

4 Issues, Data Gaps and Baseline Data Collection Program

4. Issues, Data Gaps and Baseline Data Collection Program

4.1 Issues, Resource Values and Interests

Environmental and social/socioeconomic issues, resource values, and interests associated with the North Bala Hydro Project were identified through the following procedures:

- application of MOE environmental screening criteria (Appendix B)
- communications with all relevant provincial and federal agencies, particularly MNR, MOE, DFO, CEA Agency, and Transport Canada (Marine)
- communications with the Corporation of the Township of Muskoka Lakes and District Municipality of Muskoka
- invitations to other stakeholders to provide input, i.e., those directly or potentially affected, as well as the general public and local First Nations.

The first step in identifying environmental and socioeconomic issues for this project involved applying the MOE screening criteria checklist to determine potential impacts to the resource values listed prior to mitigation. The results of this exercise are presented on the completed MOE screening criteria form included in Appendix B.

The issues (areas of concern and potential impact), identified through communications with government agencies were generally already identified through application of the MOE screening criteria checklist. Additional comments from government agencies are presented in Section 3.5.3.

Issues identified through other stakeholder consultation activities are presented in Section 3 (Tables 3.6 and 3.8).

Resource values considered important for this project are the environmental components listed in Table 1.1 (Section 1.7). These environmental components were assessed in terms of potential impacts from the proposed project and the results are summarized in Tables 5.4 and 6.1 (Sections 5 and 6).

4.2 Baseline Data Collection and Data Gaps

Initial baseline data collection activities focussed on gathering information on the existing natural, social and socioeconomic environment from local sources and government websites.

The results of this exercise indicated there were baseline data deficiencies in the following areas:

- site-specific information for the project study area on fish species, potential fish spawning habitat, locations and timing of spawning
- site-specific information for the project area on benthic invertebrate diversity and habitat
- site-specific information for the project area on vegetation in the project area potentially affected
- site-specific information for the project area on surface water quality.

4.3 Baseline Field Investigations to Fill Data Gaps

In consultation with MNR and DFO, baseline fisheries/aquatic habitat/field investigations were undertaken as follows:

- aquatic habitat assessment and electrofishing survey – September 2007
- benthic invertebrate survey – November 2007
- spring spawning surveys – spring 2008
- surface water quality – September and November 2007, May 2008
- dam flow/fish spawning velocity study – June 2009.

Complete details regarding the above baseline field investigations are included in the existing environmental section of this screening report (Sections 2.1.9 to 2.1.11).

The results of baseline field investigations to identify existing vegetation in the project area are presented in Section 2.1.7. The results of the baseline field investigations to characterize existing surface water quality are provided in Section 2.1.6.2.