Belize: Planning Underway For $175 Million Hydroelectric Generation Project

Barbara Khol
Belize: Planning Underway For $175 Million Hydroelectric Generation Project

by Barbara Khol

Category/Department: General

Published: Thursday, May 9, 1991

Plans are underway for construction of 60 megawatt hydroelectric generation project on the Macal River, located in southwestern Belize. At present, Belize is largely dependent on imported fossil fuels, and also purchases electricity from neighboring Mexico to supply certain communities in the country's northern region. The nation's current demand is estimated at about 55 megawatts. Project cost is $175 million, the largest of its type ever undertaken in the history of Belize. Funds for the studies, commissioned by the Belize Electricity Board (BEB), were provided by the governments of Belize and Taiwan, and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Companies from Canada, Czechoslovakia and Jamaica, among others, are working on the current phase of the project, which includes seismic testing on the planned dam sites and aerial photography for topographical mapping. The present phase also includes a drilling programme which will help to determine the geological conditions for the construction of the project's dams, tunnels and power plants. The feasibility and pre-investment studies on the project have concluded that any impact the project may have on the environment would be minimal. The Macal River runs through an area lightly covered with pine forest. The Macal is one of the nation's five rivers, and has its source in the Maya mountain range, which covers most of the central-western section of the country. The project entails the construction of four medium-sized dams along the river, under the so-called cascade system. The first dam 165 m. wide by 45 m. high, producing 18 megawatts will be built at Mollejon, near the upper reaches of the river. A 130-km. transmission line network is to transfer power from Mollejon to the capital, Belmopan, and Belize City, the commercial capital. A similar facility will then be built at Rubber Camp, a few kilometres downstream. Depending on the energy requirements, two additional facilities are to be constructed later. The Belize government has announced its intent to develop the Macal project under a build, operate and transfer (BOT) agreement. Four foreign companies have expressed interest in the project. The government retains the option to buy out the facility as soon as funds are available. (Basic data from Inter Press Service, 04/27/91)

-- End --