

ECONEWS #188

A monthly newsletter funded by your donations that dreams of a world blessed by the harmony of nature, the pleasures of community, and the joys of personal fulfillment, guided and protected by our active citizenship.

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WELCOME TO 2009!

My apologies to all who wondered what happened to the January issue – it never happened! My body took over the controls for a week, and used the nearest available bug to tell my mind to switch off and lie down. Thankyou, body!

And welcome, Barack Obama, 44th President of the USA! What a difference, and so long overdue. It was great to see #43 flying off into the sunset. The whole world feels like a different place.

WIND ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Who would have thought it? Picture every on-road vehicle in the US, light and heavy-duty – and picture them being powered by electricity from the wind. How many turbines would be needed, and how much space?

In 2008, Mark Jacobson, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Stanford, looked at eleven possible energy sources – wind, solar PV, solar thermal, geothermal, hydroelectric, tidal, wave, nuclear, coal with carbon capture, corn ethanol, and cellulosic ethanol (85% flex-fuel mixes). For each technology, he compared their resource abundance, life-cycle CO2 emissions, deaths from air pollution, land and water needed, effects on wildlife and the environment, reliability, and ability to reduce CO2. He weighted each factor, and produced a final result ...

Worst were corn ethanol and cellulosic ethanol, because of the vast land areas needed, high CO2 emissions, and premature deaths from air pollution. Next worst were nuclear and carbon-captured coal, due to their low CO2 reductions, high mortality rates, and continued air pollution – the very technologies the federal government is supporting.

And the Oscar goes to... wind energy, in a runaway victory. The number of 5 MW wind turbines needed to power all US on-road vehicles is 73,000 to 144,000 - less than the 300,000 airplanes that the US produced during World War II. By powering all vehicles this way, CO2 would be reduced by 32%, and 15,000 people would not die from air pollution. The total land needed for their footprints is between 1 and 3 square kilometres. Yes – that's all. When the land for turbine spacing is included, it increases to 0.35%-0.7% of US land - and farming and wildlife can coexist in the spaces. Some turbines can also be ocean-based. Corn ethanol, by contrast, needed 10-18% of all US land, and cellulosic ethanol 4-35%. Solar PV, which came in second, needed less than 0.18% of the land. To read Mark's paper, see www.tinyurl.com/6pedz3.

ETHICAL INVESTING

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SMALL GREEN STEPS

How can one small municipality tackle climate change? Oak Bay established a Climate Action Task Force in 2007 as part of its commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which issued its report in March 2008 (see www.tinyurl.com/bn7tqo). Since then...

* Oak Bay has changed its bylaws to allow residents to grow and sell produce locally. Small-scale urban farming and pocket markets are allowed, and they've loosened the controls on raising chickens. The bylaws have also been strengthened to protect more trees.

Oak Bay was the first municipality in BC to permit neighbourhood electric vehicles. More bike lanes have been installed, and new bike shelters built. The building department has a Smart Car and the Police Department is acquiring a hybrid patrol vehicle.

* Zoning bylaws have been changed to encourage home renovation rather than demolition; when an owner must bring a house down, the bylaws encourage deconstruction and re-use rather than demolition and landfilling. A task force is also reviewing restrictions on secondary suites.

* Oak Bay has signed the province's Climate Change Charter that commits it to be carbon neutral in its operations by 2012. All big things start in small ways – and Oak Bay has made a great start. (Thanks to Nils Jensen).

MAY THE TWELTH

This spring, on Tuesday 12th of May, there will be a provincial election. At the same time, we will be invited to vote on something of enormous significance. On May 12th, all BC voters will be asked this question: "Which electoral system should British Columbia use to elect members to the provincial legislative assembly? The existing electoral system (first past the post) or the single transferable vote system (STV) proposed by the Citizen's Assembly on Electoral Reform?"

The government has given \$500,000 to each of two groups, one in favour (BC-STV), and one against (No STV), and the campaign began on February 1st.

I am very clear. Our "first past the post" system of voting is archaic, dysfunctional, and undemocratic. It deprives most people of their right to be represented by an MLA of their choice, and creates 'majority' governments which are supported by only 35% of the voters – like the current government in

Ottawa which is opposed by 64% of Canadians. The Single Transferable Vote gives us a far more open, democratic choice, which we will soon get used to. Some 80 countries worldwide already use some form of proportional voting. Over the next three months, EcoNews will focus on the importance of the vote, and the merits of STV. In 2005, after studying different systems of voting for many long months, 95% of the randomly selected members of BC's Citizens Assembly on Electoral Reform voted to recommend STV to their fellow citizens. 58% of the voters said "Yes", but the bar had been set at 60%. It has been set at 60% again, so we will need wide support across the province to win. To learn more, go to www.stv.ca.

URBAN RAIN CATCHERS

Freya Keddie writes: Victoria's storm sewers are in bad shape. What better time to look at alternatives to traditional "big pipe" stormwater methods? Homeowners could be given incentives to manage rainwater on their properties, or to slow the flow of stormwater by using rain barrels and raingardens. Many public utilities have begun to use natural techniques to reduce the rate and volume of runoff. Seattle Public Utilities found that its Natural Drainage Systems can cost 15-25% less than the traditional sidewalks, curbs, gutters, and catch basins, and may increase the property values in retrofitted neighbourhoods. And because natural stormwater management is so visible, rather than hidden in pipes, it increases our awareness of water conservation and stormwater, strengthening support for innovation in the public sector. To learn more, see Freya's great website www.UrbanRainCatchersGazette.ca

VICTORIA'S URBAN FOREST

Victoria has over 40,000 trees in its parks and boulevards, but many are nearing the end of their life. So the City is developing a new Urban Forest Master Plan – and they want to hear from you by Monday February 9th. What kind of urban forest should Victoria grow? Do you want more fruit and nut trees? Should the city use natural stormwater techniques and raingardens to nourish them? How about an avenue of apple trees, as the Japanese city of Iida planted in 1947? Cared for by Higashi Middle School students, the street is a place of joy, and the city celebrates Apple Festival each August. The on-line survey is here: www.tinyurl.com/awev2v

MISERABLE CHICKENS

You see them in quiet, rural areas – those large white sheds that seem devoid of activity. But sometimes, their metallic walls hide a pit of suffering, housing chickens crammed into cages with 17,000 other birds. If the eggs you buy are not free range, this is how their mother hens live. In 2003, 26 million Canadian birds lived and died this way. In Britain, Sainsbury's (one of the Big Four supermarkets) has announced that starting on Feb 5th it will only sell eggs from uncaged birds, causing 500,000 chickens a week to be removed from their cages. That leaves 85% of Britain's chickens in cramped and desolate hell, but the movement to free them has started. The European Union is ending the use of conventional battery cages by 2012. In Switzerland, they have been banned since 1992. Why are Canadians so slow and uncaring? We keep five happy free-range hens who sure enjoy their freedom. See www.chickenout.ca, where the Vancouver Humane Society is campaigning to end this cruelty.



GO SOLAR – NOW!

In China, 40 million households enjoy the use of solar hot water – so why don't we? We've got just as good sunshine. A good system can reduce the energy needed to heat your water by 60%. If you have ever pondered going solar, now would be a very good time because SolarBC, a project of the BC Sustainable Energy Association, is offering subsidies up to \$1,625 for 2,000 installations (including \$150 for a LiveSmart BC energy assessment) thanks to support from the federal and provincial governments. And right now, there are two additional incentives: If a group of 20 or more place their orders together they will each receive an additional \$375 – friends, neighbours, members of the same non-profit society. (Call Patrick Chenier at 250-386-0832

to join the Solar Buying Group). The first 100 installations will also be entered into a draw, and two lucky winners will win a 100% refund of their costs. Developers and builders of new homes can get incentives up to \$1,375. The new federal \$1,350 home tax credit may also apply. There's also fixed rate 3.5% financing available from TD Canada Trust in exchange for a reduced \$300 incentive, if that works better for you. Don't delay – go solar today! See www.solarbc.ca. Tel 1-866-650-6527

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MY JOURNEY TO 2030

Do you ever wonder what life might be like in the 2030 if we succeed in eliminating our carbon emissions and use of fossil fuels? *My Journey to 2030* is a half-hour fictional trip to that future, written as a story. It is published on my new blog at www.guydauncey.com – just scroll down until you get to it. And enjoy! I will be expanding the story into a larger fictional work this spring.

ACTIONS OF THE MONTH

(1) THE CONSERVATIVES

Stephen Harper has cut the funding to ecoEnergy for Renewable Power, which supports wind and other renewable energy with 1 cent per kWh. (In the US, Obama has just renewed their support of 1.5 cents kWh for 4 years.) This will cost Canada \$600 million, leverage over \$6 billion in private sector investment, create 8,000 jobs, and help the Tories reach their commitment of providing 90% of Canada's electricity from renewables by 2020.

Action: Write to Office of the Prime Minister, 80 Wellington Street, Ottawa K1A 0A2 Email: pm@pm.gc.ca

(2) THE LIBERALS

The Liberals seem to have lost sight of the road to sustainability, and the urgency of taking it. (See Editorial)

Action: Write to Michael Ignatieff, and urge the Liberals to require far more from the Conservatives, or bring them down and form a coalition government. Room 435-S, Centre Block, House of Commons, Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6 Email: Ignatieff.M@parl.gc.ca