

Food forever? Or fracking for export? Tough choice!

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Fraser Valley, but with higher yields from the longer sunshine hours of a northern growing season.

some family farms and market gardens, much of it is in hayfields.

ish Columbia. An article appearing in the Vancouver Observer, August 11, 2014 by Warren Bell



BY WENDY HOLM
The writer lives in British Columbia

community and the interests of investors, the BC government appears bent on pushing ahead with the construction of Site C dam on the BC portion of the Peace River.

If it goes ahead, the dam will impact almost 32,000 acres of BC farmland, flooding half and leaving the rest within “stability lines” that limit farm operations.

And we’re not talking just any old farmland here. The rich alluvial soils of BC’s Peace River, blessed by the micro-climate of its east-west running valley, are capable of supporting the same range of crops as BC’s

Because they can be continuously irrigated, alluvial soils are ideally suited to the production of high-valued horticultural crops. Indeed, the farmland to be destroyed by the dam could produce fresh vegetables to meet the nutritional needs of over one million people. Forever.

Back in the late 1950s, the BC government imposed a flood reserve over the valley and since then, much of the land held by private farmers has been acquired by the BC government through its Crown Corporation, BC Hydro. Today, although the valley continues to support

But tomorrow could look very different. BC is vegetable deficient - we import 57 percent of the vegetables we consume that could be produced locally. With major supply regions (e.g. California) facing drought, soil erosion, reduced soil fertility, water alienation and higher transportation costs, the price of imported vegetables can only rise. Add to this population growth (more mouths chasing a dwindling food supply), and the gravity of policy concern becomes poignant. In the past twelve months alone, the prices of fresh vegetables to Canadian consumers spiked by 9.4% (StatsCan).

According to area residents, an emergent water rush is rivalling the gold rush in its intensity; “everyone and their dog” are applying for licenses. The bad news for Canada is that if American investors are involved, full NAFTA rights apply to each and every water license issued.

Coincidentally, Site C Dam is also smack where it belongs to support the Kuiper, NAWAPA and Grand Prairie schemes for continental water sharing. As water becomes scarce, the ridiculous becomes profitable. And deliverable by governments who - bereft of ideas - are busily trading off the commons for a handful of jobs.

CBC’s The Current recently ran a series on the link between poverty and health that found when families don’t have enough income to put nutrition on the table, health suffers. And the most important years are childhood.

Already, people in the northern regions of our province pay four times what the average British Columbian does for their food supply. Already, BC has the highest rate of child poverty in Canada. Fresh fruits and vegetables are the building blocks of nutrition. Only fruits and vegetables are fruits and vegetables. The Peace River Valley is the only area for large-scale horticulture expansion in the province.

Until very recently, BC Hydro’s ability to proceed with Site C absent the blessing of the provincial Agricultural Land Commission was anything but clear. With spring passage of Bill 24 creating a two-zoned ALR (Site C conveniently falls in Zone 2), any jurisdictional questions were swept away like last night’s rubber chicken.

And it’s not like Site C makes energy sense. BC’s power mavens have already predicted that even if the project came in “on budget” (unlikely), Site C’s over-priced power - three to four times today’s rates - would drown BC Hydro (and BC taxpayers) in red ink, triggering demands for privatization. Perhaps the agenda all along.

Why is the BC government pushing this project so hard? If you look more closely, you will see it just may be about the water itself. If food is the new gold, water is indeed the new platinum...

Site C sits directly over the Montney Shale Formation - the largest shale gas deposit in Brit-

This liquidation of resources belonging to tomorrow to fill the pockets of investors today is unconscionable public policy and governments know better. Natural capital laid down over millennia is not for the present to withdraw - we are meant to live off its interest (crops) and reinvest thought good stewardship to grow the legacy for the future. The value of carbon stored in the Peace River Watershed was recently estimated by Suzuki Foundation to be over \$8 billion a year. And this doesn’t include agricultural values: food, nutrition, health, sustainability, food security and resilience.

Food forever? Or fracking for export? Should be a no-brainer. Which sadly, in these times, offers little hope. We need to halt this process before the slope becomes so slippery we cannot recover, engage the public in discussion, and give government their marching orders.

Watch this one closely. (Wendy Holm is a prize-winning Agrologist and farm columnist living on Bowen Island at www.wendyholm.com. Last January, Holm provided expert testimony before the Joint CEAA /EAO Panel regarding the economic impact of BC Hydro’s proposed Site C dam on agriculture. Copies of her written and oral presentations to the Panel are posted on her website.

There is a storm brewing in BC’s Peace River Valley that has implications for farmers across Canada. It’s about fracking versus food. And holding government to account for sustainable public policy.

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