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Privatization bad for B.C. energy

The Record

Saturday, December 20, 2008

Dear Editor:

Regarding the editorial by Gene Vickers entitled, "River a viable source of energy," which was published on Saturday, Dec. 6.

I have noticed that Mr. Vickers likes to write letters in support of the B.C. government's current program to pick apart and dismantle B.C. Hydro and to hand over B.C.'s rivers and streams to private corporations for the purposes of producing expensive, unreliable, intermittent creek power. His letters of support have been showing up recently in newspapers across the province.

Perhaps the private power developers that he seems to admire so much are getting nervous at seeing angry citizens showing up at public meetings from one end of B.C. to the other to oppose Premier Gordon Campbell's river privatization push.

But it is us, the general public, that should be nervous and horrified at the premier's plans to sell us all down the river. Thankfully, many people are already doing something about it.

More than 1,000 people showed up this past February to oppose a private operator's plan to divert all of the Upper Pitt River's tributary streams into large pipes, totalling some 30 kilometres in length, then cut a power line swath through Pinecone Burke Provincial Park. It would have been an environmental disaster for the salmon-rich river system and the park.

The plans appear to be on hold for now - thanks to the crowd that showed up at the meeting - but the developer continues to push for the right to dam and pipe the Pitt system and wire Pinecone Burke.

Up north of Pemberton, a public meeting about the fate of the Ryan River pulled in more than 200 concerned citizens last week. The Ryan River has been identified as a secluded valley important in the province's efforts to recover the local grizzly bear population and was recommended in 2004 by a government-sponsored land-use planning committee as a no-go zone for industrial power production. Some people are more than a little steamed to see a private company proposing to divert the Ryan into a 10-km long tunnel, then slash a power line right-of-way across the hillside above Pemberton.

Recently, about 80 people piled into the Sechelt Seaside Centre for a public meeting regarding a private company's plans to divert local rivers and streams. This scheme involves drawing down at least one local lake as much as 20 metres to provide water for the company's power plans.

There is also worry over blasted rock producing acid leachate into fish bearing waters.

Kootenay residents are boiling over with anger at plans to divert their beloved Glacier and Howser Creeks and to carve a private power line across the Purcell Mountain Range. Other Kootenay Rivers are being targeted by various companies' pipe dreams as well.

In the northwest of the province, the fight is on to protect important salmon habitat in Sedan Creek, a tributary of the Skeena River.

On the mid-coast, a company is proposing to divert the Klinaklini River into a tunnel three-stories high and 17-km long. The impacts on grizzlies and salmon boggle the mind.

Closer to home, there are private plans to divert key tributaries of the Chilliwack River system for private profit and public pain. Pretty little Statlu Lake, located northeast of Mission, a favourite hiking destination, has been staked by a private developer as a water storage area, to be drained down to produce power.

There are now just too many environmentally disastrous proposed river privatization projects to name in this letter.

More than 600 of B.C.'s precious rivers, lakes and creeks have been staked by private companies.

It's a liquid gold rush the likes of which have not been seen before.

The sad thing is that none of this power is really needed. Most of it is so unreliable and expensive that it will eventually render B.C. Hydro bankrupt. Hydro shouldn't be blamed, as they have been ordered by Mr. Campbell to buy from these privateers.

We'd be much better off allowing B.C. Hydro to do what it does best - produce and transport hydro power to our homes and businesses.

We could start by upgrading existing power facilities at our publicly owned hydro dams and bringing back our downstream Columbia Treaty benefits in the form of clean green hydro electricity.

You just got to wonder, in a province where people clearly value power public and wild rivers, how did we end up with a premier so bent on lining the pockets of the private power guys at the expense of the rate payers and environment?

Joe Foy, Wilderness Committee National Campaign Director and New Westminster resident

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