

August 19, 2019

Jackie Wells  
EA Commitments/Environmental Effects Monitoring Programs Lead  
Lower Churchill Project

Dear Jackie,

RE: Headpond Water Sampling Program – Update to August 19, 2019

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

In order to provide additional monitoring coverage of possible changes in methyl mercury concentrations in water during headpond formation, the provincial government requested an additional sampling program be implemented by Nalcor. Nalcor provided a program description to government and engaged Amec Foster Wheeler to implement the sampling program. This memo provides an update on information regarding the headpond water sampling program completed to date.

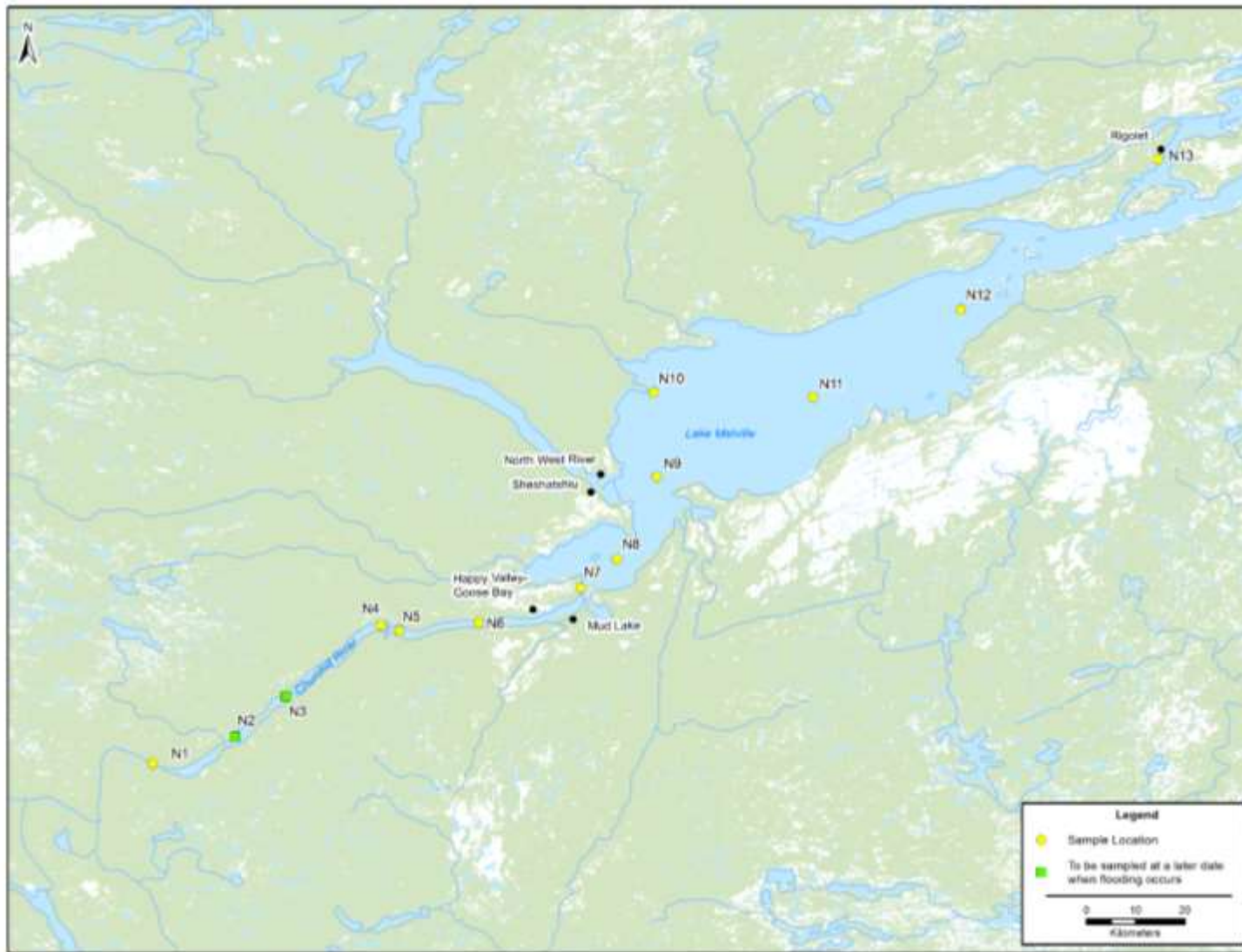
## **2.0 SAMPLING PROGRAM**

Sampling began on October 14, 2016 in an attempt to capture existing, natural methyl mercury concentrations before any headpond formation. Following re-impoundment in February 2017, sampling has been ongoing for all 11 sample locations (Figure 1) as per WRMD request. As per IEC recommendation, each location is sampled weekly when water temperatures exceed 6°C. When water temperatures are below 6°C, sampling occurs on a bi-weekly basis unless there is a change in water elevation of the headpond by Nalcor which would re-trigger weekly sampling. Water samples have been analyzed for total mercury, dissolved methyl mercury, and total methyl mercury as well as other parameters known to affect methyl mercury generation and transport.

## **3.0 HEADPOND FORMATION**

Headpond formation was initiated again in early February 2017, with the first set of impoundment samples being collected February 6, 2017. Water levels at the time of last reported samples within this summary were approximately 24.5 m elevation.

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**Figure 1: Map of sample locations, Lower Churchill River to Rigolet**

133 Crosbie Road  
PO Box 13216  
St. John's, NL A1B 4A5  
Tel +1 709 722 7023  
woodplc.com

Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions  
Registered office:  
2020 Winston Park Drive, Suite 700, Oakville, ON L6H 6X7  
Registered in Canada  
No. 773289-9; GST: 899879050 RT0008; DUNS: 25-362-6642

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#### 4.0 SUMMARY RESULTS

Sampling has continued throughout, and beyond, initial headpond activity to document any potential changes in natural, background methyl mercury in water and any potential changes due to flooding (Table 1). Each location is currently sampled on a weekly basis due to a recent rise in water elevation from 23 m to 24.5m. with weekly sampling occurring during any change in water elevation of the headpond by Nalcor or at a time when water temperatures exceed 6°C as per the IAEC recommendation.

**Table 1: Total number of samples collected from each sample site**

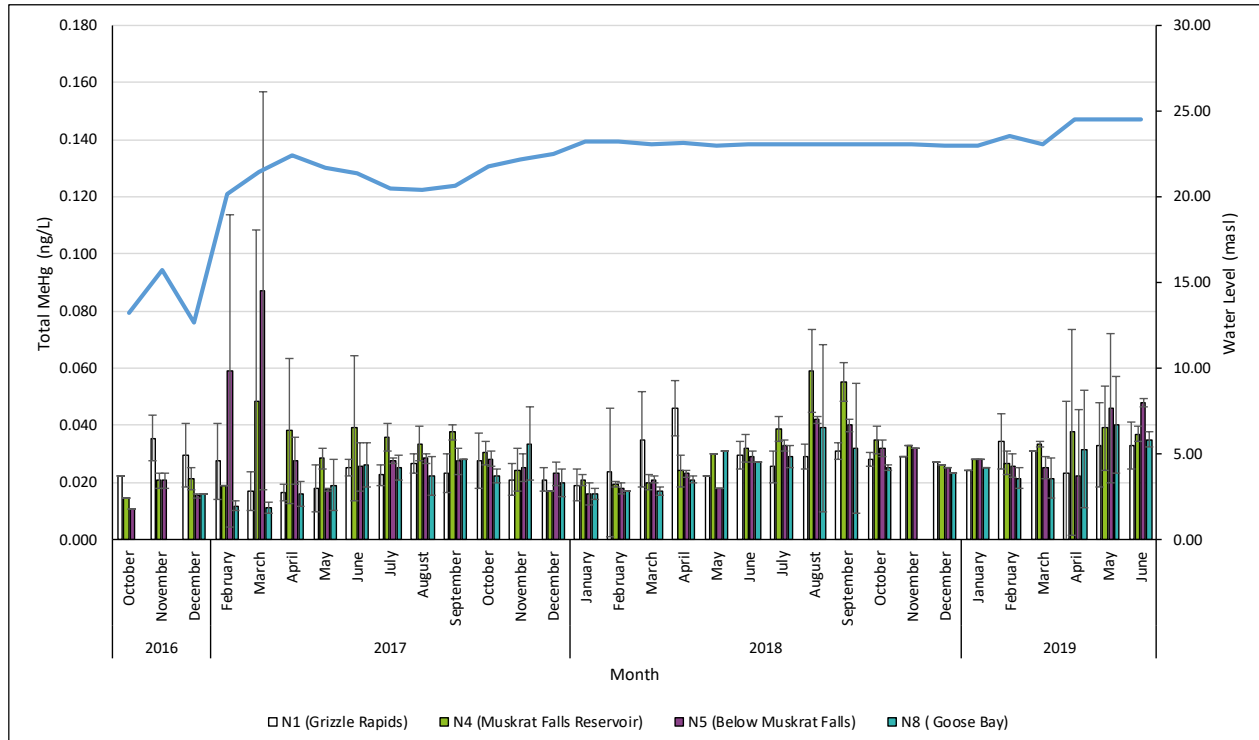
Sample ID (ongoing)	Sample ID (from original plan)	Date of First Sample Collection	Number of Samples Collected
N1	1	Oct. 14, 2016	101
N2 <sup>1</sup>	2	Oct. 14, 2016	2
N3 <sup>1</sup>	3	Oct. 14, 2016	2
N4	4	Oct. 14, 2016	100
N5	5	Oct. 14, 2016	104
N6	-	Dec 20, 2016	91
N7	7	Oct. 14, 2016	95
N8	-	Dec 20, 2016	80
N9	8	Oct. 14, 2016	70
N10	-	Dec 20, 2016	64
N11	10	Oct. 14, 2016	68
N12	-	Dec 20, 2016	60
N13	11	Oct. 14, 2016	77

<sup>1</sup> Sample sites located above headpond elevation will be completed upon reservoir formation

Sampling has been ongoing with the last series of samples presented within this summary being collected on June 27, 2019. Ongoing results beyond this date are pending analytical laboratory analysis.

As an example of the results within the dataset, a summary of existing mean monthly total methylmercury results (with 95% confidence intervals) from several sample sites is provided in Figure 2. Site N5 is located directly downstream of Muskrat Falls and N8 (Goose Bay) is the first sample site within the Goose Bay / Lake Melville estuary downstream of the lower Churchill River. Site N8 was added to the sampling regime on the week of December 20, 2016. These sites would be anticipated to be the first to show any indication of downstream increases or transport in total methyl mercury related to flooding. Also shown are the results for the upriver control site (Grizzle Rapids – Site N1 in Figure 1) which is located upstream of any reservoir influence. Figure 3 provides the results of dissolved methylmercury for the same sample sites and times.

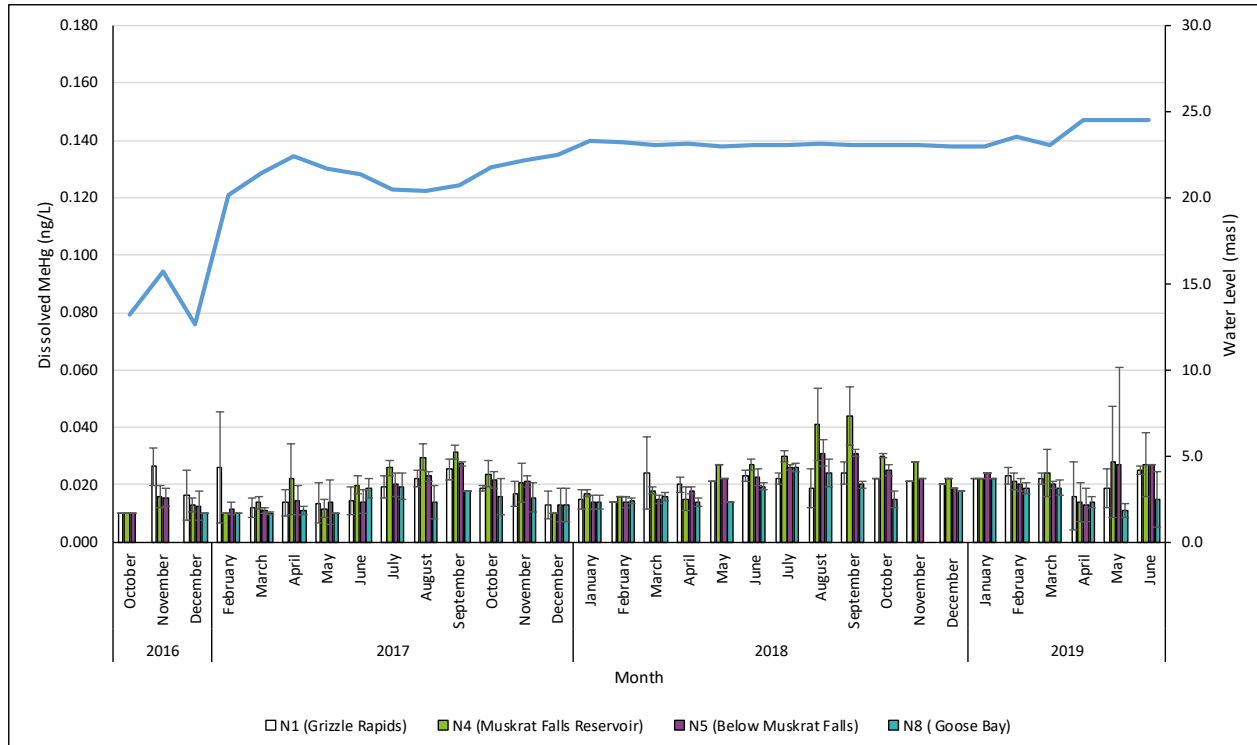
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Water elevation data from October 14-November 18, and April has been provided by Environment Canada (Station Number 03OE015). Data post November 18 has been provided by Nalcor. Missing dates have been estimated based on data provided by Nalcor. For calculation purposes, values below MDL are included as the MDL (0.010ng/L)

**Figure 2: Mean monthly total methyl mercury concentration (ng/L) at various sample sites. 95% confidence intervals also shown.**

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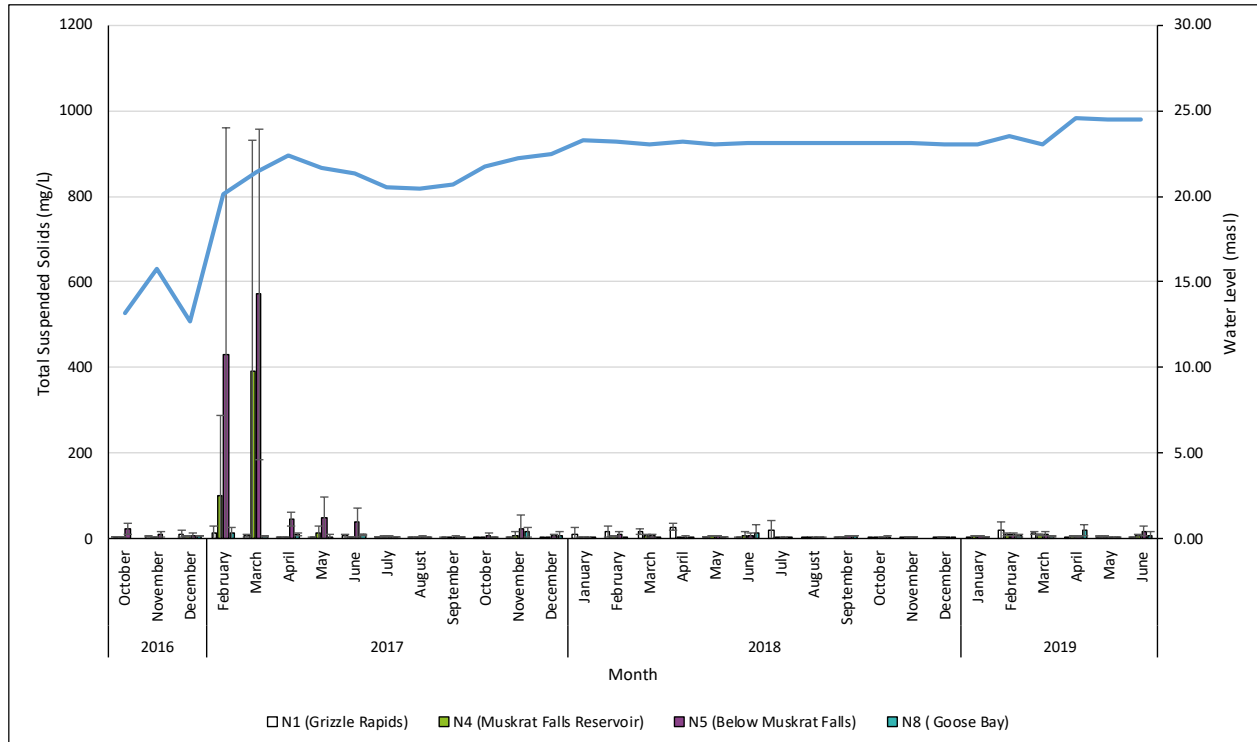


Water elevation data from October 14-November 18, and April has been provided by Environment Canada (Station Number 03OE015). Data post November 18 has been provided by Nalcor. Missing dates have been estimated based on data provided by Nalcor. For calculation purposes, values below MDL are included as the MDL (0.010ng/L)

**Figure 3: Mean monthly dissolved methylmercury concentration (ng/L) at various sample sites. 95% confidence intervals also shown.**

As noted, these graphs include a select number of representative sites sampled and the accompanying spreadsheet contains all data to date. Higher concentrations of total methylmercury recorded during several sample weeks within N4 (headpond) and N5 (below Muskrat Falls) have been associated with increased total methyl mercury likely bound to particles within suspended sediments; Figure 4 shows Total Suspended Solids (TSS) concentrations. Increases in total mean methyl mercury concentrations at various sample sites occurred during the same weeks as increases in TSS were detected. This is supported by dissolved methyl mercury concentrations (Figure 3) which did not show any similar increases and therefore methylation due to flooding caused by bacteria activity was not evident.

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**Figure 4: Mean monthly Total Suspended Solids (TSS) concentration (mg/L) at various sample sites. 95% confidence intervals also shown.**

As indicated in the figures, concentrations of total and dissolved methyl mercury measured within sample stations have generally remained low. During the warmer sampling periods (June – September of 2017 and 2018), a slight increase in total and dissolved methylmercury concentrations was observed within all stations shown in Figures 2 and 3. Highest concentrations were recorded within the headpond station, which was likely caused by increased microbial activity and increased access to flooded material within the headpond. However, these slight increases do not appear to be transported downriver as most concentrations within Goose Bay (N8) remained similar to those at the upriver control/baseline (N1), particularly dissolved methylmercury. Any cumulative trend in downstream methylmercury concentrations is not evident.

Most total methylmercury concentrations have remained below 0.050 ng/L. The lab’s accredited detection limit for both total and dissolved methylmercury is 0.010 ng/L. All results to date for all parameters tested have been provided to Nalcor and government and are available. As more data becomes available, it will be provided as quickly as possible.

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If you have any questions, or require any further information, please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,

**Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions  
a Division of Wood Canada Limited**

Prepared by



Matthew Gosse, B.Sc  
Environmental Biologist

Reviewed by



James McCarthy, M.Sc., CFP  
Associate Biologist