

Columbia River Treaty: Key Interests of Canadian Columbia Basin Residents



Flood Control

Before the four Columbia River Treaty (CRT) dams were built-Mica dam north of Revelstoke; Hugh Keenleyside dam near Castlegar; and Duncan dam north of Kaslo in Canada; and Libby dam near Libby, Montana-there was extensive flooding in the Columbia Basin. Today the dams are operated to coordinate transboundary flood control and protect communities on both sides of the border from the scale of flooding that happened before the dams were built. As the climate continues to change, more frequent and intense extreme weather events are expected, making coordinated transboundary flood control even more important. Continued coordinated flood control is essential to minimize damage to our communities.

Decision Processes

The original decisions regarding the CRT did not adequately incorporate the views of Basin residents. In recent years, residents have contributed to operations planning through Water Use Plans and consultation on the Non-Treaty Storage Agreement. These examples illustrate the ability of knowledgeable Basin residents to help find solutions to complex operations issues. Ongoing involvement of residents in transparent, sciencebased decision making that considers social, economic and environmental values is needed regarding the future of the CRT and ongoing operations. This is essential to recognize the impacts of these decisions on our communities and to strengthen local understanding of, and support for, decisions.

Fair Share of Benefits

The Province and BC Hydro benefit from the operation of CRT dams and reservoirs through downstream power benefits, revenues from the Non-Treaty Storage Agreement and income from the sale of hydroelectric power. Many Basin residents feel this region-the area most impacted by the CRT-is not sharing equally in the benefits associated with the CRT.

Power Production

In the early years of the CRT, hydroelectricity generated in the Basin was the foundation for building British Columbia's economy. Today, Basin generating stations produce about 50 per cent of all hydroelectric power in BC. Local governments in the Basin support continued low-cost, environmentally sound hydroelectricity production from the Columbia River.



Recognition of Past Losses

Communities across the Basin in Canada made many sacrifices and were negatively impacted in order to control floods, produce power and create economic benefits through the CRT. Losses included entire communities, agriculture lands, fish and wildlife, ecosystems and economic opportunities. Basin residents believe these sacrifices have not been fully recognized and compensated for.

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Continued Access to Water

The CRT explicitly allows Canada to withdraw water from the Columbia River system for 'domestic uses,' including irrigation, industrial and municipal use. Although there are few water withdrawals from the Columbia River at this time, Basin communities want to make sure they can meet their domestic needs especially in light of projected climate changes which suggest reduced summer water supplies. Local governments want the CRT to ensure these rights continue into the future.

Healthy Ecosystems

The Basin's diverse ecosystems are treasured by residents. Alpine meadows, forests, grasslands, riparian areas and aquatic ecosystems provide habitats for a variety of plant, wildlife and fish species, including several species at risk. These ecosystems are the foundation of our quality of life and economic future. Creating the CRT reservoirs and the ongoing operation of these reservoirs has altered important ecosystems and impacted fish and wildlife habitats. The Columbia River system must be managed to protect riparian and aquatic ecosystems, as well as provide flood control and power benefits.

Reservoir Operations

Canadian communities in the Basin continue to be impacted by reservoir operations designed to support power generation and other benefits for the Province of BC and the United States. The fluctuating reservoir levels create erosion, debris problems and dust storms, and limit water access. These impacts restrict economic opportunities and recreation activities that are important to the continued growth of our communities. As well, reservoir planning and operations must proactively take climate change into account to reduce impacts on flood control, power production revenues, ecosystems and communities. Basin residents believe there are opportunities to shift operations to minimize negative impacts. This is especially true for Kooecanusa Reservoir, in the East Kootenay. This reservoir was created by Libby Dam in Montana, and there is no process to recognize and include Basin interests in operations and decisions.

Economic Opportunities

Creating CRT reservoirs behind Mica, Hugh Keenleyside, Duncan and Libby dams flooded fertile valley bottom lands and existing road networks, limiting agriculture and forestry opportunities in the Basin. The resulting high-cost roads and ferries continue to restrict forestry and tourism development. Reservoir operations that limit water access and include inadequate debris management discourage tourism expansion and reduce recreation opportunities. The agriculture, tourism and forest industries believe more can be done to compensate for land and transportation network losses and reduce the impacts of ongoing operations.



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Salmon

Before Grand Coulee Dam was completed in 1941 on the Columbia River in Washington State, salmon were a vital part of Basin ecosystems and cultures. Chinook salmon spawned in the Columbia headwaters near Canal Flats, the Arrow Lakes supported a very large run of sockeye salmon, and steelhead used the lower reaches of the river in Canada. The technical and financial feasibility of restoring salmon to the main stem of the Columbia River should be explored.

The BC Columbia River Treaty Local Governments' Committee includes representatives from regional districts across the Canadian Columbia Basin. We are working together to help Basin residents and local governments engage in decisions about the future of the Columbia River Treaty. This information is based on views we have heard from Basin residents. For more information about the committee, go to: www.cbt.org/lgcommittee.

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