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Quebec utility partnering on CMP corridor may revive nuclear plant

by **Lori Valigra**

11 hours ago



In this June 22, 2010, file photo, the Jean-Lesage hydroelectric dam on the Manicouagan River is seen north of Baie-Comeau, Quebec. A transmission line across western Maine will serve as a conduit for Canadian hydropower through Lewiston to the New England grid. Credit: Jacques Boissinot / The Canadian Press via AP

Hydro-Quebec, a partner on the controversial \$1 billion hydropower line through western Maine, may restart a nuclear reactor as it eyes future power demands.

News broke earlier this month that the Quebec utility is considering restarting a decommissioned nuclear plant, and that has renewed questions about whether it can meet existing power contracts for the New England Clean Energy Connect project in Maine, a collaboration among it, Massachusetts electric companies and a Central Maine Power affiliate.

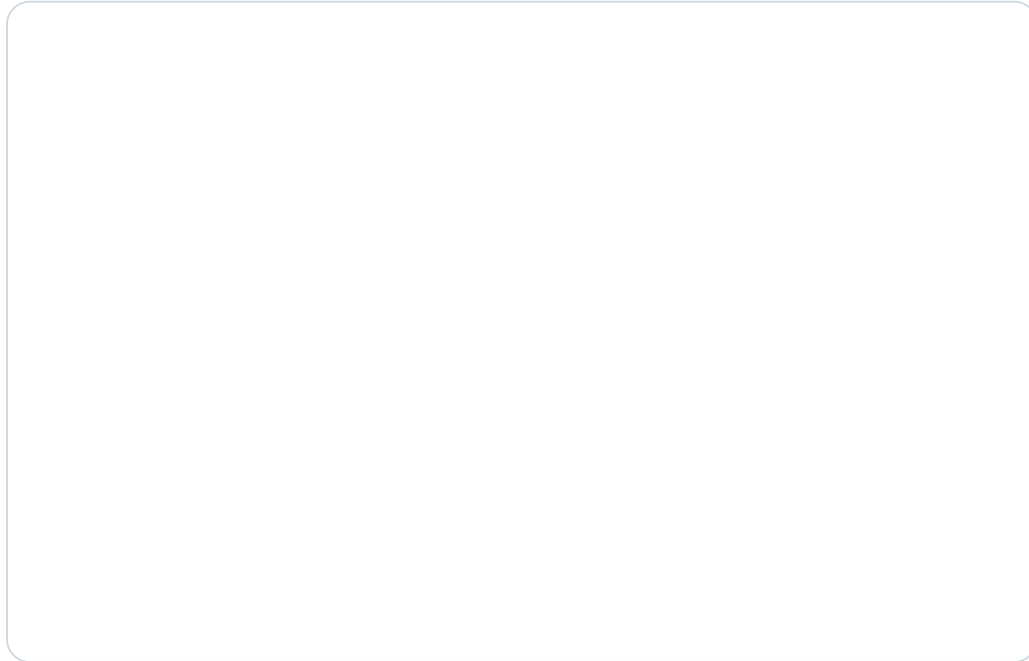
Work on the project resumed slowly in early August on both sides of the border as Hydro-Quebec and CMP await a decision by the Massachusetts Legislature on whether to alter current electricity contracts to cover a \$500 million cost overrun. Both issues present potential new hurdles to the project, which already has survived multiple court challenges, including a referendum in Maine that was invalidated.

The Quebec utility said in an Aug. 10 Twitter post that it is evaluating different options to increase the production of clean electricity, including nuclear power.

“It would be irresponsible at this time to exclude certain energy sectors,” the post reads.

Hydro-Québec @hydroquebec · [Follow](#)

Plusieurs informations circulent actuellement concernant [#Gentilly-2](#). Rappelons que la demande en électricité propre augmentera de manière significative au cours des prochaines années, afin de décarboner l'économie du Québec, ce qui représente un défi immense. Une évaluation de... [Show more](#)



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Hydro-Quebec will need new energy supplies by 2027 as electricity demand increases by 20 terawatt hours from 2019 to 2029, according to the utility's [strategic plan](#). The Maine project will take about 9.45 terawatts and the New York project, known as the Champlain Hudson Power Express, about 10.4 terawatts.

With its current resources, Hydro-Quebec cannot meet its commitments to supply those and other projects over the next few years, according to Robert McCullough, head of energy consulting firm McCullough Research. It has limited choices to broaden power generation resources.

But he was surprised to learn Hydro-Quebec was considering nuclear energy to fill the gap, because restarting any nuclear plant is very difficult. The plant in question, Gentilly-2, was decommissioned because of

economic and other reasons in December 2012, and defueling was completed in September 2013. Restarting it could cost \$3 billion or more, he said.

“The nuclear plant option smacks of desperation,” McCullough said.

One option is to buy thermal power from Ontario and New England for Quebec customers, and assign the hydroelectricity to the NECEC and New York that was promised for the clean energy goals of those projects.

“This is commonly known as greenwashing and is quite common,” McCullough said.

Hydro-Quebec is firmly committed to its export contracts, and has 70 workers back on the project now in Canada, said Lynn St-Laurent, a spokesperson for the utility.

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Canada may not have hydropower capacity for New England energy projects

AP by [The Associated Press](#)

The company has surpluses for almost the next decade, St-Laurent said, but projected demand in Quebec has jumped for new initiatives, including hydrogen and battery production.

That means it is tightening energy supplies for use in Canada, but it has planned for the NECEC and New York projects in its energy supply outlooks.

The contract that Hydro-Quebec has for the NECEC project with Maine and Massachusetts will deliver hydroelectricity most of the time, but it allows Hydro-Quebec to pull back supplies in critical hours when Quebec has its own shortages, said David Littell, an energy and environmental attorney in Portland and a former member of the Maine Public Utilities Commission.

“That risk has always been there since Massachusetts did the contract,” Littell said.

