Phase 1 Archaeological Impact Assessment and Heritage Review– Amherst Wind Energy Project

Introduction

Acciona Wind Energy Canada Inc. in partnership with Wind Dynamics Inc., is proposing to construct and operate a 34 megawatt wind power facility consisting of approximately 20 wind turbine generators with a sub-surface collection system connected to a new substation. The proposed project would be built on land near the town of Amherst in Cumberland County, within an area of approximately 30 hectares, mainly marshland. The study area is bordered by Highway 104 to the east, John Lusby Marsh to the west, the LaPlanche River to the north, and Amherst Ridge to the south. The study area is currently being used as a sod farm, so the surface has seen considerable disturbance (Figures 1 and 2).

This report examines the historical background of the study area, with an emphasis on the Acadian period, to determine the level of archaeological potential within it and whether the proposed project will have a negative impact on any archaeological resources, both historic and First Nations. It was concluded that there was a low potential for First Nations archaeological resources but a moderate potential for historic resources, specifically dyke related. It was recommended that any disturbance of the riverbank be avoided or, barring that, an archaeologist monitors such work. If that mitigation is followed, it was recommended that the project proceed as planned.

Historical Background

The Amherst region is one that boasts a rich Mi'kmaq prehistory mainly due to the abundant resources of the surrounding marshlands and the canoe routes that connected the Cumberland Basin with the Northumberland Strait. While many of the historic references refer to Mi'kmaq occupation around Amherst, there is usually very little specific geographic detail supplied.

The historic occupation of the area began in earnest with the Acadian settlement in the seventeenth century. The closest former Acadian village to the study area is Beaubassin, located on Fort Lawrence Ridge, approximately 1.5 km to the northwest. Jacques Bourgeois founded the village of Beaubassin in 1671 or 1672 and by 1686 there were 22 houses on the ridge, and it was boasted that the area could sustain 100,000 cattle.[1] The village thrived as the hub of a trading network with the Mi'kmaq, Louisbourg, and New England and by 1720 it was reported that there were 70 or 80 families there.[2] The Abbé Le Loutre evacuated Beaubassin on April 21 and 22, 1750, and burned the village to the ground. By September of that year the British had built Fort Lawrence just north of the former village in a bid to gain military control of the area. The French retaliated by building Fort Beasusejour on present-day Aulac Ridge, 1.8 km west of Fort Lawrence. Figure 3 shows the two forts at some time between 1750 and 1755, but there is no indication of Beaubassin. This map does, however, show the portage route along the

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[1] Lavoie: 1
[2] Ibid

Missiquash that led to the Baie Verte. Figure 4 shows the area in more detail with the two forts and their associated settlements. Of particular interest are the dykes along the La Planche River, which border the north end of the study area. Ironically, there is a small hill that is labeled “Wind-mill Hill”. Finally, the prominent ridge to the south is the study area is also shown.

The two forts faced each other for several years but, in 1755, a combined British and New England force attacked Beausejour from Fort Lawrence and, after a short siege, they captured the fort, which they renamed Fort Cumberland. Figure 5 dates after 1755 and shows the new Fort Cumberland and includes insets of the soon-to-be demolished Fort Lawrence. Beaubassin is shown to be more widespread on this map, presumably to illustrate its destruction. The well-documented exportation of the Acadians began that year and, as the British moved their operations to the more substantial Fort Cumberland, Fort Lawrence was abandoned and burned in 1756.[3]

There was very little development close to the study area, apart from the establishment of Amherst in the second half of the eighteenth century, until 1888, with the start of construction on the Chignecto Ship Railway. This mega project, which was the brainchild of engineer Henry Ketchum, was designed to carry ships the 27 km overland from Baie Verte to the Cumberland Basin. Unfortunately, the project had financial difficulties and came to an end, three quarters completed, with the withdrawal of government support in 1891.[4] Figure 6 shows the proposed Chignecto Ship railway and the Cumberland Basin lifting dock. It also shows a proposed “Keefer’s Canal” just north of the study area.

While the project was not completed, one can still see evidence of the work on the shores of the Cumberland Basin. Figure 6 shows the remains of the lifting dock and the filled-inline of the railway. The study area is located just at the right-hand side of the photograph and Fort Lawrence Ridge can be seen to the left.

Previous Archaeology

There has been archaeological work done on the sites of Beaubassin Fort Beausejour and Fort Lawrence, but there are no reported archaeological sites located within the study area.

Archaeological Potential

First Nations

There is documentation indicating the presence of Mi’kmaq people in the region surrounding the study area. They would have used the Missiquash River as a canoe route between the Cumberland Basin and the Northumberland Strait. The Mi’kmaq would have also exploited the natural resources located within the marshlands and in the higher inland regions. It is very unlikely the study area was a place where the Mi’kmaq would have settled, as it was too low and wet. It is more likely they were to be found on the high

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[3] http://en/wikpedia.org/wiki/Fort_Lawrence
[4] http://www.lib.unb.ca/archives/ketchum/chignecto_railway.html

ridge where the town of Amherst is now located. Therefore, the potential for the study area containing First Nations archaeological resources should be considered low.

Historic

While there is a great deal of historic potential to the north and south of the study area, concentrated on the high ground, it is unlikely that any settlement was attempted within the study area itself. It is too low and wet for any type of habitation. However, there is little doubt that the Acadians had used the area beginning in the seventeenth century, and this is reflected in the dyke system constructed along the banks of the La Planche River (Figure 4). The remains of these dykes can be seen today and they should be considered as significant. It is also possible that aboiteaux, a type of wooden sluice, were incorporated into the dyke construction as well. The historic potential for the study area should then be considered as moderate.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The background research shows that the region around the study area has a rich prehistory and history, but there is no evidence of any settlement within the study area itself. The area is salt marsh and would simply have been too wet and all settlement in the area is concentrated on any patch of high ground (‘islands’) or along the ridges of land. However, there are remnants of an Acadian-period dyking system within the study area and this is considered as moderately significant. It is unclear if the dykes have been modified or destroyed by past development and difficult to evaluate what remains. It is recommended that any negative impacts to the banks of the river be avoided, particularly in areas where tributaries may have entered the La Planche River and aboiteau were could have been employed for drainage. If excavation along the banks cannot be avoided it is recommended that the work be monitored by a professional archaeologist. The Chignecto Ship Railway was constructed very close to the study area but it should not be impacted by the proposed project. Apart from avoidance of the riverbanks, it is recommended that the project proceed as planned.

References

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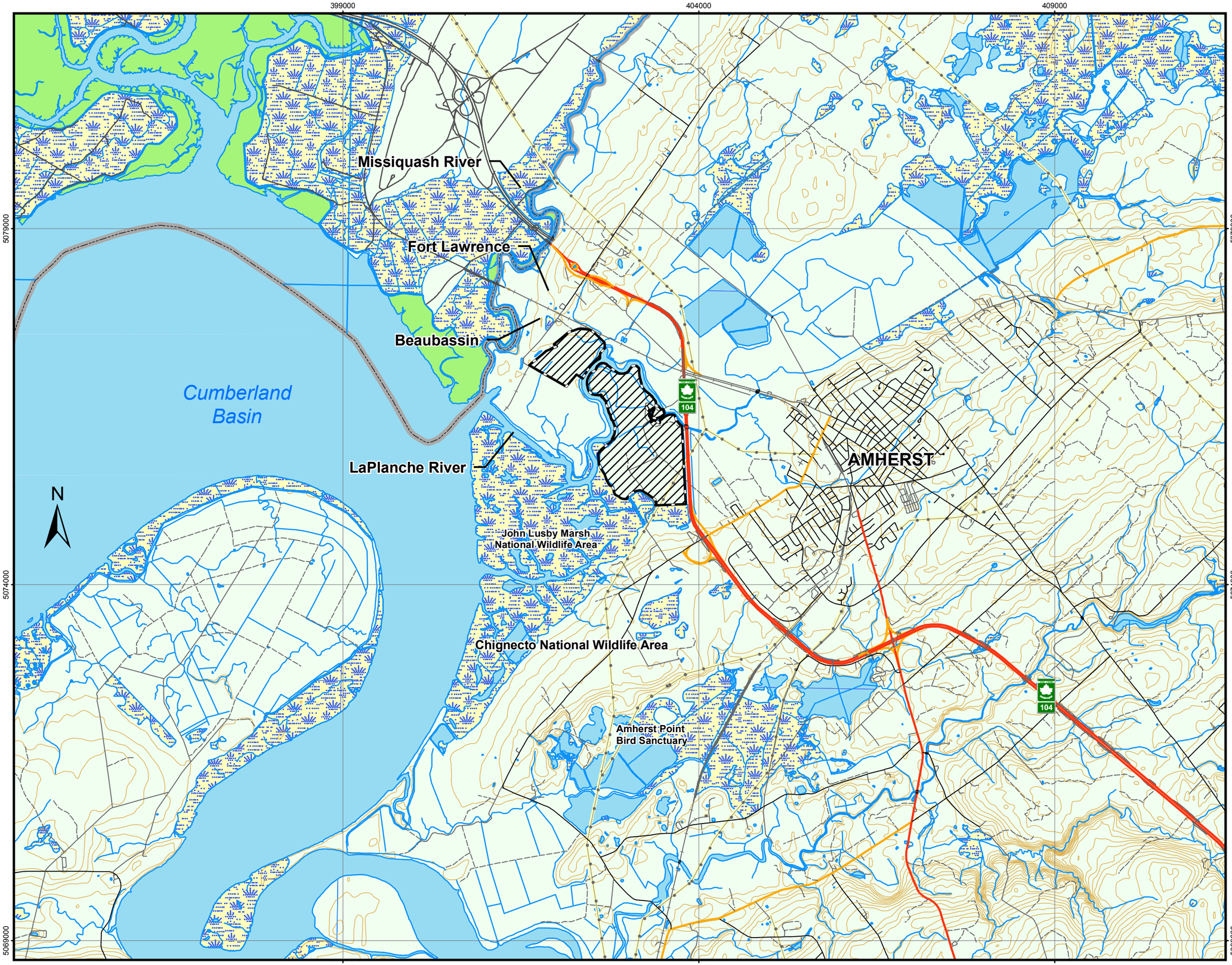

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Figure 1

Study Area

Amherst Wind Energy Project

Map Features

- Highway
- Major Road
- Secondary Road
- Tertiary Road
- Bridge
- Railway
- Trail/Track
- Utility Line
- Watercourse
- Provincial Boundary
- Contour (5 Metre)
- Project Area
- Mud Flats
- Wetland
- Waterbody
- Island

0 475 950 1,900 2,850

Meters

Map Parameters
Projection: UTM, NAD83
Scale 1:50,000
Date: January 17, 2008
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