Watershed Sentinel

The Common Good Issue

October November 2026



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P28 Resisting Big Data

Next-generation AI facilities target rural communities

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Watershed Sentinel

October | November 2026

Vol. 36 No. 4

Features





BC is Burning

Elected officials are applauding a film's false claims that industrial logging makes forests more resilient.

The Common Good

For centuries, corporations have been pilfering public assets for profit. This issue features people and communities standing up for their neighbours and the environment, one local battle at a time.

Content

3,5 **News Shorts**
AI battles, alewives comeback, lab-grown chocolate, and more

4 **Letters**
Readers weigh in on wildfires and corporate psychopathy

7 **Shrinking Forest**
Can cutting red tape save jobs, wildlife, or ancient trees?

8 **Eelgrass Rising**
Mapping a "blue carbon" powerhouse of the BC coast

10 **Pesticide Politics**
Canada opens the door to banned toxins for "security"

11 **Water Grab**
Tiny town competes with industry for its own groundwater

15 **Culture Wars**
Who's driving the backlash against Indigenous rights in BC?

32 **Captured CO_2**
Proposed carbon pipeline comes with serious risks

33 **LNG Gamble**
Pembina report warns of shifting demand and supply risks

34 **Book Reviews**
Reading the latest from Maude Barlow and Suzanne Simard

36 **Wild Times**
Forests on the borderlands, past and present

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Watershed Sentinel



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Next Issue Copy Deadline: September 30, 2026

The Underground World

I have a question for those who believe they have dominion over nature: can you make dirt? As Paul Harvey once said, with all our artistic pretensions and accomplishments, we owe our existence to a six-inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains.

The most humble among us, the slugs, worms, mushrooms, and microbes, deserve all our respect. We barely see them; almost invisible, always busy, hidden beneath the surface. But then, in a forest heavy with the smell of wet ferns and damp earth, I spot clusters of tiny heads: yellow chanterelles and red lobster mushrooms just poking above the leaves and fir needles, fruits of a sprawling underground network. These mushrooms are still small and few, so instead I fill my bag with elk dung for the compost pile I'm nurturing for next year's veggie garden.

Down on the river, I'm thrilled to meet five juvenile vultures. Even half-grown, they are huge, glossy black, totally silent, soaring in circles overhead, landing on the riverbank and tearing strips off a dead salmon, doing the most important work on the planet alongside crows, ravens, beetles, and worms.

I wonder about the arrogant ones who think they are superior to the elk and the vultures and the salmon – are they truly happy? Do they ever have enough? Can't they take what they need and leave the rest?

—Zoe Blunt, Sayward BC, September 2026

At the 'Shed

Happy Thanksgiving! What are you thankful for? We are beyond grateful to you, our readers, subscribers, and supporters! You are the wind in our sails and the compass that keeps us on course.

We're giving back again with our annual calendar subscription package! We've teamed up with our friends at the Wilderness Committee to offer a special price on their glorious 2027 Wild Canada calendar plus a *Watershed Sentinel* subscription for only $35. Order early so you don't miss out! *www.watershedsentinel.ca/store.*

Don't forget to subscribe or renew before the end of the year to take advantage of the current subscription price. It's been the same since 2010 but it's about to go up! Pro tip: use the auto-renew option to lock in your subscription at the current rate.

Reminder to subscribers: We've stopped relying on paper renewal notices. Instead, we're sending emails to let you know when it's time to renew. Check the date printed above your name and address on the back cover so your subscription doesn't expire.

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Cocoa without trees or farmers

Lab Chocolate

Several companies, including an Israeli start-up backed by Cadbury owner Mondelez, are producing lab-grown chocolate by taking cells from cocoa beans and feeding them sugar and nutrients. The companies are looking to get products to market by 2027. If successful, lab-grown chocolate will represent more than a technological breakthrough. It will bolster corporate security by insulating earnings and reputations during times of volatile and politicized supply chains, at the expense of millions of poor West African cocoa-growers.

—www.ft.com
April 15, 2026

Markets richer, workers poorer

Profits Bonanza

US corporate profits have surged to record highs. Pre-tax earnings hit an annualized $4.8tn in the second quarter of 2026, which equals 18% of national income – the highest share since the aftermath of the Second World War. Employees' share from wages and benefits fell to 60%, the lowest level since the 1950s. The decline in labour's share of income has accelerated in the past five years, and especially over the past 12 months.

—www.ft.com
August 28, 2026

Huge conservation success in Maine

Alewives Return

Following years of conservation efforts, dam removals, construction of fish-friendly infrastructure, and tribal co-management, Maine's alewife population is looking better than it has in decades. The small fish, also known as river herring, acts as a "biological conveyor belt" of nutrients between the ocean and inland waters, feeding seals, otters, eagles, and other fish and carnivores. By the 1990s, populations had disappeared completely from many river systems due to dams, pollution, and overfishing. In 2025, more than 20 million alewives were counted migrating in Maine.

—www.motherjones.com
July 11, 2026

EU lags behind on solar storage

Go Romania

Romania is leading the EU in combining solar power and battery storage. To beat grid congestion – when generators have to disconnect during peak hours or pay users to offload their excess power – the EU estimates it will need enough batteries by 2030 to supply 150GW of power from storage. By the end of 2025, it had only 37GW-worth installed. Romania deployed storage relatively early in its solar build-out, rather than trying to catch up after large amounts of solar capacity have already been installed. Even as the growth of solar installations stagnates across Europe, installs in Romania grew by 45% in 2025, driven by high demand and fast permitting.

—www.economist.com
August 27, 2026

Norway ignores Arctic moratorium

Will to Drill

In August 2026 Norway announced it will continue to develop Barents Sea oil and gas, whether or not the EU decides to continue its 2021 Arctic drilling moratorium. A new EU Arctic policy is expected soon, and the Norwegians insist that Barents gas should be treated as a security issue rather than a climate one.

—www.energycentral.com
August 26, 2026

Australian high court ruling

Water Win

Native title holders have won a high court appeal canceling the largest groundwater licence ever granted in Australia's Northern Territory. The license would have allowed Fortune Agribusiness to extract 40 gigalitres of groundwater (equivalent to two Sydney Harbours) every year for 30 years. The Mpwerempwer Aboriginal Corporation challenged the NT government's legal basis for granting the licence, arguing the project threatened sacred sites, cultural survival, and a fragile desert water system.

—www.theguardian.com
August 5 2026

War, heat, and drought

Price of Wheat

Amid war, drought, and extreme heat, wheat prices are rising sharply, raising fears of food insecurity around the world. Russian and Ukrainian bombers are targeting each other's export terminals, drought has lowered yield in South Africa, and in both the US and Canada, yield is down by an estimated 13%. In Europe extreme heat has withered crops, including wheat, and damaged corn pollination.

—www.aljazeera.com
August 31, 2026

Letters

Fire, Flood, and Drinking Water

As the organizer of a May public forum on the Mt. Underwood wildfire, I think Ben Wickham's retrospective (see "Fire and Flood," *Watershed Sentinel*, Summer 2026) is a thoughtful, well-written piece with one minor correction required.

Nahmint is not the source of Port Alberni's water. The China Creek watershed, on the east side of Alberni Inlet, is that source. Mosaic continues to intensively log our watershed. Therefore, a small correction would fix this error and improve the article.

Also worth noting: the Evergreen Alliance, a citizens' advocacy group, has filed a complaint with the BC Forest Practices Board over Mosaic logging practices that contributed to the aggressive behaviour of the Mt. Underwood wildfire. (see "Complaint," *Watershed Sentinel*, Summer 2026).

At our spring forum, a BC Wildfire Service speaker confirmed that excessive slash and juvenile stands, in combination with drought and heat brought on by climate change, contributed to the unusual Rank 4 and 5 behaviour which fed the raging inferno that threatened our city.

—Mike Youds, President
Alberni Valley Transition Town Society
Port Alberni, BC

Psychopaths and Overshoot

As the leading politicos in Alberta and Ottawa announce their signed agreement to sell out BC's already vandalized environment to psychopathic oil corporations, one must trust the countless saner souls across this land to spurn such matchless folly.

Any reader who absorbs the cautionary Swedish volume *Overshoot: How the World Surrendered to Climate Breakdown* (Verso Books, 2024), whose gist is Earth's climatic death knell, has to realize that failing to halt fossil-fuel emissions now spells an untimely terminus for humankind plus all our fellow species.

Krishnamurti once observed that it's prudent – nay, essential – to pay enhanced attention when encountering a cobra on a jungle trail.

—Virge MacLeod
Sirdar, BC

The *Watershed Sentinel* is human-created, not AI-generated.

Dear readers,

As technology evolves, we remain committed to providing real stories from real people. Our readers rely on us for authentic, original, fact-checked news and commentary. We don't accept AI-generated text and images for publication, and we're diligent about using human-created content only.

Generative AI takes and distorts content from real writers and artists without compensation. It comes from data centres that consume vast amounts of land and water and pollute the air with noise and emissions. AI is increasingly a tool of Big Tech and government surveillance and aims to replace human workers.

Our website has no chatbots. Phone calls are answered by the editors, not AI agents. All our emails, newsletters, and subscription confirmations are written by us. AI is evolving rapidly, but we remain committed to our shared humanity and life on Earth.

—The editors and staff

The Watershed Sentinel welcomes letters

but reserves the right to edit for brevity, clarity, legality, and taste. Anonymous letters will not be published.

Send your musings and your missives to:
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Wonder Valley case goes forward

Cree Battle AI

Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation's case against a proposed Alberta data centre can proceed, a federal court ruled in August. SLCN is challenging provincial approval for a water license for Kevin O'Leary's massive Wonder Valley Project. The license grants O'Leary Digital Ltd. access to 6 million cubic metres of water per year from the Smoky River near SLCN reserve lands. O'Leary's lawyers tried to have the case dismissed, claiming the company was not given proper notice. SLCN says it was not consulted about the water license.

—www.aptnnews.ca
August 14, 2026

AI plan fails the environment

Sloppy Strategy

Ottawa has unveiled a much-anticipated federal AI strategy that falls short of addressing the serious environmental and climate impacts of data centre development. The new document promises the rapid and widespread buildout of "AI For All," including Indigenous-led projects and 850 megawatts in public-private partnerships by 2030. The plan declares data centres will create jobs rather than displacing them, and mentions both "robust environmental standards and tangible benefits for local communities" without further explanation. Recent analysis shows three-quarters of Alberta's planned data centres would be built in regions under high to extremely high water stress, yet the strategy document makes no provisions for safeguarding community water supplies.

—www.nationalobserver.com
June 4, 2026

Public infrastructure selloff looms

Grabbing Assets

The world's most powerful investors are flocking to Toronto in September as part of the Carney government's push to attract $1 trillion in new investment to Canada. Among other things, the closed-door meetings will explore privatizing public infrastructure like airports, ports, water systems, and power grids, reports say. Representatives from trillion-dollar Middle Eastern wealth funds are also looking at Canada as a place to invest in AI data centre development, critical minerals extraction, and weapons manufacturing. Since his election, Carney has cut taxes on the wealthy while adding billions in military spending. Ottawa also expects to pour $40 billion of public funds into a new tar sands pipeline.

—www.canadiandimension.com
August 15, 2026

2024 Chilcotin River disaster

Landslide Claim

Owners of a cattle ranch near Williams Lake are suing the Province over alleged mismanagement leading up to the devastating 2024 landslide that temporarily dammed the Chilcotin River. The suit claims that provincially approved logging, prescribed burning, and water diversion measures triggered the massive landslide and subsequent flood that wiped out hayfields and structures on the Wineglass Cattle Ranch and elsewhere and forced valley residents to evacuate. The Province failed to take reasonable steps to reduce the risk of a catastrophic flood, the claim says.

—www.biv.com
August 21, 2026

Quebec LNG export announcement

Mega Pollution

Canada's largest and most polluting LNG megaproject to date will be built in Quebec to export gas to European markets, according to an announcement by proponents Kino Aski and Marinvest Energy Canada. The announcement comes as global LNG demand is predicted to drop and the climate crisis escalates worldwide, driven in large part by heat-trapping methane emissions from LNG plants.

—www.environmentaldefence.ca
www.kinoaskilng.ca
August 17, 2026

National emergency centre slashed

A Thousand Cuts

As wildfires and climate emergencies multiplied this summer, the Public Service Alliance of Canada warned that about half their members were laid off at the Government Operations Centre in January. The national centre, which is responsible for coordinating Canada's emergency response, was already suffering from exhaustion and low morale before the cuts, according to PSAC president Sharon DeSousa. Meanwhile, demands for a public inquiry are coming from Ontario First Nations who say the Ford government ignored their emergency preparation recommendations and failed to notify them as an out-of-control wildfire bore down on their communities, forcing residents to flee by boat.

—www.desmog.com
August 3, 2026

What is Your Legacy?

An open letter to the Premier and the Forest Minister

Dear Premier David Eby and Minister Ravi Parmar:

I write to you today to implore you to refrain from clear-cutting any more old-growth forest on Pacheedaht unceded lands, particularly the Walbran Valley.

As a boy, I remember when the salmon ran in the river in runs so strong you could walk across them to the other side. I have always considered our forests as our cathedral, our relatives who provide us with food, medicine, biodiversity, and everything we need to exist. Quite simply, the land is us and we are the land, and that relationship of love and respect has sustained us for millennia. Never take more than you need; never take it all has always been our way.

Yet, in less than 200 years, our land has been ravaged in the pursuit of profit for both government and industry. There is no thought to the care of the people. In destroying our forests, you have brought upon us terrible wildfires, droughts, floods, and landslides across the province of BC.

Nothing seems to have moved you, not the pleas and protests contained in the thousands upon thousands of letters, emails, phone calls, rallies, sit-ins, parades, art installations, documentaries, books, and legal actions from people of all walks of life. Indigenous peoples, teachers, writers, filmmakers, artists, lawyers, doctors, scientists, foresters, students, retirees, children, youth – all of us have not made the slightest dent in your determination to annihilate all the accessible old-growth forest.

You ignore the recommendations of your own panels, including the Old-Growth Strategic Review, the Technical Advisory Panel, and more recently the Forest Practices Advisory Board. Most of all, you continue to ignore Fairy Creek, the largest mass civil disobedience movement in Canadian history. You simply pretend it didn't happen. The voices of tens of thousands of people across the province apparently made no difference to you.

What of your legacy in the generations to come? As it stands, you will be remembered as architects of the destruction of our once-great BC forests, those who refused to stray from the path of corporate profits to consider the needs of the people. Why not change that by saving what's left of our old-growth forests?



The voices of tens of thousands of people across the province apparently made no difference to you.

It seems to me a strange legacy, particularly for Premier Eby, considering the government no longer makes any profit, as it spends forest revenues on fighting wildfires, repairing infrastructure, and increasing health costs.

Now with the use of gates and roadside boulders, you deny me access to what remains of my cathedral. Please tell me why you think you have the right to deny me and my Nation our spiritual practice and culture on our unceded lands?

—Elder Bill Jones
Pacheedaht First Nation, Vancouver Island

Listening Once Again To Our Great Mother, about the Fairy Creek blockade and Bill Jones' life, co-authored by Karen Moe, is available at Dundurn Press. *www.bit.ly/Great-Mother*

The Shrinking Forest

Can cutting red tape save jobs, wildlife, or ancient trees?

Commentary by Zoe Blunt

This summer, the BC government announced it is "exploring" a "working forest" solution for the logging industry. But forest advocates question whether it will address the roots of the forest crisis.

The Eby government's "modern forest management vision" outlines a three-zone model that designates areas for industry, "multiple-use," and conservation. This would improve "predictability" for forest companies, workers, communities, and First Nations by reducing "unnecessary red tape" and building a "competitive and value-added" forest sector, according to Forest Minister Ravi Parmar.

This vision comes two months after the New Forest Act tour presented its own conservation-based forest solution (*Watershed Sentinel*, April-May 2026). The zones resemble the NFA framing but the goals of the working forest differ sharply. The NFA aims to safeguard intact forests and watersheds for drinking water, fish, wildlife, protection from drought, floods, and fire, and economic diversity.

In contrast, Parmar's statement focuses on intensive region-wide resource management to attain a harvest level of 45 million cubic metres of forest, or about one million truckloads every year.

In response to the August 2026 announcement, Aurora Teijera of Sierra Club BC said the working forest model is tied to an "unrealistic timber target." She warned that it "could give industry a free pass to clearcut old growth to the brink" and "reduce habitats to fragments that are too small, too isolated, or too degraded to support biodiversity."

> The Ministry of Forests may have to acknowledge certain inescapable truths, such as the lack of harvestable trees.

Previous provincial promises did not slow the flood of mill closures, job losses, and unsustainable old-growth logging. The Ministry of Forests may have to acknowledge certain inescapable truths, such as the lack of harvestable trees and the global economics of pulp.

"Falldown" is the term for cutting forests faster than they can grow back. The forest sector has seen this shortfall widening for decades, and now it may be coming to a head. As former BC MLA Mike Morris told Dan Miller on The Clearcut podcast this summer, forest resources were "squandered."

And as we learned in January, so is public money. Some forest-products companies appear to stay afloat only because of multi-million dollar government handouts, even as they lay off workers by the hundreds. For example, Greenpeace reported this year that the federal and provincial governments gave Domtar, one of the world's largest forest products companies, $200 million in public funds from 2020 to 2024.

Meanwhile, in the last five years, Domtar and its parent company Paper Excellence have closed five mills, most recently the Howe Sound Pulp Mill and the Crofton Mill. The industry giant cited "lack of access to affordable [fibre]" and the "shrinking supply" of available wood in its announcements. As a global conglomerate, it carries on buying, selling, and reorganizing its companies from country to country like a grand game of chess.

It's no coincidence that Domtar and the Paper Excellence Group share an owner with another forest-products empire: Asia Pulp & Paper, which went through Indonesia's largest bankruptcy when it defaulted on $14 billion in loans from state-owned banks in 2001.

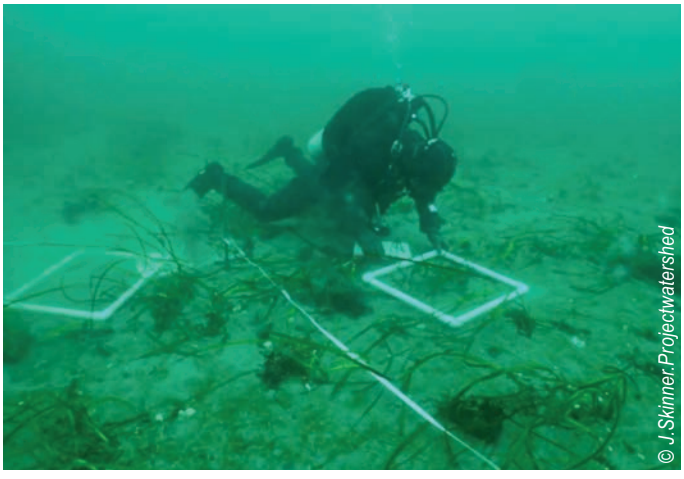
These powerful multinationals are playing the same game. Take public money, liquidate forests, plead poverty and shut down operations with a few weeks notice. Without decisive action to protect and restore the land, the Province's jobs-and-conservation plan is little more than a dog-and-pony show.

Eelgrass Rising

The blue carbon powerhouse of the Pacific Coast



Participants in Parks Canada's educational program Gone Crabbin' measure and record the carapace widths of a sampling of green crabs.



Diver doing an eelgrass survey

by Alefiya Dungrawala

Along the Pacific coast of Vancouver Island, an ecosystem largely hidden beneath the tide is becoming increasingly important in the fight against climate change: eelgrass meadows.

From the sheltered, forest-fringed waters of the Sooke Basin to the remote fjords of Clayoquot Sound, these underwater habitats store carbon, shelter marine life, and help stabilize coastal environments. But they are increasingly threatened by warming waters, human development, and invasive species.

Though separated by geography, these two coastal landmarks serve as major ecological hotspots where common eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) thrives as a foundational "ecosystem engineer."

The Sooke Basin, surrounded by dense forests, sandy beaches, and a rugged, pebbly coastline, offers a protected sanctuary. The fresh waters of the Sooke River provide the perfect gentle environment for eelgrass meadows to take root and flourish. Further up the Island's west coast is Clayoquot Sound – a remote wilderness known for its ancient old-growth rainforests. Eelgrass meadows thrive there along a 25-km gradient of freshwater input, offering a unique setting for studying how freshwater conditions influence these coastal ecosystems. Within its intricate networks of shallow channels and mudflats lies some of the most expansive meadow coverage on Vancouver Island.

Eelgrass meadows are known to capture what is known as "blue carbon" up to 35 times faster than terrestrial forests. Unfortunately, these coastal powerhouses are among the most threatened ecosystems on the planet. Eelgrass meadows are declining globally, driven by anthropogenic pressures, rising water temperatures (which can cause summer diebacks in warmer zones), agricultural runoff, and physical marine disturbances.

When we lose these meadows, we don't just lose critical nurseries for salmon and shellfish – we actively weaken our planet's capacity to buffer atmospheric greenhouse gases.

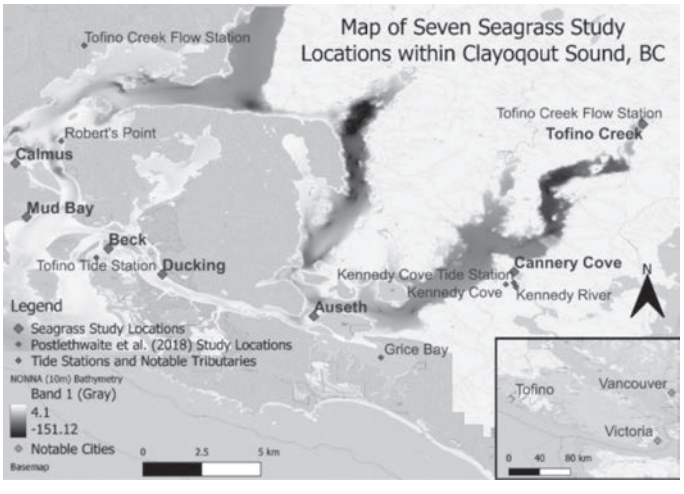
Since eelgrass is highly sensitive to environmental conditions and human interference, monitoring eelgrass ecosystems is increasingly critical. In 2016, recognizing this urgent crisis, the Commission for Environmental Cooperation identified the Pacific Coast of North America as a high-priority location for seagrass mapping and carbon sequestration research.

Mapping Canada's eelgrass meadows

Since 2017, Hakai Institute and Parks Canada have been cooperating to map and monitor eelgrass meadows at specific sites in coastal BC. Monitoring starts at low tide, when the eelgrass is fully exposed. Scientists use drones fitted with RGB and multispectral sensors to take high-resolution images of shallow coastal areas.

These images are then compiled into detailed orthomosaic maps, which trained experts analyze using object-based image analysis to identify eelgrass. To ensure the maps are accurate, underwater cameras, SCUBA dives, and shoreline checks are conducted for verification.

While this level of detailed monitoring is critical for understanding the condition of eelgrass meadows, other technologies are being explored that could expand mapping and monitoring to the entire BC coast and below the intertidal zone. The Canadian Space Agency is funding development of the Eelgrass Explorer (E2) system – "a prototype Cloud-based processing platform" that uses satellite data and AI models to produce province-wide intertidal eelgrass maps. And while BC's turbid waters and frequent cloud cover present challenges to geospatial mapping tools like LiDAR, they have been successfully used to map subtidal seagrass in Atlantic Canada and other countries such as Norway, France, and the Bahamas.



Beyond mapping and monitoring, protecting eelgrass meadows requires addressing other threats lurking beneath the waters of Sooke Basin.

Invasive crabs

Since the late 1990s, the European green crab has plagued the the west coast of Vancouver Island, outcompeting native species for food and contributing to eelgrass habitat destruction. The population is rapidly expanding across a wide range of temperature and salinity conditions, leading to a significant decline in the extent of eelgrass meadows.

Partnering with the Coastal Restoration Society, the T'Sou-ke First Nation has mobilized a frontline defense against one of the coast's most persistent invaders. Backed by community volunteers and freedivers plunging into cold coastal waters, the coalition has already cleared hundreds of thousands of the destructive crustaceans from local seabed habitats.

Green crabs are harming vital nurseries for native fish and shellfish. But where others see an environmental disaster, the team sees an opportunity for circular economy innovation, such as exploring ways to turn the massive harvest into organic fertilizer or a novel culinary dish.

Investing in conservation

Much of the Pacific coast's eelgrass remains hidden beneath the tides, yet its value extends far beyond what is visible. These underwater meadows store blue carbon, nurture marine life, protect shorelines, and strengthen the resilience of coastal ecosystems in a changing climate.

Across BC, scientific monitoring, geospatial technologies, Indigenous stewardship, and community-led restoration are helping to bring these invisible habitats to light so that they can be cared for in the long term. Protecting eelgrass is about more than conserving a marine plant – it is an investment in the health and resilience of Canada's Pacific coast.

Alefiya Dungrawala is a computer engineer turned geospatial data specialist and writer, covering topics related to climate change, environmental systems, and geographic changes.

Pesticide Politics

Bringing back banned toxins in the name of "security"

by Watershed Sentinel staff with files from the National Farmers Union

Public interest organizations are denouncing new laws that grant Cabinet the power to override the Health Minister and allow the use of banned pesticides like paraquat and DDT.

Bill C-30, an omnibus financial bill adopted in June 2026, contains changes to Canada's *Pest Control Products Act*. This new law and a separate budget bill (Bill C-31) represent a massive restructuring of Canada's pesticide regulatory system.

A long list of independent scientists and health and environmental organizations are calling for the new amendments to be repealed, noting that the federal government did not consult with Parliament's health and environment committees or even give them time to study them.

Folding these unannounced changes into the omnibus bill provided political cover while the bill was rushed through to the final vote. The Senate committee charged with studying Bill C-30 noted, "Given the significance and potential repercussions" of the pesticide act amendments, they "should have warranted a separate study rather than being included in an omnibus bill." But that didn't happen.

The *Pest Control Products Act* (2002) was created to protect human health and the environment. However, the C-30 amendments grant Cabinet broad authority to overrule the Health Minister and permit the use of pesticides banned for unacceptable risks to people and the environment. The new amendments require Health Canada to consider "economic security" and "food security" when making decisions about pesticide registration, but fail to define what that means.

> "Why would Cabinet want to create holes in Canada's food and agricultural legal fabric?"

According to the National Farmers Union, Bill C-30 gives Cabinet "sweeping power to weaken oversight of Canada's food, agriculture, health, and environment" and allows Cabinet to exempt "persons [including corporations], things, or activities" from any provision of these laws or regulations for up to six years if politicians say it is "necessary to protect national economic security, regional economic security, or national food security."

The NFU points out that no definitions or parameters regarding "economic security," "national food security," or "unreasonable risk" are included in the bill, meaning this clause could be invoked by Cabinet for any reason. Thus, the new law politicizes the legal framework governing our food, health, and environmental safety, and invites self-interested corporations to lobby Cabinet members for exemptions that go against public safety. In a statement, the NFU asked, "Why would Cabinet want to create holes in Canada's food and agricultural legal fabric?"

Bill C-30 comes in the wake of drastic cuts to Agriculture and Agrifood Canada's research capacity – research that provides crucial information for regulatory decisions – and even more drastic cuts to Canadian Food Inspection Agency personnel. The CFIA's Departmental Plan for the coming three years shows a nearly $80 million budget cut, and forecasts the loss of 1,627 full-time equivalent positions in 2029 compared with 2023.

CFIA's personnel are key to prevention. They are on the front lines to detect problems and avert Canadian food and agriculture crises like avian flu and salmonella outbreaks.

More than two dozen organizations, including Ecojustice and Canadian Environmental Law Association, are calling on the government of Canada to revoke these changes before a new crisis erupts.

A parliamentary petition (e-7541) sponsored by Elizabeth May, calling for the amendments to be repealed, is open for signatures until Nov 7, 2026. Visit: *https://tinyurl.com/pesticidepetition*

Corporate Water Grab

Fanny Bay competes with industry for its own groundwater

by Wendy Holm

In the tiny Vancouver Island community of Fanny Bay, residents are waging a fight against foreign control of their groundwater resources.

Every summer, local wells drop sharply and some run dry. Meanwhile, Natural Glacial Waters and Mitsubishi-owned Cermaq – the former shipping water in 500 ml bottles to local and offshore markets and the latter producing Atlantic salmon smolts to supply their open-net pen fish farms along BC's coast – are in the queue for licenses. These two companies are pumping commercial volumes of groundwater from the same aquifers residents rely on to supply water for their households, to grow crops, and for fire protection.

One year ago, the Fanny Bay Groundwater Collective began calling on the provincial government to pause consideration of these two groundwater licenses and hold public hearings to allow informed community input into this crucial public policy decision.

BC government was late to the game when it came to protecting groundwater. It wasn't until 2016 that BC's Water Sustainability Act came into effect, requiring commercial groundwater users be licensed. Companies diverting groundwater prior to 2016 are considered "existing use" applicants. As such, they are fast-tracked, face a lower bar – e.g. an exemption from meeting environmental flow needs – and are permitted to divert water at their historic rate while awaiting license approval. Once licenses are granted, rights are tied to the land and exist in perpetuity. FOREVER.

The BC government was late to the game when it came to protecting groundwater.

Fanny Bay has a lot at stake. And a lot to offer. Research is well underway by Beaufort Watershed Stewards (a local community organization) in association with the University of Victoria to understand better the capacity and sustainability of our aquifers, the impact of climate change and logging practices on recharge rates, and what the community needs to sustain itself into the future. This in turn will underpin the development of a local Water Sustainability Plan. Presenting this research to government through the public hearing process to document impact and analyze risk posed by these proposed licenses is critical to good public policy.

Last September, the Collective called on Hon. Randene Neill, BC Minister of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship, to pause the licensing process and allow for public hearings. Its request was accompanied by a detailed Briefing Note. Over the winter and spring, representatives communicated with Ministry staff. At the end of May, when it became apparent the license review was proceeding, a second urgent letter was sent to Minister Neill on June 10, copied to federal, provincial, and municipal politicians, as well as K'ómoks and Qualicum First Nations.

On July 21, 2026, the Collective finally received an answer. But it was not the one they'd hoped for. In her letter, Minister Neill turned down the community's request for a pause, adding that they intend to complete decisions on all Existing Use Groundwater License applications by June 2027.

Water is a good of the commons and must be managed in the sustainable interests of the community. Fortunately, thanks to West Coast Environmental Law and strong community support, the community is saddle-ready to head out in pursuit of legal options.

Never doubt that local initiatives – born and bred in the community – are the most powerful pathway to change. To learn more and support the Fanny Bay community, visit *www.saveourgroundwater.ca.*

Wendy Holm is a retired agrologist, journalist, and author on the unceded territory of the Sahloot, Sasitla, Ieeksun, Xa'xe and Pentlatch peoples who together make up the K'omoks Nation.

BC is Burning

Despite film's claims, logging the forest won't save it

by Emily Milne

As wildfires raged this summer, I turned to the documentary film *BC Is Burning* hoping to find ways to protect British Columbia's wilderness from being destroyed. What I found instead was pro-logging propaganda that tries to fool the public into thinking forestry is the saviour that will keep us from burning.

The film's creator, Murray Wilson, is an industry man through and through. From logger to tree-planting camp supervisor, he's done every forestry job under the sun. He's joined by many "experts" of the field, nearly all of whom have spent their careers prescribing more logging, not conservation or protection of natural landscapes. Wilson and his gang of industry people have every incentive to paint the forest industry as the good guys looking out for the public by claiming logging is the solution.

Wilson's plan for wildfire mitigation is simple: active forest management – or plainly put, logging. By the film's final act, the possible plan of action morphs into something more accurately resembling industry lobbying: "We need to go back and treat the wildfire situation like the mountain pine beetle infestation ... and increase our harvest levels to address the fire risk."

It should surprise no one that a film created by a lifelong industry man would land on "log more" as its solution, but something far more alarming came out of this documentary. Forty BC MLAs – including Minister of Forests Ravi Parmar, Speaker of the House and Burnaby-New Westminster MLA Raj Chouhan, and the MLAs for Cariboo-Chilcotin, Kamloops-North Thompson, Vernon-Lumby,



and Kootenay-Monashee – were tagged on social media or personally shared accounts of attending screenings of *BC Is Burning*. In their respective photos, they are all grinning ear-to-ear after watching the film. It appears as if Wilson's "log more" propaganda is landing well with all political blocs in BC.

Blaming environmental protections

Stripped to the bone, *BC Is Burning* makes three points. It begins by claiming that today's "mega-fires" are caused by insect outbreaks and years of fire suppression, then moves on to its main mark: environmental protections. Wilson whines that "constrained harvesting around communities," (which includes visual quality objectives, wildlife habitat rules, and old-growth management areas) is the true reason why wildfires are growing more devastating. He claims that because logging is limited in these protected areas, the forests are dense, and therefore there is more fuel for the fires.

This is misleading because most wildfires happen in managed forests, not protected areas. Nevertheless, the film goes on to frame prescribed burns, "regeneration harvesting," and thinning as the fix for fires, going so far as to contend that the sale of the wood removed in the process is not a business perk, but a public service.

Logging releases carbon

Finally, the film turns to carbon. The speakers argue that a young monoculture stand functions as a "permanent carbon sink" if managed properly. However, this is inaccurate. Carbon sinks work by storing carbon in living biomass and soil as long as the forest is left undisturbed. A stand that is logged within a few decades is not a "permanent" sink, because logging releases stored carbon back into the atmosphere the moment the trees are cut, milled, and often burned as slash.

> The film's underlying claim, that industrial logging makes forests more resilient, fails at every conceivable level.

But not everything in the film is false. It's true that fuel accumulates. Indigenous-led prescribed burning is an under-used tool. The brief mention of traditional ecological knowledge is the only credible part of the film. (One point for you, Wilson.)

But the underlying claim of *BC Is Burning* is that industrial logging makes forests more resilient, and this claim fails at every conceivable level.

The inconvenient truth

In August 2025, in the forests south of Port Alberni on Vancouver Island, a spark ignited the largest wildfire on the Island since 1967. BC Wildfire Service described the fire's behaviour as "explosive," and officials pointed fingers to wind and heat as the culprits. But a formal Notice of Complaint[1] filed with the BC Forest Practices Board by researcher David Broadland and the Evergreen Alliance notes that the actual conditions the night of August 11 contradict this narrative.

The same complaint addresses the history of the burned forest. Satellite imagery shows roughly 68% of the forest in the fire's wake had been logged and replanted by Mosaic Forest Management. BC Wildfire's video footage of the fire shows widespread dead dry debris in the cutblocks, with fire crews working through slash-covered clearcuts.

The images taken after the fire reveal something completely different than what the forest industry tells the public. The planted trees burned to the ground, whereas the older, mature forest that Mosaic hadn't logged remained standing.

The complaint references the Canadian Forest Fire Behaviour Prediction System to bolster its claim. According to the fire weather recorded that night, predicted fire spread through logging slash was around nine times faster than through the mature coastal forest, and its spread through young conifer plantations was more than four times faster than mature stands.

Low-canopy, young plantations let sunlight reach the forest floors, which dries out brush and creates the ladder-fuel conditions that *BC is Burning* warns about. The difference is that the film claims these conditions occur in mature forests. Mount Underwood demonstrates that young plantations and logging are the culprits.

Boreal research

This is the truth that the forest industry doesn't want the public to know. Mount Underwood isn't just a one-off – a 2025 study[2] out of Quebec's boreal forest proves it's part of a pattern. Researchers analyzed 35 years of forest survey, harvest, and wildfire data across more than half a million forest plots, controlling statistically for site conditions. Their findings, published in a peer-reviewed forest

Continued on Page 14 ⇨

⇦ *Burning continued*

ecology journal, form a powerful scientific rebuttal to the forestry's industry's "log it before it burns" theory.

The study showed that logging and wildfire target completely different kinds of forest. When loggers harvest, they search for the most profitable timber – the dense, old-growth stands. Wildfire tends to do the opposite. Researchers found that as forests get older, denser, and taller, the risk of wildfires decreases, whereas low-canopy, young stands are where fire concentrates the most.

This is consistent with the Mount Underwood fire. Open canopies dry out faster and keep flammable branches low to the ground, while mature forests hold moisture closer to the forest floor. The study also claims that because the industry logs the most fire-resistant forests and leaves the fire-prone matchsticks standing, our current method of forest management is applying a "double penalty" – meaning they shrink old-growth habitats while making our forests more flammable.

Make that a triple

That double penalty doesn't stop at fire risk: it reaches into carbon too. This finding directly contradicts the carbon argument in *BC Is Burning*'s latter half. Mature, dense forests are not simply more fire-resistant; they also hold the most carbon because they have been left standing the longest.

Claiming that logging the forest preserves the carbon is false. Primary forests store carbon for centuries, accumulating far more per hectare than any replanted stand could reach within a human lifetime. Replacing them with young trees locks the landscape into a continuous cycle where the forest is cut long before it matches what was lost.

Mature, dense forests are not simply more fire-resistant; they also hold the most carbon.

The film's own contributors admit trees "can die from being burned, from pests, from storms, from harvesting" and release stored carbon regardless of which of those causes ends them. A young replanted stand is not a carbon sink "forever" like the film claims – it's a matchstick waiting to be lit because the mature trees protecting it have already been hauled away.

With sawmills closing, harvest volumes decreasing, and logging companies facing regulatory scrutiny for the fuel condition they leave behind, it is easy to see that this film is not based on neutral wildfire science. It relies on scare tactics and bunk science to persuade the viewer that it's good to log more, faster, and without restrictions.

An industry that's losing mills and logging volume has an incentive to reframe wildfire risk as a reason to expand logging, not restrict it – which makes a film funded by that same industry a poor messenger for real wildfire science.

The Forest Minister's apparent endorsement of *BC Is Burning* should shock the public. When government officials openly support this narrative, it stops being a documentary and becomes government policy filtered through a camera lens.

Communities don't need forestry propaganda; they need facts. And the facts, from Mount Underwood to Quebec's boreal forest, demonstrate the opposite of everything this film says. Old growth doesn't burn like this. Plantations do. The ancient forests were never the problem – they're the only thing standing between us and more wildfires like Mount Underwood.

If MLAs smiling for a photo op is what passes for wildfire policy in this province, then the mismanagement isn't in the forests. It's in the legislature.

Emily Milne is an aspiring educator who grew up on Vancouver Island. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, hiking, and exploring British Columbia's nature.

Footnotes:

1: *www.evergreenalliance.ca/notices-of-complaint-to-forest-practices-board/3*
2: *What burns and what is cut? Contrasting disturbance effects of harvesting and wildfire on primary forest stands in old-growth-dominated boreal landscapes*, Martin et al, *Forest Ecology and Management*, Volume 617, 2026 (*www.bit.ly/forest_science*).

See also *Watershed Sentinel*, April/May 2026.

The New Culture War

Who's driving the backlash against Indigenous rights in BC?

by Kai Nagata

The fake letter showed up on a family's doorstep in Britannia Beach in May, warning the residents to leave their home and "remove all personal property, structures and improvements," because the Squamish Nation was coming to take the land back.

The fraudulent document, which reads like it was generated by an AI chatbot, was signed with the name of Wilson Williams, chair of the Squamish Nation's elected council. Williams quickly put out a statement calling it "100% false" and a "deliberate provocation."

Months later, it's still a mystery who created the letter, and why. But whoever dropped it off must have known it would land like a spark in a tinderbox. Feelings of anti-Indigenous resentment have been cultivated for years by overlapping networks of activists in BC and beyond. Now, things are coming to a head.

Boosted by high-profile court battles, the backlash against Indigenous rights is shifting public opinion in BC, shaping political outcomes, and turning neighbours against each other. As the conflagration grows, it's worth looking at who is putting fuel on the fire, and why.

How did we get here?

This culture war is the product of three interrelated campaigns that have built momentum over the last decade.

The first sprang up in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report in 2015, which found that Canada had committed "cultural genocide" against Indigenous peoples. Ever since, a network of right-wing think tanks has worked to justify, downplay, or deny the impact of Indian Residential Schools, and undermine public sympathy for Indigenous rights.

The second is the response by powerful industries in BC to a series of Aboriginal rights wins. These include the 2014 Tŝilhqot'in title case, the Yahey cumulative impacts case in 2021, the Gitxaala Nation's fight over mining claims, and the Cowichan case, which centres on a historic village site that was fraudulently sold to private buyers over a century ago.

Finally, there's the campaign by anti-Indigenous activists to win elected office and use the legislature to change laws and roll back Indigenous rights. This started on the far right, but has moved into the mainstream with the election of BC Conservative leader Kerry-Lynne Findlay.

To be fair, racial hostility has been a feature of BC politics since the province was founded. The high-water mark of legal and social progress was probably 2019, when BC lawmakers voted unanimously for the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.* At that time, opponents of reconciliation were on the political fringe. But seven years later, British Columbians' sense of economic security is crumbling. And people are looking for someone to blame.

The Atlas Network and the "hoax"

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report stated that "at least 3,200 children" died out of 150,000 who were forced to attend Indian Residential Schools. TRC chair Justice Murray Sinclair said that the number was probably 6,000 or more, but poor record-keeping meant the exact number would never be known. The schools, the TRC found, were intended to dismantle Indigenous languages and cultures, to facilitate the takeover of their land. The stark testimony of thousands of witnesses added weight to decades of Indigenous lawsuits, which have exposed the Crown's shaky legal claims to much of the landbase.

This sent a ripple of alarm through Canada's network of libertarian and "free market" think tanks, which advocates for private property rights, deregulated resource extraction, and the legitimacy of a Canadian state founded on the European colonial occupation of North America.

The Frontier Centre for Public Policy began a pushback campaign that has produced hundreds of opinion articles attempting to downplay, justify, or outright deny deaths at residential schools.

Continued on Page 16 ⇨

⇦*The New Culture War continued*

The think tank has ramped up its rhetoric over the last decade, running radio ads, writing speeches, and promoting books purporting to expose "the Great Canadian Hoax."

The Frontier Centre is part of the US-based Atlas Network, which offers training, funding and coordination to more than 500 right-wing think tanks around the globe. Its partners include the Fraser Institute, Canadian Taxpayers Federation, MacDonald-Laurier Institute, and more.

The campaign took on greater urgency after 2021, when ground-penetrating radar revealed anomalies that suggested burials at the site of the Kamloops Indian Residential School. Soon, First Nations across the country reported similar findings, and in one case, physical remains.

A fierce debate continues over whether and how to excavate these sites. If they are indeed the unmarked graves of children, some residential school survivors want them left undisturbed. But that leaves the Frontier Centre and Fraser Institute free to claim no graves exist at all. The Atlas-backed campaign to create doubt around deaths at residential schools has fueled a culture war that diverts attention from the underlying question: whose land are we living on? And who should decide what happens on that land?

The real threat to private property

It's ironic that the people fighting to maintain this Gold Rush-era status quo pretend that it's First Nations who pose the greatest threat to private property. A pipeline company can build through your back yard, and use a Right of Entry order to access your property if you say no. Anyone with $20 and a laptop can legally stake a mining claim under your back yard.

British Columbians' sense of economic security is crumbling. And people are looking for someone to blame.

But this corporate supremacy has been challenged in the last ten years by a string of legal victories that threatens to balance the playing field between Indigenous title holders and the global investors who control resource extraction in BC.

The most direct challenge is posed by the Gitxaala case, which goes right to the heart of the Free Entry Mining regime, and has unleashed a counter-campaign by resource companies that see the implications of losing unfettered access to almost all land in BC.

Resource companies double down

What if that land is not actually the Crown's to rent out? That's what the Tŝilhqot'in proved in 2014, in a landmark title case that offered a powerful precedent to other nations seeking to prove collective ownership of their land.

Corporations, the Crown, and their lawyers have spent much of the last decade battling Indigenous rights claims in the courts and losing. This has led to the conclusion that they need to change the underlying laws, so that First Nations have less of a legal foothold to deny consent or assert jurisdiction over land.

Many of the same Atlas Network members have now taken up a campaign to repeal the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, or DRIPA, to "help spur mining investment," in the words of the Fraser Institute. But some on the right go farther, calling to reopen Canada's Constitution.

Alberta's Danielle Smith is trying to build a coalition of premiers to amend Section 35, which recognizes Aboriginal rights. BC Conservative leader Kerry-Lynne Findlay, who wants to create a "Western Alliance" with Smith, says she would seek amendments "to ensure that property rights take primacy and are constitutionally protected."

That's exactly what the Frontier Centre has been advocating for: US-style constitutional protections for private land ownership, as a bulwark against Indigenous land claims.

Meanwhile the BC NDP premier has turned his back on Indigenous leaders, complained publicly about judges' decisions, and tried desperately to wriggle out of the DRIPA legislation that his party introduced a few short years ago. By chasing the conservatives to the right, he has revealed a lack of principles, alienated traditional allies, and tanked his own approval numbers.

"Landback" is not a metaphor

It was never going to pass unnoticed that a Canadian province forgot to get receipts for 95% of the landbase that it claims. British Columbia has been fudging the land question for 180 years, ever since the Oregon Treaty of 1846. And like that earlier negotiation with the Americans, the current reckoning has deep implications for US interests.

American billionaires own millions of acres of farmland in BC. They control the

only oil refinery on Canada's West Coast and the only gas pipeline to the coast. They own the Ksi Lisims LNG proposal. The American government, companies, and wealthy citizens own critical minerals mines, sawmills, warehouses, businesses, and luxury real estate all over BC.

Although Indigenous land claims have been careful over the years to focus on "Crown land," not private property, it was inevitable that some specific properties get swept up in lawsuits, due to rampant criminality (illustrated by the Cowichan case) during the decades when much of the best land in BC was carved up.

Whatever the outcome, greater Indigenous control over Crown lands is already proving to be make-or-break for high-stakes resource extraction projects. That's why so many powerful people are paying attention to the ongoing lawsuits, and trying to enlist British Columbians in a wider backlash against Indigenous rights. But more foreign-owned megaprojects are not the solution to our problems.

It's time to try something different. But first, we have to shake off the fear that's been drilled into us over the last decade by a coalition of ideological think tanks, greedy billionaires, self-interested politicians, and online provocateurs.

Excerpted from the original article at *www.dogwoodbc.ca*. Read the full story: *https://bit.ly/the_backlash*.

More about Indigenous rights and private property: *www.bit.ly/aboriginal_title*.

Kai Nagata lives on Gitxsan territory in Northern BC. A former journalist, he works at Dogwood BC and volunteers on the board of Harbinger Media Network.



The Welcome Figure is a West Vancouver landmark visible from Lions Gate Bridge, Stanley Park and the waterfront of West Vancouver.

Carved from a Hollyburn Mountain old-growth cedar log, the Welcome Figure is a gift from the Squamish Nation, marking K'aya'chtn (gathering of ocean canoes).

In honour of the teachings and wisdom of the Squamish Nation grandmothers, the sculpture fosters respect for the land, animals and people that occupy it.

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The Common Good



The common good serves us all. It includes the basics of life: water, air, peace and quiet, the earth, and the sky.

But corporate greed is trying to pilfer all it can. From the loss of a rare and beautiful peat bog to the looming threat of a massive data centre, citizen groups are battling privateers and complicit governments. People are defending their water, air, forests, and even the skies above.

We bring you these stories to inspire, not to distract. They aren't a diversion; they are the main event, the most important stories of our time.

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The Quiet Places

Discovering a rare and imperiled urban peat marsh

by Ben Wickham

Southwest of Cottle Lake, tucked beneath towering Douglas firs and bedrock cliffs and hidden behind the growing neighbourhoods of North Nanaimo, lies a wetland that has been quietly shaping itself for thousands of years.

Pileated woodpeckers flit from tree to tree, while red-legged frogs call from beneath salal and Labrador tea bushes. Beneath the dark water, dense peat filters groundwater, stores carbon, and supports a web of life that extends far beyond the wetland's boundaries.

A wooden boardwalk carries visitors into the heart of the fen, offering a rare glimpse of a landscape that has largely been left to itself. The air is cool beneath the trees. The scent of pine or still water hangs over the wetland. It is the sort of place that asks little of us except that we slow down long enough to notice it.

The larger forest to the northeast was almost lost. In 2003, Linley Valley Cottle Park was saved from development through years of hard work by residents and the Nanaimo & Area Land Trust. Today, the neighbouring wetland, which lies on private land and is far less well-known, faces its own development threat. But there is an important difference between the two places. By the time neighbours heard what was planned for this land, several binding decisions had already been made.

The armchair environmentalist

Tamara Brown never expected to become the voice of a wetland.

"I've always been an armchair environmentalist," she told me. But campaigns, council meetings, and environmental advocacy seemed to belong to other people.

Like many Rock City residents, she had assumed that one day a few houses might appear among the trees. Instead, while catching up on development notices, she discovered plans for a much larger project. She said the scale of the proposal and the amount of clearing it would require left her "speechless."

The proposal at 3400 Barrington Road is for a six-storey rental apartment building with 102 homes and two additional parking levels. The development permit was approved in January 2026. "I always knew this land would probably be developed someday," she said. "I imagined a few houses. I imagined them cutting down a few trees, I never expected 437. I never imagined the scale of the blasting."

"I read as much as I could immediately," she said. "That's kind of my thing; I have to understand things inside and out. I have to understand how this could happen."

No public hearing

That understanding proved more complicated than she expected. The development permit did not go before city council for approval. The Director of Community Development had delegated authority to approve or reject it, and the permit was approved administratively. Because the land was already appropriately zoned, the development-permit process did not include a public hearing – or a public notice.

"The only way you would have known about it is if you had looked up the 'What's Building In My Neighbourhood' page like I did," Brown told me.

The city operates an online database where residents can search applications and subscribe to development updates. But Brown says many neighbours had no idea that a project of this scale was moving through the approval process.

Learning to love the peat

The Rock City wetland is particularly unusual. As a peat-forming wetland, it represents thousands of years of accumulated organic material, slowly storing carbon and supporting specialized plant communities. Features like these are rare in urban environments and, once disturbed, can take centuries or longer to recover.

The more Brown dove in, the more the landscape revealed itself. What had once seemed like an ordinary patch of wetland

Continued on Page 20 ⇨

⇦*The Quiet Places continued*

became a rare peatland ecosystem, home to species and ecological processes that had quietly persisted for thousands of years. “Learning more about it makes me fall in love,” she said.

Brown also discovered that the wetland was a small part of a much larger living system.

Connected waters

Paul Chapman, Executive Director of the Nanaimo & Area Land Trust, says wetlands suffer from a public relations problem. “If we called them the hearts of the Earth instead of the kidneys, maybe people would appreciate them a little more,” he told me with a laugh.

Like kidneys, wetlands perform the quiet work that keeps ecosystems healthy.

> Decisions affecting the common good deserve public attention.

They filter streams and rivers, recharge groundwater, store vast amounts of carbon, reduce flooding during heavy rains, and provide habitat for an extraordinary diversity of plants and animals. But their most important quality is less obvious: they connect.

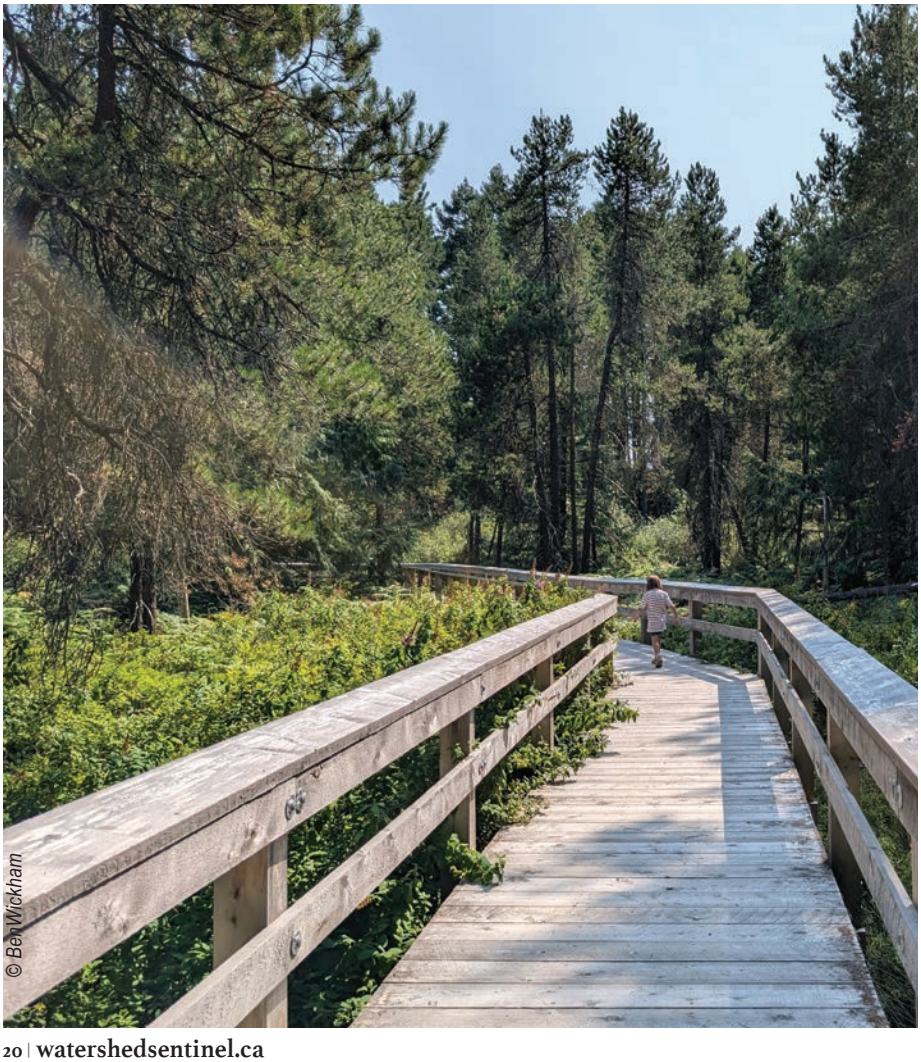
The Rock City wetland is part of the larger Cottle Creek watershed, linked through both surface water and groundwater to Cottle Lake and the surrounding landscape. Water, sediment, nutrients, and wildlife move from the wetlands to forests, streams, and eventually the ocean.

“People often think of these places as isolated pockets,” Chapman explained. “They’re really part of a much bigger system.”

That invisibility may be wetlands’ greatest challenge. Rivers move and roar. Wetlands whisper, working on timescales measured in both seasons and millennia. Because many of their greatest contributions happen beneath the surface, they can be mistaken as empty spaces waiting to become something more useful.

For Brown, learning about the wetland came with an unexpected consequence: once she understood what it was, she could no longer look away. “I can’t stop the Amazon from being cut down,” she told me. “I can’t do anything about Gaza. But I can do something here.”

But what happens when one decides to act, only to discover that much of the for-



© Ben Wickham

mal decision-making process has already happened?

Brown and her neighbours can collect signatures, speak to council, consult scientists, and push for stronger environmental protections. But they began doing so after the development permit had already been issued. That does not make their involvement meaningless, but it changes what success might look like.

The larger wetland is protected by covenant and a 15-metre setback under the zoning bylaw, while a smaller seasonal wetland on the property has a 7.5 metre leave strip under the covenant. Brown's concern is that protecting individual patches of wetland does not necessarily protect the surface and groundwater connections that allow the larger system to function. And that a 7.5-metre buffer will not be enough to protect the wetland from the kinds of developmental disturbances that might cause it to disappear forever.

Those concerns echo Chapman's warning that wetlands do not exist as isolated pockets. Across the region, citizens and stewardship groups are increasingly trying to identify those connections before development reaches the point where choices have narrowed. Volunteers map vernal pools, restore salmon streams, monitor wildlife, and document natural features that may otherwise go unnoticed.

"People are really connected to place," Chapman said. "That's where stewardship begins."

The need for housing

Nanaimo is one of British Columbia's fastest growing communities, and with that growth comes an undeniable need for housing. The challenge isn't whether to build, but where and how.

> Many neighbours had no idea that a project of this scale was moving through the approval process.

Chapman is careful not to frame conservation and development as opposing forces.

"We need housing," he said. The question is whether communities can grow without treating every undeveloped parcel as vacant land waiting to be filled.

The conflict at Rock City is larger than one development. It is about when the public gets to participate in deciding what protection looks like. Once zoning is established, permits issued, and investments committed, even an engaged neighbourhood may discover that its legal and financial room to maneuver has become very small.

Brown did what civil society asks people to do. She paid attention. She educated herself. She spoke to her neighbours, contacted experts, and brought her concerns to elected officials. Whether those actions can substantially change what happens at 3400 Barrington Road is another question.

"The answer to despair is to do something," Chapman said. "The primary motivator for action is hope."

But action does not guarantee victory. Sometimes volunteers plant native species on rainy Saturday mornings. Sometimes neighbours attend council meetings after putting their children to bed. Sometimes people discover that a place worth protecting entered the public conversation only after many of the decisions governing its future had already been made.

Civil society is often described in grand terms, but perhaps it's something simpler: the decision to care about what belongs to everyone, and to insist that decisions affecting the common good deserve public attention. For Brown, that began with curiosity. Curiosity became stewardship.

Perhaps the lesson of Rock City is that stewardship needs to begin before permits are issued and machinery is on its way, while there is still space to decide what a community is willing to protect. The people have a right to know what is happening in their backyards, and governments have a responsibility to reasonably inform people.

We know that the quiet places cannot speak for themselves, but someone should.

Ben Wickham is a writer from Nanaimo, BC with a background in education and public service. His passions for writing and nature come from his father and mother respectively.

Your Water, Your Vote

Questions

the candidates hope you won't ask

by Susan Blacklin

Municipal election season is here — that magical time every four years when lawn signs multiply like dandelions, candidates rediscover the existence of community centres, and a surprising number of people suddenly remember they live in a town with a mayor.

You know the pattern. Council ignores residents for three and a half years. Residents get annoyed. Residents get organized. A wave of righteous civic energy sweeps in and occasionally replaces a perfectly mediocre council with something demonstrably worse. Democracy in action.

But before you vote based on whoever has the best-looking sign or the firmest handshake at the farmers' market – can we talk about water?



Yes. Water. The Thing You Drink Every Day.

Here's a thought experiment: imagine your tap water delivering asbestos fibres, pharmaceutical runoff, or PFAS – "forever chemicals" – directly to your family's glasses.

Suddenly every other campaign promise feels slightly less urgent. Safe drinking water is not a niche concern for people. It is the foundational public health issue. You cannot expand a community into a watershed you've spent a decade degrading and expect clean water to keep flowing. And if contaminants enter after your treatment plant – what then?

A few uncomfortable facts: British Columbia has the highest number of Drinking Water Advisories of any province in Canada. Not second highest. The highest. In a province that sells itself internationally on pristine wilderness.

Canada is also – pause for quiet national embarrassment – the only G7 country without national drinking water regulations. Everyone else has federal standards. We have a patchwork of weak provincial guidelines and municipalities are largely left to muddle through alone.

The "Drinking Water Advisory" should not be a way of life in a wealthy democracy.

The 23-Question Stress Test

(Bring to every all-candidates meeting.)

Municipal candidates will cheerfully field questions about dog parks, roundabouts, and the approved shade of beige for downtown planters. They are less prepared for people asking questions about watershed management and their drinking water.

Let's fix that.

What We Have

1. Where does our drinking water come from – surface water, groundwater, wells?
2. How sustainable is our water supply, and how much growth can it support before water rationing?
3. Is anything – or anyone – contaminating our source water right now?
4. If contamination is a risk, what's the plan – with a timeline, a budget, and an official name attached?

What's Going Wrong

5. How often has our sewage overflowed into storm drains, creeks, or rivers?
6. Can our treatment system actually remove pesticides, pharmaceuticals, and PFAS, and to what percentage? "Meets standards" is not the same as "removes 99% of forever chemicals."
7. What firefighting foam has been used in our area over the past twenty years? Did it contain PFAS? Could it have reached our source water?
8. What funding applications have been submitted to upgrade our water treatment systems? If the answer is none, why not? Communities that don't apply don't receive.
9. What PFAS testing is being done regularly on our land and water? "We haven't found a problem," is meaningful only if someone has actually been looking.

What's Coming

10. What contracts or agreements – for data centres, bottling plants, or high-density development – are in place or under consideration that will affect our water supply?
11. How many contracts have been awarded in the past decade for asbestos cement water pipe maintenance? These pipes degrade. They potentially deliver cancer directly to your tap.
12. Tell us exactly where abandoned asbestos cement pipes have been left in the ground – leaching fibres into the water supply.

The Promises

Will you:

13. Engage with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities on water protection? If not, why not?
14. Ensure our source water catchment area is protected from industrial over-extraction? – Or is it open season for anyone with the right permits and a thirst for profit?
15. Confirm our water treatment and wastewater treatment systems effectively remove everything on the BC guidelines list – arsenic, lead, asbestos, PFAS, pesticides, *E. coli*?
16. Refuse to sign any water-related contract without full public transparency and a community vote?
17. Require all asbestos pipe contracts to legally mandate removal or encasement – never abandonment underground?
18. Commit to removing all asbestos pipes unlawfully left in the ground by previous councils?
19. Mandate PFAS-free firefighting foam wherever contamination of land or water is possible?
20. Follow Tofino and ban single-use plastic water bottles?
21. Disclose negotiations with any industry that requires significant water extraction and make sure a community referendum is held first?
22. Initiate a municipal tax on industrial water users to compensate for the low provincial price they currently pay per litre?
23. Will you pledge to always protect public health and the environment – even when it's inconvenient or unpopular with corporations?

A Final Word

In January 2026, the United Nations declared that the world has "entered an era of global water bankruptcy." *(https://unu.edu/inweh/news/world-enters-era-of-global-water-bankruptcy)*. BC is burning hotter and drying faster every year. Doing nothing is not a neutral position – it is a slow-motion choice to leave your community, your children, and seven generations after them, increasingly vulnerable.

Water is not a policy file. It is not a line item. It is not something to get around to after the parking structure debate is resolved. These questions are equally applicable anywhere in Canada, not just BC.

Water is life. Right now, it's asking urgently to be treated like it.

Susan Blacklin lives on Vancouver Island and is the author of *Water Confidential: Witnessing Justice Denied* (2024) and *Water Justice: What you Don't Know Could Kill You* (2026). She is a proud member of the National Council of Women of Canada which has launched a national campaign to raise awareness on this critical issue. The NCWC invites everyone to join in by reading, signing, and sharing its Open Letter at *https://www.ncwcanada.ca/open-letter-for-canada-to-protect-our-water*

Reclaiming Darkness

Why saving the night sky is saving ourselves



by Patrick Earl

There is nothing quite like a story told around a campfire. Growing up on the prairies, the tales shared around a dancing flame ranged from fictional legends to lifting a truck transmission without a hoist in -30°C weather.

Before humans chipped stone into tools, the campfire clan was our first institution. As the sun set and stars emerged in the darkening twilight, the night sky served as humanity's storyboard. Early civilizations mapped their truths, cycles, and sacred mythologies onto the celestial canvas.

That shared canvas, however, is vanishing. Over the last two centuries, we have bathed the planet in a relentless artificial glow. We've traded the collective wonder of the campfire clan for the isolated glow of individual digital screens, walled off inside concrete, steel, and artificial light.

When environmental advocates talk about light pollution, the conversation focuses on ecological disruption: disoriented sea turtles, birds colliding with illuminated towers, disrupted bat feeding cycles, collapsing insect populations. But building broad, lasting support for light-pollution abatement means expanding the narrative. Saving the night sky isn't just about saving turtles or bugs; it is an act of human self-preservation. Reclaiming our connection to the cosmos restores a missing piece of human health and identity.

Events serve as powerful engines for outreach to both the public and industry leaders. Back in April 2009, during the International Astronomical Union's yearly "100 Hours of Astronomy" celebrating Galileo's legacy, I hosted a major event in Strathcona County, Alberta, that drew 800 attendees and an energy company sponsor. By pairing telescopes with local artisans live-painting the night sky, we proved that industry collaboration and public celebration can walk hand in hand.

Over the years, a multi-sensory approach became the core of my outreach philosophy. At Manning Park in BC, we brought dark skies to life through immersive outdoor activities, with something for everyone – from midnight paddleboarding under the Milky Way, to twilight yoga, to hearing different cultures' stories while discovering their constellations.

Once emotional and collaborative connection takes root, light pollution abatement look less like a restrictive sacrifice and more look like intelligent design for the common good. Dark Sky advocacy groups are forming in communities around the globe, including on Gabriola Island, where they are working to get dark sky principles adopted into the new Official Community Plan in 2027.

The principles of dark sky preservation apply whether in a prairie municipality, an industrial corridor, or a coastal island community. In rural and island settings, light pollution creeps in through unshielded residential floodlights, unmanaged commercial glare near local businesses, and bright, unshielded security lighting at ferry terminals and marine hubs.

Smart lighting design makes commercial, industrial, and transportation sites safer. Blasting a work yard, ferry terminal, or roadway with intense, unshielded light does not improve visibility; it causes "disability glare" as blinding light constricts the human pupil and creates pitch-black shadows adjacent to the light fixture, where hazards can lurk unseen. Proper abatement eliminates glare, ensuring that workers, drivers, and visitors can see clearly without being light-blinded.

When I led the application to establish Bon Accord, Alberta, as Canada's first International Dark Sky Community through DarkSky International (*darksky.org*), our goal wasn't to turn off the lights but to master them. The regional utility company stepped up as an annual sponsor of our Equinox celebrations and a direct partner in municipal infrastructure. Together, we executed a full lighting retrofit across the town by upgrading park and street fixtures to warm, fully shielded, full-cutoff halogen lamps to comply with our Light-Efficient Community Bylaw.

To track our impact empirically, we took baseline readings using Sky Quality Meters before and after the municipal retrofits. The data offered immediate proof: a measurable, significant reduction in skyglow over the town and a drastic drop in light trespass. We demonstrated that a municipality near a major urban hub could safeguard its night skies while launching practical, safe lighting standards.

Saving the night sky isn't just about saving turtles or bugs; it is an act of human self-preservation.

Effective lighting policies rely on three straightforward engineering principles:

- **Shielding and direction:** Utilizing full cut-off fixtures (FCO) that direct 100% of emitted light downward onto target surfaces, eliminating upward light scatter (skyglow) and horizontal glare.
- **Colour temperature controls:** Restricting outdoor lighting to a colour temperature that minimizes short-wavelength blue light, which blinds the eye at night and disrupts circadian rhythms in humans and other animal species.
- **Adaptive controls and curfews:** Implementing automated timers, motion sensors, and dimmers so that lighting scales down during overnight hours.

By retrofitting fixtures, managing commercial glare, and establishing sensible light-efficiency codes, communities and industrial partners cut energy waste, reduce costs, and eliminate dangerous glare for night workers and drivers.

We do not need to choose between safety, productivity, and the ancient magic of the night sky. Through thoughtful governance, precise fixture design, corporate cooperation, and creative community outreach, we can easily have all three.

The campfire clan of our ancestors gathered under a dark canopy of stars that stirred human curiosity, birthed our earliest philosophies, and bonded communities together. By treating darkness as a precious natural resource, we restore that ancestral canvas for future generations. Reclaiming the dark sky is far more than an environmental chore; it is a return to what makes us human.

Patrick Earl has spent his career in municipal economic development in BC and Alberta, driven by a lifelong passion for night-sky preservation. He is the founder of Novaburn (*www.novaburn.com*).



Cumberland Mines

Reclaiming a traumatic past through geothermal energy



by Alyona Latsinnik

The village of Cumberland, a former coal-mining centre on Vancouver Island, is exploring the possibility of harnessing geothermal energy from the water in abandoned mine shafts.

The ground beneath the town of 5,000 is riddled with abandoned drifts from eight coal mines that operated from 1888 to 1966. More than 16 million tonnes of high grade coal was extracted and shipped around the world.

Flooded mines are a source of geothermal energy because the water trapped underground gets heated from the Earth's core, and the rock serves as a buffer, helping the heat stay there all year round. Geothermal energy – heat from the earth – has huge benefits: it is available 24/7 all year round, it has a very small footprint with net zero emissions, and it is carbon-free.

Cumberland's pilot project is being conducted through a collaboration between the federally funded Accelerating Community Energy Transformation (ACET) program and Falcon Engineering.

Cumberland mayor Vickey Brown, whose family has lived in town for five generations, prompted the project. She wanted to find out how coal mines could potentially be used as a resource for sustainable development in the community.

The flooded mine shafts can serve as a fire reservoir, so that the drinking water isn't used to fight fires, the mayor says.

"Exploring the mine water has brought up a lot in our community. Intergenerational trauma lives on," Brown says. Miners were exploited and their conditions were very dangerous – an estimated 321 people lost their lives in the mines between 1888 and 1966. "I think telling that story and then using that remnant water to do something really positive to fuel our future would be just amazing."

Sophie Janke is an engineer and technical researcher who joined the Cumberland geothermal project in March. She currently works on phase one of the project, doing geological research, investigating viable pathways for energy integration, and assessing broader potential.

Janke says that it's been about 100 years since anyone physically descended into

the mine shafts. The key to success, she says, is assessing what the water is like down there, how moving it impacts the surrounding area, and what opportunities for community development exist.

Meanwhile, a team of geologists is researching historical records from the coal mining era and cross-referencing with modern GIS technology.

It takes a village

As much as this is an energy project, it is also a community project. According to Janke, the project is supporting community members to find the potential of the mine and explore "water resources for sustainable development in Cumberland." The goal, she says, is to "provide knowledge of the resource and capacity to get them closer to whatever they want to do with that knowledge."

Falcon Engineering, a local company, is currently working on finding the best place for the drilling based on research, historical records, and local people with knowledge of the town. After the drill is positioned, a pumping system would be installed and perform tests to gauge how much water is in the mines, its temperature, and what happens when it is removed and pumped back in.

Phase one of geological research is expected to be finished by the end of the year, and that's when the findings will be available for discussion. As soon as Janke gets the engineers' reports, she will assess how the data aligns with concerns about water, wildfire, economic and sustainable development, and overall vision of residents for a thriving community.

Village officials hope that the successful execution of this project would bring more development into the industrial part of town, creating jobs as well as tax revenue. The mayor and council are guiding the process, and they are hoping that the best-case scenario would be getting the shovels in the ground next summer.

> Flooded mines are a source of geothermal energy because the water trapped underground gets heated from the Earth's core.

Learning from Springhill

On the other side of the country, Springhill, Nova Scotia – famously the site of horrific mining disasters in 1891, 1956, and 1958 – is already using its flooded coal mine. The 17°C mine water is heating its fire hall and community centre and cooling the arena, according to Emily Smejkal, a professional geologist and research fellow at the Cascade Institute.

Part of the work that the University of Victoria is doing through ACET is looking at Springhill as an example of what Cumberland could accomplish.

Smejkal explains that the Cumberland project would use a minimum of two wells. One well would produce the warm water that's already sitting in those mine shafts beneath the town of Cumberland. Once the energy is taken out of that water, it will be injected back into the mine stock, so it works as a closed loop continuously circulating system. Only what already exists in the subsurface will be used.

An operation like this is closely watched and regulated by the provincial government to minimize risk. As development progresses, the town will have to follow a set of rules for safety. One potential risk to homes and businesses is the fact that many of them are built right on top of the abandoned mines. But the town has been sitting on top of the coal mines for almost 100 years, and monitoring wells have been installed to detect early signs of gas release or collapse.

"Canada actually has an advantage when it comes to geothermal. We can lean into our expertise in mining," Smejkal says. "Oil and gas… is the same technology we could use to extract geothermal energy."

Alyona Latsinnik is an undergraduate student in Indigenous/Xwulmuwx Studies and Journalism, living on unceded Quw'utsun and MÁLEXEŁ territories.



Resisting Big Data

Next-generation AI facilities target rural communities

by Leif Gregersen

A dark spectre is looming over the heads of everyone who lives here. More than any other province, Alberta is about to be carved up by companies proposing to build more than 90 large-scale data centres that threaten to use up our water, send electricity prices through the roof, and take up huge amounts of land.

To many, AI at first seemed to be the greatest thing since sliced bread. Those who invested in such companies as NVIDIA, a leading manufacturer of computer chips that power AI systems, have cashed in on a scale rarely seen since the dot-com bubble and the housing market collapse. AI allows people to churn out computer-generated "creativity" that will literally produce any image it is asked to display. It also powers some innovative and useful technology like robot arms that can take garbage from among recyclables faster than any human.

Battle lines are being drawn. Places like Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, Mississauga, Ontario, Rocky View County, Alberta, and Île-Des-Chênes, Manitoba, are pushing back, hoping the big tech companies will relent and locate their facilities elsewhere.

Across Canada, from the Maritimes to Vancouver Island, there is heavy opposition to data centres, and according to polling information gathered by the Angus Reid Institute, 68% of Canadian respondents are against construction of data centres near their homes. Among the reasons for this is that the plants need to constantly use massive amounts of energy. AI servers need this power to cool their computer systems. Cooling also uses far too much water to be sustainable.

Small data centres, typically around five megawatts in capacity, have proliferated across the country. But the next generation of facilities, known as "hyperscalers," are the powerful engines driving the AI boom, and they can demand 100 megawatts of power – enough to power 40,000 to 64,000 homes.

> What if these massive centres get built and then become obsolete in a few short years?

Five hyperscaler facilities are currently operating in Canada – two in BC and one each in New Brunswick, Ontario, and Quebec. Currently, 96 more hyperscalers are proposed or under construction. The power used by these facilities often comes from local power grids, but backups are also needed, and those can mean hundreds of smoky, incredibly loud diesel generators. Further, the centres need large amounts of cheap land, which is why they are looking to remote and previously unspoiled territory, according to Lyndsey Rolheiser, an assistant professor of economics at the Schulich School of Business, York University.

Thanks to plenty of land and water and a compliant United Conservative Party, Alberta is where many big-tech companies are looking to build more data centres. Next on the list is Ontario, with 252 megawatts of facilities proposed or under construction.

According to *City News Edmonton,* Sturgeon County is the target for Meta Corp's new $13.5 billion AI hyperscale data centre. The county has already seen investors ink a 250-megawatt deal to deliver electricity for the facility before breaking ground.

The proposed facility is sparking outrage from local citizens. The *St. Albert Gazette* reports that residents have been organizing public protests and rallies around the 21,000-person county, and they are also implementing transparency groups to directly question elected officials about energy grid impact and the lack of input from the public in greenlighting the proposal.

The community has also been reaching out to make alliances to fight the construction of the facility, most prominently with nearby Edmonton, population 1.2 million – all of whom have a stake in guarding against data centres: Because they use incredible amounts of electricity and water, they drive up the cost of utilities for everyone.

Monterey Park, California is a shining example of a community that effective-

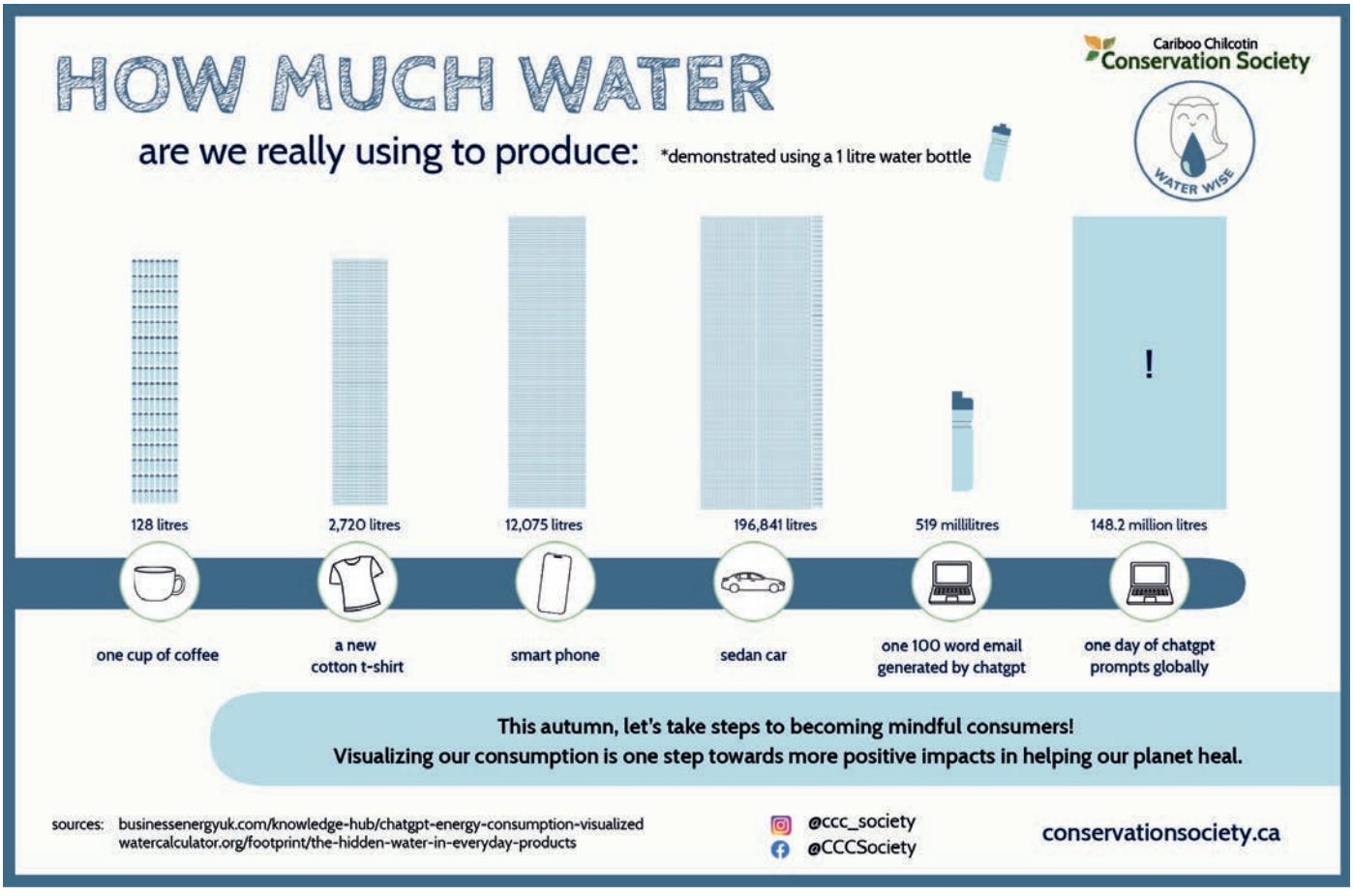
ly and legally blocked construction of a 50-megawatt AI data centre. According to *The Guardian*, the town was faced with the possibility of being swallowed up by a 250,000 square-foot data centre just metres away from homes and neighbourhood parks. Fearing relentless noise, mass consumption of water, and rising energy costs, residents rallied and forced a vote on the issue. Monterey Park thus became the first community in the US to block an AI company from building a local data centre.

The beauty of their accomplishment is that future governments can't be enticed to reverse this decision without the proposal getting past a public vote on the matter. Many of the residents and leaders of this successful grassroots campaign have set their sights on helping other nearby communities to keep data centres out of their back yards.

We need to look at the long term. What if these massive centres get built and then become obsolete in a few short years? What if new technology replaces AI and we are left with hundreds or thousands of facilities that are not even good for recycled material? Remembering the early, bulky, expensive home computers that had the same processing power of a hamster on an exercise wheel: how many millions of tons of these computers were declared to be completely useless only to be thrown in a garbage heap the size of the Empire State Building.

At this point, you can't even do a Google search without getting feedback from an AI bot. I sometimes find the information useful, but AI makes mistakes, sometimes a lot of them. In the end, without knowing it, all of us have been affected by AI, and this is just the start. With the expanding scope of the industry, we may find ourselves running out of land and water before we realize they are our most important priorities.

Leif Gregersen is an Edmonton-based writer, teacher, and public speaker who has written 12 books. *https://edmontonwriter.wordpress.com*



Wildwood Forever

An oasis of forest stewardship

by Kathy Code

Wildwood Ecoforest has long inspired awe and reverence. Centuries-old trees soar hundreds of feet into the sky, sentinels of time gone by. Birds flit and sing through the trees, moss drapes like art, and a green glow is always present in the old-growth forest no matter the weather or time of year.

Wildwood is located on Quennell Lake, near Ladysmith on Vancouver Island, BC. It is the only working demonstration ecoforest on the west coast of North America. Now encompassing 104 acres of intact forest and associated ecosystems, it stands protected in perpetuity, the first of its kind in Canada. Stewarded by the Ecoforestry Institute Society (EIS), Wildwood serves as a testament to what strong community support and a small band of determined environmentalists and ecoforesters can do.

Ecoforestry is a forest management practice that maintains or restores natural ecosystem richness, complexity, and resilience, while providing for ecologically appropriate levels of harvest of trees and non-timber forest products, and of other types of land use, including environmental education.

Conventional forest management practices revolve around clearcuts, monoculture tree plantations, and poisoning deciduous species. Wildwood is a rare example of an old-growth forest that is stewarded as an entity with an inherent right to exist. “We believe we humans are a part of Nature, not apart from it,” says Dr. Nancy Turner, renowned ethnobotanist, EIS co-founder and director.



©TylerCave

Old-growth forests are more resistant to wildfires due to their ability to retain moisture, their thick bark that protects the living tissues of the trees, and the mix of deciduous species among the conifers. This contrasts sharply with monoculture, single-aged tree plantations – often growing in dry, damaged soils – that catch fire and burn easily. Scientists have calculated that BC forests hold less than 3% old-growth, with much of the primary forest converted to tree plantations. Wildwood represents an inspiring example of how forests in our province could be sustainably managed with ecoforestry practices that can be scaled up or down according to the nature and size of the sites.

Despite the harvesting of more than 400 hundred truckloads of logs, Wildwood contains a higher volume of wood now than when its original owner, Merv Wilkinson, first started harvesting trees in 1945. He adhered to the ecoforestry practices he learned at the University of British Columbia and refined in subsequent decades. His selective harvesting methods honour the needs of an intact functioning forest, taking trees only after considering the canopy cover, tree density and species, wildlife needs, the light, moisture, water hydrology, soil quality, and other factors.

Wildwood has never been clearcut and we have never planted a tree, depending on Mother Earth to replenish the forest in her own time. Now, 80 years after Merv started to develop his vision, Wildwood remains a fully intact and functioning forest ecosystem.

Just imagine if BC's Crown lands and private forests had been managed in the same manner. With more moisture held in the soil, with intact water systems, trees of diverse ages, from seedlings to saplings to old-growth, and a mixed forest including deciduous trees and understory, it is very likely that forest fires would be fewer and less intense.

Instead, we live in a time of severe climate disasters that include raging wildfires, droughts, floods, and extensive loss of intact, biodiverse ecosystems. The destruction has been immeasurable.

The need to protect Wildwood required a creative legal solution to keep it safe forever. In 2016, the BC Supreme Court awarded EIS the right to buy and steward Wildwood. The deed is irrevocable, ensuring Wildwood can only be owned by a like-minded organization and stewarded according to ecoforestry principles and practices.

Stewarding Wildwood has pushed us to develop a unique business model that extends beyond the GDP standard. Wildwood came with a $450,000 mortgage. As a small charitable society, we had to find a way to be financially responsible and pay the bills and the mortgage. Cutting down the trees to satisfy the debt was never an option.

In truth, we treasure the forest gifts priceless to humans – the natural services that purify air and water, the food, medicines, wildlife, health and wellness (spiritual and physical), and especially the partnerships with Indigenous neighbours, whose ancestors cared for these lands over countless generations. This perspective has greatly influenced how we developed diverse revenue streams that keep us financially solvent. The EIS board incorporates ecotourism, recreation, education, health and wellness, food, medicine, and events as key revenue streams.

Wildwood exists and stands today as an intact ecoforest because people treasure the forest as a holistic entity.

Wildwood exists and stands today as an intact ecoforest because people treasure the forest as a holistic entity. Wildwood is a magnet for community support. It is thanks to the community that we were able to add another 27 acres to the property at a combined cost of $1.7 million. We are not funded by government or philanthropic organizations, so we rely heavily on the goodwill of the community to support our special projects.

Over time, Merv and the EIS team have welcomed many national and international delegations and dignitaries. Famed primatologist Dr. Jane Goodall planted a pear tree that remains a prolific producer to this day! Thanks to community goodwill and spirit, Wildwood the forest will remain forever, to embrace and inspire generations of school children and seasoned professionals.

To learn more about ecoforestry or sign up for events, please visit *www.ecoforestry.ca*.

Kathy Code is a long-time environmentalist and activist. She has been an EIS Board member since 2014 and Chair since 2023. She is a co-founder of the Fairy Creek movement and the forestry critic in Elizabeth May's shadow cabinet.

Captured Carbon

Grassroots town halls bring serious concerns to light

by Keepers of the Water

Since the Pathways Project was proposed in 2022, public scrutiny has been growing. What began as an industry-led proposal has evolved into a broader public conversation about water security, groundwater protection, induced seismicity, pipeline safety, public funding, Indigenous rights, and long-term liabilities associated with large-scale carbon capture and storage.

The Oil Sands Alliance (formerly known as the Pathways Alliance), a consortium of five major oil sands producers operating in northern Alberta, proposes to capture CO_2 emissions from oil sands facilities and transport it through a regional pipeline network of over 650 km. The proposed "storage hub" would cover approximately 18,000 km^2 – an area that encompasses or borders eight First Nations reserves (and lies within 10 km of three more), and several municipalities.

Recognizing the proposal's scale and potential implications for Indigenous Nations, local communities, lands, waters, wildlife, and future generations, Keepers of the Water began research in 2024 to help communities better understand the project and potential impacts through presentations, town halls, and collaboration with Indigenous Nations, scientists, landowners, and environmental organizations.

Our goal was not only to share information, but also to listen. Participants consistently told us they had received little information about the potential risks of transporting, injecting, and permanently storing carbon dioxide. While specific concerns varied between communities, several common themes emerged:

Project costs and public funding: Many participants questioned the overall cost of the project (current estimates range from $16-50 billion), and expressed concern that public funds could be used to subsidize a project intended to support continued oil sands production.

Long-term storage and liability: Community members questioned the long-term implications of storing millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide underground. Many expressed concern that future generations could inherit environmental and financial liabilities associated with the project, and asked who will be responsible for monitoring storage sites decades into the future.

Pipeline safety and emergency response: People asked whether emergency response plans, evacuation procedures, and public notification systems would be adequate given the unique hazards associated with high-pressure CO_2 releases, including the fact that gas and diesel vehicles will not run in a concentrated CO_2 plume.

The 2020 CO_2 pipeline rupture near Satartia, Missisippi, in which over 200 people were evacuated and 45 received medical care, demonstrated that a quick pressure alarm does not mean a CO_2 release will stop immediately. The Alliance says emergency plans will be developed and tested. KOW hasn't found a public plan.

Water Protection: Protecting groundwater and drinking water supplies was a significant concern for many landowners, Indigenous Nations, and rural residents. The Pathways project could use as much as 740 litres of water for every tonne of CO_2 captured. By 2050, this would work out to 5.9 billion litres annually from the Beaver River basin system, which is projected to have only nine billion litres of reserve in dry years.

Induced Seismicity and Groundwater: Scientists and regulators recognize that underground fluid injection can alter subsurface pressures and, under certain conditions, trigger induced seismicity – earthquakes caused by human activity.

Changes in underground pressure can influence existing faults, well integrity, and groundwater flow pathways. For Indigenous Nations, rural residents, and farmers who depend on groundwater, understanding these risks is essential. Communities deserve clear information about seismic risks, groundwater protection, emergency preparedness, and the long-term environmental liabilities associated with underground carbon storage.

Excerpted from Keepers of the Water's July 2026 report *Oil Sands Alliance Carbon Capture and Storage Proposal Community Engagement Report 2024-2026. www.keepersofthewater.ca/publications*

The LNG Gamble

Shifting demand and higher costs make a risky investment

by Delores Broten

The Pembina Institute's June 2026 report *The LNG Gamble: Separating Hype From Evidence* paints a gloomy picture of uncertain markets for LNG, especially Canada's expensive gas. It should be required reading for Prime Minister Mark Carney and BC Premier David Eby.

Demand uncertainty

The American war on Iran has created a situation of high prices, but if the Strait of Hormuz re-opens, and Qatar's vast and readily accessible reserves come back online after Iranian bombing, that price bonanza will only last two or three years (*The New Arab*, June 24, 2026).

Projections of future LNG demand vary according to their assumptions about future prices compared to other options. The Pembina report discusses factors that suggest demand for Canadian LNG may weaken in the future. For example, it goes through each accessible Asian market one by one. In almost every case, countries are increasingly turning to solar, wind, battery storage and, in some cases like Japan and China, nuclear.

The report notes: "LNG projects typically require five years to construct and several decades of operation to recover investment costs. If global gas demand follows lower-demand pathways, Canadian projects built today could face declining demand, underutilization, or increased competition in global markets."

While the demand for natural gas for data centres looms large in small towns, the International Energy Agency projects the global total will be relatively small, and about half the energy required will be supplied by renewables, according to its 2025 report *Energy Supply for AI*.

High costs and urgent warnings

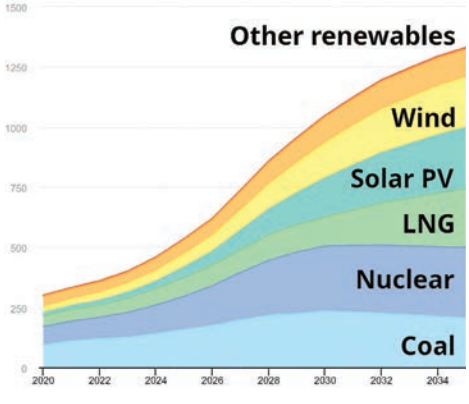
Canadian liquefaction costs, passed on to buyers, run about double the global average; 40% above new US facilities. Meanwhile, competition is coming on fast with new plants in Qatar, the US, and Africa, and a global glut forecast by 2030.

The biggest weakness for Canadian industry competitiveness in a surplus market is cost. New infrastructure, long pipelines, and high labour costs reduce profitability, especially given low prices and low demand. GHG emissions and pollution are also potentially significant financial risks. But US LNG facilities clustered along already-built Gulf Coast infrastructure and pipelines may remain financially viable if prices drop. Meanwhile Qatar, with its large reservoir, existing infrastructure, and skilled labour, can deliver gas at even lower prices.

The study recommends that governments should not subsidize, finance, or enter into risk-sharing agreements with LNG projects. That includes offering preferential electricity rates and tax expenditures, because all these interventions shift commercial risk to taxpayers and increase the likelihood that public funds will be exposed to stranded-asset outcomes. Pembina advises governments to require LNG projects to proceed only on fully commercial terms. If private capital won't absorb the risks associated with long-lived LNG infrastructure in a volatile, competitive, global market, governments should not do so on its behalf.

The BC government initially painted a pretty profit picture for its proposed new LNG facilities. However, in August it admitted to $1.5 billion in accounting errors which falsely inflated expected gas royalties. The error, unmasked by Treaty 8 First Nations and other economists, apparently failed to deduct overhead from the company profits on which royalties are based. Disputes continue over the exact nature and amount of the error, according to reports in *Business in Vancouver (https://bit.ly/LNG-error)*.

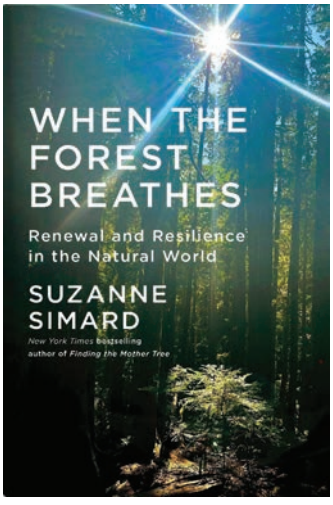
Global electricity sources for data centres 2020-2035 (Source: IEA)



The Forest Breathes

Relationships and resilience in the natural world

Review by Heather Menzies



When the Forest Breathes: Renewal and Resilience in the Natural World
by Suzanne Simard | Penguin Random House
2026

This important new book by UBC forest ecologist Suzanne Simard documents the devastation of conventional forestry policy and why the alternative she and her students tested through the Mother Tree Project makes sense. Simard models how settlers can bridge the colonial divide through respectful relationship building and humility.

In BC forests, 94% of logging is still done through clear cutting (with reserves). While denuding the land and destroying bear dens and eagle nests, massive machines like the 37,000-kg hoe chucker compact the ground as they "chuck" the tree down the slope, squishing out the moisture, releasing carbon, and destabilizing essential organo-mineral soil compounds that support and regenerate life.

Through decades of arduous field research, Simard and her students have demonstrated the inadequacies of conventional reforestation through monoculture seedlings. The survival rate is much higher in places where at least 60% of the forest is left intact. The carbon stored in the ground is a small fraction of what old-growth forests can hold.

Then there's the research supporting a more relational policy: local seeds do better than a single generic brand. Kin-related trees flourish. Cedar, yew and maple not only seem to share mycorrhizal fungal networks, but carbon networks. In mixed stands, kin seedlings grow better near kin than around other unrelated Douglas firs. They respond to their neighbors by adjusting their mycorrhizal status, foliage, and fine roots. In other words, it's all about relationships and relating.

Over the years, Simard and her colleagues and students have formed relationships with Indigenous foresters, scientists, knowledge keepers, and leaders. People like Dave Walkem of the Nlaka'pamux Nation, Dr. Teresa (Sm'hayetsk) Ryan of the Ts'msyen Nation and Makwala (Rande Cook), hereditary chief of the Ma'amtagila Nation. When they explained that kin-related interconnectivity among trees has long been part of their teachings and their creation stories, she saw the complementarity with her seemingly new scientific knowledge.

As one of her colleagues put it, "all [our] ideas about connection and respect and reciprocity in the forest – these are very, very old ideas…. The original people of this land had it right. And we're sort of bumbling along trying to catch up."

Simard and her students spent time in Ma'amtagila territory documenting the effects of clearcutting, in support of the nation's efforts to have the land and its precious forest returned to them so that they can restore the forest on their own terms – using their lifeways, their laws, and the knowledge embedded in their stories and their language. On Haida Gwaii, she and her colleagues worked with the Haida Gwaii Management Council to include some remnant old growth in the Mother Tree Project. The bridge-building collaborations continue, with relational ways of knowing supporting them.

Relational ways infuse how Simard approaches her work. Throughout the book, she tells stories honouring the research of cherished colleagues, including her scientist daughters. An ethic of mutually respectful relations versus a mastering one might be the transformational change Simard is calling for.

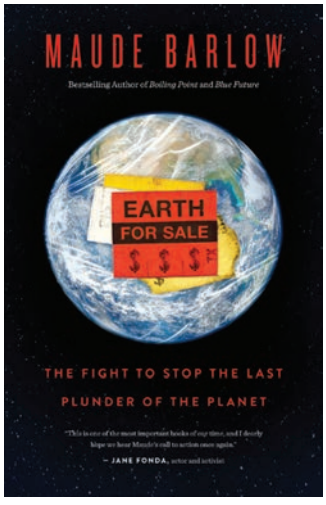
Heather Menzies is an award-winning writer, speaker, and adjunct professor in the School of Indigenous and Canadian Studies, Carleton University. She lives on Snuneymuxw territory.

Earth for Sale

Maude Barlow's latest book takes aim at "green finance"

Review by Alice de Wolff

Maude Barlow has an exceptional capacity to combine her deep passion for social justice and the health of the planet with the ability to identify and critique complex international trends and relationships.



Earth for Sale: The Fight to Stop the Last Plunder of the Planet
by Maude Barlow | ECW Press | 2026

In *Earth for Sale*, Barlow warns of a new threat to our ability to protect the planet. Corporations are learning how to profit from citizen initiatives, smaller business innovations, and government projects that attempt to keep carbon in the ground, protect forests and biodiverse areas, reuse materials, and protect watersheds.

Using concrete examples, Barlow acquaints the reader with the "financialization of nature" or "green finance." For centuries, wealth in our economy has been based (problematically) on the extraction of natural resources like gold and beaver pelts. Financialization is a further step that turns complex ecosystems into an "asset class" that can be bought and sold in a market.

Barlow recognizes that this process often begins with good-faith efforts to address aspects of the environmental crisis. But placing financial value on things like "nature-based solutions," "green growth," "natural capital," and "ecosystem services" has opened a Pandora's box in the financial world. Measures such as carbon trading, blue carbon trading (oceans), plastics offsets, nature bonds, debt-for-nature swaps, Water Quality Trading, nature-based Exchange Traded Funds, natural capital cryptocurrency trading, biodiversity credits, and water futures have proliferated in recent decades.

Barlow demonstrates how these measures create huge wealth and rights inequalities among humans while harming rather than protecting nature. "Not only does the carbon market continue to grow, so does Big Oil," she writes. Polluters can claim to be "green," or "carbon neutral," by investing in so-called nature-based solutions anywhere in the world. As these investments become a larger part of a project's revenue, investors have greater influence over that project's management. These interests conflict with the ecosystem knowledge and interests of local, often Indigenous, communities.

The studies highlighted in *Earth for Sale* make the point that this is not something happening at the edges of global finance. Global "clean energy" investments exceeded US$2 trillion in 2024. Forty-three per cent of Tesla's 2024 net income came from selling carbon credits. Two-thirds of the world's largest corporations use carbon offsets to claim they're achieving their own net-zero targets.

Barlow introduces us to the people who are challenging these claims about reducing carbon use and strengthening biodiversity. She shares how she is inspired by groups and coalitions from around the world who are opposing the financialization of nature, and finds special inspiration in new efforts to merge environmental law with human rights. For her, this means keeping water, land, air, and biodiversity as a "commons," which requires both strong public-trust measures and the promotion of human rights.

Jesse Cardinal, Executive Director of Keepers of the Water, captures the urgency of *Earth for Sale*: "Maude Barlow has given us a strong warning about the 'financialization of nature' – the newest corporate assault on Mother Earth. We must all work together and listen to these words."

Alice de Wolff is a community activist, researcher, and writer based in the Comox Valley. She is a Sentinel Educational Foundation board member.

Wild Times Borderlands Old Growth

by Joe Foy

A friend and I decided to backpack into an area of old-growth forest on the borderlands near Chilliwack Lake where I first visited 40 years ago.

I thought it might be the site of a rare unlogged stretch of the 1858 Whatcom Trail. Turned out, it was.

This is within Ts'elxwéyeqw Tribe territory, which is part of the Stó:lõ Nation. In January 1858, there were about 70,000 Indigenous people and fewer than 1,000 non-Indigenous people living in what is now called British Columbia.

The Whatcom Trail route was stitched together using Indigenous knowledge and trails used by Hudson Bay fur traders. The US town of Whatcom wanted to be the point of departure for the Gold Rush that had just started in the Fraser Canyon, in Stó:lõ Nation and Nlaka'pamux Nation territory. 30,000 gold-seekers, mostly departing from San Francisco, would head for the canyon that year, and Whatcom wanted that business.

But Whatcom had a problem. The 1846 Oregon Treaty between Great Britain and the US designated lands north of the 49th parallel as British Territory. Miners entering British territory needed to pay a tax and get a certificate, which meant they needed to land at Victoria, not Whatcom.

The Whatcom Trail was a tax-dodging trail designed to siphon gold-seekers away from Victoria.

The trail turned out to be an utter disaster, with starving gold-seekers returning to search for food in tribal villages. Stó:lõ people referred to them as *Xwelítem*, "the hungry people." Xwelítem is now a Stó:lõ word for all non-Indigenous people in their territory.



Whatcom Trail marker

The Fraser Canyon gold rush lasted only a year. Most of the gold-seekers returned home empty-handed.

Despite its treaty with the Americans, Britain never negotiated treaties with most of the Indigenous nations in the area we now call BC. In later years, Canada and British Columbia also failed to behave honourably by returning stolen lands and compensating for stolen resources and other crimes.

And so it was that my friend and I went on a three-day bushwhack along the old Whatcom Trail route into spectacular old-growth forest groves recently designated as critical habitat for spotted owl and priority for old-growth protection. But this borderland old-growth is not protected and could still be logged.

The 1858 Gold Rush started a logging boom which first provided lumber to build the colonial city of New Westminster, then ended up cutting down low-elevation old-growth forests throughout the region, a practice that continues today although most of it is long gone.

This is why I say we must return stolen lands, negotiate honourably with Indigenous nations, and protect the remaining magnificent old-growth forests – like the big tree forest habitat along the old Whatcom Trail route near Chilliwack Lake.

Joe Foy is the protected areas campaigner for the Wilderness Committee. You can see his video of the area at: https://bit.ly/old-growth-trails

Thank You!



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