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Hammond raps Canadian hydro project

Associated Press

Juneau — A hydroelectric dam proposed to be built on the Stikine River by a British Columbia firm is not warranted and "probably should not be built," Alaska's governor said Tuesday.

"I don't think it's an appropriate project. I don't think it's warranted. I don't think it's cost effective. I don't think it's viable and I think it probably should not be built," Gov. Jay Hammond said.

Hammond also said he was assured recently by British Columbia Premier William Bennett that the hydroelectric project proposed by B.C. Hydro probably would not be built.

According to Hammond, Bennett said "you can go home and tell the people there won't be a nickel spent to construct that project during my term in office."

B.C. Hydro has been conducting field studies on the Stikine and Iskut rivers since 1978, and considering construction of five dams, two on the Stikine about 140 to 160 miles upstream from the U.S.-Canada border and three on the Iskut River, a major Stikine tributary, about 50 miles from the border.

The rivers flow from British Columbia into Southeast Alaska near Wrangell and Petersburg.

The proposed dams have spurred some opposition in Canada, and also in Southeast Alaska, where fishermen are concerned the dams could harm downstream king, coho and sockeye salmon runs.

State Department of Fish and Game officials have warned that changes in stream flows even far above the salmon spawning beds could do significant damage.

Hammond said that an earlier statement he made about the hydroelectric project may have been misinterpreted. Following a meeting with Bennett in Whitehorse in late January, Hammond announced that some of his fears about the dams had been alleviated.

But Hammond said Tuesday the reason his concerns were put to rest was that he was convinced by conversations with Bennett that the project would not be built.

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