B.C. Hydro

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North has promising power potential

UNDER STUDY — Thousands of hectares of delta spread out from the mouth of the Stikine estuary near the Alaska community of Wrangell. Proposed hydroelectric developments upstream in B.C. have both Hydro environmentalists and Alaskan resource managers studying possible downstream effects on delta ecology.

What is B.C. Hydro doing in the north? It is looking for suitable sites for hydroelectric projects.

So far, the two most promising areas under study are the watersheds of the Stikine-Iskut river system, in north-western B.C., and the Liard River near the B.C./Yukon border, says Don McFarlane, manager of B.C. Hydro's System Engineering Division.

"Today's planners of hydroelectric projects must weigh the cost of new generation against the power the project would produce, while bearing the possible impact on the environment and the people of the area very much in mind," he said.

Although both the Stikine-Iskut and Liard hydroelectric projects "pose some unique problems for B.C. Hydro," McFarlane believes that they promise the best combination of moderate environmental impacts and reasonable construction costs.

The Stikine-Iskut system supports runs of sockeye, chinook and coho but the sites for the four dams under consideration are above the parts of the system the spawning salmon can reach.

"Even skilled kayakers can't run the Grand Canyon of the Stikine because of the turbulence," he says, "and the Iskut Canyon waters are also too fast for fish.

"Nevertheless," McFarlane asserts, "we feel very strongly that we must make ourselves fully aware of any possible downstream effects these hydroelectric projects might have on fish and wildlife."

Although the Liard is not a major salmon river, "we are studying the environmental impact of Hydro's proposed dams very carefully," says Stan Hirst, Hydro's environmental program co-ordinator for the Liard project. So far, Hydro's fisheries consultants have found two species of salmon — chum and chinook — in small numbers in the lower Liard River.

"The salmon make the trip up the Liard all the way from the Beaufort Sea," says Hirst.

Hydro's biologists also have found other migratory fish such as Arctic cisco and inconnu in the Liard.

"We are studying the effects of the proposed projects on a host of other areas of concern," Hirst reports.

Both the Stikine and the Liard rivers are navigable for some of their length, while the Stikine crosses an international boundary. In the case of the Liard, Hydro must "consider the interests" of the Yukon and Northwest Territories, he says.

"Above all," McFarlane stresses, "we must be aware of the interests of the people who live in the regions affected by the proposed developments."

At present, detailed studies are underway to determine the social and economic impacts that might occur if the projects go ahead.

Province's energy needs growing with population

Enough energy at the right time and in the right place and at the right price. That, says Norman Olsen, corporation president since 1978, sums up B.C. Hydro's mandate.

"Essentially," he said, "Hydro is responsible for providing a firm, adequate supply of electrical energy for its customers. It has to be done on a business-like basis, and it has to be done with a safe electrical system."

In order to meet those criteria, Olsen added, Hydro must plan for an expansion of the electrical system with projects such as Site C on the Peace River and dams on the Stikine and Liard Rivers.

"Contentious issues, those last two," he admitted without hesitation. "But look, if Hydro *is* to meet the needs of its customers — meet its mandate in other words — over the next 15, 20 or more years, it has to consider further hydroelectric generation projects. It simply has no choice."

To those who hold that such projects could be environmentally and economically harmful to B.C., Olsen maintains a sympathetic but firm position.

"I would guess that most, if not all the people of this province have its best interests at heart," he said. "And why not? It's a beautiful part of Canada. A beautiful part of the world. That's why so many people want to come here to live. And therein lies part of the problem. The latest statistics indicate that the population of B.C. is increasing at the rate of about two per cent per year. That may not sound like much, but over one or two decades it amounts to a great deal. Obviously, as the population grows, there'll be a greater demand for residential, industrial and commercial electric service. And Hydro can supply it only if it has the means to produce it."

Plans for such generation, Olsen explained, are based on forecasts made by experts. "We *always* start with the energy forecast. This is extremely difficult. It's tough enough to forecast what's going to happen in the next six

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JOURNAL DEBUT

At the same time as B.C. Hydro studies the possibilities of hydroelectric projects on the Liard and Stikine rivers and associated transmission systems, the corporation is moving to keep the people of northern B.C. fully informed about its future plans.

Northern Projects Journal has been designed to tell you about our planning process and keep you up-to-date on the status of the proposals.

Readers are encouraged to express their opinions of the proposed projects through letters and articles for publication in future editions.

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