

The Telegram

December 7, 2001

Fortis plan threatens endangered species

I am writing in response to the Forum by Eugene Conway in the Nov. 29 Telegram regarding Fortis's plans — over the will of the people of Belize — to build a hydro dam in Belize's rainforest ("What's the cross between a macaw and a seal?").

I don't doubt Mr. Conway's sincere interest in protecting the environment — his tireless efforts in the past have led to the protection of a rare Newfoundland lichen.

Belize's Macal River Valley is no less precious. It is home to more than a dozen rare or endangered species, including species such as the jaguar, scarlet macaw and tapir — all of which are listed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species as threatened with extinction.

This convention lists at least six species that reside in the Macal River Valley as threatened with extinction. Furthermore, 18 of the world's leading forest experts and ecologists, including David Suzuki and Peter Raven, president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, have described the dam as "reckless" and stated it would have "significant and long lasting-impacts" on the ecosystems and species of the region.

World-renowned jaguar expert Alan Rabinowitz has said this dam would be a "festering wound" on the world's only jaguar preserve.

In addition, Fortis's own consultant on the project, the Natural History Museum of London, urged this Newfound-

land company not to build the dam due to the environmental catastrophe that would result.

Fortis may hem and haw, but every respected expert in the world agrees that the scarlet macaw, a large, colourful parrot in Belize, is highly endangered — only 200 of them are left.

Fortis's own consultants said the dam would probably wipe the birds out in Belize.

The majority of Belizeans are strongly opposed to the dam, and are trapped by Fortis's monopoly into paying more than three times the electricity rates of customers in Canada.

While the dam would, at best, produce a small amount of electricity and there are many cheaper options, the deal is great for Fortis: the company made more than eight times more in earnings last quarter per kilowatt hour sold in Belize than here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Four hundred Belizeans recently protested Fortis's dam plans and exorbitant electricity rates in the capital city.

There is ever-growing opposition to this dam throughout Newfoundland. Newfoundlanders have begun to raise their voices in opposition to Fortis in order to stop the exploitation of the people of Belize by this monopoly, and to help Belizeans stop Fortis's dam.

This is our business as long as Fortis is in Belize.

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