

Water-use planning in British Columbia

Gary Robinson

The use of surface water in British Columbia is regulated under the Water Act. More than 42,000 water licences are in effect under legislation, providing for the storage, diversion and/or use of water for a wide range of purposes.

These purposes range from hydroelectric-power generation to conservation projects; from a variety of industrial, commercial, and agricultural uses to the provision of drinking water and other water services by local authorities, private water utilities, and individual domestic users.

The operation of licensed works, such as dams, reservoirs, and intakes, can often have undesirable effects on fishery, archaeological, and cultural values. Alternatively, they can provide other benefits beyond those intended by the licensee, like improved recreational opportunities or flood protection.

In the fall of 1998, the provincial government issued guidelines for water-use planning as a means to enhance water management at hydroelectric power and other water-control facilities. At the same time, the provincial government issued direction to BC Hydro to begin a five-year program to complete the development of Water Use Plans (WUPs) for each of its water power facilities.

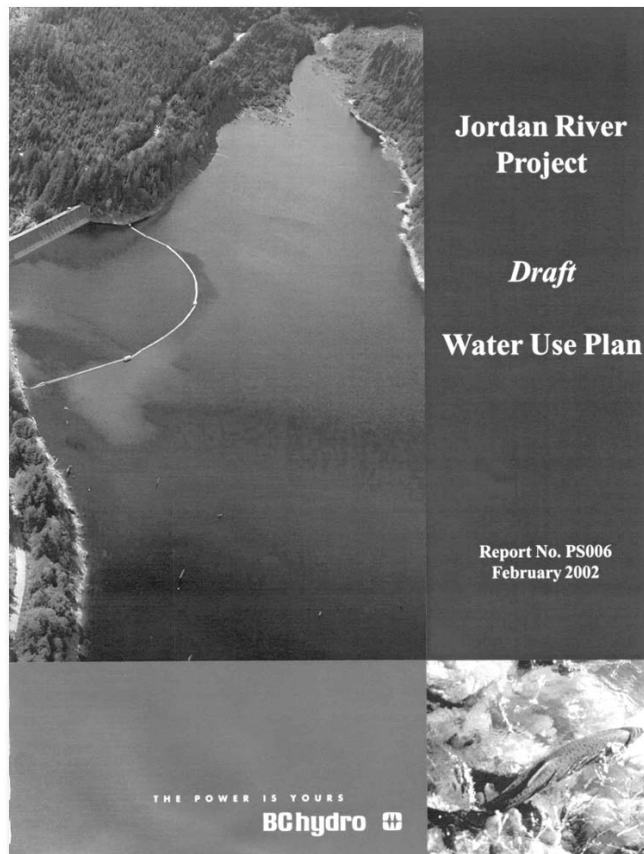
The program is managed by an inter-agency committee with representation from the Ministries of Sustainable Resource Management; Energy and Mines; Finance; and Water, Land and Air Protection; as

Water-Use Planning Committee, which comprises representatives of various First Nations participating in the planning processes. The WUP guideline sets out 13 steps, from initiation and scoping of issues through to subsequent monitoring and review.

The resulting WUPs will set out operating rules for each facility that clarify the parameters within which BC Hydro can produce electricity, while at the same time providing for other values and interests.

As the plan development phase of the program enters its final year, BC Hydro has now submitted three plans for review (Alouette, Stave, and Jordan). A further six plans are expected shortly, and all 23 plans should be ready for review by November 2003.

The development of these plans has required a major commitment of resources by BC Hydro, the provincial and federal government. Achievements have been built on a strong relationship with First Nations and an open dialogue with other stakeholders. The experiences of the water-use planning process will be invaluable, as the profile of water and aquatic values gains prominence in other land and resource use planning activities throughout British Columbia.



well as Land and Water British Columbia Inc.; BC Hydro; the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and First Nations.

A number of Advisory Teams provide further support for the program. This includes a Fisheries Advisory Team, and a provincially funded First Nations

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