

Action Item of the Month:

Ask Minister Neufeld for a Sound Energy Plan

By Elaine Golds

Last month, I suggested people could write a letter to Premier Campbell asking him to respect provincial park boundaries by not allowing a transmission line across a wilderness area of Pinecone Burke Provincial Park. I also suggested people should request his government develop an integrated management plan for run-of-river projects so that we don't end up with an excessive number of transmission lines criss-crossing the province and disrupting important wildlife habitat. Now I think we should ensure Energy Minister Richard Neufeld receives a similar message.

The manner under which these run-or-river projects are developed is very much akin to a gold-rush process where companies stake out a river and then develop their claim. There are now apparently almost 500 hundred of these "claims" staked with more in process. We have been told that every suitable river in BC now has a run-of-river water license on it. This is not only more energy that BC needs but it is also an extremely haphazard manner in which to allow development of this resource to occur. At the very least, we are likely to end up with a number of redundant transmission lines built at a cost to the environment as well as to electricity consumers who are the ones who will eventually pay the price.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives recently released a report, "Sticker Shock, The Impending Cost of BC Hydro's Shift to Private

Power Producers" by John Calvert (see www.policyalternatives.ca). Calvert points out that one consequence of allowing private producers to develop these resources in the absence of an overall management plan will be far higher prices for electricity in the future. Calvert believes BC Hydro would do a far better and more efficient job of developing these resources in a timely and logical pattern. Regardless of whether this is done privately or publicly, it is irresponsible of government not to play a regulatory role to ensure run-of-river resources are developed effectively and efficiently with as little harm to the environment as possible. We can't call this energy "green" if its development destroys wild salmon habitat, slices up provincial parks and damages critical wildlife habitat. Apart from a lack of overall planning, there also appears to be inadequate attention paid to monitoring these projects to be certain that all regulations and guidelines are followed. These days, we constantly hear the provincial government is "under-resourced". This means they don't have enough staff to do their jobs effectively. It seems that cutting the red tape of regulation simply means that future generations will pay the cost of our lack of oversight today.

We know from past experience that a big boom is often followed by a big bust. I remain to be convinced that we actually need all that much power from these run-of-river facilities. With appropriate development of their own generating

facilities plus conservation initiatives, BC Hydro certainly has enough publicly-owned resources to supply our needs. Run-of-river projects generate the most electricity in April and May when the snow is melting. That's when BC Hydro has excess capacity as well so it's hardly the time when BC Hydro will need to purchase additional power from private producers. The largest electricity demands in BC come in the winter months when run-of-river facilities have little capacity to generate electricity because high elevation rivers will be mostly frozen. Imagine what our province could look like if even half of the run-of-river projects go bust at some point in the future. We could end up with abandoned and damaged rivers left behind with rusting hulks of pipes leaching corrosive material next to sensitive streams.

Please write to The Honourable Richard Neufeld, Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources, PO Box 9060, Stn. Prov. Govt., Victoria, BC V8W 9E2. You can email him at EMPR.Minister@gov.bc.ca, phone him at 250-387-5896 or fax him at 250-356-2965. Be sure to mention your opposition to hydroelectric transmission lines crossing a wilderness area of Pinecone Burke Provincial Park and the need for the province to develop an integrated management plan for the timely development of run-of-river resources.



A Great Horned Owl is nesting this year in the deciduous tree stands on the south side of the Deas Island Regional Park by the lake. There are two owlets in the nest but one seems to be much smaller and hiding behind the mother all the time. Two in the photo were very active, and quite alert when a Bald Eagle flew overhead. Photo by Kiyoshi Takahashi



David Schutz's search for owls at Colony Farm paid off on March 1 when he located this Northern Saw-whet Owl on the PoCo Trail near the Mary Hill Bypass. David's sighting is only the second Northern Saw-whet Owl reported from Colony Farm. Photo by David Schutz