



Wild Lands Advocate 16(1):18, February 2008

Run-of-the-River Project Threatens the Peace

By Chris Wearmouth

Glacier Power Ltd. has reapplied to the Energy Utilities Board (EUB), now the Energy Resources Conservation Board, and the Natural Resources Conservation Board (NRCB) to build a run-of-the-river hydroelectric facility on the Peace River in northwest Alberta. The project involves building a 12-metre-high weir across the width of the river two km upstream from Dunvegan Provincial Park on Highway 2. The weir will raise the water level six and a half metres, creating a headpond that will run for 26 km upstream and flood between 106 and 215 ha of land, depending on the fluctuations of the river.

The Peace River is one of the most diverse and productive river valleys in Canada's Parkland and Boreal Natural Regions. It is a nationally significant waterway that supplies water to the Peace-Athabasca Delta, one of the largest freshwater deltas in the world. The river valley provides key habitat for bear, moose, elk, and birds of prey such as golden eagles.

Run-of-the-river hydroelectric projects are often presented as a low-impact green energy source. While they allow for normal river flow rates and do not involve flooding an extensive area for a reservoir, they do have potentially serious environmental impacts. Of primary concern is how the project will affect the local fish populations. While Glacier is planning to build ramps and bypasses, and to use "fish friendly" turbines, the project's application states there will be a "significant adverse effect" on the local population. The possible introduction of invasive plant species to the valley is also a concern. Furthermore, the project could set a precedent for similar developments along the Peace River, resulting in further loss of wilderness. AWA is opposed to this development.

The project was denied in 2003 by the EUB and NRCB when the joint panel decided the cumulative economic, social, and environmental effects clearly outweighed the project's benefits. A public hearing will be called but at the time of writing no date has been set. To obtain copies of the project's Environmental Impact Assessment and other documents, visit www.canhydro.com/projects/dunvegan.

