



Matthew Evenden

The Roots of Canada's Big Dam Era: Mobilizing Rivers in the Second World War



Abstract:

Canada's modern hydro-electric regime emerged in the Second World War. Against a background of weak hydro-electric development in the Great Depression, war reversed the situation. Canada's generating capacity expanded by a fifth over six war years with resulting effects on power system development and dam construction, particularly in Central Canada. As resource processing and manufacturing grew to meet war production targets, the federal state intervened in an unprecedented fashion to control and conserve Canada's power supply. In the process, military strategy trumped civilian demand and a new politics of rivers emerged which favoured wartime utility over all other claims. At a time of limited international hydro-electric dam development, Canada's hydro systems surged forward and laid the

foundations for post-war growth and the era of big dams. Drawing on archival evidence from corporate and government repositories across Canada, this paper builds a historical context for understanding how and why in the twentieth century Canada came to be a hydro-state par excellence. I argue that world war redrew the rules of river development and hydro power in Canada, created the opportunity for new state powers and weakened the position of river development critics.

Biography:

Matthew Evenden is an Associate Professor of Geography and the Chair of Canadian Studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC) who specializes in the environmental history of water. He has taught at UBC since 2000 and offers courses in environmental history, historical geography and Canadian Studies. He completed a PhD in environmental history at York University in 2000 under the supervision of Viv Nelles, for which he received the Governor General's Gold Medal as well as the Rachel Carson Prize from the American Society of Environmental History for best dissertation of the year.

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1 - 2pm
AERL room 120

