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Bog covenant seems to mean diddly-squat

2004 DOCUMENT: Politicians who bared pearly-whites now seen abdicating legal responsibility THE FRASER VALLEY

A legal document isn't worth the paper it's written on if the parties who created it subsequently fail to uphold it.

And that, according to some, is where the once-highly-praised Conservation Covenant on Burns Bog sits today.

The politicians — local, regional, provincial and federal — who made sure their pearly-white teeth were captured on camera when the covenant was signed in 2004 are now ignoring the same document and everything it represents.

The covenant is supposed to protect a significant portion of the 40-square-kilometre bog that covers roughly one-quarter of Delta municipality.

Known as the "lungs of the Lower Mainland," the bog plays an incredibly important role in the Fraser River estuary's overall health.

Oh, yes, it's extremely important for people, too.

Unfortunately, too many politicians blindly believe that the economy always trumps all else, which is why the B.C. government is pushing aside all opposition to build the \$1-billion South Fraser Perimeter Road.

This four-lane, 40-kilometre diesel-truck freeway will serve an expanding Deltaport and it will run through a great deal of Burns Bog lands while skirting the edge of its 2,000-hectare core, which is supposedly protected by the covenant.

In planning for this questionable freeway, our supposedly greenminded B.C. government has conveniently ignored the warnings of not only well-informed citizen groups but also that of well-qualified scientists.

The planned road will also destroy the livability of several long-established neighbourhoods in North Delta and Surrey and will consume a considerable amount of farmland.

All of which leaves people like Susan Jones, who is director of the 20-year-old Boundary Bay Conservation Committee, more than a little mystified and bitter.

"Why aren't the governments that signed the covenant in 2004 using it to protect Burns Bog?" she asks. "The road is much too close to the bog's protected area."

Jones and the non-profit conservation committee argue that the covenant also covers the bog lands that skirt the protected area where the perimeter road will run.

These lands have been identified in the Burns Bog Ecosystem Review, which served as the baseline for the legal covenant, as being very important to the protected bog area's health, Jones explains.

She's particularly critical of Delta council for failing to take a tougher stand against the new freeway and has asked it to uphold the covenant, especially since it owns some of the bog property through which the road is routed.

In response, Delta says it has written to the federal Department of the Environment, requesting Ottawa's formal position on any potential breaches of the covenant.

A Delta spokesman said yesterday the municipality is still waiting for a reply.

In the meantime, Jones says the minimum solution is to relocate the South Fraser Perimeter Road farther away from the bog. But she realizes this would place it within prime industrial land, which, of course, would significantly increase land-acquisition costs.

The SFPR's estimated costs have already increased to \$1 billion from \$800 million.

But this, Jones warns, is only the beginning.

"When they get down to it, the costs of building this road through soft, bog lands will be astronomical," she says. If you have a noteworthy item about the Fraser Valley, e-mail



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