

EXCERPT FROM

SUMMARY REPORT: COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY REVIEW

NOVEMBER 2012 COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

GOLDEN FEEDBACK

Introduction

The information contained in this excerpt¹ is the direct feedback received by the Columbia River Treaty Review Team from attendees at the November 2012 Columbia River Treaty Review community consultation sessions.

Background

The Columbia River Treaty Review provided an opportunity to increase the Province's understanding of Basin residents' interests and values. The Province wants to ensure the implications of Treaty options on those interests are communicated to, and well understood by, Basin residents, and that those residents have full opportunity to provide input to help inform Provincial recommendations on the Treaty.

Golden Community Session

Forty-nine participants attended the session held in the Golden Civic Centre. The session was similar to the format followed in other community sessions, with the addition of a short presentation on a BC Hydro report of the potential cost of installing a dam at the top end of Canoe Reach in order to maintain stable water levels for recreation. The estimated cost was

¹ The full Summary Report for the November 2012 Community Consultation can be found at <http://engage.gov.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/6/2012/07/Treaty-Review-November-2012-Public-Consultation-Summary-Report1.pdf>

extrapolated to help inform discussions in Golden around a water retention structure in the southeast end of Kinbasket Reservoir. The dam at the southeast end would likely need to be bigger than the one considered for Canoe Reach and the costs were estimated to be substantially higher. Therefore, the presentation concluded, such construction would not be considered in the foreseeable future

One comment was repeated numerous times: Golden and the surrounding areas has been impacted by the reservoir but have not been adequately compensated. Promises had been made by the Province that Kinbasket Reservoir would be a “mountain lake,” but that has not been the case; instead a widely fluctuating reservoir has been created since there is no minimum drawdown zone for Kinbasket Reservoir unlike Revelstoke Reservoir. Water levels vary far more here than other reservoirs in the Basin.

During the discussions regarding compensation, some felt that Golden should receive some form of water rental revenue, stating that Revelstoke receives approximately \$1.4 million annually because of Revelstoke Dam, but Golden receives just one-fifth of that. BC Hydro’s Grant in Lieu of Taxes was also thought to be inadequate, and should be expanded, and that for taxation/grant purposes the definition of “industrial land” should include reservoirs.

Participants felt that there was a lack of local input to decision-making on BC Hydro systems operations that negatively impacted local communities; one person asking how many BC Hydro board directors come from the interior of B.C.

Lack of project funding from the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program in the region was also a point of criticism, although a participant highlighted that Golden did get a “good deal” with a Columbia Basin Trust office being located in the community - although this is still far from adequate compensation.

The issue of unfair allocation of funds was raised, whether it was the money (from Treaty benefits) going to Provincial General Revenues (and not coming back to the Basin), or compensation funds within the Basin not being directed towards those communities most impacted. In general, it was thought that compensation has not been adequate for what has been lost. One person commented that while Kinbasket Reservoir is drawn down extensively each year, Golden does not receive the revenue generated by that draw-down, adding “it’s immoral that we see so few benefits in return.” Another stated that while they thought it unlikely that the Province would give up some of the revenue, something had to be done to

sustain the community. One person requested that the Treaty Review Team “push government to respond” on this matter.

Following the presentations, the participant’s split up into four break-out sessions.

During the break-out sessions, the following issues were raised:

- Poor road access to the Reservoir on poorly maintained gravel roads.
- No camping and recreational sites.
- Widely fluctuating water levels.
- Large amounts of debris on Kinbasket Reservoir; BC Hydro has spent significant resources in recent years but more needs to be done.
- A boat ramp at Bush Harbour that does not provide low-water access and is in need of upgrading or replacement.
- Archeological sites are not getting the same attention at Kinbasket Reservoir as they would in other reservoirs, with many sites eroding away due to fluctuating water levels.

The consensus at one of these break-out tables was that the Province should either continue with the Treaty, or recommend Treaty Plus. There was a belief that there would be a financial loss if the Treaty were terminated and that Treaty Plus would provide more flexibility for local compensation. A desire was expressed that benefits be tied back to the region that is impacted, and that Kinbasket Reservoir be kept at a higher levels. One participant believed that there would be more ability to compensate for the local impacts if the Treaty were terminated.

One person observed that Albertans drive by this town, preferring to recreate elsewhere, and that Kinbasket Reservoir is a lost economic opportunity for the community. One person commented that there is no road access to Kinbasket Reservoir for five months of the year, contrary to the information stated by BC Hydro. A participant noted that Golden is dependent on the highway, and infrastructure improvements are required to help support recreation and tourism development. They suggested funds could come in the form of grants or funding, or even tax off-sets for local municipalities. A secure revenue stream to local government was recommended.

Another breakout table focused on impacted ecosystems and the return of salmon to the Columbia River. It was felt that water is managed in B.C. to meet power needs first, and the environmental needs in the U.S. It was suggested that, instead, we should be looking at the needs of the B.C ecosystem first, in particular the needs of salmon, and then see what opportunities there are for power after that. Future modelling should prioritize the essentials – the ecosystem and the return of salmon to the Columbia River - and then see how other interests fit in.

It was also noted that there is a general lack of baseline data available for Kinbasket Reservoir (although the Water Use Plan implementation did help fill some gaps), and that managing various values for this Reservoir is more difficult than others. Some felt that the knowledge and skills developed during the Water Use Plan process should continue with the Treaty process.

One area of discussion during the break-out sessions focused on economic opportunity, especially regarding tourism development. It was reported that BC Hydro had identified risk of landslides around Bush Harbour. As a result, leases in certain areas suitable for recreational sites could not be obtained. It was thought if the land and access issues could be resolved, there are excellent opportunities for tourism and recreational development on Kinbasket Reservoir.

Finally, it was acknowledged that, given the significant revenue generation derived from water storage in Kinbasket Reservoir that there is little chance that water levels will change from their current wide fluctuations. It was thought that improving road access to the Reservoir would be a far more realistic goal to achieve, rather than to trying to achieve higher, and more stable, water levels. One break-out group recommended that an advisory group be formed to fix road access and crown land usage and to not spend time trying to effect change in water levels.

The Review Team committed to returning to the community of Golden for more dialogue if it was invited to do so. There was also a commitment for the Treaty Review Team and a representative from the Local Governments' Committee to meet with the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations district manager to discuss road access to Kinbasket Reservoir.