Columbia River Treaty Review

Arrow Lakes Reservoir Mid-Elevations Scenarios Public Meeting

Fauquier, B.C. September 12, 2016 6:30pm – 9:00 pm

Summary Report of Public Discussion

ATTENDEES

Researchers / Authors (*Arrow Lakes Reservoir Mid-Elevation Scenarios* study)

Alan Thomson	Environmental/Water Engineer, Nelson,
Greg Utzig	Conservation Ecologist, Nelson
Bill Green	Canadian Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fisheries Commission, Cranbrook
Nicole Kapell	Archaeologist, Kimberley

BC Ministry of Energy and Mines

Kathy Eichenberger	Executive Director, Columbia River Treaty Review Team
Brooke McMurchy	Policy Advisor, Columbia River Treaty Review Team

Communities Represented by 95-100 Attendees

Arrow Park	Burton	Edgewood
Fauquier	Nakusp	Revelstoke

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

This meeting was well attended, beyond expectations, with an estimated 95-100 area residents present. The vast majority stayed to the end of the meeting at 9:00pm, listening to the full report presentation and responding with interest and passion during the public input section.

This summary report focuses on the five key points that emerged from the public discussion, following the presentation of the "***Arrow Lakes Reservoir Mid-Elevation Scenarios***" report:

1. Broad desire exists for a constant and stable reservoir level
2. There is uncertainty about what this level should be, although many people want it to be higher than the 1420/1425 feet of the proposed scenarios
3. Some mistrust of the process and intent of this report/meeting was expressed
4. There is some lack of clarity about the Treaty and Treaty negotiations process
5. This group was primarily focused on the reservoir elevation. Other aspects of the report drew no questions or comments from those attending.

KEY POINTS

1. Constant and Stable Reservoir Level

During the last part of the meeting, one of the researchers reminded people that there were two related, but separate, proposals/recommendations contained in this study: (1) a constant and stable reservoir level; and (2) the 1420 and 1425 feet levels used in the respective scenarios. One of the final public comments reiterated this point, which led to a vocal indication of a seemingly very broad support for the constant and stable level aspect.

2. Determining the Constant and Stable Reservoir Levels

However, the main concern expressed by most attendees, throughout the meeting was that both of the two mid-reservoir scenario proposed water levels, 1420 and 1425 feet, are too low. People who live on the reservoir want higher levels, the numbers 1430-1435 feet being mentioned on several occasions.

Towards the end of the evening, a show of hands was invited for those who favoured higher levels. Approximately half of the 80+ or so people remaining in the audience raised their hands. Reasons expressed throughout the meeting for wanting a higher level were:

- Added costs related to rebuilding marinas/docks if level is lower
- The unpleasant aesthetics of marinas/docks so far from where people live
- Ugliness of mud flats
- Less concern about regrowth in uncovered areas, if level is higher, as it will recover faster
- Mosquitoes are bad when levels are low; residents do not want this
- Would be easier for fish to spawn with higher levels
- Better for water-based recreation
- Affects the overall economy of communities i.e. affects camping, tourism, beaches, restaurants, hotels, which leads to loss of jobs, young people leaving region, leading to the demise of communities.

One person mentioned that a constant higher level, such as 1435 feet, would not leave much room in the reservoir to mitigate flooding during high water years. .

3. Mistrust of the Intent of this Study/Report and Meeting

Some people who live on and around the reservoir had concerns about the process for this study and meeting:

- Not understanding that this was a proposal seeking public input, not a 'done deal' being forced upon area residents
- 'Government' was not listening to those who live on the reservoir
- Worried that government is only concerned about environmental values

There were also comments connected with the mid-reservoir levels outlined in the study, indicating, perhaps, that not everyone understood either the background around this study and/or some of the key elements:

- Some thought the 1420 and 1425 foot levels were 'written in stone'
- There was some lack of clarity around where the 1420 and 1425 foot levels came from, that is, not understanding that they are a result of feedback from the 2013 Columbia River Treaty Review public meeting in Fauquier.
- Unclear that one in every 5 or 7 flood years mentioned in the report scenarios were based on an average, not a predetermined time when the reservoirs would be used to store excess water to reduce flood risk, and the reservoir water elevation would rise and fall over a defined period

4. Lack of Clarity Around the Treaty and Treaty Negotiations Review Process

The Columbia River Treaty is a complex agreement, the details of which were not fully understood by many of the attendees. Aspects of the Columbia River Treaty that required clarification:

- It is incorrect that the Treaty can only be negotiated in 2024. The Treaty can be changed at any time providing both U.S. and Canada/BC agree to the changes. 2024 represents the earliest that either country can terminate the Treaty, providing at least 10 years notice is given. The scenarios presented at this meeting represent the beginning stages of exploring potential changes to the Treaty that could be negotiated with the US.

- How water levels are currently governed under the Treaty was unclear to some. Reservoir levels are tied to Columbia River flow requirements at the border to maximize power production and prevent damaging floods. More information on how the Treaty operates is found on the Ministry of Energy and Mines' website http://blog.gov.bc.ca/columbiarivertreaty/

- How projected levels are communicated to residents was unclear to some. BC Hydro provides regular communication on reservoir levels in real time through their web site and through bi- weekly reservoir updates that are sent by email. To view reservoir elevations or to sign up for the update emails go to https://www.bchydro.com/energy-in-bc/our_system/transmission_reservoir_data/previous_reservoir_elevations.html

- The role of high water in Mica Dam in relation to overall power generation with BC was not understood by some.
  Mica Dam generating station can produce up to 3000 megawatts (MW) in power and relies on high reservoir elevation (high head) to maximize power production. Conversely, Hugh Keenleyside Dam is a relatively low head dam produces a maximum of 185 MW.

- Someone suggested that it doesn't matter what local residents want; BC Hydro will maintain what ever levels the US wants.
  Rather, it's the Columbia River Treaty that determines flows at the border and therefore water levels in reservoirs to regulate those flows; BC Hydro does not have discretion in that regard. The BC Government has committed to improve the Treaty, which is why a mid-elevation stable Arrow hydro operation is being explored.

5. Other Aspects of Report (beyond reservoir water level issue)

There were no comments or questions regarding: environmental impact (vegetation, erosion, fisheries, wildlife), archaeology, navigation, agriculture, power generation.

There was one comment stating that Canada needs to think about how to retain water instead of sending it to the US. By nature of the river system, the water will always flow downstream, however we can manage the timing and volume of the flow crossing the border.