

**For immediate release**

**Unmasking the “Clean” Hydroelectricity Myth:**

**BUILDING HYDRO DAMS TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE  
DESTROYS THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Montreal, December 8, 2005** – A Coalition of International and Canadian environmental organizations are demanding that governments and hydro utilities not destroy the environment in order to fight climate change. The environmental organizations point out that damming rivers has major environmental impacts, including on communities. The Coalition stresses that new hydroelectric dams not be part of any greenhouse gases reduction plan.

The International Rivers Network also shares the Coalition’s position regarding the myth of ‘clean’ hydroelectricity. Patrick McCully, Executive Director of the International Rivers Network, commented “Canada should not destroy its rivers for electricity or for dollars from exporting electricity to the US. Both countries have massive potential for reducing electricity use through improving efficiency and for replacing dirty coal plants with clean renewables such as wind and sustainable biomass.”

In Quebec, Manitoba and Newfoundland, the increasing threat of new small and big hydroelectric projects will result in damage to river ecosystems. The James Bay (Rupert River), Hudson Bay (Nelson River), Labrador and Newfoundland (Churchill River) regions in Canada’s North, some of the most important ecosystems in North America, are threatened by massive hydroelectric projects. No studies of combined effects from existing and intended dams have been done.

It is now well recognized that building dams, with power lines – and reservoirs, destroys boreal, taiga and tundra ecosystems; affects fish populations and wildlife habitat; causes mercury contamination in fish, in humans, and in wildlife that eat fish. Damming rivers in the North has other long term unforeseen impacts. “These impacts expose the myth that selling our rivers will cure climate change” says Manitoba Wildlands Director, Gaile Whelan Enns.

The Coalition states that communities living near dams are affected by social upheaval, forced relocation, destruction by flooding of their lands, accelerated modification of the traditional use of their territory and major health impacts. Past hydroelectric developments in the James Bay region led to a de facto ban on fish consumption by the Cree, contributing to the spectacular increase in diabetes among the James Bay Cree. This is just one example of unforeseen impacts that have been characteristic of hydro development. “Do we have to destroy the environment in order to save it?” asked Anne-Marie Saint-Cerny, Vice President, Rivers Foundation.



The Coalition finds it unacceptable to dam rivers instead of implementing a transparent climate change action plan that reduces emissions within the jurisdiction. A real action plan to reduce greenhouse gases must include drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from the principal sources (transport, large industrial emitters, energy generators using coal, oil, gas), and must also rely on energy efficiency and the development of green energy alternatives such as wind power, solar, and geothermal.

“To say that large hydro dams will help defeat climate change is to ask us to destroy our rivers to save the world, and that is a pact with the devil.” says Daniel Green, Quebec Campaigner, Sierra Club of Canada.

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