struggles which influence their capacity to act in the modern colonial framework. Most importantly, true consultation would involve respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples to say no to resource development" (CCGS, 2013). I ended by stating that "the CNSC has not yet demonstrated that it has the institutional and moral capacity to respect the rights of Indigenous peoples to act in self-determining capacities" (CCGS, 2013). While this was very much true, it had no impact of course on the overall mandate of the CNSC to push uranium development through. Federal bodies are structured and designed to facilitate the expansion of state goals; in the case of the CNSC's role in the uranium mining industry, this state goal involves both the maintenance and expansion of the economic project of colonialism into previously untouched Indigenous territory. With this in mind, it was my hope through this presentation to contribute to critical discussion at the community level and to undermine the perception of legitimacy that the CNSC enjoys as it dispossesses Indigenous peoples of their territory.

In the end of course, the licenses were approved for the three mines for another ten years. This didn't come as a surprise to most community members, myself included. It isn't that I intervened at these hearings because I believed that my intervention would significantly alter the future of those three particular mines (I knew that it would not), but I wanted to know for myself what the limitations of engaging in this process are, and more about how the CNSC stifles dissent. What was confirmed to me through participation in these CNSC meetings was that the entire process served to maintain the inertia of the uranium mining and nuclear industry, rather than provide a space for any meaningful debate surrounding the consequences of uranium mining. Under the current framework of consultation that guides the relationship between the CNSC and Indigenous communities regarding uranium mining, Indigenous communities facing such environmental degradation have no choice whether or not such projects will proceed, at least not in the regulatory realm. By encouraging and even offering funding for Indigenous peoples to participate in the regulatory process, the CNSC seeks to funnel dissent into an arena that does not effectively challenge the status quo⁸. In doing so, Canada's nuclear regulator maintains the colonial structure on which the country's relationship with Indigenous peoples is built.

By forging the illusion that Indigenous communities can engage meaningfully in the regulatory process, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission legitimizes the age-old imperial act of opening Indigenous territories to large scale resource extraction. The uranium mining industry will make every attempt to coerce our people to accept the regulatory regime as the only appropriate avenue of voicing ourselves. Yet, even if Indigenous communities form their

⁸ In the 2010 Budget, the Federal Government authorized the CNSC to establish a participant funding program to ensure the "timely and meaningful engagement of the public, stakeholders and Aboriginal peoples in CNSC hearing processes" (CNSC, 2011, p. 3). This participant funding program provides communities with tens of thousands of dollars to ensure that their efforts to address uranium mining and nuclear projects on their traditional territories are channeled into the CNSC's regulatory process.

opposition in scientific terms regarding safety, the inertia of the nuclear industry takes precedence. As I hope to have shown in this paper by reflecting on my experience as an observer and presenter at licensing hearings, engaging in the regulatory process offers no hope in the protection of lands and future generations, except insofar as it can be used as an opportunity for truth-telling to further raise awareness of the unethical nature of the uranium mining industry. Accepting the regulatory regime as the only means of voicing opposition prevents our people from achieving freedom from the colonial structure, and keeps us in a relationship of dependency with the Canadian state. Without a critical understanding of the way that the regulatory process reproduces relations of power and control, our nations will not have a clear understanding of the limitations of seeking justice within this framework. I will now turn to an exploration of direct action as a form of resistance to the uranium mining industry in northern Saskatchewan as well as a catalyst for the resurgence of our traditional teachings and the healing of our nations from the duality of oppression that characterizes colonialism.

Resistance and Resurgence: Direct Action for the Reclamation of our Future as Nehithawak

In its essence, colonialism is concerned primarily with access to territory for the purpose of the accumulation of wealth and resources. The colonial structure- legal, political, economic and social structures included- is designed to ensure the facilitation of state access to land. Obtaining access to Indigenous territory in northern Saskatchewan is crucial to the continued operation of Cameco and Areva and as I hope to have shown in the previous section, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission as the nuclear industry regulator performs its function of territorial dispossession well. But maintaining the Canadian colonial framework also requires that the colonized adhere to a set of specific mindsets and behaviours that prevent disruption of the colonial order of domination. It is this set of mindsets and behaviours that colonialism has been so successful at reproducing over time through strategies like residential school, assimilation policies and the dispossession of traditional governance structures meant to erode our existence as nations. These mindsets and behaviours include the attachment that so many of us have toward seeking justice from within state-centered mechanisms- including the CNSC's regulatory process. Therefore, any tactic that we use to defend our territories and our nations must simultaneously address the actual flow of wealth and resources out of our territory, as well as the colonial mindset that has been in place for so long that has allowed this to happen. In the context of colonialism in northern Saskatchewan, this means that actively resisting and defending against the colonial structure must address the objective conditions of our oppression (i.e. the political/economic conditions of the uranium mining industry) and the subjective attitudes to these conditions (i.e.- the widespread support for uranium mining *as well as* the conditions that have led to the normalization of the belief that justice will only be achieved if

pursued in state-centered institutions). Direct action, when informed by our traditional teachings on governance, leadership and our treaty responsibilities, has the power to actively challenge uranium mining as the economic arm of colonial oppression while simultaneously acting as a catalyst for the psychological process of decolonization as well.

Lessons from the Wollaston Lake Blockade

Direct action as a strategy of resistance to uranium mining in northern Saskatchewan is not a new concept. The years and decades following the development of the Canadian nuclear industry, when Indigenous territory was becoming consolidated into the economic framework of Saskatchewan and Canada, was rife with Indigenous resistance. One such example of resistance was the blockade at Wollaston Lake. There are a number of lessons that we can learn from this action, including the uranium industry's response to this form of land defense. I will now turn to a brief review of the Wollaston Lake blockade in order to illustrate what barriers we may expect to be up against in defense of the land in the future.

In June of 1985, members of the Denesuline community of Wollaston Lake and their Nehithaw, Métis and Settler allies prevented the machinery of Cameco's predecessor, El Dorado Nuclear, from entering or exiting the Rabbit Lake mine and mill site for four days. Along with the assistance of southern allies, the Collins' Bay Action Group organized a public gathering before the blockade in order to hold workshops and share perspectives and truths with one another about how uranium mining and processing had impacted their lives. From this meeting, approximately 150 people made their way to the road leading out of the Rabbit Lake mine, the closest mine site to the town of Wollaston Lake. At this site, blockaders set up camp and occupied the only road in and out of the mine and mill. A meeting was requested by blockade

leaders several times with the general manager of the Rabbit Lake mine, but to no avail. As tensions rose and as revenue was lost, it became imperative for El Dorado to begin mining operations again as soon as possible. In order to end the blockade, mine executives agreed to this meeting, however, once production began again at Rabbit Lake, they never followed through. Instead, the mine executives met behind closed doors with Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nation leadership to discuss, presumably, ways to mitigate Indigenous opposition in the north.

One of the things that came out of the closed door meeting with mining corporation executives following the blockade at Wollaston Lake was a new corporate and governmental strategy designed to address some of the political, social and economic factors of Indigenous resistance to uranium mining in northern Saskatchewan. It became clear to industry that there was a need to address the Indigenous communities directly in order to prevent a broad-based movement of opposition towards the uranium mining industry. Following the meeting, a “communications committee” was established to facilitate communication between the people of Wollaston Lake and Eldorado Nuclear Ltd., as well as an “economic committee” to determine how northerners could benefit from mining (Goldstick, 1987, p. 247). As a result, beginning after the blockade, uranium mining corporations launched a more comprehensive public relations campaign geared toward ensuring community support of uranium mining in the north. We can still see clearly the impact of these public relations strategies on our communities; it has been years since there was a broad-based movement toward direct action in resistance to the uranium mining industry in northern Saskatchewan. One of the key lessons that can be learned from the blockade at Wollaston Lake is that the messaging coming out of the public relations campaigns of the uranium mining industry will need to be addressed.

One of the most prominent features of this messaging is the notion of inevitability concerning our participation in uranium mining. The normalization of and justifications for uranium mining on Nehithaw and Denesuline territories is part of a larger strategy to disempower our people by creating the illusion that we have limited options. The uranium mining and nuclear industry, including its lobby groups, works tirelessly to ensure that the nuclear industry remains relevant and influential, in spite of a growing movement toward renewable energy resources. In reality, nuclear energy is quickly becoming an out-of-date technology, whose risks far outweigh any potential benefits. The expansion and intensification of uranium mining on Nehithaw and Denesuline territories is directly connected to Canada's economic agenda of growth and the accumulation of wealth, *not* any actual necessity in terms of energy needs. In order to clear the path towards a sustainable and just future, it is clear that uranium mining as the economic arm of colonialism on our territories will need to end.

An Act of Love: The Transformative Power of Direct Action

In communities without histories of resistance to the economic agenda of the colonial project, there is often concern about the messaging that is being sent by interfering directly with resource development. In many communities, there is a stigma around the social acceptability of this form of defense. This mindset is based upon the view that our struggles for justice must be focused towards state mechanisms, and not on empowering our communities to act on their traditional responsibilities to ensure the safety and security of our people- the same responsibilities that our ancestors expected from all leaders in the community. Feeding into the perception that seeking justice by interrupting the flow of capital is inherently immoral, land defenders are penalized and criminalized under colonial law for their actions. However, what the colonial state perceives to be violence (and in turn what it reacts to with actual violence) is quite

different from what Indigenous peoples *experience* as violence. One of the key features of the colonial project, one which the uranium mining industry plays a large part of in northern Saskatchewan, is the normalization of daily, ongoing violence on the bodies of Indigenous peoples and on the lands. This was expressed in the messaging coming out of the Wollaston Lake blockade when it was stated that blockaders “view the uranium open pit mines or any such disturbance of the land as an act of violence” (Goldstick, 1987, p. 153). Likewise, in defense of direct action as a strategy to resist uranium mining, a participant at the blockade expressed that “no physical violence occurred in addition to that which the mines perpetuate on a daily basis with their radioactive wastes and environmental destruction” (Goldstick, 1987, p. 267). We can see then, that to the colonizer, violence against the land and against the bodies of Indigenous peoples is justifiable, as it is not deemed to be violence, while a disruption to the flow of capital to corporations is deemed by the state to be inherently unjustifiable and violent. It is crucial to highlight that the concept of violence is manipulated by the colonizer in order to justify the use of force as a response to expressions of Indigenous resurgence. It is also used as a discursive tool to delegitimize resistance that does not fall into the structure deemed legitimate by the colonial state.

Yet, there is nothing inherently violent or even remotely aggressive about standing in defense of the land, especially if it is simply standing in the way of the flow of capital. In fact, the process is an inherently empowering and transformational one. Paulo Freire recognized that the act of defending against oppression is fundamentally an act of love, arguing that is it “precisely in the response of the oppressed to the violence of their oppressors that a gesture of love may be found” (2000, p. 56). He then goes on to add that “whereas the violence of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter to this

violence is grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be human” (Freire, 2000, p. 56). Rather than accepting the discourses that frame opposition to uranium mining in negative terms, we see how defending the land against the economic arm of colonialism in northern Saskatchewan is actually an act that is grounded in love and has the power to heal our nation from the dehumanizing effects of colonialism.

One of the most detrimental effects of colonialism has been its impact on gender relationships in Indigenous communities. Prior to colonialism, the Nehithaw system of social organization was matriarchal; women were tasked with important decision making responsibilities, especially as they related to family life and the selection of onîkânîwak. The leadership of women was indisputable, whether it was at the family level or at the level of the community or Nation. Recognition of the dignity of women was a regular part of community life and the honour and respect afforded to Indigenous women meant that values of caring, humility and compassion were entrenched in all our ways of life.

With colonialism and the imposition of European culture came a shift in our communities toward patriarchy and away from traditional systems that placed women at its center. Patriarchy, the predominance of men over women and children, played a powerful and dehumanizing role in disconnecting our people from traditional values such as sharing, love and kindness. This system of social structure continues to influence our Nation; we see this frequently with violence against Indigenous women and men, the replacement of traditional parenting practices with volatile or detached ones and the denial of freedom and respect to those in our communities whose genders or sexualities don't conform to the rigid binaries introduced through residential schools and Christianity. The influence of patriarchy is powerful, seeping into our intimate relationships and our understandings of self.

One of the things we must keep in mind when conceptualizing our efforts towards decolonization and defending the land is this influence of patriarchy on our communities. There is growing attention being paid in Indigenous communities to the ways that patriarchy has disempowered Indigenous women, even in struggles for justice. The influence of patriarchy and misogyny are incredibly subversive in our communities and as Glen Coulthard (2014) explains “the symbolic violence of settler-colonial misogyny...has become so diffuse that it now saturates all of our relationships” (p. 177). Coulthard goes on to add that this misogyny “now informs many of our struggles for recognition and liberation” (p. 177). However, more and more people are coming to the belief that without addressing the entrenchment of unhealthy gender relationships in our communities, we face the possibility of replicating patriarchy in the very processes we choose to guide our efforts towards liberation. Increasingly, scholars and community members alike agree that ridding our communities of the influences of patriarchy (and heteropatriarchy) is a crucial step to true liberation and decolonization. As Leanne Simpson states, perpetuating these degrading social systems by excluding women, children and those whose genders or sexualities don’t conform to rigid binaries “simply cannot be part of our nation-building work. This is not resurgence” (2012, para. 8). By recognizing that patriarchy has become intertwined with even our strategies of liberation, we can begin to understand and appreciate how our efforts to resist the economic arm of colonial oppression through direct action also offer opportunities for our communities to begin to heal from the influence of patriarchy in our families and in our Nation.

In addition to the imposition of patriarchy in our communities, colonialism has also had a detrimental effect on our understandings of spirituality. Throughout what has now been centuries of colonialism on our territories, we have been repeatedly told that our traditions and ways of

life, especially our spiritual practices, are primitive and backward. Many Nehithaw Elders tell of the time when spiritual practices were outlawed and punished by missionaries and government agents. During the early years of colonialism, numerous ceremonial bundles were burned and buried in northern Saskatchewan, either by missionaries and government agents or by our people themselves as preventative measures taken to protect themselves from violence. Elder Mary Cook (paraphrased here) shares one story told to her by her grandmother, of Settlers intruding on her great-great grandmothers' camp,

“Her great-great grandmother had witnessed, while spending time out in the land, a particular group of intruders encroaching upon their encampment at a haste pace. Her grandmother watched sadly, as her great-great grandmother gathered her ceremonial bundles, tears flowing down her cheeks, gradually disappeared into the woods, only she guessed, to rid of her sacred possessions...She assumed then her spirit was broken, as she appeared disheartened when she returned to camp. Her bundles were buried - but she knew, a traditional and sacred way life as she knew it, would change for generations to come negatively affecting her grandchildren and their children” (Laliberte, 1997, p. 2).

The long-term impact of this violent history in northern Saskatchewan has meant that our people are less closely connected with the spiritual traditions of our ancestors than ever before. This history also has implications for how our people approach the pursuit of justice; internalized notions of spiritual inferiority have translated to the idea that our political and governance systems are inferior as well. Direct action has the potential to reverse these psychological impacts of colonialism, freeing us from centuries of dehumanization by emphasizing and acting on the belief that our traditions and teachings are inherently valuable, worthy and honourable.

Whereas the colonial structure relies on the psychological attachments that the colonized have to the institutions of the structure itself, direct action has the capacity to begin the process of revaluing Indigenous traditions, both in and of themselves but also as a means of achieving justice by breaking the psychological attachments to colonial institutions. In his interpretation of Franz Fanon's work on the psychological freedoms associated with rejecting colonialism, Glen Coulthard (2008) explains how direct action can have a transformational effect on the mindset of the colonized. "It is through struggle and conflict", Coulthard writes, "that the colonized come to purge the "arsenal of complexes" driven into the core of their being through the colonial process" (p. 194). The "complexes" he refers to include the imposition of patriarchy and beliefs about spiritual inferiority, as well as the psychological attachments that so many of us in Indigenous communities have toward seeking justice- and even our identities- within state-centered mechanisms. This includes institutions such as the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission and other regulatory bodies, but also the Canadian court and legal system and the political process. This practise of seeking justice in state-centered institutions rests on the assumption that justice can only be achieved when the Canadian state has affirmed our humanity, recognized the legitimacy of our struggles and is able to respectfully cede decision making authority into the hands of the Indigenous peoples they have colonized for over 400 years. It is through struggle against all the ways that the uranium mining industry and the Canadian state are attempting to gain access to our territories, that we will come to realize that it is our traditional teachings that give us our identity and it is our traditional teachings that set out the pathway toward our liberation.

If there is one thing that the history of resistance to uranium mining in northern Saskatchewan has taught us, it is that seeking justice in state-centered institutions has a limited

benefit in liberating our people from the economic arm of colonialism on our territories as well as the colonial relationship overall. In the nearly 40 years that we have expressed opposition through inquiries, hearings and meetings with industry, uranium mining in northern Saskatchewan has only grown. Direct action on the other hand, when informed by the self-affirming belief that our teachings contain the key to our liberation, has the power to transform our communities. Transformative practice, as Coulthard refers to struggle or direct action, is a process of self-affirmation and self-recognition, whereby we as Indigenous peoples recognize the legitimacy of our own processes and teachings in the struggle for justice on our homelands. It is a recognition that justice will come from ourselves and not from the colonial state of Canada. For our people as Nehithawak, this involves the recognition that traditional forms of leadership, such as onîkânîwak, contain the teachings required to strengthen and liberate our nations. This also involves acknowledging that the teachings our Elders have about treaties provide a clear set of instructions about our responsibilities towards the land and how we are to relate with Settlers in the new societal structure following contact. Through transformative practice that challenges the economic arm of colonialism in northern Saskatchewan as well as the colonial mindset that has allowed it to persist for so long, our nations will be able to address both the economic or material, as well as the psychological aspects of the colonial structure.

Conclusion

It was clear to me as I began my Community Governance project that my community was not ready to engage in the kind of direct action that I have discussed in this section. The mindset that justice should be achieved through the Canadian state, rather than emanating from our traditional teachings on leadership and governance, holds pretty steadfast. It is clear that educational work needs to be done both on the environmental harms posed by uranium mining, but also on the ways that the colonial structure limits our ability to move towards healing and justice. The onus isn't on us to prove to regulatory commissions that we are deserving of justice on our own homelands. The onus is on uranium mining corporations to prove to us that they deserve to be a part of our traditional territory. The onus is on them to prove that they are upholding their treaty responsibilities towards the lands and peoples of treaty 6, 8 and 10. Given what I have come to know about the nature of the uranium and nuclear industry over the course of my Community Governance Project, the basic tenet of the nuclear industry- that uranium and all its by-products can be exploited and manipulated without contaminating the land- is wrong. Despite the oft-heard claim that the uranium industry alleviates the symptoms of poverty through job creation and the stimulation of local economies, it is clear that uranium mining has the potential to significantly alter the relationship that Cree and Dene people have with the land, and the regulatory regime that oversees it serves to legitimize the lies coming out of the nuclear industry regarding health and safety. Uranium mining in northern Saskatchewan is connected to injustice and risk worldwide, including nuclear power plant meltdowns, depleted uranium weaponry, increased outputs of radioactivity in regions surrounding nuclear power plants, and the threat of nuclear warhead manufacturing in nations with nuclear power plant capacities. The threat to the land in northern Saskatchewan is significant as well, with tailings ponds, effluent

releases and airborne contaminants threatening northern communities. By critically reevaluating the teachings that our nation possesses about healthy relationships to land, we can both destabilize the western, corporate and colonial ways of connecting to the land while simultaneously addressing the subjective or psycho-affective components of colonialism that seeks to devalue Indigenous ways of knowing. Undermining the discourses that justify the contamination of the land by speaking truth to the lies of the uranium mining industry will be an important catalyst for our liberation as Nehithawak.

What became clear over the course of my Community Governance Project was that the nuclear industry in Saskatchewan is a system of colonial violence that threatens the integrity of the northern landscape. The nuclear industry, with its various partners, including regulators, lobby groups and government partner agencies are accomplices in this system that seeks to normalize its detrimental impact on the environment and the wellbeing of Nehithaw and Denesuline peoples by questioning alternative ways of being and knowing that challenge its legitimacy. Namely, the accuracy and authenticity of land-based knowledge of Nehithaw, Denesuline and Métis peoples is disputed. Through the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission's regulatory process, the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples in Saskatchewan are positioned as inferior to Western, scientific and technical ways of knowing. Sanctioning the violence of uranium extraction by empowering the corporations, the CNSC operates in collusion with the nuclear industry it is mandated to regulate rather than protecting communities.

With this report, I wanted to document the strategies that Indigenous peoples in northern Saskatchewan have engaged in so that when we engage in resistance in the future, we can clearly see what options have been tried, and which have not. Although Indigenous groups have expressed opposition to uranium mining through decades of inquiries and hearings with

regulatory bodies, these sites of engagement have proven ineffective in preventing the uranium industry from expansion. Few options exist through the regulatory process for community dissent and opposition to be respected. As has been demonstrated through CNSC regulatory hearings, resistance to the uranium industry through informed truth-telling is not a welcomed way of engaging with the process, although it does provide an opportunity for education and the beginning of critical community discussions. The myth that consultation is achieved through the regulatory process is a fallacy that owes its supposed legitimacy only from colonial systems that are already in place, such as the court systems. In order to appear as though communities are given options, a false benevolence of regulators is emphasized, especially the idea that communities are fortunate to have any involvement in the regulatory process at all. This paternalistic attitude, combined with a sense of legitimacy that is rooted in colonial privilege and psychological attachments that many Indigenous peoples have with the State, fuels the perception that the CNSC carries the right to deny decision-making authority to Indigenous nations. Canada's current federal nuclear regulators replicate the history of the denial of Indigenous access to land in northern Saskatchewan. In exposing their mandate, hearings participants can frame the hearings process for what they are: colonial intrusions which promote corporate access to land.

Pursuing justice in the regulatory paradigm of the CNSC does not fundamentally alter the configuration of colonial power because the psychological realm of colonial rule remains unchallenged. That is- the idea that consultation is a just or fruitful process necessarily means that we ascribe to notions of justice that are centered in the colonial structure rather than our own teachings. Pragmatically speaking, however, it is clear that participation in those hearings can serve as an educational opportunity only insofar as the content of presentations regarding

environmental contamination and injustice reaches community minds. It is important to acknowledge these as opportunities to raise awareness amongst our community members rather than as sites where we will find justice for our nations.

I came to understand through my participation in the regulatory process that is essential to not get caught up in framing our opposition with the terminology that the nuclear industry uses and wants us to use. When we express our resistance in ways that are recognized as legitimate by the state, the struggle for justice will continue to be couched in terms that are beneficial to the colonizer and not informed by our teachings on leadership, governance and good relationships with others. It was clear throughout my CGP that scientific and technical frames of reference were the only legitimate information that the Commission would consider, while traditional Indigenous knowledge on the land is considered insignificant. This is a powerful strategy used by uranium mining corporations and their regulators to discourage Indigenous and other opposition to their operations. By not recognizing our knowledge as legitimate, colonial entities seek to disempower us.

Resisting the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission's mandate of justifying and legitimizing the intrusion of the nuclear industry into Cree and Denesuline territory through participation in the regulatory process is but one way of confronting the rhetoric and colonial perspectives in the nuclear industry and should by no means encompass the entirety or even the majority of our resistance to uranium mining. In order to disrupt the continued environmental degradation caused by uranium mining and address the colonial structure that is maintained through the regulatory process, communities must engage in struggle that interrupts discourses justifying uranium extraction, as well as disrupts the real flow of capital from Indigenous territories to corporate coffers. Education that focuses on the environmental, political and

economic realities of uranium mining is crucial to the process of ending uranium mining in northern Saskatchewan. The political will to explore alternative, ethical revenue and energy sources in order to ensure our independence from the Canadian state will come from the resurgence of our traditional governance systems. Resurgence of Nehithaw nationhood requires recognizing the inherent inability of modern Indian Act leadership to effectively oppose the development of uranium mining on their traditional territories and is key to raising up onîkânîwak at the community level to take their place. By becoming onîkânîwak of the movement to liberate our people from the colonial structure, and at the same time re-grounding ourselves in our teachings that put our family members and community before the needs of the government and the Canadian state, we are simultaneously addressing both the objective (or economic) and the subjective (or the psychological) structures of colonialism that keep us from realizing our true capacity as Nehithawak.

Refamiliarizing ourselves with our languages, teachings and complex knowledge systems is crucial at this juncture. By self-affirming our traditional knowledge, self-recognizing our concerns regarding the environment, our health and the well-being of future generations, and self-empowering our nations to live according to treaty, as well as governance and leadership principles, we can confront both the material/economic and psychological/identity-based components of colonialism. Recognizing our histories, traditions and collective abilities to stand firm against uranium mining corporations and the Canadian state is a process of collective self-affirmation that is the first step towards shedding our attachments to seeking justice in the colonizers' terms and healing our nations from colonialism. Through the resurgence of traditional governance and leadership concepts, direct action and the political will to pursue alternative energy economies, Indigenous communities have the opportunity to recreate northern

Saskatchewan in ways that respect the original spirit and intent of the treaties and will lead to our liberation.

Recommendations:

- The development of a Renewable Energy Review Panel for northern Saskatchewan. It is essential going ahead that we assess our options for sustaining ourselves on renewable energy resources. One of the ways that we can address the material/economic aspect of colonialism on our territories is to work towards the establishment of renewable energy as a viable economic alternative to uranium mining development. Solar energy, including passive solar, wind projects, micro-dams and geothermal energy are among the options that we must explore for northern Saskatchewan. There is every possibility that we can become independent from the uranium mining industry while at the same time providing jobs, stable energy resources, and financial independence for our nation. In doing so, we open our future to the bright possibility of becoming financially and politically independent of the Canadian state and getting out of a morally and ethically corrupt industry. On-the-ground work has already begun on developing alternative energy renewable systems that allow communities independence from the current economic colonial system. It is time that we tap into these.
- Reoccupy our traditional territory. While men and women in business suits in board rooms in big cities divide our lands on maps and make claim to our lands, we need to be out on our lands defending our rights and the rights of future

generations to live peacefully. By physically occupying our lands, and through the practice of traditional forms of sustenance and livelihood, we can shed the colonial mentalities that deny us agency and freedom. One of the greatest strengths that we have as northerners is that we have not lost the land-based knowledge and language that our ancestors possessed. Unfortunately though, our ability to summon these skills and knowledges as instinct is diminishing; let's practice these and ensure this knowledge is carried to future generations.

- Deepen solidarity networks. As we work towards a new future for northern Saskatchewan, it is clear that we will need to unite with a diverse array of allies. Although widespread resistance to uranium in the north has yet to develop, significant pockets of anti-imperial, anti-nuclear and anti-colonial strongholds exist throughout northern Saskatchewan. Learning from these groups and supporting these groups will be a key component of our liberation. One of these groups is the Committee for Future Generations (CFFG). The CFFG, a northern Saskatchewan based network of Nehithaw, Denesuline, Métis and Settler peoples committed to combatting the uranium industry at its source, provides us with a clear example of what Indigenous resistance and resurgence looks like. Working with the CFFG over the course of my Community Governance Project, I came to understand that resistance to the nuclear industry necessarily entails the development and implementation of alternative systems of energy production, job creation and social organization. Whereas proponents of the nuclear industry insist that a uranium centered economy is essential to the future of northern

Saskatchewan, members of the CFFG and their allies are actively building alternative systems that prove otherwise. By working to protect future generations and by taking responsibility to foster healthy relationships between Settler and Indigenous peoples, CFFG members really are living out the spirit and intent of the original treaties. For many members of the CFFG, living out traditional Indigenous knowledge systems and working to regain governance practices are key tools in the fight against uranium mining in Saskatchewan.

- Educate ourselves as northerners (both Indigenous and Settler peoples included) on the hazards of uranium mining. It is clear that the information provided by uranium mining corporations is biased. It is clear that the regulatory controls of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission are slack. Given the fact that so many jurisdictions (including the provinces of British Columbia and Québec and the James Bay Cree of Quebec and Labrador) have now banned uranium mining within their territories, it is clear that there are hazards associated with uranium and nuclear development that must be explored. For more information and for resources about the environmental and health hazards of uranium mining, please see Appendix A.
- Embody traditional notions of leadership. In the old way, leadership was a responsibility that was shared and community members gave according to the different skill sets that they could offer. Leadership was always oriented toward the well-being and security of the community, rather than away from it. The importance of the role of women to the well-being of the community was

acknowledged and our roles were respected and honoured. Women held decision making authority over a number of key aspects of community life, including the designation of onîkânîwak. It is crucial that we recognize and understand the expectations that our ancestors placed on onîkânîwak (leaders) historically; we can begin to heal our nation from colonialism by acting on these responsibilities. Recognizing the inherent limitations of okimâhkânak and the Indian Band structure of government can help us to understand the limitations of pursuing justice in state-centered institutions. As an alternative to this form of pursuing justice and liberation, becoming onîkânîwak in the form of land defenders, language learners and traditional knowledge seekers will enable us to lead the way toward a movement to decolonize northern Saskatchewan. Honouring our ancestral responsibilities to nurture, provide a safe haven for and ensure the prosperity of our nation enables us to think and act on the long-term interests of our people and our descendants.

Appendix A

One of the goals I had at the beginning of my Community Governance Project was to understand the ways that the uranium mining industry impacts the health and wellbeing of the Nehithaw and Denesuline peoples through contamination of surrounding environments. Much of what I discovered through my research contradicted the information that I had received from the nuclear industry for many years. While communities in northern Saskatchewan are being bombarded with positive imagery and rhetoric around uranium mining, the basic truths about the environmental, political, economic and health impacts of the nuclear industry are avoided. Contrary to what uranium mining corporations and regulators would have us northern Cree and Denesuline believe, the nuclear industry is not safe, politically neutral, environmentally friendly or even financially viable. While the impact of Saskatchewan's uranium on a global scale is too large to be explored in this Community Governance Project report, it is important for our communities to be informed on the truths about the uranium mining industry and to understand the threat that uranium mining has on the landscape, waters and people of northern Saskatchewan. Simply put, the uranium mines in northern Saskatchewan pose both immediate and long-term threats to the health and well-being of northern residents and ecosystems. In my experiences attending licensing hearings and community information meetings, when these environmental hazards cannot be hidden due to voiced concerns in the community, the uranium mining industry seeks to normalize environmental impacts, to rationalize it so that our communities don't reject their presence. They are very aware, after all, that we, the Indigenous peoples of northern Saskatchewan, have the power to shut them down.

Mining corporations and their regulators will claim that our concerns about contamination don't have any basis in reality; that Cameco and Areva maintain rigorous

monitoring programs and abide by all regulatory controls. We will hear from their representatives that tailings ponds have been securely isolated from ecosystems and that spills and accidents occur infrequently and do not pose any real threat to lands and waters. We will hear how corporations are held to and abide by strict regulatory standards concerning health and safety- although those standards themselves are some of the most lax and controversial standards in the world. We will never hear industry admit how many people have already lost their traplines due to uranium mining. We will not hear industry admit that animals have fallen into toxic tailings ponds and died. We won't hear that long-term management of tailings facilities and former mine sites requires a level of commitment that corporations and regulators cannot adhere to, simply by their nature as short-sighted profit seekers.

The issue of tailings ponds is a good example of the short-sighted thinking that characterizes the uranium mining industry. Numerous tailings ponds, with many millions of cubic meters of toxic, radioactive material dot the northern landscape and pose a threat to the surrounding lands and waters. Contained within these tailings ponds are uranium, arsenic, selenium, cadmium, lead and molybdenum, among other substances. Along with containing heavy metals, which themselves pose a threat to northern environments, these tailings also emit radioactivity. Due to the very long half-life of the radioactive substances produced out of the milling process, these tailings ponds will be radioactive for hundreds of thousands of years and must be isolated from the ecosystem *indefinitely*. We as community members are told by Cameco and Areva that tailings ponds are designed not to release the toxic substances they hold into the water. We are assured that the design of these facilities is so sound that they will protect ecosystems for hundreds of thousands of years. We are informed that the monitoring systems in place are effective. The reality is however, that the corporations have set aside the financial

resources to manage them for just 30-40 years following mine closure. After this time, the nuclear industry claims that management is handed over to the Province of Saskatchewan, which has apparently developed institutional controls for tailings management. It is unclear how the Province of Saskatchewan, a political entity that has existed for just 109 years, could have developed an institutional control that will successfully protect northern residents for 100,000 years and longer. This would be especially impressive since there is no record of any institutional control that has lasted that long in human history.

A very recent example of the dangers posed by tailings ponds is the Mount Polley disaster. On August 4, 2014, the Mount Polley open-pit copper and gold mine tailings pond breached its dam, quickly becoming one of the largest environmental disasters in Canadian history. Located on the northern edge of unceded Secwepemc territory in the Cariboo region of northern British Columbia, the Mount Polley tailings pond contained such toxic, heavy metals as selenium, arsenic, copper and lead. The disaster released over 10 million cubic meters of water and 7.3 million cubic meters of toxic slurry containing these metals into lakes and rivers downstream (Imperial Metals, 2014). Most directly affected was Quesnel Lake, known to the Secwepemc as “Yuct Ne Senxiymetkwe”, or “the birth place of the salmon” (D. Morrison, personal communication, January 13, 2015). As the second largest sockeye salmon spawning grounds in the Fraser Basin, Yuct Ne Senxiymetkwe was once a pristine body of water which nourished and sustained the Secwepemc people. Now, as toxic metals contaminate this fragile ecosystem, the full impact of the tailings ponds disaster on the lands and waters on traditional Secwepemc territory can only be fully understood with time. It is important to note that regulators had been overseeing, inspecting and licensing the tailings facility for nearly twenty years.

There are numerous such tailings ponds dotting the landscape in northern Saskatchewan. In terms of their size, the comparison is notable; the Rabbit Lake Tailings Management Facility alone is projected to increase from 9 to 12 million cubic meters in the coming years (Cameco, 2011, E1). In addition to the toxins found in Mount Polley tailings ponds, the tailings ponds in northern Saskatchewan also contain radioactive elements such as uranium ore, thorium-230 and radium-226. These elements pose a significant threat to local ecosystems and must be isolated from the biosphere *indefinitely*.

Already though, tailings ponds are difficult for corporations to manage, with numerous reports of contamination of local groundwater as well as animals coming into contact with tailings ponds. Community members have reported moose drinking from the tailings ponds, as well as animals falling into the tailings ponds and needing to be shot. This has occurred just in the last few decades. It is difficult to imagine how the landscape will be changed with another 100,000 years or more of the existence of tailings ponds in northern Saskatchewan.

It is not my intention here to give a comprehensive overview of the environmental and health impacts of Saskatchewan's uranium mining industry. That work has been done by people much more qualified than I to do so. For those who would like to do further research on their own, I have included below a list of some of the most active groups that provide educational materials on the hazards of uranium mining and the nuclear industry in Canada:

- 1) James Bay Cree Stand Against Uranium- The James Bay Cree, our counterparts on the other side of the Hudson Bay, are also struggling against uranium mining. Their stance has been much more overtly resistant to uranium development, and the province of

Québec has respected their call for a moratorium on uranium mining. For more information, and to join the movement, please visit <http://standagainsturanium.com/>.

- 2) The Committee For Future Generations (CFFG)- The Committee for Future Generations originally began as a group opposed to a high-level nuclear waste repository in northern Saskatchewan. Although the group successfully fended off a high-level nuclear waste repository in the Métis community of Pinehouse and the English River First Nation, it has since turned its attention to solidarity building with the citizens of Creighton, Saskatchewan, who are also facing the Nuclear Waste Management Organization. For more information on uranium mining in Saskatchewan, and for the latest news on their struggle to prevent a high-level nuclear waste repository in Saskatchewan, please visit <https://committeeoffuturegenerations.wordpress.com/>.
- 3) Coalition for a Clean, Green Saskatchewan (CCGS) - The CCGS is a Saskatoon-based solidarity group committed to the movement away from nuclear energy to renewable energy sources in the province of Saskatchewan. For more information on the potential of renewable energy resources for Saskatchewan, please visit <http://www.cleangreensask.ca/>.
- 4) Physicians For Global Survival (PGS) - Physicians for Global Survival is the Canadian affiliate to the international not-for-profit organization of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW). As one of the key organizing groups for the upcoming World Uranium Symposium in Québec City in April 2015, the PGS

contributes significantly to the movement against uranium mining and the nuclear industry. More information on the hazards of uranium mining and nuclear power can be found on their website at http://pgs.ca/?page_id=89.

5) The Canadian Coalition For Nuclear Responsibility (CCNR) - The CCNR is a not-for-profit organization with an extensive database of independent research on the health and environmental effects of the uranium mining/nuclear industry not only in Canada, but its far-reaching effects in other parts of the world. Topics covered in their material include: the history of the Canadian nuclear industry, nuclear waste, the militarization of Saskatchewan's uranium (nuclear weapons and depleted uranium weaponry), the huge financial costs and subsidization of Canada's aging nuclear infrastructure, alternatives to nuclear energy and many other relevant subjects. For more information, visit <http://www.ccnr.org/>.

6) Nunavummiut Makitagunarningut (MAKITA) is a non-governmental organization of concerned Nunavummiut who are committed to the distribution of accurate information on uranium issues to those who are concerned about the possibility of uranium mining development in the territory of Nunavut. Their blog offers some useful resources for those of us seeking more information on the harms of uranium mining and can be found at: <http://makitanunavut.wordpress.com/>

In addition to the above online resources, I would like to recommend Dr. Jim Harding's book entitled "Canada's Deadly Secret: Saskatchewan Uranium and the Global Nuclear Industry", published by Fernwood Publishing in 2007. Dr. Harding is a former professor of Human Justice

at the University of Regina and a long-time leader in the anti-nuclear movement in the province of Saskatchewan. “Canada’s Deadly Secret” is a foundational text on the relationship between uranium mining on Denesuline and Nehithaw territories in Saskatchewan and environmental, health and security hazards worldwide. Harding’s work is extremely informative, especially on the local environmental implications for uranium in Saskatchewan, as well as the history of the anti-nuclear movement in Saskatchewan.

Appendix B

My Presentation to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission in La Ronge, Saskatchewan on October 3, 2013.

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