

The 2026 Hydro Agreement: What's Missing

Grand Riverkeeper Labrador's concerns about Gull Island and the new deal with Hydro-Québec

September 2026

What's Being Proposed

**2,250–
2,700 MW**

A new dam at Gull Island;
capacity depends on the
final design

~230 km

Length of the reservoir the
dam would create

51 years

Length of the new Churchill
Falls contracts (2027–
2077)

The deal also includes upgrades at Churchill Falls, new transmission lines, and a study of 2,000 MW of new wind power.

The Assessment Is Out of Date

15+

years since Gull Island was last reviewed (Joint Review Panel, 2011)

The project has grown, too: Gull Island's planned capacity has risen from 2,250 MW to as much as 2,700 MW.

What's changed since then



Climate science



What we know about reservoir emissions



Energy markets and demand



The cost of wind and solar power

What the Summary Says... and Leaves Out

NL Hydro's summary highlights

- “Largest clean energy investment in North American history”
- \$50+ billion in spending
- More power for Labrador mining and industry

What it doesn't mention

- The land the reservoir will flood
- Methane from the reservoir
- Methyl-mercury in fish and country foods
- Traditional land use and cultural sites
- Labrador's coastal communities

Why Methylmercury Matters



What It Is

A neurotoxin formed when flooded soil breaks down underwater. It builds up in fish and in the animals that eat them, so levels rise as it moves up the food web.



Who Is Most Susceptible

Fetuses' developing brains and nervous systems. Effects on the developing brain can include cognition, memory, attention, language, fine motor skills and visual-spatial skills.



What the Research Projects

Harvard researchers projected a doubling of average exposure for Inuit downstream of Muskrat Falls. Gull Island was among the 22 projects assessed.

Is Hydro Really “Clean”?



When land is flooded, plants and soil break down underwater and release greenhouse gases, including methane.

- 1 Methane traps more than 80 times as much heat as carbon dioxide over 20 years (IPCC, 2021).
- 2 Emissions for these projects are estimated with computer models, not measured directly.
- 3 Measuring emissions at the reservoir itself would give real figures rather than estimates.

Our ask: measure the emissions before calling these projects “clean and green.”

A River Is More Than Electricity



Flooded land

Wetlands, shorelines and forest disappear under the reservoir.



Fish and wildlife

Changed water flows disrupt habitat in the river and the Lake Melville estuary.



Sediment and nutrients

Dams trap sediment and nutrients that feed the estuary and the ocean.



Mercury in our food

New reservoirs can raise methylmercury levels in fish and country foods.

Big Questions an Assessment Should Answer



How will shifting river flows to winter affect river ice and ice roads?



Could changes to fresh water flowing into the North Atlantic affect ocean currents and Arctic warming?



How will climate change affect water supply, reservoir levels and reliability?

Scientists are actively studying these questions. They belong in any modern assessment.

People and Places



Who's being consulted?

NL Hydro's summary names only the Innu Nation. Other Indigenous groups and downriver communities aren't mentioned.



What's already been lost

Flooding at Churchill Falls and Muskrat Falls destroyed cabins, travel routes, harvesting areas and important places.



Coastal communities

The summary promises power for mining and industry. Coastal communities still rely on costly, polluting diesel.

Remember Muskrat Falls

Muskrat Falls went billions over budget, and the public is still paying for it. Big projects need independent checks before the shovels go in.

- ✓ Test cost estimates independently
- ✓ Show how the project holds up if costs rise or markets fall
- ✓ Say clearly who benefits, and who carries the risk

\$29.1 billion

Estimated cost of Gull Island alone, before financing

Public backing

Canada will guarantee Gull Island's debt

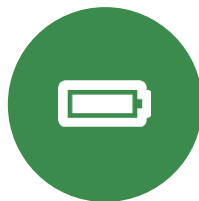
Better Options **Exist**



Wind



Solar



Storage



Conservation

Since Gull Island was assessed in 2011, wind and solar have become far cheaper and remain the lowest-cost, quickest-to-build new generation (Lazard, 2025). We welcome the wind study in the new deal.

The question isn't just whether Gull Island can make electricity. It's whether this is the *best* choice for Newfoundland and Labrador.

OUR MESSAGE

Pause. Reassess. Then decide.

We're asking the provincial and federal governments to hold off on further commitments until Gull Island gets a new, independent and complete assessment based on updated science.

What We're Asking For



A new, independent assessment

Of the whole project: dam, reservoir, turbines and transmission lines



Measure methane and methyl-mercury

Using current, site-specific science



Real consultation

With Indigenous peoples and all Labrador communities, with funding to take part



Strong federal oversight

No shortcuts through old approvals



Independent checks on the numbers

Costs, markets and reliability



A fair look at alternatives

Wind, solar, storage and conservation

“The Grand River is not simply a source of electricity. It is a living river, a source of food and livelihood, and part of Labrador’s heritage.”

Read our full critique and get involved

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