



Muskrat Falls workers bused out after protesters occupy site in Central Labrador



Group wants topsoil and vegetation cleared to reduce risk of methylmercury poisoning of water

Lukas Wall and Katie Breen · CBC News ·

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After cutting the lock to the gate 60 protestors occupy Nalcor site. 1:43

Busloads of workers are being sent home after protesters occupied the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric project work site in Central Labrador yesterday.

Ten buses arrived at the hydro electric project late Saturday to retrieve workers. A number of unscheduled flights have since arrived at the Goose Bay Airport, the closest air strip to the site.



At around 2:30 p.m. AT, a group of about 60 protesters broke through the gate, with about 200 more remaining at the gate.

Several trucks also entered the site carrying protesters, one driven by Cartwright Mayor Dwight Lethbridge.

Protesters have been calling for the clearing of all vegetation and topsoil at the Muskrat Falls reservoir prior to initial flooding, which Nalcor has said to expect by the end of this month.

Moving forward

Neither contractors, nor Nalcor, the Crown company behind the megaproject, have returned request for comment about the level of work at the hydroelectric project.

Premier Dwight Ball released a statement Saturday evening saying a meeting with Indigenous groups and the province has been scheduled for Tuesday.

"Today, during a scheduled protest at the Muskrat Falls site entrance, about 50 people and several vehicles breached the main gate. Since then, I have been in contact with the Innu Nation, the Nunatsiavut Government, the NunatuKavut Community Council, and my Labrador MHAs to discuss the situation occurring onsite today. Currently, my priority is the safety of both protesters and workers with this change in events at the site. On Tuesday, we have a scheduled meeting with leaders and representatives from the Innu Nation, the Nunatsiavut Government as well as the NunatuKavut Community Council. Until this meeting has occurred, Nalcor will do nothing to increase water levels above the falls.

My office and I have been working closely with Labrador MHAs, appropriate Cabinet Ministers, and Senior Executives of Nalcor to work towards resolve. We urge protesters to remain peaceful and be respectful in their actions for the safety of both themselves and workers onsite."



Katie Breen

@KatieBreenNL

Statement from @PremierOfNL on #MuskratFalls protest. Says no flooding will happen before meeting on Tuesday w/ Indigenous groups and MHAs

8:48 PM - Oct 22, 2016

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"Until this meeting has occurred, Nalcor will do nothing to increase water levels above the falls," he said in the statement.

- [Muskrat Falls project 'should never have seen the light of day': N.L.'s new consumer advocate](#)
- [Inuk artist taking Muskrat Falls hunger strike to Ottawa](#)
- [Protesters march on Muskrat Falls site in final effort to stop reservoir flooding](#)

Controversial project

Muskrat Falls, a multi-billion dollar hydroelectric project in central Labrador, has been the subject of much controversy.

Cost overruns, a construction collapse and now protests against Nalcor, the province-owned company building it, have plagued the project.

Protesters are demanding Nalcor clear the reservoir of vegetation and topsoil before flooding begins to prevent the leaching of methylmercury into the water.

A study conducted by researchers from Harvard University in 2015 determined that methylmercury levels would rise with Muskrat Falls flooding, increasing the potential for mercury contamination in traditional food sources like fish and seal downstream in Lake Melville.

However, Gilbert Bennett, vice-president of the Lower Churchill Project with Nalcor Energy, said at the time "we do not predict that creation of the Muskrat Falls reservoir will heighten risk to people in Lake Melville."





Protesters enter the Muskrat Falls site after breaking through a gate Saturday afternoon. (Jacob Barker/CBC)

Increasing opposition to the project led Environment Minister Perry Trimper to order Nalcor to remove more forest cover at the reservoir on Wednesday to further address "anxiety and concern" surrounding methylmercury.

For now, clearing of trees will take place inside the initial 25-metre flooding zone before the flooding begins. Nalcor says it plans to look at clearing options for the second watermark at 39 metres.

The plan doesn't call for soil clearing.

Protester cut lock

Protesters are determined to force Nalcor to complete the clearing process. Darren Sheppard says he cut the lock off a fence at the entrance to the work site to give the protesters access.

**Jacob Barker**

@JacobBarkerCBC

Darren Sheppard says he cut the lock off the fence. A very large group entered behind him. [@CBCNL](#) [@CBCLabrador](#) [@KatieBreenNL](#)

3:11 PM - Oct 22, 2016

20

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"I cut the lock because Nalcor is going to go ahead and do the work," Sheppard said.

He said the company has the time and ability to clear the vegetation from the site before the flooding begins, and protesters will remain on the site until Nalcor agrees to complete the work.

"If they're not going to do that, then we will stay on site until they say yes," said Sheppard.

"Once they [say] yes, we'll all walk off freely, we're all friendly protesters."

He said he "doesn't care" about any possible police reaction. "I'm standing up for what I believe in and what's right."

Police close Trans Labrador Highway

Several RCMP vehicles also attended the site Saturday afternoon and closed Route 510, also known as the South Coast Highway, while protests continue. Hundreds of vehicles are backed up on the road.

About 100 protesters abandoned their vehicles and gathered at the police blockade. Officers on the scene said the situation has become a public safety concern and they are working to gain control.

Public safety concern forces road closure and traffic delays in Labrador.

October 22, 2016. St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Owing to public safety concerns, the RCMP is advising that Route 510 will be closed until further notice. As well, there will be delays on Route 500.

Emergency vehicles are in the area and drivers are asked to proceed with caution.

Police are asking the motoring public to remain away from the area as it is anticipated the roads may be closed or blocked for several hours.



Bailey White
@baileywhite

RCMP confirm Trans Lab Route 510 (South Coast highway) is closed while protests continue at [#MuskratFalls](#) [#cbcnl](#)

**Katie Breen**

@KatieBreenNL

3 RCMP vehicles and 2 speeding rigs with lights flashing just passed me. Headed towards [#MuskratFalls](#) site protesters have entered [@cbcnl](#)

3:54 PM - Oct 22, 2016

11

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Nalcor issued a warning on Twitter urging those on the site to use caution. The company said there is a significant safety risk to protesters and workers, as construction sites can be hazardous.

**Nalcor Energy**

@NalcorEnergy

There is a significant safety risk to protesters & workers as protesters have entered the Muskrat Falls worksite.

3:03 PM - Oct 22, 2016

8

43 people are talking about this



Nalcor Energy

@NalcorEnergy

We are urging everyone at the Muskrat Falls site to exercise extreme caution. Please be safe. We are extremely concerned for your safety.

3:19 PM - Oct 22, 2016

24 53 people are talking about this

With files from Jacob Barker

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