

BC's rivers at risk

Join the Wilderness Committee in calling for a moratorium on river power projects

Joe Foy, national campaign director

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Rainbow, Burnt Bridge, Chipmunk, Tzoonie, Volcano and Statlu are not just colourful names; they are some of the many wild creeks and rivers found throughout British Columbia. They are also just a few of the 600 water bodies that have been staked by private power corporations over the last seven years in BC.

The rush to stake our streams and rivers was triggered by the 2002 Energy Plan when the provincial government forbade BC Hydro, our very profitable crown corporation, from producing new sources of hydroelectricity as part of a government shift to deregulate the electricity sector in BC. Since that time, there has been a 1,040 percent increase in waterpower licence applications, with mining companies, stock promoters and even US giant General Electric looking to develop BC streams and rivers for power.

The proliferation of private hydro projects, also known as Independent Power Projects (IPPs), appears green and sustainable at the outset, but it is fraught with problems:

- There is no provincial planning, and local governments, through the enactment of the infamous Bill 30, have had their zoning authority removed.

- Most projects do not undergo an environmental assessment and even if they do the cumulative impacts of the transmission lines, logging, road networks and river diversions which accompany these projects are not evaluated by the provincial government.

Not surprisingly, there is growing public concern regarding the wisdom of turning over our rivers and the production of hydroelectricity to the private sector. The Wilderness Committee recognizes that we have something unique in BC: a public utility which produces low-carbon energy, provides for BC's energy security, promotes conservation initiatives, can engage in low-term planning and is answerable and accountable to the people of our province.

In an era of climate change, it is essential that we think ahead and make wise decisions. There is a right way and a wrong way to produce green power – let's make sure we do it the right way. Join the Wilderness Committee in calling for a moratorium on river power projects until they are regionally planned, environmentally appropriate, acceptable to First Nations and publicly owned.

✳ *Get involved at wildernesscommittee.org*



photo by Joy Foy, Courtesy Wilderness Committee

Bute Inlet update good news

The last time we emailed our members and supporters about the fight to save the wild rivers of Bute Inlet, we had one simple request. We asked you to write a letter to Premier Campbell to tell him how strongly you wanted those wild rivers in the Bute Inlet area protected from plans to dam and divert them to produce hydro-power for General Electric and Plutonic Power Inc. Well, the people on our email action list continue to amaze and delight us. Turns out that you folks write some mighty powerful letters. We promised to post some of them on our website and we have. These heartfelt letters are amazing testimonials as to how much we all love our wild rivers and want them protected. [Read the letters at http://wildernesscommittee.org/joe/bute_inlet_update_good_news]

I have some really good news. Actually I have freakin' fantastic news! General Electric and its partners Plutonic Power have decided to postpone their bid to gain control of 17 rivers in the Bute Inlet area. This puts the Environmental Assessment Process into a holding pattern for at least 12 months. We have a saying here at the Wilderness Committee: "To stop a train, you first have to slow it down." Well, this train has been slowed, a lot, thanks in large part to the wave of letters sent in by the folks on this 10,000 Voices e-mail list. You all deserve a great big pat on the back.



photo by Gwen Barlee, Courtesy Wilderness Committee

This just goes to show you that when enough folks get to know about a threat to our environment and then take action, even a giant company like General Electric can be knocked back on its heels. Today, the wild rivers of Bute Inlet teem with fish that support grizzly bears and other wildlife. Let's keep it that way. Now that the project to dam and divert Bute's rivers is on the ropes, let's get rid of it once and for all. Time to write another letter to the Premier telling him how much you want him to declare the Bute Inlet hydro power scheme dead so that the wild rivers there can continue to flow free.

✳ *More than 50 grassroots organizations reject energy privatization policy. Visit saveourrivers.ca*