

# CANADIAN COLUMBIA RIVER FORUM

## BACKGROUND PAPER

NOVEMBER 2006







*This document provides background information and is a record of the reasons various agencies have agreed to form the **CANADIAN COLUMBIA RIVER FORUM**. It is meant as reference material only.*

## **A COOPERATIVE APPROACH IN THE CANADIAN COLUMBIA RIVER BASIN**

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Given the economic, environmental, cultural and social importance of the Columbia Basin to Canadians, it is incumbent on governments and decision-making agencies to collaborate on water-management initiatives. There are existing issues that need collective attention right now, and a growing list of new and emerging issues, often precipitated by American activities. Examples range from potential development in the basin to management of the hydro system for species at risk. Experience has shown that pro-active collaborative engagement is decidedly preferable to reactive management.

At present, collaboration in the Columbia would serve (at least) four objectives:

- Enhance the working relationship among federal, provincial, First Nation and regional organizations;
- Aid governments (including First Nations) in sharing perspectives and developing a common understanding and set of values for dealing with trans-boundary issues;
- Develop mechanisms to maintain this common understanding and to help agencies stay abreast of and active in relevant ongoing and emerging trans-boundary issues; and,
- Identify tangible initiatives that warrant collaborative attention.

In the end, cooperation will enhance the ability for each agency to make well-planned, thoughtful and informed decisions that optimize the economic, environmental, cultural and social outcome for Canadians.

## **BACKGROUND**

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The entire Columbia Basin (in Canada and the United States) is 671,000 square kilometres, approximately the size of the province of Alberta or the State of Texas. It is the sixth largest river basin in North America, crossing one international boundary, and seven state boundaries. It contains a wide range of ecosystems from interior rain forests to grasslands to deserts, and is home to a diversity of wildlife with over 700 hundred species of reptiles, birds, fish and mammals. Archaeologists tell us that humans have inhabited the Columbia River Basin for more than 10,000 years . First Nations have traditionally used the river system for fishing, hunting, gathering, transportation, and cultural purposes. These uses are still an important way of life for First Nations in the Columbia River Basin.

The Basin's water resources have played a critical role in supporting the growth and development of human habitation in the region. Human use of water has expanded to include hydropower production, industry, agriculture, domestic water supplies, waste assimilation, transportation and recreation. These uses have placed greater demand on the finite water resources, and have resulted in water use conflicts. Regulation of the Columbia River and its tributaries has become





commonplace, while the complexity of the system is increased by the number of national, provincial, First Nations, and state jurisdictions co-managing the system.

Management of water values within the Canadian Columbia basin is driven by a wide array of laws, regulations, policies and international obligations. One major international agreement which heavily influences the management of Columbia River flows in Canada is the Columbia River Treaty (CRT). In 1964, Canada and the United States ratified the CRT. Its primary purpose is to provide flood control protection and optimize electrical energy production on the Columbia River system in both countries. Under the CRT, Canada agreed to build three storage dams: Duncan (1968), Keenleyside (1969), and Mica (1973), in exchange for a share of downstream (U.S.) flood control and power benefits. The CRT does not expire, but may be terminated (re-negotiation may also be possible) no earlier than 2024, given 10 years advance notice (2014).

The Pacific Northwest United States and British Columbia, Canada are dependent on the power and revenue generated from the hydroelectric system in the Columbia Basin. The Canadian Columbia Basin region provides about 50 per cent of the total hydroelectric power produced in B.C. Power produced, as a result of the Canadian Columbia Basin hydroelectric infrastructure, provides export revenues as well as relatively low-cost electricity to all British Columbians, and is a keystone to the provincial economy. In addition, the storage regulation in the Canadian system provides significant power generation benefits to a number of U.S. hydroelectric facilities downstream. The Columbia River reservoir storage system also provides critical flood control protection for many areas in the U.S. and Canada.

However, these benefits came at a cost to some areas in the Canadian portion of the Columbia Basin. Areas of highly productive and fertile low elevation land were flooded, First Nations' traditional use and heritage areas were lost, communities were displaced and valuable fish and wildlife habitat and species were lost. The communities that currently surround the reservoirs are continually affected by fluctuating reservoir levels, and aspects of the local economy are hampered due to changes in land use and transportation patterns, and the lost opportunities for use of the areas that were flooded.

The Canadian Columbia Basin is an evolving region with increasing population growth, and different societal values than those that existed at the time the Columbia River Treaty was created. There are a broader range of issues concerning both the use and the management of the water resources of the region. Potential climate change impacts on these resources are not clearly understood, and may further exacerbate these issues.

The challenge is to recognize and understand the complexities of the system and manage for a variety of interests and values.





## Issues we are facing in the Canadian Columbia Basin

The following is a summary of some of the existing and emerging water management issues facing the Canadian Columbia Basin.

*While the focus of this initiative is on transboundary issues in the Canadian Columbia Basin these broader ranging issues will influence Canadian perspectives in dealing with transboundary water management decisions.*

### 1. Fish

- Impact of reservoir operations on fish species (including but not limited to sturgeon, salmon and resident fish).
- Impacts on freshwater fish from development pressure, mining, transportation infrastructure, foreshore development, and introduction of exotic species.

### 2. Watershed Issues

- Domestic watershed issues (land use conflicts).
- Drinking water protection.
- Regional population and tourism growth and impacts on water supply and quality

### 3. Recreation

- Reservoir access.
- Conflicts with other uses.

### 4. Water Quality

- Dissolved gas concentrations which are high and harmful to fish.
- Impacts from industrial use and developments.
- Point source issues: industrial and municipal effluent.
- Non-point source issues: urban growth, agriculture, forestry.

### 5. Hydro Power/Flood Control

- Managing the system for a range of values.

### 6. First Nations

- Salmon restoration.
- Implications of asserted aboriginal title and rights.

### 7. Climate Change

- Uncertainties and information gaps.
- Changes to snowpack, temperature and precipitation patterns.
- Potential impacts and adaptation activities.

### 8. US expectations and needs

- Increased need (fish, power, municipal and agriculture) for water.
- Increased expectation that these needs can be met by altered Canadian storage and regulation.

*The complexity of dealing with these issues is magnified by the fact that there are a number of federal and provincial agencies with some form of jurisdiction/responsibility to deal with parts of these issues. Coordination between the agencies to adequately address the issues requires time and resources.*





## WHY IS THIS INITIATIVE IMPORTANT?

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*1. The Columbia is a trans-boundary river system and we share the resources with the United States.*

- There is an international treaty (Columbia River Treaty - CRT) between Canada and the United States that obligates Canada to operate storage at three Canadian reservoirs within the confines of the agreement. The CRT does not expire but may be terminated (or possibly renegotiated) if 10 year's notice is given by either party.
- We want to avoid conflict and plan in a cooperative, forward-thinking, strategic manner.
- We want to identify issues and resolve them before they become disputes (such as the situation in the Milk River system, Devils Lake etc.)
- There are increasing demands in the US and Canada on the water resources of the Columbia River. This may lead to discussions with the US over a number of water-related issues.

*How do we coordinate and effectively work on the Canadian side?*

*2. The Columbia is important to Canada for a number of reasons.*

- It is a major element of the provincial economy (producing about 50% of the provincial hydroelectric power). The relatively inexpensive power produced in the region helps to keep power costs in BC amongst the lowest in North America.
- The Province of BC derives a large amount of financial benefit from the CRT in the form of downstream benefits.
- There are important fisheries issues.
- It has increasing values related to recreation, tourism, transportation etc.
- First Nation issues are emerging.

*How will we manage for all these interests now and in the future?*

## GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

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The parties will strive to work on a watershed level and work across political and jurisdictional boundaries. The objective is to work seamlessly in the entire Columbia Basin watershed in Canada and the United States.





## PROPOSED DIRECTION OF THIS INITIATIVE

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- ▶ Take a *significant organizational step* towards developing an integrating mechanism that will promote Basin education, foster information sharing, and maintain the network of contacts and collaboration begun at the Canadian Columbia River Forum in Vancouver.
- ▶ Adopt a *networked* approach which would enable all levels of government to coordinate their initiatives in the Canadian Columbia Basin. A multi-stakeholder process is required that allows for on-going dialogue between government, community, tribal groups, and industry. The initiative could be structured as a collaborative alliance of relevant government entities run by the senior staff of involved organizations.
- ▶ This process would need to be opened up to broader public participation. Other models or frameworks for basin management and cooperation should be researched. Any plan for basin management and cooperation must include a grassroots stewardship outreach plan to educate and involve citizens.
- ▶ Continued dialogue and interaction with the interest groups in the United States is important:
  - i. Outreach to our US counterparts must be fostered in order to enhance working relationships among the many organizations and their initiatives;
  - ii. Understanding and collaboration within the whole basin must be fostered;
  - iii. Canadian and US planning and decision-making processes need to be linked, including both First Nations cross-border linkages and federal/state/province protocols.

## MECHANISMS TO MOVE FORWARD

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The following is a preliminary list of ideas put forward for consideration by the steering committee:

- The agencies and members of the Canadian Columbia River Forum (CCRF) organizing committee should provide organizational support to move this initiative forward;
- The Columbia Basin Trust should act as the convener/facilitator for the next steps, advised and supported by the current CCRF organizing committee;
- The Columbia River Treaty should be used as a focal point or model to foster a collaborative approach amongst Canadian organizations;
- Existing, long duration, cross border working groups should be used as models for the initiative.





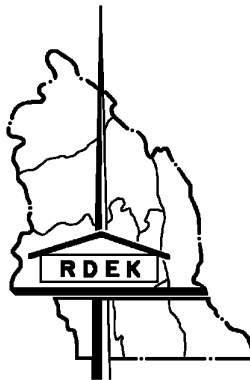
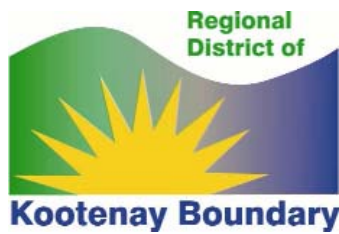
## SUGGESTED SHORT TERM ACTIONS

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- Investigate existing models of cooperative agreements to use as a model for the *Canadian Columbia River Forum*.
- Draft a Terms of Reference (ToR) or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the initiative.
- Make a specific effort to include and engage First Nations and local governments.
- Reconvene the CCRF delegates to review this paper and the ToR/MoU for the *Canadian Columbia River Forum*.
- Hold the next forum in the Basin (with consideration for ease of travel for the many parties involved).
- Identify and initiate a small number of tangible initiatives that warrant collaborative attention to demonstrate the efficacy of interagency cooperation.



# PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



Canadian Columbia River  
Inter-Tribal Fisheries Commission



Shuswap Indian Band