

Green Scene: Do Pipelines Belong in Parks?

by Elaine Golds

(for publication September 12 2014 – *The TriCity News*)

This week, the Burke Mountain Naturalists were pleased to learn Kinder Morgan is negotiating with CP Rail regarding the use of a spur line as a construction site instead of using Colony Farm Regional Park. Last March, the Naturalists were astonished to learn staff at Kinder Morgan viewed the open fields at the Park as the perfect “empty” work site for them to assemble, weld and test the portion of their pipeline that would be pulled under the Fraser River. Although this work would be a temporary use, concerns are the wildlife which rely on these fields year-round would be disturbed and truck traffic over the wet soils at Colony Farm would cause compaction and severely impair their agricultural capability. An additional concern was such use of Colony Farm Park, which lies within the Agricultural Land Reserve, is a prohibited activity under ALR policies and the Land Use Plan for the Park.

The Naturalists met with Kinder Morgan staff in April to discuss their concerns in detail. In May, the City of Coquitlam followed up with a letter to Kinder Morgan which respectfully requested Kinder Morgan seek an alternative alignment which would not impact the park. To everyone’s relief, it now seems Kinder Morgan staff have taken these community concerns seriously and are pursuing a better option.

However, many people may not be aware Kinder Morgan is proposing their pipeline cross a number of provincial parks and protected areas across BC. In late August, a consultation period was announced for some of these proposed crossings with a deadline for public comments on October 12 (comments can be submitted online at www.transmountain.com/bc-parks-application). Sadly, the provincial government does not hold the same high standard on park protection as does the City of Coquitlam. This spring, the provincial government passed Bill 4, the *Parks Amendment Act*, which now allows industry to conduct tests in parks which are designed to lead to the construction of pipelines, transmission lines and other forms of industrial development within areas once fully protected under the *Provincial Parks Act*. Kinder Morgan which conducted such tests last year even prior to the passage of Bill 4, is now seeking public input on proposals to build the pipeline across three provincial parks (Finn Creek, North Thompson River, Bridal Veil Falls) and one Protected Area.

These areas, which are mostly relatively remote from the lower mainland, with the exception of Bridal Veil Falls, have not attracted the degree of media attention as have the issues of the pipeline work on Burnaby Mountain and Colony Farm Regional Park. One complicating factor is that all three provincial parks have been created since the first pipeline was built in 1953/4. In fact, the existing pipeline goes through all three parks. Both the 303 hectare Finn Creek and 126 hectare North Thompson River Parks are located in a narrow corridor along the North Thompson River which also supports a busy highway and railway. As such, they provide valuable fragments of habitat for grizzly bear, moose and caribou. Kinder Morgan had proposed options which bypass these parks but apparently favour less costly options to go directly through the parks. Pipeline construction would require the removal of some old-growth forests in North Thomson River Park.

To my mind, the most egregious proposed pipeline crossing is the 10 km or so corridor through Lac du Bois Protected Area north of Kamloops. It's deemed a protected area rather than a park because of historic leasing agreements with local ranchers for cattle grazing. This 15,000 hectare area was established in 1996 to protect rare native grasslands which provide habitat for almost a third of the species at risk in BC. These grasslands are a complex ecosystem of prairie bunchgrasses, lichens, mosses, liverworts and cyanobacteria. Truly, it is an old-growth ecosystem only 10 centimeters in height; below the soil, it goes much deeper. It consists of a unique and fragile vegetative community called a cryptogamic crust. This cryptogamic crust fertilizes and stabilizes the soil, deters weeds and retains moisture. Once disturbed, it can take decades to re-establish. More often than not, invasive weedy species end up dominating disturbed sites. Thankfully, the existing pipeline avoids Lac du Bois and instead follows the highway close to areas now more developed than they were in the 1950s. Kinder Morgan is proposing to cross Lac du Bois at an estimated cost savings of over \$20 million rather than follow the existing pipeline. If there was ever a place to draw a line in the cryptogamic crust, I would say it's Lac du Bois.

Of course, any discussions about proposed pipeline locations ignore the broader issue of why this pipeline is being built in the first place. In a too-rapidly warming world with increased risks of droughts, flooding, etc., we should have federal policies in place to help wean us from our fossil fuel addictions rather than hastening to increase bitumen exports and the rate of tar sands exploitation. In addition, many people would be far more comfortable if tar sand-derived bitumen was fully refined in Alberta and shipped as a less combustible and less toxic product on railways and pipelines through our neighborhoods and parks. Sadly, such options are not part of the National Energy Board's evaluation of Kinder Morgan's proposal.



Members of BMN and the Colony Farm Park Association prepare to attend a ‘Parks, not Pipelines’ rally at Colony Farm Regional Park. Jane Thomsing photo.

The Burke Mountain Naturalists and Forest Ethics Advocacy are co-hosting a “Parks not Pipelines” Rally at Colony Farm Regional Park this Sunday, September 14 at 2:30 pm. Because parking is limited (not to mention the associated greenhouse gas emissions), we encourage everyone to join the bike tour which will depart from Gates Park at the western end of Wilson Avenue in Port Coquitlam for a pleasant 20 minute bike ride to Colony Farm Park along the PoCo Trail.