

NEWS

Fighting Fortis with fire

BY STEPHANIE PORTER

The Express

When Greg Malone was asked to appear at a 'Stop Fortis' press conference in Toronto, he didn't know a lot about the company's plans to build a dam in Belize.

It didn't take the social activist and entertainer long to learn.

Seven months later, he has presented petitions, lead demonstrations and is currently hosting Greg Sho, a Belize Mayan Indian, in his home.

The debate is over Newfoundland-based Fortis Inc.'s proposed Chalillo dam.

Its construction, opponents say, will flood the Macal River valley: destroying pristine rain forest, and the habitats of countless species — including the endangered jaguar and scarlet macaw.

But John Evans, chief engineer with Fortis Inc., says the government and people of Belize want the dam — and the electricity.

"If they decided they didn't want the dam, then we wouldn't build it," Evans says. He adds the company has worked with "top bureaucrats" and non-governmental organizations on an environmental compliance plan.

That includes hundreds of commitments, from monitoring endangered species to creating artificial nesting grounds.

Malone has faced Fortis before. He was outspoken against Fortis' bid to buy Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro in the 1990s.

He says this issue is no less relevant to Newfoundlanders. Pressure from Canada and within Belize has already delayed the start of construction.

Malone is frequently in the public eye for various political, environmental and entertainment reasons. He shrugs off any notion he may be spreading himself too thin.

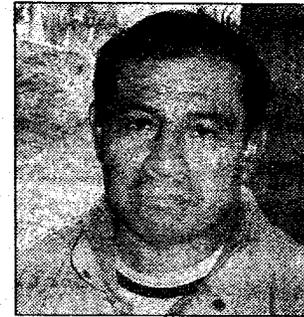
"There are so many issues going on here, issues that I would like to address myself: fisheries and power and municipal issues, town plans and all that.

"There are so many issues, does the public have room to take on this too?"

Malone thinks people do, and is encour-

aged by the international response the campaign has received.

Hoping to further galvanize support, Malone has invited Sho to speak tonight in St. John's (7:30 at Hampton Hall, Marine Institute).



Greg Sho

"A lot of people tell me to, you know, mind my own business, you're from Newfoundland, not Belize. Well here's Greg Sho...his ancestors, have lived there for thousands of years. He's worth listening to. People owe him that."

Sho says he made his first trip this far north to, simply, "ask for help."

He paints a heartbreaking picture of what could happen: he works in the lush land to be flooded. He carefully monitors scarlet macaw and other wildlife. He says Mayan ruins not yet excavated will be forever lost.

"For me, I just want to save the river, and keep it natural," Sho says.

"We are here now in this world and we want to destroy everything, but what about the younger generations? It will really hurt."

Sho has taken part in protests and spoken on TV in Belize. He says the electricity to be gained from the project is too little, and too expensive, to be worth the destruction.

Malone insists locals are interested and have the power to make a difference.

"You have a responsibility to, first of all, your own locality, but anywhere your people are affecting the well-being of the people and environment," Malone says

"What we can do is be aware and put pressure on Fortis. This is a worldwide cause. People around the world are outraged we would go into this very small country and do this."

As for Fortis, Evans says the protest is "vigorous by a very small amount of people in a very select location." In his opinion, the dam is the best option for the region.

"I don't think you'll get energy development without some impact," he adds.