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'I'm saying don't build this highway' near bog

SCIENTIFIC PANEL: Member speaks out about high risk, high cost of planned route
THE FRASER VALLEY

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One of the scientific experts on an advisory panel for management of Burns Bog has presented perhaps the strongest argument yet that the controversial proposal for a \$1-billion South Fraser Perimeter Road is located in the wrong place.

John Jeglum, a retired Victoria professor and acknowledged global expert on peatland ecology, dropped his bombshell Friday.

He released a position paper that outlines the scientific advisory panel's grave concerns over Victoria's intention to build part of the 40-kilometre, four-lane truck freeway along the western and northern borders of Burns Bog, the huge ecological reserve in Delta that's often described as the "lungs of the Lower Mainland."

The highway would accommodate increased container truck traffic from an expanded Deltaport.

Jeglum's highly critical assessment of potential damage to Burns Bog follows an earlier report in which Environment Canada expressed similar concerns.

"Most of the members of the [scientific advisory panel] are concerned with the [road's] current routing owing to unquestionable environmental impacts it will have," Jeglum wrote in his paper.

The report has been submitted to the B.C. government's Environmental Assessment Office for its review of the megaproject's Environmental Certificate application.

"In our view, the current proposed location of the highway along the Bog will likely be harmful to the Bog and its adjacent forested lands," Jeglum added, noting that the highway will impact the bog's critical water levels and water flows.

"A high-level assessment and review of the positioning of the highway is required, including consideration of farsighted mass transportation options," his paper said, citing examples such as widening or twinning existing highways and railways.

Any alternate routing for the road has been quickly rejected by the Campbell government.

Jeglum told me Friday he released the position paper because he and his scientific colleagues on the advisory panel felt that the public needed to know what's at stake.

The panel had been invited by the provincial government's Gateway Project group to study ways in which placing the road alongside Burns Bog could be mitigated.

"I've worked my whole life in wetland ecology and I'm saying don't build this highway near Burns Bog — because there's a high probability that we're not going to get good [environmental] results," he told me.

He also said even if mitigation were done, the costs "would be in the millions of dollars" and "take two to three years to complete before the road-building could begin."

Jeglum's last position as a professor was with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Umea, Sweden, and his latest book, *The Biology of Peatlands*, was co-authored with Hakan Rydin and published in 2006.

If you have a story idea or noteworthy item about anything going on in the Fraser Valley, you can e-mail Brian at blewis@png.canwest.com



A new report says the South Fraser Perimeter Road would impact water levels in the highly sensitive Burns Bog.