EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1998, the Ontario Government passed the *Energy Competition Act* in order to establish a competitive electricity market in Ontario. In 2000, the *Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act* (LRIA) was amended to establish the statutory authority of the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) to order the preparation of a water management plan for operation of waterpower facilities and associated control structures and ensure compliance with that plan. The intent of the Water Management Plan is to provide certainty and clarity as to how waterpower facilities and control structures are operated with respect to levels and flows so as to balance environmental, social and economic objectives. The Water Management Plan for the Matabitchuan River system is a complex plan that includes the numerous waterpower structures and facilities located along the river system that have influence on levels and flows. This plan is the result of a partnership between Ontario Power Generation Inc. (OPGI) and Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) who operate facilities along the Matabitchuan River system, as well as members of the public and First Nations who participated on committees to assist with the planning process.

The Matabitchuan River travels approximately 70 km from its headwaters at Rib Lake, taking in other major tributaries such as Net, Cassels, Rabbit and Fourbass lakes, to its confluence with Lake Timiskaming, covering a drainage basin of 933 km^2. Small sized urban centres and First Nations communities depend on the Matabitchuan River system for municipal as well as industrial uses. The Matabitchuan River system provides prime outdoor recreational opportunities to the residents and visitors in Northeastern Ontario. The watershed is home to a variety of fish and wildlife species. Resource based tourism industry within the Matabitchuan River watershed relies heavily on the waters to provide fishing, hunting and recreational opportunities for their clients. The Matabitchuan generating station has an installed capacity of 10,140 kW, which represents approximately 0.1% of the hydroelectric capacity in the province. In addition to power generation, these facilities also provide a means of flood mitigation.

Initial meetings between power producers and MNR began in August 2002 to establish the scope of the Water Management Plan and the planning process. In November 2002, the Steering Committee and Planning Team were formed. The role of the Steering Committee is to provide direction to the Planning Team, decide on responsibilities for the cost associated with the development of the plan, to resolve any impasses reached by the planning team and to recommend approval of the Water Management Plan. The Planning Team is responsible for completing the work required to finalize and meet the objectives of the plan as set by the Steering Committee.

A large component in the preparation of the Water Management Plan is consultation with the public and First Nations. The first stage of public consultation invited the public to participate in the planning process. This consultation communicated to the public that a Water Management Plan was being prepared, identified that a Public Advisory Committee would be formed and invited participation of the public on this committee. In September 2002, the Public Advisory Committee was formed. This committee is composed of ten volunteers or dedicated citizens representing a diversity of interests along the course of the river. The Public Advisory Committee provides a mechanism for the public to contribute to the review process and the preparation of the final document. The formation of such a committee not only enhances the facility operator's representatives' and MNR's ability to provide a communication link with the public, but also provides advice to the planning team. Also participating in the planning process are representatives from the following First Nations: Teme-Augama Anishnabai First Nation, Temagami First Nation and Matachewan First Nation. Mattagami First Nation has chosen to remain informed of the water management process but not take an active role.

The Planning Team then gathered background information on the watershed and facilities in preparation for the next stage of public consultation. The second stage of public consultation was a series of scoping workshops in the major urban centres in the watershed. This consisted of a number of open houses in which the public was invited to get information on the planning process and raise any issues and concerns. Questionnaires were given out at the open houses as well as distributed through a mail out. From the issues and concerns received from the public, a Public Issues Document was created. MNR also included issues relating to fisheries, wildlife and parks while the power producers included issues outlining the voluntary constraints currently adhered to that have been agreed upon over the years with the public to mitigate issues relating to such things as navigation, recreation and fisheries. The Planning Team gathered background information on the issues and identified any key gaps in information pertaining to the issues with recommendations for required studies. A Scoping Report was prepared for the Steering Committee for approval. It contained background physical and biological information on the watershed, descriptions of the structures and facilities with the current operating regimes, the issues document, and the terms of reference for both the plan and Public Advisory Committee. The issues formed the basis for the options that were developed for each facility. The existing operations were used as the baseline conditions to which options were compared to make improvements. Concurrent to the gathering of public issues and option development pertaining to these issues, issues were gathered from the participating First Nation Communities. Temagami First Nation presented a report on the Montreal & Matabitchuan Rivers Water Management Planning that outlines issues and concerns of the First Nation. The issues and concerns that are within the scope of the Water Management Plan will be referred to the Standing Advisory Committee for follow-up.

The third stage of public consultation was a series of information sessions in the major urban centres in the watershed to present the range of options developed to the public and gather feedback. The Planning Team then selected the preferred overall operating option for each facility and drafted the Water Management Plan Report. The fourth stage of public consultation consisted of additional information sessions to the public and to participating First Nation communities; these were held in the major urban centers within the watershed. These information sessions provided the public and First Nation communities an opportunity to provide comments and to review the draft Water Management Plan Report. The fifth stage of public consultation will be the inspection of the final approved plan by the public and participating First Nations.

In 2006, the Standing Advisory Committee will be appointed as outlined in the Standing Advisory Committee terms of reference (Chapter 13). The role of the Standing Advisory Committee is to review and advise the Steering Committee on matters relating to the implementation, monitoring and communications of the Water Management Plan. The term of the Water Management Plan is ten years. During the term of the plan, the Standing Advisory Committee will monitor the progress of plan implementation and determine the need for any plan amendments as outlined in Chapter 14. Each year the Committee will prepare an Annual Report which will provide an overview of system operations, document any new issues and associated actions and highlight ongoing monitoring and assessment activities. The Annual Report will be sent to all key system stakeholders and to all First Nation communities and will be available to the public.

In the fifth year of the plan, a Five Year Water Management Status Report will be prepared by the Committee which will summarize progress on plan implementation and recommend any additional actions necessary to meet plan objectives. System stakeholders and the general public will be invited to inspect the report through notice on the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry, notices placed in local newspapers throughout the system and through direct mailing. Copies of the report will be provided directly to all First Nation communities. The Committee will consider any comments received on the Report and may make recommendations to waterpower operators and MNR on the need for additional monitoring or assessment activities or for minor changes to facility operating regimes. Plan amendments will be initiated where required to address these

changes. If the Committee determines that there are significant unresolved issues, a recommendation may be made to undertake an early review of the plan.

In the beginning of the ninth year of the plan, the Committee will initiate a comprehensive review of the Water Management Plan. The plan review process will mirror the steps involved in the initial plan preparation, as appropriate, with new data and information considered as a basis for continuing with the status quo or recommending changes.

The following is a list of some of the major accomplishments of this Water Management Plan:

Net Creek Dam:

- Revised the winter drawdown to have a partial draw down of 30 cm in the fall by removing one log per sluice September 15th, with the full drawdown completed prior to freshet. This will have the potential to benefit lake trout spawning by encouraging the trout to spawn deeper with the initial drawdown prior to spawning (Oct), thus reducing the impact of the final drawdown for flood mitigation.

Rabbit Lake Dam:

- The operating minimum elevation was raised to 287.00 m from 286.00 m. The winter drawdown target was revised to achieve 287.00 m by March 20 and then close off the dam to fill the reservoir to 291.40 m by May 1 on a reasonable effort basis.
- During dry summers the lower end of the summer band is to be targeted by Thanksgiving weekend which will assist in providing downstream flow to benefit downstream aquatic habitat, recreation and navigation. For these purposes, a dry summer is defined as a summer in which the total precipitation received at Earlton in July and August is less than 160 mm.

The committees involved in the water management planning process have worked cooperatively and have agreed by consensus that the selected operating plans for the facilities provide sustainable management of levels and flows that will contribute to the environmental, social and economic well-being of the people of Ontario.