

Ecotourism discussed

by Rose Brandt

Last Monday, the CBC Cable News Network aired a discussion on the great Northern Alberta pulp mill debate. University of Alberta Forest Science Professor Jim Butler participated on a panel discussing the ramifications of the upcoming explosion of pulp mills in Northern Alberta.



When the concept of "sustainable development" was brought up, Professor Butler proved an excellent point: you don't need mega-industries in virgin forests to stimulate and sustain economic activity in Northern Alberta communities. "Ecotourism (tourism geared towards environmental preservation) is an economic alternative," said Butler.

Why have an alternative? Well, the dioxin and furans are known toxins found in pulp mill effluent. Although scrubbers will be used to treat much of the effluent, the environment can only assimilate a limited amount. Given the number of proposed pulp mills and their large capacity, a threat to the environment is imminent.

Aside from water and air borne effluents, another threat to northern Alberta forests is "the vast areas needed to feed these mills", said Butler. "The Canada-wide problem of eliminating old growth forests threatens wildlife such as woodland caribou, fishers, martens and the champagne of songbirds - woodland warblers. Tomogami in Ontario is a perfect example.

"The development of a whole mosaic - tourism incorporated with other industries - is a viable alternative to the Environment Ministry's mono-industry vision."

On the evening of October 5 in the Myer Horowitz Theatre, Professor Butler will be presenting a slide show on the great northern Alberta pulp mill debate.

That damn dam jam

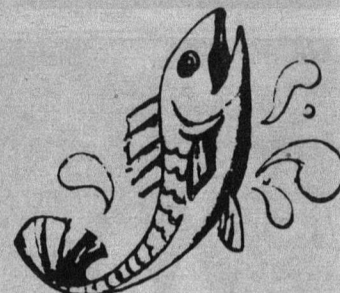
by Michelle Waritsky

Buddha said, "Let no drop of water reach the sea without first growing a grain of rice," but he had apparently never encountered the conflict between irrigation and environmental preservation, as seen

in contentions over the Oldman River dam.

In 1976 the Alberta government announced plans to construct an embankment on the Oldman River, approximately 10 kilometres north-east of Pincher Creek, to improve

management of water resources in the area. The river sees 60 per cent of its annual flow from May to July (the current originating mainly from spring meltdown in the Rockies), and then experiences a steady decrease through August and September when water demands are at their peak. The dam, which should be completed and in full operation by the spring of 1991, will provide irrigation to southern Alberta, aid-



ing agricultural and livestock production. It will also give a more reliable water system to the regions of Lethbridge and Fort McLeod, and open up opportunities for hydroelectric development in the future.

Despite these advantages, which should benefit all Albertans, there are also major disadvantages which have attracted the attention and ire of groups such as "Friends of Oldman River." The construction involves the flooding of 5,800 acres of land, a large part of which is known to have at least a 10,000 year history of human habitation. The government planners allocated 2 to 3 years for the excavation and study of approximately 170 prehistoric sites - an impossible time limit for even the most qualified archaeologists and researchers. The wildlife and natural habitat in the affected areas are being completely uprooted by the impending dam. The productive fishing region will be destroyed, and although the government is implementing mitigation strategies in an attempt to resolve these problems, environmentalists suggest that these are weak substitutions for the natural scheme. Generally speaking, opponents advise that the social and environmental damages far outweigh the need for a dam, particularly in such an historically and ecologically rich area.

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