

Thunder Bay Services Centre - Unaffiliated First Nations (North)

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.

The OCWA representative visited 11 of the 16 communities of the Thunder Bay Service Centre - Unaffiliated First Nations (North) from February to April of 2001. This report summarizes the information gathered, and observations made, at the time of the visits. The Namay Goosisa Gagun, Sandpoint, Saugeen, Poplar Point, and Flying Post communities were not visited.

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 Northern Unaffiliated First Nations is comprised of 16 communities: the Ochiichagwe'babigo'ining (Dalles) community is located 8 km northwest of Kenora; the Sandy Lake community is located 225 northwest of Red Lake; the Mishkeegogamang and Namay Goosisa Gagun communities are located approximately 250 to 300 km northwest of Thunder Bay; the Gull Bay community is located approximately 180 km north of Thunder Bay; the Fort William community is located just south of Thunder Bay; the Saugeen community is located 95 km northeast of Sioux Lookout; the Sandpoint, Rocky Bay, Lake Helen, Poplar Point, and Pays Plat communities are located within 65 km from Nipigon; the Pic Mobert and Ojibways of the Pic River communities are located within 10 km from Marathon; the Michipicoten community is located 3 km west of Wawa; and the Flying Post community is located near Nipigon.

Based on the Capital Asset Inventory System (CAIS) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) reports, the total Unaffiliated First Nations (North) population amounts to 5,715 and there are 1,466 houses of which:

- 74% of the houses are serviced by communal water systems including in-ground distribution, 4% are serviced by individual wells, 10% are serviced by water haulage to holding tanks, and the remainder 12% are serviced by other means; and
- 34% of houses are serviced by communal sewage systems, 56% are serviced by individual septic tanks, and the remaining 10% have other sewage services.

Risk Assessment

It was reported that there had been up to 14 Boil Water Advisories placed on five of the communities in the past year - mainly on the water treatment and distribution system.

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

- Ochiichagwe'babigo'ining (Dalles) - communal water system;
- Pays Plat - communal water system;
- Biinjitwabik Zaaging (Rocky Bay) - communal water and sewage systems; and
- Gull Bay - communal water system.

The water supply systems are categorized as high risk because of the Boil Water Advisory, malfunctioning equipment and other issues. The sewage facility is categorized as high risk because of frequent power failures leading to flooding and improper discharges.

The report has identified potential medium risk issues at the following two locations:

- Pic Moberg – communal water system; and
- Gull Bay - communal sewage system.

Definition of Risk

High-risk issues 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 on immediately.

The report also identifies medium risk issues that should be attended to in the short term. These issues include spare parts and equipment, 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 not up to date. 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.