

Province duped by BC Hydro's not-so-"green" Site C

Fort St. John – July 6, 2009: In the northeastern corner of the province, far from the Lower Mainland's watchful eyes, BC Hydro is pulling a fast one on the people of British Columbia. Site C, a new dam proposed for the Peace River, is being promoted by the hydro-electric company as the province's best green energy alternative for new power. What citizens don't know is that the province would lose more than it would gain by flooding BC's 4th most endangered river.

The Living Peace River Valley, a recent report by Chillborne Environmental, shows that the Peace River Valley is worth more environmentally and socioeconomically to the province intact, than flooded to produce electricity.

- The current valley ecosystem acts as a carbon sink and lessens the impacts of climate change. If flooded by Site C, the valley's forests and greenery would release large amounts of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide and methane) into the atmosphere and stop acting as a climate change buffer.
- Some of the best agricultural land in the province would be put under water and fog by Site C, endangering the province's food security.
- The vast valley is an important wildlife corridor and calving ground, that if destroyed, would harm moose, bear and many other species along the Rocky Mountain chain.
- Hundreds of archeological sites (some dating back over 10,000 years) and culturally significant First Nations territory would be ruined by Site C flooding.

"We know how important the Peace River valley is to our people and to First Nations along the watershed," commented Chief Roland Willson of West Moberly First Nations. "This report shows clearly how important it is to the province."

"The science is so clear," states Ruth Ann Darnall, president of the Peace Valley Environment Association. "For BC Hydro to flood the Peace River is ludicrous and short-sighted. After reading this report and learning all that would be lost – agricultural land, wildlife habitat - and the climate change effects, I can't believe anyone would think Site C is a green energy option for BC."

The Living Peace River Valley report is part of the broader *It's Our Valley* research and communication project about the Peace River Valley, funded by the Vancouver Foundation. The project's purpose is to enable local stakeholders and decision-makers to make educated sustainable decisions for Peace River natural resources.

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FULL COPIES OF THE REPORT are available for download: www.itsourvalley.ca

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BACKGROUND and REPORT EXCERPTS ATTACHED

REPORT EXCERPTS

July 6, 2009

Chillborne Environmental. (2009). *The living Peace River valley: An overview of the Peace River valley's natural and cultural values.*

“ The Peace River Valley is known as the “breadbasket of northern British Columbia” because it is the only area north of the Okanagan that can support such large sustenance crops and livestock herds. Approximately 75 percent of the land in the valley is considered arable for vegetable, cereal, oilseed, and forage crops. A large portion of the soil, especially near the Halfway River, is classified as Class 1, which is the highest rating, with no constraints to agriculture ... With the climate changing, it is possible that the focus will be on the Peace River Valley as an ideal agricultural location since the climate in the valley region will likely be better than more arid areas of the south. **With the current interest in food security, a relatively remote region of British Columbia able to produce food for residents and export becomes very important.**

The Peace River valley plays a positive role in climate change. The valley's intact ecosystem acts as a buffer to climate change effects and its forests act as efficient carbon sinks. If dammed and flooded, the valley would release large amounts carbon and methane into the atmosphere, and stop its function as a climate change mitigator. In fact, **another hydroelectric dam on the Peace River should not be considered a “green” or “clean” source of energy,** as it would contribute negatively to climate change by destroying an ecosystem and releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

The undisturbed land on the islands and on the south banks of the Peace are irreplaceable in terms of providing wild space for animals and as corridors. Important features in corridors include wetlands, rivers, riverbanks, and forest cover, all of which the Peace River Valley has to offer. The valley provides a wide, long, healthy green space for wildlife to thrive. It plays an incredibly important role in connecting southern habitats with northern ones, and, according to the Yellowstone to Yukon initiative, provides the “backbone of a natural network” that links wildlife in the Peace with Rocky Mountain ecosystems to the west.

People have lived in the Peace River Valley since time immemorial. In centuries past, people inhabited the Peace River Valley because they could find food season by season, hunt and fish, access water and building materials, and collect plants for food, medicine, and crafts ... Over time, these capacities enabled First Nations and other recent residents to trap and trade furs, raise cattle and other animals, and grow foods in the rich valley soils. **Residents of the Valley continue to live here because of the natural resources. However, there is a unique relationship that exists between people and the Peace River Valley.** Many people draw inspiration from its beauty and depth. Others appreciate the natural services and scenic landscape it provides. Others have a spiritual relationship that enables them to understand their role in the world.

The Peace River Valley draws people due to its high potential for recreational activities. Hiking, swimming, camping, hunting, trapping, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, river boating, horseback riding, geocaching, backcountry camping, birding, and photography are some of the more popular activities in the region ... As well, **the area is known as one of the best places in the province (and in Canada) for viewing wildlife.** It is common to see deer, moose, bears, wolves, bighorn sheep, eagles, osprey, and other animals that are otherwise not too easy to see.

The proposed Site C dam would cause significant ecological and socioeconomic losses. Thousands of hectares of agricultural land would be flooded, more would be lost to slumping and sloughing of the banks, and erosion and siltation will dramatically increase. Productive forestry lands will be flooded or cut for road construction, thousands of hectares of wildlife habitat (including important wintering and calving sites for ungulates) would be lost, and local climate will be altered. Traditional lands and hundreds of archaeological sites would be flooded and/or destroyed, First Nations' hunting lands would be lost, river-based recreation would be changed dramatically, and several residents would lose their homes and livelihoods.

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BACKGROUND

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West Moberly First Nations

The West Moberly First Nations (WMFN) is a vibrant, engaged indigenous community headquartered at Moberly Lake in Northeastern BC. Moberly Lake is 125 km west of Fort St. John, British Columbia. An autonomous First Nation, WMFN strives to preserve its culture and lands while providing governance and services to its members. WMFN identified the Peace River Valley as a culturally critical bioregion. WMFN has made it a priority to preserve the environment and culture in the important Peace River Valley and is working with the PVEA and other local first nations to identify cultural and environmental values; and inform and educate both First Nation and non-aboriginal audiences about the best management of the valley.

Peace Valley Environment Association

The Peace Valley Environment Association (PVEA) is a group of citizens concerned with protecting the natural and historic values of the valley. This diverse group of farmers, sportsmen, guide-outfitters and rural residents was formed to in 1975 in successful opposition to the BC Hydro proposal to dam the Peace River at a third location (Site C). 30 years later, the group is a strong and active protector of the valley, with members from urban, rural and First Nation communities. www.peacevalley.ca

The Peace River

Designated as a BC heritage river, the Peace River in Northeastern British Columbia has a deep cultural history of First Nations use, historic travel and homesteading activity. The valley is also one of British Columbia's richest biological areas, providing habitat for great and distinctive diversity and bounty of wildlife and birds and extensive Agricultural Land Reserve Lands. At the narrowest point of the Yellowstone to Yukon system, the Peace River Valley forms an essential connective link between the mountain park complexes to the south and the Muskwa-Kechika landscape to the north. The valley supports traditional First Nations use, farming and ranching, and provides recreational opportunities for Northern residents from nearby Fort St. John and Hudson's Hope. www.itsourvalley.ca

Paddle for the Peace

The West Moberly First Nation and the Peace Valley Environment Association's original joint project, Paddle for the Peace, launches for the fourth year on July 11, 2009.

The WMFN and the PVEA organized the original Paddle for the Peace in 2006 to celebrate the Peace River Valley and demonstrate opposition to the proposed Site C hydroelectric dam. In 2008, 347 people paddled down the river in 166 boats, canoes and kayaks to show their support for the valley. Participants came from as far as Germany, although most were local First Nations, farmers, rural and urban residents. All were concerned about the loss of the valley's ecological, First Nation, traditional and agricultural values.

Media are welcome! For more information or to join the paddle, visit www.paddleforthepeace.ca.