

Public Meeting on Unprecedented Private Hydro Project Coming to Victoria

Government restrictions on public input for a massive private hydroelectric project on the BC South Coast have prompted conservation groups to hold their own open house in Victoria on February 11.

“We’re staging an open house in Victoria that the provincial government refused to hold itself, in the name of public interest,” says Dr. Craig Orr, Executive Director of Watershed Watch. “The unprecedented scale of this project necessitates a broad public discussion about whether such a development should move forward at all.”

Plutonic Power Corporation, with funds from Connecticut-based General Electric, is proposing a massive network of run-of-river facilities around Bute Inlet (on the BC mainland north-east of Campbell River) that would dam and divert water in 17 streams and rivers. As proposed, this four billion dollar project will require at least 443 km of new transmission line, 267 km of permanent access roads and 142 bridges – all in wilderness habitat essential to grizzlies, wolves, salmon and many other species of concern.

The proposed development is currently in the environmental assessment process, and open houses to provide public information and opportunity to comment were scheduled on January 27, January 28 and February 2 in Powell River, Sechelt and Campbell River respectively.

But the province has resisted calls for broader public meetings, despite the fact that a vast majority of the affected public lives outside the reach of the meeting locations.

“The Bute Inlet private power project is the biggest BC private power project ever proposed yet there are only three public meetings scheduled so far, which is completely unacceptable,” said Wilderness Committee Policy Director, Gwen Barlee. “It looks to us as if the BC government is trying to rush this project by before people catch on to the huge environmental and financial risks associated with it.”

The Victoria meeting, which will follow a similar open house in Vancouver on February 10, will include technical explanations of the project, high-profile guest speakers, and the opportunity to pose questions to an expert panel.

EVENT DETAILS:

Victoria Open House:

February 11, 2009, University of Victoria; Elliott Building Room 168, 7:00 – 9:30 p.m. with speakers starting at 7:00.

Vancouver Open House:

February 10, 2009, UBC Robson Square Campus; Room C300, 7:00 – 9:30 p.m. with speakers starting at 7:00.

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