ECONEWS #207

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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* **Have a Green Birthday Party** at the Greater Victoria Compost Education Centre! On-site children's birthday parties offer a fun and exciting atmosphere, while promoting sustainable living. Prices vary. outreach@compost.bc.ca 250-386-9676.

* **EcoNews needs envelopes!** Do you have unused regular letter-sized envelopes? Call Guy 250-881-1304.

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ENERGY EFFICIENT TELEVISION

Sometimes, changing the world means changing 100 little things. Each might seem minor, but taken together, they add up. BC Hydro is working to meet 66% of BC's new power demand by greater efficiency, and among other things they are looking at televisions, with a request for public response during November. TVs are getting grander and more glamorous. The way things are going, friends may soon mock if your TV is not as big as your emperor sized bed.

It's not the standby (phantom) power - most TVs draw less than 1 watt when switched off. It's the power they use when they're on. The average new plasma screen TV draws 300 watts - 2-3 times more than liquid crystal display (LCD), and the bigger they are, the more they use. The most efficient LCDs use LED lighting, and draw 100 watts.

California is working to make all TVs more efficient, in the face of stiff industry opposition. BC wants to copy California's regulations, and is seeking our thoughts on two matters: (1) should we bring in the new more efficient standards by January 2012, or wait until January 2013? And (2) should we eliminate California's special exemption for large screen TVs over 58 inches in size? I wonder who lobbied for that one - was it the Hollywood Screen Writers Guild, or the Emperor-sized Beds TV Watchers Association? I would answer "yes" to both. If you want to share your thoughts, write to Erik Kaye, Senior Policy Advisor Energy Efficiency, Ministry of Energy. 250-356-1507 Erik.Kaye@gov.bc.ca

ARCTIC WARMING

The temperature is rising again in the Arctic, after a slowdown in 2009. In the first half of 2010, monthly temperatures in northern Canada were 4°C above normal; by the end of September, the summer sea ice cover had fallen to the third lowest level on record. Three of the smallest ice covers have occurred in the last 4 years. Makes you think, eh?

Last year, the winter snow accumulation on land in the Arctic was the lowest since records began in 1966; Arctic glaciers and ice-caps continue to lose mass; and Greenland had record-setting temperatures. The more the ice melts, the more the dark water surface is exposed, and the more heat is absorbed into the ocean instead of being reflected away by the ice.

Last winter was terrible in the North-east and Mid-Atlantic US states - and climate deniers seized on this as evidence that global warming was a myth. Now we learn that the massive snowstorms were connected to the higher Arctic temperatures. The winds that normally blow west to east across the Arctic were instead bringing the colder air south. The more sea-ice we lose, the more these winter storm may occur. (NOAA). Global warming is not letting up, and nor must we.

SOLAR HOT WATER, ANYONE?

Winter is coming, but the Sun still shines, giving us the ability to use its energy to heat our water. For the past three years, the BC Sustainable Energy Association has been running SolarBC, which among other activities has offered a $2,000 incentive towards the purchase of a solar hot water system, reducing the price from average $7,000 to $5,000. The incentive ends on December 31st, so this is the LAST CALL if you want to make the most of it. Your system must be *installed* by December 31st, so if you want to act, do so now. See www.solarbc.ca, and there's a solar hot water workshop in Victoria on November 18th (see Green Diary).

A CRD BIOSPHERE RESERVE?

It's a very unusual thought - but the more I think about it, the better it seems. A United Nations Biosphere Reserve is a designation given to a select number of places to demonstrate a balanced relationship between humanity and nature. The designation bring status, and funding that can help the integration of conservation, sustainable development and scientific research to manage the ecosystems within the Biosphere.

It's unusual, because while much of the CRD is rural or forested, much is also built up and suburbanized - but that's precisely why it's such a good idea. How can the world be sustainable, unless we run our lives in a sustainable manner?

UVic's Environmental Law Centre is holding the ball for this great new idea, and there's a public meeting to float the idea and seek support at UVic on Tuesday, Nov 23rd (see Diary).

UPLANDS PARK

On the east side of Oak Bay there's a Garry oak woodland that would be a jewel in any Biosphere Reserve. It's Uplands Park, and it's about to get the stewardship it has always needed through the formation of the Friends of Uplands Park, led by Margaret Lidkea and Kathleen Matthews. Their goals include research & education

pertaining to all aspects of this jewel, practical restoration activities, and events, art, poems, photography and songs inspired by the Park. If you've never been there - go! You can park at Cattle Point, and walk in. If you want to become a Friend, there's a meeting on Nov 9th.

THE COMMUTERS' DILEMMA

Road congestion is getting worse, and some people believe the answer is to widen the highway, or eliminate a set of traffic lights by building a bridge. Time and again, evidence shows that the easier it is to drive, the more people will do so. Shave 15 minutes off a commute, and people will buy a house 15 minutes further out. "Look - now we can commute to Victoria from Ladysmith!"

BC Transit is grappling with the problem, and has firmly embraced the need for rapid transit - a frequent, high-capacity service that runs all day, every day from the West Shore to downtown Victoria. But should it be Light Rail Transit, or Bus Rapid Transit? That's a big decision, and now is the time to join the discussion and share your views - see www.transitbc.com/vrrt/community.cfm. BC Transit is seeking your thoughts, either directly or by contacting a member of the Community Liaison Committee.

THE FOOD DILEMMA

Everyone (well, mostly everyone) nods their heads in agreement at the sustainability thing. But how sustainable is it to import 95% of the food we eat on Vancouver Island? When the average farmer is approaching 60, and hoping to retire soon - but young people who want to farm can't find land to farm on? Meanwhile, the average bite of food travels 2,500 kilometres, burning fossil fuels and congesting the roads all the way. These are big questions we must address.

* Could young organic growers be allowed to lease land from older farmers and build mobile homes they can live in, as long as they farm the land?
* Could owners of Agricultural Land Reserve land be required to grow food on 10% of it as a condition of zoning, as opposed to hay or hobby-horses?
* Could government ministries, municipalities, schools, universities, hospitals, churches, businesses, hotels and restaurants make a public commitment to buy local food from Island farms?
* Could supermarkets be ranked and rewarded for their commitment to offer food from Island Farms?
* Could urban farmers grow surplus food for market, pooling their surplus for sale at farmers' markets?
* Could home-based business by-laws be changed to allow people to sell surplus food through local street stalls?
* Could food products in supermarkets be encouraged to carry a carbon footprint logo, showing how much carbon has been released per gram or per litre - as the UK supermarket Tesco has committed to do on all 70,000 of its products? Wholemeal loaf- 1.3 kg CO2. 1 kg of beef - 36 kg of CO2.
* Could city streets, parks and boulevards be re-designed to provide more space to grow food?

We need many more proposals like this to help us meet a target of growing 50% of our food on the Island by 2020.

There are two opportunities to explore solutions this month. On Sat Nov 6th, the Island Farmers Alliance is devoting a day to the quest for answers, and on Sat Nov 27th, the District of North Saanich is doing the same, both for its 1226 hectares of farmed land and to encourage more local families to grow more food. (See Green Diary)

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Individuals, Couples, Families
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SPECULATING IN FOOD

One of the worst aspects of the global food market is the way food is used as a commodity by investors and speculators. Having a futures market helps farmers to hedge their bets, and create financial stability. Having people speculate on that market, however, as if the food was a chip in a casino, is cruel, unethical and disastrous. Between 2003 and 2008, institutional investors such as pension funds and university endowments increased their investments in commodities futures from $13 billion to $260 billion - a 20-fold increase. This drove up the price of 25 basic food commodities by 183%, and (by UN estimates) drove 130 million people to hunger - that's four times the population of Canada, all hungry because of speculation. In Kenya, the price of maize more than doubled - so people had to cut back on education, health care, and food. Kenya was forced to declare a national state of emergency, and introduce free school meals to all children in school.

In response to this and all the other financial craziness, a new alliance has formed. Americans for Financial Reform is an unprecedented coalition of 250 national, state and local groups who have come together to reform the financial industry, including consumer, civil rights, investor, retiree, community, labor, social justice, religious and business groups, and Nobel prize-winning economists. They are tackling multiple agendas, but on this one, they set three priorities to be included in the Wall Street Reform Act: to create transparency by requiring all trades to go through exchanges and clearing houses; to establish limits on how much a trader can hold in any one commodity; and to aggregate the limits across all the different markets (wheat, oats, etc).

Despite millions of dollars of Wall Street lobbying, they won on all three points, plus winning additional authority for the Commodity Futures Trading Commission to prosecute fraud and manipulation when it occurs. They are now pursuing three new food commodity-related goals: first, to ensure that the financial reform law is not watered down in implementation; second, to support a bill that will end the tax exemption that financial institutions currently enjoy on money made in the commodity markets (how did *that* ever come about?); and third, to run a campaign to encourage pension funds and similar investors to pull their investments out of commodities, and stop gambling on hunger. This is truly important work, backed by the Obama administration. For too long, they say, the rules of Wall Street have been written by the bankers on Wall Street themselves - and that had to change. For more, see www.ourfinancialsecurity.org
(Thanks to the World Development Movement in the UK for this story).