

Objections to the plan

A group has recently started in Saskatoon, as a result of these development proposals. It is called the Churchill River Basin Study Group and its stated objectives are "to study the Churchill River Basin with a view toward formulating recommendations for its wise use concerning the needs of the whole province with respect to energy and resource development. Its aim is to aid in the dissemination of information to the people of the province and to recommend that no decisions should be made without full public knowledge and majority support of native residents of the area."

The group sent off a letter to Premier Blakeney asking certain questions about the various projects under consideration. To date, the Premier has referred their letter to Industry Minister Kim Thorson, minister in charge of the SPC. These questions deal with the basis of the estimated power demands, the economics of long distance power transportation, alternate power sources, river diversion schemes being considered, ecological damage to the area and effects on the resident population. Answers to these questions would provide people with a much clearer picture of what the developments would actually mean.

Other considerations enter into the proposed developments. In 1969, the governments of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba plus the federal government signed the Apportionment Agreement which provided for the equitable sharing of all eastflowing streams. Saskatchewan is entitled to store and use one-third of flows as they enter the province and 1/2 of the natural flow which originates in the province. This agreement also allows Saskatchewan to use more than its share of water in the Saskatchewan River as long as it makes up that deficit by diverting water via Frog Portage from the Churchill River. Hydro developments on the Churchill in Saskatchewan have to be very carefully studied to assess their impact on the hydro developments on the books for Manitoba.

Another problem complicating the decisions about the proposed dams has been raised in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Many agencies in both provinces in both provinces have made petitions to keep the Churchill River completely intact as a "whitewater" park area. In 1971, Eiling Cramer, then Natural Resources Minister decided to undertake studies which would examine the feasibility of turning the area into either a national or provincial park. Organizations such as the Wildlife Federation, Saskatchewan Camping Association, Saskatchewan Natural History Society and Saskatoon Environmental Society have expressed interest in seeing the river preserved.

As well, there are fears that severe ecological damage will be caused by the developments. Frog Portage will disappear under 40 feet of water, thereby destroying an area of historical significance. Several sets of rapids will be removed and a large portion of the canoe route. The flooded area back of the Iskawatam dam will extend to Drinking Falls in the west and to Reindeer Lake in the north. This will flood a large area used for commercial fishing and alter the character of many miles of river. The Pita dam will remove several more rapids areas and wipe out a very profitable sturgeon fishing concern. This area

is one of the few sturgeon fishing areas left in the province.

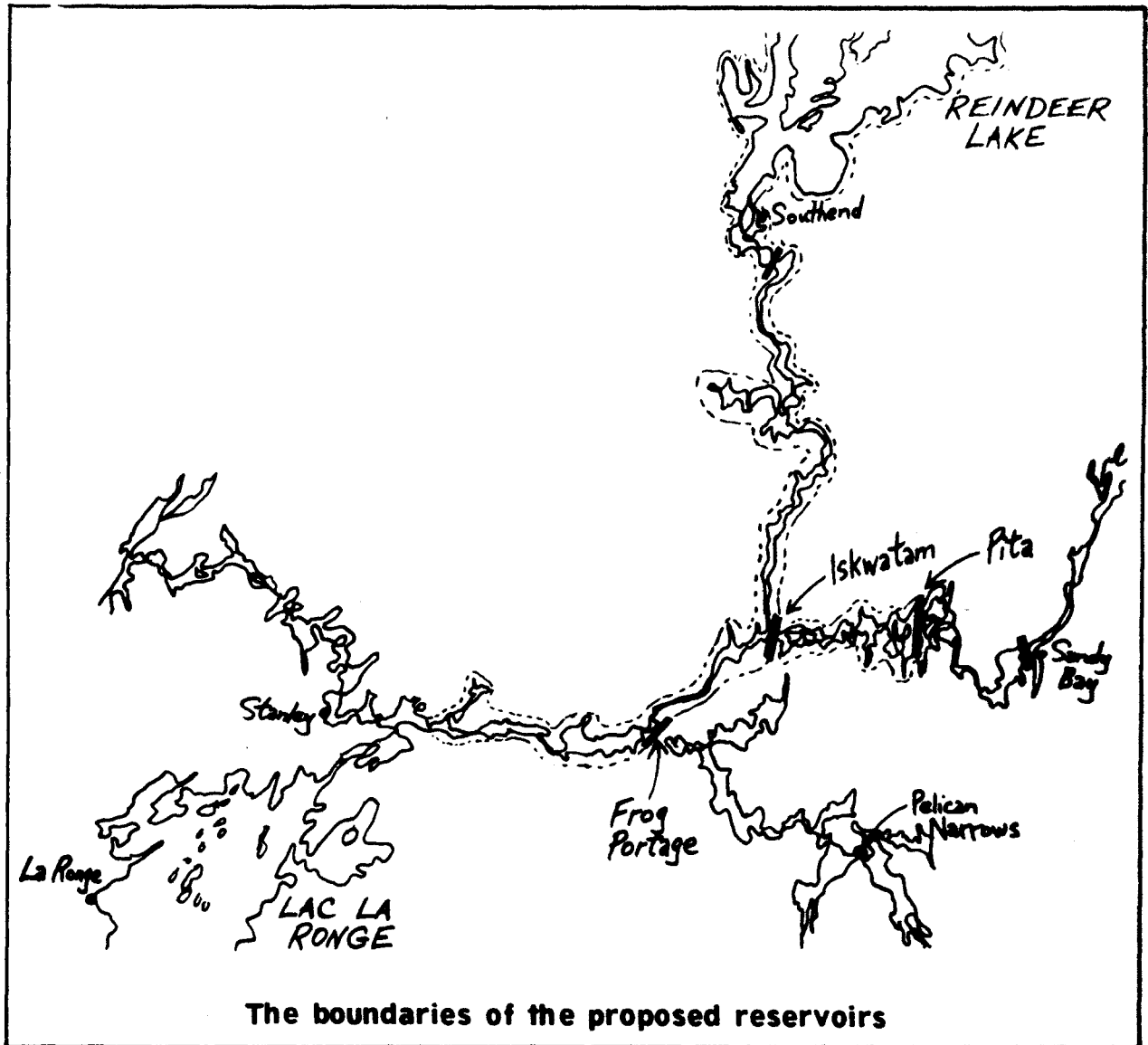
One aspect not previously mentioned concerns the involvement of the resident population. These people have very little say about whether their livelihoods will be taken away from them because of future power needs which seem unlikely to materialize. Something as important as this issue requires that the people who are the most vitally involved with it should be given more than a token representation in the decisions made.

Last but not most important perhaps, are the water diversion and export schemes being studied at the moment. It seems rather convenient that at the same time as so many water export schemes are being studied as to their feasibility, the Saskatchewan government is considering the possibility of dams which have the capacity of diverting large amounts of water via the Saskatchewan River system. Several diversion schemes were suggested in the Saskatchewan-Nelson River Study report and the logical conclusion to be deduced from these facts is that the governments of Saskatchewan and Manitoba may be

actively considering the possibility of water export to the States. Our concern is that once again the government is using power production as a smokescreen to cover up their real objectives. Why else would a province like

Saskatchewan with a declining population need to add one-third as much wattage to its present supply?

There is no easy solution to the problem. Here we have attempted to present some of the details which must be considered before the government goes ahead with the development. Complications ensue because the government has already received an initial report on the problem which it refuses to make public, on the grounds that it is preliminary. It may be this, but it is also a framework from which people can assess the relative merits of the developments. The government is holding hearings before it decides whether to proceed with the proposals. This is a slightly better attitude than the Manitoba government's. It has decided that "window dressing hearings" would serve no useful purpose and has refused to hold any.



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