



## **RELIEF AT WITHDRAWAL OF DAM PROPOSAL**

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The Lower Similkameen is being flooded today – not by the Similkameen River, but by an overwhelming sense of relief that the Shanker’s Bend dam proposal is dead.

George Hanson, Regional District Okanagan Similkameen (RDOS) director for Cawston and a leading figure in the opposition to the dam, says he was told two weeks ago that the proposed dam just across the border in Washington State was being shelved. He says an official announcement is imminent.

“All I can say is that everyone here is totally relieved,” Hanson said in an interview. “While the dam was always a longshot, it’s always been a nagging issue for the people here.”

Hanson, who has been in contact with State officials since the dam was first proposed, said he was informed by Okanogan County’s Public Utility District officials that the District decided against proceeding with the dam because it is no longer economically viable.

“They have asked the agency in charge to remove all three applications. That means, for the foreseeable future, at least, the threat of a dam in this area is gone.”

The Shanker’s Bend dam would have been located on the Similkameen River about eight kilometres northwest of Oroville. Of the three applications, the high dam – which would have been about 79 metres in height – was the most controversial. Located less than 10 kilometres from Osoyoos, it would have flooded approximately 7,200 hectares – about half on the B.C. side of the border – creating a reservoir of about 1.6 billion cubic metres. The Cawston area would have been most affected, including a large portion of the Lower Similkameen Indian reserve.

Opposition to the dam was widespread, both in B.C. and Washington. Hanson said RDOS was on record as opposing any dam that would cause flooding in the Lower Similkameen in B.C.

“At regional board level, everyone was opposed to the notion of flooding Canada without consent,” he said. “And there was certainly no consent here.”

Two years ago, officials at a public hearing into the project were criticized by residents on both sides of the border. Held in Oroville, that hearing attracted more than 130 people, many from Canada. After Public Utility District officials described the three alternatives, more than two dozen speakers expressed their disapproval of the project.

Hanson was among those to speak out against the dam proposal at the time, pointing out that the high dam would not only flood Lower Similkameen Indian Band lands, it would eliminate farmlands in what is described as the Organic Growing Capital of Canada.

Osoyoos Mayor Stu Wells says he was surprised when he learned the dam proposal was dropped, particularly because American officials continue to express a need for fresh water supply. In fact, as recently as early this week Washington Senator Bob Morton repeated that message to the Osoyoos Lake Water Forum.

Wells notes that, “The Similkameen River is not dammed anywhere from its creation point to its conclusion” – and he says he thinks both that lack of dams and the latest failure of the Shanker’s Bend proposal recognize an important fact. “It is a given that the First Nation lands in Canada will not be lost to flooding, so that does not make the project viable.”