
Matawa First Nations Management Inc.

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 Matawa First Nations Management Inc. (Matawa) and met with the facility operators. Site visits of the last two communities were not required because one of the communities had refused to participate and the other one did not have any communal systems.

From interviews with the operators and the completion of questionnaires, information was collected by OCWA and compiled into 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 Matawa First Nations Management Inc. (Matawa) is comprised of ten communities: the Aroland community is located 30 km west; the Martin Falls community is located 170 km northeast, the Neskantaga (Landsdowne House) community is located 245 km northwest, and the Webequie community is located 320 km north of Nakima; the Eabametoong (Fort Hope) community is located 220 km northwest, the Ginoogaming community is located 40 km east, and the Long Lake No. 58 community is located 40 km northeast of Geraldton; the Nibinamik community is located 500 km northwest of Thunder Bay; and the Constance Lake community is located 30 km west of Hearst.

The Martin Falls and Hornepayne (White Water Lake) communities did not take part in the OCWA study.

Based on the Capital Asset Inventory System (CAIS) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reports, the total on-site Matawa population amounts to 4,558, and there are 1,084 houses of which:

- 95% of the houses are serviced by communal water systems, including in-ground distribution, and 5% are serviced by other means; and
- 83% of houses are serviced by communal sewage systems, 4% are serviced by individual septic tanks, 5% are serviced by individual sewage holding tanks, and the remaining 8% have other sewage services.

The water treatment facilities for the Aroland and Eabametoong communities are Class I facilities. Neskantaga, Nibinamik, Webequie, and Constance Lake have Class II water treatment facilities.

Webequie has a Class II sewage treatment facility. Aroland, Nibinamik, and Eabametoong have Class I treatment facilities.

Risk Assessment

It was reported that there had been up to 19 Boil Water Advisories placed on six of the communities in the past two years - mainly on the water treatment and distribution system.

There has been multiple Boil water Advisories at the Aroland, Neskantaga, Constance Lake and Eabametoong communities in the last two years. One Boil Water Advisory has been issued at the Nibinamik and Webeque communities.

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

- Aroland - communal water and sewage systems;
- Neskantaga - communal water system;
- Webeque - communal water and sewage systems;
- Constance Lake - communal water system;
- Eabametoong - communal water and sewage systems;
- Ginoogaming - communal sewage system; and
- Long Lake No. 58 - communal sewage system.

The water supply systems are rated high risk because of the Boil Water Advisories, turbidity not being monitored, insufficient sampling, equipment in need of repairs, water shortages and THMs in treated water. The sewage systems are rated as high risk because of needed berm repairs, odour issues, sewage bypasses, basement flooding, and repairs to valves.

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 sewage 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.