



wildsight

For Immediate Release

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Event: Rivers at Risk takes on B.C.'s new Gold Rush

Tapping streams to export power

Golden and Invermere, B.C. — More than 800 rivers and creeks in British Columbia are staked with independent power projects (IPPs) and watchdog groups say the Province needs to come clean about what its brand of 'green energy' really represents: disturbing watersheds, some of which are still pristine, to export electricity to the U.S.

To help residents of the Columbia Valley understand the current politics of power, Wildsight and the Council of Canadians will host events in Invermere and Golden in early June called *Rivers at Risk: Saving Kootenay Rivers from Private Power*.

The events will feature private power experts Joe Foy and Gwen Barlee from the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, along with Rex Weyler from B.C. Citizens for Public Power and co-founder of Greenpeace. They will cover the big picture of power and sustainability, the recent history of private power in B.C., and how residents can respond to projects that put Kootenay rivers at risk.

The film *Wood River Wild* will be shown, and Rachel Darvill, Wildsight's Upper Columbia Program Manager, will discuss the current status of some close-to-home IPPs in the Columbia Valley, such as Selkirk Power's proposals in two watersheds located 45 minutes north of Golden.

"For years, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee has been a leader on the issues related to IPPs in B.C.," said Darvill. "We're fortunate to have them come and speak to us about this critical issue."

"Many things right now have big consequences for the Columbia Valley," Darvill said. "The *B.C. Energy Plan* legislates building power lines *ahead* of domestic demand. The Green Energy Task Force advocates creating an artificial demand for green electricity in the province as a way of shoring up domestic supply in order to prepare for future exports.

"This affects the Columbia Valley enormously: essentially, our beautiful wetlands corridor is slated to become an electricity transmission corridor to route power south."

In **Invermere**, the event is at David Thompson Secondary School on June 2 at 7 pm.

In **Golden**, the event is at the Seniors Centre on June 3 at 7:30 pm. (1401- 9th Street South.)

Admission is by donation to cover the event costs.

Darvill said that IPP development in the province is driven by a Gold Rush mentality. "We have yet to see evidence of a real long-term vision for IPPs that truly addresses the cumulative environmental impacts for construction activities, road building, transmission line development, water diversion and all the mitigation measures. Nobody is looking at the bigger picture in terms of regional cumulative assessments either.

“IPPs are slated to occur in clusters and if a number of drainages that are in close proximity to one another are developed, what will the impacts be then? It’s too much, too fast.”

Darvill warned that the current rush to build IPPs is just a taste of things to come. “Some people may assume that IPP issues ended after the provincial elections,” she said. “But with the new B.C. Clean Energy Act, we’re just seeing the beginning.”

Through the Act, the Province committed to better Environmental Assessments, but Darvill said that 90 per cent of IPPs proposed for B.C. fall under the 50-megawatt trigger point to qualify for a Provincial or Federal environmental assessment. “Unless this specifically changes under the new Clean Energy Act, promises by government to do better for issues such as addressing cumulative impacts are inconsequential.”

Darvill questioned why the government is streamlining IPPs while conservation efforts are slow to arrive. “The *B.C. Clean Energy Act* legislates that 66 per cent of new energy resources come through conservation,” she said. “Our area is bucking that trend and we have to ask ourselves if there isn’t a better solution. The upcoming Rivers at Risk events in Invermere and Golden will shed some light on how residents can help their local watersheds before it’s too late.”

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About Wildsight • www.Wildsight.ca

Wildsight works locally, regionally and globally to protect biodiversity and encourage sustainable communities in Canada's Columbia and southern Rocky Mountain region. This area is internationally recognized as a keystone to conservation in western North America.

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Rex Weyler, Communications and Research Support, BC Citizens for Public Power

Rex Weyler is a passionate advocate for the protection of B.C.’s wilderness, wildlife, and public power. He is a co-founder of Greenpeace International and author of nine books, including *Greenpeace: The Inside Story*. In 2005, he received a Social Justice Award from the Urban Environmental Policy Center in Los Angeles recognizing his lifetime achievements.

Gwen Barlee, Policy Director, Wilderness Committee

Gwen Barlee’s diverse education and experience includes social work, film production, and web development, and she is a past executive team member of the Victoria chapter of the Council of Canadians. For the last several years she has focused on protecting B.C.’s rivers from private power development.

Joe Foy, Campaign Director, Wilderness Committee

Joe Foy has been the driving force behind many of the Wilderness Committee’s campaigns to successfully protect spectacular areas, including the Elaho Valley, Boise/Pinecone-Burke, and the Stein, Carmanah and Lower Walbran Valleys. His passion for the wild shines through in his speeches.