



KEEP THE PEACE



SITE C? NO DAM WAY!

SAVE THE PEACE RIVER VALLEY—STOP THE SITE C DAM!



Joe Foy
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Wilderness Committee

The Peace River Valley has long been known as one of British Columbia's most beautiful regions. Its temperate climate and unique blend of farmland and wildlife habitat has made the valley renowned for its natural abundance.

For those who live there, it's a slice of heaven. **But a proposal to build an \$8 billion hydroelectric project – known as the Site C dam – on the Peace River near the town of Fort St. John has residents calling for help.** BC Hydro, the province's publicly owned Crown Corporation, is seeking to build a 1,100-megawatt dam that would flood 83 kilometres of the Peace River from near Fort St. John upstream to Hudson's Hope.

The Site C dam would be 1,050 metres long and 60 metres high¹, and would also flood 14 kilometres of the Halfway River and 10 kilometres of the Moberly River, which are tributaries of the Peace River². Many people

agree that the electricity produced by Site C would be expensive and unneeded, and that the damage caused by the project would be too great for a region already straining to heal from earlier industrial projects.

BC's Peace River has been greatly impacted by two massive hydroelectric dams located upstream from Hudson's Hope. The WAC Bennett Dam began operating in 1968, flooding a massive amount of wildlife habitat to create the Williston Reservoir – the largest body of freshwater in BC. The Peace Canyon Dam was completed in 1980, and flooded the scenic Peace Canyon.



Photo: The beautiful Peace River Valley (Joe Foy).

NO NEED FOR SITE C

BC Hydro documents released in 2013 showed that BC has a significant surplus in power and is selling the excess at a loss.⁵

The reservoirs created by these two dams have severely impacted regional wildlife. A once abundant herd of caribou has been diminished to endangered status. Fish populations have become contaminated by mercury as a result of the reservoirs.³ Changes in the river's flow have affected wildlife located hundreds of kilometres

downstream, as far away as Alberta's Wood Buffalo National Park, where reduced flooding has caused grasslands to convert into forested lands.⁴

Worse still, the uplands all around the Peace River Valley have experienced a huge increase in gas industry activity, which uses the water intensive and highly polluting practice of fracking (hydraulic fracturing) to release trapped gas. Habitat on the uplands has been increasingly fragmented by a web of thousands of roads, well pads, pipelines and wastewater ponds.

The Peace River Valley between Fort St. John and Hudson's Hope is a green oasis surrounded by the ever expanding boot-print of industry.

The people of the region want



Photo top: Peace River Valley, BC (Garth Lenz), above: Site C dam protest at the BC legislature (WC files).

to see what remains of their beautiful lands and river protected. [They say "NO Dam Way" to Site C.](#)

In December 2013, public hearings began as part of a joint federal-provincial environmental assessment for the Site C dam, and a final decision on its fate rests with our elected leaders in Victoria and Ottawa. Submissions made by local people to the Joint Review Panel were both informative and heartbreaking, as person after person called on the panel to save their valley from being flooded.

This report will introduce you to the amazing Peace River Valley and the people who live there. **Please read on to find out more about this beautiful place, and learn what you can do to help save it from being drowned out by Site C.**

A HISTORY TO BE HONoured, NOT DAMMED

From the Yukon south almost to Mexico, there's only one river that breaks the barrier of the Rocky Mountains. **The Peace River Valley in British Columbia has provided a gateway through the rugged range for people, wildlife and weather since time immemorial.** All this has created a region with a unique history, culture and way of living.

Warm, wet storms cross over from the Pacific Ocean through the gap of the Peace River Valley to create a micro-climate here in this part of the east slope of the Northern Rocky Mountains. Wildlife like moose and caribou take advantage of this, congregating in the sheltered valley bottom habitats all along the Peace River.

Attracted by favourable living conditions, First Nations people have called the region home for over 10,000 years. Evidence of this was discovered at an important archaeological site at Charlie Lake Cave, located near Fort St. John. Charlie Lake is one of longest continuously occupied communities known to exist in North America.⁶



Photo: Looking for artifacts near Charlie Lake (Creative commons).

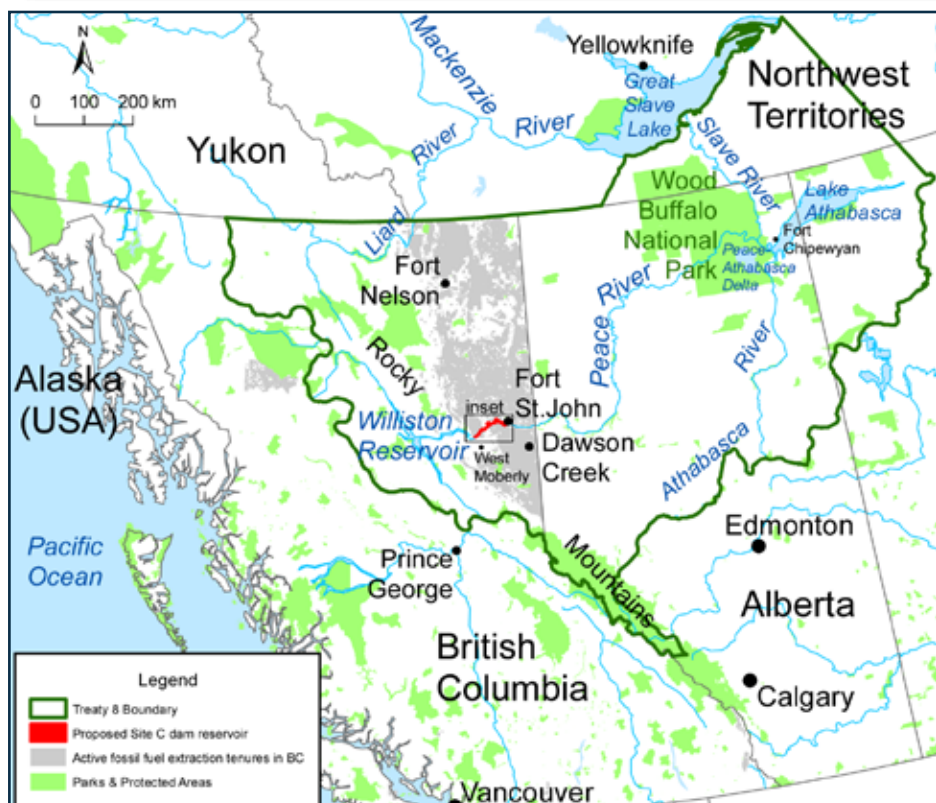
In 1793, Sir Alexander Mackenzie – working for the North West Company – was the first European known to have reached the Peace River area, on his trail-blazing journey across the country to the Pacific Ocean.⁷ Mackenzie noted in his journal that the valley was so rich in wildlife that in some places, it looked almost like a barnyard.⁸

On the heels of Mackenzie's expedition, a North West Company fur trading post known as "Rocky Mountain Fort" was constructed near present-day Fort St. John sometime before 1798 – making it the first non-Native community in BC.⁹

In 1900, First Nations in BC's Peace River region signed a treaty with the government of Canada, known as Treaty 8. The Treaty was a promise that the First Nations people could continue their way of life, including rights to hunting, fishing and trapping. By 1910, settlers were moving in to take up homesteads on what would be the most northerly farming area in Canada.

In 1961, construction started on the Peace River just upstream from Hudson's Hope, and the massive WAC Bennett Dam eventually began to choke and flood the river.

Today the descendants of the First Nations families that signed Treaty 8 are standing shoulder to shoulder with the descendants of the early settler farming families, determined to protect their Peace River Valley and stop the Site C dam.



BEAR FLATS FARM – HOME SWEET HOME

Ken and Arlene Boon live in the same house that Arlene's grandfather (Lloyd Bentley Senior) built in 1959 at Bear Flats. Lloyd started buying land here from the original homesteaders in the late 1940s. **Most of the family's land would either be flooded, eroded into the reservoir or taken up by road realignment should the Site C dam actually be built. This includes Ken and Arlene's home.**

It's a terrible thing for a third generation farm family to face, just as they are introducing their younger family members to the land.

Ken and Arlene love their home and their farm very much. They love the Peace River Valley. From their front steps they can see all the way down the hill to the riverside fields. This is all part of their farm, too. They lease some of these rich riverside lands to a



Photo: Ken and Arlene Boon (David Lavallee).

market garden farmer, and on other parts of their land Ken and Arlene do some grain farming and sell hay.

They like to watch elk, deer and black bears amble across the hillside. From time to time, they see grizzly tracks in the snow. Their nearest human neighbour is miles away and can't be seen from their farm at Bear Flats.

In the summertime, Ken and Arlene host the **Paddle for the Peace** gathering

on their farmland. Several hundred people gather once a year to paddle the river and listen to speakers calling for the valley to be protected from the Site C dam.

Several First Nations cultural

gatherings also occur at Bear Flats throughout the year. Stone artifacts are often found here, indicating that Bear Flats has been a gathering place for a very long time.

After decades of fighting the project, Ken and Arlene made a heartfelt submission to the environmental assessment panel calling for a final end to the Site C dam proposal. They ended their submission with the following statement:

"There is a mix of emotions and frustration we experience while writing this report. The thousands of hours we have spent dealing with the whole Site C issue is like time stolen from us. Meanwhile, as we write this submission, we feel like a prisoner trying to save his life by writing a statement that will hopefully save him from the death penalty."¹⁰



Photo: Paddle for the Peace (WC files).



Photo left: Moose and calf (Glen and Rebecca Grambo), top right: Tiger swallowtail (Mike Grandmaison), above: Bald eagle (Jakob Dulisse).

PROTECTING PRECIOUS FARMLAND

Site C would take the biggest bite out of the Agricultural Land Reserve in its 40-year history

Forty years ago, BC created the **Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR)** to preserve the province's shrinking farmland resources in the face of rapid losses due to inappropriate land development.

These days, removing sections from the reserve requires approval from one of the province's regional Agricultural Land Commissions, which aim to conserve lands for food production. Currently BC produces only about half the food its citizens eat – the rest must be imported.¹¹

By BC Hydro's account, **3,800 hectares of farmland would need to be removed from the reserve if the proposed Site C dam were to go ahead, and the land would be flooded under a new reservoir.** That's an area almost twice the size of the city of Victoria, BC!

The removal would be the largest

elimination of farmland from the reserve in its 40-year history, according to Arthur Hadland, Area C Director for the Peace River Regional District.¹²

To make it easier to drown all this farmland, the provincial government announced in December 2013 that it will ensure the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* doesn't apply to the 3,800 hectares of farmland needed if the Site C dam proposal is approved.¹³

Local farmers are appalled. Who better than farmers to know just how rare and precious BC farmland is – especially Peace Valley farmland?

Site C? No Dam Way signs have sprouted up on local fields like mushrooms after a rainfall.



Photo left: Fort St. John, farmers' fields (Creative commons - Ryan Clare), above: Produce grown on Silver Spring Farm in Peace Valley (Larry Peterson).



Photo top: A sign on the bank of the Peace River (WC files), above: Peace Valley farmland (Creative commons).



The Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) covers approximately 4.7 million hectares of land in BC, including private and public lands that may be farmed, forested or vacant land. Some ALR blocks cover thousands of hectares while others are small pockets of only a few hectares.¹⁴

FIRST NATIONS STANDING STRONG AGAINST SITE C

Aboriginal communities in the Peace River watershed in BC and Alberta have been some of the strongest opponents of the Site C dam.

As reported in a recent *Business in Vancouver* article, Chief Roland Willson of the BC community of West Moberly put

“Our treaty rights are not for sale.”

-Liz Logan, Tribal Chief, Treaty 8 Tribal Association¹⁵

it this way when speaking to the Site C environmental review panel:

“West Moberly is not opposed to development – what we're opposed to is unnecessary impacts...One of the big things we're opposed to is the flooding of this valley. We see no need for this.”¹⁶

Chief Willson described the aboriginal fisheries that had been polluted by mercury as a result of the two earlier dams on the Peace River. He spoke of the continuous and severe erosion of soil along the banks of the

Williston Reservoir, and the resulting dust storms that roiled up in strong winds. He lamented the dwindling of caribou and moose populations that

had once fed the people, now diminished because much of their habitat was lost to flooding caused by the earlier dams.

He went on to explain how important the islands in the Peace River are to certain wildlife species that need a place

to give birth and raise their young. These islands would be under water if the Site C dam were to go forward.

Chief Willson concluded his presentation to the panel by saying, “Our rights are continuously pushed aside for other interests. We're told to move over there or hunt over here. There are not many places left for us to go.”

“Let's work together to protect the last remaining stretch of the Peace River that's relatively undisturbed,”

he said.¹⁷ Downstream on the Peace River, several First Nations in the province

of Alberta (backed by the Alberta government) have submitted their opposition to plans to build the Site C dam – including the Athabasca Chipewyan, the Little Red River Cree, the Fort Chipewyan Métis, the Deninu K'e, the Mikisew Cree and the Dene Tha First Nations.¹⁸ Representatives point out that BC Hydro still hasn't dealt with the severe effects that the previous two Peace River dams have had on the Peace-Athabasca Delta, which is mostly within Alberta's Wood Buffalo National Park. The Peace-Athabasca Delta is one of the world's largest freshwater inland deltas.¹⁹

Reduction of seasonal flooding caused by the two existing dams has greatly reduced habitat for key wildlife species like caribou. Additional impacts from the Site C dam, were it to be built, are a major concern for First Nations and for scientists at Parks Canada.²⁰



Photo: Chief Roland Willson (Jeremy Williams).



Photo: 2010 Protect the Peace protest (Janine Bandcroft).



Photo: Teepee with protest sign (Joe Foy).

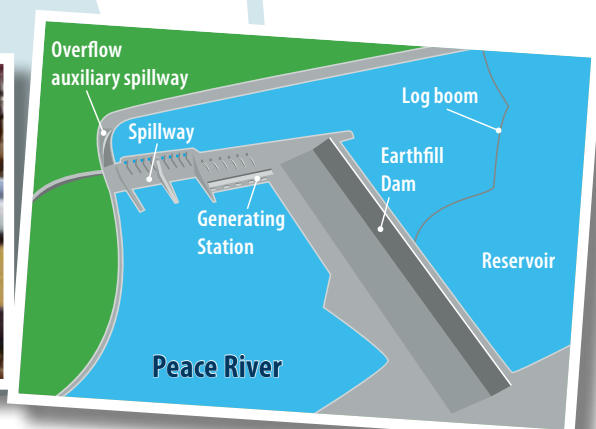


Illustration of the proposed Site C dam (Perry Jack).

PROPOSAL ON SHAKY FISCAL GROUND

In the 1980s, the Site C dam project was considered by the independent BC Utilities Commission (BCUC) and was turned down because the electricity it would produce would be too expensive, and was not needed to power the province's homes, businesses and industries.²¹ In the 1990s, BC Hydro decided to suspend the project again because the need for power was still insufficient.²²

The project would likely have been turned down once again by the BCUC, but in 2010 the provincial government removed Site C from the Commission's oversight.²³ Consequently, the agency responsible for determining whether or not the proposed Site C dam has a

credible business case and is in the public interest was silenced.

At the request of the Joint Review Panel, BC Energy Minister Bill Bennett recently agreed to let the BCUC review Site C – but only if "the province decides to proceed with the project".²⁴

The provincial government has said that the Site C dam will be needed to power a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) export industry. But even if LNG takes off, which is unlikely, the high cost of Site C's power makes it doubtful that industry would use much – if any – of it, unless given highly subsidized rates.

Richard Stout, Executive Director of the Association of Major Power Customers of BC (representing mainly heavy industrial users like forestry and mining), described the Site C dam as a very expensive "White Elephant" – a useless project with no prospect of paying for itself.²⁵

Jim Quail, Legal Director for COPE 378 (the union that represents many of BC Hydro's employees) also commented that the Site C dam project has not had a rigorous review that shows a credible business case, and until that happens, the union will not be supporting Site C.²⁶



Photo: Site C dam protest (WC files).

HOPING FOR AN END TO SITE C DAM PLANS

Hudson's Hope Mayor Gwen Johansson has lived in the same home since 1975. It's easy to see why she has chosen to live here for so long.

From her veranda near the bank of the Peace River, just downstream from the town of Hudson's Hope, the Mayor often sees wildlife that would be at home in a national park.

If the Site C dam were to be built, all this would go away, covered up by the rising waters of a new reservoir. Mayor Johansson has watched while

BC Hydro has bought up properties all around the river in anticipation

of building the dam. As a result, BC Hydro is now the largest landowner in Hudson's Hope²⁷, and is stifling the modest growth that the town would otherwise enjoy. All of this has the Mayor imagining the day that Site C goes away – for good.



Photo: Mayor Gwen Johansson (Joe Foy).



Photo: The Peace River at Hudson's Hope (Creative commons).



Photo: WAC Bennett dam (Joe Foy).

LINKS

- Peace Valley Environment Association - peacevalley.ca
- Treaty 8 Tribal Association - treaty8.bc.ca
- Yellowstone 2 Yukon Conservation Initiative - y2y.net
- Sierra Club BC - sierraclub.bc.ca
- David Suzuki Foundation - david Suzuki.org



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TAKE ACTION!

WRITE OR WRONG?

Please write now to stop a great wrong. The Site C dam is not needed, too costly and far too destructive to be allowed to proceed. Flooding the Peace River Valley would do too much harm to the people and wildlife who live there.

The Environment Ministers of BC and Canada will soon decide whether or not the Site C dam should proceed. **Please write them to say No Dam Way to Site C!**

Contact information:

BC's Minister of Environment
The Honourable Mary Polak
 PO Box 9047, Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, BC, V8W 9E2
 ☎ 250-387-1187 📠 250-387-1356
 ✉ ENV.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Canada's Minister of the Environment
The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq
 Les Terrasses de la Chaudière, 10 Wellington Street,
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WildernessCommittee.org • 1-800-661-WILD (9453)

YES! I WANT TO HELP SAVE THE PEACE RIVER VALLEY



clip

Return to the:
 Wilderness Committee
 P.O. Box 2205,
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