

In Our Backyard: Keeyask and the Legacy of Hydroelectric Development. Edited by Aimée Craft and Jill Blakley. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2022. 422 pages. \$31.95 paper; \$22.50 e-book.

Historically, hydropower has been viewed as a relatively “clean” means of producing electricity to supply ever-increasing demand. Until recently, that narrative excluded the devastating impacts the construction and operation of hydropower facilities (e.g., dams, transmission lines, storage reservoirs) can have on local Indigenous communities. *In Our Backyard: Keeyask and the Legacy of Hydroelectric Development*, edited by Aimée Craft and Jill Blakley, brings the issue of the impacts to Indigenous groups, particularly First Nations, into sharp focus through an extensive case study analysis of the Keeyask Generating Station in the broader context and history of hydroelectric development in Northern Manitoba.

The intersection of climate change, increasing energy demands, capitalism, and Indigenous culture presents a number of complex and challenging issues. This point is encapsulated in a series of questions posed by Craft and Blakley in the book’s introduction, one of which asks, “Is our collective well-being eclipsed by the need to build/expand/exercise power/grow?” (12). Over the course of four parts, each comprising multiple chapters, *In Our Backyard* grapples with these issues in the context of the Keeyask case study. A mix of Indigenous peoples, academics, regulators, experts, and other individuals affected by the development of Keeyask approach these issues from multiple angles, including analyzing everything from the impact the dam has on the migration patterns of caribou to the government’s obligations to First Nations “under the Honour of the Crown.”

The book is organized in logical sequence, with the first part addressing topics such as the narrative, largely economic in nature, used by Keeyask proponents to garner support. This included arguing that “1) hydropower is clean; 2) demand for electricity will increase indefinitely; and 3) the project will be overwhelmingly positive for hydro-affected Indigenous peoples” (49). As Byron Williams argues in Chapter 1, this narrative eventually garnered enough support to essentially “lock in” the project. This discussion is tied to the literature on other mega projects where sunk costs eventually run so high that the project becomes unstoppable, regardless of changing environmental, economic, or social conditions that undermine the original justification. As noted by Will Braun in Chapter 2, “In the end, a rather inexplicable impulse to build dams, bolstered by a narrative of clean, necessary, and Indigenous-license energy, prevailed” (62). While multiple authors challenge the accuracy of the Keeyask narrative, a more focused analysis targeted at uncovering that “inexplicable impulse” could have benefited the entire volume in establishing the underlying motivations for the rest of the actions taken by the various entities involved.

With the project locked in, the book turns to the impacts caused by the Keeyask dam. This includes more technical discussions on the impacts to various species important to First Nations as well critical reviews of both the Keeyask-specific and broader regional cumulative effects analyses. In the third part of the book, the focus is on partnership-building with Indigenous peoples and the government's responsibility when engaging in these negotiations. These chapters are particularly insightful, as they grapple with more nuanced questions of whether effects of the project could ever truly be mitigated given the fundamental impact to the culture of multiple First Nations. While multiple First Nations signed on to the partnership agreement, various authors raise difficult questions on whether they really had a choice in light of the locked-in nature of the project. In other words, "If Manitoba Hydro did move forward despite a community's refusal of a partnership, that community would then suffer all the aforementioned negative impacts without any of the benefits" (281). Interspersed throughout the book are quotes from Indigenous communities on the substantial and detrimental effect the Keeyask project would have on their way of life, regardless of financial agreements. These quotes are powerful and ground the text in an Indigenous perspective, but one quote in particular summarizes the impossible position of the First Nations. Remarking on the importance of building relationships in the context of the partnership agreements, Ted Bland of the York Factory First Nation states, "We especially want our children and future generations to know that we entered into this partnership with these feelings and deep misgivings, but insisted on a long-term, ongoing commitment to healing, reconciliation, mutual respect, and self-determination" (292).

In addition to the different perspectives and analyses provided in each chapter, what makes this a particularly interesting and complicated case study is that the project proponent, Manitoba Hydro, appears to have learned from past mistakes and worked to address them during the development of the Keeyask project. To that point, as various authors critique aspects of Manitoba Hydro's approach, they provide useful insights on what they did well and where there is room for improvement. For example, authors provide thoughtful critiques on the cumulative-effects analysis, sustainability plans, and a somewhat novel two-track environmental assessment approach that attempted to integrate Western science and Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Similarly, with the community agreements, Manitoba Hydro seemed interested in addressing past mistakes and securing a "social license" from First Nations to operate, but, as multiple authors note, it still came up short. This raises a number of challenging questions on whether financial remedies (e.g., profit sharing, job training, compensation for impacts to hunting) can ever truly address a fundamental impact to the culture and lifeways of First Nations. Similarly, given that and the substantial power differential, can a legitimate agreement even be negotiated?

The last part of the book then looks to the future, analyzing what "good" development may look like in Northern Manitoba in light of lessons learned from Keeyask and other projects in the region. There are certainly a number of valuable lessons learned for future development in northern Manitoba, but the depth and breadth of analysis will be useful to a number of audiences beyond this region, including

academics, practitioners, and Indigenous populations. For example, practitioners will find the critiques on technical analyses such as cumulative effects, environmental assessments, and adaptive management especially helpful. These analyses and critiques are broadly applicable and may be considered lessons learned and best management practices for a wide range of large-scale projects. Finally, Indigenous groups, particularly in North America, will find useful analyses that can be used to strengthen their positions in their own negotiations and hold governments accountable through the Honour of the Crown in Canada or the United States government's trust responsibility to Native American tribes. As detailed in multiple chapters and the powerful quotes from Indigenous community members, this book can also be used as a reference to counter narratives on other large-scale developments that claim certain types of energy development, such as hydropower, have "limited" impacts and are needed for environmental or economic reasons.

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