Modernizing the Columbia River Treaty

CSG-West, Big Sky Montana
July 18, 2019
Outline

• What is the Columbia River Treaty
• Benefits of the Treaty
• Update on Treaty negotiations
• Opportunities and challenges
• Q&A
Portland 1894
Why Columbia River Treaty

• In 1944 IJC began investigating whether development of water resources in the Columbia Basin would benefit both countries.

• 1948 flood destroyed Vanport, Oregon, a city of about 35,000

• More than 50 people were killed; flood damaged homes, farms, and levees from British Columbia to Astoria, Oregon

• May 1956 – diplomatic talks begin

• The IJC submitted its report in 1959.
Columbia River Treaty

• Significant flooding around the Columbia in 1948 and growing U.S. power demand after WWII led to the desire for a water management agreement between Canada and the U.S.

• Main objective: power generation and flood control in both countries

• Key Principle: create benefits and share them equitably

Diefenbaker and Eisenhower signing the Treaty in 1961

Treaty and Protocol ratified and proclaimed by Pearson and Johnson in 1964
Key Provisions of the Columbia River Treaty

Canada to construct 3 dams to provide 15.5M acre-feet (Maf) of water storage
- Duncan 1967
- Hugh Keenleyside 1968
- Mica 1973

U.S. had the option to construct Libby dam in Montana – Canada made land available (42 mi - 67 km) for the reservoir

The Treaty continues indefinitely but can be terminated with 10 year notice at the earliest in September 2024
Main Treaty Provisions

Power
• Canada operates 15.5 Maf for optimum power generation downstream in the U.S.

• U.S. delivers to Canada one-half the estimated U.S. power benefits (Canadian Entitlement - CE)

• Current CE approx. worth about $100-150M/yr

Flood Control pre-2024
• The US bought 60 years of 8.45 Maf “primary” flood control up to 2024 for $64.4 million

• Regardless of Treaty continuation or termination, assured flood control ends in 2024 and flood control changes to “Called Upon”

• Called Upon not well defined in the Treaty
Benefits of the Treaty to the U.S.

- Prevents significant flooding, loss of life, property and infrastructure damage, economic disruption
- Increases reliable GHG-free electricity generation
- Supports favorable commercial navigation conditions
- Prolongs recreation season
Benefits of the Treaty to the U.S. (cont’d)

- Assists U.S. in managing flows for fisheries enhancement, meeting ESA legal requirements

- Provides relief during annual low flow periods and dry years

- Supports seasonal availability of water supply for irrigation, municipal, industrial uses
Current Benefits of the Treaty to BC

Canadian Entitlement

• Sold on the market
• Currently worth:
  approx. $100-150M/year

But ongoing impacts

• Erosion of indigenous cultural sites
• Impacts to ecosystems, fish and wildlife
• Air quality deterioration
• Reduced recreation and tourism opportunities
• Effects on forestry, agriculture, transportation
Columbia River Treaty Negotiations

• Began in May 2018
• 7 rounds to date
• Issues discussed so far:
  – Flood risk management
  – Power generation
  – Libby Dam coordination
  – Ecosystems
  – Other Treaty benefits
  – Adaptive management
Key challenges

• Reaching a common understanding of the full range of benefits of the Treaty
• Seeking consensus on value of the Treaty today and into the future
• Including interests of key stakeholders in both countries
• Reducing real or perceived limitations of the Treaty
• Fiscal constraints
Key challenges

Dealing with uncertainty:
• evolving science
• energy system transformation
• changing legal and political landscapes
• evolving Indigenous rights
• anticipating climate change impacts and mitigating its effects
Key opportunities

• Building on 55 years of strong transboundary collaboration in implementing the Treaty

• Maintaining and enhancing core Treaty values

• Finding flexibility within the Treaty to expand and increase benefits and to adapt to future challenges

• Finding ways to become more transparent and inclusive
Questions & Comments?

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