



October 13, 2021

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau, Premiers of Atlantic Canada, and Elected Leaders,

We, the undersigned organizations and individuals are calling on you as elected leaders to oppose the construction of the Gull Island mega-hydro project (Phase 2 of Nalcor's Lower Churchill Project) and to protect the Grand River/Mistashipu (colonially known as Churchill River) in Labrador and other endangered rivers across the country.

In the September 2020 Speech from the Throne, Canada's federal government embraced the concept of an Atlantic Loop, a term for enhanced electrical grid connectivity amongst provinces in Eastern Canada. Since then, messages from the Canadian government indicate this could subsidize the transmission of electricity from mega-hydro projects such as Gull Island. We believe any such investments in Atlantic Canada energy interconnectivity should support local renewables and jobs, as well as community resilience—not further subsidize and pave the way for building the Gull Island mega-dam.

If built, the Gull Island Project would block the Grand River with a massive 300-foot dam; flood 23,000 hectares of pristine boreal forest; and increase already dangerous levels of methylmercury in fish and wildlife, the traditional food source of Inuit and Innu people.

Some of the most dangerous impacts of the Gull Island Project and other mega-dams include:

- Fragmenting and strangling rivers, as nutrients and sediment get blocked behind dams;
- Destroying freshwater and marine habitat along with the fisheries dependent on them;
- Changing natural river flows and upstream and downstream ecosystems;
- Producing significant volumes of greenhouse gas emissions, including methane;
- Poisoning wildlife, fish, and the Indigenous People who depend on them with the neurotoxin methylmercury; and
- Repeatedly violating treaty obligations and Indigenous rights, as prescribed by the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Backing Gull Island will only compound the problems created by the Muskrat Falls mega-dam, located east of the Gull Island rapids on the Grand River. Muskrat Falls has already introduced dangerous levels of methylmercury into the food chain and is built on layers of an unstable geological formation called quick clay. Like many mega-hydro projects, Muskrat Falls is years behind schedule and billions over budget—and it is responsible for nearly bankrupting the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This project was only possible because it was backed by a \$9.2 billion dollar loan guarantee from the federal government.

In 2016, many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, many connected with the Labrador Land Protectors and Grand Riverkeeper Labrador, engaged in hunger strikes and the occupation of the Muskrat Falls construction site, including a visit to important traditional lands blocked by construction. These efforts were made with the intention of forcing the federal and provincial governments to take responsibility for the impacts of the Muskrat Falls mega-dam on downstream communities and to reduce the threat of methylmercury. In spite of these efforts, both levels of government chose to ignore the concerns of the community and nothing has changed.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights and hazardous substances, Baskut Tuncak, had this to say about the Muskrat Falls megadam: “I urge the Federal Government to use its leverage as the largest investor in the project to review whether UNDRIP compatible procedures were followed for **all** affected Indigenous Peoples, and to prevent the release of methylmercury.” (bolding added)

Building the Gull Island mega-dam would increase methylmercury released into the Grand River system, directly contravening the UN Special Rapporteur’s recommendation and would call into question Canada’s commitment to UNDRIP even further.

We stand in solidarity with an alliance of hydro-impacted communities across Turtle Island in calling for a halt to the cultural genocide of Indigenous Peoples taking place wherever megadams are constructed. Life-giving rivers are essential to healthy communities and protecting the increasingly imperiled natural world. Large dams are not consistent with climate action — rather, they degrade natural ecosystems that would, if protected and restored, contribute to climate resiliency and they release GHGs that are currently not included in Canada’s inventory.

We are not willing to sacrifice more land, water, and communities to another disastrous mega-hydro development on the Grand River and are calling on you as elected leaders to take a clear and decisive position opposing the Gull Island Project. Please join us and allies across Canada and New England in protecting our life-giving rivers. **Over 80 organizations and individuals have signed on in support of this letter.**

Sincerely,

Gretchen Fitzgerald,
National Programs Director,
Sierra Club Canada Foundation

Roberta Benefiel,
Director, & Riverkeeper
Grand Riverkeeper Labrador

Meg Sheehan,
Coordinator,
North American
Megadam Resistance
Alliance (NAMRA)

Attachment: Signatories to this letter