

Talks under way for huge power project

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Need for huge hidro project



by Denise Raymo

PLATTSBURGH — Another large-scale, international hydropower project is in negotiations between the New York Power Authority and Canadian entities.

Importing cheap power from Canada would lower electric bills throughout the state, including customers of the municipal departments in Plattsburgh, Rouses Point and Tupper Lake.

New York Power Authority President and Chief Executive Officer Richard Kassel met recently with the Press-Republican Editorial Board to outline his agency's plan to "do the biggest energy project in the state since the St. Lawrence/Robert Moses power project 50 year ago."

2,000 MEGAWATTS

The authority would import up to 2,000 megawatts of power from multiple sources, including hydropower from Canada and renewable resources both here and in Canada.

That means wind farms, such as the one in Chateaugay established by Noble Environmental Power, could have a market for the power they produce.

"There are dozens of wind farms producing wind, and you can't bring the wind anywhere because there is no transmission," Kassel said.

"The goal is to build an artery in our existing rights-of-way and replace our lines, including the Moses-Adirondack line which is 50 to 60 years old, with a newer, higher-voltage line.

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“This will enable us to bring in more hydropower and free up more power at the St. Lawrence Power project for this area.”

COSTS BILLIONS

NYPA hopes to make a formal announcement of the plans before the end of the year, Kessel said.

“As much as we can enhance (the system) for economic development in the region, we’re going to do that.”

NYPA said the project would be phased in over six to eight years and cost between \$4 billion and \$6 billion.

It could be paid through a number of scenarios, Kessel said, but until negotiations are complete, no particular payment method is set.

“But we hope to be granting permits in the first two quarters of next year.”

Because talks are ongoing, he did not want to provide specific prices that customers could expect. But Kessel estimated that cost could be 6 cents to 8 cents per kilowatt hour, or about half the current rate.

MOHAWK POWER

At the same time, leaders of the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe are hoping to broker a deal for cheap power for its gaming operations and the community as a whole.

“We’re going to help the Mohawks tribe in a lot of ways,” said Kessel, first by broadening the temporary North Country Electricity Stimulus Plan to include Akwesasne.

Because Alcoa temporarily closed its east-side smelter, NYPA is using the \$10 million in net revenue it would have received to lower rates to commercial-, industrial- and retail-businesses customers in Franklin, Jefferson and St. Lawrence counties.

Qualified customers, including those at Akwesasne, will save between 10 and 15 percent, starting in September, Kessel said.

NYPA has also agreed to help the tribe leave its contract with National Grid to form its own municipal-power system.

Kessel said the Power Authority will hold negotiations with the chiefs on cheaper electrical rates for the reservation when the time comes.

The Mohawks will also benefit from a possible upgrade or splitting off of the existing 765 KV power lines that run from the reservation to the southern Adirondacks.

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