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Richard J. Brennan

Deborah Ylanko didn't skip a beat Thursday when committing to use her \$3,300 radio contest windfall to help finance the ongoing fight to stop a proposed hydro project in Bala, Ont.

She and many more cottage owners from Toronto as well as local residents are locked into a [multi-year battle](#) to prevent Swift River Energy Ltd. from diverting water from the picturesque falls in order to produce so-called green power encouraged by the Liberal government.

"Their plan is to divert the water from both set of falls through a turbine so there will be no falls," said Ylanko who has been cottaging on Moon River for 54 years.

Ylanko was a contestant on CHFI's Big Bag of Cash contest when she won \$3,300. She quickly told the co-hosts she would be turning it over to Save the Bala Falls campaign run by volunteers opposed to the project now under review by Environment Minister Jim Bradley, who is to decide on whether there should be further environmental studies.

The project proposed by Swift River Energy Ltd. would install a 4.5-megawatt hydro station at the falls, which critics say will "dry up" the falls and in effect kill the tourist destination in the heart of Muskoka. The falls are located where Lake Muskoka flows into the Moon River.

Project manager Karen McGhee said the company's plans are far less intrusive than critics maintain, saying water diversion will only be in the spring and fall during runoff periods and will not result into the scenic falls becoming nothing but rocks.

"They have been using the term that we are going to dry it up and so on . . . but really what we have said right from the beginning is that the flow during the tourist season, which is in the summer, will not change over those falls," McGhee told the *Star*.

The company did take out a half-page ad in the local Bala newspaper last fall stating that Swift River was proposing yet another design change, but has declined to be more give details until the environment minister has reviewed the project.

“We’ve just basically put ourselves on hold until we get the minister’s decision then we will be back up and full steam ahead,” McGhee said, adding that it is Hydro One’s intention to build lines up to the project in the meantime.

Toronto’s Mitchell Shnier, a volunteer for Save the Bala Falls, said Ylanko’s donation will be welcome because as the battle continues, it will mean the group having to hire high-priced expertise to take on Swift River.

Besides damage to the falls, opponents insist the power is not needed, particularly at the high price Premier Dalton McGuinty’s Liberal government has promised Swift River and other green energy projects.

“The taxpayers of Ontario would be paying subsidies of \$100 million to Swift River over the 40-year life of the proposed project. This is straight subsidies; everybody in Ontario paying a private developer \$100 million. This is just for this one particular project,” Shnier said.