

**Muskrat Falls and the Concorde fallacy and  
Birds I View  
Bill Montevecchi**



Great black-backed gulls often nest in colonies though some like this one along the causeway to Cow Head nest solitarily [photo: Bill Montevecchi]

Recent aboriginal protests about unnecessary mercury poisoning of birds, fish and seals reflect a government in denial about straight-forward best environmental practices. This government has the unusual habit of continually asking for advice then ignoring it. It has been obvious from the get-go that removing the trees and underbrush from the reservoir basin at Muskrat Falls is the most straight-forward way to minimize unnecessary mercury pollution [see Birds I View column January 2016].

More basically, we must ask seriously if the ongoing Muskrat Falls mess can be put on hold. You would never think this is even a possibility given the pronouncements of Premier Ball and Nalcor CEO Marshall. They claim that we must continue to inflate spiraling out-of-control deficits throwing good money on a boondoggled exercise championed by former-Premier Williams and paraded by former Nalcor CEO Martin.

Mismanagement has resulted in cost overruns, incompetent and incomplete work. Nalcor management commissioned SNC Lavolin, a standard-bearer for unethical corporate activity, to vet billion dollar Muskrat Falls contracts around the globe. Were any precautionary monitoring procedures, checks and

back-up plans put in place? What kind of due diligence could have led to such a give-away?

And given that indiscretion why should there be any wonder at all about unrestricted and broken contracts?

It is not necessary to keep digging bigger deficits without taking a break in the spending and in the massive borrowing needed just to cover the interest on debts. Such imprudent governance is supporting an unsustainable fiscal strategy, which government seems so concerned about while failing to attend to the bigger picture.

### **The Concorde Fallacy**

What can supersonic jets teach us about MF fiasco? Consider the Anglo/French business venture to move the top 1% around globe in no time at all – breakfast in New York, business lunch meeting in Paris and back home for dinner. The supersonic Concorde venture failed after almost 50 years [1956-2003] of government mega-investments. The doomed project was kept running for decades because too much had already been invested to stop it. But it did stop.

Governments' tendency to throw good money after bad was a driving cause of the Concorde failure. No doubt corporate lobbyists and smoozers used their influence to keep the funds flowing. This danger is precisely why discerning independent governance is so important to society at large. The Concorde failure was as much a matter of government posturing and vanity as it was poor fiscal management.

Biologists coined the term Concorde Fallacy to refer to situations in which animals [both human and nonhuman] defend an investment beyond the cost of abandonment and alternative solution. Indeed alternatives must be considered.

We can stop Muskrat Falls. And most importantly given the province's inability to afford it, putting Muskrat Falls on hold is the only responsible action. Such a decision is crystal clear to individuals, households, and small business owners.

As Forbes small business expert Jim Blasingame has warned when the financial viability of an enterprise is questionable, any decision to continue should NOT be based on what has already been spent. It is simply untenable to suspend economic reason and continue on.

So why is putting the venture on hold until we can better afford it not an option for government? And why does the clarity of responsible individual decision-making not apply to government?

Along with wind, hydro-electric power is a necessity for cleaner energy production. And even a large environmentally destructive development like Muskrat Falls is preferable to a proliferation of small hydro projects that would dam every salmon river in our province.

Yet the Muskrat Falls reality is that we can and must put it on hold for times when we are better prepared to carry the debt. If you or your household spent beyond your means, the only credible decision is to round up the wagons, take care of your family and stop running your credit beyond your fiscal capability. Any financial advisor would recommend such.

Things are no different for large government boondoggles. It's just that the decision-makers are so locked into a flawed economic perspective that they are trapped into spinning a separate reality. But we must avoid the trap and stop the endless creation of more debt.

The project should be put on hold until the province is better able to handle the expenditures involved. Otherwise, irresponsible smoke-screening and spinning will cloud a brutal deficit that will lead to the suffering of 99% of us, and certainly some much more than others – the vulnerable ones.

Earl McCurdy got it right this time. Land the supersonic spending. Shut it down. Put it on hold. Save the Republic.

### **Illegal environmental destruction ignored**

It's illegal to drive ATVs through bogs. Who'd have guessed? It's illegal clear-cut trees to the water's edge. Who'd have known?

Besides guessing or knowing, does anyone care? I think so. But if so, does anyone who cares have any influence? I hope so, but it's not obvious.

Clear-cutting to the water's edge abounds throughout the province and is a daily occurrence on the Northeast Avalon. In Portugal Cove, the town council takes a blind eye to clear-cutting to the water's edge. Recent developments at Butler's Pond and in the Murray's Pond housing loop are illegal. Perhaps the town's environment committee can remind council about this [again].

### **Birds in our area**

On 25-26 June about 60 female eiders were vigilantly guarding new broods of ducklings likely from the nearby Penguin Islands off Anchor Brook on the Straight Shore of Bonavista Bay [Janet Montevocchi].

Dennis Elliott of Gander sent me some intriguing photos of an immature little blue heron at Brigus Junction on 12 June. Curiously or not as is often the case with rare bird occurrences, an adult little blue heron was seen at Ferryland the day before.

Seabirds have newly hatched young and fledgling songbirds are winging about. Juncos, fox sparrows, song sparrows, American goldfinches among others are singing lustily perhaps siring second broods. The ever-so-resourceful starlings are having a boom year.

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