

Participation of Northerners and Aboriginal People in Uranium Development in Saskatchewan

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The participation of northern Saskatchewan First Nations and Metis residents in the development of Saskatchewan's uranium resources is a case study in mutually beneficial development. The northern Saskatchewan experience is one which demonstrates that the interests of industry and people in disadvantaged regions can be—and must be—mutually addressed. The Government of Saskatchewan has played a key role in supporting this process. This paper reviews the manner in which northern Saskatchewan uranium has been developed.

Northern Saskatchewan is a vast and beautiful region of more than 320 000 km² with large tracts of forested areas interspersed with numerous lakes, rivers and streams. The northern half of the province is sparsely populated with about 40 000 residents in 36 communities, which represents less than 4% of the provincial population. More than 80% of the northern population is of aboriginal ancestry. Approximately 70% of the aboriginal people are Cree while 30% are Dene (Chipewyan). The latter live mainly in the far north and northwest areas of the province.

Ending the Colonial Era

The Cree and Dene entered the world economy through the fur trade period beginning in the 1700s. They have provided furs to the European market since that time. Of the 100 000 Canadians making their livelihood from the trapping industry, just under 1000 are from northern Saskatchewan. Inland commercial fishing, which did not fully

develop until after World War II, peaked in 1969. Tourism activity began in the area during the 1950s. Forestry development has also evolved since that time.

In the colonial era, the indigenous Cree and Dene of northern Saskatchewan were essential participants in the economy of the fur trade. They provided fur for the European market, and in the process lost much of their independence, becoming reliant on this new economy. When European fashions changed and the demand for fur declined, the focus of Canada's development shifted. The potential of agricultural development, and later industrial development, lay in the southern regions of Canada; the north became largely "out of sight and out of mind".

The north was maintained in a "colonial" state in the sense that, until the 1970s, the institutions of northern life were largely directed by non-residents and non-indigenous peoples. Government, religion, education, commerce—all were controlled by legislatures, churches, companies and administrators in headquarters elsewhere. Poverty and the many social ills associated with unemployment and lack of opportunity were widespread, taking their toll on many families and individuals. But northern people persevered and maintained their determination to regain their independence; to participate in governance and development as full partners; to end their colonial status.

Northern people have significantly increased their control and involvement in northern

development and government since the 1970s. In that decade, elected northern school boards attained regional authority for education. A regionally elected Northern Municipal Council was created in 1974 and municipal government was further developed with a new Northern Municipalities Act in 1983. Northerners are presently in the process of assuming responsibility for health services with the establishment of three northern health boards. First Nation Indian Bands have gone through a similar process of asserting more local authority.

Differences and Common Goals

Northern Saskatchewan society is not homogeneous. There are distinct differences among its people. The Denesuline communities of the Athabasca region are culturally distinct from the Metis and Cree communities south of Buffalo Narrows. The communities on the west side of northern Saskatchewan are quite different from those on the east side.

First Nations people who were signatory to historic treaties with the federal government—sometimes referred to as “Treaty Indians”—have different legal status from the Metis and non-aboriginal population. Languages differ as do the cultures. As well, northern communities include people who rely heavily on the land and the traditional harvest of wildlife and those who either wish to participate or are already employed in the wage-based economy.

These differences make it difficult to generalise about northern Saskatchewan. There are however three fundamental objectives shared by all northerners to which both government and industry must respond:

- Economic independence through employment and business development, including the option of maintaining traditional lifestyles associated with hunting, trapping and commercial fishing.
- Northern control and administration of northern social and political institutions.
- Cultural recognition through the maintenance of traditional values, customs and languages, and protection of the natural environment.

While the renewal of northern Saskatchewan is still work-in-progress, significant strides in meeting these objectives have been achieved during the past two decades, supported in part by the cooperative efforts of the provincial government and the uranium industry. The challenge to both government and industry is to maintain this momentum, ensuring that development of Saskatchewan’s uranium resources continues to

support—and is seen to support—the aspirations of the people who live in the region. To do otherwise would be to lose the confidence of the Saskatchewan public in undertaking responsible development of our uranium resources.

Cultural and Socio-Economic Considerations

Cree and Dene cultures have traditionally valued and acknowledged the importance of labour and quality work. Cree words such as *otukoskew* (worker) and *otutoskeyagun* (helper) reflect the role and importance of labour in Cree society, with words such as *e neetawutosket* recognising high skill levels which were valued and respected. While there may be difference in form and substance, there is a shared respect for worker excellence among aboriginal and European cultures. This provides the basis for collaborative relationships in the modern workplace.

In northern Saskatchewan, as elsewhere in the world, there is a strong preference to be working—even to participate in demanding labour—than to be caught in the cycle of welfare dependence. Northerners know the devastating effects of unemployment and welfare dependency, having experienced unemployment rates exceeding 30% in a province where the normal unemployment rate has been about 6%.

An important assessment of the effects of unemployment was published by the Canadian Mental Health Association in 1983 and updated in 1992. Authored by Sharon Kirsh, the publication titled *Unemployment: Its Impact on Body and Soul*,¹ documented research that links unemployment as a major factor in contributing to poverty, alcoholism, illness and suicide—despair and depression of the human spirit. The evidence of this has been clear in northern Saskatchewan, where suicide rates far exceed the provincial norm, and where fetal alcohol syndrome, alcoholism and the other results of poverty have been all too common.

Given these circumstances which have confronted northerners, it is tragic when the politics of fear and emotion concerning wildlife and the environment are applied to regions such as northern Saskatchewan. Some people, claiming concern for maintaining sustainable development, object to the harvest of wild fur and, as we have seen within the European Union, encourage legislation to ban the import or use of such fur. They would deny northern aboriginal people the opportunity to maintain a traditional, independent livelihood, conducted in harmony with nature—a truly

sustainable industry.

Some of these same people, applying the same politics of fear and emotion, oppose northern mining, notwithstanding its responsible regulation. They would deny northern aboriginal people the opportunity of training, employment, self-sufficiency and self-pride. Where is their concern for the sustainability of the people of northern Saskatchewan?

Shortly after it was re-elected in 1992, the Saskatchewan New Democratic Party (NDP) held its annual provincial convention and debated whether uranium development should be phased out or continued within the province.

Having seen the results of northern poverty, and knowing the regulatory safeguards in respect of mining and milling, the author's concerns, as an elected member of the NDP government, were focused on how uranium development could be undertaken in a manner which would ensure participation and benefits for northern people. For the writer, the key debating point was simply this: people in northern Saskatchewan were not dying from radiation, they were dying from unemployment, poverty and lack of opportunity.

The convention voted to continue responsible development of our uranium resources.

Protection of the environment is essential, but it must be balanced against the benefits afforded by the stimulation of social and economic development, which is a significant factor in the long term stability and growth—indeed the 'sustainability'—of any society. It is society's responsibility to ensure that this balance is achieved when making the decision as to whether or not industrial development projects should proceed.

The World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland ten years ago, declared that sustainable development must ensure that the participation and interests of indigenous peoples are fully addressed when development occurs. The Brundtland Commission report (*Our Common Future*) noted that:

"Indigenous peoples will need special attention as the forces of economic development disrupt their traditional lifestyles—lifestyles that offer modern societies many lessons in the management of resources in complex forest, mountain and dryland ecosystems. Some are threatened with virtual extinction by insensitive development over which they have no control."²

This paper documents measures taken to ensure that sustainable benefits from resource

development, with the active participation of indigenous peoples, are being achieved as an essential element of the growth of the uranium industry in northern Saskatchewan. However a brief review of the history of uranium mining in Saskatchewan reveals that this was not always so.

History of Uranium in Saskatchewan

Phase 1—Uranium City

The development of the uranium mining industry in northern Saskatchewan can be divided into three distinct phases, the first of which took place near the end of the Second World War and was centred in the far northwest corner of the province (see Figure 1).

In 1944 Eldorado Mining and Refining Limited, owned by the Government of Canada, teamed up with the Geological Survey of Canada and expended a considerable effort in the geological mapping and prospecting of the Beaverlodge Lake area on the north shore of Lake Athabasca. Over one thousand pitchblende or radioactive occurrences were identified as a result of the survey, and a decision was made by Eldorado to establish a mine and mill.

Production mining began in early 1953. Ultimately ten ore bodies in the Beaverlodge area reached the production stage. During the initial 10 years, three mills operated on the north shore of Lake Athabasca—the Eldorado Mining and Refining Limited mill with a capacity of 2000 t/day, the Gunnar Mining Limited mill with a similar capacity, and the Lorado Uranium Mines Limited mill with a capacity of 750 t/day. After the Gunnar and Lorado mills were shut down in 1964, only the Eldorado facility was processing ore.

In the early 1950s, because of this increasing mining activity, the government of the day formed the opinion that it was necessary to establish a town site to provide services to an expanding workforce. In 1952 a site was surveyed by the Government of Saskatchewan and designated as Uranium City. The community, with a population of approximately 1500 in 1956, eventually had all the amenities of southern communities.

The population of Uranium City rapidly increased in the ensuing years and peaked at approximately 4600 in 1959. With a decline in mining activity in the area the population slowly dropped, reaching approximately 2500 in 1979 and 2100 by 1981.³ In 1982, following a decision by Eldorado Mining and Milling to shut down its operation, the population of Uranium City

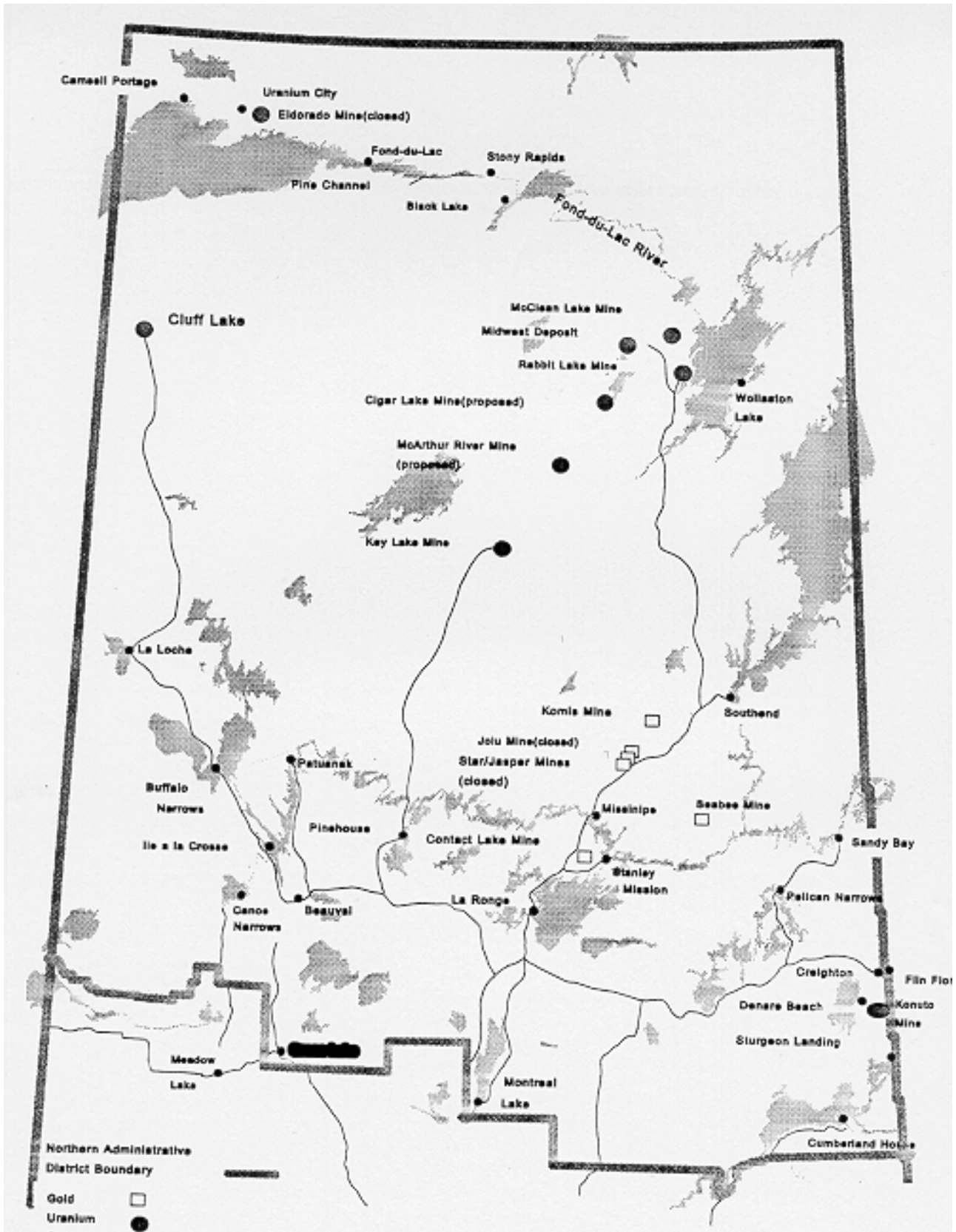


Figure 1. Northern Saskatchewan, showing main communities and mining developments.

plummeted. Today the community is little more than a hamlet with a population that hovers around 150.

The legacy of this initial phase of uranium development in northern Saskatchewan is typical of the boom and bust of “hinterland economies”

observed in many parts of the world. The community and workforce employed at the mines was made up entirely of people from outside the north and, to a large extent, of people from outside Saskatchewan and even Canada. Virtually all of the required goods and services were imported from the south with a significant portion of the economic benefits being realised not by Saskatchewan but by the neighbouring province of Alberta. Although the Government of Saskatchewan provided many essential services to the area, such as health and education, few benefits were realised by the people of Saskatchewan and virtually no benefits were garnered by the people of the north.

The situation has been compounded by the fact that when mining was concluded in the early 1980s, although the Eldorado mine and mill complex was decommissioned, the community of Uranium City was essentially abandoned overnight and remains even today a virtual ghost town with many of the buildings still standing.

Neither the Gunnar Mine, which itself consisted of a community of some 1200 workers and associated facilities, nor the Lorado Mill were decommissioned. As a result they remain today in need of decommissioning and reclamation, an undertaking which will involve significant public costs. On reflection one must conclude that the initial stage of uranium development in northern Saskatchewan resulted in little social or economic benefit for the people of Saskatchewan, particularly the people of the north. This is particularly true when the legacy of this boom and bust development is considered—an abandoned community and two mining and milling operations which have yet to be fully decommissioned.

Phase 2—Cluff Lake and Key Lake

Twenty years after the initial boom of uranium development in the Uranium City area, a social democratic government was elected in Saskatchewan with a mandate that included a particular commitment to improve opportunities for northern residents. The government recognised the need for distinct approaches to northern issues and addressed that need by enacting specific legislation and creating government institutions to deal exclusively with northern policies and programme delivery.

As an example, the Department of Northern Saskatchewan (DNS) was established in 1972 to be responsible for virtually all facets of provincial policy, planning and programme delivery for

northern Saskatchewan. During its tenure, DNS was a central provincial government agency with a global overview of northern issues. It made significant expenditures which peaked above C\$95 million per year in 1981. DNS also marked the beginning of concerted efforts to increase northern participation in northern decision-making through the development of municipal government, elected school boards and committees, and the employment of northerners within DNS itself.

It was in this context of significant provincial government initiatives to improve living conditions and opportunities in northern Saskatchewan that the second phase of uranium development took place. It was a time when the provincial government expected its social and environmental priorities to be shared by the proponents of the mining industry. This second phase can primarily be characterised by development of the Cluff Lake mine and mill undertaken in 1978 and the Key Lake mine and mill in 1981.

The Cluff Lake Board of Inquiry

In late 1976 the Saskatchewan Department of the Environment received an Environmental Assessment and Safety Report for the development of a uranium mining and milling operation south of Lake Athabasca near Cluff Lake. The proposal was from Amok Ltd, a Canadian corporation whose shareholders consisted of three French private companies—Compagnie de Mokta, Compagnie Française des Minerais d'Uranium, and Pechiney Ugine Kuhlman—and a French State Corporation—Commissariat à l'Énergie Atomique.⁴

After a preliminary study of the report by officials of various government departments, the Minister of Environment advised the government that a public inquiry to review the proposal was warranted. The scope of the inquiry, chaired by Justice E D Bayda, included two distinct aspects—the Cluff Lake mine and mill proposal and an assessment of the overall future expansion of uranium development in Saskatchewan.

The terms of the inquiry were to review all available information and to receive public comment in relation to relevant questions. These questions included reference to workers' health and safety, the physical environment, concerns about nuclear weapons, and the potential social and economic effects upon the Saskatchewan population with specific reference to northern residents.⁴

The inquiry began in April 1977 with formal hearings in Saskatoon and Regina which lasted 67 days and heard some 138 witnesses, creating more

than 10 000 pages of transcripts. These were followed by local hearings in 23 communities throughout Saskatchewan, including 14 northern communities.

On 31 May 1978 the Cluff Lake Board of Inquiry submitted its final report to the Government of Saskatchewan. The report included some 174 conclusions and recommendations, ranging from those specific to the technical aspect of the proposed development to those dealing with ethical judgements and moral obligations regarding the nuclear industry in general.

Socio-economic recommendations from the inquiry included expectations of the proponents and the provincial government to ensure northern employment and business opportunities associated with the Cluff Lake project. The inquiry's recommendations also called on the province to develop a structure to more directly share the revenues generated from future uranium mining with the people of the north. The inquiry report did not, however, address federal government participation or responsibilities associated with this latter proposal—given federal receipt of revenue from mining ventures and the federal government's fiduciary responsibility for the majority of the people in the region in which uranium mining takes place.

The Key Lake Board of Inquiry

In October 1979 the Key Lake Mining Corporation submitted to the Saskatchewan Department of Environment the final Environmental Impact Statement in respect of its proposal to mine and mill uranium near Key Lake. In December of that year, the Government of Saskatchewan appointed a further board of inquiry to examine the various aspects of the proposal and to make recommendations to the Minister of Environment concerning the conditions under which the project should proceed.

The Key Lake Board of Inquiry held 68 formal sessions, nine informal hearings and 18 community visitations. All of the board's activities took place in northern communities, with an additional 55 information centres established throughout the province.

In its final report submitted in January 1981 the Key Lake Board of Inquiry made numerous recommendations on aspects of the proposed development. As with the Cluff Lake Inquiry, significant discussion was dedicated to the social and economic issues affecting the north and the potential impact of the Key Lake proposal on northern communities and people. Emphasis was

again placed on the need for the government and industry to ensure training, employment and business opportunities for northerners.

Government Policies

Recommendations from the two inquiries supported government initiatives to ensure northern residents would benefit in a meaningful way from the Cluff Lake and Key Lake projects.

One of the initial tools used by the government to ensure that employment opportunities at these mine sites were made available to local residents was the "surface lease". If a mining company wanted the surface rights to develop a mine, it was required to lease the surface lands from the government. As a condition of this lease, the companies were required to employ 50% northerners. In addition the surface leases stipulated that northern mines must provide a 10% bidding preference for northern based contractors bidding on work at the mine site.

These were significant requirements given the under-participation of northern people prior to the Cluff Lake project and the cost impact of providing preferential treatment to northern-based contractors. But these obligations succeeded in jump-starting northern participation in mining, as Cluff Lake succeeded in reaching northern employment levels of 50% and northern business contracts of C\$10 million during the initial production year.⁵

One shortcoming of this initial quota system of preferential hiring of workers was that it did not adequately address training requirements, given that many northerners lacked the education or experience to qualify for positions requiring higher skill levels at a modern uranium mining and milling operation. As a result, mining companies either could not meet their prescribed quota, or northerners were frequently employed in menial positions which required little or no training. As noted by the Key Lake Board of Inquiry Report, "each time we met a person who expressed an interest in employment—indeed, each time we got into any kind of discussion respecting employment—the need for training was emphasised to us".⁵

In contrast to the earlier experience in the Uranium City area, industry and government both opted for "week-in, week-out" commuting to the new sites. No longer would the government create "company towns" for the sole purpose of finite non-renewable resource extraction. Instead, existing northern "impact communities" were designated

for priority recruitment and as pick up points for aircraft providing commuter transportation. These measures enhanced opportunities for northern people and ensured benefits from the mining ventures were shared among many northern settlements.

With a change in government in the early 1980s, a number of changes occurred in the conditions imposed within the surface lease agreements and in the government's overall initiatives directed at the north. In 1983 the Department of Northern Saskatchewan was disbanded, earlier than had been originally planned. In 1986 employment quotas were removed from surface lease requirements and replaced with a commitment by the mining companies operating in the north to negotiate separate Human Resource Development Agreements (HRDAs) with the provincial government.

The central feature of the HRDAs is that each mine proponent makes a specific commitment to maximise its recruitment, hiring, training and advancement of northern people for the upcoming year. The HRDAs also specify the impact communities from which the mine operator for each site must first recruit.

A worthwhile development in 1983 was creation of the Northern Labour Market Committee (NLMC), established to assist in coordinating the resources and programmes required to help northerners gain additional training and employment benefits from mineral development.

In the last ten years, the NLMC has evolved to address other job creation and business development issues in the north and has expanded to include more than just the mineral sector. Its quarterly meetings attract representatives from industry, senior governments, First Nations, Metis organisations, training institutions, organised labour, banks and businesses. The meetings provide a forum for the exchange of information on development trends, potential employment opportunities, and training needs – all from a strictly northern perspective.

The Present Situation

Phase 3—The 1990s

The third phase of uranium development in northern Saskatchewan is currently under way.

In April 1991 the governments of Canada and Saskatchewan announced a joint federal-provincial environmental assessment review process to address proposed new uranium developments in northern Saskatchewan. Included in the review,

overseen by a panel appointed by the two governments, were proposals for an expansion of the Cluff Lake Mine (the Dominique-Janine extension), the development of a new mine and mill at McClean Lake, and a satellite mine to McClean Lake—the Midwest Joint Venture. This review process was later expanded to include the proposed Cigar Lake and McArthur River mines, both of which proposed the mining of uranium ores with grades higher than any mined before.

The year 1991 also saw the return of a social democratic government in Saskatchewan under the leadership of Premier Roy Romanow. The new government also appointed the author, the Member of the Legislative Assembly for the northern Cumberland Constituency, as the first aboriginal member of the Provincial Cabinet.

Faced with continuing public concerns about uranium development, the new government moved quickly to clearly define its position with regard to the proposed expansion of the uranium industry. It stated that any future uranium development would be allowed to proceed only when it had been publicly judged to:

- provide for stringent environmental protection;
- provide stringent health and safety protection for workers;
- provide an appropriate level of economic benefit to the province as a whole and to northerners in particular.

The latter point remained critical, notwithstanding the growth of northern participation in northern mining which had occurred from Phase 1 to Phase 2 of the uranium industry's experience in Saskatchewan.

In 1991 the demographics of northern communities showed that the northern population was growing at an annual rate of 5.5% (substantially higher than the rates observed in southern Saskatchewan)⁶; almost 60% of northern residents were under the age of 25 (compared to 38% for the rest of the province)⁷; and unemployment levels in northern communities ranged from 25% to in excess of 33%.⁸ This was compounded by the fact that the majority of employable individuals lacked the appropriate skills to enter current and anticipated jobs.

Early in the term of the present government, it was recognised that the pressures of these demographic trends, if not addressed in a meaningful and permanent manner, would place unmanageable pressures on health, education, and other social programmes. It was also recognised that northern benefits from uranium mining were still

inadequate and did not fully meet the needs and expectations of the northern public.

In late 1995 the government created the Office of Northern Affairs, with the author as Minister, to provide a new focus on northern social and economic development. In addition to the administration of northern economic development programmes and surface lease agreements for northern mines, the office participates directly in the development of training and municipal government initiatives.

The office also coordinates the overall development and delivery of northern programmes and public communications on behalf of the provincial government. The objective of the Northern Affairs Office is to work with northern communities and industry to maintain the momentum of improving living conditions and opportunities for northern people.

The new provincial government continued its previous commitment to decentralise decision-making to northern people. The Northern Review Board, new Northern Health Districts controlled by Northern Health Boards, strengthened municipal government, and increased participation of northern people in northern business have all contributed to the momentum of social, political and economic development in northern Saskatchewan.

In October 1993 the Joint Federal-Provincial Review Panel released its recommendation on three of the proposed mines under review. The panel recommended the approval of the Dominique-Janine Extension at Cluff Lake and the new McClean Lake mine and mill, while recommending against approval of the proposed Midwest Project because of significant environmental and technical concerns. The Government of Saskatchewan, after a detailed review of all the recommendations made by the panel, approved both the Dominique-Janine Extension and the McClean Lake Project and refused to approve the Midwest Project.

In making its decision, the government also realised that the proposed expansion offered the chance to implement some innovative measures designed to enhance the social and economic benefits which could be realised by the north and its people as a result of these developments. Based on past experience, recommendations included in the review panel's report, and discussions with industry and training partners, the provincial government implemented initiatives to ensure its policies would provide additional benefits for

northern people from the further development of the north's uranium resources.

Multi-Party Training Plan

The first of these new initiatives was the design and implementation of what is referred to as the Multi-Party Training Plan—a five year, C\$10.5 million plan which targeted the training and employment of northerners for 60% of all new jobs created by the expanding mineral sector in the north. The plan was developed with, and approved by, the Northern Labour Market Committee made up of provincial and federal governments, industry and training institutions, as well as First Nations, Metis and northern agencies. This initiative achieved impressive results in its first four years and has become a model for northern development in other resource sectors such as forestry. As well, the plan has generated a great deal of interest in other provinces of Canada and internationally and received awards for its innovative methods of training to promote increased employment for aboriginal peoples.

The partners in the Multi-Party Training Plan have facilitated more than 850 enrolments of northern people in employment readiness and mine-related training. One quarter of enrolments in the plan have been in "adult upgrading" or work experience programmes. The majority of students have enrolled in skills, apprenticeship, technical and supervisory programmes, with training most often directly tied to employment.

The Multi-Party Training Plan has been successful in encouraging two groups with traditionally low participation rates to train for opportunities in the mining sector. Students of aboriginal ancestry made up more than 90% of all enrolments in the plan's training programmes. As well, 26% of enrolments in mine-related training have been female, and all of the female students have been of aboriginal ancestry. A human resource data bank, tracking education, training and work experience for more than 6000 northerners, is used for training programmes, to facilitate recruitment and to monitor the progress of the Multi-Party Training Plan.

Figures 2 and 3 and Table 1 show the growth in employment of northern and northern aboriginal people in the mining industry (mining companies and mining contractors) from 1990 to 1996, including the increase (in numbers and percentages) of northern employees in more highly skilled positions within mining. As of 31 March 1997, 1043 northerners (84% of aboriginal ancestry) were

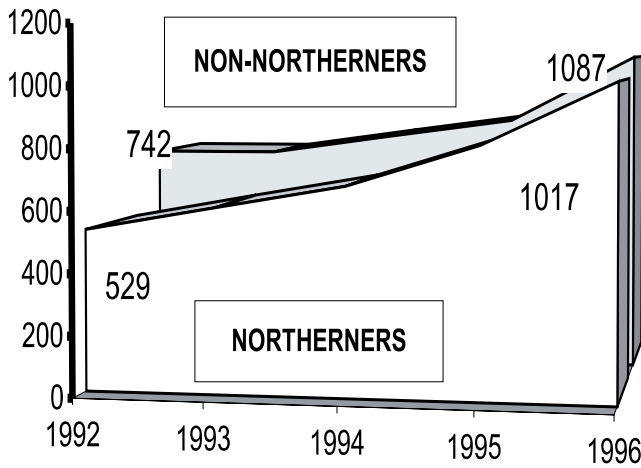


Figure 2. Employment of northerners and non-northerners at northern Saskatchewan mine sites, including contractors, 1992–96

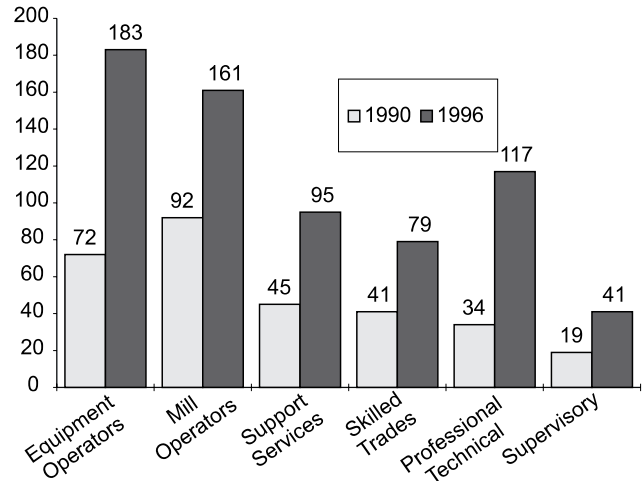


Figure 3. Employment of northerners by job type at northern Saskatchewan mine sites, excluding contractors (1990 and 1996 annual averages).

employed in northern Saskatchewan mining—908 in uranium mines, 135 in gold mines.

Northern Saskatchewan’s participation rate of aboriginal people in mining jobs far exceeds that achieved in mineral sector projects anywhere else in Canada.

As mineral exploration and development moves further into the Athabasca Basin geological formation, substantial high grade deposits such as those found at the McArthur River and Cigar Lake sites have been discovered and are in the process of being developed. This is leading to an ever increasing move towards deeper, more high-tech methods of mining. As a result, training must of necessity move with the times and focus to a lesser extent on heavy equipment operators and more on technology, robotics, chemical sciences and other areas more compatible with contemporary mining methods. The Multi-Party Training Plan, which is to be extended, will be flexible enough to meet these new training needs well into the next century.

Northern Development Fund

In response to a need to provide core funding for business development in northern Saskatchewan, the provincial government implemented the Northern Development Fund in 1995. The fund is a tool to help northerners develop northern based businesses to take advantage of increasing economic activity, particularly in the resource sector. The fund provides support to develop northern businesses and entrepreneurs, assisting those who may not qualify for funding from conventional financial agencies. The fund offers:

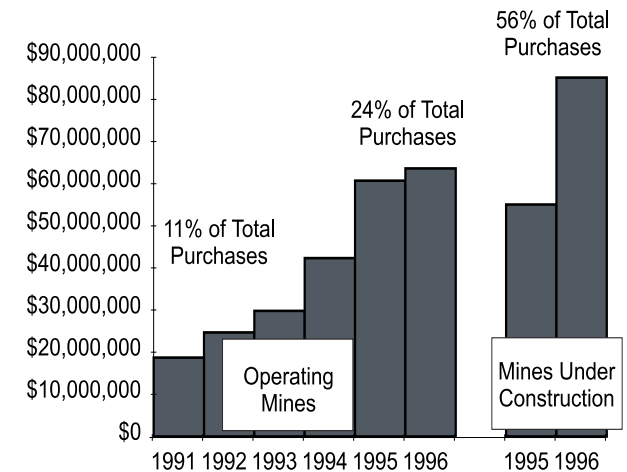


Figure 4. Value of contracts awarded to northern businesses and joint ventures by mining companies in northern Saskatchewan, 1991–96.

- Loans for the development of new businesses to service and support the mineral industry and other sectors of the northern economy.
- Assistance to primary producers, such as trappers, fisherman and wild rice growers business management support.
- Financial and professional assistance in marketing, promotion and research.
- Grants for business and organisational skills training.

The fund also provides for the operations of the Northern Review Board which monitors the performance of the fund, makes recommendations on loan and grant applications, acts as an appeal board, and provides advice in identifying economic development opportunities in the north. The review board, comprised entirely of northern residents,

Table 1. Participation rates of northerners (percentage of total work force) by job type at northern Saskatchewan mine sites, excluding contractors (1990 and 1996 annual averages).

	1990	1996
Equipment operators	51	75
Mill operators	72	82
Support services	73	78
Skilled trades	22	27
Professional/technical	26	40
Supervisory	14	22

also oversees provincial grants to Community-based Regional Economic Development Organisations (CREDOs) to assist communities in supporting local business development and job creation endeavours.

The Northern Development Fund provides more than C\$2.5 million for loans and grants to northern enterprises each year. Its expansion is under review.

The goal of increased northern participation in business activity is also supported by an annual Northern Business Opportunities Forum, sponsored by the provincial government in cooperation with industry, to increase awareness of business opportunities and to provide workshops and discussions in support of establishing and expanding northern firms.

As a result of expectations arising from past public reviews of uranium development proposals, uranium mining companies in northern Saskatchewan have been proactive in doing business with northern suppliers and contractors. They have also encouraged joint ventures where northern companies may develop expertise in partnership with established firms from elsewhere.

These various initiatives in support of developing the northern business community have dramatically increased the value of contracts awarded to northern companies and joint ventures, as shown in Figure 4.

Environmental Quality Committees

The report of the 1993 Joint Federal-Provincial Review Panel discussed the concept of community-based monitoring committees for the uranium industry in northern Saskatchewan:

“There is a need for the people of Saskatchewan to be reassured that the mines are operated in compliance with all regulations and that northern economic benefits are being maximised through appropriate hiring practices and policies related to business opportunities. However, it is clear from the hearings that neither the word of the

company executives nor of the officials from the regulatory agencies will be accepted without a certain amount of scepticism. To be completely believed, information must come from knowledgeable and trusted members of the local community.”⁹

Because a significant portion of the northern population is dependent on the harvest of wildlife for food and commerce, and because of a desire to maintain traditional trapping and commercial fishing activity as viable lifestyle and income options, it is vitally important to northerners that measures are in place to protect the northern environment. Indeed, Canadians generally insist that industry and government take measures to ensure the security and enjoyment of our natural environment.

Saskatchewan has some of the most stringent environmental protection legislation in the world. This has prevented any significant degradation of the biophysical environment as a result of uranium mining. However it is equally important that the men and women who live in the region in which the mining is taking place fully understand and trust that the environment in which they live is safe. They should also have the opportunity to contribute their wisdom and advice in proposing measures to ensure such environmental protection.

In order to address this need for northern public participation in regulation of the uranium mining industry, the province established three regional Environmental Quality Committees (EQCs). Membership of each EQC is comprised of representatives from impact communities designated in each uranium mine’s Human Resource Development Agreement. Individual members are nominated by their community to represent their concerns related to uranium mining development in northern Saskatchewan. The activities of the EQCs are supported by professionals from the provincial government’s Northern Mines Monitoring Secretariat, based in the northern community of La Ronge.

These committees have been in operation for three years and have made a significant contribution in addressing issues of concern. They have increased the understanding of northerners about the industry and how it is regulated and, equally important, they have raised the level of understanding of both the uranium industry and government as to issues of concern to northerners. Perhaps the most vivid indication of this was the 1996 public hearing on the McArthur River and Cigar Lake proposals

at which two of the EQCs made strong, well researched presentations to the Joint Federal-Provincial Review Panel.

The importance of incorporating traditional skills in the management of our environment, and involving northern people in the monitoring process, may be better understood through a personal experience of the author.

One summer during my university years, I was employed as a geophysical surveyor. While working with one of my uncles who was an expert trapper and hunter, he asked me to identify a set of footprints on a sand base. After I had pondered and unsuccessfully used my scientific powers of observation, he smiled and told me it was a bear track. I asked how he could tell given the tracks were barely visible in the sand. He smiled, pointed, and picked out a hair from a tree.

That incident helps demonstrate the advantage of applying traditional skills to modern science. Such skills contribute to the value of northern people constituting the EQCs and training as technical workers in the labs and carrying out fieldwork associated with northern mining.

The Future of Uranium in Saskatchewan

McArthur River

The Joint Federal-Provincial Review Panel's 1997 report on the McArthur River project echoed the theme of social and economic obligations in recommending approval of the richest uranium development project ever undertaken:

"The environmental damage and potential social disruption caused by the McArthur River Project can be justified only if the project returns certain benefits to Canadian society. To be acceptable, resource development must bring benefits to Canadians in general and to local residents in particular. The major quantifiable benefits take two forms—taxes/royalties paid to government, and employment/business opportunities for citizens."¹⁰

The panel's report went further in recommending specific targets for employment and business opportunities for northern people. Noting the achievement of a 50% northern employment rate in existing mines, the panel called for an increase by 1% each year until at least 67% of the workforce is northern. They also recommended that an objective of at least 35% of all required goods and services from northern suppliers be added to the socio-economic provisions which continue to be included within surface lease agreements.

Appropriately, the panel also said that the federal and provincial governments should adopt similar human resource objectives as those being applied to the uranium mining industry. This expectation is currently being pursued within the Government of Saskatchewan.

The panel made new references to revenue sharing:

"It is evident from their words and actions that northern leaders wish to have the issue of revenue sharing resolved in a political forum rather than as part of the environmental review process. We agree with that approach and urge both levels of government to become involved in a multipartite discussion of revenue sharing with northern leaders."¹¹

The panel acknowledged that the matter of revenue sharing is complex, with federal, provincial, constitutional and political issues which should not be resolved at the expense of any single industry. The issue of precedent, with respect to other resources revenues received by the provincial and federal governments, adds to the complexity of this question.

There is, however, a basis for agreement from which consensus may be achieved "in a political forum". The premier of the province, together with the author and several other members of the cabinet met with northern political leaders—municipal, First Nations and Metis—in May 1997 to initiate a dialogue with northern leaders to develop a joint northern strategy intended to ensure provincial priorities and expenditures respond to the priorities of northern people.

There was agreement on a common desire to improve living conditions, increase opportunities, and ensure the northern economy is developed and diversified for long-term sustainability. Training, job creation, further increases in northern control of northern affairs, improved infrastructure and more efficient government services were all accepted as priorities to be translated into new action plans. Revenues received by the provincial and federal government, from various sources, must be used for this purpose.

Completion of the struggle of northern people to regain independence, by concluding the colonial chapter of our northern history, is now within reach. It is necessary for all who participate in the development of our resources to also participate in this larger obligation of supporting the social and economic development of our people.

Cooperation and Collaboration

Social and economic conditions in northern Saskatchewan remain at a level below those in other parts of Saskatchewan. The economic base in the north is small and its geographic location provides hurdles in the form of a limited consumer base for local products and high transportation costs both into and out of northern communities. These factors, combined with others such as depressed prices in the traditional renewable resource economy and the regrettable and largely uninformed debates in Europe regarding northern trapping, only serve to exacerbate the situation.

The uranium mining industry offers one of the few economic opportunities available to northerners and allows them a choice between a traditional lifestyle and the wage-based economy.

Social and economic benefits arising from non-renewable resources such as mineral development in Saskatchewan can of course form only part of the solution to northern economic stability. A public investment strategy, as opposed to one with only an expenditure focus, will also be necessary to ensure that dollars spent today will support the future well being of northern residents when the current non-renewable resources are depleted and are no longer a contributing factor to the northern economy.

The cooperative and collaborative efforts of the northern Saskatchewan uranium mining industry,

in working with governments, communities and northern people, is a successful model for mutually beneficial development. The industry's achievements deserve recognition. The industry's continued participation in meeting new and greater expectations must also be recognised—for the well being of northern Saskatchewan, and for the well being of the industry.

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