

U.S., Canada negotiating Columbia treaty

The U.S. State Department and the Canadian government are beginning the renegotiation of the Columbia River Treaty.

The tribes are a necessary part to the process, as the Treaty of 1855 preserves the tribal interests at the river.

The Columbia River Treaty between the U.S. and Canada was ratified in 1964. The document focuses on flood control and hydroelectric power generation.

It calls for Canada to store water behind four major dams on the river, whose headwaters lie in British Columbia. In return, Canada received electricity generated by U.S. dams, plus funding

for flood control.

The treaty has no expiration date, but a provision allows for changes, with 10 years notice, beginning in 2024. In 2014 lawmakers and other stakeholders called for the new talks.

The issues won't be easy. Values and priorities have changed over the past 50-plus years, especially in regard to salmon, dam operations, and tribal treaty rights. Negotiations toward the original 1964 treaty included very little consideration of the impact of dams on fish.

Electricity and fisheries will no doubt be key points in the negotiation process.

An example: Electricity users in the Pacific Northwest pay \$250 million to \$350 million a year to Canada a year for power generation—much higher than the utilities envisioned back in 1964.

In November, seven members of the Washington and Oregon congressional delegations sent a letter to the Canadian ambassador in Washington, D.C., arguing that the monetary sums are way too high. In the letter, the bipartisan group estimated that Canada receives almost 10 times the benefits that the Northwest receives.

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