

ECONEWS #221

EcoNews is a free monthly newsletter, funded by your kind donations. It dreams of a world blessed by the harmony of nature, the pleasures of community, and the joys of personal fulfillment, guided and protected by our active citizenship.

To receive EcoNews by email, sign up at www.earthfuture.com/econews. To receive it by mail send your address to Guy Dauncey, EcoNews, 395 Conway Rd, Victoria V9E 2B9.

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THE ECO-PERSONALS

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

* **Oak & Fern** Nature-based counseling. RaineyHopewell.ca 250-380-5055.

CANADA'S BATTERY HENS

We keep chickens for their eggs, and we know how they love to scratch around, laze in the sun, and flutter a dust-bath. Their social relationships are a matter of great importance, with friendships among some and chasing by others to enforce the all-important pecking order.

So now remind yourself, viscerally and with your full imagination, that less than 5% of Canadian eggs come from free-range farms. Some 22 million egg-laying hens live in battery cages for all their lives, packed five to a cage 16" by 18" where they constantly push up against the wire and have no chance to stretch their wings, hardly more than half the size of a piece of paper per bird, for all their lives.

On January 1st the last battery hen cage in Europe was shut down, though there are some illegal hold-outs. Switzerland banned the use of battery cages back in 1992, and California will do so in 2015.

Canada has no such ban, and it's not even on the table, but each year each province's marketing board decides what share of their chickens will be cage-free. Knowing this, the Vancouver Humane Society created a campaign to persuade college campuses to use only free-range eggs, and Langara College, BCIT, UBC,

UNBC, UVic and SFU all signed up. They also have a campaign for cities to end the purchase of eggs from caged birds for city-run facilities, to which 15 communities have signed up, including Victoria. As a result of these efforts, the proportion of cage-free chickens in BC has risen from 2% in 2002 to 12% in 2011, and hopefully to 15% this year. The goal should be 100%.



The Humane Society's Chicken Out campaign also wants labeling to allow consumers to make educated choices. The Canadian Coalition for Farm Animals wants a legislated ban on battery cages, but the government committee considering improvements won't even allow them to sit at the table. A 2009 poll showed that 63% of Canadians support such a ban, 69% in BC. It's hard to wrap my mind around the 26% who oppose the idea. They actually *want* this horrible kind of cruelty? For follow-up, see www.chickenout.ca, www.cetfa.com, www.humanefood.ca/battery.html, www.choos cagefree.ca and www.choos cagefree.ca/news/ccf_infographic.html

HAPPY HAT BIRTHDAY

To us locals, HAT stands for the Habitat Acquisition Trust, an offshoot of the Victoria Natural History Society that has just celebrated its 15th birthday. Thanks to the efforts of the volunteers and staff who sustain it, HAT protects more than 1600 hectares of natural ecosystems in the Capital Region, including the Ayum Estuary in Sooke, the Matson Conservation Area along the Westsong walkway (the last Garry Oak meadow on the Inner Harbour) and Brooks Point on South Pender. Thanks to the efforts of HAT and many others, the Sea-to-Sea Green-Blue Belt is now 90% protected, covering more than 130 square kilometres. HAT has also helped more than 350 householders find ways to make their yards more nature-friendly Yea - HAT! Here's to another 15 years. To become a member or a volunteer, see www.hat.bc.ca

LOCAL or CORPORATE RULE?

In Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the city council voted in November 2010 by 5-4 to adopt a community bill of rights that bans corporations from drilling natural gas within the city limits, putting the rights of people, the community and nature above those of corporations.

In Northern California, the 3,500 citizens of Mt. Shasta are proposing an extraordinary ordinance which would prohibit outside corporations from bulk water extraction and corporate cloud seeding, assert the rights of residents over those of corporations, and recognize the rights of nature to exist, flourish and evolve.

In Spokane, a group called Envision Spokane put a Bill of Rights on the ballot asserting the right to neighborhood control over significant development projects, the right to constitutional rights and collective bargaining in the workplace, the right of the Spokane River and aquifer to exist and flourish, and the right to elevate community rights above those of corporations. At the vote in November 2011 it won 49% of the vote, and its organizers say they'll be back. See www.envisionspokane.org

Since 1998, 125 municipalities have passed ordinances that place their citizens' rights ahead of corporate interests. How far might this go? In Pennsylvania, anger about natural gas fracking is prompting people to organize at the state level, helped by the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, which organizes a Democracy School where citizens learn what is possible. There is one coming up in Bellingham, WA on February 3/4th. Call Naomi Bunis 360-933-4529. www.celdf.org.

YEA for FOCUS MAGAZINE!

The *Victoria Times Colonist* is sadly missing in action when it comes to thoughtful detailed coverage of important local issues, and *Monday Magazine* often merits the same judgment. This cannot be said of *FOCUS Magazine*. The January 2012 issue contains lengthy articles by Victoria writers including Ross Crockford, Rob Wipond, Gene Miller and Briony Penn on local commuter rail, community investment, light rail transit, the First Nations crisis, and the crisis of the bees, as well as great coverage of local arts and culture. So look out for an issue! It's at a host of locations, and at www.focusonline.ca.

OBESOGENS

We've all got an opinion on the surge of obesity, whether we judge it or wish it were happening to someone else. In 2008, 34% of Americans, 30% of Mexicans, 25% of the British, 24% of Canadians, 10% of Italians and 3% of Japanese were obese. Globally, more than 1 in 10 of the adult population is obese and 33% of the world's children are overweight. See www.hivehealthmedia.com/world-obesity-stats-2010.

For years, the general understanding has been that it was being caused by too much junk food and not enough exercise. That remains true, but it is only two parts of a sinister three-part story. For the third part get used to a new word: obesogens, chemicals that cause obesity. A study in 2006 by the Harvard School of Public Health found that the prevalence of obesity among babies had risen by 73% since 1980. Among *babies*? They don't even know what a remote control or a grunge-burger is. So what's going on? In 2002, a Scottish doctor, Paula Baillie-Hamilton, started wondering why it was so hard to lose weight, and observed that global obesity rates had risen in lockstep with the use of chemicals such as pesticides and plasticizers over the previous 40 years.

At the same time, a team of Japanese scientists found that Bisphenol A, used in a variety of things including the plastic lining of baby bottles and canned food, causes certain precursor cells to become fat cells, and stimulates the proliferation of existing fat cells. In 2006, scientist Bruce Bloomberg from the University of California, Irvine, found that a common disinfectant, when fed to pregnant mice, caused their babies to have a 5-20% chance of becoming obese. What does all this point to? When developing babies are exposed to these obesogenic chemicals, their bodies are programmed to produce more fat cells – and the more fat cells you have, the more places there are where fat can be stored when you eat too much or don't exercise enough. In other words, if your body was obesogenized during pregnancy or early childhood, you're going to have to work twice as hard to keep the fat off. (Google says the word obesogenized has never been used before). Even among genetically identical mice, reaction to the obesogens varies – the slightest change in dose or timing can make a difference.

Canada has banned the use of Bisphenol A (BPA) in baby's bottles, but it's still in widespread use. Tests done by the federal government found that 91% of

Canadian children and adults have BPA in their bodies. Environmental Defense is working to extend the ban to cover all food and beverage containers, and other common sources such as cash register receipts. See environmentaldefence.ca. The price of obesity on our health and our collective purse is enormous. We need to take to our rooftops and shout, "Keep the obesogens out of our babies' bodies!" For a recent CBC *The Nature of Things* which covered the matter, see <https://bitly.com/A2E3mq>. See also en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Obesogen



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NATURAL GAS - CAN IT BE WORSE THAN COAL?

After all the talk of natural gas being 'clean', and even 'the bridge to a renewable energy future', there is alarming new science which shows that at least for shale gas, which is released by fracking – injecting water mixed with toxic chemicals into the ground and hoping it doesn't re-emerge in the groundwater – it is worse than coal as a cause of global warming.

The reason is that as well as the carbon dioxide that's produced when you burn it, the extraction and distribution of natural gas also releases raw methane, and molecule for molecule, over 100 years, methane traps 33 times more heat than CO₂. Over 20 years, which is more meaningful since methane's life in the atmosphere is ten years, it traps 105 times more heat. All natural gas loses about 1.5% of its volume as methane, and when measured

over 20 years, this makes it about as bad as coal. However, according to new research by scientist Dr Bob Howarth from Cornell University, shale gas operations may be releasing as much as 5.9% of their volume as methane, making it worse than coal, and a complete disaster, from a climate perspective. Measured using the old 100-year yardstick, the extraction of shale gas in BC's north-east will release 15 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent into the atmosphere a year, increasing BC's greenhouse gas emissions by 22%. That's going to make it really tough to achieve the planned 33% reduction in our emissions by 2020. To accommodate the shale gas and still meet its target, BC would have to reduce its emissions by 55%. If we are not going to close down the shale gas industry, it should at least pay BC's carbon tax on its greenhouse gases, scaled up to account for methane's greater impact.

Dr. Bob Howarth gave a recent webinar to the BC Sustainable Energy Association on the Global Warming Impacts of Natural Gas Fracking, which can be viewed at www.vimeo.com/35286645 or www.bcsea.org/past-webinars

OIKOCREDIT

Looking for a socially responsible, ethical place to invest your RRSPs where they will make a difference, for the end of February deadline? Oikocredit provides microfinance small loans to some of the world's poorest people, 85% in women's projects. Every \$1000 invested creates five jobs. They pay 2% on RRSPs, See www.oikocredit.org, or 250-483-5255

ACTION OF THE MONTH THE ENBRIDGE PIPELINE

You may be thinking that if you were not among the 4,000 people who have asked to speak to the Joint Review Panel about the planned Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipeline, that will carry oil and fuel condensate to and from the Alberta tar sands to Kitimat, for shipment by oil tanker through the Great Bear Rainforest coastal waters to China, you've missed your chance.

Not so, however. The deadline for written comments is March 12th.

Action: Compose your thoughts, and tell the three Commissioners what you think about this planned project, using the simple instructions on their website <http://bit.ly/Pipeline-comments>