



Canadian Environmental Law Association
L'Association canadienne du droit de l'environnement

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CANADA'S WATER FOR SALE?
dammed if we do or damned if we don't

On Wednesday, November 20th, at 8:00 p.m. in City Council Chambers, the Canadian Environmental Law Association will be sponsoring a public debate on the controversial Great Lakes Recycling and Northern Development (Grand) Canal concept. The debate, moderated by Michael Keating of the Globe & Mail, will commence with Mr. Tom Kierans presenting his Grand proposal. A panel of respondents - Mr. H.A. Clarke of the Ontario Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Mr. James MacLaren of the Inquiry on Federal Water Policy, Mr. David Miller of Great Lakes United, and a representative of the Native community - will react to Mr. Kierans' proposal. Questions from the public in attendance will follow.

Background

This proposal, which has been around for several decades, is receiving renewed attention due to the current political and economic climate in North America. It proposes to cut off a portion of James Bay, turn it into a fresh-water lake, and "recycle" the water into the Great Lakes "storage basin" where it would be distributed throughout North America. Many experts predict a request for a major diversion from the Great Lakes will be forthcoming from the parched districts of the U.S. by the end of this century.

The appointment, made last weekend by Prime Minister Mulroney, of Simon Reisman to head Canada's delegation in free-trade talks with the U.S. is a boost to this proposal. Mr. Reisman has been an advocate of the Grand Canal scheme and of water sales for the leverage it will give Canada to open the doors to free trade.

Robert Bourassa's book "Power from the North" links the Grand Canal project with his James Bay II power project. This book was launched in Washington, D.C. with much acclaim. The U.S. introduction was written by James Schlesinger, consultant and former principal energy advisor to the Carter administration. Two large engineering firms, SNC and Bechtel Canada, are studying and promoting interest in the Grand Canal project.

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The environmental and economic impacts of this project are huge and have implications for many sectors. Much of the water will have to be moved uphill from James Bay. To accomplish this transfer, pumping stations, each using 10,000 megawatts of power, will be required. One possibility being entertained is to build nuclear power stations along the canal which could be used to supply power to Ontario and Québec grids. Both existing watersheds (the Upper Ottawa Basin, Mattawa Valley, Lake Nipissing, Georgian Bay) will be conduits, as well as man-made dams, reservoirs and canals. However, the Grand Canal proposal is being promoted as an environmental boon - as a recycling project that can reduce Great Lakes pollution and acid rain.

The recently released federal "Inquiry on Water Policy" did not come out against this and other large diversion schemes. It took a wait-and-see attitude by stating that the decision to sell Canada's water will be a political one. If the federal government decides in favour of funding further studies of the Grand Canal proposal, the defensive moves undertaken by Great Lakes' governors and premiers, with their signing of the anti-diversion Great Lakes Charter, will be circumvented. Should this occur, there will be little incentive left for governments to develop a North American water management conservation strategy to avoid future water crises.

This issue will be a crucial one for Canadians in the future. This is the first forum of its kind where the public has had the opportunity to question this controversial scheme.

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