

WESTERN Daily FARMER

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All Canada's farmers have a stake in the Peace!

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LAST OCTOBER, when Fort St. John farmer Arlene Boon stood at her kitchen window overlooking the Peace River valley, a bold yellow stake intruded on her view. Placed there by BC Hydro, it marked the road that will soon run right through her third generation farmhouse following expropriation. The road is being built as part of BC Hydro's construction of the Site C dam on BC's Peace River.

While most of the Boons farmland lies below the proposed reservoir, their house and yard do not. There is already a road running past the farm. Why does BC Hydro, a Crown Corporation, need ANOTHER road less than half a kilometer away? And why do they need it now? Politics – Ken Boon, President of the Peace Valley Landowners Association, has kept up a respectful and very vocal public information lobby against destruction of the Peace Valley farmland. Perhaps it is hoped that the expropriation proceedings will silence Boon's voice leading up to the May 2017 provincial election.

Think again.

On its October 25th, launch, the Yellow Stakes Campaign drove 100 Yellow Stakes into the ground surrounding that lone BC Hydro stake. A fundraiser to support the costs of the First Nations' legal battles to save the Peace River Val-

ley and stop the Site C dam, each stake represents a \$100 tax deductible donation to the West Moberly and Prophet River First Nations bands.

As of mid-December, the flock of Yellow Stakes had grown to over 500, bringing in more than \$50,000 in donations from four countries. In only seven weeks, the view from Arlene and Ken Boons kitchen window has changed considerably.

The Site C dam makes no economic sense from an energy perspective. Even if it kept to its budget of \$9 billion, it would take taxpayers over 70 years to retire the debt. And such projects are notoriously over budget. Given the costs of alternative sources of power and projected demand, the energy sector argues the power will be overpriced and BC will be forced to sell it below cost. For this reason, the Federal-Provincial Joint Panel to assess the environmental impact of the proposed Site C Dam recommended it be referred to BC Utilities Commission. The former chair of the Panel, Harry Swain, has become one of Site C's most outspoken critics.

On the food side, Site C is a disaster. Over 30,000 acres are impacted, roughly half will be flooded. The alluvial soils of this east-west running valley with a class one climate for agriculture have the same cropping capability as BC's

Fraser Valley, with higher yields for many crops due to the long hours of summer sun this far north. Because the Valley has been under a flood reserve since the late 1950s, many farms have already been bought up by the provincial government; those in operation today grow mostly hay crops.

In its impact assessment, BC Hydro based their analysis on only 13 % of the farmland lost. Using an inappropriately high social discount rate, an impoverished baseline and inept scenario analysis, they rejected the farmland loss as insignificant.

In fact, that same 13 per cent of the land they did measure is capable of producing sufficient fruits and vegetables to meet the nutritional needs of over a million people a year, in perpetuity. If all the high capability land lost to the dam is accurately counted, these soils could provide the nutritional needs of OVER TWO MILLION people a year. Imagine.

BC is vegetable deficient, importing close to 60% of the vegetables that could be grow there. Most imports come from California, experiencing a drought of unprecedented magnitude. If President-Elect Donald Trump delivers on his threat to deport illegal workers, California farmers will be hit hard, resulting in even higher prices for imported veggies. Childhood poverty is

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the single most important determinant of health in later life. Why? Because if moms can't afford to buy fresh fruits and vegetables for their children, nutrition suffers. Already, one in 10 Canadian families are nutrition deficient, and this rises dramatically for single parent families. Already, one in four BC children lives under the poverty line. Already, families in Canada's north are paying 3 to 4 times the Lower Mainland cost of a market basket of food. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett has labeled Canada's Nutrition North program an "abject failure".

Then there is water. The water and power for Site C will support fracking in the nearby Moberly Field (touted to become the largest in north America) in the medium term. In the long term, the end game is continental water sharing. Remember that flood reserve placed over the Peace Valley in the 1950s? Just a few years before that, the US Army Corps of Engineers - tasked with ensur-

ing the US never runs out of water - mapped northern water resources under auspices of NORAD. Big engineering firms then took those maps and worked out plans for the plumbing of North America. The Columbia River Treaty Dams bring northern water west of the Rockies. Every engineering plan ever tabled uses the Peace Valley to bring northern waters east of the Rockies. It is the only route. Site C - the last dam in the system - is being built exactly where planned.

And while it once may have been true that "whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting over", Canada's hands have been conveniently tied by the FTA and NAFTA, which both include Harmonized Commodity Coding System Tariff Item # 22.01.09 (water).

Seventy percent of British Columbians are against the dam. And it's not too late to stop it. The greatest chance lies with First Nations, who have mounted legal challenges based on unextinguished Treaty 8 Rights. But it is

difficult for two small bands to bear the cost of saving the Peace Valley all by themselves.

Every farmer reading this column has a stake in saving the Peace River Valley. It's about respect for farmers and farmland, food security, and water. And it's so easy to help. Visit <http://www.stakeinthepeace.com>. Plant a stake with your family's name on it. Stand shoulder to shoulder with other farmers, First Nations and those who eat for a living to help save the Peace River Valley. 100% of your donation funds the legal battle to stop Site C. And it's tax deductible.

It's 2017. A New Year. Time to be generous of thought and deed. No time like the present... We all have a stake in this... StakeInThePeace.com

Wendy Holm is an award winning journalist and resource economist. As a Professional Agrologist, Holm provided expert testimony to the Joint Federal Provincial Panel on the economic impact of Site C on agriculture. **D**