

# ISSUES & IDEAS

SITE C

## A damning indictment of process

BC Hydro: Serious errors made in measuring agricultural impacts

WENDY HOLM

SPECIAL TO THE SUN



**A**s a professional agrologist, I was asked to provide expert evidence to the Joint Federal Provincial Review Panel on Site C regarding the agriculture values that would be lost if the Site C Dam were constructed.

In its Environmental Impact Statement, BC Hydro made three serious errors in its assessment of the Site C dam's impact on agriculture:

1. It failed to measure correctly the amount of farmland lost. The land BCH claims will be "lost" to agriculture (1,666 hectares) represents only 13 per cent of the impacted land, 26 per cent of all flooded land and 47 per cent of the Class 1-3 flooded land.

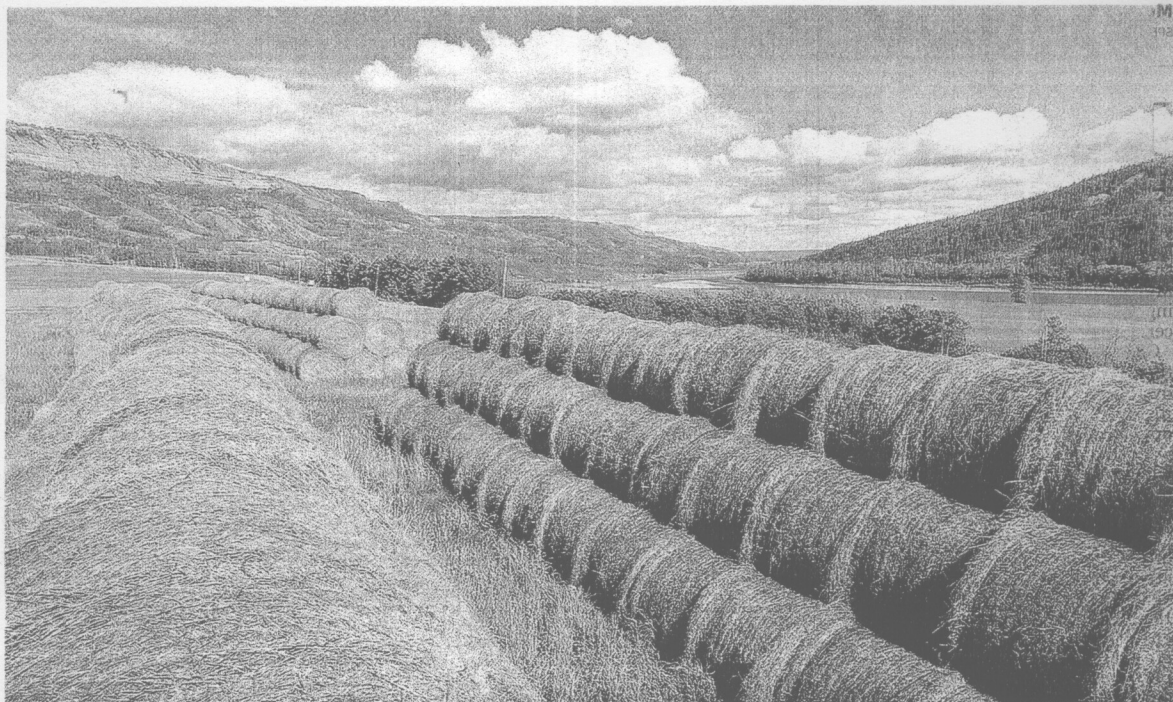
2. It failed to value correctly the land they did measure. The value BCH places on the loss of these 1,666 hectares was based on current and future values of the canola, hay and pasture now grown in this (mostly) BC Hydro and Crown owned valley under a flood reserve for more than 50 years. When medium and robust horticulture cropping scenarios are considered, this valuation jumps dramatically.

3. Most significantly, it failed to acknowledge the cumulative impact the removal of these foodlands will have on nutrition, health, community resilience and long-term food security.

With the same range of crops as the Fraser and Okanagan valleys with (often) higher yields due to long daylight periods, those same 1,666 hectares of fertile soils in the east west-running Peace River valley are capable of producing sufficient fresh vegetables to satisfy the nutritional requirements of more than one million people a year. And considering these 1,666 hectares represent only 47 per cent of the Class 1-3 farmlands flooded by the dam, this figure should be doubled.

Vegetables are the key building blocks of human nutrition. British Columbia is 55 per cent deficient in vegetables, making us reliant on imports. California, our major source of fresh vegetable imports, is in the middle of a 1,200-year drought.

According to NASA scientists, California is down to a one-year supply of water. Massive cuts in water use are being imposed.



The Peace River Valley is one of Canada's most fertile regions.

Agriculture uses roughly 80 per cent of California's water supply. With climate change forecasts predicting more frequent and extreme droughts, the cost of imported fruits and vegetables can only rise dramatically.

A 2014 report by Vancity Credit Union (Wake up Call: California Drought & B.C.'s Food Security) notes the California drought already caused B.C.'s fruit and vegetable prices to increase between five and nine per cent in 2014, predicting increases of 20 to 34 per cent in 2015.

The Peace Valley is 200 kilometres closer to Vancouver than California's Central Valley, and much closer than Mexico. It is also the most logical supplier of fresh vegetables to nutrition-deficient communities in northern B.C., Yukon and the Northwest Territories.

According to Food Insecurity in Canada, a report released by Statistics Canada on March 25, 2015, fully 8.3 per cent of Canadian households — almost one in 10 — experienced food insecurity (defined as lack of access to a sufficient variety or quantity of food due to lack of money) during 2011-2012. In single parent families, 22.6 per cent — approaching one in four households. three

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times the national average — are food insecure.

In December 2014, The Auditor General's Report on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's Nutrition North program delivered the same message: abject failure.

The energy pundits have said it makes no economic sense, the business community agrees, farm, rural, environmental and First Nations communities have launched Supreme Court challenges.

Why, in the face of such unified opposition, would government push so hard? Makes no sense. So I hauled out two maps prepared for me by geography students at the University of Winnipeg following my release of the book *Water and Free Trade* (Lorimer, 1988). One traces

North America's rivers, the other major continental water sharing projects. When you overlay the two maps, every scheme ever put on the table uses the Peace River Valley to transfer water east of the Rockies. Site C dam is exactly where it should be to support continental water sharing projects.

A mega-project for politicians and investors for the next decade, energy and water for fracking for export in the medium term, and convenient pondage for the commodification of bulk water in the longer term?

Harry Swain, former Chair of the Site C Joint Review Panel, went so far as to describe the province's failure to investigate alternatives to the dam as a "dereliction of duty" and called on the province to refer the Site C project to the BC Utilities Commission.

Dereliction of duty indeed. Not to mention a damning indictment of the federal/provincial environmental assessment process and — unless Site C is stopped — the ability of Canadians to remedy this tragic public policy error through effective and democratic action.

Wendy Holm is an agrologist and columnist.

### BC Hydro undervalues agricultural land lost to Site C dam

BC Hydro estimates of the loss of 1,666 hectares are based on values of canola, hay and pasture. But when medium and robust horticulture scenarios are considered — the land could produce sufficient vegetables to feed more than one million people a year — the valuation jumps dramatically.

