



**The Most Precious Gift: The Right to Clean
Water in First Nations – Economics Subgroup
CREATE-H2O Conference – June 2, 2017
Raymond Harper and Melanie O’Gorman
(St. Theresa Point First Nation and University of Winnipeg)**

Scope of the problem

- There were 132 drinking water advisories in 89 First Nations (excluding British Columbia) in August 2016 (Health Canada (2016)).
- The Trudeau government has promised to end boil water advisories in First Nations communities by 2020.
- To do so, more funding is needed for infrastructure and operations and maintenance.
- Our work asks: “What is the cost of **not** providing such funding for water infrastructure?”



Results of National Study

- We used the Regional Health Survey from the First Nations Information Governance Centre and found that:
 - Those with running water are 40% less likely to report feeling distressed.
 - Piped water is associated with a 20% decrease in stomach/intestinal problems relative to trucked water.
 - Self-rated health is more likely to be positive for those who access water from a piped water system, then from a cistern system and finally from a well.
 - All other water sources are associated with less distress compared to having water delivered by truck.

Study in St. Theresa Point (STP) First Nation

- Study conducted in March 2016.
- St. Theresa Point is 610 kilometers northeast of Winnipeg.
- Why STP? Leadership passionate about the issue:
"The response by INAC will not alleviate the third-world living conditions of our communities, but instead INAC is effectively condoning and perpetuating such tragic conditions."
- Chief: David McDougall (CBC (2011))





Survey

- We surveyed 145 people between March 19-23, 2016.
- We first went door-to-door – stopping in at peoples’ homes and having them fill out the survey/be interviewed there
- We also had a booth at the Northern Store
- Our survey consisted of:
 - Open-ended questions
 - Quantitative questions

Access to Water in STP

- 88% have a working flush toilet
- 4.8% use an outhouse
- 10.5% use a slop pail
- 87% have a working shower
- 74.2% have a septic tank



Water Source	
Pipe (home connected to main water line)	52.1%
Water tank (water delivered by truck)	35.2%
No running water	12.7%

What would you do with the extra time if you weren't hauling water?

- “I would focus on my family, spending time with them”
- “I would clean my home and yard during the summer”
- “I would relax”
- “I would exercise”
- “I would look for a job”
- “I would play video games”
- “I would watch TV or visit friends”
- Most prominent response – “I would work”



Water and Health

- 30% of individuals said they've missed work or school because they or a family member was sick from a waterborne illness
- 18% said they've missed school or work for another water-related reason
- 33.3% felt chlorine is bad for their health

Health conditions mentioned:

- Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)
- Impetigo
- Lice
- Boils
- Infections
- Diarrhea
- Stomach aches

Water and Health (continued)



“Babies with rashes – but so many babies look like that. Then racism happens - because such issues are blamed on parents’ mistreatment”

“People are desensitized – because it happens all the time here”

Water Quality

“Before we had running water we had clean water”

- Water quality goes from one extreme to the other – not consistent
 - At times we have lots of brown water coming out
 - Other times you can just smell chlorine
- Many don't use water for drinking – only for washing

“Our ancestors respected water”

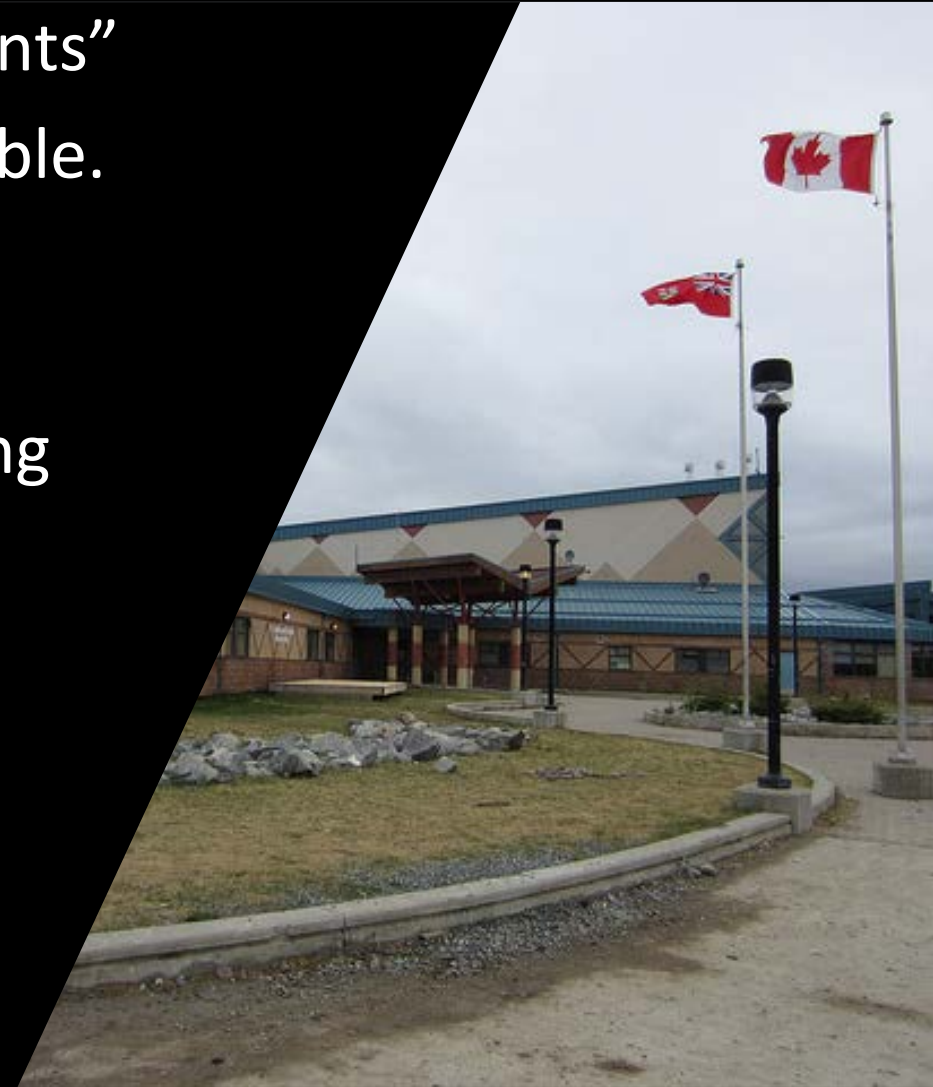
“Water is a spirit. It is used in many ways – for the animals, plants and us. We use to heal our bodies.”



Impact on Schooling

“The water situation does make a difference when you’re talking about the quality of life of the students”

- Water pressure – at the school – very unpredictable.
 - It’ll shut off sometimes for an hour or so
 - School is at the end of the line
- Skating rink – can’t flood it – so it’s not functioning
- Some students go to the washroom every hour – they have diarrhea
 - But they’re still managing to come to class
- If water isn’t working, school is shut down – this happens a lot





Impact on Schooling (continued)

- Some students don't come to school because they haven't been able to shower or do laundry
- Eye wash stations don't work – science classes can't do experiments
- If there is a fire – and everyone is using water so water pressure is low – it would be a disaster
- “Water has always been an issue”

What, in your view, is most important for improving the water/sanitation situation in your community?

- Most prominent answer - for all to be directly connected to main water line – 38% of respondents indicated this
- 10% of individuals demanded more water trucks
- Other responses:
 - “I would like water to run in pipelines in each home for convenience like washing clothes or daily shower”
 - “Water that I could trust so I don’t need to boil it”
 - “More retrofitting of homes”
 - “More frequent testing of water”
 - **“If everyone got water from the main line – how would things change?”**

