

Court rejects federal assessment of Quebec power project

By Bob Cox

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The federal government has no power to do an environmental assessment of the \$1.5-billion Eastmain hydro-electric project in northern Quebec, the Federal Court of Appeal has ruled.

In a 3-0 decision released Friday, the appeal court overturned a lower court ruling which ordered the federal government to do a full impact study of the work, which is part of the James Bay hydro project.

James Bay Crees immediately said they would appeal the ruling to the Supreme Court of Canada.

They said the decision has broad implications because it runs counter to recent Supreme Court rulings which favored environmental assessments and expanded recognition of native rights.



Bacon
Roadblock gone

said Bill Namagoose, of the Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec.

"They've clearly given a licence

to Hydro Quebec just to go in there and destroy the environment in northern Quebec."

The federal government had already started organizing an environmental review of the project which involves flooding 700 square kilometres of territory along the Eastmain River in the James Bay region.

It is part of the original James Bay hydro project, rather than the \$12.6-billion expansion known as the Great Whale project.

In Montreal, Hydro-Québec said it's happy with the decision.

"The judgment confirms our contention that Eastmain 1 is part of the La Grande project which was

covered under the James Bay agreement of 1975," said Hydro spokesman Guy Litalien.

In a statement, Litalien said Hydro-Québec will continue its efforts to arrive at an agreement with the Cree on compensation for development of the project.

Energy Minister Lise Bacon, in a statement from Quebec City, said the decision reaffirms Quebec's jurisdiction and clarifies the procedures for putting new hydro-electric projects in operation.

"The decision will allow us to start a project that's important for Quebec's economic development, while respecting environmental laws," Bacon said.