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Site C News - Natalie Dunsmuir

Currently under construction in the Peace River Valley, the Site C dam hydroelectric project is controversial.

The dam would rise 60 metres into the air, be 1,000 metres wide and would create an 83 kilometre-long reservoir that would flood an estimated 9,310 hectares of land. The dam will cost around \$8.8 billion to construct and operate, making it BC's largest public project in history. There are currently several court cases underway in opposition of the project.

Below is a compendium of news about the project:

Paddle for The Peace

The 11th annual Paddle for the Peace took place on July 9 to protest the Site C dam. Hundreds of people took to the river in kayaks to show their opposition to the project, some coming from as far away as Germany and India. Green Party Leader Elizabeth May spoke at the event, calling on Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to put a halt to the dam.

'The decision made by Harper's cabinet was made in defiance of the evidence, and in contempt of First Nations' rights,' May said. 'They can't rely on anything the previous cabinet did, because it was an ideologically driven decision that ignored the evidence. They've promised us evidence-based decision-making, science-based decision-making, and a new approach of nation-to-nation relationship based on trust.'

'It violates every single precept of sound policy-making. It's a monstrosity. It's a decision that defies economic sense, ecological sense, and human rights.'

Farmers Given Until Christmas to Leave

According to Peace River Valley third-generation farmers, Ken and Arlene Boon, BCHydro will expect them to leave their home before Christmas of this year—despite there still being eight years before the dam's flood waters would cover part of their farm. The news came from their lawyer after he had been engaged in talks with BCHydro's properties division. According to the Boons, BCHydro plans to expropriate their farm for the re-alignment of Highway 29 away from the flood zone. The construction of the road is estimated to take two years and is planned to begin in 2017. According to a BCHydro spokesperson, interviewed by the online news source DeSmog, BCHydro does have the legal right to expropriate residents' land if they refuse to sell it.

First Nations' Agreements

BCHydro has made agreements with the McLeod Lake Indian Band and the Dene Tha' First Nations. The agreement with McLeod includes an impact benefits agreement, a contracting agreement and a tripartite lands agreement. The band will receive a lump-sum payment, along with a payment stream over 70 years—BCHydro has not released the details or amounts of these payments. The band will also receive procurement opportunities for McLeod Lake companies, the transfer of Crown lands to the band, and a commitment to 'consider land management initiatives involving McLeod Lake respecting certain lands'.

The agreement was voted on by the McLeod Lake Indian Band, which totals 515 members and is located 150 kilometres north of Prince George.

The agreement made between BCHydro and the Dene Tha' First Nation includes a one-time payment and BCHydro's promise to keep the nation informed about employment, training and procurement opportunities during construction. The Dene Tha' Nation resides primarily in three communities in northwest Alberta, with 1,800 members living on reserve and 600 living off.

Job Numbers

The Site C dam has passed an employment milestone. The dam is currently employing over 1,547 workers, according to BC Hydro. Of these, 79%, or 1,223, are from British Columbia, and 443 workers are from the Peace River Regional District.

These employees are working in varied fields, including as carpenters, truckdrivers, crane operators, safety advisors, general labourers, heavy equipment operators, mechanics, electricians, workers' lodge operations staff, construction supervisors, environmental workers, and project staff.

Construction began in the summer of 2015 and employment numbers have been rising steadily since then. By the fall of this year, the key civil engineering contractor expects to have 600 workers on the site.

Site C Lodge Construction

All of those many workers need places to stay—the second phase in the construction of the Site C workers accommodation lodge has just been completed. The lodge now contains 1,200 rooms, along with full dining hall and kitchen, lounge and fitness

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facilities. The second phase, which added 900 rooms to the 300 already constructed, was completed on-time and on-budget, according to a BCHydro press release. The company constructing the lodge, ATCO Two Rivers Lodging Group, was awarded an eight-year, \$470-million contract for the construction. When all three phases are completed, the lodge will have 1,600 rooms

Over-budget and Behind Schedule

The lodge may have been built on-budget, but new documents filed by BCHydro to the BC Utilities Commission show that the project as a whole went over-budget recently. BCHydro reported having spent \$314 million more by the end of March as was originally budgeted. According to BCHydro's quarterly report, the variances were 'primarily due to earlier than planned expenditures related to worker accommodation and main civil works'.

The quarterly report also shows that Site C construction has

fallen behind on four of seven 2016 milestones, and is at risk of failing to meet the deadlines of a fifth. The missed milestones range from being one-month late to eight-months, and include road work, site preparation and excavations. The worker accommodation milestones were the only two met on-time.

Air Quality Monitors Turned Off

This spring, federal investigators with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) discovered that air monitors near Site C—measuring total suspended particulates, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide—were turned off. The CEAA issued a warning to BCHydro about the breach in monitoring, saying that BCHydro 'has been unable to monitor air quality effects in order to inform the appropriate authorities of exceedance of federal and provincial air quality standards.' The failure to monitor the air quality is a breach of Site C's Air Quality Management Plan and, if repeated, could result in a \$400,000 fine. ✍