

Bimose Tribal Council

Tribal Council Report Phase II - Executive Summary

Introduction

The Ontario Clean Water Agency (OCWA) was retained by the Ontario First Nations Technical Services Corporation (OFNTSC) to carry out an overall general assessment study of existing water and sewage facilities in First Nation communities with regard to the magnitude and scope of existing and potential problems in terms of health and safety risks.

From late February to early April, a representative from OCWA traveled to eight out of ten of the communities within Bimose and met with the facility operators. Site visit to the Washagamis Bay community could not be arranged and the Lac des Milles Lacs is uninhabited. Jodie Knibbs, Tribal Council Advisor, was also in attendance at seven of the eight community visits. Larry Karaim, Tribal Council Advisor, was in attendance at the eighth community, Iskatewizaagegan.

From interviews with the operators and the completion of questionnaires, information was collected by OCWA and compiled into individual Community Reports included in Appendix "A". At the time of the visits, walkthrough tours of the facilities were conducted by OCWA and observations were recorded in the reports. This Tribal Council Report summarizes the findings from the Community Reports.

Community Services

The Bimose Tribal Council is comprised of ten communities. The Wabauskang, Eagle Lake, and Wabigoon Lake Ojibway communities are located within 70 km of Dryden. The Naokamegwanning, Wabaseemoong Independent, Iskatewizaagegan, Shoal Lake No. 40, Washagamis Bay, and Grassy Narrows communities are located within 80 km of Kenora. The Lac des Milles Lacs community is located 88 km northwest of Thunder Bay.

Based on the Capital Asset Inventory System (CAIS) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reports, the total on-site Bimose First Nations population amounts to 3,485, and there are 916 houses of which:

- 756 houses (82%) are serviced by communal water systems including in-ground distribution, 34 houses (4%) are serviced by individual wells, 3 houses are serviced by water haulage to holding tanks, and the remaining 128 houses (14%) are serviced by other means; and
- 513 houses (56%) are serviced by communal sewage systems, 359 houses (39%) are serviced by individual septic tanks, and the remaining 44 houses (5%) have other sewage services.

The water treatment facility in the Iskatewizaagegan is a Class II facility. Naokamegwanning, Eagle Lake, Wabigoon Lake Ojibway, and Grassy Narrows have Class II water treatment facilities. Wabauskang, Shoal Lake, and Wabaseemoong Independent have Class I water treatment facilities.

Grassy Narrows and Naokamegwanning have Class II sewage treatment facilities; Iskatewizaagegan has a Class III sewage treatment facility; and Wabaseemoong Independent has a Class I sewage treatment facility.

Risk Assessment

It was reported that there had been at least seven Boil Water Advisories placed on six of the communities in the past year - on the water supply system.

OCWA's assessment identifies the following locations to have potential high risk issues:

- Wabauskang - communal water system;
- Naokamegwanning (Whitefish Bay) - communal water and sewage systems;
- Iskatewizaagegan - communal water system;
- Shoal Lake No. 40 - communal water system;
- Wabigoon Lake Ojibway - communal water system;
- Grassy Narrows - communal water and sewage systems; and
- Wabaseemoong Independent - communal water system.

The following communities' water supply is considered high risk because of the following:

- the Wabauskang, Naokamegwanning and Wabigoon Lake Ojibway communities because of Boil Water Advisories and equipment malfunctions;
- the Iskatewizaagegan community because of malfunctioning equipment (the alarms are turned off), the system is operating without chlorination, and a phenol exceedance
- the Shoal Lake No. 40 community because of a Boil Water Advisory and no filtration;
- the Grassy Narrows community because of a Boil Water Advisory and the presence of high THM's; and
- the Wabaseemoong Independent because of a Boil Water Advisory, continued turbidity exceedances, and no filtration.

The following communities' sewage treatment is considered high risk because of the following:

- the Naokamegwanning community because of bypassing/basement floodings, inadequate operator training, malfunctioning equipment, and no effluent testing
- the Grassy Narrows community because of sludge digester is full of sludge and affecting the treatment process, infrequent sampling, and no backup power

Definition of Risk

High risk issues may include non-compliance events, broken or malfunctioning equipment, lack of necessary monitoring equipment, inadequate sampling/testing/reporting, safety issues and lack of operator training. These items should be acted upon immediately.

The report also identifies medium risk issues that should be attended to in the short term. These issues include design and capacity assessments, record drawings and manuals, and backup power supplies.

Long term planning objectives have also been identified in the report. These objectives are to ensure that a support structure is put in place to not only bring the facilities into compliance with approved operating standards, but also through operator training, testing and reporting protocols, planning and capital improvements, to maintain that level of operational excellence. This approach will ensure the long term health and safety of both the communities and the operators while also maintaining the value of the capital assets.

Recommendations

The report recommends immediate action be taken on the high risk issues with attention being given to the medium risk issues. Concurrently, the long term planning issues should be formulated and implemented.

From OCWA's observations in the communities, it is recommended that consideration be given to further studies of the water distribution systems and the sewage collection systems. In addition the individual wells, water holding tanks, septic systems and other individual services should also be reviewed on a continuing basis.

The information available through the CAIS and INAC reports was found to be not up to date and/or in agreement. It is recommended that these reports be updated and reconciled.

The foremost recommendation would focus on operator training programs together with a reporting structure to ensure both operating compliance and effective response to changing conditions.