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Site C given the go-ahead to begin construction but...

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On July 7, the BC government granted approval to BC Hydro to begin construction of the Site C dam in the Peace River Valley, despite several pending lawsuits against the project. The Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations approved 24 authorizations, with conditions.

Eight authorizations are under the *Water Act*, seven under the *Land Act*, five under the *Forest Act* and four under the *Wildlife Act*.

The approved authorizations are for timber removal, road building, and site preparation. During the life of the construction, additional authorizations will need to be granted.

Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Minister Steve Thomson stated that each application had been reviewed in regards to its impacts on the environment and First Nations treaty rights. However, although consultations with the Treaty 8 First Nation took place from August of 2014 to June of this year, Minister Thomson has not yet said whether the two sides of the discussion have reached a decision.

Treaty 8 First Nation's Lawsuit

The Treaty 8 First Nations, upon whose land Site C will be located, have filed for a judicial review of the project. The federal appeal began on July 20, two weeks after approval for construction was given. Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, president of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs, stated prior to the approval that beginning construction before the court proceedings will 'indefinitely scar BC's relationships with First Nations'. He went on to say 'If construction begins, it will be understood as a clear message that this government has absolutely no respect for the Treaty 8 First Nation people, and is blatantly disregarding constitutionally recognized aboriginal title, rights and treaty rights.'

The Site C dam will flood over 5,000 hectares of land, covering farms and more than 350 archaeological sites. The Treaty 8 First Nation believes this to be in violation of their treaty rights, as protected under section 35(1) of the *Constitution Act*, which affirms the rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada to continue their way of life on their land. Site C, First Nations say, will cause irreversible damage to their lands that will put their way of life in danger. Close to \$50,000 has been donated through RAVEN, a Victoria-based charity, to the Treaty 8 First

Nations to help pay legal fees.

Call For A Two Year Moratorium

The Greater Vancouver Regional District Board recently joined the call for a 2-year moratorium on the construction of Site C. The district, which represents 2.5 million British Columbians and 23 local governments, voted overwhelmingly in favour of the moratorium. It joins over 30 other BC municipalities in doing so.


Thirty-five of the Board's 38 directors also voted in favour of requesting Premier Christy Clark to refer the construction of Site C to the BC Utilities Commission, which has so far been barred from the process, and to the Agricultural Land Commission. With this vote, groups representing approximately 70% of British Columbians are now urging the province to give the Site C dam a full independent review. The Vancouver Regional District has joined the North Local Government Association and the Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities in voicing this recommendation.

Paddle for the Peace

An on-the-water rally was held on July 11 to protest the construction of Site C. The annual Paddle for the Peace drew people from all across the province, beginning with a pancake breakfast hosted by the West Moberly First Nations, before boats were launched into the Peace River at the Halfway tributary. The boats paddled the Peace River to a third-generation farm owned by farmers Ken and Arlene Boon, which will be underwater if the Site C dam is built.

Conflicting Opinion About Public Opinion

Meanwhile, BC Hydro has released a report stating that a new poll has found growing support for Site C. The poll concluded that awareness of the project has grown from 41% in 2013 to 75%, while support has also increased since then—59% of people surveyed support construction of the dam, 22% can support it under certain circumstances, and 17% are opposed.

From comparing notes, it is easy to spot the discrepancies. If groups representing 70% of British Columbians are urging the government to halt construction and give the project a full independent review, then how can 81% of British Columbians support the project? 

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