

The Crees of York Landing were originally from the region now known as York Factory, Manitoba, a community that was located on the north shores of the Hayes River, approximately six miles inland from the coast of Hudson Bay. In 1957, York Factory Cree Nation was relocated from York Factory to York Landing. Individuals whom we interviewed indicated that they wished their community to be referred to as 'York Landing' to underscore the fact that they are no longer living on their native soil in York Factory.

## 1. Observed Changes

York Landing community members described a variety of changes in weather conditions, water bodies, and the winter roads within and surrounding their community over the past decade or so.

### Seasonal Changes in Weather

Winter seasons are milder and shorter than they were in the past, with long falls and early springs. Snow colour has changed. For example, snow is now yellow rather than white along the shorelines. In 2002 the community received only 1 foot of snowfall instead of the usual 3 feet. This cause problems in the spring; the barge could not use the regular landing due to lower water levels and a new landing had to be constructed about 1km downstream. Spring and summer seasons tend to be hotter, dryer, and longer. Last summer was an exception, however, since there was a lot of rain. The weather now changes rapidly and extreme weather events (such as windstorms and thunderstorms) are increasing in severity and frequency. Sometimes, there are even thunderstorms in the winter. A few years ago, a tornado hit the community for the first time.

### Water bodies

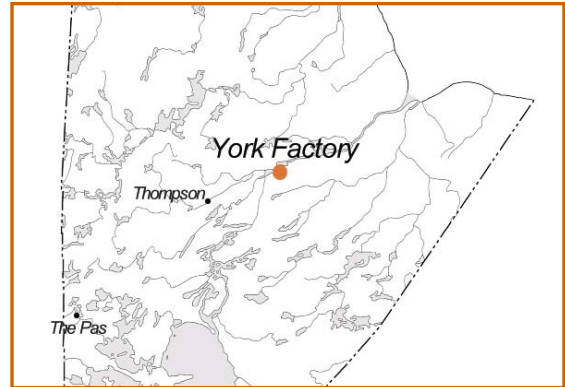
Individuals expressed a number of concerns about water bodies in and around the community. Water levels fluctuate rapidly, with periods of very high water and strong currents, followed by sudden drops in water level. In the winter, ice conditions are a concern since water bodies (e.g. lakes and rivers) do not freeze to the same extent that they used to. Ice forms later and melts earlier than it did in the past, and there are now air pockets and openings in the ice.

### Winter Roads

Some concerns were voiced about the condition of the winter road to York Landing. The ice is thinner than it used to be, and the road is often covered with slush. As well, the road now has more earth patches over sections of the road that occur over land and air pockets over sections that occur over ice.

### Plants and Animals

York Landing community members are seeing changes in the local wildlife, particularly in the mammals, fish, and birds. Migration times and patterns are changing. Caribou, beavers, and muskrats are decreasing in number. New animals (e.g. porcupines, skunks, coyotes, brown bears, and catfish) are now found in the area. There have also been



## Quick Facts

On-Reserve Population: 436  
Total Population: 1054

Reserve Area: 967.4 Hectares

Language: Cree and English

**Primary Winter Road Network:**  
From north to south: York Landing -Split Lake.  
Length: 32km

**Other local Networks:**  
Various trapper trails (old and new)  
Winter road from York Landing to Ilford  
Ferry between York Landing and Split Lake

**Winter Activities:** Hunting, fishing (net and ice-hole, derby's), trapping, winter carnival

**Spring Activities:** Goose Camp

**Summer Activities:** Fishing

**Fall Activities:** Hunting

**Users of the Winter Road:** Trucking companies (hauling food, supplies, and gasoline), community members in personal vehicles, band employees hauling supplies for motel, health centre, band office, school etc.

**Community Amenties:** Postal services (mail delivered by Skyward Aviation from Thompson), motel, community store, satellite TV system, local radio station CHYL 93.5FM broadcast range of 10-15 miles, CBC broadcast is sent by a microwave tower located 14 miles east of the community. As well telephone services are provided by Manitoba Telephone System (MTS) through single party lines and Internet service is dial-up.

**Developments:**  
Hydro control of the Nelson River via the Kelsey Dam

sightings of a mountain lion. In addition to changes in migration, the quality of the meat (e.g. caribou and fish) has diminished. Changes are also being seen in plant species. For example, plants used for tea or for their berries are decreasing in number. As well, berries are drying out prior to fully ripening in the summer

## 2. Perceived Causes

Community members suggested that a variety of factors are contributing to the changes that they are observing in York Landing. The two major contributors to poor ice conditions in the community of York Landing are thought to be warm weather (i.e. climate change caused by pollution) and control of water levels by Manitoba Hydro. Individuals believe that control of the Nelson River via the Kelsey Dam is causing the high, rapidly fluctuating water levels that subsequently result in the formation of thin ice that is covered with slush, air pockets, and ice shelves. Heavy traffic on the winter road too early in the season is thought to further exasperate the situation by causing the ice to be weaker and the surface of the road to be rougher.

Dry conditions (due to lack of rainfall) and lengthy hot summers are thought to be causing plants to die and berries to dry out prior to ripening. Sudden fluctuations in water level (resulting from control by Manitoba Hydro) are also negatively affecting plant survival since flooding along the shoreline kills trees and shrubs. These sudden fluctuations in water level also decrease animal numbers since sudden high water levels cause muskrats and beavers become trapped in their dens and drown. Over-fishing, over-hunting, and human encroachment (e.g. of houses onto previously unused land) may also play a role in decreased animal populations. Poor water quality (attributed to impacts by Manitoba Hydro) is thought to affect the quality and taste of wild meat (fish and mammals).

Some community Elders suggest that the changes that are being observed (e.g. less wildlife and extreme weather events) are written in the Bible and are occurring since community members no longer follow the teachings of the bible anymore (i.e. the 'lid is closed').

## 3. Roles and Impacts of Observed Changes

York Landing community members described an important role of the winter road and other trails for the well-being of the community. Changes in the weather and ice conditions subsequently affect all of these aspects of their lives.



Image 1:  
Ferry used to connect the community of York Landing to Split Lake.

## Social / Cultural

Warm winter weather, thinner ice, and increased slush have decreased community participation in winter recreational activities (such as skidooring, sliding, snowshoeing, fishing

Image 2: Daily activities in York Landing community.



derbies, and various winter games). Skills such as snowshoe making are not being passed on to younger generations since participation in these activities is much less than it used to be. This year, the annual Winter Carnival may be cancelled due to warm weather and poor ice conditions.

These factors, in addition to hydro impacts, also affect the ability of the community to participate in their traditional lifestyle. Decreased access to resource areas (due to poor trail conditions) and diminished quality of meat, fish, and furs have impacted the ability of community members to participate in traditional activities such as trapping, hunting, fishing, sliding, and gathering of medicines. Social gatherings and church attendance are also not as common as they were in the past.

## Financial role

In ideal years, the winter road is used to bring fuel, food, and other goods into York Factory by freight trucks for approximately three months of the year. Community members with suitable vehicles also use the road during this time to shop and stock up on supplies. These actions help to offset the high cost associated with shopping in the community. During the months when the road is not open, the community relies on the ferry (for three months) and air transportation (for six months). A decrease in the timeframe during which the winter road is open, increases the reliance on air transportation (and subsequently, increases the cost of goods). The winter road is also important to community income since its operation creates employment for community members (in road construction, maintenance, brush cutting, and unloading freight from trucks).

Hunters, trappers, and fishers use non-winter road trails around York Landing to access and haul furs, meat, wood, and fish. These activities are important for generating a source of income and for accessing affordable wild meat and fish to offset the high cost of food at the Store. In recent years, the warmer climate and poor ice conditions have meant that these activities are not undertaken as frequently

as they were in the past. Problems associated with using trails (due to increased slush, weaker ice, and higher fuel costs for operating snowmobiles) are making these activities increasingly difficult.



Image 3: Terry Neepin, hunter, trapper and guide provided insight into the impacts of decreased trail access on traditional activities.

## Community Operations

During the winter months, trucking companies haul food, goods, fuel and gasoline into York Landing to supply local businesses. When the winter road doesn't open on time (due to poor ice conditions), it is difficult to stock shelves, and local stores run out of gasoline, food, and other supplies.

## Personal health and safety

Poor and unpredictable ice conditions on the road and trails around York Landing have also raised concerns about damage to vehicles and personal safety. Some individuals feel compelled to risk travelling on the winter road to offset the high price of goods prior to the official opening by Manitoba Transportation. There have been incidents of skidoos, trucks, and graters falling through the ice or sinking into the slush along winter road and other trails around York Landing.

Community members also voiced concerns about water quality in York Landing since Manitoba Hydro took control of the water. For example, the meat (e.g. fish and caribou) now tastes different and children sometimes get sores or rashes after bathing or swimming.

## 4. Strategies, Capacity, Barriers and Drivers

Various ideas were presented as means for addressing the challenges that the community is facing. One community member stated, however, that 'the community can do something to help themselves, but they can't change the Earth.'

### Physical Infrastructure / Winter Road Construction

Concerns were raised that it is more difficult to meet regulations now that Manitoba Transportation has changed the parameters regarding the required ice thickness prior to the winter road opening. This affects how early the winter road is able to open and how quickly it closes at the end of the season, thereby shortening the winter road season. One technique that the community is using to address this issue is to flood the surface of the winter road frequently in order to create a thicker and stronger ice foundation.

## Financial

Some community members hunt, fish, and trap in order to generate an income and/or to access affordable meat and fish. Barriers to carrying out these traditional activities are decreased access to resources areas and concerns about safety (as a result of weak, unreliable, and slushy ice and trail conditions), increased fuel costs (to operate snowmobiles), and decreased quality and value of furs, fish and meat. One community member stated that 'nowadays, only regulars that know the soft spots in the ice can travel on land extensively to hunt, fish, or trap. Recently, the community has begun to fly some individuals to York Factory / Churchill to get wild meat, furs, tea, and berries and send them back to the community by plane.

Some individuals recommended that subsidies be provided by the government and by businesses to offset the high cost of goods and services in the community. Some community members do not have access to a vehicle and cannot take advantage of the winter road for cheaper supplies and must rely on the more expensive items in the community. A subsidy would help reduce the costs for these community members. It was also suggested that the community should also ask the government for financial support to help them stock up on goods before the ice melts and the road is closed.

One Elder suggested that the community should go back to the old ways (i.e. with mud and log houses, kerosene lamps, candles, and woodstove) as things were 'alright' back then.

## Access to Goods and Resources

To address safety concerns, hunters and trappers rarely travel alone anymore. Additionally, many trails have been moved off of the river and into the bush. A barrier to this, however, is that it costs more (due to increased fuel costs) and takes more time and energy to travel (since trails have to be cut and they tend to be longer). The trails are also rougher which can cause damage snowmobiles. Another strategy that some hunters and trappers are using is travelling early in the morning and late in the evening when the temperature is colder and the ice is stronger. Some trappers also take a different route back than was taken on the outgoing trip in order to avoid crossing ice that was weakened from the first crossing. Some recommended that weak spots on the ice should be marked on the trails and advertised on the radio to let others know about problem areas.

Image 4: The presence of water and slush damages the winter road making travel difficult.



## All-weather road and other transportation alternatives

Discussion of an all-weather road in the area has been underway for a number of years. Some individuals feel that the community needs an all-weather road to address many of the financial, safety, and social issues that they are facing. Community members are unsure if anything has been signed yet, but Manitoba Transportation did come to their community recently. The round of discussions that is currently underway is expected to last until 2009.

Some community members indicated that a good route for the all-weather road (i.e. with a solid bedrock and gravel base) has already been selected. If the all-weather road does go ahead, community members recognize that it is important that the environmental damage be minimal. Several barriers stand to delay or cease the development of the all-weather road. Firstly, the land that York Factory Cree Nation is currently using (i.e. York Landing) is in the Tataskweyak Cree Nation Resource Management Area. Thus, the support of that First Nation is mandatory. The process is also hindered since York Factory Cree Nation does not know where they will be in 10 years. It is possible that they will be moved to another location where their reserve will ultimately be. Additionally, the community does not have the money, capacity, or materials to build the all-weather road on their own, so government support is mandatory. Over and above these barriers, there are also concerns that Manitoba Hydro is stalling the talks.

In addition to the all-weather road, other transportation options exist. For example, it is possible to haul fuel and other supplies to Ilford from Thompson via train, and then truck it into York Landing along a land-based winter road. The community has begun discussing this option with War Lake Band at Ilford, but no decision has been made. Rail travel has also been considered. One community member submitted a proposal to Omnitrax to have train tracks built near their community, but the outcome of that proposal is not known.

## Programs and Training

The community needs programs and training to address the issues that they are facing. Training is needed in the area of management, development, and infrastructure and land use planning. Chief and Council do not have time to address these issues themselves as they already have too much on their mind. People with more time need to take on these issues.

One community member recommended that youth should be involved with addressing the issues since it is their future that will be most impacted.

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

### Community members

- Collect data – monitor and record changes
- Come together
- Identify concerns
- Put concerns down in a report
- Get training

### Chief and Council

- Maintain good relations with Tataskweyak and War Lake Band
- Get things going
- Obtain help because they can't do everything

### Provincial and federal government

- Visit the community to experience the situation first-hand
- Look at ways to help get the winter road built more quickly
- Provide funding
- Work with each other to make the all-weather road a reality