

Hydroelectric corporations around the world are misrepresenting their impacts on the environment.

Here's how.

A CASE STUDY ON GREENWASHING BY MANITOBA HYDRO

ANDREA SUTHERLAND
STEPH McLACHLAN, Ph.D.
suther55@myumanitoba.ca
steph.mclachlan@umanitoba.ca

Clayton H. Riddell Faculty of Environment, Earth, and Resources

Background

Greenwashing

The misrepresentation of environmental impacts and efforts.¹

Types of Greenwashing:

- CLAIM-BASED**
untrue claims about a product: “carbon-free hydropower”
- MOTIVE-BASED**
falsely claiming environmental initiative as a motive: a hotel presents cost-saving water conservation measures as environmentalism
- EXECUTIONAL**
audio-visual cues implying a connection to nature: an advertisement shows a gas-intensive truck in a lush forest²

Greenwashing Strategies:

- HEROIC FRAMING**
Unfairly presenting oneself as an environmental hero: celebrating carbon reductions while illegally dumping toxic waste³
- DIDACTIC FRAMING**
Presenting company experts to enforce industry-led solutions: a fossil fuel company presents an expert to talk about “clean coal”⁴

Greenwashing is illegal under Canadian law.⁵

Existing research is focused on high-profile cases, such as the rebranding of large fossil fuel companies like BP and Chevron as environmentally friendly.⁶⁻⁸

Objectives

- To identify and characterize the greenwashing of Manitoba Hydro’s environmental impacts.
- To consider the implications of this greenwashing for affected communities.

Method

Corporate and public dialogues were compared.



Differences were evaluated for greenwashing.

Results

Greenwashing Mitigation Efforts: South Indian Lake Environmental Steering Committee

The South Indian Lake Environmental Steering committee was formed as a partnership and continues to be presented as a working relationship despite Manitoba Hydro pulling its funding and ignoring community concerns.



“When are we going to hear the truth about what Manitoba Hydro is doing?”
• Elder Joyce McKinney, Swan Lake First Nation •

“We have no money to fight Hydro so we’ve got to fight back with words and with words we can fight back. By telling the truth about what really is happening in these communities.”
• Gerald McKay, Grand Rapids •



Greenwashing Environmental Impacts:

Above are two versions of the same reality. The first as shown by Manitoba Hydro as a two-story mural on the corner of Portage Ave and St James St in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The second was painted by Annie Beach, a Cree/Saulteaux/Ukrainian artist, and depicts the environmental effects of hydroelectric developments.

This emphasizes the visual misrepresentation of environmental impacts, and is an example of *executional greenwashing*.

Photo Credits: The Murals of Winnipeg; Annie Beach, Wa Ni Ska Tan

Promotional Videos

Framing Manitoba Hydro as the field’s expert:
Resigns consumers to corporate mitigation efforts.



An example of *didactic framing*.

An example of didactic framing, re-enforcing Manitoba Hydro’s sturgeon stocking efforts on the Nelson River.

Photo Credit: Manitoba Hydro
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oy8kCAq06To&t=18s

Beyond Public Relations:

Greenwashing wasn’t just seen in advertising efforts. It was also identified in:

- Presentations to Indigenous Communities**
Environmental impacts are underemphasized when consulting with Indigenous groups.
 - For example, an information session for the Keeyask project was called “far too rosy.”¹¹
- Corporate Science**
 - Concerns that research is censored to underemphasize negative impacts.¹²
 - Projected impacts are based on ‘arrogance’ and assumptions rather than actual data.¹³

Conclusions

- Manitoba Hydro greenwashes both their environmental impacts and mitigation efforts.
 - Evidence of executional greenwashing and didactic framing in their advertising practices.
 - Similar greenwashing strategies were shown by BC Hydro (Site C) and Hydro-Québec (Romaine Complex).
 - Further research required to determine its causes.
- It is of particular concern as it relates to consultation with Indigenous communities and organizations:

Greenwashing can act as a barrier to free, prior, and informed consent.

References

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