

G'ganoonigonaa Zaagigan | The Lake Is Speaking To Us: Nuclear Waste in Saugeen Ojibway Nation Territory?

by Biidaabinokwe and Waasekom

ONE KILOMETRE FROM THE LAKESHORE, 680 metres below ground, a Deep Geological Repository (DGR) has been proposed by Ontario Power Generation (OPG). The DGR will be the home for 200,000m³ of low and intermediate level nuclear waste.

On January 31st, 2020, the members of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON) will vote on this proposal.

We, Biidaabinokwe (Neyaashiinigmiing) and Waasekom (Saugeen), are two grassroots members of the SON advocating for the inclusion of the Water in nuclear power and waste decisions in our home territory.

We launched "G'ganoonigonaa Zaagigan | The Lake Is Speaking to Us," a campaign to honour the voice of the Water as well as to listen and to advocate for them.

On the eve of the vote, we hope our call is heard.

LEGACY OF THE NUCLEAR INDUSTRY WITHIN OUR TERRITORY

The Bruce Power Nuclear facility is located in Kincardine, Ontario, Saugeen Ojibway Nation Territory. This facility **produces 30%** of Ontario's electricity.

The Bruce Nuclear Generating Station is the world's **largest active nuclear power plant** with eight pressurized heavy water reactors and is second in the world in energy produced. Ontarians depend on this energy, yet, few likely know the full price paid for this type of energy production.

The impacts and potential threats to the lake and land are immense.

Every seven seconds Bruce Power Nuclear takes an Olympic size swimming pool from Lake Huron into its condensers. **The water is later released back into the lake, but 10 degrees warmer than when it came in.**

Since the 1960s, nuclear waste has been steadily accumulating through operations at the Bruce site. Low and intermediate level nuclear waste from both Pickering and Darlington stations are transported daily to the Western Waste Management facility also located at the Bruce site. When the facilities are decommissioned this radioactive waste has been proposed to be included in the DGR containments.

Some of the intermediate and high-level waste will remain radioactive for 100,000 to 1,000,000 years.

When it comes to nuclear waste, there is no end in sight. Bruce Power was just approved by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission to begin their **Major Component Replacement project** that will extend the plant's life for another 50 years.

Ontarians must be pressured to conserve and enact energy efficient solutions (**Canadians use five times the world's average energy consumption**) and leaders must come up with energy strategies that rely much more on renewable sources.

RESPONDING TO OUR SACRED RESPONSIBILITY

For years, both the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation and the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation have vigorously advocated for our rightful place as decision makers in our Territory.

After years of advocacy and pressure from our political leaders, OPG finally recognized our right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) in 2013, followed by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) in 2016 (NWMO is looking at sites in Ontario to locate a deep geologic repository for all of Canada's high-level nuclear waste and one of those sites is in our Territory).

Over the last few years, SON members have been contemplating the issues, getting informed and discussing these issues through a community engagement process.

As Anishinaabek and original peoples of these lands, it is a sacred responsibility to ensure our Ancestor Lake Huron's well-being is considered, respected, and that their ability to provide life to all is protected.

Through Anishinaabe worldview, we look back and forward seven generations, however it is also said that we are incapable of truly seeing beyond the seventh generation. Our decisions today must consider the beings who will endure beyond even our best generational thinking. The long-term storage of nuclear waste will have forever impacts on the entire Great Lakes ecosystem and on all of us.

With the many issues in mind, we as Anishnaabek look to our values, teachings and law. We must take up our Sacred Responsibility and consult with the Lake and the non-human beings that hold the entire ecosystem in balance. We must do our part to petition, inquire, and build relationships with the water in order to properly understand the impacts the decision we make now will have on future generations.

FINDING A FOREVER SOLUTION TO NUCLEAR WASTE & THE "RIGHTS" OF LAKE HURON

This week, on January 31, 2020, we, Biidaabinokwe and Waasekom, are voting "no" to the question OPG is asking of us.

We cannot support the construction of the DGR project. The SON has not had the opportunity to explore other options for long-term nuclear waste storage and the issues more broadly. In fact, we have a commitment from OPG that legacy issues must be addressed, however, that work is still underway. Additionally, it is worth noting that First Nations in our territory did not create these issues. The SON was not consulted in the development of the Nuclear facility in the first place.

When it comes to a DGR for low and intermediate level nuclear waste so close to Lake Huron, the answer seems simple. However, a yes or no vote to this project is not a solution for the long-term storage of nuclear waste. It will continue to accumulate above ground in an aging waste management facility.

We propose to be a part of the process to get to a forever solution. That means asking some important questions. Do we hear? Do we honour and respect our Ancestor? Do we, as human beings, truly know the impacts of the decisions we make every day: to leave the lights on, to elect political leaders that ignore energy over-consumption issues, to deregulate business and corporations who over-extract?

If we know the impacts those decisions are having, what are we doing about it?

Like so many of our Elders and Knowledge Keepers have been saying, it is time we all take responsibility (including OPG & Bruce Power) in our relationship to the water and derive our direction from there. It is time that Lake Huron takes up their rightful place in the decision-making processes as our wise Ancestor who's connection to Mother Earth gives and sustains life for all.

Our commitment to Anishinaabe notions of consent go beyond the standard FPIC principles.

An Anishinaabe version of consent should not only fully consider the impacts on our communities but the impacts that this forever decision will have on our Ancestor Lake Huron. By including their voice, we can move towards better embracing a forever solution.