

# The Coast

Sustainable City Column, by Tim Bousquet  
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## Two Steps Forward

**Tim Bousquet finds a couple of good news stories. Kind of**

I'm a glass-half-empty kind of guy, but two recent bits of environmental news threaten to make me uncharacteristically hopeful. Fear not, though: Every ray of sunshine casts a shadow, so I'll be sure to call attention to the dark.

First is the province's announcement that 1,350 hectares of crown land in the Blue Mountain—Birch Cove Lakes area has been given official wilderness protection.

BMBCL is a chunk of undisturbed land the size of the Halifax peninsula just minutes from downtown. It stretches from the back side of the Bayers Lake Industrial Park out to Hammond Plains Road and it includes most of the land between the Bi-Hi and Highway 103.

The new wilderness designation will protect a plethora of environmental and recreational assets, including 22 lakes, nine of which form a canoe loop; habitat for bear and endangered moose; old growth forest stands; rare arctic flora; 150 bird species and the granite outcrop of Blue Mountain itself. From that point you can see east to the harbour bridges and airport, and west to the shores of St. Margaret's Bay.

The hero of this story is a fellow named Chris Miller. Miller grew up in Rockingham, went off to earn a Ph.D. in ecology from the University of Waterloo and returned to work tirelessly with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society to protect the area he hiked as a kid.

Let's also credit Mark Parent, the provincial minister for the environment. Past provincial governments had traded away some of the crown land in the BMBCL area for what they considered more valuable property elsewhere. As a result, the traded land was developed into such god-awful suburban nightmares as the Kingswood subdivision off Hammond Plains Road. The new wilderness designation puts a stop to that practice, forever.

The dark shadow: As welcome as the announcement is, the wilderness protection extends westward only so far as a corridor reserved for a future four-lane roadway known as Highway 113. The highway isn't necessary, will only serve to increase the province's greenhouse gas emissions and clips off important

habitat that should instead be part of the wilderness area.

A second bright spot in the otherwise bleak environmental landscape comes from Cape Breton Power, a private company now operating nine wind turbines, which is embarking on what is known as a "hybrid pumped-storage" electrical generation project.

Pumped-storage consists of two reservoirs, at different heights. When electrical power is needed, water flows from the higher reservoir to the lower through a regular hydroelectric turbine, generating electricity. When electricity isn't needed for houses and businesses and such, it's instead used to pump the water back up to the higher reservoir, to be stored for later release through the turbine. Consider the whole thing as a giant battery.

The CBP proposal is a "hybrid" because the "pumping the water back up to the higher reservoir" part is done with wind power, so the entire project is a clean, renewable power source. Moreover, it gets around the intermittent nature of wind power by levelling out the power flow: When the wind blows, excess power is stored for low-wind periods in the higher reservoir.

This will be the first wind- pumped storage hybrid in North America. Luciano Lisi, chief financial officer of CBP, didn't want to release much information before he applied for the various permits necessary for the project. He wouldn't even tell me if he is the very same Luciano Lisi who produced the B-movie favourite *Island of the Dead*. (I suspect he is.)

Lisi did say that the pumped-storage project would generate about 200 megawatts of electricity annually, comparable to the output of a small coal-fired power plant.

From what I can piece together from various published reports, the project appears to consist of 44 wind turbines placed along Bras d'Or Lake, which serves as the lower reservoir. A hydroelectric plant will be placed at Lake Uist, which is the higher reservoir.

I stress that Lisi wouldn't confirm the configuration I just outlined. He did say, however, that thanks to our strong winds and hilly landscape, the potential for such hybrid pumped storage projects in Nova Scotia is "unlimited: You want 100 of them, we can build 100. You want 1,000, we can build 1,000."

Just a dozen 200-mw projects could supply all the province's electrical needs, making our coal plants completely unnecessary.

The dark shadow: Our provincial renewable energy targets are so low that Lisi can sell only half the project's electricity to Nova Scotia Power. The rest will be sold to New England.

Despite the tremendous potential for clean, renewable power in Nova Scotia, we'll keep burning dirty coal until our political leaders set higher targets.