

AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT

Stage 3 of the Site C Clean Energy Project (Site C) is the environmental and regulatory review phase. As part of an environmental assessment of Site C, BC Hydro will identify and assess potential project effects — environmental, economic, social, heritage and health — and opportunities to provide lasting benefits for the region and First Nations. Where effects cannot be avoided, BC Hydro will identify and evaluate options for mitigation.

This study update provides an overview of work completed to date and currently underway and is current as of fall 2011. Studies may be changed or revised in scope or timing on the basis of input from regulators, government agencies, First Nations, stakeholders and the public as part of the pre-application stage of the environmental assessment process.

The Site C project requires environmental certification and other regulatory permits and approvals before it can proceed to construction. In addition, the Crown has a duty to consult and, where appropriate, accommodate Aboriginal groups.

DEFINITION

An agricultural assessment will be conducted for the Site C project to characterize the effects of the project on the agricultural economy and resources, and to identify potential avoidance, mitigation and enhancement strategies related to agriculture.

STUDY PURPOSE

An agricultural assessment considers the agricultural resource base and the agricultural systems.

- The agricultural resource base includes the capability of the agricultural land base, local micro-climatic conditions, and direct farm operations including crop and livestock production.
- The agricultural systems include economic considerations of agricultural use of the land, such as the economic factors associated with crop and livestock production, regional agricultural businesses, and local food production and consumption.

This assessment involves field work to confirm the agricultural capability of the land, consideration of historic, current and predicted future climatic conditions, and technical research. The study includes research involving provincial agencies, potentially affected farmers and ranchers, and the Peace River agricultural community.

The local study area includes the proposed project areas, including the Site C reservoir from Hudson's Hope to the proposed Site C dam location, and other aspects of the project within the broader regional context including the Peace River valley down to the BC / Alberta border.

STATUS OF STUDIES

Historical Studies

During the consideration of Site C in the early 1980s several studies were completed to update agricultural resource mapping within the valley, to determine the impact on agriculturally significant lands within the project area, and to understand the potential effect on the area's agricultural industry. Based on historic agricultural studies and the Canada Land Inventory data, the majority of Class 1 and 2 lands in the Peace River valley — about 2,300 hectares of Class 1 and 10,000 hectares of Class 2 lands — are downstream of Site C and not affected by the project.

Based on the environmental review and public hearings for Site C at that time, the British Columbia Utilities Commission (BCUC) concluded that sufficient agricultural land would remain in the region to support a viable agricultural industry. In addition, in the early 1980s, the BCUC recommended removal of the flood reserve downstream of Site C to remove potential barriers to agricultural land use. The downstream flood reserve was removed by the provincial government in 1985.

Consultation Conducted

During Stage 2, a Land and Resources Technical Advisory Committee was established as part of a series of Committees to provide agency and government input into the project. This Committee provided an opportunity for municipal and provincial governments, regional districts and the Blueberry River First Nations to provide input on potential approaches for assessing land and resource use. Some of the key themes were loss, alteration or conversion of land from current uses (such as forestry and agriculture), alienation of resources (such as forest or aggregate resources within the proposed reservoir area), changes to transportation infrastructure and subsequent changes to resource access, and consideration of cumulative effects with other land use activities. Feedback is being considered as a component of the environmental assessment.

In addition, agriculture was identified as a topic of interest during Stage 2 public and stakeholder consultations undertaken from October through November 2008.

- Participants were asked to rate the importance of six aspects of valley-based agriculture to the Peace River region. Overall, four of six aspects were rated as “extremely” or “very” important: 1) forage crops and food for domestic animals; 2) farm businesses that contribute to the local economy; 3) scenic and pastoral viewsapes that contribute to tourism and liveability and 4) local food production.
- Participants were asked to rate the importance of options for mitigation and enhancement of agricultural development in the region. Overall, four options were rated “extremely” or “very” important by approximately three-quarters of participants: 1) Removing and reusing premium topsoil prior to reservoir filling; 2) optimizing the agricultural usability of remaining parcels where feasible through road alignment selection 3); minimizing construction disturbance to farming operations through scheduling and planning; and 4) minimizing the direct loss of agricultural land where feasible through road alignment selection.

Stage 3 Work

An agricultural assessment is currently under development for the Site C project. The components of the agricultural assessment include:

- **Resource Inventory:** The resource inventory started in spring 2011, and identifies current conditions of the agricultural economy and resources. In addition, the resource inventory updates land uses and capability mapping. The resource inventory includes:
 - Review of crop suitability ratings, agricultural potential, analysis of local and regional climate data, and range and grazing tenures;
 - Field work on agricultural land to determine soil properties, including shovel testing, soil sampling and documentation of soil conditions;
 - Interviews with property owners, farmers and ranchers, and agricultural stakeholders in the region; and,
 - Updating of agricultural resource mapping.
- **Effects Assessment:** Understanding the interaction of the project activities and footprint as it interacts with the agricultural resources and systems will identify potential effects of the project, which could include: permanent and temporary land loss, changes to livestock production potential, farm operations, and economic factors.
- **Mitigation:** A review of potential mitigation options will be conducted. Mitigation would be focused on strategies to avoid or reduce the impact on agricultural land and operations, and management of direct on-farm impacts, such as changes to access routes, infrastructure or fencing.
- **Enhancement and compensation:** In recognition of agricultural losses the assessment will include identification of options for regional agricultural enhancement and compensation strategies. Enhancement and compensation would be focused on strategies to support or enhance agricultural production at the local or regional scale.
- **Resource Management:** The agricultural resource management plan will focus on strategies to include agricultural management objectives and mitigation measures during construction and operations, such as monitoring and follow-up programs, and roles and responsibilities. For example agricultural measures may include site reclamation provisions, and invasive plant control and management.

LOOKING AHEAD

Public feedback on the agricultural assessment will be requested during planned 2012 public consultation. Additional study areas may be defined for 2012 as the project is further defined.

Stage 3: Consultation

The Site C project requires environmental certification and other regulatory permits and approvals before it can proceed to construction.

The Stage 3 environmental and regulatory review process will include opportunities for consultation and input by the public, Aboriginal groups, communities, property owners and stakeholders.

In addition to the consultation opportunities led by the environmental regulatory agencies within the environmental assessment process, BC Hydro will lead several streams of public and stakeholder consultation during Stage 3:

- Regional and Local Government Liaison
- Property Owner Liaison
- Local Area Consultation
- Preliminary Design Consultation

BC Hydro and Aboriginal groups are also engaged in a thorough consultation process that will continue through all stages of the project.

How Input Will Be Used

A Consultation Summary Report will be prepared and released on the project website following each consultation period and Consideration Memos will be prepared, indicating how input has been considered, along with technical and financial information, for project designs or plans, including engineering and environmental mitigation plans.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The following information can be found at www.bchydro.com/sitec:

1. Site C Clean Energy Project: Project Description Report. 2011. (pages 80, 131).
2. Stage 2: Consultation and Technical Review. 2009. (pages 89-90).
3. Site C Feasibility Review: Stage 1 Completion Report. 2007. (page 50).
4. Agricultural Assessment Regional and Local Government Liaison Committee Presentation, April 20, 2011.
5. Peace River Site C Hydro Project – Project Definition Consultation Round 2 Summary Report, February 9, 2009. (pages 34-37).
6. Project Definition Consultation Discussion Guide and Feedback Form Round 2. October/November 2008. (page 24).
7. Site C Lands: Economic Opportunities Assessment Impact Assessment. January 2002.
8. Determination of the Aerial Extent of Lands with Agricultural Capability Class 1 to 5 within the Proposed Site C Reservoir Area. September 1982.
9. BCUC Exhibits and Hearing Records.

INQUIRIES

Updates on field studies are available at www.bchydro.com/sitec and in the Community Consultation offices in Fort St. John and Hudson's Hope.

For further information, please contact:

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