

EXCERPT FROM

SUMMARY REPORT: COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY REVIEW

NOVEMBER 2012 COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

VALEMOUNT 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.

Valemount Community Session

There were 19 participants at the session held at the Valemount Visitor Centre. In addition to the format followed in sessions in other communities, participants listened to a 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. While the presentation concluded the cost

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>

of the dam (the structure required was bigger than a weir) was too high for such construction to be considered in the foreseeable future, most participants appreciated the work that had been done to answer the community's query.

Participants elected to continue discussions as a whole rather than divide into smaller groups. Central to the feedback from the participants was the belief that while Kinbasket Reservoir is a huge revenue generator for the province, relatively few resources flow back to the community and compensation has not been adequate for the impacts experienced. There were many questions concerning how much revenue, and Canadian Entitlement, is generated by the Treaty dams. One participant wanted to know how much Canadian Entitlement came back to the Basin hypothesizing that it was less than five percent.

One person asked what the royalties are on water usage, with another stating Golden and Valemount are heavily affected by hydro generation (supplying 42 per cent of the Province's needs), with basically no royalties in return.

While Valemount does receive some benefits from the dams (e.g. a BC Hydro grant helped pave the streets in Valemount, and Columbia Basin Trust has funded community projects), it was thought to be relatively insignificant by most attending. Some said that the social and economic trade-offs are not worth it, that the area is subsidising power for others, that losses for Valemount are very valuable to BC Hydro, and that more money should be invested here. Although there was a study on the impacts done in 1994 for Columbia Basin Trust, there were no socio-economic multipliers included. It was suggested that the subject be revisited now that the Treaty is up for discussion, then make sure none of the impacts have been overlooked, and to also calculate the socio-economic multipliers for 50 years into the future. A participant suggested this could be done in a relatively short time frame, by March 2013.

Negative impacts noted by participants included diminished wildlife populations, lack of transport corridors between Golden and Revelstoke (some would like to see a ferry link between Valemount and Mica and Revelstoke), timber cut loss, dust storms at low water, discontinued access to local hot springs, and poor recreational and boating opportunities.

Recreation was a key concern. One described Kinbasket Reservoir as providing "two months of okay boating." Echoing Golden participants, Valemount participants stated debris build-up, and clean-up, was an important issue and that debris negatively impacted recreation on the water. One person observed: "the lake is not a recreational experience; it's an adrenalin ride just to go

fishing!” With respect to lake levels and boating access, one angler noted that typically boat owners cannot access the lake until June.

Another commented that BC Hydro has done a good job in cleaning up debris during the summer but after 30 years of mostly neglect there has been extensive build-up, and now with extremely high waters again in 2012, there is the concern that it will be in a poor state once again.

Participants also discussed the state of the ecosystem. One participant wanted to make sure that there was a holistic view when considering the costs associated with the Treaty dams: impacts on temperature and air pressure changes; increased wind; precipitation and erosion. Both sides of the argument were mentioned: if storage levels were changed and produced less hydro power, then the power would need to be generated elsewhere and there would likely be an environmental cost of doing that.

Even at full-pool, participants noted concerns with ecosystems surrounding the lake. Many residents and tourists use their ATVs to recreate on the mudflats but if there was a prolonged period of full-pool there were concerns that these machines go elsewhere and impact sensitive habitat.

The Valemount session initiated an immediate response among some of those attending. The Mayor organized an ad-hoc committee of interested community members to discuss next steps and priorities.