



The West Kootenay Power and Light Co. Ltd

On January 7th, 1896, the first electric lights flickered on in Rossland. It was powered by a small, temperamental, steam-driven generator owned by the Rossland Water and Light Co. The booming mines of Rossland required a significant amount of electric power, and this inadequate generator could not keep up. By 1898, Rossland's booming mines, growing population, and various smelters, and railways of the West Kootenays would be illuminated by the powerful force of rushing water through hydro-electric plants, such as the one located in the Lower Bonnington Falls.

May 8th, 1897

The West Kootenay Power & Light Company Ltd. was incorporated to build a hydro-electric plant at Lower Bonnington Falls on the Kootenay River to supply power to the mines of Rossland. The head office was established at Rossland, and Sir Charles Ross, the chief promoter of the project, was named chairman of the board.

The West Kootenay Power & Light Co. (WKPL) made history when it successfully delivered electrical energy from Bonnington Falls to Rossland over the first long distance high-voltage transmission line in North America. It was 51.5 km long (32 miles) and operated at 20,000 volts. The Bonnington to Rossland project took just under a year, and on July 15, 1898, 500 lights were already shining in Rossland.

WKPL's first general manager was Lorne Campbell, who was brought in to supervise the installation of certain equipment at the Lower Bonnington project. Upon its completion, he set in motion what became a long range program to make full use of the Kootenay River's potential.



COMINCO, TRAIL

With the smelter in Trail expanding and therefore using huge amounts of power for its electrolytic processes and the onset of World War I, WKPL had to change its business outlook and structure. Cominco (now Teck) acquired a controlling interest in WKPL to ensure an adequate power supply for wartime production demands. This meant that additional generating units would be needed in the Upper Bonnington plant.

During this period, Cominco ranked as one of the world's major producers of lead and zinc. WKPL kept pace with Cominco's power requirements with the construction of the South Slocan Plant, which was completed in 1929. In addition to supplying the needs of the smelter at Trail, the system's domestic service expanded steadily.



W.K.P & L Co. General offices on Columbia Ave.

GROWTH OF POWER

Expanding its power to reach Kelowna and Princeton in 1922, and supplying Creston in 1933. This made the construction of another hydro-electric facility necessary. In 1932, the Cora Linn Dam, located on Kootenay River supplied the growing communities.

In 1951, WKPL completed a 138 km (86 miles) line from South Slocan to Cominco's operation at the Sullivan Mine in Kimberly. A branch line was also created down the east side of Kootenay Lake to meet the increasing population in Creston and the surrounding area.

The last and largest station built in the system by WKPL was the construction of the Waneta power project at the mouth of the Pend d'Oreille River in 1952. In 1964, the Columbia River Treaty was ratified by the United States and Canada, and major hydro-electric developments, flood control, and water storage were started along the Columbia River.

In 2004, Fortis Inc. acquired all distribution, transmission, and generation assets of the WKPL and re-named it FortisBC Inc.



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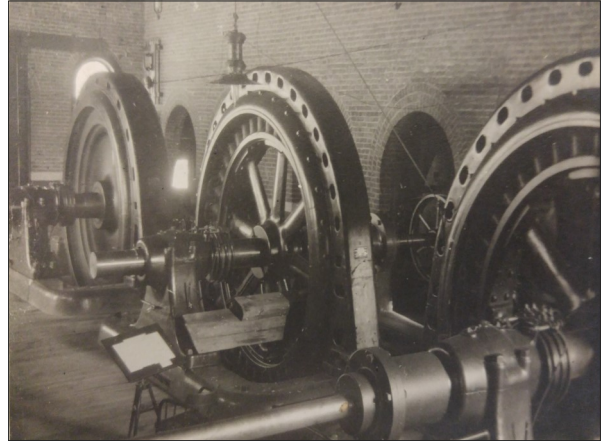
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Image from Fortis BC website

Today, the Lower Bonnington Dam is comprised of a powerhouse behind an intake dam on the right bank of the Kootenay River. It also has a concrete gravity structure which is approximately 18 meters high. The original dam, built in 1897, was comprised of a rock-filled timber crib dam, which straddled the river upstream from the falls at this site. The dam was rebuilt in 1924 with a new plant including three units, which increased generating capacity to 54 MW. The Lower Bonnington Dam is located on the Kootenay River approximately 57.4 km from Rossland.



Generators at the Lower Bonnington Falls, 1910