

GOLDSTREAMNEWS

Pond vs. the interchange

By Rick Stiebel - Goldstream News Gazette - December 14, 2007

Ecology researcher questions environmental report clearing the way for the Spencer Road Interchange

Despite the fact it was rerouted to protect Spencer's Pond, a former Langford resident has serious concerns about the impact the Spencer Road Interchange will have on the sensitive ecosystems that exist nearby.

Rob Bowen — one of 16 Leigh Road residents who sold their property to the City of Langford to clear the path for the project — spent hundreds of hours cataloguing the insects, wildlife and flora that make up Spencer's Pond.

He believes the environmental assessment conducted by Golder Associates was not comprehensive enough, and he questions the timing of its release. Although the archeological and environmental assessments are dated December 2006, they weren't made available until Langford held an open house for the interchange in October of this year.

Tim Stevens, a private consultant hired by the city as project manager for the \$30 million project, said although the assessments were completed in December of 2006, a species at risk report was only completed in October, just before the City of Langford held an open house to allow the public to see the plans and provide comment.

"We wanted to release the complete package at the same time for the open house," Stevens said.

Bowen noted that Golder Associates were faced with a lot of area to cover for their assessment.

"I don't want to criticize their work because they may have covered exactly what they were asked to," Bowen said.

However, Bowen said Golder used a baseline characterization, which examines the environmental impact before and after construction of the interchange, slated to begin in December or January.

"Baseline characterization means there's a way of comparing the before to after construction," Bowen said.

Since what is going to be after doesn't yet exist, using a baseline characterization doesn't apply, he said.

It would not be possible to measure, for example, the impact of runoff from the interchange before it is built.

Stevens stands by Golder's work, however. "They were thorough and accurate and we are happy with them," he said.

Bowen notes that Golder spent three days conducting field investigations during the summer months. "That's not the best time," he said.

The most drastic hydrological changes, when water levels in the pond go from zero to four metres, occur in the fall and winter months, Bowen said.

Much of the biological and aquatic insect activity and amphibian reproduction are most prevalent from March to June, he added. "There were no visits during those key periods."

Bowen pointed out there was also "little or no mention" of the biological connectivity between aquatic geologic and terrestrial environments.

"Salamanders hatch from eggs in the water and then they move to the forest," he noted. "There are biological systems interconnected that we can't determine."

The red-legged frog, for example, leaves the pond in the juvenile stage and spends its adult life in the forest, he said. "It only returns to the pond to reproduce."

Bowen said although the study looks at terrestrial, aquatic and surface water management as separate entities, in a place like Spencer's Pond, they're highly interconnected.

Bowen also raised concerns about the impact the interchange will have on a nearby karst cave.

The archeological assessment of the cave by Golder doesn't address the hydrology or the interconnectivity between Spencer's Pond and the cave, which floods in winter.

"The interchange will cut a big swath that will sever that biological connectivity," he said.

Langford clerk administrator Rob Buchan said the city has been diligent in ensuring any impact on Spencer's Pond is minimized. "We have kept the right of way out of it to protect the pond and the cave," he said.

Although Bowen said he received fair market value for his home, he feels like he was forced to move by the city.

"I still feel very connected to Spencer's Pond because we studied it so much trying to preserve an area that should be there for everyone's enjoyment," said Bowen, who now lives in Metchosin. "In a sense, it was our backyard."

For more on Spencer's Pond, hop over to www.spencerspond.ca.

Bowen has recently added a section on amphibians, prepared by University of Victoria graduate student Dr. Purnima Govindarajula and photos of dragonflies taken by Dr. Robert Cannings of the Royal British Columbia Museum.

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