

<Columbia River Treaty renegotiation discussed at the Vallican Whole>

On Friday, March 23 at 7pm, the Vallican Whole Community Centre's Whole Perspective series will present an information evening entitled: "The Columbia River Treaty: What is on the table? What will it mean for us, here?"

While this is a huge topic with ramifications throughout the Basin, few of us understand what is really going on, and who will be negotiating on our behalf.

To answer these important questions, The Vallican Whole has invited three well-informed persons, Katrine Conroy, Corky Evans, and Martin Carver, to give us a primer on the topic.

Katrine Conroy is the MLA for Kootenay West, and BC's Minister responsible for the Columbia River Treaty, the Columbia Basin Trust, and the Columbia Power Corporation. Thus she is uniquely situated to provide an overview of the current situation.

Corky Evans ("the formerly Honourable", as he describes himself) was the MLA for Nelson Creston for many years and held various ministry positions, including Minister of Agriculture. He is a passionate advocate for the Basin. He was a founder of the Columbia Basin Trust and currently sits on the board of the Trust.

Martin Carver is a hydrologist and conservation planner with over 25 years' experience in water resources. His work focuses on environmental impact assessment and monitoring, and detection of environmental change, particularly in light of climate change. He currently leads a collaborative of Canadian environmental groups formed with the objective of engaging in transboundary discussions concerning possible renegotiation of the Columbia River Treaty.

The Treaty has no specified expiration date. Either Canada or the United States can unilaterally terminate the Columbia River Treaty any time after 16 September 2024, provided written notice is filed at least 10 years in advance. In December of last year, the USA State Department indicated it was ready to begin negotiations, and Canada is in the process of responding. Both British Columbia and the United States are considering options to determine whether or not to give notice. This ability to terminate the Treaty, and the changing flood control provisions that will occur post-2024 whether the Treaty is terminated or not, have prompted both countries to get this process underway.

Over the last few years, the province has conducted an extensive review process to get input from as many stakeholders as possible, in preparation for sitting down at the table.

The Columbia River Treaty is a trans-boundary water management agreement between the United States and Canada signed in 1961 and ratified in 1964. The Treaty optimizes flood management and power generation, requiring coordinated operations of reservoirs and water flows for the Columbia River and Kootenay River on both sides of the border.

Back in the day, the USA prepaid Canada \$64 million for 60 years to provide assured flood control operations which resulted in reduced flood damage and increased safety for USA citizens. The USA also committed in the Treaty to paying Canada half of the incremental power potential that could be produced because of the new flow regimes made possible by the Treaty coordination. Now everyone wants to take a new look at the arrangements. Both sides hope to cut themselves a better deal, and this time to take many things into consideration that were not initially considered, such as First Nations rights and environmental concerns.

Things were very different when all this began, as Corky Evans points out, and he is excited to see the

transparency now as compared to then. “Good for the Vallican Whole!” he says. “Good for the folks who are organizing this thing! Sixty years ago, the people here were kept in the dark until they lost their land and people's homes were burnt down to make way for the reservoir. Thanks to a whole bunch of good people we're talking about it now. This is better for the people, the animals and the fish. It's as different as night and day. This sort of thing gives us our best chance to have things turn out differently.”

It is all phenomenally complicated, really important, and far beyond the scope of one evening's discussion. Hopefully, however, people will get a sense of what is happening, ask thoughtful questions and get intelligent answers, and have some idea of where to go from here to find out more.

The Vallican Whole is at 3762 Little Slocan S. Road. Admission is by donation. Check out www.VallicanWhole.com or FB/TheWhole