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Another invasive species is lurking

IT'S not only stopping ships on the Great Lakes that need to be careful about not introducing or spreading an invasive species. While every boater along the North Shore knows it's important to be vigilant about cleaning their vessel's hulls to prevent zebra mussels from spreading to inland lakes, people will now have to be careful about where they get their firewood.

The emerald ash borer is edging closer to Northwestern Ontario forests.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has confirmed the presence of the emerald ash borer (EAB) on Manitoulin Island. One adult beetle was collected from a survey trap near Shequindah as part of a national detection survey for EAB.

Movement restrictions, which prohibit the movement of all ash materials (such as logs, branches and wood chips) and all species of firewood from the affected site, have been put in place. Property owners in the affected area have been notified of these restrictions. Further regulatory measures are being considered, the CFIA says.

The emerald ash borer was first discovered in Windsor, Ont., and Detroit, Mich., in 2002. It is believed that this beetle was introduced to North America from eastern Asia in wood packaging material in the early 1990s. It went undetected until its population built up to damaging levels.

The presence of EAB has now been confirmed in 25 Ontario counties and in three areas in Quebec. EAB does not pose a risk to human health, but it is a highly destructive beetle. It has already damaged millions of ash trees in Ontario and the northeastern United States, and poses a major economic threat to urban and forestal areas of North America.

It's not the first time that invasive species have been moved across the region.

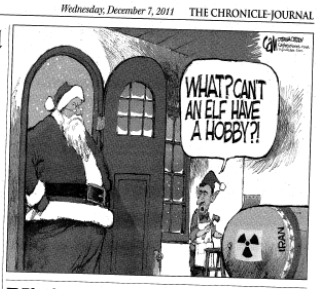
Some inland lakes in Northwestern Ontario are coming under increasing biological and ecological pressures due to the introduction of small by ice-fisher people who mistakenly felt they would make good bait for lake trout in the past.

As for emerald ash borer, it can spread rapidly if it is moved by people. The public can play its part in helping to control its spread by simply not moving firewood and ash materials.

As of 2006, 186 non-native species were present in the Great Lakes basin. These include invasive species like the sea lamprey, zebra mussel, round goby, spiny water flea and purple loosestrife. These species can have direct impacts on biodiversity, and spread viruses and parasites.

Everyone in Northwestern Ontario has a stake in preventing the spread of invasive species.

Don't let a hitch-hiking beetle be the next to ruin the region's environment.



Vision vs. reality

Auditor raises red flag over green energy policy

BY MARTIN REGG COHN

PROVINCIAL AFFAIRS

JIM McCarter's annual report documents how the province is overpaying for solar, overbuilding wind power and outsourcing on a massive scale. The auditor's left Dickensian again for criticism by forgetting their own playbook. They over-promised and under-delivered.

The auditor's details are damning if not especially incriminating: No malaceofant, corruption or Chom Bibs. Just a glaring contradiction between the government's bold vision and the blinkers it strapped on at the same time. The Liberals proclaimed green energy a panacea, then pursued it aggressively — and often thoughtlessly.

Bold can be good. Bold can also bounmang, allowing the opposition to close ranks.

Those who doubt the green strategy was serious. Ontario paid top dollar for solar contracts, and bizarrely offered the same price for rooftop panels as those mounted in a farmer's field (far cheaper to install).

When the arm's-length Ontario Power Authority pointed out the contradiction, it took the government five months to recalibrate the rates, by which time 13,000 applications had been sent in at the older, higher rate. That cost us a limb and will require diverting more money for transmission lines.

The auditor's report is sharp in its reliance on questionable foreign studies that claim every green job costs three or four jobs elsewhere when rates rise. These studies have long been discredited for their dubious methodologies and funding.

In Ontario, solar power is in its infancy, so its contribution to higher rates remains marginal. Yet most of our energy-hungry places (notably pulp and paper) have been running out of steam for years due to shutdowns, oversupply and a rising Canadian dollar (not due to solar power).

It's against the backdrop of a dwindling industrial heartland that Queen's Park considered its green jobs vision, laying the groundwork for a renewable energy manufacturing sector to pick up the slack. It's a gamble, to be sure, but it's better than betting all those lost jobs will come back in the auto or forestry industries if we just stick to cheap and dirty coal.

many rural suppliers out on a limb and will require diverting more money for transmission lines.

The controversial deal to attract $7 billion in investment from the Samsung consortium also comes in for criticism because the government moved too fast to do its due diligence. And the promise of 16,000 "green jobs" inspires skepticism in the auditor, who notes that the majority may well be construction jobs that peter out after a few years.

There are lessons to be learned from the flawed implementation of the green energy plan. But there is no turning back (as the Tories want) to its the recent election by threatening to rip up the Samsung contract.

The Samsung deal was always about something more than a straight commercial transaction. It embodied an industrial strategy at a time of economic upheaval — a road map for rebuilding Ontario's shrinking manufacturing base.

The auditor takes a strict value-for-money approach, as auditors are want to do. But one should also factor in the true price of using coal and other conventional energy forms, with their hidden environmental and health costs. In that light, the premium we pay for renewable energy doesn't seem so high.

Sometimes, the unconventional