

THE WINTEGO OF OUR
DISCONTENT: ENVIRONMENT
AND ENVIRONMENTALISM
ON THE CHURCHILL RIVER

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ON THE CHURCHILL RIVER

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ABSTRACT

The Saskatchewan Power Corporation's plans for a dam on the Churchill River and the subsequent study and enquiry sparked debate in Northern and Southern Saskatchewan on the meaning of the Churchill River. Many people from southern and northern Saskatchewan expressed their ideas about why they opposed or supported hydroelectric development. By studying this debate, *The Wintego of Our Discontent* explores the meaning of nature and wilderness, region and ethnicity, for Saskatchewan people in the 1970s. It shows that ideas of nature and wilderness are defined by history, culture, gender, geography and economic status. It draws conclusions on the implications of those definitions for environmental protection and points to the problems inherent in ideas of nature and wilderness.

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Introduction: The Ideas

Ideas of nature and wilderness are constructed by history, culture, gender, economic status, and geography. The definitions created by those factors determine the ways in which people use the non-human world. The debate over the Churchill River and Wintego Rapids shows that these definitions are problematic. In order to work toward a meaningful place for humans in the non-human world, we need to rethink those definitions.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the debate over the Churchill River some explanation of the history of the place and people is necessary. Similarly descriptions of earlier northern development histories and environmental histories, and an explanation of my own motives will place this study in a clearer light.

The Churchill River Study was commissioned by the government of Saskatchewan in 1973 to study the environmental and social impacts of hydroelectric development on the Churchill River in northern Saskatchewan. This study was the first of its kind in Canada: it was the first time an environmental and social review was commissioned before project approval was given.¹ Mainly because of the opportunities for dissent afforded by the Churchill River Study and the following Churchill River Board of Inquiry, the Saskatchewan Power Corporation did not build the Wintego Dam. However, a lignite

¹Churchill River Study, Summary Report (1976) 9.

coal plant *was* built in southern Saskatchewan. Pristine northern nature was saved, but only at the expense of southern nature.

Wintego Rapids, the most favourable sight in terms of cost effectiveness and energy production chosen by the Saskatchewan Power Corporation for its hydroelectric development, is located just downstream from the confluence of the Churchill and Reindeer rivers. The Churchill River Basin is in the sub-arctic precambrian shield with an abundance of rocks, lakes, trees, rivers, and wildlife. The Churchill River, or Missinipe (meaning “big river”) is a long chain of lakes, eventually emptying into Hudson Bay. Many consider it to be one of the best rivers in Canada to canoe.² This area *is* the picture that comes to mind when most Canadians think wilderness.

Archeological evidence suggests that the area has been inhabited by the Rocky Cree since 900 A.D.³ After the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the fur trade became more important in the area and trading companies built many more trading posts such as Frog Portage. The Churchill River is named after John Churchill, the first duke of Marlborough and governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) from 1685 to 1691. The name was used for the river as early as 1686 as indeed the river was an important trade route for the HBC and Montreal traders.⁴ Heavy trapping and trading resulted in the depletion of fur bearing animals until the HBC monopoly in 1821. The lifestyle of the Rocky Cree began to change drastically at this point. They became increasingly sedentary: one band in one

²Eric Morse, Fur Trade Canoe Routes of Canada: Then and Now (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979) 92.

³James E. Smith, “Western Woods Cree” Handbook of North American Indians: Subarctic vol. 6, ed. William C. Sturtevant (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1981) 257, 258.

⁴“Churchill River,” Canadian Encyclopedia, 2nd ed. vol. 1 (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1988) 426.

place, set up around a trading post-mission complex.⁵ Fish became more important to both diet and economy and communal hunting gave way to family hunting and trapping areas by the end of the nineteenth century. This process of gradual change continued until the end of the Second World War when governments began to take an interest in the Aboriginal residents of Canada's North. Children were sent to residential schools in the South until education services were provided within northern communities. The government set up nurses stations were set up and housing projects began. Emergency welfare as well as family allowance supplemented subsistence from hunting and trapping.⁶

By the time of the Churchill River Study, it was evident that the social and cultural change that had taken place had not materially benefitted the lives of the Rocky Cree. Indeed, those who had been educated in southern residential schools found few economic opportunities open to them, and the option of hunting, trapping, and fishing was shut. As a result, education levels were very low. Only 1% of Treaty Indians in the Study area in 1971 had completed secondary school.⁷ Employment levels were also very low; a full 72% of the potential labour force remained unemployed.⁸ Many northerners avoided permanent employment in order to continue trapping, hunting, and fishing. This type of lifestyle enabled many northerners to provide their families with a more nutritious diet than would have been probable had they been employed in wage labour.⁹ What employment was available was seasonal; many acted as guides for southern hunters. It was certain that

⁵James E. Smith 259.

⁶James E. Smith 267.

⁷Churchill River Study, Summary Report (1976) 24.

⁸Churchill River Study, Summary 24.

⁹Churchill Committee, Churchill Committee Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry (1978) 35-40.

there was not enough employment to accommodate the growing population. In the Study area, 51% were under the age of 15. Birth rates were high, death rates low, and people tended to stay in the area.¹⁰ High paying government jobs went to educated southerners who usually spent only a few years in the North. Other non-Native residents were more permanent, often operating outfitting stores for southern tourists. Tourism was restricted to wilderness recreation such as hunting, fishing, or canoeing.¹¹

In the 1970s, the community of Sandy Bay (population 586) had two shops, operated by outsiders. One shop contained the post office while the other housed the SaskTel radio phone. The village had no banks, restaurants, or running water. The Department of Northern Saskatchewan had an office set up, but was not always attended. The ten year old school building had been almost completely destroyed by permafrost and housing was in short supply.¹² In an area that depended on the land for subsistence, the possibility of a dam causing major or even minor changes was an issue of grave concern for the residents. It also caught the attention of people from southern Saskatchewan. Not even proponents of development could ignore the environmental and social implications of hydroelectric development in the Churchill region.

After the various sectors completed the Study in 1975, the Churchill River Board of Inquiry began preparations for its part in the decision making process. It heard briefs from groups and individuals from all over Saskatchewan and eventually made its

¹⁰Churchill River Study, Summary 23.

¹¹Churchill River Study, Summary 23.

¹²"A warm welcome at road's end" Regina Leader Post 18 February 1975 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (January 1-April 30 1975) (1975) 36.

recommendations to the government of Saskatchewan in June, 1978.

The event that occupied reporters, environmental groups, scientists, engineers, labour groups, Aboriginal groups, concerned citizens, and government for five years fell out of popular memory to be replaced by larger-scale projects and studies such as the James Bay hydroelectric project in northern Quebec and the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline in the Yukon. But perhaps the job of the researcher and reader is made easier when dealing with a subject that does not immediately bring to mind passionate arguments and seemingly irreconcilable differences, although the Wintego project had its fair share of both. The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the field of environmental history and, by extension, to the environmental movement. Exploring people's motivations for using a particular piece of land in a particular way, and examining the ways in which they tried to convince one another of the legitimacy of their purposes will help resolve similar disputes that will inevitably rise. This thesis is meant to help take discussions over contested terrain out of the realm of unthinking, unquestioning, and unyielding dogma. A relatively obscure example of disputed territory such as the Wintego project is perhaps a more useful tool than its more famous cousins in accomplishing this task. There are very few people, today, who have preconceived notions about it.

This might explain why so many studies of northern development serve only to heighten tension and opposition. At the time when the Saskatchewan government was announcing its intention to conduct an environmental and social study of the effects of hydroelectric development in the northern part of the province, two journalists, Robert Davis and Mark Zannis, published a work provocatively titled, *The Genocide Machine in*

Canada: The Pacification of the North. As can be gleaned from the title, this work was not an attempt at reconciliation but a sort of call to arms. It makes sweeping generalizations about government policy and Aboriginal victimization in the North. The authors seem to ignore information which does not help them to drive home their ideas. For instance, they argue that, “western-style colonialism in its classic, neocolonial and now automated versions never has conceived of the North other than as a supplier of raw materials for mercantile, and industrial enterprises,”¹³ completely skipping over the fact that southern Canadians have also used the North for recreation, spiritual renewal, and education. But perhaps, as one of the first books to address the issues of Northern exploitation and neocolonialism in Canada, it deserves some leniency.

In 1974, H.V. Nelles had his work published on hydroelectric development entitled, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines and Hydro-Electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941*. Using a traditional approach to history, Nelles examines government policy and hydroelectricity as it related to nation building. However, he does include an interesting analysis of Canadian ideas of nature and how hydroelectricity fit into those ideas. He writes, “Because it existed in harmony with the rational and the romantic world, hydro-electric power could resolve the paradox of ugliness that had blighted nineteenth-century industrialism; it could create factories *and* natural beauty.”¹⁴ This work is extremely important in that it reminds us that there was a time when hydroelectric

¹³Robert Davis and Mark Zannis, *The Genocide Machine in Canada: The Pacification of the North* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1973) 173.

¹⁴H. V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines, and Hydro-Electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974) 217.

suicide rates, alcoholism, child abuse and neglect in the region, but suggests that they might have more to do with an increased presence of southern culture through means such as television, radio, etc.

James B. Waldram's 1988 book, *As Long as the Rivers Run: Hydroelectric Development and Native Communities in Western Canada* is a prime example of the Cree-as-ultimate-victim thesis. In it, he likens hydroelectric development to treaty making a century earlier. "The processes by which these people had come to be victimized by hydro dam construction were so similar to the processes by which they had lost their lands through treaty making and scrip allocation that I knew I had found the link. The story had to be told."¹⁵ Waldram, by making Aboriginal people into absolute victims, overemphasizes the antagonistic relationship between government and northern people. Besides being a distortion of events, it does nothing to facilitate future discussions between government, southerners, and northerners. Jim Harding's 1988 *Aboriginal Rights and Government Wrongs: Uranium Mining in Northern Saskatchewan* and Boyce Richardson's *Strangers Devour the Land*, published in 1991, are written along a similar theme. Richardson romanticizes James Bay Cree culture and seems to mourn its passing as if it were a static instead of a flexible and dynamic thing. Stanley Warner, a contributor to the 1999 book, *Social and Environmental Impacts of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project*, calls this a "subtle form of racism."¹⁶ Though carefully researched and usually

¹⁵James B. Waldram, *As Long as the Rivers Run: Hydroelectric Development and Native Communities in Western Canada* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1988) 71.

¹⁶Stanley Warner, "The Cree People of James Bay," *Social and Environmental Impacts of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999) 98.

quite informative, the works of Harding and Richardson tend only to make thoughtful and open dialogue more difficult.

Kenneth Coates has written a number of books and articles on northern Canada. Although not shying away from pointing out government policies and projects which have adversely affected northern peoples, (such as economic instability caused by primary resource dependency and the accompanying boom and bust and transient workforce) he also gives some solutions to those problems (local control of natural resources). Not only this, but his narrative makes room for Aboriginal agency. In the book he coauthored with Judith Powell, *The Modern North: People, Politics and the Rejection of Colonialism*, they describe the ways in which northerners have gained more economic control. However, they are not sanguine about the possibility of resolving conflicts over northern territories: “On the environmental front, the North remains both a treasure trove of resources, to be developed in the ‘national interest,’ and a delicate ecological preserve, to be treasured and protected at all costs. The two uses are not, for the most part, compatible; the battle between these conflicting definitions of the North will undoubtedly remain at the forefront of political life in years to come.”¹⁷ But works like this one are a step towards conflict resolution.

Sean McCutcheon’s book, *Electric Rivers: The Story of the James Bay Project*, published in 1991 by Black Rose Books, a publishing house which specializes in leftist analyses, is an attempt at an impartial detailing of events. It is filled with numbers and

¹⁷Kenneth Coates and Judith Powell. *The Modern North: People, Politics and the Rejection of Colonialism* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1989) 158.

statistics which lend it an air of scientific objectivity (according to Marie-Anik Gagne who used it as her primary source of information for her book on James Bay) and generally attempts to give as many sides of the story as possible, including Bourassa's dream of an economically and culturally independent Quebec. This is one of the few books that actually studied that subject in any meaningful way.

Gagne, mentioned above, wrote *A Nation Within a Nation: Dependency and the Cree* published in 1994 also by Black Rose Books. Through a series of convoluted theories and models, Gagne comes to the conclusion that Salisbury's thesis that the James Bay Agreement has actually benefitted the Cree is false. Her argument is this: the transfer payments and other subsidies that the government of Quebec is required to give to the James Bay Cree will always be necessary. They will never be able to become economically independent: money from southern Quebec will always be necessary. This is a straightforward conclusion made unnecessarily confusing by a series of development models. Once again, however, the Cree of James Bay are relegated to victim status.

The latest work on the James Bay project and, by extension, northern development, has already been mentioned, *Social and Environmental Impacts of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project*. Edited by James F. Hornig, it is a collection of articles written by people in sciences, social sciences, fine arts but none from the humanities. Perhaps its greatest shortfall (even worse than its neglect of the humanities) is its lack of an Aboriginal contributor. Moreover, the importance of traditional ecological knowledge is emphasized by many contributors but never included in the work. Similarly, although mentioned and deemed important, the social and economic impact of the La Grande

project on southern Quebecers is never studied in any detail. These seem to be glaring omissions. The strongest article is by Stanley Warner and explores what made certain Cree strategies either effective or ineffective. He points out that by focussing on the social effects of environmental damage on Cree culture and pushing the more controversial topic of Aboriginal title aside, the Cree ran the risk of encountering the same problems with the Quebec government at a later time. Because less calculated to appeal to southern sympathies, issues of self determination were neglected at some peril. The article by Raymond Coppinger and Will Ryan on the environmental effects of James Bay is the weakest. It contradicts itself in places and, in order to establish the relative biological insignificance of the region, the authors repeatedly compare it to a rainforest, a seemingly inappropriate analogy especially given the loaded meanings with which the word “rainforest” is imbued. However, the book does cover more issues relating to the James Bay project than any other work and usually does it in a way that can lead to a more thoughtful discussion of the topic.

Jean Manore’s *Cross Currents: Hydroelectricity and the Engineering of Northern Ontario* is, I think, more thoughtful analyses of controversial subjects. Manore’s work goes so far as to attribute agency to the land and water. This is interesting and helpful in reminding the reader that nature does not always go along with developers’ plans for it. Humans are not yet able to manipulate it freely according to their will. But I think there is also a danger in using the term agency in connection with nature. I think it degrades the meaning of the word, active participation in the creation one’s own destiny. Considering the context in which it has been used in recent historical scholarship on Aboriginal-

European relations, the word does not seem appropriate when applied to nature.

Work on northern development tends to focus on political policy, Aboriginal communities, ecological change, and neocolonialism. Generally, researchers do their work using a done in a top-down approach; data is collected by a field researcher, statistics are gathered, and interpretations are based on these. The authors tend to assume what the Cree of James Bay thought or said about the dam, rather than ask. They also assume the reasons why environmentalists have opposed development, rather than study it. How southern Quebecers (who were not politicians) felt about James Bay or southern Canadians felt about the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline is often ignored. My thesis examines these things in detail using the words of Saskatchewan citizens from all regions and from varying ideologies. Discussions of nature (which are usually restricted to examinations of Aboriginal ideology or the place of the North in the Canadian psyche) have usually been abstracted from events. Instead of studying ideas of nature and the North abstractly, the thesis shows how these ideas manifested themselves in the words and actions of Saskatchewan people through newspaper articles, letters to the editor, press releases, briefs to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry, and Churchill River Study Reports. As such, my work is really an amalgamation of two historical methods, environmental and cultural. William Cronon writes, "If we wish to understand the values and motivations that shape our own actions toward the natural world, if we hope for an environmentalism capable of explaining why people use and abuse the earth as they do, then the nature we

study must become less natural and more cultural.”¹⁸ My research begins with place, the Churchill River basin, and asks, who wants it for what, and why. The methods that the thesis uses to answer those questions are those of cultural history, it analyses text.

My ideas and methods have been influenced by many writers, but foremost among them is William Cronon¹⁹. He highlights the problems inherent in the cultural constructs of nature and especially wilderness. In the case of the Churchill River basin, environmentalists were willing to sacrifice the familiar and already “disturbed” prairie to the “pristine,” and “untouched,” wilderness of the Churchill River. The idea of wilderness makes nature remote and allows us to continue ignoring environmental problems close to us. Northern nature acted as a foil to hectic, capitalist, southern society. Southern nature was a part of that society and so did not require protection. If the goal of the environmentalists was to protect nature, this dichotomy blocked their success. The idea of wilderness made nature remote and allowed citizens of southern Saskatchewan to continue ignoring environmental problems close to them. And as Canadians, the “true North,” remote yet accessible to those who had the inclination and the means, played a vital role in forming our national identity. The wilderness needed protection while southern non-nature enabled the continuation of an environmentally destructive lifestyle. Moreover, it

¹⁸William Cronon, Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1996) 36.

See also: William Cronon, “A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative.” The Journal of American History vol. 78 no. 4 March 1992. 1347-1376.; “A Round Table: Environmental History” Journal of American History vol. 76.4 (1990) This includes articles by Donald Worster, William Cronon, Carolyn Merchant, Richard White and others; Carolyn Merchant, “Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory” Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism, ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990); Carolyn Merchant, Earthcare: Women and the Environment (New York: Routledge, 1995); Raymond Williams, Problems in Materialism and Culture (London: Verso, 1980)

enabled the continuing justification of that lifestyle; as long as the wilderness still existed, cultural reexamination remained unnecessary. Cronon also shows that conflicts over nature are never straight forward, but holding certain ideas out as natural makes conciliation impossible. I will discuss his ideas in more detail later.

American environmental history has been around for much longer than Canadian and so it becomes logical to draw heavily on it for theoretical perspective. However, there are significant differences in the ways in which Canadians and Americans look at nature. For Americans, the frontier is central to concepts of nature; in Canada, the North plays that role. However, it does not hold the all consuming place which some such as W.L. Morton give it: "The ultimate and the comprehensive meaning of Canadian history is to be found where there has been no Canadian history, in the North"²⁰ But the North has been important to Canadians, perhaps partly because it is so capable of shifting and changing to accommodate different times and different regions. What is now Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta was once considered the Northwest and what people from Ontario, Saskatchewan, or Dawson City consider to be The North is probably quite different. Rob Shields wrote an extremely interesting book called *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. In it, he devotes a chapter to the "True North Strong and Free." He identifies "three main stances toward the North that were prominent among southern Canadians: (1) the idolisation of the North as a wilderness zone of purity, an unstained (*purus*) cultural 'heartland'; (2) the North as a resource

²⁰W.L. Morton, "The 'North' in Canadian Historiography," Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, Series IV, 8 (1970) 40.

frontier offering riches to developers; (3) ignorance founded on irrelevance to everyday life.”²¹ He explains that the North is a construct of southern Canadians. It is defined spatially, and, I would add, racially and economically. For instance, for people of southern Saskatchewan,²² the North usually begins north of Prince Albert, above the southern treeline. The inhabitants of the North are mostly Aboriginal or Metis; Euro-Canadians are in the minority. Moreover, this area’s economy tends to depend on primary natural resources. There are few economic opportunities for residents, and capital is scarce. The Churchill River basin is situated spatially, racially, and economically, in what is generally known as northern Saskatchewan.

In the field of Canadian environmental history, Bill Waiser has had the most influence on my work. In his 1995 book *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915-1946* he describes how enemy aliens and conscientious objectors from the two world wars were used for cheap labour in building roads and facilities for the national parks. He writes, “The story also has a sadly ironic dimension. Although the men were busy developing the parks for the future enjoyment of all Canadians, they were not even welcome in the places that directly benefitted from their labour. The same special areas, moreover, that are synonymous today with holiday escape and outdoor activity for people across the country were used at one time to intern other,

²¹Rob Shields, Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity (London: Routledge, 1991) 181.

²²Southern is itself a problematic term and usually defined negatively, by what it is not: the North.

Though

acknowledging the inadequacies of this definition, I will leave it there for now.

less fortunate groups.”²³ Though usually unacknowledged elsewhere, in Waiser’s work, we cannot help but see that the idea of nature has a large class and race dimension. Moreover, nature, even when used for recreation, has serious economic and political implications. Recreation is not value neutral; it is used to build economies and build nations.

George Altemeyer, whose article “Three Ideas of Nature in Canada” appears in *Consuming Canada: Readings in Environmental History* challenges the traditional notion put forward by Margaret Atwood and others that Canadians generally looked on nature with fear; nature was the antagonist. Altemeyer argues that although fear has certainly been a part of the Canadian attitude toward nature, it was by no means the only or even the most important. He argues that between 1893 and 1914 Canadians began to look to nature for relaxation and renewal. “This positive perception involved the ideas of Nature as a Benevolent Mother capable of soothing city-worn nerves and restoring health, of rejuvenating a physically deteriorating race and of teaching lessons no book learning could give; as a Limited Storehouse whose treasures must in the future be treated with greater respect; and as a Temple where one could again find and communicate with the Diety.”²⁴ This is a concept that we will see playing an important part in the defeat of the Wintego project. Altemeyer also describes the ways in which nature became an educator of youth. Scouting programs which involved camping trips and summer camps in which children

²³Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915-1946* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1995) 252.

²⁴George Altemeyer, “Three Ideas of Nature in Canada, 1893-1914” *Consuming Canada: Readings in Environmental History* ed. Gaffield and Gaffield (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1995) 98.

learned how to canoe, start fires, and bake bannock became popular in this period.

Despite these popular perceptions of nature, there still remained a strong willingness to use nature for continued economic development.

Laura Cameron published her revised M.A. thesis, *Openings: A Meditation on History, Method, and Sumas Lake* in 1997. It is a thoughtful and very interesting study of a place, Sumas Lake, which was drained in order to create more arable land in the Fraser Valley. It manages to do this without pitting government against “the people,” Euro-Canadians against Aboriginals, progress against nostalgia. However, there is a contradiction in her work. She writes that “one of the greatest problems of environmental degradation is people’s real human capacity to forget a disappeared environment” and that “perhaps a purpose of history is to make people miss what they haven’t experienced and to help them understand where they are.” Unfortunately, Cameron partially fails to do this because her somewhat jargon filled writing style would not appeal to many outside of an educated elite. It is exclusionary. However, the book deserves attention for its ability to address oppositional narratives of development and avoid them.

In this respect, Cameron’s work is part of a growing revisionist study of Aboriginal - European relations in Canada and around the world.²⁵ Much like nature, and

²⁵For an interesting look at the debate around the writing of Aboriginal-White relations history in Canada see Cole, Douglas and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand Upon the People: The Law Against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990); Tina Loo, “Dan Cranmer’s Potlatch: Law as Coercion, Symbol, and Rhetoric in British Columbia, 1884-1951” *Canadian Historical Review* 73.2 (1992); J.R. Miller, “Owen Glendower, Hotspur, and Canadian Indian Policy” *Ethnohistory* 37.4 (1990); Mary-Ellen Kelm and Robert Brownlie objected to the revisionist scholarship of these four authors in “Desperately Seeking Absolution: Native Agency as Colonialist Alibi?” *Canadian Historical Review* 75.4 (1994); Miller and Cole responded to Kelm and Brownlie’s article and a reply by Kelm was published as “Desperately Seeking Absolution: Responses and a Reply” *Canadian Historical Review* 76 (1995).

especially wilderness, acts as a foil to city life, Aboriginal culture often acts as a foil to European culture. As Candace Slater so succinctly points out in her contribution to *Uncommon Ground*, “Outsiders’ tendency to see Indians much as they see whales or dolphins may distress or amuse native peoples, who nonetheless remain ready and willing to use others’ perceptions of them to further their own ends.”²⁶ As we will see in the study of the Wintego project, southern, Euro-Canadians sometimes used Aboriginal peoples as symbols of an Edenic wilderness in order to protect nature *from* hydroelectric development *for* tourism. Aboriginal people, although ambivalent about tourism (as we will see in chapter three), tended to encourage this view of their culture in order to protect their lands from the dam.

Although, for the most part, this thesis is a contribution to environmental history, it draws on the work of not only environmental historians, but northern Canadian historians, Aboriginal-White relations historians, and cultural historians. There are three historians whose work I have found to be particularly helpful in understanding and analysing text. These are Valerie Korinek, Judith Walkowitz, and Mariana Valverde. Korinek’s book, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* discusses the magazine as a producerly text, a text which, though encouraging a preferred reading, leaves room for various interpretations and readings.²⁷ This interpretation allows the reader or consumer to be an active participant rather than passive recipient; they have agency. Applied to the Wintego project, the text (the Churchill River Study), though

²⁶Candace Slater, “Amazonia as Edenic Narrative” *Uncommon Ground* 130.

²⁷Valerie Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) 20.

containing and privileging a western, scientific based ideology, also exposed the weaknesses of that ideology and opened the way for dissent from both southern and northern opponents of hydroelectric development. Judith Walkowitz's book *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* I found fascinating because of the way in which she weaves narrative and theory. She does have the advantage of one of the most famous and engaging murder mysteries in history, that of Jack the Ripper, but she does have the merit of using it extremely effectively. Her book also emphasizes the importance of narratives both in assessing and creating ideas.

Valverde's book *The Age of Light Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* I found particularly helpful. Like the people in turn of the century Canada, Saskatchewan people in the 1970s were living in a time of moral re-evaluation. Nature had become a moral standard by which city life was to be judged. Using nature in a certain way (such as hydroelectric development) was a crime against morality according to some. Debates around nature involved much more than the obvious; they became "a complex and multi-layered emblem representing moral, social, economic, and political regulatory crises in a condensed form."²⁸ The main similarities between the social purity activists of the turn of the century and Saskatchewan environmentalists of the 1970s is their motivation: "to preserve and enhance a certain type of human life."²⁹ The addition of a cultural analysis to the theoretical framework of my thesis has been incredibly helpful.

I began my primary research by taking stock of the material I had at my disposal. I

²⁸Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart Inc., 1991) 99.

²⁹Valverde 24.

found that the Churchill River Study and the later Churchill River Board of Inquiry, because of their emphasis on public participation, had made available vast quantities of material. I began by perusing the reports from the various sectors of the Study, but soon found myself, for the most part, unqualified to analyse them. This was somewhat disappointing, but when I came across the books of newspaper clippings which had been collected and put together by a member of the Churchill River Study Group, and the volumes and volumes of briefs presented to the Inquiry by citizens and groups in Saskatchewan, I didn't feel so bad anymore. It may seem odd that in a historical study where so many of the original participants are still alive that I did not seek to interview any of them. I did consider it for a time, but when I thought about what the task would involve, it did not seem practical for a Master's thesis. One obstacle was that there were just so many people involved; the number of potential interview candidates was overwhelming. Doing interviews could have easily added another year onto my work. And when I saw the amount of material that I had already, the interviews already done with northern residents by the Churchill Committee, the briefs prepared by individuals and groups, and the final report of the Inquiry board itself, the benefits of such an undertaking did not seem to justify the time that would need to be expended. Also, by selecting interview candidates who had been involved in boards, studies, activist groups, I would be privileging an expert viewpoint. This was something I was trying to avoid.

In a thesis that is mainly a discussion of values, it is important that I make mine clear. I care very much about the non-human environment. This is why I feel it is so

important to find a place for humans in it. I grew up in a small town on the prairie and that landscape remains a special place for me, even now that I have moved to Vancouver and the mountains. However, I grew up going on family vacations to national parks and other “natural” vacation spots which featured trees and lakes. I still enjoy going to these places and camping in my tent, but I spend more time trying to make my home place, the place I actually live, into a congenial place to be by vegetable and herb gardening and tending house plants. I think that real change starts at home, with analysing ideas and actions and then making real change. This thesis has forced me to look carefully at my own ideas of nature and wilderness and has resulted in a revolution in my ideas. Before writing this, I thought that most of the world’s human population had to die off and the rest had to live in huts in order for real nature - or wilderness - to flourish. However, this did not work well with my ideas of human rights. I was uncomfortable with my ideas on environmentalism which were a product of the popular environmental movement. I was also uncomfortable with the tensions between activists and loggers, activists and fishers, activists and miners... the list goes on. This is perhaps why I was so receptive to the ideas of William Cronon when I first saw him at a lecture held at the University of Saskatchewan. The essays in *Uncommon Ground* introduced me to an environmentalism that was thoughtful, critical, and allowed for the existence of human beings. And so Cronon has become central to this thesis. But it would be incorrect to say that I have taken his ideas and applied them to this situation. Rather, I came to understand his ideas through the writing of this thesis. I was already part way through writing a thesis on the triumph of environmentalism in the debate over the Churchill River when I came to a snag,

the lignite coal plant on the Poplar River, which I could not reconcile. After giving the matter serious thought, I finally understood Cronon's central idea on wilderness.

This, then, is the central paradox: wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural. If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall. The place where we are is the place where nature is not. If this is so - if by definition wilderness leaves no place for human beings, save perhaps as contemplative sojourners enjoying their leisurely reverie in God's natural cathedral - then also by definition it can offer no solution to the environmental and other problems that confront us. To the extent that we celebrate wilderness as the measure with which we judge civilization, we reproduce the dualism that sets humanity and nature at opposite poles. We thereby leave ourselves little hope of discovering what an ethical, sustainable, *honourable* human place in nature might actually look like.

Worse: To the extent that we live in an urban-industrial civilization but at the same time pretend to ourselves that our *real* home is in the wilderness, to just that same extent we give ourselves permission to evade responsibility for the lives we actually lead. We inhabit civilization while holding some part of ourselves - what we imagine to be the most precious part - aloof from its entanglements. We work our nine-to-five jobs in its institutions, we eat its food, we drive its cars (not the least to reach the wilderness), we benefit from the intricate and all too invisible networks with which it shelters us, all the while pretending that these things are not an essential part of who we are. By imagining that our true home is in the wilderness, we forgive ourselves the home we actually inhabit. In its flight from history, in its siren song of escape, in its reproduction of the dangerous dualism that sets human beings outside of nature - in all of these ways, wilderness poses a serious threat to responsible environmentalism at the end of the twentieth century.³⁰

How wilderness is defined depends on who is defining it. For many people, especially the urban middle class, the wilderness represented a place of awe and beauty, a place for spiritual renewal and contemplation. And it existed primarily, if not solely in the North. Southern nature, which had been modified and used by Euro-Canadians for generations was hardly even worthy of being called nature. It has been argued that the

³⁰Cronon 80.

secularization of western culture has led many to turn to nature for spiritual fulfilment. The wilderness was sacred. It was an Edenic place representing the Earth before its fall, before it was imprinted with the “destructful hand of man”, as one opponent of development put it. That hand print was always white and always male.

In this scenario, the Aboriginal populations who inhabited the wilderness were identified with man before civilization, before the fall. Their culture is often considered as pristine as the environment they inhabit. Quite often their cultures became idealized. Their actions were considered natural until their culture became tainted by civilization. Wilderness cannot accommodate Euro-Canadians except as romantic sojourners. Taken to its logical extreme, wilderness cannot accommodate humans at all.

For others, especially the working class, wilderness represented economic expansion for Saskatchewan. By extracting its resources, the provincial economy could be stimulated and diversified. This in turn would create jobs which would allow families to pay their bills and buy food. A legitimate concern, although it is often people from the working class who become demonized in debates over wilderness. This is because working class jobs depend perhaps most obviously on an expanding economy which in turn depends on more and more resource extraction and development.

For others, especially northerners, the wilderness of the Churchill River was home, a place in which people lived and worked. But by the 1970s, a growing human population and diminishing animal population made a lifestyle based solely on hunting, fishing, and trapping unrealistic as a means of continuing support for northern communities. Already a large proportion of northern income was derived from transfer and welfare payments. In

the North, the wilderness was also a bargaining chip cleverly used to gain the support and sympathy of southerners who idealized northern wilderness and northern lifestyles. The wilderness also represented autonomy. The Churchill River basin had been used by northerners for generations. It was unacceptable for southerners to make a final decision about land use in the North.

The definition of nature is problematic. If we define nature as the non-human world, then where do humans fit in nature? They do not. But if we include humans in its definition, then what does unnatural mean? Does it have any significance? The problem with the definition of nature goes beyond the question of whether it includes humans.

Nature also defines what is moral and immoral. William Cronon writes,

On the one hand, people in Western cultures use the word 'nature' to describe a universal reality, thereby implying that it must be common to all people. On the other hand, they also pour into that word all their most personal and culturally specific values: the essence of who they think they are, how and where they should live, what they believe to be good and beautiful, why people should act in certain ways. All these things are described as *natural*, even though everything we know about human history and culture flies in the face of that description. The result is a human world in which these many human visions of nature are always jostling against each other, each claiming to be universal and each soon making the unhappy discovery that even its nearest neighbours refuse to acknowledge that claim.³¹

There can be no one definition of nature. However, although the word is problematic, I have used it throughout the thesis to refer to the non-human world.

By studying the ideas, words, and actions of Saskatchewan citizens (northerners, southerners, opponents, and proponents of development), I will show that the arguments of all were based on that desire, explained by Valverde, to protect their own lifestyles.

³¹Cronon 51.

Working-class southerners advocated development in the belief that it would boost the economy, which would in turn lead to more jobs. Aboriginal people in northern Saskatchewan opposed development because it would disrupt their way of life which depended on a thriving and diverse riverine ecosystem. The main reason given by middle-class southerners for opposing development was the Churchill's capacity for tourism. They argued over and over that the pristine northern wilderness provided a necessary escape from southern society and spoiled southern nature. It is this argument, given by southern opponents of development, that was the most problematic of the three. Jobs and domestic food production were certainly more important than tourism. Moreover, the need for escape was created by the environmental degradation caused by consumer demand; southerners did not oppose development because they depended on the Churchill for their livelihoods, but to escape the damage created by their own lifestyles. Wilderness then became the central focus for middle-class environmentalists, at the expense of less spectacular vistas, such as the prairie, or urban landscapes. The wilderness/civilization, North/South, and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal dichotomies present in the arguments of southern environmentalists and those of Aboriginal people, were destructive. Successful campaigns against wilderness development created feelings of complacency and discouraged meaningful examinations of lifestyles that caused environmental change.

In Chapter One, I will give a time line of events and provide an overview of the people and institutions involved in the debate over what to do with the Churchill River basin. It will examine the criticisms levelled at the Study's structure and point to some of its limitations. It will also examine the positive roles played by the Study and the Inquiry

in discussions over nature. Chapter Two will examine those who supported the idea of hydroelectric development, why they supported it, and how they went about convincing others of the legitimacy of their views. It will also study southern opponents of development, and their motivations and tactics. Chapter Two will point to the problems inherent in common ideas of nature and wilderness. Chapter Three will turn the same magnifying glass on northern people. It will reveal the fallacy of the myths surrounding Aboriginal people and nature and show how northerners used those myths to their advantage.

Chapter 1: The Story

The 1970s was a decade of beards, potlucks and protests. The Aboriginal rights movement was gathering momentum, women were wearing pants and entering the workforce in ever increasing numbers, and concern for the natural environment was gaining ground. But somehow, amid all this social and environmental consciousness, demand for consumer goods was growing along with the demand for electrical power. Before we begin a detailed exploration of the opinions of Saskatchewan people toward northern hydroelectric development, an explanation of historical context is necessary. This chapter will examine who was making decisions and why. The province seemed to need more energy resources, but at the same time, attitudes toward northern development projects were undergoing significant changes. The ways in which the Saskatchewan government went about choosing new power sites differed significantly from Ontario and Manitoba. Many people in Saskatchewan, including the provincial government, felt that they were heralding a new era of environmental concern and management. But the Churchill River Study faced criticism from many sides. The chapter will explore the Study's structure and why so many were suspicious of it. Although the decision making process contained problems, it also enabled Saskatchewan residents to explore their relationship with nature.

Saskatchewan's economy in the 1970s was still firmly rooted in agriculture, and

the province was not rich. There were still many people, especially rural people, whose homes and farms were without the usual modern conveniences. For example, in 1973, there were still approximately 30 000 farms in Saskatchewan that did not have water pressure systems. The introduction of water pressure would allow the use of water heaters, clothes washers, and dish washers which would, in turn, require increased use of electricity.¹ Industry was also growing and energy needs were increasing. In the late 1960s the Saskatchewan Power Corporation (SPC) saw that energy demands had been increasing steadily for years, and if they were to continue providing energy to Saskatchewan citizens, they had to begin further developments soon. Since the late 1950s, much of Canada looked to the North to provide natural resources. Northern development projects had been hailed as successes, but this was starting to change, and the SPC would not find its road an easy one. The ensuing oil crisis of the 1970s did not make the situation any clearer and Saskatchewan people were torn over the issue of hydroelectric development on the Churchill River. An increasing awareness at the government level of environmental problems prompted the Saskatchewan government to take steps to protect the interests of all Saskatchewan people (it hoped) in calling for the Churchill River Study (CRS). Academics were appointed to positions in the Study while other academics were asked to critique its structure. Advice and criticism also came from environmental and Aboriginal groups. The Study began; controversy arose; fieldwork ended, and reports were duly filed. Soon the Churchill River Board of Inquiry (CRBI) took over the decision making process and in September of 1978, the question of

¹Churchill River Board of Inquiry, Report (Saskatoon: 1978) 93.

hydroelectric development on the Churchill River was put to rest with a decidedly *unemphatic* negative. The Saskatchewan government decided not to proceed with development *at that time*. Indeed, today (March 1, 2001) there was talk on CBC radio about possible hydroelectric development in the region. The victory over northern development was not a solid one.²

Although the economy was still dependent on agriculture, Saskatchewan's people knew the importance of diversification and hoped to attract new investors and new businesses into their province. To do this, they had to show they were ready. The SPC knew that it was responsible for providing enough energy for new industry, but its obligations certainly did not stop there. The industrial sector that was already a part of the Saskatchewan economy was using more and more energy in production; those rural areas that had so far been without electricity were steadily being added onto the grid, and urban residential customers were buying more and more appliances that required SPC's services. It was clear that demand was growing and additional power sources would be necessary to meet it. The SPC, being responsive to the needs of Saskatchewan citizens, began searching for an appropriate power source, conducting feasibility studies on the Churchill River in 1968 and 1970.

Initially, the SPC decided on two dams, one on Iskwatam Lake and another at Pita Lake. Later, it found that a dam between the Pita and Wintego lakes at Wintego Rapids

² The possibility of a dam on the Churchill spurred the Peter Ballentyne band and the Lac LaRonge band to begin studying land claim issues in the area. The results of their study are presented in *Aski-Puko - The Land Alone*. Land claim issues have still not been resolved in the North, and as a result, no one can proceed with any major development projects, recreational or industrial.

on the Churchill River would be the most suitable for environmental reasons. But the SPC was not the only organization with an interest in the area. The federal government expressed an interest in creating a National Park in the Churchill-Reindeer Rivers region and the Saskatchewan government had similar designs. The Manitoba government also had an interest because of its concern regarding the effect a hydro development in Saskatchewan would have on its hydro developments on Southern Indian Lake, also part of the Churchill River system, and its tentative plans for a provincial park at Hughs Lake.

Northern development still seemed like the obvious choice for the SPC. They were not alone in that assumption; many Canadian people believed that the North was the path to prosperity. Northern development projects were in the works all over Canada, and Saskatchewan had just successfully completed its own hydroelectric project, the Squaw Rapids Dam, in 1963. In *As Long as the Rivers Run*, James Waldram quotes Saskatchewan Premier W.S. Lloyd's and two Saskatchewan newspapers' responses to Squaw Rapids:

We may look upon this great complex of machines and masonry as a symbol of many things. In one sense it is a symbol of man's control over his environment and of man's use of his opportunities. In another sense it is a symbol of the growth of our province. The use of power is one of the measurements of economic growth and of growth in our standard of living.

Premier Lloyd suggested that leaving the river undeveloped would be a missed opportunity, a mistake. What is perhaps most interesting in this quote, is the perceived connection between large scale environmental change and standard of living.

This is from the *Regina Leader Post*: "Man is bending the mighty Saskatchewan River to his will as the province's first hydro-electric project nears completion on this rugged,

isolated site.” The powerful and forbidding nature of the Saskatchewan River is emphasized to magnify the accomplishments of the engineers.

The Commonwealth wrote: “Saskatchewan, once the dry land, drought-ridden bread basket of Canada will be transformed into a diversified, increasingly vital province in which the people, by controlling a river, exercise a substantial control over their entire economic and social environment.”³ Here, water, always scarce on the prairies, is the key to economic success. The major industry, agriculture, which had sustained most of Saskatchewan’s residents since it became a province, is dismissed. The province was a “drought-ridden bread basket” until the advent of hydroelectric power on the prairies.

These excerpts reveal a naive assumption of people’s ability to control nature successfully, without negative consequences. The writers of these excerpts seem very optimistic about their ability to make nature work for them, to “bend...[it] to [their] will.” There is also a strong connection described between significant environmental change and prosperity, again without a possibility of negative economic, social, or political consequences. Also interesting is the use of the word man in the first two quotes. Although gender neutral terminology was not common throughout the sixties, it does seem to point to the idea that controlling nature was a decidedly masculine activity.

Certainly, in the 1960s, there was an apparent lack of opposition to northern development, but this situation changed drastically in the 1970s. In 1971, Quebec premier Robert Bourassa announced plans for the James Bay Hydroelectric Project to a room of

³James B. Waldram, *As Long as the Rivers Run: Hydroelectric Development and Native Communities in Western Canada* (Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1988) 59.

Liberal supporters with the aid of an audio-visual presentation. The Quebec government's lack of knowledge of its northern territory became obvious; bison were shown grazing in the film (bison do not live and never have lived in the James Bay region, and it is unclear where the film footage would have come from).⁴ To the Liberal party, development of the North's "almost illimitable" resources was the key to economic growth and independence and ultimately, the key to Quebec's survival within Canada.⁵ The first of three project phases, called the La Grande project, was completed in 1985. This development doubled the water flow of the La Grande River and flooded six percent of the James Bay area.⁶ Trap lines were flooded, town sites were threatened with erosion, and animal habitats were destroyed. The Cree and Inuit living in the James Bay area depended on hunting, fishing, and trapping in much the same way as the Cree of northern Saskatchewan.

Unlike the Saskatchewan Cree, the Quebec Cree and Inuit were informed of the intended hydro-electric project by a day old newspaper headline. Project approval had already been given and construction would not wait for environmental studies. The only recourse open to the people of James Bay was the courts. Two cases were launched which sought a declaration stating that the James Bay Regional Development Act was unconstitutional. One was against the government of Quebec and the other was against Hydro-Quebec. The second case was against the James Bay Development Corporation.

⁴Sean McCutcheon, Electric Rivers: The Story of the James Bay Project (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1991) 33.

⁵McCutcheon 30.

⁶Will Hamley, "Some Aspects and Consequences of the Development of the James Bay Hydro-Electric Complex" The British Journal of Canadian Studies 2.2 (1987) 252-3.

It sought a permanent injunction on all development in the James Bay area.⁷ Ultimately, neither case was successful, and the Cree and Inuit eventually negotiated a settlement with the Quebec government in 1975.

The government of Manitoba was also embroiled in controversy because of two recent northern developments, one on the Saskatchewan River at Grand Rapids and the other on the Churchill - Nelson rivers near South Indian Lake. The development on the Saskatchewan River required the relocation of the entire Rocky Cree community at Easterville. By the mid 1980s, land transfers and other grievances of the Rocky Cree still had not been dealt with. The dam at South Indian Lake raised a considerable amount of debate and protest. While announcing that it had learned from its mistakes, the Manitoba government planned to divert water from the Churchill River into the Nelson river which would require the relocation of half the community at South Indian Lake and the flooding of thousands of acres of boreal forest.⁸ It seemed to many as if northern development was inevitable and with northern development came the suffering of Aboriginal people. An Easterville resident made this statement after the dislocation of his community:

We are not pointing the finger at any particular government or political party. When we look at the development of the North, we can say that all governments of whatever political stripe have been callous and indifferent to the needs of Indian people when the choice has to be made between the welfare of Indian people and the short-term benefits of a society and a system which appears to measure benefits using money as its chief standard. If it had to be a choice between money and Indians, it seems the Indian always loses.⁹

⁷Billy Diamond, "Aboriginal Rights: The James Bay Experience," The Quest for Justice: Aboriginal Peoples and Aboriginal Rights ed. Menno Bolt et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) 270.

⁸Waldram 119.

⁹Waldram 114.

But this was not always the case. The government of Canada took a rather different approach with the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline. Initially proposed in 1970, the pipeline would carry oil and gas from the Arctic Ocean to Alberta. In 1974 a number of companies applied for permission to build, but because of opposition from northern peoples, the federal government ordered a Royal Commission headed by Justice Berger to determine the social, environmental, and economic effects of development. To the chagrin of developers, Berger conducted an exhaustive study, making the stories and opinions of northern peoples an integral part of his researches into the viability of oil and gas development in the Yukon. Nor did he restrict his study to the North; people from across Canada were invited to express their views on northern development. This study was far more successful in including local peoples than was the Churchill River Study. Berger eventually recommended a 10 year moratorium in his publication of his findings, *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland*, and development did not proceed. However, this decision had more to do with a fall in oil prices.

The idea that a shift had taken place in the way Canadians thought about the environment, the North, and northern peoples was prevalent in the rhetoric of Saskatchewan politicians. Saskatchewan's New Democratic Party was the first government to order an environmental impact study before project approval had been given. Kim Thorson, minister in charge of SPC, stated after the Study was announced: "I feel we are now in an age where there is more sophistication in our approach to construction projects in all respects. Nobody should cry about construction holdups

caused by environmental studies. Advanced planning is a part of life.”¹⁰ Environment Minister Neil Byers expressed a similar opinion shortly after the announcement of the Study. “I suspect we are seeing an evolution in the degree of public concern over the casual manner in which we have manipulated and exploited our natural resources without knowing the environmental implications.”¹¹ Byers had attended a national conference on the environment the previous summer which had emphasized the need for environmental studies before approval for development was given. He felt that Canadian governments were perceiving the need to pay closer attention to citizen concerns.¹²

Despite its efforts at transparency in the Study, the Saskatchewan government did not always get the response it expected from the Saskatchewan people. J. W. Sheard, an associate biology professor at the University of Saskatchewan, suggested that the Churchill River Study was a cover for the SPC, that a decision had already been made, and the Saskatchewan government was using the Study to convince the people of Saskatchewan that the dam would be beneficial to them. Indeed, suspicion of Saskatchewan government motives was so prevalent that officials spent a great deal of newspaper space trying to convince people otherwise.

But concern for the environment was not the only reason the first pre-decision environmental and social study was commissioned in Saskatchewan; the governments of both Manitoba and Canada had an interest in the results of a study. As a result of these

¹⁰“Northern Development: Ecology won’t be sacrificed: Thorson” The Saskatoon StarPhoenix 31 January 1973 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 16.

¹¹Churchill River Study, Proceedings of Workshop I, ed. James S. Wilson and Judith I. Mitchell (1974)

¹²“Historic site, canoe route seen dam victims in the legislature” The Saskatoon StarPhoenix 28 February 1973 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 23.

varied and perhaps conflicting interests, the Saskatchewan government proposed to the Canada-Manitoba Advisory Committee and the Canada-Saskatchewan Consultative Committee that a study be done in the region to determine an appropriate course of action. On December 12, 1972, Industry Minister Kim Thorson, Northern Saskatchewan Minister Ted Bowerman, and Environment Minister Niel Byers announced the proposed dam and their intention to conduct an environmental study before any decisions were made. A Task Force was then formed to design the study. It completed its work in January of 1973, recommending a two and a half year and two and a half million dollar study to assess the environmental and social impact of development. The government of Canada took on the bulk of the financial responsibility (72%), with the governments of Saskatchewan and Manitoba sharing the rest (20% and 12% respectively). Because of the urgency felt by the SPC to produce more energy as soon as possible, the Interim Study Board began work. This was replaced by a Permanent Study Board in 1974.

The Churchill River Study had four main objectives: to assess the environmental, social, and economic impacts of (1) developing the Wintego hydroelectric site; (2) creating a national park in the Churchill-Reindeer Rivers area; (3) a provincial park in the Hughes Lake area in Manitoba; and (4) taking over the licences on the Whitesand Dam and Island Falls Dam, two dams previously on the Churchill River. The Study was made up of 21 sectors: directorate, public participation program, geology, socio-economic, transportation, mapping (geodetic), archaeology, fisheries and water quality, forestry, recreation, wildlife and vegetation, mapping (photogrammetric), hydrology and climate, water quality (federal jurisdiction), Manitoba fisheries, recreation, wildlife, hydrology,

socio-economic, hydro-electric, physical impact.

At the Churchill River Basin Symposium in March of 1973, professors from the University of Saskatchewan were given the opportunity to examine the Study and suggest changes and improvements. Dr. Jim Millar of the Anthropology and Archeology department advised Study officials that local people be involved in the Study in a meaningful way, not simply as informants, but as workers. He also urged that studies be “coordinated...so that the results are cohesive and provide an overall view.”¹³ His first suggestion was ignored and the local population eventually refused Study employees access to their lands as a result. Dr. L.F. Kristjanson of the Economics and Political Science department criticized the Study for its lack of scope: “The most serious shortcomings of the Study proposal is its failure to consider the legitimacy of the proposals for change.”¹⁴ Dr. D.A. Rennie of the Saskatchewan Institute of Pedology, although in favour of northern development, dismissed the Churchill River Study as next to useless. In a statement perhaps more bold than thoughtful, he announced that “The abject poverty of the northern residents is no less than the poverty of knowledge of the natural, physical and biological resources of the region.”¹⁵ He also argued that science and technology had advanced to the point where they could protect the natural world from disaster caused by ignorance.

Much of man’s interventions into nature and natural systems have in the first instance, been catastrophic. History is replete, here in Western Canada and elsewhere, with ecological disasters caused by industrial and agricultural

¹³Churchill River Study, Proceedings of the Churchill River Basin Symposium (1973) 65.

¹⁴Churchill River Study, Symposium 38.

¹⁵Churchill River Study, Symposium 22.

mismanagement. Society today is rightly concerned that the environment is being spoiled by our misuse or overuse, or by, for example, industrial poisoning...Fortunately, today we have the technical know-how to ensure that the mistakes made in resource development in the past will not again be made in the future.¹⁶

According to Dr. Rennie, a two and a half year study would be incapable of developing an understanding of the physical world, neither would it lead to ways of exploiting it effectively and responsibly. Instead, he suggested a five year study, at the end of which, social scientists would inform local residents of the kind of economic activity in which they should be engaging.

For varying reasons, Saskatchewan's academic community was unanimous in its skepticism of the future success of the Study. Had the advice of Drs Millar and Krisjanson been taken, much criticism and controversy could have been avoided by the Study Directorate. However, the opinions of Dr. Rennie were somewhat more problematic. Many shared his criticism that the study time allotted was too short. Time constraints were one of the reasons given for not changing methods of Aboriginal involvement. However, his suggestion that a longer study, focusing exclusively on the natural resources of the region would solve the problems facing northern peoples was naive. His recommendation that social scientists then take over to direct local residents was patronizing. His criticisms were not received well by many of his colleagues. Some were even deeply offended.

The directorate had the difficult job of supervising and coordinating the various sectors. Dr. Walter Kupsch, a member of the University of Saskatchewan faculty since

¹⁶Churchill River Study, Symposium 27.

1950 and director of the Institute for Northern Studies since 1964, was appointed to the position of Study Director. Kupsch and the Directorate came under fire from various groups in Saskatchewan and even from Study sectors, particularly the Public Participation Program for its exclusion of local people from active participation in the Study.

The Public Participation sector deserves some special attention. The Churchill River Study was the first of its kind to have a Public Participation Program where information about the proposals would be made available to the public and concerned citizens would have an opportunity to voice their opinions and ideas. The Program had three main objectives: “to provide an opportunity for as many people as possible to learn about the study, to encourage and develop an interest in the Study and to participate in mutually agreed upon activities, and to provide an opportunity for public participation in the assessment and evaluation of alternatives.”¹⁷ Towards this end they held meetings, fora and symposia across the province. They published reports, and held press conferences. However, the Public Participation Program was not considered a success; the definition of “mutually agreed upon activities” was never resolved. Northern residents were not satisfied with simply receiving information and reacting to it; they wanted to be involved in the Study and have their expertise consulted or carry out a study of their own. The director of the Public Participation Program, anthropologist Doug Elias agreed and eventually resigned over the lack of Aboriginal participation and the Study Directorate’s inflexibility on the issue.

Three reasons were given for the exclusion of Aboriginal people from an active

¹⁷Churchill River Study, Summary Report (1976) 36.

and meaningful role in the Study. First, they did not possess formal education and therefore did not possess the expert status that was a requirement for Study employees. Dr. Kupsch stated that, “in these highly technical and scientific studies there is little room for the involvement of anyone other than scientists and engineers,”¹⁸ dismissing valuable traditional knowledge. Second, northern residents, because of their proximity to the Churchill River, were not considered disinterested enough to produce reliable results (whereas professionals who had staked their reputations on the success of the study were considered neutral); and third, the Study had progressed too far to make significant changes in Aboriginal participation.

Demands for more active participation in the Churchill River Study were made by Aboriginal people early on. By the beginning of the first field season, in the summer of 1973, the Metis Society of Saskatchewan (MSS) was calling for funds to carry out their own study. However, the Department of the Environment did not consider this necessary as the MSS would have access to the government’s information.¹⁹ But the MSS wanted to carry out their own study because they felt that the Saskatchewan government study did not reflect their interests. Throughout the next year there were repeated requests from northern residents for a more significant role in the official Churchill River Study. In early March of 1974, a workshop was held for Study participants where it was agreed that not enough input had come from local communities, “but no ideas or solutions to this problem were presented. It [was] assumed that each segment [would] attempt to correct its own

¹⁸Churchill River Study. Proceedings of Workshop II ed. James S. Wilson and Judith I. Mitchell (1974) 5.

¹⁹“River Basin Studied” Regina LeaderPost 1 June 1973 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 40.

particular problems of this nature.”²⁰ The Study director, Walter Kupsch, even suggested that the northern residents had received too much assistance from the directorate since the Missinipe Committee (the committee set up by northern residents to analyse the progress of the Study and act as liaison between the Study and the communities) was not required to produce any information.²¹

Other Study employees had opposing ideas. Doug Elias expressed frustration with the lack of Aboriginal involvement. “Their opinions and comments would be vital on the very study which is deciding how the proposals affect the native residents (sic) way of life.”²² This frustration led him to resign in disgust in late March of 1974. He told the press that he could not continue to abide “the prevailing attitude of contempt (the board and directorate have) for the skills and abilities of the people living in the basin and elsewhere in the province.” Protesting their lack of meaningful participation, the Lac La Ronge and Peter Ballentyne bands banned first the Socio-economic sector and then all sectors from conducting research on their lands. However, the director of the socio-economic study, Jack Stabler did not think that the ban would greatly affect their findings. The only result would be that they would be unable to conduct the 6000 interviews they had been intending.²³ In December of 1974 another official from the Public Participation Program resigned because of frustration with the directorate’s lack of interest in public

²⁰Churchill River Study, Proceedings of Workshop I 3.

²¹Churchill River Study, Proceedings of Workshop II 6.

²²“Public opinion wanted in Churchill study” The Saskatoon StarPhoenix 2 February 1974 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 119.

²³“Indians protest lack of involvement” Saskatoon StarPhoenix 19 August 1974 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 175.

involvement.²⁴

To counteract their exclusion from the Churchill River Study, Aboriginal groups formed and lobbied various levels of government for funding to carry out their own research. The Missinipe Committee, (also called the Churchill Committee, Churchill River Committee and the Missinipe Advisory Committee) made up of residents of the Churchill River Basin concerned about possible dam construction, eventually received \$42 000 from the Study. It acted as a kind of liaison between the Study and the people in the basin. It disseminated information about the Study among northern people, then brought the opinions and ideas of northern people back to the Study and the provincial government. They compiled dozens of interviews of northern residents and wrote briefs to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry. The Federation of Saskatchewan Indians received money from the Department of Indian Affairs to conduct field research and write a report on Aboriginal and Treaty rights in the basin. With their \$50 000, it published the 475 page report, *Aski-Puko: The Land Alone* in September of 1976. These groups did not believe that the Churchill River Study was able to take their interests into consideration in a meaningful way. They were not alone in their doubts of the effectiveness of science and expert based Churchill River Study.

The Churchill River Board of Inquiry (CRBI), in its evaluation of the Churchill River Study, made note of the problems created in the Study by the need for quantifiable evidence. It stated quite clearly that “the Study’s findings...cannot be understood to cover

²⁴“Project official criticizes Churchill River Study” Saskatoon StarPhoenix 3 December 1974 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (September 1974 - December 1974) (1975) 76.

the full cost of the project,” and that “very few of the indirect effects were found to be measurable... partly due to the fact that the method rested on assigning dollar values...”²⁵ Even when shortcomings were recognized and pointed out, real change could not be made in the Study because of time constraints and rigid parameters; issues such as land claims were not allowed to be discussed because they were outside the Study’s mandate. When Doug Elias resigned from the Study and levelled heavy criticism at the Study directorate, Kupsch responded by accusing Elias of believing the Study’s mandate to be wider than it actually was.²⁶ There was no room in the Study for meaningful participation by northern people and the Study was not flexible enough to accommodate interests that had not been identified by the Task Force.

Reputations had been staked on a successful and quick study. “Even before the Study got under way, severe criticism was levelled at it. The question was raised as to whether a thorough environmental analysis could be made in 2 ½ years. I maintained, and still maintain, that it can be done. I put my integrity as a scientist and administrator on the line and accepted the job of guiding the Study...”stated Kupsch.²⁷ He blamed northerners, not the Study, for the failure of the Public Participation Program. “Some events could not be foreseen two years ago, like the banning of study personnel from the Indian reserves in the impact area. And that’s what I think basically wrecked it.”²⁸

²⁵Churchill River Board of Inquiry, Report (Saskatoon: 1978) 150, 151.

²⁶“Churchill study official resigns” Saskatoon StarPhoenix 22 March 1974 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 131.

²⁷Churchill River Study, Proceedings of Workshop II 4.

²⁸“Project official criticizes Churchill River Study” Saskatoon StarPhoenix 3 December 1974 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (September 1974 - December 1974) (1975) 76.

Southern environmentalists were also concerned about the Study, first that it was legitimate, and second, that it was effective. The Churchill River Basin Group was set up by southern environmentalists as a sort of Study watchdog. They collected newspaper clippings about the project, followed the progress of the researchers, and made sometimes critical, sometimes congratulatory statements on it to the press. Other environmental groups such as the Saskatoon Environmental Society, and the Saskatchewan Natural History Association joined in criticizing the Study. Doug Whitfield and Tim Jones, co-chairmen of the Churchill River Basin Group, an organization created to oppose dam construction on the Churchill River, suggested that the Study was too restrictive. Whitfield told the StarPhoenix in March of 1973 that he was concerned because the Study was not looking into alternative forms of energy.²⁹ Later that same year Tim Jones objected to the disjointed nature of the Study. "We are not supposed to ask questions about how either of these proposals relate to other things, such as northern development as a whole, how the proposed dam relates (or doesn't relate) to Saskatchewan's future energy demands or needs in relation to alternative sources; we aren't asked to look at the conservation of energy and other resources, land use, etc."³⁰ He also argued that a thorough study could not be completed in the time allotted. He said in an interview that the members of his group "seriously question the extreme haste with which this study was thrown into gear....Someone is displaying something less than full credibility or

²⁹"Churchill river study criticized by group" Saskatoon StarPhoenix 5 March 1973 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 24.

³⁰"The Churchill River Basin - Which way development?" The Environment Probe August 1973 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 67. Parentheses original.

intelligence when the public is told that this unique experiment in ecological research and in participatory democracy will be done between now and June 30, 1975.”³¹ These same criticisms came up repeatedly throughout the course of the Study.

The Churchill River Study privileged the values of western science: reductionism, objectivity, quantifiability, and control. However, without the Study, dissenting voices would not have been heard, and the dam would most likely have been built. The residents of northern and southern Saskatchewan who opposed development and who opposed the structure of the Study were able to use it for their own benefit. Anti-development groups were not the only ones who used the Study as a way to express their opinions. There was a minority of Saskatchewan citizens who wanted the Churchill River to be dammed. The Churchill River Study and later the Churchill River Board of Inquiry provided an important forum for debate over what should be done with northern nature. However, southern nature did not really enter the debate. The development of a lignite coal fired power plant and strip mine near Coronach, Saskatchewan in 1974 did not seem to bother either opponents or supporters of northern development. Certain views of nature and wilderness were not explored or questioned in this forum. Neither did the Study allow discussion of conservation or alternative energy production.

The Churchill River Study was able to publish its findings in late 1976. In 1977 the Churchill River Board of Inquiry was put together in order to hear briefs from Saskatchewan citizens, groups, and corporations throughout 1977. The Churchill River Board of Inquiry was an independent body carefully selected to represent Saskatchewan’s

³¹“The Churchill River Basin” 67. Underline original.

diverse population. Maureen Rever-Duwors described the members in her 1995 article on their work.

Gus Macdonald was a retired fisheries expert who had spent many years in Northern Saskatchewan and had been instrumental in the establishment of many northern cooperatives. He had been a consultant for international development agencies in Africa, Sri Lanka, and in Italy where he had been involved with projects where dams had been built and the impact witnessed. Gus Macdonald was an excellent choice to chair this Board because of the respect he held in the north, his considerable development experience and the leadership he offered to the Board and its support staff. Gordon South was a farmer and registered seed grower from Melfort who had had a good deal of experience as a leader in agricultural business organizations in the province. John Hastings was a trapper, hunter and fisherman from Besnard Lake. He was familiar with most of the impact area and had experiences and concerns which well represented those of northern residents. Maureen Rever-DuWors was a biologist from the University of Saskatchewan with a long-time interest in natural history, and in resource development in Saskatchewan.³²

The mandate of the Board was to decide whether or not a dam should be built on the Churchill River. After months of reading and listening to briefs, travelling to the area, and speaking with northerners, they came to their unanimous conclusion. The further recommendations came out of this process, but they were not part of their mandate. A series of meetings were held in La Ronge, Prince Albert, Regina, and Saskatoon. In June of 1978 the Churchill River Board of Inquiry published its report which recommended that the Wintego hydroelectric project not proceed, and that a corridor be established along the river for its preservation and the preservation of the hunting, fishing and trapping lifestyle of the Rocky Cree. Outside of this corridor, logging, mining, and other resource

³²Maureen Rever-DuWors, "The 1970s Public Hearings: Organization, Delivery and Results," The Churchill: A Heritage River 75.

extraction activities would be allowed. It recommended that the government settle land claims as soon as possible and that archeologists conduct more archeological investigations in the area. Moreover, it suggested that the province of Saskatchewan establish a provincial energy planning board composed of both industry experts and public citizens in order to avoid crisis development. On September 18, 1978 a press release from Neil Byers, Saskatchewan Environment Minister, announced that a dam at Wintego Rapids would not be authorized at the present time. It was the only recommendation that was actually followed, and the government still left the possibility of future hydroelectric development open.

Attitudes towards northern development had shifted significantly since the 1960s when hydroelectric projects were naively hailed as the answer to a beleaguered agricultural economy. Changes in the use of electricity indicated to the Saskatchewan Power Corporation that new developments would be needed soon. Once again, in the 1970s, some hoped that a new hydroelectric development would boost Saskatchewan's economy, but by this time, people had grown suspicious of large northern projects. Manitoba and Quebec continued to push ahead their projects against heavy criticism, but the Canadian government decided it was wisest to conduct an environmental and social study before going ahead with oil and gas development in the Yukon. But conducting a pre-decision study did not satisfy the people of Saskatchewan; the Study itself came under intense criticism from many groups. Aboriginal groups were angered by their exclusion from meaningful participation in the Study, and as a result, they banned officials from conducting research on reserves. Development did not proceed, but neither were the

extra recommendations of the Churchill River Board of Inquiry followed. The Study, which could have been a prime opportunity to discuss issues of land and resource use, forbade discussion outside of its somewhat rigid parameters. This was no clear victory for environmentalists or for Aboriginal groups whose economic condition failed to improve after the Study was completed.

But neither was it a complete failure. Although created by the dominant culture and implicitly expressing their values, Aboriginal peoples and other dissidents were able to use the Study to critique the Saskatchewan government, the Study, western science, racism, the North American economic system, and consumer culture. However, many also used the opportunity for debate provided by the Study to reinforce their support of hydroelectric and northern development. The ideas and opinions of southerners will be discussed in the next chapter. Their desires for the Churchill River reflected their core values. Opponents of development wanted to protect the river in order to protect their ability to relax and commune with nature. Supporters of development encouraged the dam because it would provide jobs and stimulate the economy.

Chapter 2: The Southerners

The distinct separation between wilderness and civilization was prevalent in the rhetoric of environmentalists and politicians. Most citizens of southern Saskatchewan, at least those who made their opinions heard, were against building a dam on the Churchill River. They wanted the area preserved for wilderness recreation such as canoeing, camping and hunting. Some emphasized its educational value and a few suggested that the area be protected for the use of northern residents. Saskatchewan citizens from the middle class for the most part opposed development because it threatened an area which had provided some with a memorable vacation experience. For others, whether they had been there or not, the area represented beauty, simplicity, and a non human world, important for its own sake, outside of economics and other human needs. These motivations are compelling, but they are not without problems. The focus on wilderness protection meant that some other part of nature, some part deemed less valuable, had to be destroyed and the problems that threatened nature in the first place were left unexamined. However, not everyone wanted to protect the Churchill River. Many, especially those whose jobs depended directly on increased economic development, felt that the benefits that would accrue to Saskatchewan through development of the wilderness were vital to industry and citizens. But this ignored the real problems of environmental degradation.

Those who supported development and those who opposed development did so because of their value systems. Some valued economic growth and so supported development whereas others valued wilderness recreation and so opposed development. However, opponents of northern development supported, or at least did not openly oppose, southern development; they did not value southern nature in the way they valued northern nature. Northern nature acted as a foil to hectic, capitalist, southern society. Southern nature, if considered nature at all, was a part of that society. If the goal of the environmentalists was to protect nature, this dichotomy blocked their success.

While a dam was unacceptable on the Churchill River because of concern for the environment, a strip mine and lignite coal power plant was acceptable near Coronach in southern Saskatchewan. Opponents of northern development expressed concern for the effects a dam would have on the livelihoods of northern people, but environmentalists and media gave little attention to the farmers whose land would be destroyed by the strip mine. Much like the northern wilderness, Aboriginal peoples were viewed as victims in need of protection. However, Euro-Canadian farmers were the backbone of western civilization; monetary compensation was all that was due to them. Emotional attachment to their farms and communities was disregarded in the southern development process. And the press largely ignored concerns of the farmers except for one rather plaintive sentence in Next Year Country: “The hearings (on Poplar power plant), in the local Kinsmen recreation hall, turned out to be a four way debate between the SPC, environmentalists, the local business community who saw the project as the road to riches and the local

farmers who see their lives' work disappearing into a coal mine."¹ Farmland was not considered to be nature, and so was not worthy of the protection appropriate for northern wilderness. Farmers were also victims of classism and racism.

The people of southern Saskatchewan were vocal about their opposition to hydroelectric development. In 1973, the meetings held by the Churchill River Study's Public Participation Program in Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert each attracted sixty to eighty people.² To the frustration of Study director Dr. Walter Kupsch, most of these people came to protest development. Kupsch had hoped for a neutral public, eager to learn from the experts and then make up their minds. A year later, a series of meetings were held entitled "Pillage of the North." Set up to oppose northern development, these gatherings attracted 150 to 200 people per meeting. Reasons for wilderness preservation were complex and varied. Southern Saskatchewan residents opposed the dam for its environmental, social and educational value, for its value as a refuge from civilized society, and for its own sake.

Because of their tendency to be somewhat abstract and scientific, arguments based on the effects of environmental degradation were rare among non-academic citizens. Even scientists shied away from making technical statements. G.F. Ledingham of the Department of Biology at the University of Regina pointed to the importance of northern forests: "Faced by constant pressure to increase industry in Saskatchewan, we should

¹"SPC: Power to the People?" Next Year Country February/March 1975 found in Elna Sins Newspaper Clippings (January 1 - April 30 1975) (1975) 53.

²"Parkland or wilderness but no dam flooding" Regina LeaderPost 21 June 1973 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 47.

consider the value of our forests as purifiers of the environment.”³ Others pointed out the possible relationship between exploitive behavior towards the environment and people. Dr. Stan Rowe of the department of Plant Ecology at the University of Saskatchewan argued that his opposition to dam building in northern Saskatchewan was “not just an environmental argument, as if sensitive and restrained treatment of the environment has nothing to do with humane treatment of people! For just as abundant cheap energy makes for cheap treatment of land and resources, so it makes for cheap treatment of people.”⁴ Rowe and others discuss the social rather than the technical, scientific aspects of environmental change. This approach was likely to be most effective in addressing an audience with little or no technical background. The debate centred on how environmental change would affect people, not nature and was fought almost exclusively in terms of values.

Almost all letters and phone calls received by the Public Participation Program expressed disapproval of the SPC’s plans. The beauty of the North was emphasized by most people. Many opponents of the dam also believed that they were fighting against a powerful force of scientists and developers who could not see what the ordinary citizen could. Dr. Stuart Houston expressed this idea during the Churchill River Board of Inquiry hearings:

The engineer looks at Wintego Rapids, what does he see, he sees so many megawatts of power. When a naturalist looks at those rapids, we see glorious colour, not black and white. Our choice is to save these sights, to save this river,

³G.F. Ledingham, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Regina Public Hearings November 17-18, 1977 (1977) 8.

⁴Stan Rowe, “Brief to Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Saskatoon Public Hearings, November 25-26, 1977 (1977) 1.

to save the way of life ,and at least some of the native people. We prefer a river and rapids to a man made structure which would begin to deteriorate soon after it was built, and last for less than a hundred years, after having destroyed a mighty river forever.⁵

A Saskatoon resident asked, “We struggle so hard to create beauty, why should we destroy it when we find it?”⁶ Beauty, as defined by those with the leisure time to seek it, was an important reason for saving nature. This beauty did not seem to exist in southern Saskatchewan where the land was relatively flat, dry, and treeless. Beauty was not found at home. But the water, trees, and rock of the North, far away from cities and farms, were considered beautiful. However, certain people, namely engineers and developers, were deemed incapable of seeing the beauty in northern nature and could only see its utilitarian value.

Many southern residents expressed concern for the northern residents whose livelihoods would be threatened by development. Some concerned citizens had experience in the North as tourists, but many others had never visited the area for any reason. The Saskatchewan Natural History Society emphasized in a brief to the Churchill River Study that “the environment is important because of people.”⁷ It argued that the Churchill River Basin was far too important to the local residents to allow destruction of the land. At a meeting in Regina, Masie Schiell argued against any form of development, including a park, in the North: “Indian culture and development must be considered in any plan for the

⁵Churchill River Board of Inquiry, Report (Saskatoon: 1978) 67.

⁶ 1st St. James Venturer Co., “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Saskatoon Public Hearings, November 25-26, 1977 (1977) 1.

⁷Saskatchewan Natural History Society, “Brief to Churchill River Board of Inquiry.” Written Briefs Presented at Saskatoon Public Hearings, November 25-26, 1977 (1977) 2.

basin, and either parks or dams would deter much of the Indian's trapping and fishing." Instead, she suggested that the government should set up marketing boards to assist the economic activities of northern residents.⁸ Similarly, a group of people from Swift Current stated in a brief to the Churchill River Study that "the government has a moral obligation to native people who have been living in the area for generations and supplement their income by hunting, fishing and trapping."⁹ However, it did not see that a park would interfere with the livelihood of Native people and recommended that the area be preserved "in perpetuity...strictly for boating with small engines, canoeing, hiking, tenting, and fishing."¹⁰ Perhaps the allowance of small engines was for the benefit of commercial fishers who would not have been pleased had they been forced to use only canoes for their work. However, the restriction to small engines might not have been too welcome either.

Most people felt the same way. Tourism was by far the most popular reason given for the preservation of the Churchill River. Those most vocal about protecting the area were canoeists, campers, and hunters. Perhaps surprisingly, there was no public disagreement between wilderness tourists and hunters. The Saskatchewan Natural History Society, the Churchill River Basin Group, the Saskatoon Fish and Game League, the Historic Trails Canoe Club, and the Canadian Hostelling Association all publicly opposed the dam and suggested that wilderness recreation be encouraged in the area instead. One

⁸"Parkland or wilderness but no dam flooding." Regina LeaderPost 21 June 1973 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 47.

⁹"Swift Current people upset by Churchill project" Regina LeaderPost 11 March 1975 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Articles (January - July 1975) (1975) 72.

¹⁰"Swift Current people upset by Churchill project" 72.

man, after completing a thirty-day canoe trip along the Churchill River, called the area “paradise” and advocated the establishment of a white water tourist industry.¹¹ A Prince Albert man was more enthusiastic than most about the tourism potential of Saskatchewan’s North. In a statement that bordered on boosterism, he suggested that “instead of tourism being the second largest industry after agriculture, it could be first - with higher incomes, more leisure time and greater access to northern lakes, there is great opportunity for water based recreation in Saskatchewan.”¹² Dr. Arminious of Swift Current asked, “Where else can you dip your cup in the water and not get diarrhea afterward?”¹³ He was somewhat more eloquent in a letter to the *StarPhoenix*:

Northern Saskatchewan is one of the few beautiful unspoiled wilderness areas left to mankind. The Churchill River is one of the few unpolluted rivers left on this earth. We are lucky to have it in our province. We are lucky to have it to enjoy. It is our duty to hand it over to our children as pure and as unspoiled as we found it. I have canoed the Churchill River and its beauty is beyond compare.¹⁴

People wanted to be able to enjoy the Churchill River as a wilderness area. The frequency of this argument attests to that fact.

The idea presented in Dr. Arminious’s letter that the Churchill should be preserved for future generations is also common. In its brief, the Canadian Hostelling Association recommended that the government “preserve the Churchill River system as part of the heritage which must be passed down to future generations, not as a system of power

¹¹“Churchill voyage proved challenge” Saskatoon StarPhoenix 13 December 1974 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Articles (September 1974 - December 1974) (1975) 14.

¹²“Judge Says Churchill River Studies Overstepping Rights” Prince Albert Daily Herald 29 May 1973 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 36.

¹³“Swift Current people upset by Churchill project” Regina LeaderPost 11 March 1975 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Articles (January - July 1975) (1975) 72.

¹⁴“Reader’s Viewpoint” Regina LeaderPost 26 April 1974 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 153.

dams, but as protected in all its beauty from the destructful hand of man [*sic*].”¹⁵

Similarly, the Historic Trails Canoe Club promised to “support any movement designed to establish and preserve wilderness areas in their natural state for the enjoyment of future generations.”¹⁶ Southern Saskatchewan citizens felt obligated to pass on something pure to their children who could also benefit from the educational possibilities of the North, both intellectual and emotional. Elizabeth Henger of the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina told the Churchill River Study of her experiences in taking students to the North: “I have seen the personal growth and development changes that can occur in individuals.”¹⁷ Other organizations such as the Saskatchewan Natural History Society also emphasized the wilderness education potential of the Churchill River basin. Wilderness was considered a gift to future generations who could benefit morally, physically, and spiritually from it.

Southern Saskatchewan residents valued the Churchill River for its own sake. Robert Moon of Regina stated that there was an “intrinsic good in the preservation of the Churchill as a wilderness river throughout.”¹⁸ Even those who had never been and never would go farther north than Prince Albert, believed that the wilderness area acted as a foil to the rush of southern civilization. In the northern wilderness, “man” could “associate quietly with the primeval world,... restore his cosmic consciousness, [and] learn humility

¹⁵ Canadian Hostelling Association, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Regina Public Hearings, November 17-18, 1977 (1977) 2.

¹⁶ Historic Trails Canoe Club, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Regina Public Hearings, November 17-18, 1977 (1977).

¹⁷ Elizabeth Henger, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Regina Public Hearings, November 17-18, 1977 (1977).

¹⁸ Robert Moon, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Regina Public Hearings, November 17-18, 1977 (1977) 2.

by realizing again his roots and dependencies in a wild landscape.”¹⁹ The Churchill River Board of Inquiry was affected by the eloquence of the Sheldon Williams Ecology Club which expressed a sentiment with which most southern Saskatchewan residents felt sympathy:

People go to the North for its quiet, natural setting as opposed to the bustling life of urban cities. Who hasn't been awed at the sight of millions of tons of water plummeting down a stairway of rock? Who hasn't stood still as the northern mist lifts off a marsh to reveal a bull moose? More and more people are wanting to get away and experience the north, whether for its white water canoeing, camping, or just a holiday. To these people the present state of the Churchill is more than electrical energy. It is an aesthetically pleasing experience, as well as a learning experience.²⁰

Hydroelectric development would destroy the wilderness, would taint it with civilization, and ruin its healing properties. Gary Anweiler of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society reminded the Board of Inquiry that “it is this very untamed power that is the basis of much of the attraction that the river holds.”²¹ The northern wilderness held an important position in the minds of southerners because of its ability to counteract the adverse effects of southern, civilized society. It was a refuge for southerners where they could canoe, camp, and teach their children. These are not necessarily destructive things to do in the North, but neither are they value free. These are the values of the middle class who wanted to consume the benefits of natural resources such as electricity produced by coal, oil, and water, which powered household appliances manufactured from mined metals and plastics from petroleum, which gave them the leisure time to drive their cars

¹⁹ Churchill River Study, Proceedings of the Churchill River Basin Symposium, March 24, 1973 (1973)16.

²⁰ Churchill River Board of Inquiry, Report, , 39.

²¹ Gary Anweiler, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry.” Written Briefs Presented at Regina Public Hearings, November 17-18, 1977 (1977) 2.

made from metal, glass and rubber to relatively remote areas where they could get away from the bustle created by capitalist consumerism.

Although many opponents made reference to the needs of Native people living in the region, clearly, preservation of the Churchill River as a wilderness area was more of a priority. For example, Tom White of the Saskatchewan Natural History Association advocated that a park, which would emphasize the fur trade history of the region, be established in the basin. He added that “Indian residents of the basin should be allowed to remain if their land is made into a park and to participate in its administration.”²² It is possible that residents of the basin would not look kindly on being allowed by southerners to stay on their land and participate in an industry established for the benefit of southerners. The Swift Current group established to oppose the dam was quite vocal in stating that the needs of local residents had to be addressed. However, when asked if it had ever been in contact with northern residents, it said no. Moreover, when its members listed the activities that the Churchill River should be preserved for, they stated that it was “strictly for boating with small engines, canoeing, hiking, tenting, and fishing,”²³ all southern leisure activities. They restricted their definition of preservation even further by recommending that “a certain distance on either side of the river”²⁴ be preserved, presumably for the benefit of wilderness vacationers. A corridor would preserve the wilderness look of the Churchill, but would not protect the wildlife species which

²²“Parkland or wilderness but no dam flooding” Regina LeaderPost 21 June 1973 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 47.

²³Swift Current people upset by Churchill project” Regina LeaderPost 11 March 1975 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Articles (January 1- April 30 1975) (1975) 72.

²⁴“Women argue against Churchill dam” Saskatoon StarPhoenix 13 March 1975 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Articles (January 1- April 30 1975) (1975) 76.

depended on the forest or the local residents who depended on the wildlife. Perhaps concern for the livelihoods of Native people was not as important to southerners as it first seems. It would be unfair to suggest that southerners felt no concern for Native people, but it is possible that northerners were most important as tools for southerners who wanted to stop development. It is certainly clear that southerners did not have a good understanding of the lives of northern residents or the ramifications of environmental change caused by development. Perhaps the idea of the North's intrinsic value presented by southerners was an attempt to express an unclear vision of the importance of the area to people and things other than themselves.

The Churchill River Board of Inquiry (CRBI), when making its recommendations in its Report, echoed the concerns and arguments of many dam opponents. It dismissed the idea of comparing southern development with northern development: "Nor is it useful in our view to compare damage due to the creation of a reservoir to damage to land caused by strip-mining for coal; strip-mined land can be reclaimed, but wilderness areas cannot be reconstituted."²⁵ Here is the difficulty that wilderness presents. Since the only acceptable use of wilderness is wilderness recreation, and, by definition, to modify wilderness it is to destroy it, wilderness loses its value once it is used by western culture for purposes other than recreation. Because the land to be strip mined had already been modified, and had lost its status as wilderness, it could become useful again.. This leaves decision makers in an either/or situation. Either land is pristine and must not be touched, or it has already been touched and continued exploitation is acceptable. The same concept

²⁵ Churchill River Board of Inquiry, Report 223.

of nature was evident in the CRBI descriptions of the portion of the Churchill River which had been affected by the Island Falls Dam.

The Board of Inquiry recognizes that the Churchill River from the confluence with the Reindeer River east to Island Falls is not pristine. The water flows here are regulated by the Whitesand Dam, a control structure on the Reindeer River. The greatest visual impact of disturbance is on Sokatisewin Lake (the Island Falls reservoir) where deadheads still protrude dangerously from the surface of the lake and dead timber lines the shore. This particular section of the river could not be termed 'wilderness' under any acceptable definition. However, the Board of Inquiry from its own experience on the river and many experienced river travellers in their submissions to the Board *do not regard the existing modification sufficient to condemn this part of the river to another development.*²⁶

According to the Board of Inquiry, this area of the Churchill River is worthy of protection *despite* the fact that it was not "pristine."

The government of Saskatchewan reflected the opinions of many people from southern Saskatchewan. Unlike its decision concerning the Churchill River, the government did not believe that an environmental study was necessary before development took place on the Poplar River power development. These evaluations were to be "completed later" according to Saskatchewan industry minister Kim Thorson.²⁷ This conflicts with statements made by environment minister, Neil Byers, shortly after the Churchill River Study was announced. He said that "studying the environment after the damage is done or while the damage is being done is not the policy of the present government."²⁸ Southern nature did not require the same consideration as northern nature because it lacked wilderness qualities.

²⁶ Churchill River Board of Inquiry, Report 234. Italics added.

²⁷ "Power Plant to be Largest in Province" Saskatoon StarPhoenix 11 September 1974 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (September 1974 - December 1974) (1975) 5.

²⁸ "Press Release" Department of the Environment found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 94.

The New Democratic Party (NDP) government seemed even to oppose hydroelectric development along the Churchill River (the Saskatchewan Power Corporation, not the government, proposed the dam). Politicians and officials emphasized the uniqueness and wildness of the North. Alan Blakeney, premier of Saskatchewan, described the area as “one of the last great unspoiled wilderness area[s] in North America.”²⁹ To Henry Baker, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Regina-Wascana, the Churchill region was a “great northern Saskatchewan paradise.”³⁰ While the North was a unique paradise, southern Saskatchewan was disposable. Henry Baker suggested that the northern “paradise” not be harmed “without first exhausting southern sources of power.” John Comer, MLA for Nipawin called for a dam to be built along the Saskatchewan River instead of the Churchill as “dams built along this river would not materially affect the lives of 99 per cent of those who live along it.”³¹ The government reiterated and reinforced the idea that southern Saskatchewan was not nature because it had already been modified.

The arguments of the opponents of hydroelectric development have a touch of moral superiority. They suggested that they were able to see and appreciate things that the developer and engineer were incapable of seeing. They sought beauty instead of profit, relaxation instead of bustle, and preservation instead of destruction. They looked to something higher than mere economic gain. However, the demands of middle class

²⁹ “Press Release” Office of the Premier found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 85.

³⁰ “Ecology among debate topics” Saskatoon StarPhoenix 8 March 1973 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 26.

³¹ “Comer urges building of hydro plant near Nipawin” The Commonwealth 2 January, 1974 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 - August 1973) (1973) 103.

southern society made further development necessary. But because it was not directly involved in damming a river, it could take the moral high ground and condemn those who were. Moreover, declaring a river to have intrinsic value automatically places those who use it for more than recreation in the position of exploiters in the moral sense of the word. Meaningful and wise use then becomes very difficult if not impossible.

This is not to suggest that appreciation of the beauty of the North is not legitimate; it is. However, making the North into a paradise resort for the leisure time of middle class southerners reinforces the separation between southern and northern nature; the South is for exploitation while the North is for recreation. Southerners who used the North for recreation also tended to be more concerned with the way nature looked than with its integrity as an ecosystem. The ways in which southerners wanted to use the Churchill River area reflected their value system. But their value system and the assumptions and activities that went with it were not necessarily in the best interests of northern residents.

Those who supported the development of a hydroelectric dam on the Churchill River acted with another set of values. The primary concern of this group was economic. Included in almost all arguments for development was an emphasis of the important role electricity played in an industrial economy. More electricity meant more industry which led to more jobs and more demand for electricity again, a circle of growth. The Saskatchewan Construction Association advocated development because it would provide jobs to current construction workers and attract new, skilled workers from across Canada. Development of the region “would, from our [the Construction Association] point of view, precipitate large scale northern development. The opening of this whole new

geographic area for expansion will provide impetus to the construction industry as well as the other segments of our provincial economy.”³² Similarly, the Saskatoon and Regina locals of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers emphasized, in their brief, the importance of an adequate electrical supply for the citizens of Saskatchewan.

Our support of the project is not based on a selfish interest, based on the work activity that might be created, but rather we are basing our submission on the need for growth and expansion in our economy that is required to meet the growing labour force, and to broaden the economic bases, as we have said, so we can avoid some of the serious cyclical things and economic difficulty in the province.³³

It is interesting to see that the electrical workers felt it necessary to disclaim any motivation of selfishness in their brief. Certainly, they were motivated by self interest. Perhaps we can make a distinction between selfishness and self interest. More electricity and a larger economy would mean more work. More work would mean the ability to feed their families. Self interest is not necessarily destructive. Self interest, the protection of the things they valued, led construction workers and electrical workers to support development. Here we can see the differences of class; the middle class wanted the North for leisure, while the working class wanted the North for work. The middle class could afford to suggest that the wilderness had intrinsic value. And it was the middle class which lobbied with the most selfishness. It did not need the land for jobs or food; middle class opponents of development wanted the Churchill saved for leisure time activities. These activities compensated for a destroyed home environment whose destruction they perpetuated with their consumer based lifestyles. The moral superiority with which it

³² Saskatchewan Construction Association, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry.” Written Briefs Presented at Regina Public Hearings, November 17-18, 1977 (1977) 7, 15.

³³ Churchill River Board of Inquiry, Report 51.

argued for the preservation of the Churchill shows how little it had questioned its own motives.

Just as middle-class opponents of development placed an intrinsic value on the wilderness, some supporters of hydroelectric construction placed an intrinsic value on development. Dr. Rennie warned that if the area was not developed, it would be “wasted.”³⁴ Inherent in this statement is the assumption that only those things that generate capital are productive. W.R. Staples, of the College of Engineering at the University of Saskatchewan and a man who was heavily involved in water resource use in Saskatchewan at the time of the inquiry, stated that “if the pioneers of our province had taken the same attitude towards development as is presently being taken by some groups, our country would never have been developed,”³⁵ assuming that everyone would understand the evil this would have been. But Staples had two, more concrete reasons, for advocating development of the Churchill River. First, and this idea is echoed by other advocates of development, he argued that renewable energy resources such as water should be used before non-renewable resources. As director of the Canadian Water Resources Association, a director of the Saskatchewan Resources Development Association, and past president of the Lower Saskatchewan Basin Association, it is not surprising that he should say this.

Certainly, the energy crisis of the 1970s had contributed to this feeling among many segments of the population. Shortages and price hikes scared people in Canada into

³⁴ Churchill River Study, Proceedings of the Churchill River Basin Symposium 22.

³⁵ W.R. Staples, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Saskatoon Public Hearings, November 25-26, 1977 (1977) 4.

thinking very seriously about their use of petroleum. Some believed that the current shortage was a warning that supplies would not last forever and began thinking about possible consequences: either to ration oil supplies or turn to other forms of energy.³⁶ Conservation of energy supplies became a priority for these people. However, not everyone agreed that serious shortages were imminent. Instead, they thought that the current crisis had been caused by political and economic factors and called for a national energy policy that would prevent another crisis from occurring.³⁷ Whatever people had decided was the reason for the oil crisis, the idea of a need for fossil fuel conservation had entered the minds of North Americans and it most certainly affected the debate around possible hydroelectric development in Saskatchewan. Interestingly, supporters of development, rather than the environmentalists, made it an issue.

The Saskatchewan Construction Association also urged the use of water before oil: "The hard facts are that as petroleum resources become more scarce and expensive, they will be reserved for special applications. As more parts of the world become developed, energy demands will increase. All sources of energy will be needed which can realistically and economically be developed."³⁸ This was not perhaps the most environmentally responsible attitude, (many argued that a river was not a renewable resource) but in the context of short-term economics, it was the most practical.

Staples went on to argue that as the "Churchill development [would] only be the third Power Corp[oration] hydro development in Saskatchewan [it] should be

³⁶ Richard Rohmer, *The Arctic Imperative* (McLelland & Stewart Ltd., 1973) 8-9.

³⁷ James Laxer, *Canada's Energy Crisis* (Toronto: James, Lewis & Samuel, 1974) 1.

³⁸ Saskatchewan Construction Association, "Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry," *Written Briefs Presented at Saskatoon Public Hearings, November 25-26, 1977* (1977) 16.

completed.”³⁹ This would also serve to spread the benefits of the Churchill River to all Saskatchewan residents.⁴⁰ Staples was supported in his view that the benefits of natural resources must accrue to all member of the population rather than only those who live on or near them. Kupsch made similar statements during a Churchill River Study workshop in 1974: “Governments are obligated to provide the economic and social justice which is required for the enjoyment of nature’s gifts.” Therefore, according to Kupsch, the emphasis placed on northern Aboriginal participation in the decision-making process was erroneous: “I firmly believe that this government, or any other government, can just not afford politically to turn decision-making over to special interest and local groups.”⁴¹ This left the government with a problem. There were three dominant groups with opposing opinions on what should be done with the Churchill River: citizens for hydroelectric development, citizens for middle-class leisure development, and citizens for local control over northern resources. Kupsch warned the government not to fall under the influence of special interest groups. However, if special interest implies minority opinion, then the proponents of development were a special interest group.

So what happens to nature? People acted according to their value systems. They (naturally) valued the lives of the people around them over nature. Nature became important when lives were directly affected by it. For instance, nature was important to the construction workers because it could give them jobs, and it was important to the

³⁹ Staples 2.

⁴⁰ Staples 4.

⁴¹ Churchill River Study, Proceedings of Workshop II (1975) 132.

harried doctor, businessperson, and executive because it gave them a place to relax. Both these claims were legitimate, and both were problematic.

Those who promoted development on the Churchill River emphasized the important economic contribution a hydroelectric dam would make to the province. Most importantly, growth would mean jobs. But most economic growth in the west is not sustainable. The rate of resource use in North America and other western countries has worried scientists and environmentalists for decades. The result of uncontrolled exploitation is pollution and depletion. People suffer as a result.

The arguments of middle class southern Saskatchewan did little to help this situation. It argued to save the Churchill River because it was a wilderness area and condemned those who wanted to develop it for being blind to nature's virtues. Its frustration with advocates of development is obvious: "A person who appreciates beauty and then admits to a wish to preserve this for his grandchildren, is ridiculed as an emotional and even selfish sentimentalist. But surely aesthetic values are much more important than the economist's yardstick, the 1974 dollar, that has a fluctuating and ever-eroding value."⁴² Aesthetic values are certainly more important than the dollar for those who can afford it. But opponents of development seemed to ignore the fact that they were, themselves, an essential part of the push for development. Their demands for electricity, consumer goods, and capitalist economic growth necessitated further development. They were able to separate themselves from this destruction because they did not physically take part in it as construction workers, loggers, etc. The dichotomy of

⁴² Dr. Stuart Houston, "Should we live better electrically?" The Fish and Game Sportsman Winter issue 1974 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper Clippings (January 1 - April 30 1975) (1975) 8.

wilderness/civilization, held by the middle class opponents of hydroelectric development, is obvious in the ways they would use nature. Instead of destroying their potential playground and refuge, they advocated the development of southern nature:

Canada is an urban country with most people living in a man-made world. From the days of Thoreau and before, we have been reminded of the need to penetrate the wilderness in order to comprehend the interdependencies of all life, to contrast and reflect upon the beauty and complexity of the natural creation. These are the opportunities and values that cannot be measured in dollars...Rather than the Wintego Dam, a second 300 MW unit should be added to the Poplar River Project. It costs less; the environment to be destroyed is not unique; and the SPC is to be commended for its start on reclamation programs...⁴³

The result is that the environment could continue to suffer; development continued at an unimpeded rate but in a different area. Environmental groups such as the Saskatchewan Natural History Association and the Saskatchewan Environmental Society failed to protect the natural environment because they did not recognize non-wilderness areas as nature. The dichotomy of wilderness/civilization made it impossible for discussions of the protection of nature to move beyond the pristine North. The farmers of southern Saskatchewan became victims of this same dichotomy and the assumptions concerning race inherent in it. Because they were of European descent (non-Aboriginal) neither they nor their land required protection.

Arguments for and against development were based on values. From the statements made by southern opponents of development in the newspapers and in briefs to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry, it is clear that their primary concern in this issue was tourism. They valued the beauty of the North, and contrasted its lushness with the arid

⁴³ Barry A. Mitachke, "Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry," Written Briefs Presented at Regina Public Hearings, November 17-18, 1977 (1977) 2,3.

land of the prairies. This beauty they believed to be more important than utilitarian uses such as power generation. Education and spiritual renewal were the only accepted activities of Euro-Canadians in the northern forest. However, they also believed that Aboriginal people should be able to continue using the river for their traditional pursuits. Indeed, middle class concern for Aboriginal culture became one of its most powerful tools in its fight against development. Even though most southern activists had never spoken to the Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan's North, they assumed that they understood their needs and desires. As we will see in the next chapter, that was not always the case. Many Aboriginal people did not look fondly upon the tourists who flocked to their communities during the summers. Moreover, southerners were sometimes quite patronizing towards northerners, *allowing* them a role in future tourist development.

Moreover, the concerns of members of the working-class who valued jobs over a cosmic experience were ignored and even condemned. Working class southerners saw northern development as a way to boost Saskatchewan's economy, and in turn, give security to many people involved in construction trades and other spin-off industries. The oil crisis also added some strength to the hydroelectric development supporters who feared the depletion of oil resources. They believed that water, a renewable resource, was the answer. Engineers and developers used the same arguments to promote construction of the dam, but because they held positions of privilege, they were the group most reviled by opponents, both southern and, as we will see in the next chapter, northern.

In whose best interests must the government act? It is clear that it could not act in the best interests of all citizens: their interests were far too diverse. Who had the most

legitimate claim to the province's resources? By what criteria should the government decide which resources to conserve and which to exploit? Middle class southerners argued that a wilderness area must be preserved for recreation, working-class southerners argued that it must be exploited for the benefit of all citizens, meaning themselves. Academics such as Kupsch and Staples involved in promoting the economic advancement of the province would agree. Northerners wanted development in the Churchill region to reflect their needs and wants which conflicted with both opponents and supporters of development in southern Saskatchewan. Northerners used southern myths of wilderness and Aboriginal culture to their benefit, but not without problems. Northerners did not demonstrate an abstract concern for the environment, but wanted to use it to protect their desired lifestyle.

Chapter 3: The Northerners

Although the opinions expressed by northern Aboriginal people, as well as national Aboriginal groups, on the proposed dam on the Churchill River appear to be homogenous, this apparent similarity hides a complex relationship with the land and the river. The Churchill Committee announced in its brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry, "Never before have people in the North been so united on any one issue facing them. Their message came through loud and clear: 'We don't want the dam.'"¹ The reason most often cited for prevention of the dam was the preservation of a lifestyle and livelihood that include fishing, hunting, and trapping. Nature in the Churchill area sustained the lives of its inhabitants in a very basic way, but they appreciated less utilitarian qualities as well. Northern people raved about the beauty of their land; they went to nature in order to flee the pressures of the communities. Nature was a spiritual refuge. In this aspect, the rhetoric of northern residents is sometimes quite similar to that of their southern neighbours. Perhaps surprisingly, in the interviews of citizens of communities such as Sandy Bay, Pelican Narrows, and Stanley Mission, people did not usually speak outright of their perceived connection or harmonious relationship with nature; that was left to the community leaders. However, prevalent in the statements of all segments of northern

¹Churchill Committee Northern Municipal Council, Concerns of the Churchill Committee of the Northern Municipal Council About the Proposed Dam at Wintego Rapids on the Churchill River (1977)1-2.

society was the notion of struggle against a white society that sought to exploit both nature and Aboriginal people who were sometimes presented as the helpless victims of this greedy exploitation. Often, Aboriginal culture and its use of nature were offered as a foil to southern, Euro-Canadian society. But far from opposing all forms of development, northern Aboriginal people, especially the community leaders, supported development of small industries that would complement the hunting, fishing and trapping lifestyle. Some even suggested a mine or a pulp mill as long as it would not disrupt those traditional practices. The residents of the northern communities that would have been affected by the dam wanted to use nature in the Churchill River Basin in the same manner as southern opponents and proponents of hydroelectric development: they wanted to use it for their own benefit.

Again and again, in the interviews with northern residents, in the writings of community leaders, and in the reports of Aboriginal organizations, the use of the area for hunting, fishing and trapping is emphasized. For many, the bulk of their food was provided by these traditional pursuits, and families depended on cash incomes gained from commercial trapping and fishing. Although wage labour was becoming increasingly important in northern communities, this did not reduce dependence upon the animal resources of the Churchill River Basin. In their research into Treaty Indian uses of the basin, the Peter Ballantyne and Lac La Ronge bands found that “participation in wage labour does not reduce productivity in domestic production; the reverse appears to be the case, e.g. the more productive residents acquire the wage labour jobs, which thereby increased cash income, which then permits greater use of new technology, which in turn

increases domestic production and resource utilization.”² The dam threatened the ability of northern residents to continue working within this economy and it was rejected by northern people. “Every person interviewed in Stanley Mission was strongly against the proposed Wintego Dam... . In their view, local people in the Churchill River area will be the ones to suffer all the negative effects of the Wintego project, while the benefits of electricity, good jobs, and money generated by the project will all go south.”³

Although this was the most basic reason for northern rejection of hydroelectric development, it was certainly not the only one. Interview responses were highly personal: interviewees mentioned the loss of gravesites of loved ones, the flooding of favourite stopping and camping places and the disappearance of pictograph sites as reasons for stopping the dam.⁴ The beauty of the area was emphasized by many residents. Thirty year old John Merasty of Pelican Narrows had this to say about his home: “The Churchill River. God, it’s a beautiful river. I just can’t get over that fact. Its many rapids and wildlife, the abundance of wildlife that you see every day. There’s bald eagles, a lot of bears, lots of moose, lots of ducks, a lot of fish. Everybody that comes here says, ‘Boy it’s good here.’ The Churchill is the best place.”⁵ He went on, “Everybody enjoys his country. They may not come here every day, but when they do come here, they want to see it as it was a hundred years ago, not as it would be.”⁶ This idea of the timelessness

² Philip Ballantyne et al., Aski-Puko: The Land Alone (Saskatoon: Government of Saskatchewan, 1976) 344.

³ Stanley Mission LAC, “Brief to the Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Northern Hearings (1978) 8.

⁴ Churchill River Board of Inquiry, Report (Saskatoon: 1978) 58.

⁵ Churchill Committee, Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry (1978) 149.

⁶ Churchill Committee Northern Municipal Council, Concerns 5.

and stability of nature was common. Marie Bear worried that her grandchildren would not see the same land and wildlife that she saw if the dam were constructed.⁷ John Custer told interviewers in Pelican Narrows that he “would like to see the Churchill kept as God made it, in its natural state.”⁸

Many made reference to the river being currently in its natural state, the way that God made it. Amelia McLeod of Stanley Mission suggested that God would disapprove of a dam: “If a person reads the Bible sometimes, it seems that God was happy when he finished with creation; he was happy with the way it looked. Now why is the whiteman trying to change the landscape. And that is all I have to say.”⁹ Oscar Beatty of Deschambault Lake had a slightly more foreboding opinion of God’s reaction to a dam: “I say that this is true and we have to be careful with God’s creation. We do something wrong with the country that was given to us, I don’t think we’ll get blessings that we hope to get and that’s why we are running into so much trouble these days.”¹⁰ Northern residents expressed a desire to maintain the beauty and integrity of their land for the sake of future generations and their faith in God who had created it. This idea of an unchanging nature, an entity without a history is captivating. Southern environmentalists also used it to create a mystical and sublime aura around nature - to make it worthy of protection.

Generally, northern residents did not comment on possible alternative energy

⁷Churchill Committee Northern Municipal Council, Concerns 6.

⁸Pelican Narrows LAC, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Northern Hearings (1978) 7.

⁹Written Briefs Presented at Northern Communities.

¹⁰Written Briefs Presented at Northern Communities.

resources. They kept their responses to their own concerns, namely, keeping the dam out of their back yard. However, formal organizations had suggestions. Walter Riese of the La Ronge chapter of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation told the Churchill River Board of Inquiry that “The Churchill River, as it is and in its natural state, is a resource that would be envied by any other jurisdiction on earth.” He recommended the development of a lignite coal plant in southern Saskatchewan instead.¹¹ In its brief, the National Indian Brotherhood reminded the Churchill River Board of Inquiry that “a man-made reservoir behind a dam site in southern Saskatchewan, especially on the Saskatchewan River, would be more acceptable to tourists and would have a less disruptive effect on the valley’s economy and natural beauty than the proposed project at Wintego Rapids. It is simply unacceptable to destroy the valley of the Missinipe Basin when alternative dam sites are available.”¹² The Churchill Committee made its recommendations to the Board of Inquiry along a similar line:

We recommend that, because the Churchill-Reindeer River System composes a unique wilderness area which is very special, not only in Saskatchewan but in all of Canada; and because its destruction would cause severe social and economic hardships to the native people who depend on its natural resources, that the province should not consider damming this system, except as a last resort, when all other sources of power generation in the province have been exhausted.”¹³

Neither in the responses of interviewees nor in the briefs put together by formal organizations is there any concern for the fate of southern nature. Like southern

¹¹Sask Wildlife Federation, Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry (1978) 3.

¹²National Indian Brotherhood, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented Northern Hearings (1978).

¹³Churchill Committee, Brief 139.

environmentalists, they are willing to sacrifice it to save the more natural North. Of course, motivation for the preservation of the north goes deeper than aesthetics; the nature of northern Saskatchewan provided northern citizens with food and income. But it is clear that there was no abstract concern for nature in general on the part of the Aboriginal people who expressed their opinions. The stereotypical image of Aboriginal people as protectors of nature must be called into question. Like southerners of European descent, Aboriginal people wanted to protect their interests, interests which lay in northern, not southern nature. To do this, they described a nature that was pure and unchanging. To emphasize their right to continue using nature without the disturbance of a dam, they identified themselves with the land, its purity and timelessness.

Like southerners, northern residents used nature as a refuge from the surging humanity of northern community life. Although this might seem absurd, because population density was so low in the North, many people mentioned the relaxing effects of life in the bush. Activities such as hunting, fishing and trapping “allow a return to the wilderness and a more peaceful way of life than what can be found in the community”¹⁴ according to the Churchill Committee. It rebuked the Study for completely neglecting to take into account recreation use by northern people in the Study’s recreation report. “Local people are the greatest recreational users of the river system. All aspects of traditional ways of life...are tied in with what southerners term ‘recreation’, and are enjoyed by local people of all ages in a recreational sense.”¹⁵ Marie Bear told

¹⁴Churchill Committee, Brief 51.

¹⁵Churchill Committee, Brief 51.

interviewers, "I think they should leave the land as it is and get their power somewhere else. Right now we are having a good time with our land, though we do some work during the week. Sometimes we like to get away from our problems." Philip Merasty told interviewers that he and other trappers liked to "go out and get away from it all."¹⁶ Northerners used the same phrases as southerners when speaking of their recreational use of the land. Although at times northerners tried to make a clear distinction between southern and northern culture, when it suited their purposes they emphasized the similarities, sometimes using the exact same words.

The word "traditional" was used again and again to describe the activities of northern Aboriginal people. Traditional activities were defined by the Churchill Committee as "trapping, fishing, hunting, camping, and generally being out in the bush."¹⁷ Labelling these activities "traditional" added to their air of timelessness and mystical attraction. Unfortunately, it also left the word's users vulnerable to questions of the word's meaning. Peter Niven of La Ronge and J.E. Armand Aden of Denare Beach argued that trapping could not be traditional because the practice was only 200 years old and introduced by European traders.¹⁸ Thus its purity as an Aboriginal pursuit was shattered. Niven also called into question the legitimacy of calling the area the traditional or ancestral homeland of the Cree. "Native people are nomadic," he argued. "Someone that happened to be in the Churchill River Basin at the time of the first fur traders may

¹⁶Sandy Bay L.A.C. "Sandy Bay Questionnaire," Written Briefs Presented at Northern Hearings (1977) 25.

¹⁷Churchill Committee, Brief 51.

¹⁸Churchill River Board of Inquiry, La Ronge hearings (1978).

have been at Cree Lake a year or two earlier.”¹⁹ Although these arguments appear to be easily dismissed, they do illustrate a weakness in the use of the word traditional. For instance, what about commercial fishing? Is it traditional? Is the use of powerboats traditional? Tradition, like wilderness is incapable of adaptability; both are sullied by change. The association of Indian culture with a timeless and historyless nature is treacherous. Powerful though the rhetoric might be, it is vulnerable to attack.

A hunting, fishing and trapping lifestyle was obviously important to the Cree. From their descriptions of their work, it is certain that they enjoyed what they did. It is also safe to say that the descriptions of that lifestyle are somewhat romanticized. The depiction of northern life given by John Merasty, a man who had experienced wage labour, would appeal to any tired nine to fiver. “Out here, you are your own man, your own boss. You don’t have to worry about getting hell from anybody, or having to listen to the whistle. Out here, you just live and let live. You are living a reasonable life. There is something about nature that everybody likes. Nobody comes out here to get rich. That is the farthest thing from anybody’s mind.... People come out here to live like Indians.”²⁰ Thirty-year old Philip Merasty of Sandy Bay explained why he refused to take on steady work: “I only take jobs myself that would suit my trapping during the winter and fall. It isn’t because I couldn’t get a steady job but that is just the way I want it. I want to live the way I was brought up, trapping and fishing.”²¹ Marie Merasty, a 77 year old woman living in Prince Albert recalled her life as a young woman:

¹⁹Churchill River Board of Inquiry, La Ronge Hearings.

²⁰Churchill Committee, Brief 7, 149.

²¹Sandy Bay LAC, “Sandy Bay Questionnaire” 12.

A woman made everything a long time ago. When a moose was killed she crushed all the bones and made lard, bone lard (her words) 'moosu with kway' and crushed dried meat. It was all good, nobody could not like it. Women were very hard workers, there was nothing to distract them like plucking their eyebrows and putting lipstick to make their lips red. Those things did not exist with us. A person got up, washed their face and combed their hair, but now when a woman wants to go somewhere they spend two hours looking into a mirror - those things we didn't do. When a person is of any worth he doesn't have to look in a mirror! I'm mainly talking about young girls nowadays."²²

Merasty points to a perceived deterioration in the importance of the lives of women due to the influence of white culture. A better past had been replaced by a fallen present. The people interviewed expressed satisfaction and contentment with their work and couched it in terms that would appeal to a wilderness loving spirit among southern Saskatchewan residents.

At the same time, in the descriptions of traditional lifestyles, there was a clear distinction made between northern and southern society. Southern society was used as a foil to northern lifestyles. The preface of the Churchill Committee Brief contrasts methods used by Indians and non-Indians to communicate their ideas:

The white man must rationalize everything and present 10,000 different reasons why this has to be done and why this cannot be done. This is not our way, but we are being forced to verbalize and justify our opposition to this Board. Most briefs received in the North have been of an emotional nature. Often people made mention of the land being their mother, and that being on the land was more important than making a big profit from their trapping ventures. They have expressed their views very simply, but from the heart. Do not discount their reasons as unacceptable because they are emotional, and think, 'we cannot base our decision on the emotions of people'. We are showing you the way we are, and the way we feel; so do not discount our most important reasons. Look at things in a simple light and you shall see things more clearly.²³

²²Written Briefs Presented at Northern Hearings. Parentheses original.

²³Churchill Committee, Brief preface.

Southern readers were encouraged to “look at things in a simple light,” suggesting that the lives of northern Aboriginal people were less complicated and perhaps more wholesome than the “white man” who must “rationalize everything and present 10,000 different reasons” to explain their point of view. The Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry from Sandy Bay is similar in tone. “It [the brief] is not a cold calculated engineers report, based on figures and statistics which show water levels, minimum environmental effects or time schedules. Such reports mean nothing to the people, they are just a pile of paper.”²⁴ The brief goes on to describe the hunting, fishing and trapping lifestyle as not merely a way of life, but “an extension of the soul.”²⁵ Here, Euro-Canadian society was portrayed as an impersonal place, whereas northern, Aboriginal culture was friendly and uncomplicated. John Merasty’s testimonial to northern life is perhaps the best example of the perceived difference between north and south.

Why I am opposed to the dam, I have worked with white people for many years. Their main objective is to get and work for as much money as possible. I tried the same thing but I was disillusioned. Maybe I am unsociable but the only visitor that ever knocked on my door were salesman, repairmen, and bill collectors that wanted the money I had to give them. My life seemed to be an unhappy one. Then I found an excuse to give up the life I had been leading and to choose the Indian way. My health was deteriorating from working underground, so I decided to quit. With my wife being from Pelican Narrows, we decided to come here, live here for awhile and see what I could do to support my family. Without asking anyone, I received friendship, shelter and food for myself, my wife and children. I helped my brother-in-law when the fishing season started and I learned from him the art of commercial fishing. He didn’t sell to me or lend me but gave me an outboard motor if I would have it. Another friend loaned me his boat so I could go out commercial fishing. The Fishermen’s Committee allowed me to get a license to fish these lakes along with a few nets I was loaned and some I got on

²⁴Sandy Bay LAC, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Northern Hearings (1978).

²⁵Sandy Bay LAC. Brief.

credit from the Co-op Fisheries. I started out.²⁶

The interesting thing is that this testimonial which sets northern Aboriginal culture high above the immorality and atomization of Euro-Canadian culture was meant to appeal most strongly to southern, Euro-Canadian people who, perhaps harkening back to pioneer times, were eager to believe in a wilderness culture that contained simpler values and honest, generous people.

But this higher morality and disdain for the aspirations of southern, white society, led smoothly into victimhood. The National Indian Brotherhood directed its brief to a southern audience and used the language that audience would expect and want to hear.

The Indian lifestyle and value system is based on a harmonious relationship with nature. The Euro-Canadian on the other hand, attempts to achieve a dominant relationship with the environment. The difference lies in my people's acceptance of what is natural around them, and the Euro-Canadian's need to dominate... .

My people see themselves as part of the order of nature. In this light, it becomes easier to see how my people are also vulnerable to exploitation. The Indian way is conservationist. The white way is exploitive. The Indian maintains the balance of nature, but to the white man, nature is wasteful. Because Euro-Canadians feel compelled to exploit nature, Indian resources are depleted. And when our resources are wiped out, so are we.²⁷

In this speech, Indian culture is clearly separated from white culture in their relationship with nature. Harmony is a word commonly used to describe the relationship Indians are supposed to have with the land. Its familiarity adds to its power, just as the familiar story of a disappearing race is powerful in the minds of southerners, taught to appreciate the romantic qualities of such a narrative. As part of nature, Aboriginal people were victims of Euro-Canadian exploitation.

²⁶Churchill River Board of Inquiry, Report 61.

²⁷National Indian Brotherhood.

This was a common theme throughout the interviews with northern residents.

Malachi McLeod of Stanley Mission lamented the fate of Aboriginal people at the hands of Euro-Canadian society:

A lot of people have made their living from this, the Churchill River for as long as there's been earth. The poor Indian, and now it's these people that are being cut off. It's as if they can't any longer make their living from there. But, this is the whiteman's way, to make things worse for the Indian. If he, the whiteman can succeed in building a dam, he will get money in the hand, out of it, till the end of the world. He will have money in the pocket but the Indian will get nothing out of it. Maybe they, the Indian trapper's will go and starve somewhere else if they move away from there. And this whiteman, he's not going to care. Okay that's what I have to say."

Angus Bear of Sandy Bay said to interviewers, "When they can't trap in their country anymore, what are they going to do? You might as well shoot them." There was obvious frustration at the feeling of relative powerlessness of northern people to stop unwanted development. "Once a white man makes up his mind to get something done, no matter what people do, it would be almost impossible to get them to change their decisions."²⁸ Feelings of victimization and powerlessness were keenly felt, even though development did not proceed on the Churchill.

However, this powerlessness was also a weapon. It created and strengthened sympathy in many southerners. Chapter Two showed how southerners used the plight of northern Aboriginal people to further their own ends, namely, to prevent construction of the dam in favour of increased tourism. By insulting southern society and glorifying northern culture, northern Aboriginal people were encouraging southerners to continue on

²⁸Sandy Bay LAC, "Sandy Bay Questionnaire" 24.

with this line of argument. However, this relationship was not without its problems. First, the emphasis placed on victimization perpetuated racist attitudes toward Aboriginal people, suggesting that they required the protection and guidance of Euro-Canadians. Second, northern residents expressed considerable ambivalence toward increased tourism. An editorial in *The Saskatchewan Indian* warned, "Southern Canada, greedy for resources, power, water and playgrounds, is turning its gaze north and in Saskatchewan, during the 70's its major focus will be the Churchill."²⁹ Southerners advocating tourism instead of hydroelectric development were the target of the same contempt from this writer. Alfred Stewart of Sandy Bay had this opinion on northern tourism: "Tourists are the guys that bring in the money. They create employment for the people here, June to September...But someone is going to have to keep a close watch on those guys." Some interviewees argued that tourists should be required to hire guides. Others were openly resentful, like Angelique Ray of Sandy Bay, "I see they have no respect for the land. They throw garbage everywhere," and Solomon Ballantyne, "tourists, hunters, exploit our resources. I don't want to see them increase their numbers."³⁰ Third, Aboriginal people ignored their own capacity for causing environmental change, making that activity strictly Euro-Canadian and always destructive. But northerners also had plans to exploit their environment on a large scale through forestry, pulp and paper, and mining. But because northerners hoped that these activities would not interfere with domestic production, they

²⁹"The New Wild West" The Saskatchewan Indian August/September 1974 found in Elna Sins, Newspaper

Clippings (September 1974 - December 1974) (1975) 37.

³⁰Churchill Committee, Brief 163.

pronounced them comparatively benign.

Northerners tried to differentiate themselves, their lives, and their work, from southerners. This was to emphasize the fact that they were unique, just as the Churchill River was a unique part of Saskatchewan and so worthy of protection. This was effective in creating sympathy for northern concerns in southerners. However, the agendas of northerners and southerners did not always coincide. Whereas southern opponents of hydroelectric development wanted increased tourism in the North, northern residents were not always sure that that was a good idea. Although perhaps overemphasized in order to gain southern sympathies, there was a fundamental difference in the ways northerners and southerners spoke and wrote about nature. For southerners, nature tended to be something that inspired feelings such as inspiration and awe; for northerners, the land provided security. Mathias Maurice wrote into the *New Breed* to explain what he thought the river meant to his community, "We the people of the Churchill River know how much is going to destroy our livelihood. In the past when we use to take our paddle with a little canoe and paddle down the Beautiful River as the sun rise in the morning we know right away where we going to get food for our children."³¹ This was a concept that did not appear in southern discussions of nature where most people's food, even of farm families, came from the grocery store. The history of European settlement in Canada from first contact has traditionally been a story of struggle against nature. The more recent history of the settlement of the prairies was a story of extraordinary and hardy men and women

³¹"Letter to the Editor" *New Breed* May 1973 found in Elna Sins, *Newspaper Clippings (November 1972 August 1973)* (1974) 38.

struggling with the earth to grow something productive. A deep confidence in the land to provide and to continue providing is absent from Canada's history. The tremendous impact of the drought of the 1930s was still well within living memory. Distrust and antagonism were important elements in the relationships of prairie people with their land, a difference in world view perhaps caused partly by a difference in terrain. Coming from this tradition, it is startling to read about "the permanent security which the land provides."³²

However, this permanent security was not without the need of a little help from human innovation. Many northerners wanted development in the North, but it was to be development that would complement activities such as hunting, fishing and trapping. "Wise use of the lands resources, will bring continual benefit. The people know this."³³ Many development options were suggested by both community leaders and interviewees. Setting up a tannery was one idea: a bear skin rug would be worth much more than the hide before processing. A fish processing plant producing cat food and cattle feed was another possibility. Commercial fishers hoped that they could get their fish into restaurants in Saskatchewan. Some suggested opening a hand craft store where older women could teach young girls to make footwear and other items.³⁴ Neither were northern communities blind to the lumber potential the forest held. Some thought that a saw mill was an obvious development choice while others went one step further and

³²Churchill Committee, Brief 94-5.

³³Sandy Bay LAC, "Sandy Bay Questionnaire" 8.

³⁴Churchill Committee, Brief 128.

suggested furniture manufacturing.³⁵ According to the findings of the Sandy Bay questionnaire, northern residents felt confident that trapping and fishing would increase in importance and therefore they encouraged development which would be compatible with those activities. Increased tourism, although not approved by all northern residents, was also put forward as an alternative to hydroelectric development. Some thought locally owned and operated wilderness tours, showing southerners “how to live off the land in true native style” would “provide a source of income to ...trappers, and ...promote a better understanding of norther native culture.”³⁶ Others advocated the idea of winter recreation such as camping, cross country skiing, photography tours and ice fishing would attract southern money without disturbing northerners’ ability to make a living in their preferred way.³⁷

Northerners were anxious to show that they did not eschew all development, just the kind of development that would lead to more harm than good. “We are against this development but not against all development,” the writers of the Southend Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry assured their readers. “We do not want to be misunderstood by the people of the south. We would like progress, but being against the dam should not be taken to mean that we would prefer to live in shacks and paddle canoes, rather than living in better homes and using boats powered by outboard motors. We enjoy the use of electrical power. We object to those kinds of things that will hurt the Indian way of life and those developments that will harm us and not do a bit of good for

³⁵Churchill Committee, Brief 161, 162.

³⁶Churchill Committee, Brief 131.

³⁷Churchill Committee, Brief 128.

us.”³⁸ It was assumed here that the definition of “the Indian way of life” would be easily understood by all. However, that is not the case. We can assume that this way of life involved the “traditional” pursuits of hunting, fishing, and trapping; wage labour and welfare payments would not be considered part of the “Indian way of life.” What was the function of these traditional pursuits? Certainly by the 1970s they could not wholly support an individual or a family; on average, 44 per cent of northern incomes came from transfer payments.³⁹ But it is certain that they played an important role. According to the Churchill Committee, 70 per cent of men in the Study area were registered trappers.⁴⁰ Sixty-six percent of all food consumed in the Study area came from domestic production.⁴¹ But this was a situation that could not last. First, the population of the North was growing at such a rate that it would have been impossible for fish and animal resources to support continued heavy hunting, fishing, and trapping in years to come. Second, that level of reliance on transfer payments was an unacceptable situation for northerners. That is why they hoped to encourage northern industry, to provide jobs and livelihoods for present and future residents. Increased wage labour, although it would increase the accessibility of weekend hunting, fishing, and trapping (by giving northerners the money to get into the bush) it would also decrease the necessity and importance of those pursuits. Essentially, “the Indian way of life” would become a recreational activity, similar to the recreational activities of southerners.

³⁸Southend LAC, “Brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry,” Written Briefs Presented at Northern Hearings (1978) 4.

³⁹Phillip Ballentyne et al. Aski-Puko: The Land Alone (Saskatoon: Government of Saskatchewan, 1976) 240.

⁴⁰Churchill Committee Brief 10.

⁴¹Ballentyne 285.

The above quote also demonstrates the beginning of a separation of the “Indian way of life” from many day-to-day activities such as the use of electricity, living in “better homes,” and using boats and outboard motors. The “Indian way of life” was, for many, no longer a way of life at all, but a small part of a way of life that depended on transfer payments, wage labour, and the technology of Euro-Canadians. However, in the 1970s, a dam would have upset the rhythms to which hunters, fishers, and trappers were used, causing serious damage to the health of northern communities. But northerners held the idea that other developments might be made to adapt to those rhythms. However, a growing dependence on wage labour would marginalise those activities which northerners sought to protect.

But by showing that Aboriginal people enjoyed the new technologies, and were eager to set up industries of their own, northerners, instead of emphasizing otherness, displayed the similarities in the desires of northerners and developers. Although perhaps alienating those who would have liked to have seen the Cree continue on with strictly traditional activities, and perhaps infuriating Henry Niven (the man who pointed out that trapping was not traditional because the practice was only two hundred years old) these types of statements appealed to the members of the Churchill River Board of Inquiry. They were reassured that the opposition of northerners was not *really* emotional, as the Churchill Committee Brief had suggested, but founded on logic that was easy to understand. The Board wrote, “it was not change itself, but the pace and nature of the changes that a large construction project would create that aroused concern and

opposition.”⁴²

But small-scale development was not all that northerners had in mind. The report on the Treaty Indians of the Peter Ballantyne and Lac La Ronge Bands, written by band leaders, had only one suggestion for northern development: a pulp mill owned by the band. However, this was not to be a chemical pulp mill like the one that pumped out noxious odours just north of Prince Albert: it was to be a thermo-mechanical mill. This would create less pollution, both of the air and water. Although the authors admitted that “any development that makes use of the local environment will, in all probability, result in some degrading of the environment,” they believed that changes to the environment would also be positive. “Planned harvesting could result in roads into the best hunting, fishing and trapping areas, improved access to building and fuel wood supplies, improved disease and fire control in forested areas, and increased yield of animals that favour cleared areas.”⁴³ No illusions concerning the sanctity of untouched wilderness existed here. Although it would cause significant changes in the landscape, both through logging and construction, this alternative was deemed appropriate because it was meant to work in cooperation with the domestic production of northerners. Whether or not this is true is unclear. Similarly, Alec Bear of Pelican Narrows suggested a mine at the confluence of the Churchill and Reindeer Rivers. He claims that “a mine helps a lot because it does not destroy the land like such (like a dam).”⁴⁴ However, a mine would carry all the same problems of increased traffic on small northern roads, increased number of southern migrant workers, increased

⁴²Churchill River Board of Inquiry, Report 163.

⁴³Philip Ballantyne, 407.

⁴⁴Churchill Committee, Brief 162.

noise which would disturb wildlife, and increased wildlife depletion through recreational hunting and fishing. However, a mine would not flood the land; it could be hidden away in the forest, away from communities, and it could be owned and operated mainly by northerners. Aboriginal people were willing to change their landscape quite drastically as long as it did not interfere with their ability to continue hunting, fishing, and trapping.

It is clear from many of the briefs and interviews of northern residents that concern for the natural environment was based on a desire to continue using it in a preferred way. Because the preferred lifestyle of northerners depended on the existence of wildlife such as moose, bears and muskrat, and an abundance of fish, they were opposed to anything that threatened wildlife habitats. Similarly, because their lifestyle did not depend on the integrity of the Saskatchewan River or farmland around Coronach, they were most willing to have those areas developed instead. In describing their feelings for the river, northerners sounded very much like southern opponents of hydroelectric development. They talked of nature's beauty and its ability to counteract the stresses of community life. However, they also tried to show that there was a clear difference between the two cultures. Further, northern Aboriginal culture was portrayed as morally superior to southern Euro-Canadian culture. Euro-Canadian southerners were portrayed as ruthless exploiters of both nature and, through their intimate connection with the land, Aboriginal people. This portrayal may have appealed to southern environmentalists, eager to glorify a more natural place and a more natural people. But Aboriginal people were willing to change and modify their land as long as it did not disturb their ability to continue hunting, fishing, and trapping. Aboriginal people used their status as victims to further their goals.

Using these stereotypes did have its disadvantages, however. They called their activities traditional, suggesting timelessness, purity, and stability. But tradition is also inflexible and so, because trapping was introduced by Europeans and only a (relatively) recent practice, it could not be considered traditional according to some individuals. Neither could it be a legitimate reason for protection of their land. This questioning of the meaning of tradition could easily spread to other activities that had been modified by the use of new technologies such as snowmobiles and outboard motors. Like wilderness, tradition is easily breakable. Moreover, a focus on victimization encouraged racism. Northern residents wanted development that would complement their lifestyle, rather than require immediate and drastic change. Larger development projects were also possibilities for northerners even though they were likely to be more environmentally disruptive. However, as long as environmental change did not diminish northerners' ability to hunt, fish, and trap it was acceptable. An abstract concern for the environment did not seem to exist. As with southerners, both opponents and advocates of development, northerners valued nature for its ability to support their desired lifestyle.

Conclusion: The Sequel

Much was left unresolved after the Saskatchewan government announced that a dam would not be built on the Churchill River. Although the dam did not go through, neither did the Saskatchewan government follow the recommendations of the Churchill River Board of Inquiry. The government reserved the right to dam the river at a later time. Moreover, the preservation of the Churchill River did not usher in a new era of environmental responsibility; it merely signalled the beginning of a new wilderness preservation trend. The forces such as waste, pollution, and over-consumption that threatened wilderness were left largely undiscussed during the Churchill River Study and the later Churchill River Board of Inquiry hearings. The focus on wilderness preservation and the success of the opponents of hydroelectric development allowed a feeling of complacency among Saskatchewan citizens; as long as the Churchill River was saved, there was no reason for modification or reexamination of their lifestyles. The Churchill River Study, though providing an important forum for discussion and dissent, was hampered by racism, time constraints, and inflexibility.

Perhaps a helpful way to examine the results of the debate over the Churchill would be to take a brief look at later discussions over land use in the area. In 1995, the Extension Division of the University of Saskatchewan sponsored a conference to discuss the possibility of making the Churchill a Heritage River. The Canadian Heritage Rivers

System is a joint project between provincial and federal governments. The program has been running since 1984, nominating and designating Heritage Rivers for their natural, cultural, or recreational value.¹ A Heritage River would be protected from development, and would restrict certain activities in the area. Exact details of land use would be negotiated. At the conference, twenty-nine people presented papers on five subjects including natural features of the Churchill River, historical features, recreation, resources, and management issues and options.

Heritage Rivers can be managed in a variety of ways, but three scientists from the University of Western Ontario set forward three options in their study of the recreational carrying capacity of the Churchill River. The first option they called "Limited Use in a Near Wilderness Setting." They argued that since Aboriginal people used the river for commercial purposes and southerners used it heavily for recreational purposes, it could not be considered a true wilderness. However, it could constitute a near wilderness environment. This scenario would not allow the use of commercial or private jet boats on the river. Canoeing was the preferred mode of transport. This scenario restricted camping to designated sites with no facilities and no garbage disposal. Commercial fishing activity on certain lakes along the river could be negotiated. The second option put forward was "Multiple Use in a Natural Environment Setting" which would restrict jet boats to certain areas and times, again favouring canoe travel. More camping spots would

¹Nick Coomber, "Overview of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System," The Churchill: A Canadian Heritage River: Proceedings from the Conference Held March 8-10, 1995 ed. Peter Jonker (Saskatoon: University Extension Press, 1995) 179, 184.

be created, but a no-trace policy would still be in effect. The third option, "Multiple Use in a Developed Setting," would allow commercial and recreational jet boating, provide more camping sites with garbage pick up, and provide easier access to the area by building new roads and boat launches where necessary. Firewood could be shipped in from expendable forests, places not as unique or spectacular as the Churchill.² These scenarios privilege the values of southern recreationists over those of northern fishers. Using the river for purposes other than recreation is severely compromised by restriction of commercial equipment or competition from sport fishers.

Reaction to this new proposal to make the Churchill a Heritage River was mixed, but not in the same way as reaction to the dam. However, southerners who had opposed the hydroelectric proposal were pleased with the idea and recounted former glories. C. Stuart Houston presented a paper entitled, "Mobilizing the Grass Roots in Defence of the Churchill River." In it, he congratulated himself and his colleagues in the Churchill River Basin Group for their efforts to stop development. He even went so far as to credit the Group with forcing the government to conduct a study: "Fortunately, in the final analysis, and to the surprise of many, the government, and especially the premier, were responsive. The Blakeney government listened, took heed, and appointed Dr. Walter Kupsch to head a Churchill River Inquiry, the first ever Saskatchewan example of an Environmental Impact Assessment."³ The government had announced the Churchill River Study before the

²R.W. Butler, D.A. Fennell, S.W. Boyd, "Canadian Heritage Rivers System Recreation Carrying Capacity Study," The Churchill: A Canadian Heritage River 122-125.

³C. Stuart Houston, "Mobilizing the Grass Roots in Defence of the Churchill River." The Churchill: A Canadian Heritage River 70.

Churchill River Basin Group was even formed.

The memory of Maureen Rever-DuWors, who had been appointed to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry, was somewhat more accurate. She too credited public participation through the Churchill River Study and the Churchill River Board of Inquiry with the preservation of the Churchill in the 1970s, but also pointed out that the recommendations made by the Board in 1978 had been ignored by the government. She was now excited to see that someone was finally going to take steps to protect “the beauty and uniqueness of the Churchill.”⁴

The Historic Trails Canoe Club, which had presented a brief to the Churchill River Board of Inquiry in the 1970s, and Nick Forsberg of the University of Saskatchewan, representing the outdoor education course, presented papers to the 1995 conference expressing their desire to have the Churchill protected as a Heritage River. The canoe club told the conference that “the modern voyageur will find a sense of inner peace and contentment amid the unpolluted air and waters of one of the world’s last vast wilderness areas. For a few days, or weeks, he/she escapes the bustle and roar of modern life for the peace and solitude of this rare environment.”⁵ This sounds almost exactly the same as arguments from the 1970s except this time women were included. Forsberg presented a similar argument: “The course [Outdoor Education] has been in existence for over twenty years and, through its history, has evolved to become a program that for many aspiring

⁴Maureen Rever-DuWors, “The 1970s Public Hearings: Organization, Delivery and Results,” The Churchill: A Heritage River 75.

⁵Marcel de Laforest, “Views of the Historic Trails Canoe Club,” The Churchill: A Canadian Heritage

teachers has been and continues to be the most meaningful experience of their preparation as teachers. Their evaluation of the course is consistent with the literature that has been published regarding the high value associated with wilderness experiences.” This value came mainly from the “powerful opportunities for introspection”⁶ that the wilderness provided.

The arguments of southern protectionists in 1995 had remained almost the same as their arguments in the 1970s. They were based on the beauty and especially the uniqueness of the Churchill area, its potential for recreation, education, spiritual renewal, and contemplation. Development opponenets wanted a wilderness experience to escape the grind of a southern, urban lifestyle. Interestingly, concern for the livelihoods of Aboriginal people was no longer an issue. Also interesting is that many Aboriginal people now opposed the idea of turning the Churchill into a Heritage River.

Various presenters reported that the economic activity of the Cree people had changed significantly since the time of the Churchill River Study. Although hunting, fishing, and trapping continued to be culturally important activities, their economic importance had diminished.⁷ As a result, the position and arguments of Aboriginal people changed drastically.

The case of wild rice farming points to an interesting problem common to debates over nature. Rice farming had become an increasingly important economic activity in

⁶Nick Forsberg, “Peddling Pedagogy through Paddling the Churchill,” The Churchill: A Canadian Heritage River 80.

⁷Tom Maher, “The Fish and Fisheries of the Churchill River,” The Churchill: A Canadian Heritage River 49.

northern Saskatchewan. By the 1980s, the province had become Canada's leading wild rice producer, with almost all production taking place in the North.⁸ However, because wild rice was an exotic species, there were concerns about its impact on the river's ecosystem, raising interesting questions about the meaning of natural. "It could be argued that this activity [wild rice farming] is not so very 'unnatural' after all. The species is at least native to a part of the boreal region of Canada, was traditionally harvested by indigenous peoples of the same linguistic group as now reside along the Churchill, and was used as a food item by some of the early fur traders who travelled through this area."⁹ The meanings of natural and traditional are not always clear and can lead to questions of the legitimacy of arguments based on them as we saw in chapter three. Those kinds of arguments had been almost completely abandoned by Aboriginal people in the 1995 conference, especially as most new economic pursuits could in no way be called traditional.

Forestry had become an important industry in the North, employing a number of people. The Meadow Lake Tribal Council was involved in a logging company and a saw mill which employed 140 people, most of them Aboriginal. If the Churchill was designated a Heritage River, they would no longer be able to log the area. As the authors point out, "forestry has a significant impact on a river basin whether conducted by people of the First Nations or others."¹⁰ This statement rejects the idea of greater environmental

⁸Bert Weichel, "Implications of Rice Production along the Churchill," The Churchill: A Canadian Heritage River 30.

⁹Bert Weichel, 32.

¹⁰Bob Anderson and Bob Bone, "Indigenous People and Forestry in the Churchill River Basin: The Case of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council," The Churchill: A Canadian Heritage River 128.

consciousness in Aboriginal people, but the logging operations had not been without controversy in the North. Calling themselves “protectors of mother earth,” some were dissatisfied with their lack of participation in decision making. They did not condemn logging in general, but wanted to be sure that land important to them was protected.¹¹ They argued that forestry allowed them to pursue traditional activities by giving them money and leisure time. But whether carrying on so called traditional activities or not, the Aboriginal people of northern Saskatchewan argued that they had a primary claim to the Churchill region. The authors told the conference that the Churchill as a Heritage River would have to accommodate logging by Aboriginal people.¹²

Logging was not the only type of economic development into which northerners were looking. Many believed that mining would not only provide more jobs to Aboriginal people, but would be less destructive to the environment than tourism.¹³ The truth of this statement is highly questionable. Like those in favour of logging, mining advocates argued that new industry would allow a return to more traditional activities: “Our traditional occupations, such as trapping, are no longer viable as a means of supporting a family, but are still very important as part of a way of life for many native people. Mining does not interfere with trapping and traditional lifestyles, in fact the opposite occurs. High paying mining jobs can enable native families to spend some time on the trapline - an event that might otherwise be unaffordable.”¹⁴ Aboriginal people still wanted control over

¹¹Anderson and Bone, 134.

¹²Anderson and Bone, 136.

¹³Scott Robertson, “Healthy Economics: A Foundation for Healthy Local Communities,” The Churchill: A Canadian Heritage River 147.

¹⁴Cited in Robertson, 146.

resources in the Churchill River basin, but twenty years after the Churchill River Study, they wanted it for new purposes which were only tangentially related to traditional pursuits. The problems northerners had with development were less problems of environmental change as of local control. Northerners wanted to decide what was best for northern communities and to act without interference from southern interests.

Clearly, the lives of northerners had changed considerably since the 1970s; however, unemployment and poverty were still far too prevalent in northern communities. Hunting, fishing, and trapping had lost their central places in the northern economy and had become recreational activities. Much of what Aboriginal people had based their arguments on in the 1970s was no longer relevant. Then, they had focussed on the ambiguous idea of tradition at the expense of issues such as Aboriginal rights and local autonomy. The passing of twenty years brought significant changes not only to economics, but also discussion. The Aboriginal presenters at the Heritage River conference avoided the rhetoric of victimhood. Nor did they speak of their harmonious relationship with the land. Although they did not ignore their traditional uses of the river, they no longer based their arguments on their importance. Instead, they argued that “the successful preparation of a management plan and the eventual designation of the Churchill as a Heritage River depends on the acknowledgement and accommodation of the heritage, rights, and interests, (traditional and modern) of these First Nations.”¹⁵ Northerners now used northern nature in much the same way as southerners used southern nature, large-scale industry and large-scale resource extraction. This caused dissent among northerners

¹⁵Anderson and Bone 136.

who believed that their needs were not appreciated by foresters.

Similarly, advocates of designating the Churchill a Heritage River no longer spoke of protecting the interests of the region's Aboriginal people. C. Stuart Houston, who had presented on the work of the Churchill River Basin Group, told the conference that in the 1970s, "the welfare of the native people along the river was the greatest concern, and most important single argument, of the CRBG [Churchill River Basin Group]."¹⁶ But when the welfare of northern residents no longer depended on a pristine Churchill River, and when the culture of Aboriginal people was no longer pristine, southerners' concern disappeared.

But in many ways, not much had changed in the way southern Saskatchewan people thought about their environment. Nature was still remote to many southerners, existing mainly in wilderness environments. The conditions that threatened northern wilderness areas and sullied and polluted southern nature had gone largely unchecked. Many people still believed that escaping to the wilderness was extremely important, and so they fought hard to retain those wilderness areas.

But why wilderness? Wilderness is beautiful and rare. It is the antithesis of the civilization that makes us tired, depressed, and harried. It is absent of the pollutants that make people ill. And it reassures us that there is still something left, something civilization has not yet touched. It is still there for us to return to. It represents our "true home" our garden of Eden from which we fell. By preserving wilderness we can congratulate ourselves on protecting nature, but at the same time, we continue on with the activities

¹⁶Houston, 69.

that threaten wilderness. Wilderness preservation allows us to ignore the problems very close to home that actually make people physically and mentally ill.

There will always be disputes over nature, but perhaps too much time is spent asking whose values are most important. More often, the question that needs answering is do our values make sense? For instance, why is wilderness so important to so many people? If wilderness is valued as a refuge, that suggests that something is wrong with where we live, our homes, and communities. Perhaps then more attention should be focussed on creating home spaces from which we do not need to flee. Also, does it make sense to value nature, but at the same time, threaten it with continued degradation? Maybe we are looking in the wrong places for spiritual renewal and cultural identity. We should ask ourselves why we need to travel so far to find beauty. We should ask ourselves why we need to “get away from it all.”

From the 1970s to the 1990s significant changes had taken place in the way Aboriginal people used and spoke about nature, but very little else had changed. The same problems of underemployment and poverty still faced northerners, and southerners still wanted to escape their homes for northern wilderness. Nature was still threatened, but neither northerners nor southerners had made significant improvements in their quality of life. The intervening twenty years had failed to produce effective solutions to the problems facing Saskatchewan residents. The Churchill River Study, as the first pre-approval environmental and social study, seemed to mark the beginning of a new era of natural resource use. Although it provoked a discussion on environmental issues that could not have otherwise taken place, it also played a part in limiting that discussion. The

Study did not allow debate on alternative energy sources or energy conservation. Neither did the southern environmentalist agenda include a reexamination of their lifestyles.

Arguments over nature reflect the values of the various parties involved. In the 1970s, working-class southerners wanted to develop the Churchill River to boost Saskatchewan's lagging economy and provide jobs for its citizens. Middle-class southerners wanted to protect the Churchill from development to allow continued tourism. Northerners opposed hydroelectric development to protect domestic production. In the 1990s the middle-class southerners still had the same objective, but northerners had changed. Because their economic needs now depended on large-scale resource exploitation, they no longer advocated preservation. Although northerners changed their arguments drastically, *the problem remained exactly the same*: what should be done with the Churchill River? The problem remained the same because attitudes toward nature had been left unexamined. This thesis has analysed the values of Saskatchewan residents in the 1970s in an attempt to highlight some of the areas that require reexamination.

What we value determines our relationship with nature. Our values are determined by our culture, economic status, education, geographical location, and gender. Therefore, the values we hold are not universal. Until we can internalize this, we cannot begin to reexamine our value systems, and understand the values of others. Without examination, debates over land use will continue to be polarized and dogmatic. Equally as important, we will leave unexamined how we choose the places we protect.

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