

ECONEWS #226

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.

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Advertising	\$60	\$65	
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– **Help! The June appeal did not bring in enough to keep going. Can you help?**

THE ECO-PERSONALS

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

* Nature-based counseling and healing
RaineyHopewell.ca 250-380-5055

* Death Midwifery and End of Life counseling. Pashta 250-383-4065
beyonds.ca/Journeying/home.html

* Kootenay Lake homestead for sale. Rural eco-friendly Argenta BC. Charming 3 bedrooms, 2 bath. Organic orchard, garden. \$249,000. Call 250-366-0041
Saraadair888@gmail.com

* Grandma’s Farm invites you to visit ‘up the lake B&B’. Enjoy wilderness adventure or farm life in Argenta, Kootenay Lake, BC. 250-366-0041
grandmasfarm@hotmail.com

SUMMER NATURE OUTINGS

Even though summer is still hiding on Vancouver Island, there is a huge range of opportunities for hikes and outings. If you want to enjoy the company of like-minded people, the Victoria Natural History Society, CRD Parks, the Greater Victoria Cycling Coalition and others have a full schedule of events. See the Green Diary.

THE RIO EARTH SUMMIT – WHAT HAPPENED?

The big Rio Earth Summit has come and gone, leaving disappointment, despair and cynicism in its wake. The government staffers, charged with coming up with a text their leaders could sign off on, failed

to negotiate more than 1/7th of the text in time, so when crunch time came the Brazilian conference organizers pulled a toothless text out of their back pocket with all the square bracketed text removed (indicating unresolved disagreements) and presented it to the stunned delegates as ‘take it or leave it’. Concerned about being blamed for a meltdown similar to the Copenhagen climate conference, they preferred the prose equivalent of elevator music.

Lesson #1: When you try to reach consensus among 193 nations on a hugely detailed text you’re either going to get nothing or an agreement so watered down to please everyone that it’s only really good for composting.

Lesson #2: We need to change the way multilateral agreements are made – perhaps a voting model requiring 75% support. There’s not a municipal council in the world that could get anything done by 100% consensus.

I wasn’t at the Rio conference, but I’ve been following what happened:

* The big 350.org led drive to **end fossil fuel subsidies** whipped up a Twitter-storm, but was dismissed by developing nations who use the subsidies as a direct support to the poor.

* Greenpeace launched a great campaign to **Declare a Global Sanctuary in the Arctic** to protect it from drilling for oil and industrial fishing. When they’ve got a million signatures they’ll plant a Flag for the Future on the bottom of the ocean at the North Pole. By June 27th they had 267,000. See <http://savethearctic.org/en>

* France wanted to tax financial transactions to build a \$30 billion fund to help developing nations pursue sustainable development, but the proposal failed to gain traction.

* There was no agreement to launch immediate negotiations to develop an **international instrument for high seas biodiversity conservation** covering the 45% of the planet’s surface that is beyond national jurisdiction and therefore subject to a wild west fish-grab. Guess who objected? The US, Venezuela, Russia, Japan – and Canada.

* There was a lot achieved in side-sessions where hundreds of new agreement and projects were announced. Rona Fried, CEO of sustainablebusiness.com has put together the best write-up I’ve seen. The many commitments are being tracked at www.cloudofcommitments.org.

* The move to build a green global economy got serious face-time. 57

countries and 86 private companies agreed to create natural capital accounting rules that integrate clean air, clean water, forests and ecosystems into their business decisions. Britain announced that starting next year, every company on the London Stock Exchange must report its annual greenhouse gas emissions. Common eco-reporting standards are likely to be ready for implementation across the world’s stock exchanges in about seven years.

Some 1500 global business leaders present at Rio committed \$500 billion of corporate cash to fund various UN agendas. Some in the NGO community condemned the move to a green economy as a ‘greed’ economy, and Britain’s Professor Tim Jackson, author of the influential book *Prosperity without Growth*, was scathing of the continuing commitment to economic growth.

Will someone write a concise summary of the conference as a whole incorporating all perspectives? We need a good analysis, so I hope so.



CYCLING IN PARIS

Cycling in Victoria is on a high this summer, with Victoria’s Ryder Hesjedal winning the Giro d’Italia and competing in the Tour de France and the London Olympics, Salt Spring organizing its big Velo Village conference and its first all-bikes ferry, and 1700 cyclists participating in Victoria’s Tour de Victoria.

Paris has had five years of bike sharing, and it’s a huge success with 23,000 bikes parked at 1,400 stations, available for an annual \$36 fee. Parisians make 110,000 bikeshare trips a day, and motorized traffic in the city has fallen by 25% over five years.

Washington DC has 18,000 shared bikes (pictured above). So picture Victoria with citibikes parked all over the place, available for a quick ride wherever you need to go, the first half-hour free. If we had the equivalent to Paris in the CRD we’d have 4,000 public citibikes. Watch this space!

NATURAL GAS

- A HUGE FUTURE DANGER

Natural gas is a fossil fuel, and whenever we burn it we increase the red alert danger to our planet from climate change. The more we burn and the more we export, the greater the danger we accumulate and the greater the misery our children and grandchildren will suffer. The same applies to the oil and coal we burn.

BC's Premier Christy Clark has just announced that when BC's natural gas is liquefied for export to China it will magically become clean, since as Premier, she can rewrite the laws of physics.

Natural gas comes from the remains of 200 million year old sea creatures that have been crushed and cooked. When burnt, it creates a dangerous atmospheric pollutant, because of the resulting carbon dioxide and the methane that escapes into the atmosphere during extraction and distribution. Over 100 years methane traps 25 times more heat than carbon dioxide; over 20 years it traps 72 times more heat. (The numbers will likely be upgraded to 33 and 105 in the 2013 IPCC climate report). Methane has a natural life in the atmosphere of only 10 years, however, which means that its short term impact is far more potent than CO₂. If we are to have a chance of preventing the rising heat from passing the dangerous tipping point, it's methane we have to tackle.

The danger is very relevant, because the government is encouraging much faster extraction by fracking BC's natural gas, and BC Hydro seems to be preparing to abandon its commitment to clean power and go back to burning natural gas to generate new electricity.

The New Democrats seem to share these views, saying "all systems go" for BC's natural gas even though doing so will blast a massive hole in BC's climate action goals and undermine BC's reputation as a climate leader.

The commitment to rush ahead with extracting and liquefying natural gas for export to China presents a very tough challenge to those who understand the dangers of climate change because it is tied to big financial revenues for the government and jobs in BC's north-east. But we must speak truth to truth. Natural gas is not clean, not renewable, and not a bridge to a clean future.

NDP POLICY PLATFORM

Do you have a great policy idea that you'd like to present to the BC New Democrats, who – on present polling – may form the government next May? The NDP has held ten regional policy conferences around the province, and its Caucus Platform

Committee is gathering the best ideas. It is co-chaired by Carole James and Bruce Ralston, so if you have a great idea, you could present it as a well argued one-sider and email to Carole.James.MLA@leg.bc.ca

CALIFORNIA GM LABELLING

Do you know if your food contains genetically modified ingredients? Companies like Monsanto are fighting furiously to prevent us from knowing if our food is GM-contaminated. In Vermont, where the Legislature has been considering a bill requiring mandatory labeling, Monsanto has threatened to sue if the bill passes.

Europeans have been labeling their GM food it since 1997, the Chinese since 2004, and over a billion Indians will start labeling GM food in January 2013. In California, activists have collected the 850,000 signatures needed to place a citizens' initiative on the ballot for the November 2012 elections. See www.carighttoknow.org



VERTICAL GARDENS

Take a close look – that's a building in Paris with a vertical garden designed by Patrick Blanc, full of a huge variety of plants, irrigated by a tank on the roof with water that is recycled. Vertical gardens bring life, hope and beauty to a city – they belong in our future! See www.verticalgardenpatrickblanc.com

FIN-FREE VICTORIA

The world's sharks appeared on our planet more than 400 million years ago, long before the dinosaurs, and they have survived five major extinctions. Today, humans are killing 73 million sharks a year, and some shark populations have declined by more than 90%, primarily because of the Chinese desire to serve shark fin soup. The sharks are caught, their fins are cut off and the living sharks are thrown back into the ocean.

Shark fin soup is a delicacy dating back to the Sung Dynasty that indicates the wealth of the hosts and respect to their guests. In Vancouver, first generation Chinese-Canadian Claudia Li is running a campaign called Shark

Truth to persuade the Chinese community to embrace weddings without the soup. Two years ago, when she was on a Cantonese radio show, most of the callers were confused about shark finning and did not believe that we needed to go Fin Free. Two months ago, on the same show, every single caller supported her work and understood why they should not buy shark fin products.

Here in Victoria, the Grade 6 students at Glenlyon Norfolk School did a project about sharks after they heard Elizabeth May speak about it. They brought the film-maker Rob Stewart (*Sharkwater*) to Victoria, and founded Finfree Victoria, seeking a shark fin ban in our local municipalities. They have had good success, with five Chinese restaurants taking shark fin soup off the menu, and they are making presentations to Victoria, Saanich and Oak Bay councils and to the Victoria restaurant association, educating people about the plight of sharks and the horrific cruelty of shark finning.

Their goal is local municipal by-laws similar to those passed by Toronto last year and Port Moody this May banning the possession, sale, trade and distribution of shark-fin products. Ideally we need a nationwide ban on the import of shark fins, and NDP MP Fin Donnelly has introduced such a bill, but the chances of Harper acting are zero. Polling in BC shows that 83% of people are opposed to the importation of shark fins, including 77% of respondents of Chinese ancestry. For more information, see Fin-Free Victoria's Facebook page, www.sharktruth.com and www.sharkwater.com.

ACTION OF THE MONTH FIN-FREE VICTORIA

See the story above. Please help the students of Glenlyon Norfolk School in their bid to save the world's sharks by banning the sale of shark-fin soup in our region. Please write to your local municipality, wherever you live.

* The Mayor and Council, Victoria City Hall, 1 Centennial Square, Victoria V8W 1P6. You can email by the Contact Us link at www.victoria.ca

* The Mayor and Council, Saanich, 770 Vernon Ave, Victoria V8X 2W7. Emails www.saanich.ca/contact.html

* The Mayor and Council, Oak Bay, 2167 Oak Bay Ave, Victoria V8R 1G2 obcouncil@oakbay.ca