

May 25, 2018

Columbia River Treaty Negotiations to Commence

By: Nigel Bankes

Announcements commented on: (1) Global Affairs Canada, Canada and United States launch negotiations to renew Columbia River Treaty, [May 22, 2018](#), (2) US Department of State, Launching negotiations to modernize the Columbia River Treaty regime, [May 22, 2018](#), (3) British Columbia, Statement on Upcoming Treaty Negotiations, [May 22, 2018](#), (4) Okanagan Nation Alliance, Shuswap Nation Council and Ktunaxa Nation Council, Canada Excludes Indigenous First Nations from International Columbia River Treaty Re-Negotiation, [May 23, 2018](#).

The Governments of Canada and the United States have announced that they will begin negotiations (May 29 and 30, 2018, Washington DC) to “modernize” the Columbia River Treaty. For background on this issue see my previous post [here](#). British Columbia and three First Nation groups have also issued press releases.

The US Press Release states as follows:

The 1964 Treaty’s flood risk and hydropower operations have provided substantial benefits to millions of people on both sides of the border. The Treaty, a worldwide model for transboundary water cooperation, has also facilitated additional benefits such as supporting the river’s ecosystem, irrigation, municipal water use, industrial use, navigation, and recreation. Modernizing the Treaty regime will ensure these benefits continue for years to come.

As the United States enters these bilateral negotiations with our Canadian counterparts, our key objectives include continued, careful management of flood risk; ensuring a reliable and economical power supply; and better addressing ecosystem concerns. Our objectives are guided by the *U.S. Entity Regional Recommendation for the Future of the Columbia River Treaty after 2024*, a consensus document published in 2013 after years of consultations among the Northwest’s Tribes, states, stakeholders, public, and federal agencies.

The U.S. negotiating team will be led by the U.S. Department of State and will include the Bonneville Power Administration and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Northwestern Division (which together comprise the “U.S. Entity” that implements the Treaty in the United States); the Department of the Interior; and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Canada’s Press Release similarly notes that the Treaty “has been a model of efficient work and cooperation benefiting both Canada and the United States.” It goes on to state that the Federal Government “has been working closely with the Province of British Columbia, Columbia Basin First Nations, and local communities to ensure that all interests are heard, represented and

addressed in these negotiations. The clip from Hon. Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P., Minister of Foreign Affairs notes that:

Our objective in these negotiations is to ensure that the Columbia River Treaty continues to be mutually beneficial for both countries. We will also address environmental considerations and the interests of First Nations. I am confident that we will be able to renew this agreement for the 21st century.

British Columbia issued the following statement “in response” to the ~~F~~ederal ~~g~~overnment’s announcement:

The Columbia River Treaty is a model for Canada-U.S. co-operation in the Pacific Northwest, and we look forward to being at the table with the federal government in the upcoming negotiations with the United States.

The fundamental principle of the Columbia River Treaty must continue to be maximizing benefits for Canada and the U.S., and sharing them equitably.

We want to continue our engagement with Columbia Basin First Nations in B.C., and ensure that local communities are kept informed, as negotiations progress.

First Nations in the Basin however expressed outrage at being excluded from these negotiations arguing that this is inconsistent with the Government of Canada’s commitment to reconciliation.

Thanks to Cindy Pearce for the links to the announcements.

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