

BCEN Calls for Stop to Site C

Posted by Joan Russow

Tuesday, 08 September 2020 21:23 - Last Updated Sunday, 13 September 2020 11:04

BCEN BC Environmental Network -----

Sept 8, 2020

by the BC Environmental Network ----- Dam
cost/benefit and foundation on shaky ground. BC Environmental Network calls for immediate
stop work Peace River diversion plan.

For 45 years, the Site C Dam has been promoted by various BC Governments as being needed for a wide range of purposes. Not one of those predictions of necessity has come true. During that same time, the economics of building large hydro dams have literally tanked while the socio/environmental impacts have become increasingly unacceptable. This is true for all three large hydro dams currently under construction in Canada.

In the case of Site C, the 26,000 page 2014 Environmental Impact Statement clearly described the anticipated harmful impacts. However, even with a record setting number of "significant harms that cannot be mitigated" as identified by the Joint Review Panel, the Harper Conservatives and Christy Clark Liberals pushed this project through, with follow-up help from the Trudeau Liberals. It did not stop there. Despite the need for billions more dollars at the time and the findings of the 2017 BCUC Review saying that alternatives to Site C would be the same or lower cost, the new Horgan NDP Government made the fateful decision to proceed. As bad news continues to emerge from Site C, this cluster of past political decisions is coming home to roost.

Now BC Hydro and the BC Government have reluctantly reported yet more worsening of the financial and geotechnical problems with Site C. Specifically, they speak of serious foundation problems under what is basically the entire dam structure. Remember that true bedrock was never found under Site C, but rather it is being built on shale, which is just old mud. While not specifically stated in the BCH reports, we understand from sources that seventy vertical feet of 'roller compacted' concrete under the powerhouse is sinking in the mud. Whatever the truth is, even the Government has acknowledged that it is very serious, the fix is yet to be determined and uncertain, and the entire project budget and schedule is now unknown and the bulk of the project's contingency funds spent.

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So why is work continuing? If this were the foundation of a house; work would stop immediately. The Site C project has now progressed beyond politics, and political decision-making is not required right now.

At the very least, work needs to stop to determine if Site C is in fact buildable, whether it will be safe, and what it will now cost. To be clear, that means no river diversion in 2020.

It is important to note that the current Site C is not the same project that was reviewed and politically pushed forward in the past. Answering these three simple questions - on construction feasibility, safety and cost - may be the death knell for the project, but better to know now where the project is headed than later.

The dam design already has had major costly modifications intended to address known geotechnical challenges. Evidently, these did not work. How can the public be assured that further costly modifications will work? No government has a mandate to build this "new" Site C without an independent geotechnical and engineering review.

Let's stop work now and get a measure of what to expect.

The Site C Dam may very well be unbuildable, and if we continue to throw good money after bad because of sunk costs, an already bad situation will likely get much worse. It really is that dire...and simple.