



SIERRA
CLUB
ONTARIO

One Earth. One Chance.

Summer 2009

Sanctuary

Our Mission: To protect and restore the health of the natural environment, including human communities, by empowering the membership and citizenry through education, advocacy, action, and outdoor adventures.

NO GOING HOME: A *CANADIAN NIGHTMARE*

Exposure to toxins results in an impact to health and welfare, and today, my life is proof of that fact. I would like to recount my experiences to you; however, it will have to be done over time, as mine is a long story, currently without end.

To begin, I must explain the phenomenon that is called vapour intrusion (VI). This occurs when vapours from volatile organic compounds percolate up from the subsurface, through soil and into the structures

and buildings above. Its source can be contaminated groundwater or soil, buried wastes or leaking underground storage tanks. VI especially affects the more sensitive receptors in our communities: children, expectant mothers, the elderly and neighbours and friends who already suffer from ill health.

The theory behind this phenomenon has been understood for decades by our scientific leaders, but its risks to the public have been terribly underestimated. This shortcoming has left far too many citizens in

numerous communities across Canada vulnerable to its harmful and devastating health effects. As some of the deadliest of these vapours are odourless, or have the powers to desensitize, exposure can go on for years, until someone discovers "the plume."

This is what happened to me, and to the other residents of the Bishop Street Community in Cambridge, Ontario. Our poison is trichloroethylene (TCE), a solvent that has been abused by many an industry over the past 50 years. Today a plume lies beneath the Bishop Street Community, and it has been there for well over a decade.

In the beginning, I was like everyone else, looking to the Ministry of the Environment, the Public Health Department, our MP and MPP, the municipality and even the media for help. They all seemed sympathetic at first, but for me there were too many questions that were not being answered, and the more I asked them, the less they wanted to hear from me. I felt as though I, and my neighbours, were being swept under a big political carpet, away from the public's eye. The struggles we endured as a community must come at another date, but I will say that today I am free of the trap of demanding answers.

I was shocked to discover that the

Ministry of the Environment has no clear standards in place to evaluate acceptable levels of VI in a residential structure. They rely on the polluter to develop site-specific remedial plans with "company-researched" standards. I was horrified; our welfare, along with our children's, was nothing more than collateral damage to be dealt with by that same polluter whose focus seemed more on costs than public health.

As new data shows that TCE may be as much as 40 times more carcinogenic than previously considered, my concerns about the effects of the chronic low-level exposure endured by our neighbourhood propelled me to do a survey of a block radius around my home. No one seemed untouched. I found an alarmingly high number (70) of residents experiencing symptoms, including children with brain tumours, adults with brain tumours, others with multiple cancers, neuropathy, Parkinsonism and kidney and liver disease. According to the new data, these are all likely effects of TCE poisoning.

I was seriously disturbed by the lack of desire of "the system" to deal with the realities of public health in situations of contamination. It was as though we were the proverbial hot potato midway between the Ministry of the Environment and Public Health. The courts >>> **page 4**



Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

We greet you with the season end edition of *Sanctuary* as we transition into autumn.

Our cover story discusses an ongoing community contamination issue, representing the first-hand experience of resident Debbie Vitez in Cambridge, Ontario.

Other content includes various green-themed pieces, including a column on green businesses by Philip Shyu (page 4) and an article about bolstering the protection for Rouge Park by Bernadette Zubrisky (page 7). Please read on for pieces by our other regular

contributors.

You'll note on page 6 a reminder about receiving paper copies of *Sanctuary*. Unless hard copies are requested, we are solely providing this newsletter in electronic form.

Many thanks to our diligent Editorial Assistants Jean Coburn-White, Theo Selles and Kat Tancock.

Best wishes for the autumn,

Debbie Komlos

How to Submit to *Sanctuary*

While it is the intent of *Sanctuary* to print articles that reflect the position of the Ontario Chapter, ideas expressed in *Sanctuary* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Sierra Club. Articles, graphics and photographs are copyrighted by the authors and artists and may be reprinted only with their permission.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS

All materials for publication in the **Fall 2009** issue must be received by the following deadline: **November 5, 2009**

SUBMISSIONS FORMAT

Please limit articles to 800 words; letters to 300. All submissions may be edited for clarity and length. Submit via e-mail and save files as "text."

WHERE TO SEND SUBMISSIONS

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CHAPTER & GROUP MEETINGS: All Chapter Executive Committee teleconference meetings are open to all members. Contact our Chapter office to find out how to attend. If you are interested in attending any other Chapter committee or local Group meeting, please contact the appropriate leader or call the Chapter office for more information.

CAN THE SIERRA CLUB HELP MAKE CANADA A GREEN "ECONOMIC TIGER?"

About a generation ago small, resource-poor Singapore evolved into an "economic tiger" after it decided to become a world centre of excellence for high-tech research and development. At the time, as some of you may remember, their plan was laughed at by many of the world's economists and established technology players. The region's resulting economic success proved that Singapore's forward-thinking leaders were right: Bold action can make a difference even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Step into today's Canada and listen to John Baird's reasons about why we cannot possibly embrace sustainability. "It will kill our economy," the pundits parrot. "The last reduction of carbon emissions on the scale required to make a difference," quote some, "was when the Soviet Union collapsed."

Get their meta-message? Carbon reduction equals economic and social collapse, you tree-hugging fools. Of course, they are tragically wrong but that doesn't matter. Resource industries will dominate policy-making and business leaders from that sector will retire wealthy, develop a green conscience, and be heard saying in documentaries how they knew it all along and did the best they could to change the system from within. So it goes.

What many don't understand is that the green revolution is more than just a social trend: it is a disruptive technological trend too. What does that mean? Like the early days of high-tech, when Singapore looked into the future and saw it

was computer-based, many entrepreneurs and investors around the globe are looking forward and seeing the economic opportunity in being green. In fact, many argue that sustainable technology is the greatest economic opportunity the world has ever seen.

What are our leaders doing when faced with this brilliant opportunity? Right now they are saying we can't go forward. We have to maintain the status quo. Economic peril awaits us if we try to be green before anyone else. In other words, they are hiding behind the systemic forces of the quarterly report—GM will suffer if we act on this. The irony of recent events is probably wasted on our politicians.

WHAT MANY DON'T UNDERSTAND IS THAT THE GREEN REVOLUTION IS MORE THAN JUST A SOCIAL TREND: IT IS A DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGICAL TREND TOO.

In some ways they are right to be afraid of change. Sizing up new markets is risky. They might make a mistake. But what is there to lose, dirty air? We all know that the oil boom has only another generation or so before it collapses. There is only so much Alberta soil to dig up and boil before the whole province won't be

worth a dime.

What comes after that? Who will emerge as the dominant players on the world's green economy? If we act now, Ontario and Canada could build a green economic engine the likes of which we can only imagine. But we have to risk change and embrace innovation and all the uncertainty that comes with those things. Who will lead us into the future? What groups or organizations have the wherewithal and fearlessness to carve a trail to a new economy?

One of those leaders has to be the Sierra Club. Our members come from all parts of the cultural and business spectrum. We have lawyers, entrepreneurs, artists, musicians, doctors and truckers.

There are even a few politicians who grace our ranks. These are smart people who have the resources to change the world.

After all, of the many environmental organizations crowding the social responsibility landscape the Sierra Club has existed the longest. We have promoted the message of environmental stewardship across some 10 generations now, and learned to create new >>> page 4

Chapter Director's Column

Dan McDermott

ONTARIO TAKES A NUCLEAR TIME OUT

The hard work and persistence of Sierra Club and other anti-nuclear advocates is paying off. Years of campaigning to prevent the McGuinty government from replicating the nuclear mistakes of Ontario's past had not prevented the government from sticking with its determination to build new plants. Energy and Infrastructure Minister George Smitherman had set a firm deadline for tendering contracts to build new Ontario nukes. Then, in June, the government blinked. The nuclear decision was put on hold. As more information came forward it quickly became clear that this hesitation has a chance to become a permanent breakthrough.

The case against nuclear plants is a solid one. Nuclear power is simply the most dangerous and expensive means of generating electricity yet devised. Multi-billion dollar cost overruns, meaningless construction schedules, earlier than predicted breakdowns, radioactive leaks and deadly waste are the core of the global nuclear track record. Private capital won't build or run them without guaranteed government money and the insurance industry won't touch them. Despite this sorry record, Premier McGuinty had decided that electricity demand would continue to rise and that this demand must be met, whatever the cost.

The nuclear turnaround has resulted from multiple factors, the most crucial one being the current recession and its long-term impact. The sharp decline in Ontario's heavy industry sector has been accompanied by a similar drop in electricity demand. With new natural gas fired and renewable generation coming on line, Ontario now has an electricity oversupply. This is a far cry from the dire predictions of blackouts only a couple of years ago. Conservation is also playing a role. Ontario consumers have taken measurable steps to cut their home electricity use.

The Canadian nuclear establishment also unwittingly contributed to its own failure to close the Ontario deal. Adding to the longstanding record of mammoth cost overruns was a substantial insecurity as to the reliability and future of Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd. (AECL). AECL's record for producing high-cost reactors was well established. The company's effort to establish a >>> page 7

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THE MONEY TREE

SAVING MONEY & THE PLANET



Green Businesses on the Horizon

In the July 20, 2009, issue of *Canadian Business* magazine, I read a profile of Tim Haig, the CEO of BIOX Corporation, a business that I have been keeping tabs on for some time. BIOX is a company that licenses a proprietary technology developed and patented by a chemical engineering professor at the University of Toronto. This proprietary technology produces biodiesel on a continuous basis in industrial quantities.

Biodiesel is, as the name implies, diesel fuel derived from renewable organic resources. The article states that biodiesel produces 90% less greenhouse gases than its petroleum-based counterpart when it is used to run motor vehicles.

BIOX's pilot facility is located in Hamilton, Ontario, and since 2007 it has produced 60 million litres of biodiesel annually through the conversion of waste products such as animal fats and restaurant grease. The federal government has mandated that diesel must contain 2%

renewable content by no later than 2012. BIOX's Hamilton facility has demonstrated that it can make a positive operating margin. The obvious challenge is that the biodiesel technology is in its infancy, as compared to the very mature petrochemical industry.

For a frame of reference, I checked Statistics Canada's website to determine the total size of the diesel market in Canada by sales and, for 2008, it was 16.3 trillion litres (<http://www40.statcan.ca/01/cst01/trade37c-eng.htm>). That means that by government mandate, we must be selling at least 327 million litres of renewable diesel fuel by 2012. Clearly there are benefits to going beyond the minimum mandated by the government, but that is a frame of reference just to determine the market size for this company's products.

BIOX recently aborted an attempt to list on the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSE) due to a combination of factors, one of which included

the recent market downturn. BIOX CEO Tim Haig has not ruled out another attempt to list BIOX on the TSE, so this company is one to keep an eye on in the future.

I don't mean to sound like a flag waver, but Canadian scientists and businesspeople continue to be some of the most innovative in the world. It is very unfortunate that our venture capital industry is often too small to support our great fledgling technologies and companies and that our culture tends to reject many of these new ideas. But we as environmentalists and small investors must always look for ways to support our Canadian innovators in order to help our economy to also innovate and evolve. As with various species of life, our economy must also evolve and adapt or else perish.

Philip Shyu

>>> **from page 1 (No Going Home)** today are filled with such hot potatoes looking for a place to land. We had no control of our lives and no control of our homes. No one with authority wanted to listen; to them, we were cured—the levels were reduced, and that was the end of it. My questions regarding the cumulative effects of 10 years of exposure and the adequacy of the standards used have yet to be answered.

Through my struggles, I have come to the conclusion that Ontario's, and even Canada's, process to deal with residential contamination is severely inadequate. I was and still am determined to make our government leaders hear and listen to us. To date, I have given the public a forum to voice their concerns in *The Cambridge Advocate* (www.thecambridgeadvocate.com). I have commenced my struggles with the system and applied under the Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights to demand residential indoor air standards and a guideline for remedial efforts that would focus more on the health and welfare of the resident and less on the polluter and costs. I have also submitted a petition at the federal level asking that those standards be uniform across Canada, and to devise a better system to fill the needs of the contaminated community to be implemented equally across the country.

My account here is only a drop in the TCE bucket of my life. I have been upside down and down in the dirt too long, but you know—there are a lot of us here, and our perspectives on the reality of contamination are truer than what the system is allowed to see through its legislated blindness. Besides, I find I do my best work from here. I persevere.

Author: The voice of Debbie Vitez, Cambridge, Ontario, through the words of Magdalene Boilard



>>> **from page 3 (From the Chair)** tactics when change demanded them. Our resilient internal culture was forged through hundreds of campaigns and the actions of tens of thousands of committed people driven to ensure the natural world they enjoy remains intact for their children's children.

How do we proceed? I am looking for ideas from people who think they know how to create the massive change—if I can borrow a line from my friend Bruce Mau—needed to transform Canada's stagnant, business-as-usual mindset.

Can the Sierra Club help forge 21st Century Canada's version of a national dream? Let me know your ideas; they are bound to be good.

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ADDRESSING RESOURCE DEPLETION AND SUSTAINABILITY IN THE ONTARIO BUILDING CODE

The foremost purpose of a building code is safety. Fire is an obvious safety issue, from preventing fires from starting, through minimizing fire spread and allowing everyone to get out safely from a burning building. Structural integrity is another. Building codes also ensure that every building has healthy ventilation, adequate heating and light. Basic water and sanitation needs are also addressed, in addition to accessibility. Building codes have been highly successful in addressing these issues. So where should the line be drawn between the health and safety of people in a building, to the neighbourhood, bioregion and even the global community? And at what point is a building code locking us into practices that may be causing more harm than good?

Building codes tend to encourage meeting the bare minimum. Doing better is often a detriment to a builder. Who is likely to get a building permit and site inspection with the least hassle—a mediocre builder who in the interest of lowest capital cost achieves only the code requirements, or a quality builder who is trying to create a resource-efficient, non-toxic, environmentally responsible building? Unfortunately, we give a pass to the bare minimum and give the best builders a hard time. We don't intend to do this, but we do.(1)

The Ontario Building Code (2) has slowly introduced aspects beyond basic safety with each release. Insulation requirements have increased. Alternative wastewater treatment systems are becoming more common. But being a political creation, like all regulations, the Building Code is subject to influence from groups and industries. This works both ways. On one hand, there are those who resist change and seek to reduce compliance requirements in order to lower construction cost. The argument presented while resisting change is one of keeping homes affordable. However, an affordable home is one



Camp Kawartha's new Environment Centre in Peterborough, Ontario, features prefabricated straw bale walls, earthen plaster, earthbag foundations, cotton batt insulation, a thatched roof over the entrance, rainwater collection and much more. Photo: David Elfstrom

that also has low operational costs from repairs and energy bills. But on the other side, individuals and groups concerned with any environmental aspect also have a say. Sometimes this results in a compromise, by having code changes delayed to a future date or by finding a middle point between the status quo and what might be considered best practices.

One of the most important changes in the current Building Code is the introduction of an objective-based approach that should result in making alternative solutions more readily accepted by building officials.

The Ontario Building Code establishes its goals in Division A of the Code. This division lists overall objectives that the Code seeks to achieve and functional statements relating to those objectives. Both the objectives and functional statements are inherently qualitative, meaning no numbers or other facts. This is an appropriate way to separate goals from the solutions to those goals. Division B contains an accepted way to achieve the objectives, and this is what most people follow. However, if an alternative method, material or design can achieve the same intent as the

solutions offered in Division B, then it can be used. Unfortunately, at this time we have to infer the intent. At some point in the future, each article in Division B will have an intent statement, as described in the introduction to the 2006 Ontario Building Code:

"Intent Statements will be published to assist Code users. These statements will be an explanation of the purpose of each requirement and will be written in detailed and plain language. The statements are not part of the Building Code regulation and will be provided for explanatory purposes. Due to the number of intent statements, this user document will likely be available in an electronic format (e.g. CD) and will not be included in the 2006 Building Code Compendium."

Let's look at one aspect: use of non-renewable resources. By definition, as we use up a non-renewable resource, it's gone for good. Some resources can be recycled and reused, but energy resources invariably move from a highly concentrated form to diffuse heat with little potential for work. Our way of life and economic system has locked us into a pattern of using ever increasing amounts of energy and material resources. Any step in the opposite

By David Elfstrom

direction, toward using less non-renewable resources, is good for us and our descendants. Canada's National Building Code, which serves as a model for provincial and territorial codes, doesn't currently include conservation as a purpose or object, but Ontario's Building Code does. To improve the National Model Building Code, send suggestions to the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes.(3)

In Division A, Table 2.2.1.1, objective OR2 is "Resource Conservation - Energy Conservation." It states:

"An objective of this Code is to limit the probability that, as a result of the design or construction of a building, a natural resource will be exposed to an unacceptable risk of depletion or the capacity of the infrastructure supporting the use of the resource will be exposed to an unnatural risk of being exceeded, caused by the consumption of energy."

The related functional statement F131 in Table 3.2.1.1 indicates that statements in the Building Code relating to resource conservation are designed "To limit excessive energy consumption."

Notice the lack of numbers. And, who or what defines an "unacceptable risk"? Appendix A 1.2.1.1.1.(1)(b) says that Division B, with all of its prescriptive requirements forming the bulk of the Building Code, is considered to be the boundary between acceptable risk and unacceptable risk. That is, "the risk remaining once the acceptable solutions in Division B have been implemented represents the residual level of risk deemed to be acceptable by the broad base of Canadians who have taken part in the consensus process used to develop the Code."

There we have it. The key to changing the Building Code in a way that encourages less environmentally damaging practice is to get into the consensus process. But how does it work? >>> page 6

>>> **from page 5 (Addressing the)**

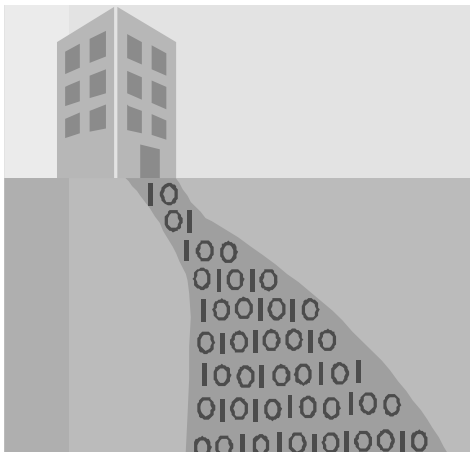
The Province of Ontario creates acts of legislation in a democratic manner. The Building Code Act sets out the various powers that the regulations under the act will have. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing administers those regulations in the documents comprising the Ontario Building Code. It's good to leave an act as general as possible because it's hard to change an act, while regulations can be changed without having to pass through the legislature.

The Building Advisory Council (BAC) is the vehicle by which the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing solicits strategic advice on policy, technical and administrative issues related to the Building Code Act and the Building Code regulations. The terms of reference of the BAC are available in a PDF document on the Ministry website.(4)

Those terms of reference spell out the organizations that may have a designate on the BAC, although the Minister can appoint additional members at will. To find out who the current designates are, have a look at the most recent minutes, available at the BAC's index page on the Ministry website.(5) It doesn't seem to be a broad base of Canadians. Rather, it appears to be a broad base of Canadian organizations involved in construction and safety. There are no environmental groups or environmental views represented there. Following the chain of command approach, as an engineer I would contact the designate for Professional Engineers Ontario, Ontario Society of Professional Engineers, or for Consulting Engineers of Ontario. A contractor might contact the representative from Ontario General Contractors Association, Council of Ontario Construction Associations, or from Residential Construction Council of Central Ontario.

Any individual can always make submissions

directly to the Ministry in the form of a Building Code Change Request Form (6) or the Minister, without having to go through the BAC, although having a recommendation endorsed by the committee is sure to be helpful. Like any submission carrying a political purpose, a comment from a building professional will carry more weight than a general member of the population. A submission from a large group of concerned individuals will also warrant more attention.



Ultimately, the BAC is only an advisory panel. The Minister and the Ministry can do what they please. They can take recommendations under advisement and then turn around and make a step in a different direction, for political or other reasons.

With the passing of the Green Energy Act of 2009, section 34.1 of the Building Code Act now requires the Ministry to establish a Building Code Energy Advisory Council. We have yet to find out what the terms of reference will be, and if this council will have more than one appointed person. Hopefully this will be an opportunity for citizens to have another avenue for expanding the objectives of the Ontario Building Code.

To reform the Building Code such that Division

B of the code significantly raises the bar on energy performance of buildings—and, in effect, lowers the threshold for the acceptable risk of resource depletion and environmental degradation—we need to work with the BAC members, the Acting Director of the Buildings and Development Branch as well as other people from the Building and Development Branch who are present at the BAC meetings. Submit a Building Code Change Form, and contact the Minister's office, your local Member of Provincial Parliament and even the Premier of Ontario. Finally, keep an eye out for the establishment of the Building Code Energy Advisory Council.

David Elfstrom, P.Eng, LEED(R) AP, specializes in energy audits of residential and commercial buildings, and efficient mechanical heating & ventilation system designs for buildings. E-mail: david@elfstrom.com; Web: www.elfstrom.com.

Footnotes

- (1) David Eisenberg, Development Center for Appropriate Technology, Our Myopic Building Codes, Fine Homebuilding, July 2007, accessed at <http://nbnetwork.org/2793>
- (2) The Building Code Act and the 2006 Ontario Building Code regulations: www.e-laws.gov.on.ca
- (3) Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes: www.nationalcodes.ca/ccbfc/index_e.shtml
- (4) BAC: Terms of Reference: www.obc.mah.gov.on.ca/AssetFactory.aspx?did=1052
- (5) BAC: Main index: www.obc.mah.gov.on.ca/Page2949.aspx
- (6) Building Code Change Request Form: www.obc.mah.gov.on.ca/Asset662.aspx?method=1

Dear Sierra Club Ontario Members:

As announced in the Spring edition of Sanctuary, Sierra Club Ontario (SCO) has made the prudent decision to discontinue all non-essential mailings. This comes in response also to your concerns as members about paper waste.

SCO's policy on paper use is to use only sustainable source products, certified by the Forest Stewardship Council. We also use 100% post-consumer recycled paper in our

office as well. We remain strong in our commitment to the responsible use of paper products and have committed to mail paper (from 100% recycled sources) only for essential Club processes, such as Club elections.

All of our publications will be available for download at our website: www.sierraclub.on.ca; you will also be able to sign up for e-mail notifications when the SCO newsletter is available here.

We understand that some of our members live in remote areas without Internet access, or do not have access to a computer or e-mail. For these members, we are offering to send you paper copies of our publications for a fee of \$20 for 4 issues, mailed quarterly.

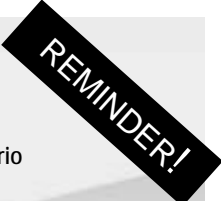
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**Emma Cane, Coordinator
Sierra Club Ontario**



Pushing for a *New National Park*

Over the last few months there has been significant media focus on gaining National Park status for the GTA's Rouge Park. A growing coalition of environmental activists and politicians has begun to lobby all levels of government in order to make this dream come true.

Why push for National Park status if the current Rouge Park is already protected? Well, protection is one thing, especially if mainly an idea. Real protection, on the other hand, takes effort and resources, largely funding, to maintain ecological attributes. As it stands, Rouge Park faces many serious problems. Current funding from municipalities isn't enough to combat issues such as illegal dumping as well as poaching of deer.

Bringing the federal government on board would mean better funding and protection, including federal park staff to help address these problems. National Park designation has several additional benefits. More land could be added to the park boundary from the disputed proposed Pickering Airport holdings, land that was federally expropriated and which is prime natural habitat. More land protected means better protection for remaining undeveloped forests, fields and river valleys including the watershed adjacent to Rouge Park, Duffins Creek.

Saving habitat is of global significance. As biodiversity plummets around the world, we can't ignore the fact that our own species will be affected. Humans are already facing costs associated with loss of biodiversity whether



A Bigger Picture. Rouge Park is already part of Ontario's Greenbelt, land designated as protected from overdevelopment. The transition to a National Park would not be a drastic change. In fact, it could only benefit environmentally important areas adjacent to the park that currently do not have a protected future. More land could be added over time and more environments saved from the wrath of urban sprawl. *Photo: Bernadette Zubrisky*

we realize it or not. Every species lost affects that which it is connected to. Envision the removal of a few strategic pieces in a house of cards.

The main reason the world is losing species so rapidly is because of habitat loss. Habitat is being stripped away and replaced by urban development at an astronomical rate the world over. Humanity must rush to protect what's left and place limits on urban development that endangers the future of all species,

including our own. It's time to step up to the plate and do something vitally important locally to protect biodiversity. You can help by lobbying your government at all levels to make the dream of a Rouge National Park a reality.

Bernadette Zubrisky

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



We are unique amongst national and international environmental organizations in that volunteers are truly us. Our volunteers head committees and campaigns, partake in research, teaching and advocacy, and participate in events. Numerous opportunities exist to make a difference while learning valuable skills through practical experience.

Volunteering opportunities with the Ontario Chapter of Sierra Club Canada tend to be local or general (often spanning several local sites). Prospective volunteers are requested to become members of Sierra Club Canada. If you're not a member yet, please become a member! Every member, active or not, is a valuable and powerful addition to Sierra Club Canada.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: **E-mail:** ontariochapter@sierraclub.ca; **Tel:** 416-960-9606; **Web:** <http://sierraclub.on.ca/index.php/site/volunteers/>

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new generation of reactor also raised doubts. The "new and improved" Advanced CANDU Reactor has not actually been constructed. AECL had tried without success to get former nuclear safety chair Linda Keen to approve the new design on the basis of blueprints. Then there was the very public scrapping of the new Maple research reactors amidst fears that their design was inherently unsafe. Topping this all off was the widespread knowledge that AECL was bleeding red ink and desperately dependent on new Ontario sales for its survival.

The years of hard work by anti-nuke advocates had succeeded in making the McGuinty government concerned that a new nuclear purchase would leave them vulnerable to the charge of repeating past mistakes. The track record of cost overruns could not be ignored. When the government put out its Request for Proposals it stipulated that the successful applicant would have to agree to absorb costs beyond those specifically contracted. Such a condition was unique in the history of nuclear deals. The McGuinty government was in fact playing a game of chicken with

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the federal government and assumed that the Harper government would step in as the guarantor in order to keep AECL viable.

Meanwhile in Ottawa, the Harper government was weighing the wisdom of continuing to throw money at AECL. There was little evidence or hope that the company could achieve real profitability in the foreseeable future, but that had been AECL's reality for many years and this had never stopped a Canadian government from ensuring AECL's survival. The Harper government broke with this pattern and publically identified AECL as being a longstanding drain on the

public purse. AECL was on its own in dealing with the McGuinty government.

AECL was the sole bidder to meet the Ontario government's no cost overrun condition. Their price for 2 new reactors was \$26 billion, which was about \$19 billion more than the McGuinty government had hoped to pay. Minister Smitherman's first public comment re the AECL price tag was that he was experiencing "sticker shock." His second was to suggest that the nuclear purchase deadline would be extended and that the Government of Canada should step forward to underwrite a substantial portion of the cost in the interest of preserving AECL.

It is glaringly apparent that the Harper government has no intention of providing billions of dollars to support new nuclear plants in Ontario. In the wake of Smitherman's announcement, Bruce Power, Ontario's private sector nuclear operator, stated that it was shelving plans to explore the building of a new nuclear plant at Nanticoke. High cost and declining demand were the clear and succinct reasons.

Reaction to the nuclear setback has been limited. Environmentalists have been quick to praise Smitherman and the McGuinty government for their 11th hour rethink of their nuclear commitment. Informed comment has noted that the recently enacted Green Energy Act is already advancing renewable energy development beyond even the optimistic projections.

To be sure, there has been some predictable alarm expressed by the nuclear establishment. Comparisons to the Avro Arrow are being drawn in an attempt to create a sense of impending crisis and loss in the mind of the Canadian public. The public, by and large, is treating all of this with a shrug, noting that there is clearly no electricity supply problem anywhere on the Ontario horizon.

It is too soon for Sierra Club and anti-nuclear advocates to declare the death of nuclear expansion in Ontario. Available evidence strongly suggests, however, that a corner has been turned. It will likely be years before a serious suggestion to build new nuclear plants comes forward in Ontario. In the meantime we should all congratulate ourselves on a hard won and deserved victory.

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