

Cortes Island (Area I) Regional Director's Report

It seems a bit odd to be pondering winter, past and future, while spring and summer grace the days. Yet that is what I have been doing in the ongoing organization for the BC Hydro reliability meeting. The original meeting was to take place on November 15, 2006, the very day the first severe storm roared through the coast. Power disruptions caused the meeting to be cancelled. Over the course of the winter the concept was expanded to include Telus representatives, also. The meeting was held a few weeks ago and after I finish this report I will officially release winter from my thought patterns.

BC Hydro/Telus Reliability Meeting

Approximately fifteen island residents attended the BC Hydro/Telus reliability meeting held June 5 at Manson's Landing Hall. Everyone recalls last winter's storms delivered the most extreme weather most can remember. The meeting was very interesting and informative. Here's a brief summary for all those unable to attend.

Weather during 2006 was generally unusual. During the summer and fall we had no rain whatsoever followed by heavy rains and strong wind. These conditions caused the severe weather that was rated as a "1 in 40 year event." Hurricane force winds were recorded at the Race Rocks weather station. At the height of the storm 800,000 BC Hydro customers were without power throughout the coast. The power outage call centre was receiving 40,000 calls per hour. An interesting fact is that most of the downed trees during those storms were totally healthy. Few would have been anticipated to sever power lines and would not have been included in the vegetation maintenance program.

BC Hydro faced many challenges. These were: the weather itself, the volume of calls, limited access to roads and ferries, and the cold load pickup. Cold load pickup happens when power is first restored and everyone turns on all their electrical equipment. The system cannot withstand the huge initial draw and the system crashes. This is something everyone should keep in mind during future electrical interruptions. If everyone would slowly turn on electrical equipment once power is restored, we will have a much better chance of attaining consistent electrical service.

Cortes presents additional challenges. Its power comes from the mainland via 199km of overhead line from Powell River to Sarah Point. The three linemen stationed in the Powell River area repair a break occurring in this stretch of line. If the disruption is on Cortes itself, crews come over from Vancouver Island. Given the ferry schedule, this means the earliest power can be restored when an "on island" power disruption occurs after 4pm, is 11am the following day.

As a means of improving response time, **BC Hydro is actively looking to lease (or purchase) land within a 5 minute walking distance from the Gorge Harbour Marina Resort.** The land is needed for a 20x40 foot metal clad insulated equipment building that would house two trucks and equipment. The protected waters of the Gorge Harbour offer better, consistent landing opportunities than Cortes Bay, where the BC Hydro storage shed has been for a number of years. A location in the Gorge Harbour would mean BC Hydro could fly crews into the Gorge Harbour and improve response time. **Please contact Don Johnson (Campbell River Line Manager) at 286-8749 or 202-8614 if you have an ideal location and are interested in more detail.**

The vegetation maintenance program keeps the lines clear of vegetation, as well as the removal of hazard/danger trees. Residents can assist BC Hydro by planting the right tree in the right location, allowing appropriate removals, and by notifying BC Hydro about trees endangering power lines. It was acknowledged that the potential for tree damage cannot be eliminated. The maintenance program can only address known danger and hazard trees.

It was acknowledged that communication problems occurred at the power outage call centres. Various changes have been implemented which should improve that part of the service. Should you ever have difficulty getting through to report a loss of power please continue until you contact BC Hydro. **Do not phone 911 to report a power outage. While very inconvenient, loss of electrical power does not constitute a 911 emergency.** Scheduled outages will be posted on the BC Hydro website. Consideration will also be given to developing an email tree as a means of distributing such notices.

Telus has also reworked their interactive phone system. Customers can now access an operator more quickly. Calls will be monitored and customers will be randomly called to follow-up on satisfaction with service.

When the power goes out the Telus system has six backup batteries. If the power outage exceeds 24 hours generators are brought over from Campbell River when the batteries fail. Telus admitted service problems occurred in respect to the past storm season and reported they are actively working to improve storm related responses.

The concept of a cell phone tower being located on Cortes was discussed. Those present learned that a cell phone tower would be difficult to locate on Cortes because of its mountains and tall trees. Pine trees in particular pose a problem to cell phone signals. It is not likely we will be getting a cell phone tower in the foreseeable future.

Special thanks to the BC Hydro, Telus and North Island 911 representatives for the coordinated efforts needed to make this meeting possible. All those present were appreciative of their presentation and efforts. Hopefully, the coming winter weather will not be as challenging.

Feel free to contact me about this or any other concern at 935-6488 Monday through Friday 9:00 am to 4 pm. (No early morning, late night or weekend calls, please.) If you get the answering machine try my cell phone -- 202-6488. You can also email me at brijen@oberon.ark.com anytime.

Respectfully Submitted by Jenny Hiebert—Regional Director