

CHARITY OR CONSPIRACY?

February, 2012

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

A recent Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) press release reports the charitable status of the Escarpment Biosphere Foundation Inc. has been revoked, a decision arising from stated irregularities and related million dollar fee. The Release doesn't mention the Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy or the validity of a previously established charitable tax status for that organization. An Internet search indicates both groups are administered by the same Board of Directors.

The world's population is indebted to dedicated environmentalists who urge society to protect the air and water of Planet Earth, to guard its natural heritage and husband its natural resources. Their consistent focus and tireless efforts are commendable, widely supported and generally applauded. That said, over the past 40 years in Ontario a number of organizations have unfurled the environmental banner to invade the halls of government and there promote, if not initiate, legislation and regulations that best serve a view of the world in which the human species is awarded little consideration, diminished space and no rights.

In the motherhood guise of ecological necessity, these professional lobbyists, several headquartered in the United States but each with a Canadian charitable tax exempt license in hand, have helped create a hugely profitable environmental industry in this province. An industry in full bloom where hired consultants are employed by every level of government to invoke and supervise, at stratospheric fees, layer upon duplicated layer of hearings and studies to enforce compliance with a bewildering torrent of environmental policies and protocols forged by ballooning bureaucracies in concert with their favorite Environmental Non-Government Organizations (ENGOS). An industry lubricated by millions of untraced taxpayers dollars sloshing around in too many make-work programs that nourish too many chronic feeders at the public trough. An industry, in a word, that enlarges government departments and enriches professional lobbyists at a total cost far beyond taxpayer imagination and as far removed from transparency and accountability as possible.

In-depth investigation is long overdue of so-called charities that routinely play the environmental card to attract political support for their various land use interventions by persuasion if possible or, that failing, by induced government regulation. Indeed, the process by which tax exempt Canadian subsidiaries of American-based special interest groups press for and dominate environmental hearings in this country while pocketing generous donations of government funds cries out for searching enquiry.

So does naming executives, past or present, of militant environmental groups and pensioned Ontario civil servants "retired" from careers with, for example, the Ministry of Natural Resources to manage the swollen budgets of unelected quasi-government aggregations like Conservation Ontario, Friends of the Greenbelt, Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, etc.

Media reports indicate the Ontario government spent 389 million dollars of taxpayer money on consulting fees in a single year (2007-2008), an amount presumably exclusive of similar costs demanded of municipalities for hearings and studies mandated by provincial land use legislation. Can there be any doubt some tax-exempt charities, whose activities link to a large part of such massive expenditures, might have a conflict of interest when influencing government policy and funding private election campaigns for preferred candidates? Or that many regulations initiated or covertly promoted by these organizations have contributed to Ontario's dire economic prospects as demonstrated by a recent decline in the provincial credit rating from "stable" to "negative" and graphically detailed in the comprehensive Drummond Report.

In that context, Mr. Drummond's suggested cost-benefit reviews might usefully shine an inquisitive light on the \$25 million gift the Ontario government entrusted to The Friends of the Greenbelt in 2008 to provide support funding for selected environment-related initiatives in their 2 million acre play pen. Such illumination, dare we hope, may even reveal how much of the first year's distribution was transferred (by what recorded vote on which minuted motion) to tax-exempt charities then prominent on their Board of Directors as well as the identity and background of each Board member.

It was recently suggested foreign money might be helping finance opposition to a proposed oil pipeline from Alberta to the BC coast, a project claimed by its proponents to safely expand Canadian exports and employment. Of equal interest is a media report the CEO of a tax-exempt Canadian subsidiary of a U.S.-based ENGO is playing a leading role in opposing the project. Whether these two statements are mutually supportive is an open question. Still, the latter organization and individual have been identified as major contributors to the creation of Ontario's Greenbelt Act and Endangered Species Act as well as active recruiters of corporate signatures on separate petitions to Ontario's Premier and Attorney-General for legislated exemption from civil law in proceedings where so-called "Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation" are encountered.

Not surprisingly, in 2010 the Attorney-General commissioned yet another government contract consultant, this one an Advisory Panel recruited from the University of Toronto Law Faculty. As usual, the Panel invited various "stakeholders" to provide written suggestions and comment on the issue and, also as usual, that invitation would no doubt be oversubscribed by the original supporters of the original Petition. Based on this "extensive public consultation" perhaps legislation to excuse some public policy advocates and/or their surrogates from court room challenges is already in place or likely to be soon introduced. Stay tuned!

R.A. (Bob) Fowler, Secretary
Ontario Property and Environmental Rights Alliance