



December 22, 2008

Joint panel decision issued on Glacier Power Ltd. Peace River hydroelectric project

Edmonton/Ottawa... A joint panel of the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB), Alberta Utilities Commission (AUC) and Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) has determined that Glacier Power Ltd.'s proposed 100 megawatt (MW) run-of-river hydroelectric project for the Peace River is in the public interest, and is not likely to result in significant adverse environmental effects. The project would be located near Dunvegan Bridge in the Municipal District of Fairview.

The panel concluded that the project would add a stable and reliable source of green electric power to Alberta, and would be a net benefit to the region. The decision report includes 21 recommendations to minimize and manage potential impacts, in addition to the commitments made by Glacier. The project was supported by all local governments.

Under federal legislation, the Government of Canada must now respond to the report for Transport Canada and the Department and Fisheries and Oceans to consider their respective approvals and authorizations. Under provincial legislation, *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act* decisions that determine that a project is in the public interest are forwarded to Cabinet for approval, and require an Order in Council. Alberta's *Hydro and Electric Energy Act* requires a new bill to authorize the AUC to issue an approval.

The joint panel was co-established by Canada's Environment Minister, the Natural Resources Conservation Board and the Alberta Utilities Commission. The panel conducted an independent review of the evidence submitted by the applicant, interveners and expert witnesses.

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency administers the federal environmental assessment process, which identifies the environmental effects of proposed projects and measures to address those effects, in support of sustainable development.

The Natural Resources Conservation Board is responsible for determining whether natural resource projects are in the public interest, by considering the social, economic and environmental effects of proposed projects.

The Alberta Utilities Commission exercises jurisdiction over the siting of major electric transmission facilities and electric power plants as part of its mandate to ensure the delivery of Alberta's utility services takes place in a manner that is fair, responsible and in the public interest.

The NRCB and the AUC are independent, quasi-judicial agencies of the Government of Alberta.

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Note: The full decision report is posted on the following websites:
Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency <http://www.ceaa-acee.gc.ca>
Natural Resources Conservation Board <http://www.nrcb.gov.ab.ca>
Alberta Utilities Commission <http://www.auc.ab.ca>

Attachment: Backgrounder

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Project description

The project is for a 100-megawatt, low head, run-of-river hydroelectric project on the Peace River near Dunvegan, Alberta. A run-of-river facility produces power from the flow of the river without significant storage of water, and does not regulate the downstream flow. The facility would include a spillway, a powerhouse with 40 turbine units, a headpond, boat lock, ramp fishways, a 4.3 km, 144 KV transmission line, and a plant substation.

Location

The site is approximately 90 kilometres west of the Town of Peace River, in the Municipal District of Fairview, about two kilometres west (upstream) of the Highway 2 bridge crossing at Dunvegan Historic Park.

Key issues considered by the panel

The panel considered the potential impact of the project on flooding in the Town of Peace River, fish movement, ice formation and break-up, access to the Shaftesbury ferry service and ice bridge for Tangent area residents, water levels, erosion, ecologically sensitive areas, and land use by First Nations and Metis peoples. The panel also considered cumulative impact and historic resources.

Panel conclusions

The panel is an independent body. Its conclusions are:

- The project is in the public interest, taking into account its potential environmental, economic and social impacts.
- The application is supported by all local governments.
- The project is an environmentally friendly alternative to fossil fuels and is not likely to result in significant adverse environmental effects.
- The net benefit to the region outweighs any potential negative impacts.
- Glacier is committed to ongoing measures for mitigation and monitoring that would further minimize the potential for negative impact.
- Glacier used the best available science and modeling to study the potential impact on ice formation and fish movement, and conducted extensive research and consultation on potential environmental and social impacts.
- Glacier is committed to mitigating the impact on local communities. The proposal commits funding for a new ferry for Shaftesbury Crossing with enhanced capacity to handle ice, pending approval from Alberta Transportation, and funding toward engineering and construction of capital works in the Town of Peace River to help reduce potential basement flooding.

Panel recommendations

In addition to the commitments made by Glacier Power, the joint panel made 21 recommendations: 13 relate to monitoring under the jurisdiction of the Government of Canada, four are directed to areas of jurisdiction under the Government of Alberta and four address the protection of native plant species.

- Recommendations 1 - 13: that monitoring programs are implemented to the satisfaction of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), and adaptive management programs are implemented to the satisfaction of DFO if any problems are identified. These recommendations address construction and the issues of fish passage, fish migration and fish population. Studies of the impact on the Burbot population are recommended.
- Recommendations 14 - 17: that Glacier work with DFO and Sustainable Resource Development to finalize its fish monitoring programs and “No Net Loss Plan”; that Alberta Transportation consider commissioning a new ferry for Shaftesbury Crossing; and that Glacier submit results of its geologic and seismic investigation and design to Alberta Environment for approval before construction.
- Recommendations 18 - 21: that Glacier minimize the impact on native plant species by conducting a detailed plant survey, transplanting rare species, monitoring and managing weed control, and re-vegetating using adapted native plants.

History

Glacier Power’s original application to construct an 80 megawatt run-of-river dam at the same site was denied by a joint review panel of the NRCB and the Energy and Utilities Board on March 25, 2003, on the basis that further studies into ice formation and impact on fish migration were required.

Current review

Glacier Power re-submitted its application on October 27, 2006 after extensive further studies, planning and consultation. In support of its proposal Glacier Power prepared and submitted an environmental impact assessment (EIA) report to Alberta Environment. On January 25, 2008 Alberta Environment declared that the EIA report was complete, pursuant to the *Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act*. The public hearing took place September 22 - 26, 2008 in Fairview, Alberta. The decision report includes the complete list of interveners.

The review was conducted under the following legislation: the *Natural Resources Conservation Board Act*, the *Alberta Utilities Commission Act*, the *Hydro and Electric Energy Act*, and the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act* (the CEA Act). The panel was struck and a joint agreement for the review was established by the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta on July 16, 2008. Federal jurisdiction under the *Fisheries Act* and the *Navigable Waters Protection Act* automatically triggered the CEA Act.

Panel members Vern Hartwell, Doug Larder and George Kupfer were appointed jointly by Canada's Environment Minister and the Government of Alberta. The joint panel agreement, biographical information on the panel members and more information on this project are available on the web sites of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA), registry number 04-05-2996, the NRCB and the AUC.

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