



**British Columbia  
Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy**

**Agency Report to the  
Mackenzie River Basin Board**

**Meeting 66 of the  
Mackenzie River Basin Board  
November 25, 2020  
Virtual (by teleconference)**

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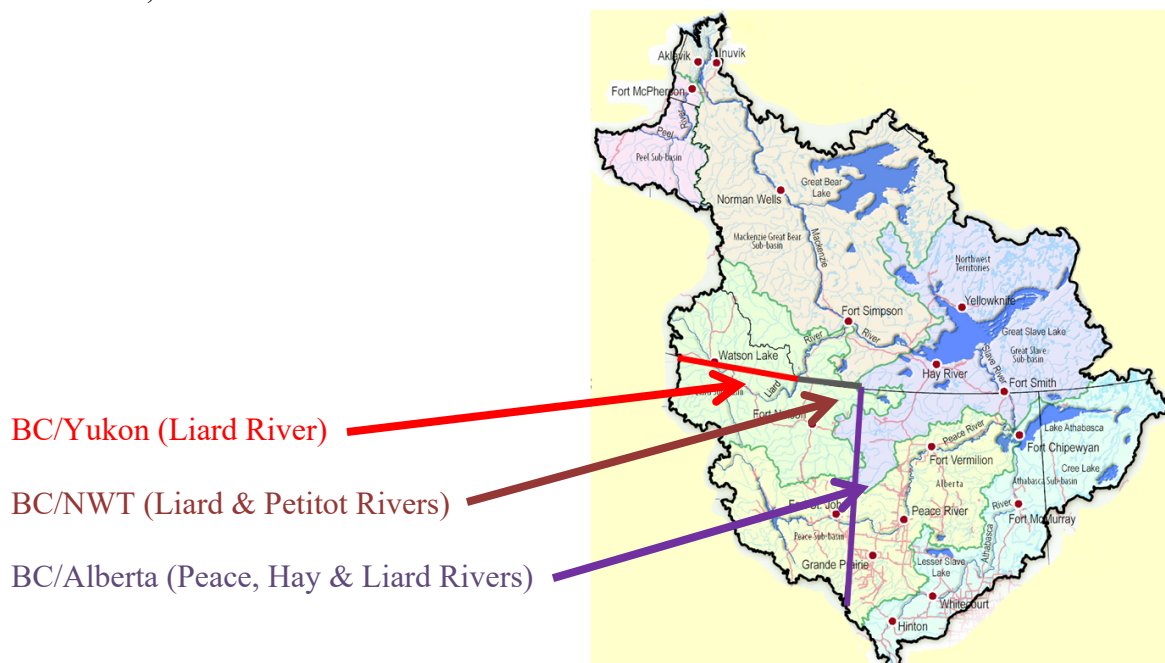
## Acknowledgement of the Ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic

The Province of British Columbia announced a state of emergency on March 18, 2020, a period that continues (at the time of writing) to be extended in order to enable the government to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Since March 2020, there have been numerous impacts to the ability to undertake certain types of work, and efforts have been made to prioritize safety for the staff and workers involved. Much field work has been significantly scaled back or cancelled altogether, especially where work involved partnerships with Indigenous governments and communities. Many Nation and Band offices have been and continue to be temporarily, partially, or fully closed as Indigenous governments and communities shift to working from home and prioritizing the safety of their communities. Some training and other field-based learning has also been delayed or postponed for the foreseeable future.

However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, significant adaptation and resilience has been shown: where possible and practical, work has also shifted to virtual or teleconference methods, including offices that shifted to work-from-home models, which has enabled some initiatives to continue. The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event that continues to unfold, with many operations and initiatives continuing to monitor the pandemic and making decisions about how best to proceed. It is acknowledged that much of the work documented in this report has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, even as much of it continues.

## 1 Bilateral Water Management Agreements

The *Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement* provides for neighbouring jurisdictions to negotiate Bilateral Water Management Agreements (BWMAs) to address shared surface water quantity, quality and groundwater. Under the Master Agreement, British Columbia is required to negotiate three such agreements with the governments of the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Alberta.



## **British Columbia/Northwest Territories**

British Columbia and the Northwest Territories signed their BWMA in October 2015. The Agreement is available on the MRBB website at: <http://www.mrbb.ca/information/120/index.html>

The British Columbia/Northwest Territories BWMA applies to all transboundary waters shared between British Columbia and the Northwest Territories in the Mackenzie River Basin, primarily the Liard River Watershed. On August 31, 2017 the British Columbia government approved implementation of the B.C./NWT BWMA through an Order in Council.

Over 2020, implementation of the BWMA has focused on continuing to identify work planning priorities and engagement with Indigenous members of the Bilateral Management Committee (BMC). The BMC met most recently in June 2020. The Terms of Reference for the BMC were completed and posted to the public websites of the Parties. Additional work plan priorities continue to identify ways to address knowledge gaps for the Liard and Petitot River, establishing efficient methods for sharing information across jurisdictions and organizations, and establishing major project notification procedures. Review of the major report “The Liard and Petitot River Basins State of Knowledge Report” was also recently completed and the report was made available online.

## **British Columbia/Yukon**

British Columbia and the Yukon completed signing of their BWMA on March 30, 2017. The Agreement is available on the MRBB website at: <http://www.mrbb.ca/information/126/index.html>

On August 31, 2017 the British Columbia government approved implementation of the B.C./Yukon BWMA through an Order in Council. The B.C./Yukon BWMA applies to all transboundary waters shared between British Columbia and Yukon in the Mackenzie River Basin, primarily the Liard River Watershed. Transboundary waters shared between the jurisdictions outside the Mackenzie River Basin, such as the headwaters of the Yukon River, are not included in the BWMA.

Implementation of the British Columbia and the Yukon Territories BWMA over the last year has focused on continuing to build relationships and establish the functioning of the Bilateral Management Committee (BMC). Two more BMC meetings were held: the third meeting in February 2020, and the fourth in June 2020. The BMC currently includes Indigenous Members from Kaska, Acho Dene Koe, and Tahltan Nations. Work planning priorities have focused on establishing and testing the updated the stream classification methodology to inform the annual evaluations, and to include Indigenous knowledge and input.

## **British Columbia/Alberta**

As with many initiatives that have been affected by COVID-19, the Alberta and British Columbia negotiations have been paused for some time and the agreement is not yet completed. When completed, the British Columbia/Alberta BWMA will apply to all transboundary waters shared between British Columbia and Alberta in the Mackenzie River Basin, with a significant focus on the Peace River.

B.C. posts updates on the implementation of agreements to its [Water Management Agreements](#) website pages:

The screenshot shows the British Columbia government website. At the top, there is a blue header with a COVID-19 emergency notice. Below the header is the British Columbia logo and a search bar. The main content area is titled "Water Management Agreements" and includes a navigation menu on the left. The menu items are: Laws & Rules, Water Licensing & Rights, Drought, Flooding, Dikes & Dams, Water Quality, Groundwater Wells & Aquifers, Water Planning & Strategies (with sub-items: Living Water Smart, Water Use Planning, Water Allocation Plans), Water Management Agreements (with sub-items: Mackenzie River Basin State of the Aquatic Ecosystem, Northeast Water Strategy, Wetlands in B.C.), and Water Conservation. The main content area has a sub-header "Mackenzie River Basin" and a paragraph explaining the Mackenzie River Basin Board. It lists three reports: Mackenzie River Basin Transboundary Waters Master Agreement (1997) (PDF), Mackenzie River Basin: State of the Aquatic Ecosystem Report (2003), and Mackenzie River Basin Board Issues Report (2012). A chatbot window is visible on the right side of the page.

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## 2 Water-Related Legislation / Policy / Regulations / Planning

### ***Water Sustainability Act Implementation Continues***

Implementation of the 2016 *Water Sustainability Act* (WSA) continues. Priorities for 2020 continue to focus on transitioning groundwater users into the water licensing system, updating operational policies to align with the new legislation, developing policy and guidance related to provisions enabled under the WSA (e.g. water objectives, water sustainability plans and governance), and continued development and engagement on a proposed livestock watering policy. In December 2019, the Water Sustainability Regulation was updated to allow use of water under regulation for mineral exploration and placer mining activities. The new provisions enable the decision maker to require an authorization if there is a risk of adverse impact to cultural heritage resources which includes those identified by First Nations.

Over 2019 and 2020, the First Nations Fisheries Council was funded to facilitate conversations with Indigenous governments and staff to provide advice on ways the Province can improve engagement with Indigenous peoples on WSA-related policy and regulation development work.

For more information about the WSA and regulations, visit the [Water Sustainability Act](#), the [WSA public engagement and blog](#) and [Water Licensing and Rights](#) web pages.

### ***New Legislation to Recognize Indigenous Rights in BC***

Continuing the Province's commitments to advance reconciliation and adopt and implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, BC passed new legislation to recognize Indigenous human rights on November 26, 2019. The *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* is the foundational framework for reconciliation in B.C. The legislation sets out a process to align B.C.'s laws with the UN Declaration, and requires the development of an action plan to achieve the alignment of provincial laws with the UN Declaration, providing transparency and accountability to the process. Regular reporting to the Legislature is required to monitor progress. The new legislation also provides a framework for decision-making between Indigenous governments and the Province on matters that affect their citizens. More information on the *Declaration Act* is [available on the webpages](#) linked here. An annual report was prepared for the period of November 28, 2019 to March 31, 2020, and is available on the [Annual Reporting webpage](#).

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### 3 Science, Monitoring and Information

#### Groundwater Science Program

BC's Groundwater Science Program exists to continuously improve the level of scientific knowledge on provincial groundwater, aquifers and the interactions between surface water and groundwater in order to support the sustainable management of groundwater. Science and research are often conducted collaboratively with leading experts, stakeholders, and, increasingly in partnership with local communities and Indigenous groups. These activities support the implementation of the *Water Sustainability Act* and Groundwater Protection Regulation.

The following key projects are underway in 2020/21:

1. Coldwater River Groundwater-Surface Water Interaction Study - Phase 2
2. Black Creek/Oyster River Watersheds Hydraulic Connection Study
3. Evaluate the applicability of the van der Kamp method of using recovery data to extend the effective duration of pumping tests
4. Denman and Hornby Islands Groundwater Budget and Water Allocation Plan
5. Mapping of the Risk of Saltwater Intrusion in Coastal B.C.
6. Refinement to the Numerical Groundwater Flow Model in the Nicola Watershed
7. Surficial Geology Mapping to Support Groundwater Management
8. North Area Aquifer Mapping: Houston Area

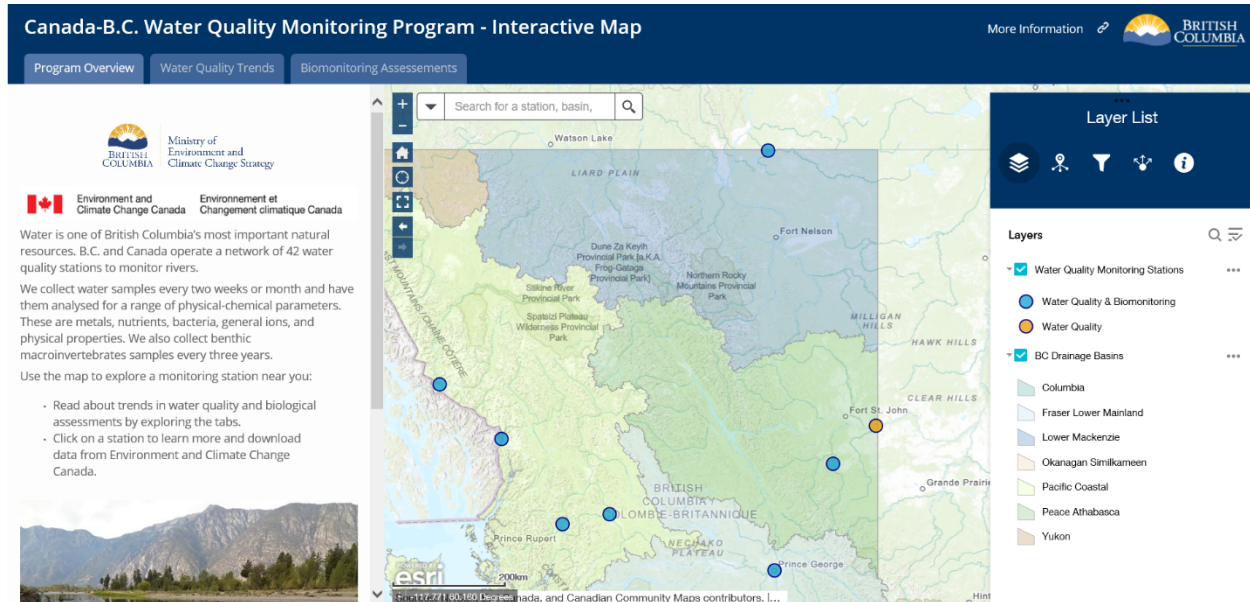
#### Multi-year projects initiated in previous years that are receiving funding:

1. Assessment of aquifer- stream connectivity related to groundwater abstraction in the Lower Fraser Valley: Tools to support science-based decision making
2. Mapping and mitigating risk of flowing artesian well in B.C.
3. Groundwater Dashboard and Aquifer factsheets
4. Identifying Drought Susceptible and Drought Resilient Aquifer-Stream Systems in B.C.

#### Development of Water Quality Guideline for Copper

The B.C. Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy updated its Copper (Cu) Water Quality Guideline (WQG) for the protection of freshwater aquatic life in 2019. The updated WQG uses a Biotic Ligand Model to predict copper toxicity under different water chemistry water chemistry conditions and produce site-specific Cu WQGs. Specialized software was developed to allow use of the new WQG and is available online on the provincial [WQG webpage](#). In finalizing the Cu WQG, a 60-day internal and external public review period was held with input from government, academia, and industry reviewers.

## New Web Reporting Tool for Federal-Provincial Water Quality Monitoring



A new [web-based water quality reporting tool was released](#) in the summer of 2020. Reports for water quality on the 42 stations located on 31 rivers throughout B.C. have previously been available, but the new tool has been created to help people learn more about water quality and makes more accessible the information of those reports. An interactive map makes available such information as 10-year water quality trends in certain rivers with the data compiled from the Canada-B.C. Water Quality Monitoring Program, which has been in place since 1985 and focuses on the long-term trends in water quality. The data is used to determine the current status of water quality, to detect emerging issues that may threaten aquatic life and support the development of guidelines for water, fish and sediment. Notably, two stations are located on key major rivers in the Mackenzie River Basin: one on the Petitot River below Highway 77, and one on the Peace River above Alces River.

### The Northeast Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment

The Northeast Regional Strategic Environmental Assessment (RSEA) is a collaborative approach between seven Treaty 8 First Nations and B.C. to assess the cumulative effects of natural resource development activities on the ability to exercise Treaty 8 rights. The RSEA process will provide management recommendations to government based on the assessment of several key values (water, old growth, moose, environmental livelihood, and peaceful enjoyment) important to the exercise of Treaty 9 rights.

In 2019/20 the RSEA Water Working Group completed a Cumulative Watershed Disturbance Model to support a regional environmental assessment of cumulative impacts to surface water in northeast B.C. The model has generated surface water quality or water quantity analysis in the 2,000 hectare and 10,000 hectare size range and ranks the watersheds in a given region from

most disturbed to least disturbed. Next steps will focus on management decision tools and their linkages with disturbance assessments.

### **Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network in BC**

The Province has worked closely with Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) over the past 15 – 20 years to promote the nationally standardized Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network (CABIN) program across B.C. CABIN uses benthic macroinvertebrates as indicators of aquatic ecosystem health. CABIN uses data from a wide range of reference sites (i.e., minimally affected by human activities) to build predictive models that can be used to evaluate the condition of test sites (i.e., where there are concerns about the aquatic ecosystem). The differences between the macroinvertebrate communities at the test site and the “healthy” reference sites provides an indication of the extent of effects to aquatic biota.

In Northeast BC, the Province and ECCC completed intensive sampling to characterize streams and develop CABIN models for watersheds of interest to the MRBB. A CABIN model for the Fort Nelson/Liard/Petitot was updated in 2018 using data from approximately 120 reference sites. A new CABIN model for the Peace River was completed in 2020 using data from approximately 110 reference sites. Both models will provide an effective tool to monitor and assess aquatic ecosystem health within the BC portion of the Mackenzie River Basin.

### **Independent Scientific Review of Hydraulic Fracturing in British Columbia – Report Response**

In February 2019, the independent scientific hydraulic fracturing review panel delivered a report to the B.C. Minister of Energy, Mines, and Petroleum Resources. The three-member scientific panel was mandated to address whether B.C.’s regulatory framework adequately manages the potential risks or impacts from hydraulic fracturing and what improvements could be made. The panel concluded “the current regulations under many acts appear to be robust.” The Report identified areas for improvements and research to support the responsible development of B.C.’s shale gas resources.

In response, the Province established a cross-government working group to conduct a thorough review of the report and its recommendations in reviewing and improving the existing regulatory framework governing hydraulic fracturing. In December 2019, the working group provided the Minister of Energy, Mines, and Petroleum Resources with a status update and a detailed long-term plan that identifies actions government will take to effectively and fully address the independent panel’s recommendations.

Responses to many recommendations have already been completed. Recent activities include installation of hydrometric stations and groundwater wells in collaboration with First Nations; implementing outreach and education for land and dam owners in the northeast region; data management and communication and expanded data availability; improved methane leak

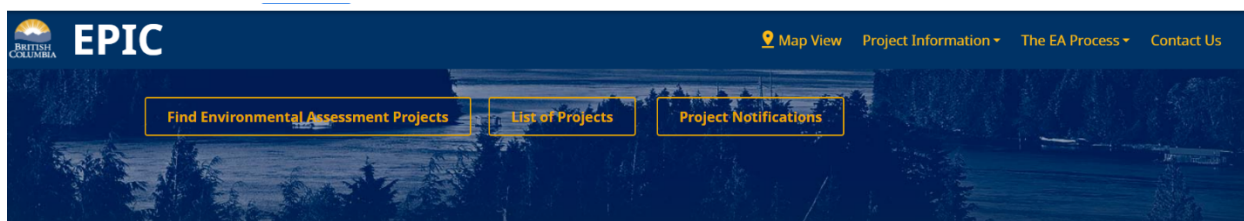
detection and collaborative research; and increased monitoring, research and thresholds for induced seismicity.

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## 4 Major Projects

In B.C., major projects are assessed for potential environmental, social, economic, health and cultural effects by the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO). On December 16, 2019 the new *Environmental Assessment Act* (2018) came into force. Many projects with an environmental assessment already underway will continue under the old Act (2002) process, while any new projects after December 16, 2019 will undergo an environmental assessment under the new Act (2018) process. In 2018, the system the B.C. Environmental Assessment Office uses to report on and provide information on major projects was updated: the [EPIC Portal](#) provides searchable information on Environmental Assessment projects, an overview of the environmental assessment process, and an interactive map that displays the geographic locations of projects.



### Recent Activities & Updates

The Environmental Assessment Office and COVID-19

August 7, 2020

As government continues to coordinate the provincial response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) is continuing its work while remaining committed to protecting the health and safety of both our staff and those with whom we work.

The following tables summarize the major projects in EPIC that fall under the Project Types of Energy-Petroleum and Natural Gas, Energy-Electricity, Industrial, Mines, Water Management, and Waste Disposal, that are in the Pre-EA, Pre-Application, and Application Review. There is one project in the Pre-EA phase. There are eight projects in the Pre-Application phase. One project, the Sukunka Coal Mine Project, remains under review. There are no major projects under the Evaluation phase.

### Pre-Environmental Assessment Act

Title	Category and Location	Phase	Comments
Stronsay Lead/Zinc	Mines; Mineral Mines Northeast of Fort Ware	Pre-EA Act Approval; June 1995	An open-pit mine operation.

### Pre-Application

Title	Category and Location	Phase	Comments
Pacific Northern Gas Looping Project	Energy-Petroleum and Natural Gas; Transmission Lines Summit Lake to Kitimat	Pre-Application; Scoping	The Pacific Northern Gas Looping Project would supply natural gas, via a 525 km long pipeline, from Summit Lake to proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG)

			export facilities in Kitimat, BC. It would have an initial capacity of 600 million standard cubic feet per day.
Kutcho	Mines; Mineral Mines 100 km East of Dease Lake, B.C.	Pre-Application; Scoping	An underground copper-zinc mine with a production capacity of approximately 3,500 tonnes of ore per day, yielding an annual average of 33 million pounds of copper and 46 million pounds of zinc over a mine life of up to 14 years.
Aley Mine	Mines; Mineral Mines 140 km N of Mackenzie, B.C.	Pre-Application; Scoping	Proposed 10,000 tonne per day open pit niobium mine with a 25 year mine life.
Carbon Creek Coal Mine Project	Mining Approximately 40 km west of Hudson's Hope, B.C.	Scoping	Cardero Coal Ltd. proposes to develop a new open-pit surface and underground metallurgical coal mine with an average annual production rate of 2.9 million metric tonnes of clean coal.
Gething Coal	Mines; Coal Mines 25 km Northwest of Hudson's Hope, B.C.	Pre-Application; Scoping	Proposed new underground coal mine with an onsite coal preparation plant. The production rate is 2 million tonnes per year with a mine life estimated at 40 years.
Frontier Project	Energy-Petroleum and Natural Gas South to Southwest of Fort St. John, B.C.	Pre-Application; Scoping	Enbridge proposes to construct a natural gas liquids straddle plant, 130 to 170 kilometre (km) pipeline, and associated infrastructure in northeastern B.C. The straddle plant and initiating pump station are located approximately 36 km west of Chetwynd, and the pipeline is proposed to span from the straddle plant to Taylor.
Wonowon Landfill	Waste Disposal 9 km southeast of Wonowon, B.C.	Pre-Application; Scoping	Secure Energy services Inc. proposes to construct and operate the Wonowon Landfill Project, which is anticipated to handle approximately 200,000 tonnes of waste annually over a 25-75 year lifespan, dependent on disposal services demand.
Arctos Anthracite	Mines; Coal Mines 160 km Northeast of Stewart, B.C.	Pre-Application; Scoping	The proposed Project would involve developing a new open pit coal mine in north-western BC located about 90 km southeast of Iskut. With a production capacity of 8,200 tonnes per day of clean coal, and a mine footprint of about 4000 hectares, the mine would produce about 3 million tones of coal for about 25 years.

## Application Review

Title	Category and Location	Phase	Comments
Sukunka Coal Mine	Mines; Coal Mines Near Chetwynd, B.C.	Application Review	Glencore (Proponent) proposes to develop and operate a surface

			mining operation and coal handling and processing plant to produce hard coking coal for export to overseas steel manufacturers. The Project will produce 3 million tonnes per year of saleable coal over a mine life of 20 years.
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There are 46 projects in the Post-Decision phases of Pre-Construction, Construction, Operation, Care and Maintenance, Complete, and Substantial Start phases, including such projects as the Site C Clean Energy electricity power plant which is in the construction phase; the Debolt Saline Project, which is in care and maintenance outside of Fort St. John, B.C.; and the Ring Border Gas Plant Expansion, which is in the operation phase 225 kilometers north of Fort St. John.

**Important Related Links:**

- BC Environmental Assessment Office: <http://www.eao.gov.bc.ca/>
- Frequently asked questions: <http://www.eao.gov.bc.ca/FAQ.html>
- EAO Fairness and Service Code: [http://www.eao.gov.bc.ca/pdf/EAO\\_Service\\_Code\\_20090115.pdf](http://www.eao.gov.bc.ca/pdf/EAO_Service_Code_20090115.pdf)
- Project Information Centre (e-Registry or “EPIC”), including links to projects: [http://a100.gov.bc.ca/appsdata/epic/html/deploy/epic\\_home.html](http://a100.gov.bc.ca/appsdata/epic/html/deploy/epic_home.html)

**BC Hydro Site “C” Clean Energy Project**



Source: [http://www.bchydro.com/energy-in-bc/projects/site\\_c.html](http://www.bchydro.com/energy-in-bc/projects/site_c.html)

Site C will be the third dam and hydroelectric generating station on the Peace River in northeast BC. The project will provide 1,100 megawatts of capacity and about 5,100 gigawatt hours of energy each year to the Province’s integrated electricity system.

In December 2014, after a three year long independent environmental assessment by the federal and provincial governments, the Project received approval from the provincial government to proceed. Construction on the Project began in July 2015. Beginning in August 2017, the Project

was subject to an inquiry by the BC Utilities Commission, which provided a report to the BC Government on November 1, 2017. This led to a decision announced by the Provincial Government on December 11, 2017 to proceed with the Project. The project budget (\$10.7 billion including Treasury Board Reserve) was approved by the BC Hydro Board of Directors in February 2018.

On March 18, 2020, BC Hydro announced that it was substantially reducing some of the project's work activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Work at the dam site was scaled back to activities deemed critical to achieve diversion and essential services, e.g. safety, security, and environmental protection. A gradual increase in construction activities began in May 2020 and continued in a phased approach over summer and fall 2020. BC Hydro continues to closely monitor the situation to address issues as they arise and remain compliant with provincial guidance.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project remained on schedule for the first generating unit to go into service in late 2023 and a final in-service date in 2024; however, the schedule and in-service date are now uncertain. More information on the project, its construction progress, risks and budget are available through the progress reports BC Hydro voluntarily files with the BC Utilities Commission. Past annual and quarterly progress reports can be viewed by visiting [Site C's News and Information](#) webpage.

#### **Major Projects Contact:**

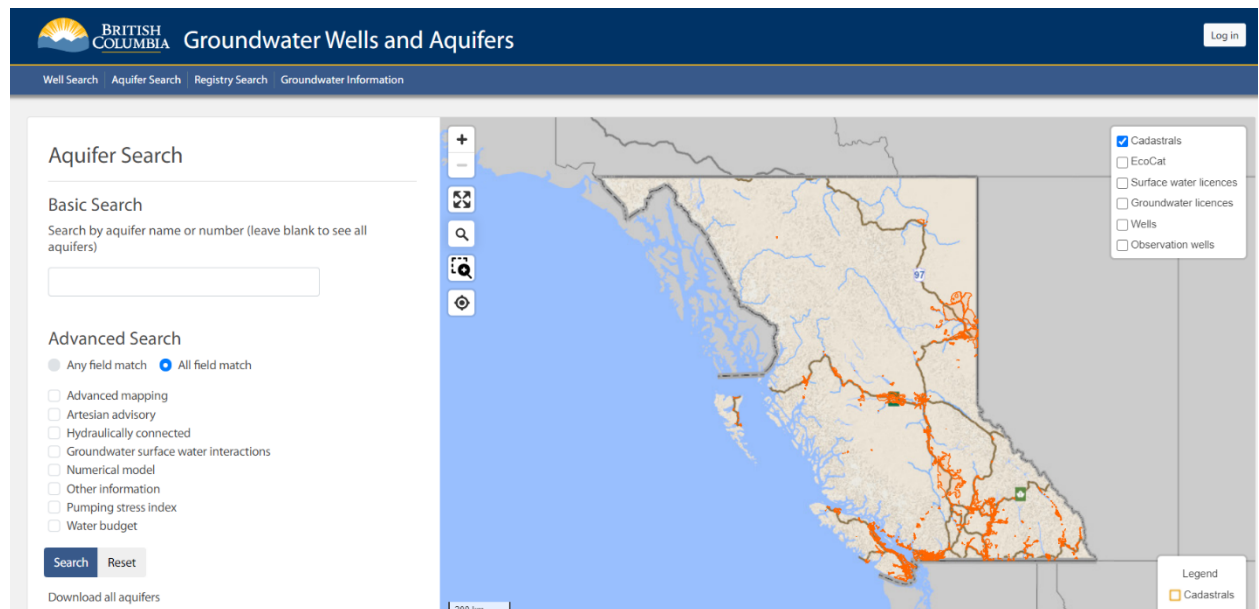
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## 5. Events, Conferences and Seminars

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many conferences, events and seminars this year have either been outright cancelled, postponed, or, as the year has progressed, have found ways to adapt their events and go virtual. Two events featured from this year:

1. [Virtual GeoConvention Conference](#), September 21-23, 2020

While originally planned for May 2020, the conference changed gears to hold a virtual event in September. GeoConvention 2020 featured collaboration of the Canadian Society of Petroleum Geologists (CSPG), Canadian Well Logging Society (CWLS), Geological Association Canada (GAC), Mineral Association Canada (MAC), International Association of Hydrogeologists (IAH-CNC), Geothermal Canada and others. This conference attracts some of the best technical content from within the earth sciences in Canada and world-wide. B.C. contributed a presentation on the State of Aquifers in B.C., focusing on advancements with the compilation and summary of existing aquifer information using automated scripts—with an [application developed that is called GWELLS](#). Aquifer Factsheets are available for over 1200 aquifers in the Province, with more to come.



2. [Watersheds 2020 Conference](#), October 15-16, 2020

This virtual event brings together a diverse community of water leaders – including Indigenous Nations, watershed groups, local and provincial government staff, funders, scholars and researchers, and a network of practitioners and champions. The virtual event offered talks, panels, and interactive opportunities to discuss emerging issues and opportunities facing watershed security. The keynote speaker this year was John Borrows, the Canadian Research Chair in Indigenous Law from the University of Victoria.

Directly related to the work of the Mackenzie River Basin Board, B.C. continues to participate actively in the SOAER committee work (all taking place virtually), and in the Water Quality Task Team, which will resume its activities after a temporary pause since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **6. Other**

### **Development of Water Quality Objectives for the Murray River Watershed**

The Murray River flows into the Pine River and on to the Peace River in northern B.C. The Murray River Aquatic Cumulative Effects Assessment Framework was formed in 2015 and has been compiling and assessing water quality data to develop water quality objectives for the Murray River. The B.C. Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy has been working collaboratively with the McLeod Lake Indian Band, Sauteau First Nations, and West Moberly First Nations to identify water values, including traditional and cultural uses, and parameters of concern to set appropriate water quality benchmarks for this system. The water quality assessment and water quality objectives reports are currently in draft form and being reviewed.