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COMMENTARY

The future is today

By Lloyd Cuttler

Windmills and renewable energy have once again taken center stage in the Western Mountains.

Endless Energy has approached the Town of Carrabassett Valley with a request to annex lands that it owns in Redington Township. This is the same wind power project that went through years of engineering and environmental studies that was reviewed and approved by the professional staff at LURC, only to be overturned by its politically-appointed commissioners.

By having the land become part of Carrabassett Valley, the permitting will fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Environmental Protection and the town's planning board and citizens. This by no means assures the approval of the project. It will allow the project to be reviewed by engineers and scientists, rather than politicians. Politics, as we all know, will still be a major part of this process as we proceed through numerous public hearings. If a project does not meet state environmental standards it should not be allowed to go forward, but to allow environmental groups and others to use their political muscle to dictate what "they" feel is best for the rest of us would be a travesty.

What has happened in the past with this project, and other renewable energy projects, is that self-serving environmental groups use their political power to redefine science. The Appalachian Trail Club (and it's spinoffs), the Audubon Society and the National Parks Department have all testified at one time or another against renewable energy projects. All these groups have done good work in the past at making us aware and sensitive to the environment we live in, so why is it that they are so opposed to renewable energy projects?

These groups are quick to make proposals that will benefit their own self-interests, but show no support when it comes to environmental proposals, which they feel, infringes on "their territorial rights."

We don't seem to notice coal and oil power plants, cell towers on mountains, telephone poles dotting the lands everywhere, but when it comes to renewable energy projects that will actually help save our environment, there is always the same opposition. Is it possible that all of these projects are planned for the worst possible site imaginable, or is it just that all of us in some way or another are in denial about the environmental and energy crisis that is coming? No single source of renewable energy is going to solve our problem, but it is the first step in a long journey to energy independence and preserving the environment that has become so endangered.

As we work our way through our current economic crisis, we must not lose sight of the importance of preserving our environment for those who will come after us. Is it any wonder that some of the strongest proponents of renewable energy are school children and young adults? Are they just naive, or is the real answer that they know that this crisis will affect them far greater than those of us that have allowed the country to continue down the road of fossil fuel reliance.

Our insatiable appetite for energy continues to grow, even as our natural resources that support that growth continue to dwindle. I don't believe that those opposed to renewable energy projects are completely wrong, but if they have another way to get us out of this crisis, I have not heard it.

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QUESTION OF THE WEEK

What spring chore do you look forward to the least?

By David Hart



Armand Hudon, of New Portland: "Raking leaves, because it's just hard work and tough on your back."



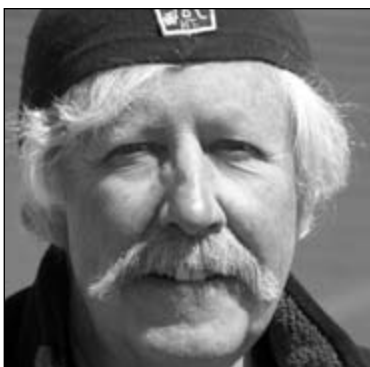
Rose Field, of Stratton: "Washing the windows. That's what I've been doing all morning."



Jessica Johnson, of Kingfield: "Packing away my winter clothes."



Stephen Roy, of Phillips: "Raking up all the debris left behind by winter and late fall."



Ed Durgin, of Portsmouth, N.H.: "Putting the skis away for the season! It's a killah."

It's about the resources. Period!

By Regis Tremblay

Director of Public Information and Education
Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

The same old tired arguments have been raging for decades around whose responsibility it is to take care of Maine's natural resources. In other words, who should pay? Meanwhile, our natural resources, our heritage and our beautiful home face enormous challenges to survive.

Sportsmen and women have carried the burden of funding the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife through license fees and registrations. But, like it or not, times have changed. The mission of fish and wildlife agencies has changed as they faced new challenges and responsibilities. Of necessity, they had to evolve along with the rest of society.

Let me be clear: it is no longer about fish and game and sportsmen's rights.

It is not about, and has never been about, mismanagement of the resources. The 300 people who work for the department have dedicated their lives to the conservation of all that we hold dear.

Management positions in the department are a fraction of what exists in other agencies and even the private sector. IF&W has been lean, out of necessity, since its beginnings in the late 1800s. It has never been a top heavy organization, but without doubt, there are many ways that it can and must improve.

It is now about diminished habitat, fragmentation from development, ecosystem management and all wildlife, not just game. The mission of IF&W has grown because of state and federal mandates, changes in public awareness, participation in outdoor recreational activities and local politics. Historically, our management efforts began out of necessity from unchecked hunting pressure.

Over the years, most of our game and non-game management has been encouraged and supported

by those sportsmen who saw the need to protect these valuable resources in perpetuity. With all of this change, the fish and game model of funding fish and wildlife agencies is no longer adequate because the numbers of hunters has declined, the number of anglers has risen only slightly and consequently, the sale of licenses has not kept up with the exponential rise in the cost of doing business.

Meanwhile, the activities of outdoor recreational activists now far out number the activities of hunters, trappers and anglers. This larger and diverse majority is calling attention to the need for protecting Maine's natural resources. According to the 2006 U.S. Fish and Wildlife National Survey, there are 801,000 people in Maine who are involved in the following outdoor activities: wildlife watching, hiking, canoeing and kayaking, riding snowmobiles and ATVs, camping and whitewater rafting, and they contribute more than \$1.3 billion annually to Maine's economy.

By contrast, the same U.S. Fish and Wildlife Survey reported that there are 526,000 hunters, trappers, and anglers in our state, and they contribute approximately \$500 million annually to our economy.

Obviously, there are far more people in Maine who enjoy the outdoors than sportsmen who hunt, trap and fish. In terms of politics, their numbers are reflected in the people they elect to the state house in Augusta to determine public policy and make laws. This has created a tension and a divide that has resulted in adversarial relationships and pitched battles over secondary issues.

The solution to fully funding the protection and preservation of our natural resources will happen when all of us accept the responsibilities of stewardship and make the hard decision to safeguard the only home we have.

IF&W's proposed budget for 2010-2011 will be in the neighborhood of \$37 million. When one

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