

# Canada and US First Nations unite Against Hydro-Québec

---

NEWS PROVIDED BY

**Innu-Atikamekw- Anishnabek Coalition /Innu Nation/Penobscot Nation →**

Mar 30, 2021, 12:05 ET

---

## **American and Canadian First Nations call on Biden and Trudeau to block Hydro-Québec's plan to build a transmission line to Massachusetts**

INDIAN ISLAND, Maine, March 30, 2021 /PRNewswire/ - The Penobscot Nation of Maine, supported in Labrador by Innu Nation and in Quebec by the First Nations of Pessamit (Innu), Wemotaci (Atikamekw), Pikogan, Kitcisakik and Lac Simon (Anishnabek), have written to the White House and to the Prime Minister of Canada to denounce Hydro-Québec's plan to build a hydroelectric transmission line through Maine to Massachusetts. Together, they are asking President Biden and Prime Minister Trudeau to halt initiatives that would see the state-owned utility make billions of dollars in profits without consulting or compensating the First Nations on whose ancestral territories its electricity is produced and through which it will be transported

Hydro-Québec plans to transmit its hydroelectricity via the proposed *Appalaches-Maine Interconnection Power Line Project* to the U.S. border and then through the *New England Clean Energy Connect* (NECEC) transmission line, which, once built,

would connect to the New England grid. Many First Nations in Canada and the United States would be directly affected by these projects.

Grand Chief Etienne Rich (Innu of Labrador), Chief Jean-Marie Vollant (Innu of Pessamit), Chief François Néashit (Atikamekw of Wemotaci), and Chiefs Monik Kistabish, Adrienne Jérôme and Régis Pénosway (Anishnabek of Pikogan, Lac Simon and Kitcisakik) stated: "It is regrettable that we are now forced to ask the highest American authorities to ensure that our rights are respected, when the Canadian and Quebec governments should be doing so on our behalf. That's why we have also sent a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau."

In the U.S., Kirk Francis, Chief of the Penobscot Nation in Maine, states in his letter to the White House: "The U.S Army Corps of Engineers ignored its responsibility – and our requests – to consult with us and gave the NECEC its stamp of approval with blinders on." He explains that the construction of a transmission line would involve extensive clearing, which would expose many creeks and streams to the sun's heat, and, in turn, threaten the sustainability of brook trout populations and several other species in different habitats.

In his letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, Mr. Francis explained that the Penobscot have steadfastly opposed the construction of the NECEC line because it runs directly counter to the ecological principles it actively pursues. "As a river people, our First Nation members have a spiritual and cultural connection to the Penobscot River. Water quality is therefore of great importance to us. Recently, we played a major role in projects to clean up the river, including one to reduce mercury and dioxin pollution and to reintroduce American shad and Atlantic salmon," he said.

The electricity being supplied by Hydro-Québec will be generated by 33 hydroelectric plants that are unconstitutionally located on the ancestral territory of the Innu, Atikamekw and Anishnabek First Nations in Quebec. In addition, a large portion of it

will be generated by the Churchill Falls hydroelectric station in Labrador, which caused the devastating flooding of thousands of square kilometres of Innu Nation territory, and for which Innu Nation has never been compensated by Hydro-Québec.

On both sides of the border, First Nations argue that there was a lack of due diligence and transparency in the transmission line approvals process, and that they were never consulted.

In their letters to the Biden administration, the American and Canadian Chiefs urged the U.S. Department of Energy to set aside the Presidential Permit issued for the NECEC project, to conduct a comprehensive environmental impact study, and to take their ethical concerns into serious consideration before proceeding any further.

In addition to taking their cases the highest level of government in both countries, the Grand Chief of Innu Nation in Labrador and Chiefs of the Innu-Atikamekw-Anishnabek Coalition in Quebec warn that Americans are being subjected to an expensive greenwashing campaign. Given that Hydro-Québec has spent \$10 million on an intensive and biased advertising campaign in the USA in an effort to influence Maine voters to cast their ballots in favour the NECEC project during an upcoming referendum, they suggest that this could be considered as interference by a foreign government.

In their letters to Prime Minister Trudeau, the Chiefs from Quebec and Labrador focused on Hydro-Québec's violation of their constitutional rights and on its breaching of several articles of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), which will soon become law in Canada. "For decades, Hydro-Québec and the Quebec government have ignored our repeated requests to sit down with us and negotiate," they said.

"Hydro-Québec claims to offer green energy to American consumers, while making billions of dollars in profits at the expense of the Indigenous peoples whose ancestral lands it exploits. We are tired of this. That's why we're calling on the Canadian and American governments to intervene on our behalf," they added.

SOURCE Innu-Atikamekw- Anishnabek Coalition /Innu Nation/Penobscot Nation

