

Opinion: Mythbusters, the BCUC, and the Site C dam



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Published on: November 29, 2017 | Last Updated: November 29, 2017 6:00 PM PST



FILE PHOTO - Grand Chief Stewart Phillip speaks to supporters as Chief Lynette Tsakoza and Chief Roland Wilson look on after they delivered petitions, postcards and messages of solidarity inside a canoe following the government's reports on the controversial Site C dam study during a protest on Lekwungen Territory at Legislature in Victoria, B.C., on Thursday, November 2, 2017. *CHAD HIPOLITO / THE CANADIAN PRESS*

It could have been an episode of Mythbusters. The B.C. Utilities Commission's recent report on Site C systematically dismantled the business case B.C. Hydro and the B.C. Liberals had assembled to support construction of the dam. The question is, can the NDP muster the courage to let lobbyists know that the project must be scrapped?

Let's start with need. B.C. needs the power, right? Wrong. The BCUC used the lowest of B.C. Hydro's demand forecasts and said that even that forecast might be too high. For decades, B.C. Hydro has inflated demand, overestimating it by an average of 30 per cent. This time, the BCUC wasn't fooled, concluding that B.C. has absolutely no need for new power within at least the next two decades.

With no demand domestically, the power from Site C would have to be sold at a massive loss. Current market prices are about \$30/MWh and it would cost Site C about twice that to produce the power, locking the province into decades of bad deals. According to Harry Swain, who oversaw Site C's environmental assessment, risks like these led Hydro-Québec to stop building dams on speculation, a policy which led to their recent upgrade by ratings agencies.

You might have heard that Site C is past the point of no return. It's not. About \$2 billion has been spent to date, and the BCUC estimates it could cost about another \$2 billion to clean up the site. But even so, the BCUC found that cancelling Site C and building an alternative energy portfolio (wind, geothermal, conservation, etc.) would cost the same amount.

International energy expert Robert McCullough, who helped uncover the Enron scandal, points to the falling costs of wind and solar, and believes cancelling the dam will actually save British Columbia up to \$4 billion dollars.

Jobs, you might say. Site C will create jobs. Far fewer than cancellation. According to experts at the University of British Columbia, the alternative portfolio would create:

- 10,000 immediately-available jobs to clean up the site
- Three times more jobs in the medium term
- Five times more jobs over the long term

And the environment? Unprecedented impacts, which won't surprise you if you've thought much about what happens when 100 kilometres of river valley is permanently put under water. Unsurprisingly, Site C was found to have had the highest number of significant environmental effects in Canadian history.

This brings us to the warning we issued last week to Energy Minister Michelle Mungall and Indigenous Relations Minister Scott Fraser: If the NDP Government builds this dam, we are prepared to launch a \$1 billion-dollar lawsuit for infringement of our treaty rights. The previous court cases dealt only with procedural issues of consultation, and the courts stated that the question of infringement must be settled in a civil action. We will file if we must.

Do you think the price of infringement is too high? Consider the Quebec Government's attempt to build the James Bay hydroelectric project without

the consent of the Cree and Inuit. It resulted in a \$225 million settlement in 1975, which if adjusted for inflation, equals about \$1 billion in today's dollars. Or, you might recall the \$1 billion-dollar settlement offer made in 2015 to the Lax Kw'alaams First Nation for the proposed Pacific NorthWest LNG facility.

Don't let the cynics tell you that First Nations are bad for the economy. If the B.C. Liberals had listened to First Nations before they started Site C, we'd have saved \$4 billion in sunk costs. If the NDP listens to us now, they'll save up to \$1 billion to \$5 billion more. B.C. Hydro's myths have been busted and it's time to change the channel. Cancel Site C.

Roland Willson is the Chief of the West Moberly First Nations. Lynette Tsakoza is the Chief of the Prophet River First Nations.

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Fred Bass · Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

After spending hours reading the Deloitte assessment of Site C for the BC Utilities Commission and Deloitte's review of comparable projects elsewhere in Canada, I am concerned about substantial budget over-runs, various geological risks to an earth-fill dam (with cracks needing repair already), the failure of BC Hydro and the BC government to use recognized demand management strategies (pricing electricity to drive conservation), the the loss of fine agricultural land, and the likely replacement of province-wide grids with local grids plus significant increases in capacity to store electricity. So, I recommend to BCUC and to the BC government that the mandate (& name) of BC Hydro be changed to The BC Energy Conservation Authority. We will all be better off, including those whose jobs might change in 2018.

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Fred Bass · Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

And of course, the government's failure to recognize the legal rights of indigenous people to free, prior and informed consent to use of their land.

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Blair King · Langley, British Columbia

This article has a number of issues that are based on the information used to generate it. Consider the UBC report by Dr. Bakker it compares direct jobs for Site C against direct+indirect+induced jobs in the alternative portfolio which is not a reasonable comparison. Thus the job claims are not legitimate.

As for the future BCUC demand forecast, the BCUC specifically notes that it excludes any demand associated with electrification associated with fighting climate change. Yet that demand (electric vehicles, moves away from natural gas for household uses) will necessarily increase demand above the forecast provided by the BCUC.

As for "International energy expert Robert McCullough" his estimates are provided absent sufficient supporting data to effectively establish how he comes up with his \$4 billion savings, but it differs from the estimates provided by every other analysis including that of BC Hydro AND the BCUC.

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Ewan Martin Quirk · Vice President, Development at Founder, President Asass-Burundi

The jobs comparison is most definitely legitimate. Benefits to agriculture are not even enumerated, the capacity to produce foods for a million mouths has been solidly researched by economists. The Peace River Valley is a massive agricultural economic asset which has been prevented from being exploited by the fiction of power generation.

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RanD Hadland

While the UBC jobs research is refreshing and new, it is supported by studies going back as far as the seventies that showed that the conservation and renewables industry provides as much as seven times as many jobs as megadam construction. Ever since the eighties when the size of our huge surplus of electricity was realized this hasn't been a concern because effectively we subsidized BC Hydros early building spree by buying more power than we needed. Now with BC Hydro again wanting to build Site C, and again in the face of a surplus though not as large as it was, the issue of our direction ... [See More](#)

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