

Don't suck the Nipple.

PHOTO PATRICK CAMBLIN



NORTHERN THRALL

DOUBLE D HYDRO DEVELOPMENT TWISTING AT SLAVE RIVER AND MOLLY'S NIPPLE

THE 30,000 CMS SLAVE RIVER and its world-famous 25-kilometre stretch of rambling class I to boat-eating class VI waves and holes have been the source of high water salivation for energy producers since the mid-1970s. Carving its 430-kilometre, Arctic-bound escape route from Lake Athabasca in northeastern Alberta and emptying into Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories, the Slave is now being eyed for a massive run-of-the-river dam project.

Times have changed in 30 years. What was once an \$8-million dam proposal that met its demise due to its high cost and opposition from area First Nations groups is now a \$5-billion project. The run-of-the-river dam would be put in place on the Alberta side of the Slave near Fort Smith, NWT, surrounded by First Nation's land on either shore.

TransCanada Corp and ATCO are in the preliminary stages of their plan, including design and public consultation, but expect to generate 1,800 megawatts annually to make it the largest hydro generation source in all of Alberta. The run-of-the-river project would divert the main flow into penstocks to drive turbines. In an interview with the *Edmonton Journal*, TransCanada Corp spokeswoman Shela Shapiro said there would be some form of dam or weir on the river to funnel water into the turbines. "But it would not be a huge dam with massive reservoirs," she said.

Smith Landing First Nations Elder Francois Paulette has helped lead the

opposition and fears the project could ruin 25 kilometres of what many paddlers consider the best park-and-play, massive-volume whitewater in the world. Oregon's Trip Jennings, a professional kayaker and filmmaker with the Epicocity Project is just one of many pros irked by the idea of losing play spots like Molly's Nipple, Rollercoaster or Little Sister.

"Diverting the Slave would be a sad loss for the whitewater community, certainly comparable to the Futaleufu or White Nile," Jennings says. "Here, you have a situation where indigenous people, ecosystems and even really great whitewater are at risk of being ignored to invest in hydropower, which will be used to extract more unclean energy in the form of oil from the nearby oil sands. I think I'll ride my bike to the river tomorrow."

Paulette believes it will also threaten North America's northernmost flock of river pelicans, the 21 species of fish that spawn in the river and negatively affect the MacKenzie River Delta, already suffering from lower water flows.

"This dam would just dry up the delta. I will guarantee the people down the Slave River, the MacKenzie River people, would be very opposed to all this," Paulette says.

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