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Watching Out for BC's Wild Salmon

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Two new reports help answer questions, raise others, on the sustainability of run-of-river hydropower

Coquitlam, BC –Watershed Watch today released two reports that expose weaknesses in how government and industry measure, monitor, and minimize the impacts of “green” hydropower in British Columbia.

“Currently, neither industry nor the provincial government can ensure the sustainability of run-of-river hydro development,” said Watershed Watch Executive Director Craig Orr. “There is an urgent need for multi-interest planning on the development of run-of-river hydro projects in the province.”

Run-of-river hydropower projects, often called ‘green’ or independent power projects (or IPPs), are being vigorously promoted by the provincial government as an environmentally-friendly solution to humanity’s ever-increasing energy demands.

But based on the reports, Watershed Watch is calling on government to dramatically improve how BC consults on, approves, plans and monitors IPP development in BC.

Run-of-River Hydropower in BC: A Citizen’s Guide to Understanding Approvals, Impacts, and Sustainability of Independent Power Projects, answers 16 questions on the nature, benefits, and costs of ‘green’ hydropower. The *Citizen’s Guide* findings, and the complex and disjointed approval process for run-of-river projects, are more fully described in a second, technical document, “*Green*” *Hydro Power: Understanding Impacts, Approvals, and Sustainability of Run-of-River Independent Power Projects in British Columbia*.

Both reports include a “Top 10 List of Considerations” to help concerned citizens assess the sustainability of hydro projects (proposed or built) in their communities (see the list in the attached backgrounder).

“With dozens of run-of-river hydro projects in the implementation and planning phases, IPPs are a hot topic in BC,” said Craig Orr. “We had been fielding so many questions and concerns on the sustainability of run-of-river hydropower, we felt compelled to provide some answers.”

To view reports: www.watershed-watch.org.

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Backgrounder

Highlights of Watershed Watch’s *Citizen Guide*

Run-of-River Hydropower in BC: A Citizen’s Guide to Understanding Approvals, Impacts, and Sustainability of Independent Power Projects

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Why should citizens care?
What are Independent Power Producer (IPP) Projects?
What is run-of-river hydropower?
How much power can a single project produce?
What do run-of-river projects mean to BC’s Energy Policy?
Who approves run-of-river IPP projects?
Is there a problem with parallel BC Hydro and agency processes?
What are the social costs and benefits from run-of-river hydropower?
What do we hope to gain from these projects?
How do these projects affect river habitat and fish?
What are the potential land-based impacts?
What about species at risk?
What are “cumulative” impacts?
How can ordinary citizens determine whether a project is sustainable?
Watershed Watch’s Top 10 List of Considerations.
How can citizens and communities make a difference?
How can interested citizens educate themselves?
Glossary of Terms.

Watershed Watch’s “Top 10 List of Considerations” for assessing the sustainability of Independent Power Projects

1. The project is located wisely—where adding roads, power lines, human activity and a river diversion will not significantly compromise existing wilderness refuge areas, species of concern, or established recreational opportunities.
2. Cumulative effects have been seriously considered, and the project does not create an unacceptable incremental impact, including effects cumulative to other power projects, water diversions, forestry, mining, and agriculture.
3. Affected First Nations, communities and stakeholders have been contacted early enough in the planning process to become well informed, and have been given ample opportunity to provide meaningful input to the project, and their input has been taken seriously, and incorporated where appropriate.
4. Potential risks to species and ecosystems have been identified (appropriate surveys have established animal and plant status and potential threats), and impacts have been avoided or mitigated.
5. Sufficient monitoring data on stream flows and biota (e.g. fish or wildlife populations that might be affected) have been collected for a reasonable period of time prior to construction (i.e. two or more years), and that the baseline data are used in the planning and mitigation processes, as appropriate.
6. A qualified professional has participated in the setting of conditions and criteria to mitigate impacts associated with ongoing operations, including: low flow thresholds in the diversion reach (to support local fish populations and other aquatic life), ramping rate, and maintenance operations. Input from the Ministry of Environment and Fisheries and Oceans Canada has been considered, and any concerns regarding minimum flows, aquatic habitat requirements, mitigation, and compensation concerns have been incorporated.
7. The headpond, weir and intake associated with the diversion are designed to minimize impacts, including those affecting fish migration, sediment movement, and flooding.

8. The locations and extent of roads and power lines have been identified, their individual and cumulative impacts on wildlife habitat and plant and animal species of concern have been considered, and qualified professionals decide whether the impacts are acceptable, how mitigation should be incorporated, and how they will work with appropriate Ministry of Environment staff.

9. The powerhouse includes fish by-pass valves to mitigate river stage impacts and fish stranding associated with unplanned and forced power outages.

10. Post-construction monitoring occurs, and includes provisions for modifying plant operations when unacceptable impacts are revealed.