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Oral Presentation

**Written submission from the
Ya'thi Néné Land and
Resource Office**

Exposé oral

**Mémoire de la
Ya'thi Néné Land and
Resource Office**

**Regulatory Oversight Report for
Uranium Mines, Mills, Historic,
and Decommissioned Sites in
Canada: 2020**

**Rapport de surveillance
réglementaire des mines et usines
de concentration d'uranium et des
sites historiques et déclassés au
Canada : 2020**

Commission Meeting

Réunion de la Commission

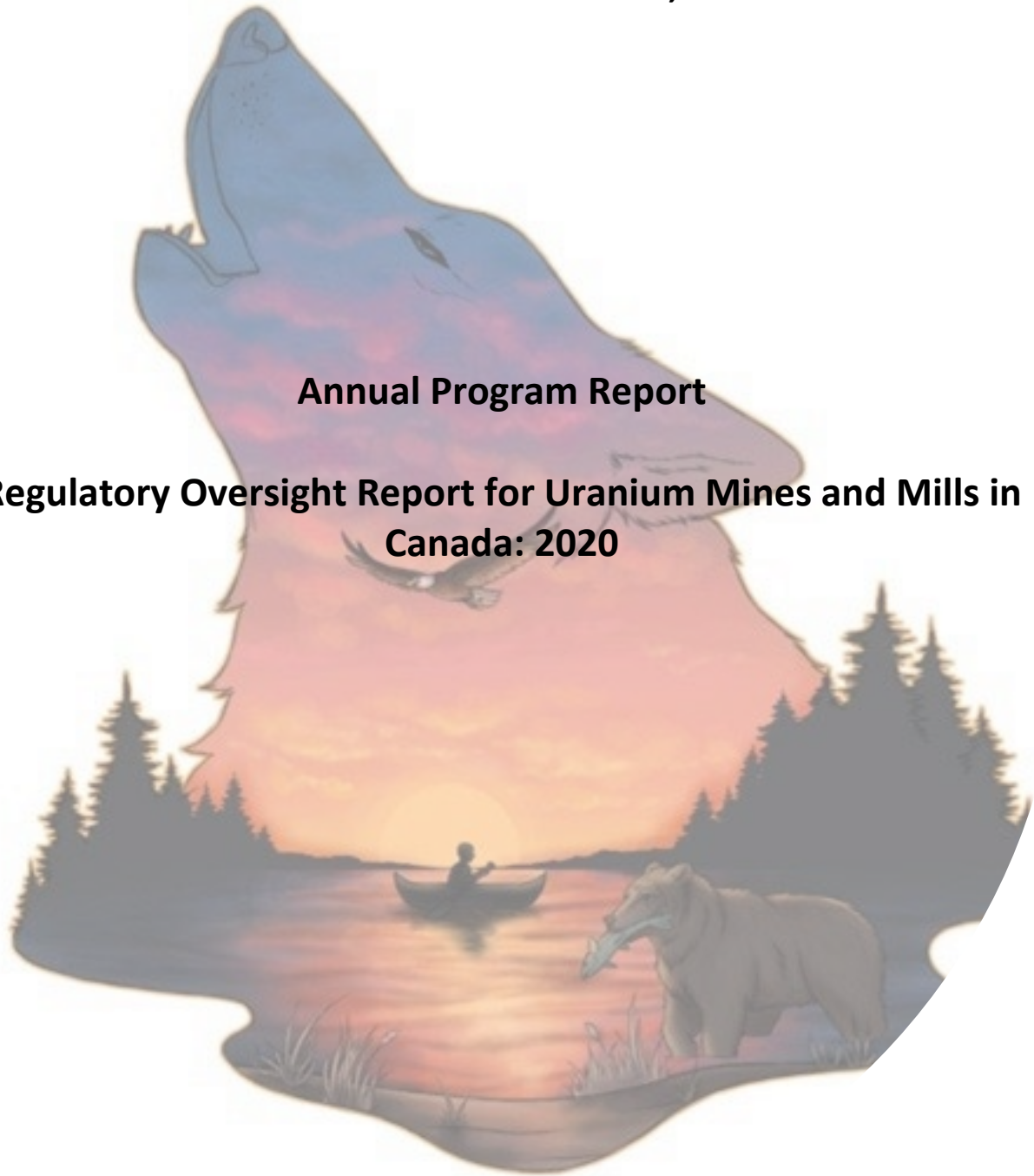
December 15, 2021

Le 15 décembre 2021

**Written Submission from
Ya'thi Néné Land and Resource Office
In the Matter of the;**

Annual Program Report

**Regulatory Oversight Report for Uranium Mines and Mills in
Canada: 2020**



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1.0 Introduction

The Regulatory Oversight Report (ROR) is completed on an annual basis and reported by the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC). The report focuses on the operating performance of uranium mines and mills licensees and licensed facilities. The facilities included in the 2020 report are Cameco Corporation's operations of Cigar Lake (underground mine with surface facilities), McArthur River (underground mine and surface facilities), Rabbit Lake (Eagle Point underground and tailings management facility), and Key Lake (mill operation and tailings management facility) and Orano Canada's operation of McClean Lake (mine and mill). Of these five mines and mills, McArthur River, Key Lake, and Rabbit Lake are currently under care and maintenance. The report also included an overview of the historic decommissioned mines of Lorado, Beaverlodge, and Cluff Lake.

The ROR provided an in-depth review and report of the performance at each of the operating facilities (focusing on radiation protection, environmental protection, and conventional health and safety), reporting of spills and incidents, and public information and community engagement. The appendices provided more detailed information on the safety and control areas (SCA) and the ratings that were given.

1.1 Ya'thi Néné Land and Resource Office

The Ya'thi Néné Land and Resource Office (YNLR) works to protect the lands and waters of the Athabasca Basin for the long-term benefits of its Denesųliné First Nations and Athabasca communities, guided by their knowledge, traditions and ambitions, while being a respected partner in relations with industries, governments, and organizations who seek to develop the Athabasca Basin's resource. YNLR has an independent board of directors that are appointed by the elected community leaders and operate four offices (Saskatoon, Fond du Lac, Black Lake and Hatchet Lake) with 14 staff. YNLR is tasked with overseeing the implementation of the Collaboration Agreement with Cameco and Orano on behalf of the seven Athabasca Basin communities among other land and resource related initiatives. YNLR works to protect the land and promote the interests of the people in the Athabasca Basin.

YNLR participates on all committees of the Collaboration Agreement which is a partnership established in 2016 between the seven Athabasca Basin communities and Cameco and Orano. The Agreement supports the operation of Cameco and Orano's mines, mills, and exploration sites throughout portions of Nuhenéné (Traditional Territory of the Athabasca Denesųliné) in return for benefits to the communities.

One of the committee's YNLR participates on through the Collaboration Agreement is the Athabasca Joint Environmental Subcommittee (AJES) alongside four community representatives. As a member of AJES, YNLR participates in quarterly meetings and various activities throughout the year from exploration to decommissioning with Cameco and Orano.

1.2 Document Timeline and Submission

YNLR received confirmation on September 29th, 2021 that we would receive funding from the Participant Funding Program Contribution Agreement through the CNSC. YNLR received the ROR on October 5th, 2020. The deadline for submission was November 15th, 2021 but YNLR was granted an extension until November 22nd, 2021.

YNLR staff along with numerous Board members, leadership, and Athabasca Land Protection Committee (ALPC) members attended the virtual engagement session hosted by the CNSC on October 8th, 2021, which provided an overview of each of the mines and mills that are regulated. This meeting was beneficial in providing insight on mining and milling activities for 2020.

After receiving and reviewing the ROR document and participating in the virtual meeting, YNLR conducted interviews with members of its Athabasca Land Protection Committee. YNLR is providing this submission on behalf of its Directors and Members.

2.0 What We Heard

During the review period, the interviews asked a series of questions on the importance, meaning, and connection of the land to the Athabasca residents. YNLR also asked those being interviewed about how uranium mining has impacted the land and the people and what they see for the future. Captured below are nine questions that were asked, and the answers received.

2.1 What does the land mean to you?

- *“This is my homeland, my ‘God’s country.’ It provides a healthy traditional way of life, fulfills my spirit, keeps me centered.”*
- *“The land means the world to me.”*
- *“Land and water, plants, trees, and animals are all useful to us Dene people.”*
- *“Protect our land, it provides for us.”*

2.2 What does (or did) the land mean to your parents and grandparents?

- *“Our parents grew up on the land, and it was passed on to us.”*
- *“They called our area God’s Country. Living here was the only place they wanted to be. It allowed them to commune with mother nature – gave them freedom, to have a cabin on the lake.”*
- *“It means the world to them. They live off the land and pass it on to us.”*
- *“They survived off the land, it meant everything to us. From survival to taking care of families.”*
- *“Land provides sustenance for current and future generations. It is connected to traditional knowledge and teachings.”*

2.3 What do you love about the land?

- *“Everything, it is our land it provides for us until the end of our time.”*
- *“The freedom to live here. The natural beauty, the opportunity to fish and hunt, and gather wood.”*
- *“Everything, beauty, calms you down and protects you.”*
- *“Beautiful country, best land in North America.”*
- *“Peace and quietness. Gain my sanity back when I go to my cabin [on the land].”*
- *“It is our home, it gives us what we need. Everything basically.”*

2.4 What is the connection of the Denesuline people to the land?

- *“It provides for us, and we hunt for our families. Our grandparents worked hard on the land, we have to continue on with what they left for us.”*
- *“The waterways – interconnects everything.”*
- *“We have a spiritual connection to the land.”*
- *“Dad used to say how he loves the land is the same way he loves his mom.”*
- *“Caribou, and other living animals.”*

2.5 How have the mines impacted the land?

- *“When you’re flying over mines, all you see is sand piles. Back then all you [would] see was beautiful green trees. It affects our land.”*
- *“Permanent disfigurement...contaminated waters. Now remediation has improved the land trying to return it back to mother nature. But the scars are testimony to mankind’s negative influence.”*
- *“The lands have been destroyed from drilling. Especially underground mines not properly decommissioned.”*

2.6 How have the mines impacted (positive and negative) the people in Nuhenéné?

- *“They have provided employment, but they’ve restricted their ability to continue with traditional lifestyle.”*
- *“The impact is the damage they are doing to the land, also the amount of water they are using.”*
- *“Many people benefit from mines positively. Raising families, not always negative impact.”*
- *“Everything has positive and negative. Raised family good financially. Downside is the traffic of the exploration, in and out of the mines, disturbance, water quality, and air dust.”*

2.7 How do you feel the land will be in the future?

- *“If this continues, it will affect water, land, there will be nothing for our young people. How are they going to survive?”*
- *“With support groups, locals, elders, natives, now having a voice and are being heard the land will have an opportunity to heal and thrive. Industry can no longer be the dominant voice.”*

- *“Good question, I can’t predict but I want the best for our children’s future.”*
- *“Time has changed, everything now is being watched carefully, documented, and being restored.”*
- *“65 years, seen a lot of change with mines and different species of animals.”*
- *“Everything is regulated so it is hard to say.”*

2.8 Do you believe the land is being protected?

- *“No! They say [they will] but they don’t protect, only samples. Everywhere you see, the land already damage.”*
- *“Now there are steps/processes in place to ensure our land is no longer being [impacted]. Been a long time coming but there is still a lot of work to do.”*
- *“Yes, again time has changed. More organizations like Ya’thi Nene protecting the lands and waters.”*
- *“No, I don’t believe it is being protected.”*

2.9 What do you want the government to know about Nuhenéné, the Denesų́líné, and mining?

- *“Government is making decisions and destroying our land, if you say no to the government, they don’t care about the Dene people. They make millions of dollars, nothing [for] local members. They should consider [the] people and share in more benefits.”*
- *“Lived off the land since time immemorial, until our land was taken.”*
- *“Since the 1940s, the government has been apart of the uranium mining industry in northern Saskatchewan, Uranium City and Gunnar...and they abandoned those mines.”*
- *“I want the government to know that [the mines are] an asset to us. Also, we want collaboration with the government.”*
- *“The government needs to respect our views and work with us to ensure a sustainable, healthy, affordable, lifestyle. They need to be aware of our close relationship to the land and hear our voice.”*

2.4 Summary of Findings

As the Commission can see from the responses, the Athabasca Denesų́líné and Basin residents are intrinsically connected to their land in all aspects of their lives. It is evident that they have firsthand experience of how mining and exploration have impacted the land and their ability to practice their treaty rights to hunt, trap, fish, and gather. They acknowledge that they have seen the cumulative impacts of exploration and mining and how reclamation and remediation does not solve all the issues on the land. The Athabasca Denesų́líné and Basin residents have concerns for how the land will continue to be impacted for future generations to come. There is acknowledgement of the regulations in place to monitor, but enhanced community communication and participation throughout the regulatory process is needed to ensure their voices are being heard in the decision-making process.

3.0 Closing Remarks

In our past interventions, the CNSC indicated the annual ROR is a means to engage on any concerns around the Uranium mines and mills. This will be the fourth intervention provided to the Commission, and there is to date limited information on how past recommendations made have influenced how the CNSC conducts their regulatory processes. YNLR recommends that the CNSC continues to work on more robust and inclusive processes for both itself and the license holders to enable more effective consultation and engagement with Nuhenéné communities.

YNLR looks forward to further collaboration with the CNSC to assist with the implementation of these recommendations and to continue the dialogue to improve the regulatory process that licensees and licensed facilities abide by.