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AMANDALA Belize

Chalillo Dam EIA: "Fortis tells BEL NO!"

by Roy J. Giampaoli

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Amandala has learned, from a well-informed source, that the Chalillo Dam Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report has been completed, for some time, and new corporate owner Fortis Inc. has told Belize Electricity Limited (BEL) to stall its release! However, *Belize Times* of November 28 reported that, "The Environmental Impact Assessment report is consistent with

standards set by international organization [sic], commented our source.... the Chalillo project will have very little impact on the tourism industry and that the reservoir will provide for more stable water fluctuation conditions."

On December 2 *Amandala Press* called Fortis Inc. and told P.R. representative Donna Hynes that we had been informed of the stonewalling BEL Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Lynn Young of the

EIA's results. Moments later BEL head Lynn Young was called and he was unavailable due to being "on an international call," per his secretary.

Amandala of November 21 reported the Chalillo Dam project was, for all intents and purposes, a "done deal" as inferred by BEL Energy Supply Manager Derek Davis, in a November 17 press conference about the GE (General Electric) Least Cost Generation Study. This, in conjunction with *Amandala* of November 28, citing former BEL public relations Chalillo spokesman Norris Hall confirming that "the [EIA] and Feasibility Study for the Chalillo Dam are finally completed." Hall also previously stated, based on reports, "Chalillo is feasible and we should probably go through with it."

An independent study previously financed by BACONGO (Belize Alliance of Conservation Non-Governmental Organizations), *Economic Review of the Proposed Chalillo Dam* by John Reid/Amy Rosenfeld of the Conservation Strategy Fund, and a "pre-feasibility" study conducted by Agra/CI Power of Canada for BEL indicates that pushing Chalillo through is both economically and environmentally unsound. "The economic cost of Chalillo, [US]\$20.4 million would exceed benefits by about US\$5.4 million," concludes the Conservation Strategy Fund/BACONGO report. Besides the negative economic affects of Chalillo, BEL's Davis admitted

that wildlife will be harmed."

Sharon Matola of Belize Zoo has previously gone on record damning the Chalillo Dam project. She says that there is no "credible data" that indicates the project should go forward. Plus, an absence of accurate hydrological information on the proposed project draws more questions as to its supposed feasibility. Matola says that four existing reports indicate that Chalillo is not economically sound; besides its being environmentally harmful.

BEL Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Lynn Young talked to *Amandala* on Wednesday the 8th and addressed a number of questions; about BEL's transfer of control to Fortis Inc., management's role in the process and the dynamics of the Chalillo Dam project/Belize electricity needs. CEO Young said the transfer of BEL to Fortis Inc. control was "totally transparent" and management consulted with both Fortis officials and the Government of Belize (GOB). Young also said that BEL is trying to reduce the costs of electricity to consumers, which was part of why the transaction took place, according to the CEO. Supposedly Fortis Inc., with 23 hydroelectric facilities, has a "good" environmental record, says Young. However, concerning the rationale for the decision to divest in BEL by the GOB, Young said, "People are very suspicious of government."