

The Chalillo Dam

Let Us do it NOW

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The case to start the Chalillo Dam as soon as possible has never been stronger. Events of the past show clearly that the weight of logic and common sense fully tilts the scale against emotionalism.

During the past dry season the MET services of Belize publicly voiced its great concern that the water levels at the pumping station at Double Run were getting dangerously low. Right now, Belize City's present population is putting a strain on the available natural amount of water at Double Run during the dry season. Look ahead twenty years. There will definitely be at least twice the amount of water needed at Double Run during the dry season. Calculate also the then needs of more modern agriculture industry, which will be taking larger amounts of water higher up stream for irrigation purposes. Consider also the billions of gallons of fresh river water that is dumped in the sea every year through floods and normal rain. There is an immediate need to store and preserve all the rainwater the country can. The best and most economic way to store water is in a dam. Water stored in a dam can be released and used as needed. Point one is that the dam is needed to conserve and regulate the use of rainwater on the Macal and Belize River for the happiness, comfort and welfare of the nation.

Point two: We now see the devastating effects that the floods had in the north and the Belize river valley, plus the huge amount of topsoil that is lost in floods of this dimension. If the floods are controlled at a normal level by the dam, then there would be only minor loss of topsoil by normal runoff. This would slow down the silting of the river mouths and prevent any silt from ever reaching the reef again.

If the dam is built large enough and strong enough once and for all, there is an immense amount of water that could be kept out of circulation during the flood caused by the catchment area of the Macal River. Let us look at the present scenario. If all the water above the Chalillo dam could have been contained, it would not have helped in the flooding of the Belize River. The run-off from the Macal below the dam would have been almost insignificant. The runoff from the Macal below the dam would have been almost insignificant. As soon as that runoff was delivered into the Belize River, the Macal would have returned to normal levels. That would leave only the Mopan River to feed into the Belize River. The Mopan would divide its waters at Branch Mouth, the larger amount going into the Belize River and the smaller amount backing up into the now low-level Macal River. The Macal River would then become a safety valve and leveling device for the floodwaters entering the Belize River.

Between the dam and the leveling backwaters in the Macal, less than half the amount of the water in the Belize River would be there now. If the mouth of the Haulover River at Mile 5 can be dredged back to its 6-7 feet depth it had before Hurricane Hattie, the river would

have emptied out 3 to 4 times faster and when the mouth of the Haulover Creek (Belize City) is dredged and its entrance from the Belize River widened, that would speed up the emptying of the Belize River even more. We would not have had the water crossing the road at 3-4 miles for so long. If the three large drains that existed in earlier days between the Haulover Creek and the sea are reopened, there would never be any more flooding at Mile 3-4. The three drains can be located on the old colonial maps that are still (I hope) in the files of the lands department.

The dam would then prevent the occurrence of the top gallon floods from the Macal that continue to threaten the people of San Ignacio and Santa Elena and the settlements downstream. With the safety valve of the Macal at Branch Mouth, I do not believe we would even see the type of flood we usually have. If there is a hurricane-incited flood, it will never again reach the proportions it has on the Belize River. Thanks to Chalillo Dam.

Point three: The final weight that tips the scale in favour of the dam is the environmentally clean and cheap source of electricity produced by the turbines at the dam, enough to supply all Belize and Peten and surplus to sell to Mexico also. Water is free; it only needs to be harnessed and used. There is no known source of electricity, except maybe nuclear, that is cheaper than hydro.

Let us look at the contra arguments. If the dam is built to its maximum capacity, say 5 miles long and 3 miles wide. This is just 15 square miles of Belize. That is less than 1/5 of one percent of the total landmass of Belize. Am I to understand that if we remove that minute part from use that all the macaw parrots, all the spider monkeys, all the tapirs and the Morlett crocodiles in Belize will disappear? Come on Sharon, Mebb and Bacongo. Give us a break! We usually stop sucking our thumb at 2-3 years of age.