

The MANITOULIN EXPOSITOR



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Bronte Peltier and Brandy Assinewai display awesome teamwork skills during the hot chocolate-boiling contest held as part of the Wikwemikong Winter Carnival.

photo by Joanne Peltier

FOR MORE CARNIVAL PICTURES, SEE SECTION FRONT

Manitoulin's biodiversity unrivalled by any other island in Great Lakes

Correspondingly, more species at risk here too

by Jim Moodie

GREAT LAKES—Manitoulin isn't just the biggest island in the Great Lakes. It's also the most biodiverse and most ecologically at risk, according to a recent study.

Last year, the US Nature Conservancy and its Canadian equivalent sponsored a binational project to categorize and assess the biodiversity—meaning the variety of all plant and animal life—of the myriad islands that dot this vast freshwater system, as well as identify which of these unique habitats face the greatest threats to their flora and fauna.

Manitoulin rose to the top in both respects, scoring highest of the basin's 32,000-plus islands in terms of its natural bounty, while also, somewhat more worryingly, getting a prominent red flag for its vulnerability to human impacts.

"From conducting research and then analyzing the report, we learned that islands ranked highest in biodiversity are often also subject to greater threats from human activity," noted Dr. Patrick Doran, director of science in Michigan and the Great Lakes for the US Nature Conservancy, in a release. "This helps us and others decide and prioritize our conservation action."

The 154-page report, titled Islands of Life: A Biodiversity

and Conservation Atlas of the Great Lakes Islands, tackles the dizzying array of islands (from sparse, rocky knolls to lush, sprawling landmasses like our own) that are strewn across our inland seas—it's the world's largest collection of freshwater islands—and attaches values to each in terms of ecological significance.

"This information has never

UCCM, Northland deal earns higher rate by 1.5 cents/kWh

by Lindsay Kelly

SUDBURY—Employment, trades training, and financial dividends for Manitoulin-area First Nations will be amongst the benefits of a new 50/50 partnership between Northland Power and the United Chiefs and Council of Mniidoo Mnising (UCCM), according to the proponents.

Announced last week during a press conference in Sudbury, the UCCM-owned Mniidoo Mnising Power corporation is partnering with Northland, with each party contributing 50 percent of the investment capital, as well as reaping 50 percent of the profits.

The partnership will initially invest in the 60-megawatt, 33-tow-

been collected and categorized before," pointed out Dr. Doran, adding that it will hopefully inform decisions about conservation acquisitions, land-use practices, and other strategies to protect rare and declining species.

Many of the islands captured in the research provide essential habitat for migratory and nesting

...continued on page 21

er McLean's Mountain Wind Farm, scheduled to be erected by 2012 just outside of Little Current, but also takes into consideration any future renewable energy projects—including wind, solar, hydro, natural gas, and bioenergy—developed within the scope of

...continued on page 10

Ontario suspends offshore wind farms for further research

by Lindsay Kelly

ONTARIO—The province's plan for renewable energy hit a snag last week, after a hold was put on all offshore wind power project developments in the Great Lakes pending further research, while Ontario is also holding off on approval for solar projects with an agreement-in-principle in place.

"We will be working with our US neighbours to ensure that any offshore wind projects are protective of the environment," Environment Minister John Wilkinson said in a February 11 press release. "Offshore wind on freshwater lakes is a recent concept that requires a cautious approach

...continued on page 12

All-day JK deemed effective in first year on Island

by Nancy McDermid

MINDEMOYA—For the first time this year, young junior kindergarten (JK) children have been attending full-time classes within the Rainbow District School Board schools and the initiative appears to be a success.

Parents, teachers and principals interviewed all agree that a combination of learning and play produces positive results.

"The benefits of children learning for a full day, every day, are that it builds consistency and a solid foundation for learning," stated Central Manitoulin Public School (CMPS) principal Tracey Chapman.

Initially some parents had their children adjust gradually to the full day at CMPS, but JK teacher Irene Musquetier-Dewar reports that all are now attending for the entire day. "They are doing very well and they want to come to school," she said. "Once we established the rules and routines they settled right in. I have a lot more continuity and time with them now."

Parent Tara Reckahn's daughter Skylar attends the JK class at CMPS and is enthusiastic about going each day. "If she can't go she

...continued on page 12



Full-day JK students at CMPS enjoy their lunch while lunch supervisor Doreen O'Reilly attends to young Nevaeh Harper's needs. Clockwise from Nevaeh are Annie Balfe, Brianna Moore, Liberty Mainprize and Skylar Reckahn.

photo by Nancy McDermid

Early deadline

As Ontario's family holiday falls next Monday (February 21), the Expositor office is moving the deadline for classified ads back to 1 pm this Friday (February 18).

Rural correspondents are also asked to meet this deadline so that their valuable contributions can be included in the February 23 paper.

As much as possible, display advertising customers are also asked to have copy to The Expositor by Friday morning.

The Expositor office will be closed on Family Day holiday Monday. Thanks for your co-operation and enjoy the long weekend!

...UCCM, Northland deal earns higher rate by 1.5 cents/kWh

...continued from page 1
the traditional territories of the Mnidoo Mnising First Nations.

The partnership presents a model of how First Nations can work closely with the private sector and government that not only benefits First Nations people, but also supports the province's renewable energy program, M'Chigeeng Chief Joe Hare said during the press conference.

"Today is a good day and it is also an historic day," he said. "Today marks the first-ever First Nations private sector partnership in renewable energy that sets a new bar for Aboriginal/private-sector partnerships in the future."

He emphasized that the First Nations are not merely participants in the project, but part owners, assuming half the risk, but also rewarded with half the profits.

This partnership presents an opportunity for the First Nations to take advantage of opportunities on behalf of Anishinabek families who struggle to make ends meet and have to leave their traditional territories to find a means of survival, he added.

He suggested that the Anishinabek of Mnidoo Minising experience twice the rate of unemployment and earn 30 percent less in income than non-Native residents. By investing in renewable energy, the economic rewards will help keep their people at home, he said.

"We need to stop the hardship and the frustration and provide an economic foundation for our communities," he said. "We need to find the future for today's youth, so we are seizing on opportunities provided through the green-energy sector."

Northland CEO John Brace noted the company's history of working with First Nations on renewable energy projects in Canada, which includes a project with Constance Lake First Nation near Hearst and a project in Quebec. When the UCCM approached Northland about a partnership—the two parties have been in consultation since September—Northland was on board immediately, he said.

"It's not just McLean's Mountain, but potentially other projects in the land use area of the UCCM," Mr. Brace said. "We can provide clean electricity resources to Ontario and we're going to provide strength to the UCCM communities and hope for the future of their people and their youth, and respecting the environment on the way. It's a win-win-win all the way around for everyone."

The CEO noted that Northland has been researching sites in the Northeast Town since 2000, and put up its first wind data tower a year later, with the nearby community being "generally supportive" of the project.

Not everyone backs the project, however. Ray Beaudry, a spokesperson for the Manitoulin Coalition for Safe Energy Alternatives (MCSEA) who has



Northland Power CEO John Brace

been expressed a laundry list of concerns about the McLean's Mountain project, said he has heard from First Nations community members who are upset that more consultation was not done with the UCCM member First Nations before the announcement was made.

"MCSEA has been informed that the communities are requesting that this partnership should be consulting with the communities," he said on Monday.

Mr. Beaudry, who was barred from last Thursday's meeting but registered his disapproval by protesting in the lobby with a small group of fellow wind detractors, is worried that the government will rubber stamp the McLean's Mountain project without properly consulting the public.

"With the First Nations coming on board, the government usually looks favourably on these arrangements, and usually approves projects," he said. "We would hope that they would follow all that is necessary in the REA process for impact studies and environmental studies."

Referencing a statement made by the UCCM Tribal Council at a public meeting last spring that outlined the UCCM's opposition to the project, Mr. Beaudry questions how supportive the First Nations really are of the new partnership.

But the UCCM says it was never fully opposed to the project. It just wanted to ensure that proper consultation and accommodation—as outlined under First Nation treaty rights—was completed before it endorsed the project.

"We are the people that were there traditionally—it's our traditional territory," said Sheshegwaning Chief Joe Endanawas. "So that was the focus of our opposition—if you want to call it opposition—but we wanted to be accommodated according to what the government has put out there already."

When asked whether he felt proper consultation had now taken place, the chief said it's difficult to judge now that the UCCM is a partner in the project, and he suggested that there will always be opposition to a project like this.

"Even if we were consulted and accommodated to the fullest extent, I'm sure there would be people who would say no," Chief Endanawas said. "There's no policy outline to say when accommodation and consultation has been finished; it has to be an agreement between the two parties saying yes, you did

consult us, you did accommodate us. There will always be more accommodation, consultation."

Recent policies developed by the UCCM outline the steps that need to be taken to ensure that the member First Nations have been adequately consulted on future developments, he added.

It remains a sore spot for Mr. Beaudry, however. MCSEA has advocated for greater setbacks from the turbines because of the suggestion that wind turbines can cause detrimental health effects in humans. Currently setbacks are fixed at 550 metres, and



M'Chigeeng First Nation Chief Joe Hare

MCSEA is seeking a setback of at least two kilometres. The Northland/UCCM partnership has increased the setbacks from the First Nation territories, but other communities have not had the same courtesy, he argues.

"Our biggest issue is the fact that Northland Power would not move turbines for anyone else for health concerns, but yet once they partnered with the First Nations, they set them back from their communities where they had previously identified they had a serious health concern," Mr. Beaudry said. "If they move them away from First Nations land, why not move them for everyone? To me, they must recognize a health concern."

"There seems to be a lack of transparency in this whole thing and I think the public should be well made aware of what's being proposed: the size of the turbines, the locations, water flows, everything," he added.

But Chief Endanawas believes that the concerns are those of a minority, and notes that while the opponents have been vocal in their opposition to the project, advocates have not been equally represented.

"There's no solid information, pro or con," he argued. "There are studies we see out there. Other countries have been doing this a long time and they're still doing it. If it was a big problem, they probably would have shut those down. Until it's proven that they are really harmful, a lot of the opposition has been because of what it looks like, but just like anything else, you get used to changes."

The UCCM had to weigh the pros and cons of the project, and for the UCCM, the pros won out.

"As people we've been so depressed for all those years with lack of money, and we have to look at ways of generating money

for our people, and try and get things going," Chief Endanawas said.

Acknowledging the controversy over the McLean's Mountain project, Mr. Brace said Northland continues to try to allay the fears of those who oppose the project.

"We are doing everything we can reasonably do to address the concerns of everyone," he said. "Whether there's a magical day at some point in the future where everybody just loves the project, I don't know that we'd ever get that far."

Mr. Brace confirmed that, under the Feed-in Tariff program of the Green Energy Act, a partnership with a First Nation will garner a proponent up to an additional 1.5 cents per kilowatt, meaning even greater rewards for Mnidoo Mnising Power.

"If you have a First Nation partner in a project for wind projects you can get up to 1.5 cents extra on the electricity price if the First Nation is a 50-percent partner on the project," he explained. "If they're less than 50, then it declines from 1.5 cents."

But he insisted that Northland is in the partnership because "it's the right thing to do."

"The partnership here, it's very much about trying to do the right thing, and I think First Nations have an opportunity through the Green Energy Act and other things to participate in opportunity in a way they've never been able to participate before," Mr. Brace said. "I think it's fantastic."

Benefits of the Northland-Mnidoo Mnising Power collaboration will include remuneration to community members, noted Chief Hare, although what the benefits will be haven't been ironed out yet.

Considerations include a hydro subsidy that would offset the cost of hydro in a home, or employment during the construction of the wind farm. Another option may be training through the Manitoulin Wind and Solar Institute, via an articulation agreement with Sault College, which will give youth the skills needed to be hired in the renewable energy sector.

Already two courses—one in the pre-electrical trades and another in solar instal-

lation—have been offered to community members.

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