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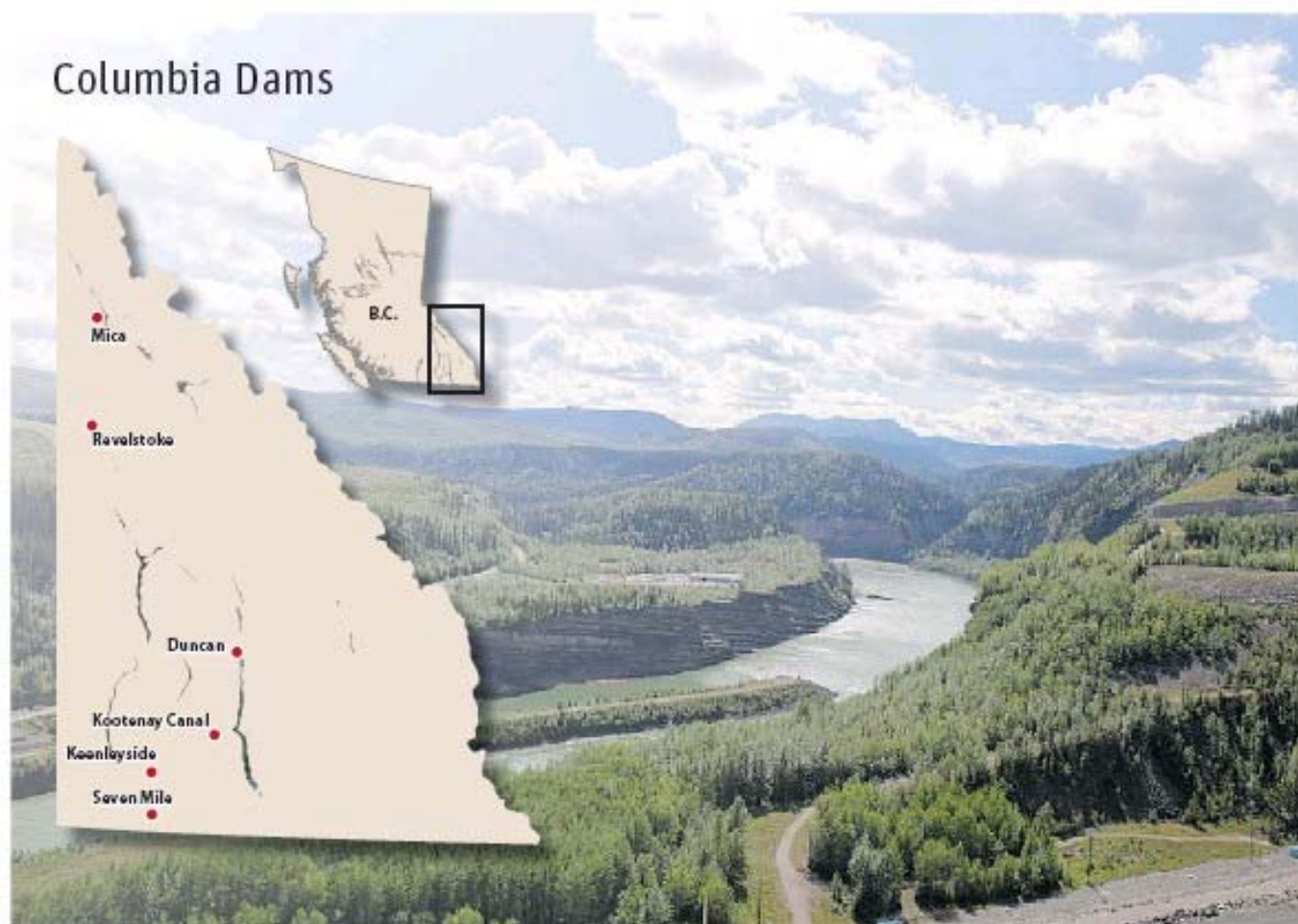
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# Water release to U.S. upped power yield 2

**Aiding parched Columbia River states helped B.C. meet its power needs in dry 2015**

Strange as it may seem, BC Hydro's forced release of additional water from its Columbia River system to help address U.S. drought conditions downstream helped the Crown corporation meet its domestic power needs during last summer's dry conditions.



**BC Hydro required less power last summer from the Peace River system, above, because more power was generated through forced releases of water to the U.S. on the Columbia system. The forced releases were made to help the U.S. address drought conditions.**

The Columbia River basin, including both Canada and the U.S., recorded the third driest year on record in 2015, Mark Poweska, BC Hydro's senior vice-president of generation, said in an interview.

The Columbia River Treaty provides for increased releases of water from Canadian storage to meet needs during severe drought periods in the U.S. — the "proportional draft" provision of the treaty.

Last year's warm winter resulted in reduced demand for electrical power for domestic heating, putting hydro's Columbia system in a better position to accommodate the additional flows passed on to the U.S., Poweska added.

Due to increased power generated through the releases on the Columbia system, less power was required from the Peace River system in the northeast, which includes the Williston reservoir behind the W.A.C. Bennett Dam. The Columbia and Peace produce about 80 per cent of hydro's power.

"As you're moving that water you're producing power, which means that our reservoir levels in the north are at a higher elevation than normal," Poweska said.

"It's a complex system but it's all tied together."

The releases did negatively affect recreation in the Arrow Lakes reservoir, along with the forest industry's ability to move logs, he noted.

The 10-year average level on the Arrow reservoir is about 438 metres at the end of August, compared to 428 metres in 2015.

BC Hydro has four major hydroelectric dams on the Columbia system (Mica, Revelstoke, Kootenay Canal, and Seven Mile) along with two storage dams that don't generate power (Hugh Keenleyside and Duncan). There are seven smaller hydroelectric dams.

Poweska said the reservoir system "can withstand a couple of drought years" and had no trouble meeting domestic loads.

Above-average rains in the fall have since helped to rebuild reservoir levels and prepare for what summer may bring. "We've pretty much recovered," he said.

Water flows into BC Hydro reservoirs in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island regions reached record lows last year, prompting the Crown corporation to release water mainly to serve the needs of fish and domestic water needs rather than to optimize electrical power production.

"It was quite an unusual year," Poweska confirmed. Flows from April to August for the two regions were the "absolute record lowest" for 56 years of record keeping for those systems. "We've never seen that."

Inflows last July were just nine per cent of average level at Coquitlam reservoir, 14 per cent of normal at Comox, and 13 per cent at Strathcona. On the Peace system, the Williston was 48 per cent of normal and the Arrow reservoir on the Columbia system was 49 per cent.

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