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COMMUNITY

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Fosthall Creek power project to benefit Splat sin First Nation

by Jan McMurray

After 14 years in the development stage, the Fosthall Creek independent power project is one step closer to becoming a reality. On November 13, an Impact Benefit Agreement was signed with the Splat sin First Nation.

"When I started this project in 2001, I was packing my daughter on my back. Now she's 18 years old," said Darcy Fear of Crescent Valley. "If I'd known how long it would take and how complicated it would be, I would never have started. But we're very close now, and I believe in this project – it will produce good, clean energy."

The Impact Benefit Agreement, the first of its kind in the area, outlines the economic and social benefits the Splat sin will enjoy from the project. Located about 10 kilometres north of Nakusp and

across the lake, the project site is in Splat sin territory.

The two other signatories to the agreement were Fosthall Creek Power Ltd. and Sorgent.e Hydro Canada Corporation. Fosthall Creek Power Ltd. is the company Fear and his friend Harold Kalke of Vancouver started to develop the project. Sorgent.e is an international engineering company with expertise and experience in renewable energy. Almost two years ago, in 2013, Fosthall forged a partnership with Sorgent.e to co-develop the project. Sorgent.e will be the final owner of the power plant.

Fear reports that the project will create about 200 jobs during the construction phase, and two to three jobs once it is up and running. He said the Splat sin will have the option to bid on parts of the construction work in the competitive bid process.

Lucas de Haro, CEO of Sorgent.e, said the Impact Benefit Agreement with the Splat sin is confidential, but the project will create business and job opportunities for them.

Construction could begin as early as this summer if all goes smoothly.

All studies for the project have been done and permits are in place, but there is one last step to be taken before Fosthall can sign a contract with BC Hydro under the Standing Offer program. This last step is an agreement with the owners of the Pingston substation, Brookfield Renewable Power Inc. and TransAlta Corporation, to allow Fosthall to bring the transmission line from the powerhouse to the substation. "We already have a Memorandum of Understanding with them, so we're optimistic that we can work through that," said Fear.

Fear looked at bringing the

transmission line to the Nakusp substation, but the high cost of the required improvements at the Nakusp substation made this plan unworkable. BC Hydro's interconnection study for this route had Fosthall paying \$7.8 million plus another \$7.8 million for contingencies. Nakusp council supported this route, as the Fosthall transmission line could have provided back-up power for BC Hydro's Nakusp-New Denver/Silverton line, but BC Hydro wouldn't budge.

The 15 MW project will see a Coanda screen intake about 1.5 kilometres upstream of the creek mouth, a 1550-metre-long penstock following the old log flume from the early 1900s, a powerhouse with two turbines near the creek mouth, and a 21-kilometre transmission line from the powerhouse to Pingston. About 400 metres of road will have to be built to the powerhouse, and a

temporary road will be built to the intake.

The project also includes a 150-metre-long spawning channel, which would be built on the flats below the power house. Fear explained that the channel's purpose is to give the kokanee a stable place to spawn, as Fosthall Creek's habitat is dependent on the water levels of Arrow Lake. Most years the lake levels are high and only a few fish spawn just below the falls. The channel could potentially accommodate 1,000 or so fish.

The Splat sin is the most southern tribe of the Shuswap Nation, whose aboriginal territory stretches from the BC/Alberta border near the Yellowhead Pass to the plateau west of the Fraser River, southeast to the Arrow Lakes and to the upper reaches of the Columbia River.

Sorgent.e has built 1,000 MW in 25 countries, and owns and operates approximately 100 MW of hydro, wind and solar plants in Italy and Chile. Currently, Sorgent.e is developing new small hydro projects in Canada and several countries in South America.