

Lower Mattagami Hydroelectric Complex Redevelopment Federal Environmental Assessment

What this is all about

This is a summary of what information the federal government will need from Ontario Power Generation on how the environment will be changed by construction work and changes to operation on the Lower Mattagami Hydroelectric Complex.

Ontario Power Generation (OPG) operates four electricity-generating stations in the complex. OPG wants to add a new generator to each of three generating stations, and replace the fourth station.

When this project was first suggested in the early 1990s, OPG was part of Ontario Hydro. In 1999, Ontario Hydro was divided up into five separate companies. OPG is the one that makes electricity. Other companies sell the electricity and deliver it to customers. OPG is owned by the provincial government of Ontario.

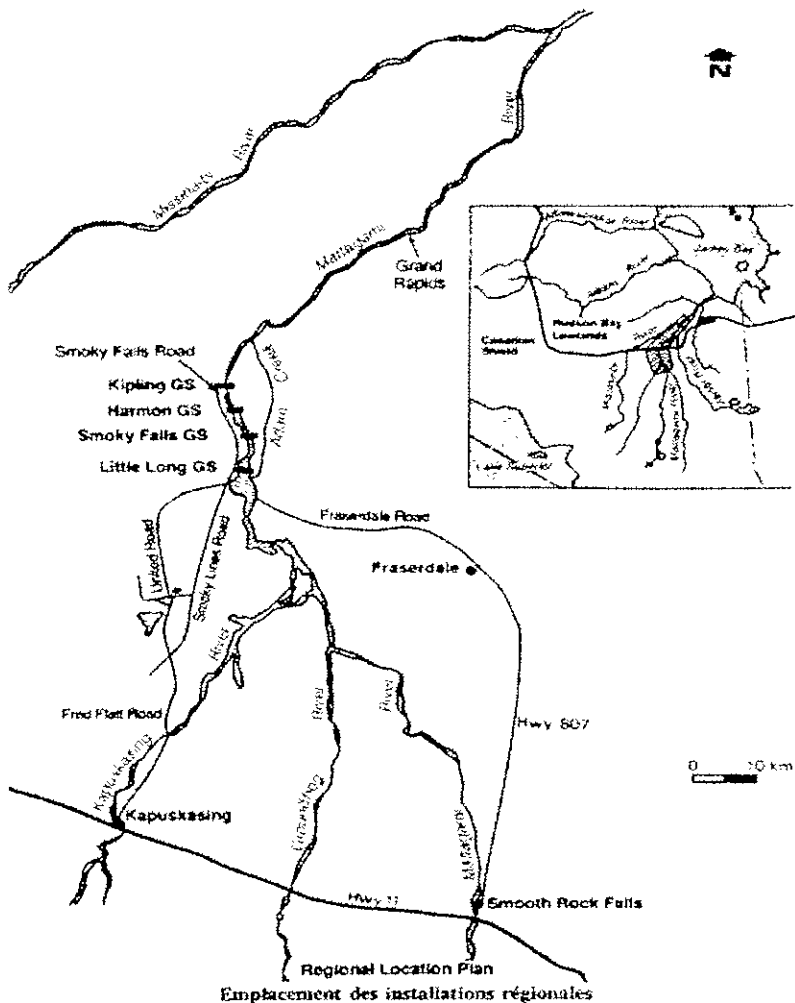
Fisheries and Oceans Canada is concerned about how the work might affect fish and fish habitat. The federal government must give its approval for the impacts to fish habitat in order for the project to go ahead and in order to do that, a full assessment of the environmental impacts of the project must take place. In particular, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) must give OPG a permit to do the work.

So OPG must explain, in writing, how the work it wants to do might change the environment of the Lower Mattagami area. This is called an “environmental assessment” and the level of assessment is called a “Comprehensive Study.”

Aboriginal Peoples, and the public, can contribute their advice and opinions to the environmental assessment.

Changes to the Lower Mattagami Hydroelectric Complex

The Lower Mattagami Hydroelectric Complex is made up of four generating stations on the Mattagami River. The four stations are: Little Long, Smoky Falls, Harmon, and Kipling. They are about 70 kilometres northeast of Kapuskasing and about 150 kilometres upstream of Moose Factory and Moosonee.



Smoky Falls was built in 1931 and right now it has a size of about 50 megawatts. One megawatt produces enough electricity for almost 1,000 homes. This station is older and smaller than the others and does not use water as efficiently as the other three. OPG wants to shut it down and replace it. This would mean building a new generating station next to the old one. There would be new manmade waterways such as an approach channel, intake and tailrace. The new generating station would have a size of 250 megawatts. The old dams and spillways for the station would remain.

Little Long, Harmon and Kipling were all built in the mid-1960s. Each station has two generators to

make electricity. Little Long has a size of 135 megawatts. Harmon is 140 megawatts. Kipling is 155 megawatts.

OPG wants to add a third generator to each of the three generating stations. Then the stations could use water more efficiently and produce more electricity. Little Long would then have a size of 200 megawatts. Harmon and Kipling would each be about 240 megawatts.

Once construction work is started it would take about four years to complete all the work.

What is involved in an environmental assessment

The project will require a federal environmental assessment. The DFO requires that the environmental assessment of the Lower Mattagami project be written down, before any building is allowed to begin. It will explain how OPG's changes to the complex might affect the environment, and how the work might be done to avoid harming the environment.

The assessment will look at possible changes to the land, water, air, plants, animals, birds, and fish, and the way they live together.

The assessment will also look at how changes to the environment affect people. This includes their health, livelihood, relationships and culture. This includes how land is used for traditional purposes by Aboriginal peoples.

The environmental assessment will collect many kinds of information. OPG will inform people, including organizations and local communities, about the project and ask if people have any concerns about it. OPG can then see whether there are different ways to do its work and operate the generating stations so that the environment is harmed as little as possible.

More than one environmental assessment

Environmental assessments of the Lower Mattagami Project have been done before now. The first one was done to obey provincial laws. In 1994, the old Ontario Hydro got approval from the province of Ontario for an environmental assessment on the project. The province has now given OPG until 2010 to begin construction.

The second environmental assessment was done in 1995 by the federal government. It was done under a federal program called the Environmental Assessment and Review Process Guidelines Order, or EARPGO. EARPGO is no longer the law.

A new environmental assessment is needed now because the federal government has new rules in place and because the project has been modified due to new technologies.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Act says that when a hydroelectric project is planned, and it is bigger than 200 megawatts, an environmental assessment in the form of a Comprehensive Study must be done for that project. The Smoky Falls GS produces 52 megawatts of electricity right now and will produce 264 megawatts if it is built, so a Comprehensive Study must be done.

The federal departments that will look at the information in the study are Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Health Canada, Natural Resources Canada, Environment Canada and Transport Canada. They will each review parts of the project that are under their

authority. The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency will act as the Federal Environmental Assessment Coordinator for this environmental assessment.

The provincial and federal governments have agreed to work together to see how OPG will meet the conditions of the provincial environmental assessment approval and any new environmental assessment needs of the Government of Canada.

The most important changes to the Lower Mattagami Hydroelectric Complex

Fisheries and Oceans Canada has written a Scoping Document. It asks OPG to describe, in the environmental assessment, the work that will be done.

The environmental assessment will look especially closely at the work to be done at Smoky Falls, because the biggest changes will take place there. The work includes shutting down the old station, and building a new station. OPG must explain how the new station would be run and how it will be looked after.

DFO will explain the scope of the project. These are the most important activities and include:

- The new generating station at Smoky Falls
- How the new station will be connected to the river by man-made waterways
- A new bridge over the outflow from the old Smoky Falls generating station
- How it will close the old Smoky Falls generating station
- How it will remove a small pond on Smoky Island
- How it will fix up the existing dam at Smoky Falls
- The change in how much water flows, and when it flows, through all four stations of the hydroelectric complex.

DFO will also explain:

- The purpose of the project
- Different ways of building the project
- How the project will change the environment
- How the environment could change the project; for example, storms and earthquakes
- How this project could combine with other activities to change the environment
- How accidents and breakdowns could change the environment
- If DFO feels the changes are "significant," "not significant," or "unknown" and how DFO made those choices
- How DFO will ask OPG to watch for, and keep records of, changes, and what it will do about those changes
- How the project could be built so the changes to the environment are few
- How the water, as a renewable resource will meet the needs of today and the future
- What Aboriginal Peoples and the public say about the project.

Your opinion matters

DFO must ask Aboriginal Peoples and the public for their opinion and advice. DFO will prepare a First Nations Consultation Plan and a Public Consultation Plan. Meetings will be held in communities near the Lower Mattagami Hydroelectric Complex. You will know when these meetings happen because they will be announced in newspaper advertising, newsletters, libraries and other ways.

What happens next

The Fisheries and Oceans Canada Scoping Document explains what will be treated in the environmental assessment. The Scoping Document is posted on the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency Registry. You can read it on the internet at www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca. Look for project number 07-03-26302.

If you have something to say about the Scoping Document, you can send your comments in writing to the address below.

Making decisions

When all the information that Fisheries and Oceans Canada and the other federal agencies have asked for has been collected, it will be written up into a Comprehensive Study Report. This report will also include comments and advice provided by Aboriginal Peoples and the public. Once DFO completes the Comprehensive Study Report, you will be able to see it on the internet site for 30 days. You can also give your comments at the public meetings that will be held.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and other government departments, will read the report and provide recommendations to the federal Minister of the Environment. The Minister will decide on whether the project will be allowed to go ahead.

The project would not go ahead if the government believes it would likely have serious negative environmental effect.

Tell the federal government what you think

You can send your written comments about the project to:

Rich Rudolph, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Telephone: 705-522-5907; Fax: 705-522-6421;

E-Mail: rudolphr@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

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