

Wind energy is not all green



A reasonably sized wind energy development in Ramea. (photo: Bill Montevecchi)

Birds I View
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A diversity of opinions, options, issues and hoopla are gusting around wind energy development in the province.

From an environmental perspective, the size and location of a proposed development are primary concerns about disturbance and destruction. These two concerns can play off with one another to some degree but in general – more caution is warranted with larger developments and the sensitivity and ecological uniqueness of a chosen site is critical especially with larger developments.

Throughout the current debate, it has been particularly worrisome that virtually all government's focus is on what they are offering to offshore bidders. As minister Parsons put it, there is "no limit on geographic size or the number of submissions".

Neither government nor the opposition have given even the slightest attention to what they might not want to give away. What they want to protect for the long-term ecological integrity of the province and for the people.

This is not surprising again given minister Parsons' statement "... I think that's ridiculous to say that a certain area is forever off the table for absolutely anything." Clearly, the minister has no conception of the provincial legislation specified in the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Act (WERA). This is an act "to Provide for Natural Areas in the Province to Be Set Aside for the Benefit, Education and Enjoyment of the People of the Province". He should read it.

Considering the ying and yang of public discourse and the smoke and mirrors of political debate, there is likely no better time to make the case for protected areas. When so much is being offered to developers, it is a perfect time to value and protect some of the phenomenal unprotected ecological sites in the province. Has anyone given any thought to this opportunity?

WERAC (Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council), the cabinet advisory committee made up of volunteer citizens from across the province is playing a key role here with regard to the protected areas portfolio. The council's plan for building support for protected areas can be found at <https://www.gov.nl.ca/ecc/files/WERAC-Recommendations-Report-Summary-2021.pdf>.

With regard to development proposals on the table to date, the massive, grizzly and all entangling proposed World Energy GH2 has garnered most of the attention. A quick perusal of the proposed World Energy GH2 clarifies its oversized footprint in a location with significant ecological value.

WERAC is deeply concerned that the World Energy GH2 proposal includes turbines within the proposed Cape St. George ecological reserve designed to protect limestone barrens and rare vegetation. Large seabird colonies occupy the cliffs along the western coast of the Port au Port Peninsula. The peninsula's linear position along the Newfoundland coastline could be an important flyway for migratory birds of prey, birds highly vulnerable to turbine strikes, during the fall. Lots to consider here.

It is not unrealistic to expect the actions of corporate wind to differ substantially from those of corporate oil or the corporate fishery, etc. As indicated by a poll taken among all the communities on the Port au Port Peninsula in late October, many people seem keenly aware of

the hobnobbing of the political and power elite who continue to stroke one another and toss enticements to the local bureaucrats. The poll results indicated that more than 80% of the residents were against the World Energy GH2 proposal (<https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/community-polls-show-84-of-residents-on-the-port-au-port-peninsula-in-western-newfoundland-are-against-world-energy-gh2-s-mega-wind-turbine-project-895753521.html>)

Given these concerns, the deep question that does not get asked and that is not on any agenda = Is there really any energy crisis in our province at all? Ever heard anyone in government or a corporation raise this issue of conservation? It just seems to be an irrelevancy in our ever-upwardly spiraling gluttonous corporation-generated and government-supported consumerism and waste.

Light up every dark space, buy more noisy and frivolous machines for suburban lawn and snow clearing, more cars, more stuff ... more ... more ... more ... morass ...

Let's try to holdfast at Christmas. Try to focus on what's really important, and support and help others. Let's resolve for grounding, sensibility and sustainable activity in 2023. Best wishes to all.

Birds I View columns are available at <http://play.psych.mun.ca/~mont/outreach.html>.
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