

Rescind votes on Muskrat Falls and St. John's Harbour fence

Birds I View

Bill Montevecchi



American Goldfinches have been visiting feeders in the area and in other rural sites around the province (photo Bill Montevecchi)

Thank you Bob and Martin. Bob Wakeham, that is, and Martin Luther King. Both in their direct and indirect ways have clarified the deep issue that I had thought about but did not come to grips with regarding the Muskrat Falls debacle.

The end or goal of a plan does not and cannot justify the means of getting to that end or goal. Wakeham clarified this in a recent *Telegram* column about the Muskrat Falls process. And on strikingly different issue, King drove home a powerful message about the war in Viet Nam during a 1967 Massey Lecture that was recently rebroadcast on CBC Radio.

As King questioned back then – how could President Johnson justify bombing civilians in North Viet Nam in the name of peace? And as pointed out by Wakeham and is clear to everyone – how can the Dunderdale government justify the Muskrat Falls development without ever having the integrity of impartial scrutiny and public review? The answer in both cases is they cannot. The end cannot justify the means of achieving that end.

To move from the ethical to the pragmatic – how can a government that in the best of times be so out of touch with economic reality? While individuals make efforts for fiscal restraint, the provincial government created an \$800,000,000 deficit in a single year. Almost \$700,000 of this being spent on the recent Muskrat Falls propaganda campaign.

With a provincial population of 500,000, this equates to about a \$1,600 debt per person generated by the government on our behalf in 2012. Such reckless mismanagement is unsustainable governing.

The Minister of Finance government has however offered a solution. The credit correction will be made on the backs of taxpayers. Not to put too fine a point on it, this means that the burden of the government's overspending of the money that we entrusted to them will also be borne by us. And we're supposed to trust them for projections \$1,000,000,000,000 hydroelectric project? It makes no economic sense, and it makes no common sense.

Rescind the vote of the Harbour fence

Thanks also to Sheleigh O'Leary and Shannie Duff for their well-grounded perspectives about the St. John's waterfront. The CEO and Directors of the St. John's Harbour Authority don't get it. A first clear indication came with the chain steakhouse on the oldest wharf in North America. It could have a local establishment with local fare, but that was too simple and quaint for the grand scheming harbour authority folks.

There are many straight-forward ways to deal with harbour security. Here's one. There are likely more cruise ships in Stanley, the capital of the Falkland Islands, in a week than there are in St. John's throughout the summer. The ships anchor in the harbour and shuttle boats run the tourists between ship and shore. At the harbour's edge, there is a small customs/security office through which incoming and returning passengers pass. It's small, it's simple and it's effective. The office is surrounded by eating and tourism establishments all along the waterfront - unlike the ass-ends of government building and garages that greet the tourists arriving at the wharf in St. John's.

What can be done?

Besides pleas for rescinding votes, what can be done? The answer seems to be calls to reason. Such calls can be made in many ways - discussions, information sessions, protests, politics and votes. Vote the dinosaurs out.

People of the Feather

Hope you didn't miss the stunning thought-provoking film - *People of the Feather*. Joel Heath, a Newfoundland film maker created the documentary during his Ph.D. research (Simon Fraser University) at a polynia (open water site in Arctic ice) where eiders congregate to survive winter near the Belcher Islands in Hudson Bay.

Eider ducks provided the medium for a rich presentation of aboriginal people and their relationships with the changing environment being brought about by climate and

increasing demands for hydroelectric power. It's compelling current issue that emphasizes the need for energy conservation which gets virtually no consideration in developmental scheming.

Christmas Bird Counts

Some signs of the anomalously warm ocean temperatures were evident in some Christmas counts. The first great shearwater record and a northern gannet were seen on the count at Cape Race. Another gannet was seen on the St. John's count and a feeding flock of 79 gannets were recorded on the Bonne Day count (Darroch Whitaker)!

Tony Lang, Darroch Whitaker and Gioia, Marina, Nick Montevicchi and I (along with feeder assists from George and Carolyn Mayo) covered the Portugal Cove – St. Philips segment of the St. John's count. Highlights included 3 belted kingfishers, hairy woodpeckers, white-winged crossbills, goldfinches and a female pine grosbeak. There are some terrific feeder sites around town. We were fortunate to add the only hairy woodpeckers to the wider St. John's count.

Other birds in the area and around the province

About 50 tufted ducks visit the open water of Burton's Pond, where a belted kingfisher and an American coot are also hanging out.

On 12 December, Tony Power collected a dead oiled guillemot from the beach in Branch. The oil had a brownish colour likely from thin kerosene-like fuel oil. Guillemots occupy inshore waters so the discharge must have been near shore. Tony is surveying the coastline carefully.

Flocks of dovekeys and murrelets have been winging o'er the waters of Conception Bay. Land-stranded dovekeys have been rescued and released in St. Philips (Robert Crane) and St. John's (Winston and Debbie White). A frantically preening dovekey off St. Philips inshore from the West Aquarius drill rig was behaving as if it was oiled or injured.

Marlene Creates had first-ever white-winged crossbills visit her feeder near Blast Hole Ponds. Snowfalls, icy cold weather bring on lots of feeder activity. If you're feeding birds, it's important to make consistent long-term commitments.

Contacts = 864-7673 (o), 895-2901 (h), 693-5305 (c)