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## **Time to comment on Site C impacts** ~ Sara Miles

On January 28, BC Hydro submitted the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for its proposed 'Site C Clean Energy Project' with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency and the BC Environmental Assessment Office.

The Site C project involves construction of a dam and a 1,100-megawatt hydroelectric generating station on the Peace River in northeastern BC. It would be the third in a series of dams on the BC portion of the Peace River.

The public comment period on the EIS began February 3, and written comments will be accepted until April 4. The EIS describes the project's potential effects, mitigation measures and intended benefits. Public open houses are being held this month in project-area communities such as Prince George and Peace River.

BC Hydro made changes to the original design to further avoid or reduce potential impacts. It has reduced the footprint of the transmission line right-of-way, and increased the capacity of the diversion works. However, there will still be significant losses for wildlife.

The EIS states that some distinct sub-groups of fish species—the Moberley River Arctic grayling, the Halfway River migratory bull trout, and the mountain whitefish that rely on Peace River habitat—'may be lost'. BC Hydro says it expects that a 'new and productive aquatic ecosystem' would develop with a different distribution and composition of species.

Several at-risk bird species, including the Yellow Rail, Nelson's Sparrow and three types of Warbler, would all lose habitat used during their migrations, putting their existence at a greater risk.

Impacts on local human communities are also discussed, such as measures to reduce heavy truck traffic during construction by sourcing riprap from a location closer to the dam. Consultation with Aboriginal groups is continuing, as BC Hydro says some concerns raised had not been fully addressed at the time of filing the EIS.

The Wilderness Committee is one group that is campaigning to stop the project, saying it is destructive and unnecessary. It is particularly concerned about the project impacts on caribou and their habitat.

The project is being promoted as a job creator, and a new source of 'clean' energy, though many British Columbians are asking if the impacts are worth the financial gains.

An Executive Summary of the EIS is available at [www.bchydro.com/sitec](http://www.bchydro.com/sitec) as well as a link to the complete document at the regulatory agencies' websites. ✍

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