

ECONEWS #199

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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THE ECO-PERSONALS

\$1 a word. Max 5 lines, non-profits, low-income free. 1" box ad \$50

* **Lovely room to rent**, close to ocean, downtown, \$30/night, 250-382-3810.

* **For rent:** New legal suite in "green" house. Centrally located. Loaded with features. 250-386-3886.

* **Wanted** - might you be a potential board member for City Green? We're an enterprising non-profit dedicated to improving the energy efficiency of BC's homes and buildings. See www.citygreen.ca/volunteer-opportunities for details.

* **Seeking conservation-minded buyer** for very special 2+ acres (Gulf Islands). Contact Greg Rowland at Holmes Realty 877-656-0911 or 250-656-0911 greg@gregrowland.ca TLC Members advantage: Donation of 25% of Commission Fees.

* **For sale:** 3 bedroom home at Creekside Co-housing in Courtenay. See: www.creeksidecommons.ca

MADRONA FARM

Last month, Madrona Farm in Victoria's Blenkinsop Valley needed \$800,000 by mid-January to guarantee the farm's preservation as a working organic farm and centre for farming sustainability. When we told the story, we mentioned Ed Johnston's generous offer to donate \$200,000 if someone else would match his offer. Well, it happened! Mel McDonald, a long-time EcoNews reader and supporter, tuned

into his celestial angels, who said "Absolutely, unconditionally, yes". So he picked up the phone to Bill Turner, and matched the \$200,000 donation. *Thankyou*, Ed and Mel! The property owners have granted a 60-day extension, so the new deadline is March 15th for the final \$287,000 - and much is coming in small donations, so they DO matter. If you can help, you can do so on-line at www.madronafarm.com, or by mail to The Land Conservancy (marked for Madrona Farm), 301 - 1195 Esquimalt Rd, Victoria V9A 3N6. Since 1997, TLC has protected almost 120,000 acres of sensitive and threatened lands in 300 projects, and grown to include over 7,000 members.

SEEDY SATURDAY!

Launch the garden! This is the time of year when everyone who wants to grow more food comes out from hibernation, and hoofs it to the nearest Seedy Saturday - the great community gatherings where you can buy local organic seeds, listen to speakers, and tune into everything you want for the season ahead. Seeds are such amazing things. One tiny seed can turn into a gorgeous plant full of tomatoes, while another, that looks almost identical, can turn into a cabbage. 350 million years - that's how long seed-bearing plants have been evolving to offer us their gifts. Without them, what would we be?



On the Island, Seedy Saturdays are happening in Victoria, Sooke, Salt Spring, Cobble Hill, Duncan, Nanaimo, Qualicum, Courtenay and Denman. Don't miss out!

REGIONAL GROWTH

Our Island's population is growing because people want to come and live here, but if we try to stop it the pressure on housing will drive prices higher, making it even harder for people on lower incomes to find a place to live. We need to accommodate growth, but we need to do so ideally by building zero-carbon homes in complete

community ecovillage clusters, and infilling the low density areas in our existing urban form. To many local developers, however, all that farmland looks enticingly attractive. What should our regional growth strategy look like? On Thur February 4th, the CRD is holding an open house and presentation on just this topic, to help us understand what's happening, and become more engaged. See Green Diary.

VANTREIGHT FARMS

On the Saanich Peninsula, meanwhile, Vantreight Farms (where the daffodils grow) wants to take a forest knoll surrounded by fields at 8410 Wallace Drive, clear 65% of it, and turn it into housing development, claiming that the 89 townhouses, duplexes and single family dwelling will be "rural". The plan is in direct contradiction to Central Saanich's regional context statement, but the council is claiming that since the suburban development is "rural", it does not breach the urban containment boundary, put there by the Regional Growth Strategy to prevent developments like this. Farmland needs forest buffers for the birds, insects and wildlife that help farms flourish. Vantreight Farms is in the process of going organic on 2% of its land (15 out of 750 acres), but unless the fields that surround the hilltop are also farmed organically, the people and children who live there will be at high risk of being poisoned by drift from chemical pesticides and/or herbicides.

Vantreight Farms has been farming on the Saanich peninsula since 1884, and is facing a tough financial challenge resulting from feuding between the two sons following the death of their father. Ian Vantreight has many plans to make his whole farming operation more sustainable, so it's easy to feel sympathy. But is this the right place to pack in the housing? And what signal will it send to other developers if they can simply label their projects "rural", and claim that they don't offend the urban containment boundary that has been put there to stop urban sprawl? It's a very hot topic right now. In Europe, rural areas are dotted with villages often smaller than this - but they come complete with their own economies, stores, and meeting places - they're not just a bunch of houses dumped at the end of a road.

For details of the Vantreight Hill Project plan, see www.daffodil.com. For the arguments against, see www.saveourruraland.blogspot.com. To send your views, write to Central Saanich Mayor & Council, 1903 Mount Newton Cross Roads, Saanichton V8M 2A9 municipalhall@csaanich.ca

SOLAR HOT WATER

It is possible that February may see the launch of a unique extra incentive for solar hot water systems in BC, with an additional \$1,000 available in support. This may be a time-limited "once only" opportunity, however, limited to 200 buyers, and with a March 31st deadline for actual installation. So if you've been wondering about solar hot water, but not yet taken the plunge, now would be a very smart time to do so. There are 27 solar hot water companies registered for the SolarBC program, so there's good choice, but you'll need to move quickly to get through the hoops.

Step 1: Check that your home has good solar potential. If the roof gets good sun, that's basically all you need. You can also use www.solarrating.ca for a free d-i-y solar evaluation.

Step 2: Learn about the SolarBC program by taking 15' to explore it here: www.solarbc.ca/install/households

Step 3: Think about getting an energy assessment done on your home - go to CityGreen.ca (1-866-381-9995) or see the full listing at <http://bit.ly/9BjCA3>. It'll cost \$150, and give you a Home Energy Rating, guidance on how to improve its efficiency, and open the door to an additional \$1,250 on top of the SolarBC rebate, plus up to \$5,000 in grants for other green retrofit projects.

Step 4: Look at photos to get a sense of what's available in BC - see www.flickr.com/photos/solarbc. Read case studies from people who have installed solar hot water at www.solarbc.ca/learn/case-studies, and study the choice of systems at www.solarbc.ca/learn/systems.

Step 5: Learn about the average cost of a system (\$6,800), and how the available grants can reduce this by up to \$2,375 - or \$3,375 if the additional time-limited incentive is put in place. If you've not got cash in hand, learn about SolarBC Low-Interest Financing, and how some of the incentives can be converted into a zero-interest loan, with monthly repayments over 5 years. See www.solarbc.ca/learn/incentives-costs

Step 6: You're now ready to pick up the phone, call a registered installer, and talk to them. They'll come out to your house and give you a quote. There's a list at www.solarbc.ca/learn/installers

Step 7: Decide! From this point on, your installer will look after the details, and you'll soon be enjoying water heated directly by the sun. Then you can submit your story to the SolarBC website, so that others can benefit too. But don't delay - these steps take time, and the time-limited offer may expire on March 31st.



CYCLING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Are you young, and yearning for a great adventure that will help change the world? The Otesha Project is a youth led charitable organization that mobilizes and equips Canadians to create local and global change through individual and collective choices. Their vision is to see sustainable consumption and lifestyle choices enter the mainstream of Canadian culture.

They do it by undertaking major long-distance cycling tours and presenting educational programs in the communities they visit using theatre, experiential activities, and storytelling. To date, they have reached over 100,000 people and trained over 300 sustainability advocates. This year they have three tours: A Farm Tour Ottawa to Toronto (May/June); Vancouver to Ottawa (June/Oct); and Fredericton to Halifax (Sept/Nov). If your heart says "Why not?" the time to apply is now. See www.otesha.ca

CLIMATE DENIAL INDUSTRY

More post-Copenhagen thoughts, when everyone is feeling the hurt of failure. We know the technologies and lifestyle changes that can achieve a zero-carbon, climate-friendly world. We also know what the best policies are. I've written about them all in *The Climate Challenge: 101 Solutions to Global Warming*. What we lack is the political leadership to press ahead, and that's

because we lack the public support - and *that*, my friends, is because the climate denial industry has done such an effective job in encouraging doubt and skepticism, funneling millions of dollars to right-wing think tanks whose supporters *hate* the idea that Al Gore and his environmental friends might be right.

The International Energy Agency has just announced that every year of delayed action to address climate change is adding \$500 billion to the price tag of saving the planet - and all because of the well-organized climate denial industry.

How do we stop it? One possibility is a worldwide boycott of ExxonMobil, and every Esso and Mobil gas station. They are the only major oil company that denies the urgency of global warming and funds global warming skeptics. There's a campaign at www.exxposeexxon.com, but it has not been updated since 2007. It was the boycotts that helped end Apartheid in South Africa - maybe they can make the difference now, as well?

ACTION OF THE MONTH

ROYAL BANK OF TAR SANDS

The Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) has been operating since 1864, and it works hard on a number of environmental fronts, making climate change, forestry, biodiversity, indigenous peoples and water its priority environmental issues. (See www.rbc.com/environment).

It is also the leading financier of companies that extract oil from the Alberta tar sands, however. According to Bloomberg's, just since 2007 it has backed \$14.3 billion (USD) in credit to a host of tar sands companies. During the Vancouver Olympics, for which RBC is a sponsor, the Rainforest Action Network is organizing a campaign to draw public awareness to the RBC's role, and at <http://ran.org/tarsands> you can download a petition and leaflets to distribute at Royal Bank of Canada branches, asking them to take a pledge to stop financing the tar sands.

Action: Write to Gordon Nixon, CEO of RBC, 200 Bay Street, P.O. Box 1, Royal Bank Plaza, Toronto, M5J 2J5, urging his bank to stop financing the tar sands companies.

PS You can also join the Facebook Campaign www.facebook.com/tarsands and see www.tarsandswatch.org.