October 2025

Wilsey Dam Fish Passage Project Update

We are making progress on a project to achieve fish passage at Wilsey Dam so salmon can access 32 kilometers of historical spawning habitat upstream of the dam. We are building on the work of the Wilsey Dam Fish Passage Committee who have recommended fish passage on the basis of technical and biological feasibility.

In the fall 2024, BC Hydro updated the scope and estimate for the refurbishment alternative of the facility and concluded that considerable investment would be required to restore it to full generation capacity and construct new fish passage infrastructure.

After careful consideration and working with First Nations and regulators, BC Hydro has identified decommissioning Wilsey Dam and its facilities as the leading alternative for fish passage. This alternative has a higher probability of fish passage success and greater instream ecological and habitat continuity benefits.

Based on current information, we anticipate the following general timeline.

Project steps		Estimated duration of each step	Earliest completion of each step
Step 1	Preliminary investigation of potential Wilsey Dam decommissioning and determine a leading alternative for fish passage.	Complete	Fall 2021
Step 2	Complete detailed studies to determine feasibility. BC Hydro Board of Directors review project plans and decide whether to move ahead with the project.	In progress	2026
Step 3	If approved, complete design and submit regulatory approvals (e.g., BC Water Comptroller Approvals, DFO Authorization, and Archaeological Assessments).	1 to 2 years	2026 - 2028
Step 4	Regulatory review and approval.	6 months	Fall 2028
Step 5	If approved, detailed design, specifications and procurement is completed and then project construction will start.	18 months	Spring 2030

*Note this schedule is subject to change.

Decommissioning option

A summary report of the decommissioning alternative engineering investigations was prepared during 2023-2025, which included further development of the Feasibility Design Concepts with a particular focus on the challenges of water and sediment management, and construction sequencing. The report will be finalized in January 2026.

What this means for other BC Hydro initiatives

We started work to renew our water licences that allow us to operate Wilsey Dam and its Shuswap Falls powerhouse including the commencement of an Order Review of our Shuswap Water Use Plan. Since both of these initiatives rely on our continued operation of these facilities, we intend to pause work until we confirm our plans for fish passage at Wilsey Dam.

Ongoing consultation and engagement

We recognize and appreciate the substantial work of First Nations, the Wilsey Dam Fish Passage Committee, elected officials, agency staff, and stakeholders in pursuing fish passage at Wilsey Dam. We will continue to consult and engage as the project moves forward.

Sediment

Management of the accumulated sediment in the Wilsey head pond is a major consideration during dam decommissioning. Introduction of sediment into the aquatic environment downstream can have both positive and negative effects on fish and fish habitat.

BC Hydro completed a trial sediment release in June 2025, a critical milestone in furthering the project and understanding the effects of sediment movement, deposition and impacts to aquatic habitat.

During the trial sediment release, approved water quality limits were not exceeded in the river downstream and no salmonid mortality was observed by the on-site First Nations environmental monitors.

History

The West Canadian Hydro Electric Corporation built Wilsey Dam and the downstream generating station at Shuswap Falls in 1929. Later, the BC Power Commission acquired the Corporation which, in turn, became part of BC Hydro. Wilsey Dam was built at the site of the natural Shuswap Falls which were a series of short drops and steep rapids. A spillway channel was blasted through rock immediately to the north of the river channel.

The Shuswap Falls facility with two generating units and a capacity of 6.5 megawatts provided most of the electric power for the North Okanagan region until 1951.

The facility is aging and currently one of the two generating units is out of service. The facility now generates approximately 12 gigawatt hours each year, less than 0.1% of BC Hydro's total hydroelectric generation capability.

Wilsey Dam and Shuswap Falls generating station

For more information

For more information or to sign up to receive project updates by email, please contact Dave Cooper at **250-549-8581 or** david.cooper@bchydro.com

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