

Canadian Wildlife Federation

# Wreck Cove impact study

The Canadian Wildlife Federation believes that an interim environmental impact report on Nova Scotia's proposed Wreck Cove hydro-electric project (Ottawa Report, December 1975) released in Ottawa this summer represents a "token effort" by Environment Canada toward environment protection. Federation Vice-President Tom O'Keefe made the CWF's views known at a public meeting held in Baddeck, Nova Scotia in July.

The planned project would be located largely on the east side of the Cape Breton peninsula, just south of Cape Breton Highlands National Park. If the \$300 million development is approved - and it almost certainly will be, even in the face of environmental damage - water will be diverted from seven rivers with a total drainage area of 256 square miles. Four major storage impoundments, or reservoirs, will be created, flooding between 1,890 acres at minimum water levels and 5,736 acres when the reservoirs are full. Nineteen dykes and dams will be constructed. Some 2.4 million cubic yards of material will be excavated for connecting canals and tunnels. Twenty-three miles of new roads will be built and five miles of existing roads will be improved.

In addition, a Federal-Provincial parkland trade had to be arranged. Approximately nine square miles of Federal Crown Land in the ecologically sensitive area of Cheticamp Lake, a key source of water for the project, was deeded to Nova Scotia on two conditions: That an exchange of land elsewhere in the province would provide alternative parkland, and that the project would result in no environmental damage that could affect nearby Cape Breton Highlands National Park.

To minimize such environmental damage, ostensibly at least, a three-month environmental study was undertaken in 1974. Conducted by the Nova Scotia Power Corporation, the agency responsible for the project, the study resulted in the controversial MacLaren Report. The MacLaren Report was widely viewed as a parody of meaningful environmental assessment. In fact, public outcry was so strong that the Nova Scotia Government was forced to launch a second assessment, this one focussing on the Cheticamp Lake area. But the Nova Scotia Government decided to approve the project even before the results of the second environmental study were known, resolving in 1974 that "the Wreck Cove project proceed and that a phased environmental assessment be undertaken so as to minimize adverse effects and to maximize positive environmental aspects of the project within the context of a viable hydro-electric development". The careful phraseology of that resolution betrayed two prevalent mentalities shared by the Nova Scotia Government: Take measures to protect the environment but only if those measures are "within the context of a viable" project - in other words, protect the environment if it's practical; and Conduct an environmental assessment, but start work on the project first.

At any rate, the resolution gave rise to the recently-released interim report, a report that, in its own words, "provides a preliminary assessment of the potential environmental impact which can be identified with reasonable accuracy at this mid-point in the study". More detailed studies are expected this summer, and a final environmental assessment report is scheduled for submission to the Nova Scotia Power Corporation by the end of January.

Although the interim report is, indeed, inconclusive and superficial, some of its conclusions are serious enough to warrant a withdrawal of approval pending the final report. The interim report states the following:

"The Cheticamp is the most important salmon river to be affected, followed in order by the Ingonish River, Indian Brook and smaller rivers near Wreck Cove. ...At this point only a moderate amount of information is available on the ecology of salmon in these rivers."

"...critical wintering habitat for moose will not be lost near Cheticamp, although the area to be inundated is used in summer by moose."

"Habitat lost to birds may be extensive."

The Cheticamp reservoir "will not be a good habitat for trout".

At the McMillan reservoir, 1,140 acres of prime moose range will be lost and the resident trout population will be affected.

At Wreck Cove, excellent moose range and good deer range has been lost, as well as more critical winter habitat for moose.

The creation of the four large reservoirs could have many negative consequences for the area - notably, loss of vegetation and wildlife habitat. It could also result in severely changed aquatic environment caused by the formation of new water bodies; "these problems will be aggravated by fluctuating water levels as water is seasonally stored or withdrawn..."

Regarding socio-economic impact, the project "is providing up to 700 construction jobs at a time when unemployment is a problem; however, there are no long-term benefits relating to the operation of the...project".

Following are excerpts from the Canadian Wildlife Federation's official response to the interim report, as presented at the Baddeck meeting:

"By its own admission, the report documents a serious lack of critical biological information necessary to evaluate effectively the possible environmental damage as a result of the hydro project. CWF is not surprised. We think that a five and a half month time constraint is an insufficient period to produce anything but a superficial overview of the possible environmental impact of the development. We are forced, therefore, to raise serious reservations about the credibility of the report as a meaningful assessment..."

"The report admits that it can not accurately predict the effect of the diversion on the salmon.

Furthermore, the study does not adequately describe the reduction of trout populations and the effect of the development on, for example, Indian Brook - a major trout river in the...area."

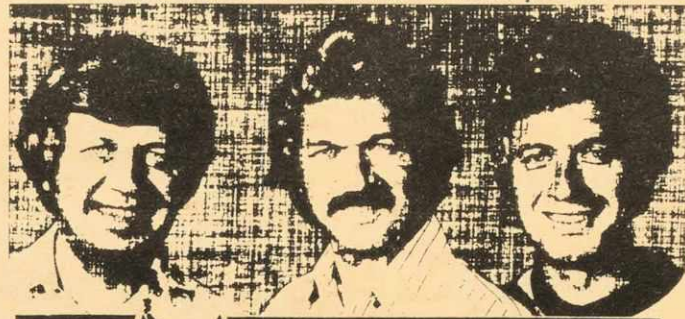
The CWF is also concerned that estuaries have not been examined for their biological resource and that a hydrological analysis has not been prepared for the environment. But the most serious omission from the report are mitigation measures for heavy siltation during the construction phase on the downstream. CWF is appalled that this vital

information was omitted in view of the fact that construction is to proceed this summer."

"CWF also has a number of reservations regarding mammal studies: It is expected that 3.1 km<sup>2</sup> a deer habitat will be inundated, and 22.6 km<sup>2</sup> of highland moose habitat, with a loss of 14.1 km<sup>2</sup> of prime moose winter habitat. Although the impact of the loss on deer is anticipated to be minor, the impact on moose will represent a major reduction in the overall

*continued on p. 6*

DALHOUSIE CULTURAL ACTIVITIES presents



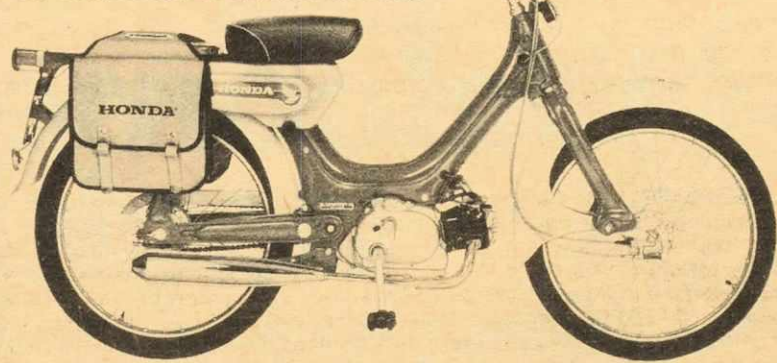
## the Mercey Brothers

Wednesday, September 15, 9:30 p.m.

Rebecca Cohn Auditorium Dalhousie Arts Centre Tickets & Information: Box Office - 424-2298

PC - 50 K1 MO - PED  
OVER 200 MILES/GALLON

The saddle-bag is an optional accessory.



REGULAR PRICE \$389.00  
SPECIAL BACK TO SCHOOL PRICE  
\$349.00

Available at:

CITY CYCLE

2053 GOTTINGEN STREET PHONE 425-5595

A FULL LINE OF HONDA MOTORCYCLES, PARTS, ACCESSORIES AND SERVICES.

**HONDA**  
You're ahead on a Honda.

**MURRAY**

**McLAUCHLAN**



ON TOUR '76  
with the Silver Tractors