

A brief presented to the Honorable H. Ström, Premier of Alberta
by the people of the Big Horn Indian Reserve.

It is our privilege to present this brief to you and your cabinet ministers. We do not want the Big Horn dam to be built. We will give you the reasons why we are against this dam. We know that many other people are opposed to this dam as well, but we will only relate the reasons why we are opposed. These other people's reasons can only give more strength to our request that you do not build this dam.

Introduction.

We know that it looks as though we have waited until too late to get the government to stop this dam. The government could still stop this dam if they really wanted to do so. You can tell us that you have already spent a lot of money on this dam project. This is true, but the government can also save a lot of money by not building the dam. For example, if the dam is built, then a lot of the new road, which has just been built at a great cost, will be under the flood water. This road will have to be rebuilt, higher up in the mountains where it will cost even more. This cost of another new road could be saved by not building the dam.

We would like to point out that one of the reasons why we have not explained these problems to you before is that you, the government, have made no effort to contact us to find out if we did have any problems. We had heard stories that the government was thinking of building a dam in the area; but, the first we really knew that this was true was when the machines and men started to do some work. You must remember that many of our people do not read, write or even speak English. We do not get newspapers and we watch very little T.V. How are we supposed to find out about these things unless the government does come and explain it to us. It is the government who has the responsibility to come to us; but you did not do this! There are approximately ninety of us people who live on the Big Horn Indian Reserve and we are the only people who are directly affected by the dam. It is very easy to say that the reserve is not in the area that will be flooded. This does not change the fact that the area that will be flooded has been and is still being used all the time by us Indian people on the Big Horn. The government is more concerned about the white hunters who go into the area for recreation than they are about the Indian people who are using and need this area for their way of life. Why is it that the government has made no attempt to even find

out what kind of problems are made for the Indian people by building this dam? You, the government, say that we are equal with the white people, but then you treat us as though we were nothing. Does the government think that we are nobody, for that is how they have treated us - as though nobody lived in the area where the dam is being built. You have talked about the needs of the Indian people and how the white society must understand and respect the Indian culture. Talk is very easy thing to do. Now is a time for action by the government. You must understand the needs of us Indian people and respect our culture by not building this dam.

Historical and Cultural Significance:

The plains area that will be flooded is an area that has a lot of history for the Indian people. This is one of the natural passes into B.C. and was used for many years by the Indians. Also, because it is open and has lots of water, the Indian people have always lived here. When the white man first came to this country, they found Indians living in this plains area. Our forefathers lived and died in this area and so it has a special meaning to us Indian people. This was an area where we Indian people kept our old ways for a long time after the white man put the Indian people on reserves where they lost the Indian ways. The white man, he is proud of his history, he writes of it in books, he saves old buildings, and he makes special places to save his history and remind him of his culture. The Indian too has things in his history and his culture which he wants to save. The Indian may not be able to write his history, but he has his special places which he can go to and see. This is his history and part of his culture. The government should not be destroying this part of our history. Instead you should help us Indian people to save these places so that our grandchildren and even the white man's grandchildren can know and see and understand about these things.

Indian Land.

This land that will be flooded does not have just meaning as our history. You can see by how we use this land even now that it is an important part of us Indian people. This is the special land that God gave to us Indian people. Before the treaties were signed, Indian people lived here. Then after the treaties, we Indian people still lived here and nobody told us that this was not our land. Back around 1900, when some of these white men came into the area and tried to take the land from the Indians, our fathers and grandfathers wrote to somebody in Ottawa asking about this land. At that time a man in Ottawa wrote back and told us that this land belonged to us Indians for 99 years, and

if at the end of that time the Indians still wanted and used that land they would have it for even another 99 years. We do not have this letter now as it got destroyed some years back; but there should be a record of this in Ottawa even now.

We may now live on the reserve which is downstream from the plains area but we have never stopped using the plains or thinking of this area as belonging to the Indians. We first moved off of the plains because Tom Wilson made us go. He wanted the plains grass so that he could raise horses and he chased us Indians from these plains. We moved back when he could no longer keep us off the plains. Later the stores and school were built at Nordegg and so we moved off the plains during the winter months so that we would be closer to the town. Even then, in the summer, we always moved back on the plains. The government then came and gave us the reserve. The forest rangers made the Indians who were still living on the plains move on to the reserve. Also, the rangers started to shoot our horses to use as poison bait to kill the wolves. We were frightened for our animals and for our children and so we could not live on the plains while the rangers were doing these things. The ranger even built a fence around Norman Abraham's houses and told him to get out of the plains and to live on the reserve. The ranger even shot our horses to feed his dogs. When we were no longer in these houses, then the ranger burnt many of these houses to keep us from going back to use them.

Even though all these things happened, we still went back to the plains when we could, especially during the summer. It is only because all these things happened and because the white man forced us to leave that we moved our homes from the plains. If the white man had not done all these things to us, we would still build our homes on the plains. These plains are still Indian land today by the right of our using this land. Does not the white man call this "squatter's rights", or maybe this is a right for only the white man and the Indian does not have this right.

Graves and old houses.

You can also tell that this is Indian land by the fact that there are many Indian graves and Indian houses in the area which will be flooded. There are no white man's graves in this area and no homes of the white man. Where does a man bury his dead? He buries them on his land where his home is!

The government has acted very badly about these graves. The forestry people have known that Indian graves were here but they did not even try to find out from us where these graves were until just a few weeks ago. In January, Mr. Sutherland of the Forestry was told that there were more than fifteen Indian graves in this area, but still he did not find out where these were. The government then sent in the bulldozers which are destroying the markers so that now there are at least three graves which are forever lost. This kind of action was not necessary and it is only because you have no regard for us Indians that you acted in this way. The band council sent you a letter asking you to stop this clearing so that the markings would not be destroyed. But still you did nothing to stop this clearing and find the graves. The clearing goes on and most probably more graves will be destroyed.

Calgary Power told us a few weeks ago that they would move the graves. We do not want these graves moved nor do we want them to be flooded. We believe that once a body is put into the grave it is not supposed to be moved. God is the only one who should move these bodies. We also believe that God did not intend that the bodies should be under water and so the graves should not be flooded. These things are part of our religious beliefs and a belief cannot be changed by somebody saying that it will not hurt to move the graves. We ask you to think how you would feel if this was your relatives' graves.

There are also some of the old houses, barns and corrals that were built by our forefathers on the plains. Also some of these buildings were built by people who are alive today. One of these houses is still being used as a trapping cabin. In the summer time we go down to these old houses and visit and tell our children and grandchildren about their relatives and how they lived and what they did. These houses have a deep meaning to us and it would be a very sad thing if they are destroyed as they are part of our culture. Already the bulldozers have destroyed some of the barns and corrals. Here again the government has shown that it has no interest in how we Indians feel about these old buildings.

Hunting, Trapping, Grazing Horses.

The plains are a very important area because this is the only place where the snow does not become too deep. The area is open and the wind can blow the snow off the ground so that the animals can feed. This also makes it easy for us to walk through the area. Also there are many spaces in this area which are open and which is good grassland on which the animals can feed. This grass does not grow under the heavy tree area, it can only grow in the open areas.

During the winter months, the only place where we Indian people can hunt is on the plains. We need this wild meat for our living. We do not have a rich reserve. Most of us people on this reserve can make a living but we do not become rich or have any extra money. When the snow becomes deep, the animals come down to the plains and we can hunt them. If the plains are flooded the animals will either move into the park, which some already do when we hunt them, or move down into valleys and plains which are much farther away from the reserve. We cannot afford to drive a great distance to do our hunting. Our treaty gives us the right to hunt, but you want to destroy the area in which we hunt. This shows that you really have no consideration for our treaty rights. You should also know that it is not just the Big Horn Indians who hunt in this area. Indian people from all over the province come to the plains to hunt and to worship and to see the beautiful country that God made and gave to us Indians.

The plains is also the area where we put our horses to feed. We have always done this and now you take it from us. Where will our horses feed when you put in the dam? There is not enough grassland on the reserve for them. The horse is an important part of the way we live and of our culture. Once again we can see how the white man is trying to destroy the Indian people.

There are six traplines which come down into this area which will be flooded. Most of these people can only trap in the plains area because the snow is too deep and it is mountains where the rest of their trapline goes. We do not have a lot of money and so we cannot buy the equipment that would let us get back into the mountains to trap. We can only trap on the plains and now you will destroy this area. Some of these are good traplines and now they will be useless. You cannot give us new traplines to replace these because this whole area is already divided into the various traplines and these are being used by other people. Right now the people on the Big Horn are mainly cutting lumber for their living. In a couple of years there will be no more timber, and

then the men will have only the traplines left with which to make a living. You take away these traplines and then what will happen to us Big Horn people?

Sundance and Religious Area.

The area that is to be flooded has a great religious meaning to us Indian people. It is not just us Big Horn people who use this area to make a Sundance; but Indians from Duffield, Morley, Hobbema and O'Chiese have all used this area in just the last few years. A Sundance is not for fun and it is made as an important part of the Indian's religious belief. We cannot make a Sundance in just any place. The Great Spirit shows a man in a dream where the Sundance is to be made. There are only special places where the Spirit wants the Sundance to be made. The Sundance Lodge and the ground where a Sundance is made becomes a sacred area. Even after the Sundance is over the place where it was made is still sacred and the Indians come to these areas. This is the reason why we do not take down the Sundance Lodge. The government sends in the bulldozers and already the old Sundance Lodges are destroyed. This is a bad thing you do against our religious belief and against our God. This is a special religious area for us Indians and the Great Spirit will be very angry if you flood this area.

It is not only that you flood the area, but even the part that is not going to be flooded the government has made into a special park called a "natural area". In this "natural area" a person cannot cut trees or set up their camp. How can we make the Sundance when you make this kind of park. The Forestry people knew that this was the area where Indian people made their Sundances, but still you made it into a park. This shows that you really have no thought for the Indian people or the Indian culture. This is Indian land and the government should not make laws and rules that stop the Indian people from following their religious beliefs and using their sacred land.

Recreation.

The Indian people use this area for recreation as well. In the summer time we go down and camp on the plains. We take our families and have picnics on the plains. We show our children the old houses, the graves and tell them of our history and our culture. Our children can ride their horses and run in the open areas. This is the Indian's land and there is no better land any place else. We Indians believe that the plains is a safe home in the time of trouble. We can enjoy God and nature by going to this area. The white man now wants to destroy all this. The white man has his own kind of recreation, but this area is the most important place for the Indian's recreation.

Dam Breaking.

The Big Horn Reserve is about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles downstream from where they are building the dam. If the dam breaks, the only people who would be hurt would be us. The reserve is on low land and if the waters came all the houses and all the people on the Big Horn would be destroyed. There are no white people who would be hurt. The nearest place that might be flooded would be Rocky Mountain House, and this town is far away. It is very easy for the government to tell us that we have nothing to fear as the dam will be well built and it would never break. The government thinks that it would never break but you cannot know for certain that it would never break. In other countries where dams have been built, the dams have broken and people have been killed. You can say that the dam will not break but this still does not change the fear that we have. If the dam did break, it would be too late to do anything at that time as we would all be dead. This is another good reason why the dam should not be built, because we are afraid.

Changed Life.

If the dam is built and the roads are paved and motels are built and recreation facilities are established, then many white people will be coming through this area. A lot of these white people could cause trouble for us Indians. They may come on the reserve to look around and to bother us. There will be more cars which will be a greater danger for our children. All these developments will make changes in the way that we are now living. We like the way that we live now. We do not want these kinds of changes as we know they will be bad for us Indians. You can tell us how we can make money from these tourists, but we know that this will not work because it is always the white man who will make this money. The white man knows and understands how to make money on these things and the Indian never has a chance. Anyway, we don't want to make all this money as it is more important that we keep our way of life and our culture than to make money. We are proud of our culture and we do not want this to change. We are Indians and we want to remain with the Indian ways. We have seen the sadness and bad things that happens when the white man lives too close to the reserves.

Conclusion.

You can see now how many problems are being made by the government building this dam. Even you white men should be able to understand that if you do build this dam, you will be doing a very bad thing toward us Indian people. Some of the people on the

Big Horn

Big Horn have said that if you build the dam you may as well kill them first because after the dam is built it will be their death anyway. We ask you to have some feeling and thought for us Indian people and not to build this Big Horn Dam.

For many years the white man has been destroying the Indian culture. This is your opportunity to help us save our culture. We ask you to realize which is more important - the dam or us Indian people.