



January 29, 2002

Premier Mike Harris
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Harris:

The Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness ("Friends") urges you to make the proposed sale of the Atikokan Generating Station contingent on the facility's conversion to natural gas. The Friends is a non-profit wilderness conservation organization based in Minneapolis, Minnesota that has 2,800 members from the United States and Canada. Its mission is to protect, preserve, and restore the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the Quetico-Superior Ecosystem.

The generating station is emitting a variety of pollutants that compromise the air of Quetico Provincial Park. The lack of sulfur dioxide scrubbers and mercury control devices make the plant one of the dirtiest in Ontario. Failure to control these pollutants means that they settle in the lakes of Quetico Provincial Park, contaminate the area's fish, and contribute to acid rain. All of these factors detract from the experience of the park's annual 30,000 visitors, who expect a wilderness experience void of the noise and pollution found in urban areas. Unfortunately, such expectations are diminished by the mercury and sulfur dioxide released from the Atikokan plant.

Meanwhile, natural gas is a superior energy alternative to coal because it is cleaner. Coal plants release 30 dangerous pollutants, including five carcinogens. Some of these chemicals cause smog, brain and kidney damage, and asthma. The related health care costs of treating such illnesses are exorbitant. Natural gas plants, however, release almost no nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, mercury, or heavy metals. This reduction in emissions means less related damage to the environment and fewer health problems.

Consequently, the sale of the Atikokan Generating Station must be made contingent on its conversion to natural gas. A similar request was made upon the sale of the Lakeview coal generating station in Toronto and Atikokan should be held to the same standard. Visitors to Quetico Provincial Park would be grateful for such a condition because it would help restore the beauty and pristine feeling of this international wonder.

I hope that you will consider these comments during review of the proposed sale.

Sincerely,

Sarah Strommen
Policy Director