

DAM CONTROVERSY GETTING HOTTER

Belize City, Tuesday May 29, 2001

The Chalillo Dam still isn't more than a proposal but it's a proposal that continues to kick up more dust in the international arena than any other single local issue coming out of Belize. The very vocal and very well foreign financed anti-Chalillo group has been turning up the heat on the dam issue of late. The anti-Chalillo group appears to have literally millions of dollars at their disposal to bad-mouth the dam and its low priced hydro-electrical power. The anti-Chalillo group is spending big money to besmirch Belize's name in the international media and put down our country as ecologically insensitive and environmentally un-

caring.

In spite of the much better financing of the anti-dam crew there are a few patriots like Norris Hall who are fighting the good fight to inform the world that the Chalillo Dam is an economically feasible source for cheap, renewable energy with virtually no negative environmental impact.

Following are three news items dealing with the Chalillo issue. One is reprinted from a Canadian newspaper, The Telegram, the second from a BEL release and the third is extracted from an address given by Norris Hall in at a Fortis meeting in Newfoundland a couple weeks ago. The dam controversy is getting hotter by the day.

Macal River dam 'vital' to eradicating poverty



By PAT DOYLE
The Telegram

Opponents of a proposed dam project for a river in the Central American country of Belize are distorting facts about the project, according to officials of Belize Electricity Ltd. (BEL) and the government of Belize.

In addition, the opposition to a proposal to install a dam to develop the hydro capability of the Macal River is essentially coming from expatriates and others from outside the country, said Lynn Young, president and chief executive officer of BEL.

"You would be hard-pressed to find anyone in Belize who is opposed to the

project," Young said in St. John's Tuesday.

He and Norris Hall, a public relations officer for government investments with the government of Belize, are in St. John's for today's annual shareholders meeting of Fortis Inc.

Fortis, which has a 67 per cent interest in BEL, has proposed the dam, which is undergoing an environmental impact assessment, with the report expected by the end of June.

The report, being done for BEL, will be submitted to the National Environmental Assessment Committee, an agency established by the government of Belize, which will have the final say on whether the project will be allowed to proceed.

John Evans, chief engineer with Fortis, said the study is being done by AMEC, an international engineering consulting company, which "will do the right thing, no matter what."

Hall told The Telegram Tuesday opponents of the dam project show "a total lack of respect for our nation's sovereignty and environmental laws."

He also said the hydro potential of all the rivers in Belize was explored before a conclusion was reached about developing the hydro potential of the Macal River.

"Successive governments in Belize have been mandated by the people ... to continue to explore the further developments of the river's hydro capability."

Many studies have been done, but feasibility studies by their very nature examine worst- and best-case scenarios for any project, Hall said.

"However, what we have seen is that the opponents of the project have deliberately, in buffet style, selected snippets from these reports to say that the project is not acceptable and that it is not economically nor socially sound," he said. "They have also chosen to ignore the reports, which have

been made available to them, on the studies for alternative sources of energy. Their many arguments are short on facts."

Hall said the debate on the proposed dam was actually opened by the present government in Belize by inviting comments and opinions.

Young said studies have shown that the current proposal for a dam on the Macal River is the best possible way to proceed.

Fortis was invited to Belize, through a careful screening process, to join the government of Belize in its development program and to become a corporate partner and strategic investor in the improvement and expansion of Belize Electricity Ltd., said Hall.

Fortis has 95 per cent ownership of Belize Electricity Co. Ltd. (BECOL), which owns and operates a 25-megawatt generating plant capable of delivering average annual energy of 80 gigawatts per hour. The government of Belize holds the other five per cent in BECOL.

BECOL will sell its entire output to BEL.

"Fortis was selected because of its excellent track record in the hydroelectric industry and its recorded environmental stewardship," Hall said. "The company has proven in a short time to be a good corporate citizen of Belize."

Hall said Belize has one of the highest electricity rates in the Central American region.

"There is a great need for more electrical power at reduced rates to stimulate development, attract more investment and industry, create employment and pay more than lip service to the alleviation of poverty, which plagues more than one-third of the country's population," he said.

Hall said they also want to bring electricity to the 18 per cent who do not have it.

BACONGO fails to rally opposition in Canada against Fortis and the Chalillo Dam

The Belize Alliance for Conservation Non-Government Organization (BACONGO) failed to rally public support and may have lost credibility in the international environmental community when a planned demonstration last Wednesday, May 16, 2001, in Canada only resulted in a show of about a dozen protesters.

BACONGO's Sharon Matola and Ambrose Tillett had planned the demonstration at the Holiday Inn in St. John's Newfoundland, where Fortis Inc., majority share-

holders in the Belize Electricity Limited (BEL) and the Belize Electric Company Limited (BECOL), was hosting its annual general meeting of shareholders. BACONGO opposes Fortis Inc.'s strategy to pursue small hydroelectric developments in Belize, including the proposed Chalillo Dam.

BACONGO had been lobbying the Canadians, particularly the Newfoundlanders, over the last year for support to protest the proposed Chalillo Dam in Belize. Fortis'

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THE BELIZE TIMES ACTION PAGE

Orange Walk's Music Center shocks UB 82-66, wins second in a row

People's Stadium, Orange Walk
Friday, May 25, 2001

Roger Favela slammed in 27 points and grabbed 15 rebounds off the glass to lift Orange Walk's Music Center to a second consecutive victory.

Their victims tonight were the young and dynamic University of Belize boys who fell 82-66.

Byron Shackles Flowers nailed in 24 and added seven rebounds. Claude Too Tall Jones contributed 15 points, 16 rebounds and an astounding seven blocks.

Eloy The Admiral Lamb and Engelbert Cherrington scored 11 points each for UB. Lamb had six rebounds while Cherrington grabbed five. Kelvin Gillett contributed ten points.