



MANITOBA ECO-NETWORK

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October 7, 2021

Honourable Sarah Guillemard
Minister of Climate and Conservation

Laura Pyles
Director of Environmental Approvals
Conservation and Climate

Honourable Ralph Eichler
Minister of Agriculture and Resource Development

Public Registry
publicregistry@gov.mb.ca

Re: CanWhite Sands Corp. – Silica Sand Extraction Project – File: 6119.00

Dear Minister Guillemard, Director Pyles, and Minister Eichler,

This letter is in response to the Environment Act Proposal (EAP) for the CanWhite Sands Corp. Silica Sand Extraction Project. Since 1988, the Manitoba Eco-Network (MbEN) has promoted positive environmental action by supporting people and groups in our community. Local residents have been in contact with us and have been expressing serious concerns about CanWhite's silica sand extraction and processing activities in Manitoba since CanWhite announced its intention to develop the Vivian Sand Facility and Sand Extraction Projects. This includes concerns about the potential impacts on the environment, particularly the Winnipeg Sandstone and Red River Carbonate aquifers and associated drinking water, and human health. There has also been significant concern about the environmental assessment process and the fact that the Government of Manitoba has allowed CanWhite to separate their directly related activities into two separate assessment and licensing processes.

To facilitate meaningful public participation, MbEN requests you consider CanWhite's combined silica sand activities as a Class 3 Development and require a Clean Environment Commission (CEC) public hearing with participant funding. The CEC should initiate a public outreach program to get input on the terms of reference for the hearing and participant funding program. Until a public hearing is held for at least the silica sand extraction activities, and further information is provided to fill gaps in currently available public information about CanWhite's proposed plans, no Environment Act Licence should be issued for either of CanWhite's proposed silica sand projects, including the Vivian Processing Facility.

We recommend the delay of the public hearing and licensing decision until more comprehensive information is made publicly available, such as:

- the draft guidelines issued by the Government of Manitoba and used by CanWhite to produce their EAP Report;
- the independent hydrological study currently being undertaken by Municipal Governments potentially impacted by the development;

- other documents referenced in CanWhite’s EAP Report including the Water Management Plan, Groundwater Monitoring and Impact Mitigation Plan, Mine Closure Plans and Environmental Emergency Response Plan, to improve the transparency, accountability and legitimacy of the impact assessment and licensing process;
- documents and studies conducted by the Province of Manitoba, to ensure the sustainability of CanWhite’s novel silica sand extraction process, and the protection of the potentially impacted aquifers (for example, the status of the Southeast Regional Groundwater Management Plan, and its applicability to this project; any new research since the work referenced in *Silica in Manitoba* by D.M. Watson (Manitoba Energy and Mines Geological Services, 1985), which concluded the proposed silica sand extraction methodology is not viable); and
- an independent review of the groundwater model provided by CanWhite, as well as an independent review of the geochemical groundwater assessment provided.

MbEN has heard a broad range of concerns from local residents and concerned citizens about the problematic and confusing planning and impact assessment process that has been undertaken by CanWhite in the past few years. To date, the process has failed to facilitate meaningful public participation and has not meaningfully included potentially affected Indigenous communities that have publicly stated their concerns with CanWhite’s proposed silica sand activities. For example, the two public meetings conducted by CanWhite (one for the silica sand processing activity and one for the silica sand extraction facility) were timed to minimize public inclusion in the EA process, and concerns expressed by participants at these meetings were dismissed and inadequately addressed.

In summary, there continues to be a long list of potential environmental and health impacts that local residents and concerned citizens do not feel have been adequately addressed by CanWhite or the Government of Manitoba. Public concerns include, but are not limited to:

- the effects of the new, unproven mining methods proposed for the extraction activities;
- subsidence due to sand and water withdrawal from the extraction process, and the potential to cause ground and surface water contamination and sinkholes;
- the effects of the extraction activities to the health and wellbeing of workers and nearby residents, including the risk of silicosis;
- potential for light, noise, and air quality impacts;
- the effect of the extraction project on the aquifer including water levels, recharge, sustainability of use, and pollution from acid rock drainage;
- the feasibility of reclamation of the aquifer if it becomes contaminated; and
- potential contamination of surface water bodies, such as the Brokenhead River via runoff from the Project site(s) and accidental or intentional discharge of contaminants.

There has also been minimal to no discussion of cumulative impacts and climate change considerations despite the clear connection between all proposed silica sand activities and the significant amount of truck and rail transportation involved. It is also unclear as to what the extracted and processed silica sand will be used for. There is documented proof from the proponent that the majority of the silica mined will be used as a proppant for the oil and gas fracking industry, despite a lack of recognition of this potential use in the EAP Report.

The Government of Manitoba has a duty to protect lands, waters and air, public health, and the interests of the public. As a proposed development that requires numerous permits, licences and approvals it is important that CanWhite’s proposed development meets the principles of sustainable development recognized by the Government of Manitoba and embodied in *The Mines and Minerals Act*,

which requires government and industry to work with local communities to ensure the preservation of the environment for the benefit of present and future generations, share responsibility for sustaining a sound and healthy environment, protect and enhance the ecosystems of the province, and rehabilitation of land that is damaged or diminished by mining activity (*The Mines and Minerals Act*, s 2(2)). In this regard we are concerned that CanWhite has used legal intimidation tactics such as the issuance of cease-and-desist letters in early 2021 in an attempt to silence concerned community members who were publicly sharing their concerns with CanWhite's proposed development.

To balance the economy with the environment, MbEN also recommends the Government of Manitoba require more publicly available information about the financial history and plans associated with CanWhite's proposed development to assure the public that the development is financially viable and there is minimal likelihood of stranded environmental liabilities in the future. There is rightful concern, as we have been made aware of CanWhite's CEO's history with the Alberta Securities Commission, whereby there is potential that CanWhite would not be able to cover the cost of future closure and remediation activities, especially if an emergency spill and contamination of groundwater were to occur.

MbEN appreciates your consideration of our comments about the environmental assessment and licensing of CanWhite's proposed silica sand extraction and processing activities. We welcome future opportunities to engage with the Government in the assessment of projects in Manitoba to ensure the highest level of environmental protection measures are required. Under *The Environment Act*, the Department of Conservation and Climate is tasked with protecting the quality of the environment and environmental health of present and future generations and providing the opportunity for all citizens to exercise influence over the quality of their living environment. We are confident you will adhere to these principles and ensure an informed decision about the proposed development can be made.

Sincerely,

Glen Koroluk
Executive Director

Heather Fast, B.A., J.D., LL.M.
Policy Advocacy Director