

Run-of-river concerns ill-founded

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To the Editor,

Re: Research needed on run-of-river power, Letters, Aug. 7.

Liz Fox of Lantzville is incorrect in claiming that run-of-river projects “only function at peak water levels when B.C.’s existing dams already provide for our electricity needs.”

Run-of-river projects are neither designed nor built around the maximum energy they could produce during the peak water flows of the spring and early summer as Fox seems to believe. They are designed and built around the annual firm energy they can generate on a predictable basis over the course of the year.

It is this predictable firm energy, supplied reliably over the course of the year, that B.C. Hydro is purchasing from independent green energy producers.

And contrary to Fox’s belief, this independently produced electricity is very definitely needed to supplement the electricity produced by B.C. Hydro’s core hydroelectric generating facilities which are no longer able to meet B.C.’s growing electricity needs.

Fox is equally incorrect in claiming that “600 B.C. rivers, their fish, wildlife and wilderness environment” are at risk from run-of-river projects.

The people who make this claim are falsely portraying the number of water licence applications on file at the province’s Integrated Land Management Bureau as though they were equivalent to run-of-river project approvals. They are not.

Submitting a water licence application is just the first step in a long, rigorous process which typically requires more than 50 approvals, permits, licences and reviews from 14 government regulatory bodies. And most project proposals never manage to advance beyond this application stage.

Fox also tosses NAFTA into the mix. Unfortunately, the notion that a run-of-river project has perpetual access to B.C.’s water just by signing a lease for a period of years runs completely counter to established property law in both the U.S. and Canada.

There is nothing in NAFTA that would force B.C. to allow a run-of-river project to occupy Crown land or operate after the expiry of a lease. At the expiration of a lease (and the maximum duration of a run-of-river water licence is no more than 40 years), the Crown land returns to the Crown along with any improvements and facilities constructed on it.

Fox is undoubtedly sincere and well-intentioned in expressing her concerns about renewable energy projects. However, her concerns are based entirely on misinformation.

Rather than falling victim to misinformation about run-of-river and other renewable energy projects, I encourage readers of the Nanaimo News Bulletin to arm themselves with accurate information and seek out the facts for themselves.

For anyone wishing to explore the question of green energy in B.C. further, information is available on our BCCGE website (www.greenenergybc.ca) and on our BCCGE Livewire Blog.

David Field, spokesman

B.C. Citizens for Green Energy