



Bala Falls

small hydro project



www.balafalls.ca

Our Proposed Bala Falls Small Hydro Project: Trying to Set the Record Straight

Swift River Energy Limited (SREL) has been working over the past year to engage the community about a plan to develop a small hydro project at Bala's North Dam, on the site where a power plant stood for the better part of the last century.

Our community outreach efforts have included holding widely advertised Public Information Centres, and seeking out and accepting numerous invitations to speak with community groups, large and small. Throughout, we've turned to professional engineers and biologists to answer the many questions the community has put to us. What follows is part of our continuing effort to try and keep the record straight by providing answers to the many questions we continue to be asked.

[Isn't this project going to destroy the character of the Bala's dams?](#)

No. Our plan to build a powerhouse, in the area where a power plant once stood, will not have any effect on Bala's existing dams. Nothing will be done to MNR's North and South Dams.

[Will the water required to run the power station effectively dry up Bala's North and South waterfall?](#)

No. The typical summer flow through Bala's North Dam will be maintained in order to support the age-old practice people have enjoyed making use of the area below Bala's North Dam.

During the summer months (May through September), the water required to operate the proposed power station will be drawn largely from the flows that traditionally pass through Bala's South Dam. While the flows at the South Dam will be reduced, the character of this waterfall will be substantially preserved, as it must in order to preserve identified aquatic habitats below it.

[Will Swift River Energy run this new power station without regard to the impacts on the water levels upstream and downstream of Bala's three dams?](#)

No. The terms of the Lease Agreement Swift River Energy would be issued will clearly spell out our responsibilities to ensure lake levels above and below Bala's North and South dams are maintained within the strict limits set out in the Muskoka River Water Management Plan.

In addition to meeting these water level requirements, SREL will be required to ensure power station operations at Burgess Falls is not compromised. SREL will also have to ensure that sufficient flows are maintained at Bala's North and South dams to ensure their character, their traditional recreational uses, and the fish habitats below them are preserved.

Swift River Energy would be held accountable if it were found to be in violation of any of these operating requirements.

Swift River Energy is confident that with our local operating "partner", Bracebridge Hydro, with its century-old experience, using modern remote controlled equipment, can meet all these requirements while being able to generate electricity at this site.

[Will the water passing through your power station deplete oxygen levels in the water to the point that it will destroy fish habitat?](#)

No. Diverting water through the station's powerhouse does not deplete the water's oxygen needed to support fish habitat. In fact, there is every likelihood the station's tailrace will create conditions that foster additional desirable fish habitat.

[Will a power station on this site make access to the waterfalls below Bala's North Dam impossible?](#)

No. In response to community comments, SREL's engineers confirmed that the powerhouse could be moved some 30 m further away from the edge of the North Dam's waterfall, and that it could be tucked into a "valley" in an effort to preserve the site's natural beauty and character. This new location will preserve access to the area around the waterfall.

[Does this new site plan call for a park-like development on the island?](#)

SREL presented an artists landscape rendering at a second Open House this past August to illustrate SREL's commitment to restore the site. While there seemed to be some general appreciation for the concept, questions arose about details in the rendering. To address this, SREL will form a Local Landscape Advisory Committee to assist us in resolving the various interests people have in how this site might look, post-construction.

Continued on back...

Has Bala been singled out for development?

No. However, the fact that Bala's North Dam was the site of a power station for the better part of last century certainly was a factor. According to information available on the Ministry of Natural Resources website, Bala is one of 17 sites released by the Government of Ontario in its efforts to develop new, clean, 'green', renewable sources of power generation to help fulfil our Province's commitment to shut down our old, polluting, coal-fired power stations.

Is blasting going to damage buildings, pose a hazard to residents and damage Bala's tourism-dependent economy?

No. We are very aware of the Stone Church's heritage value. Blasting is expected to occur periodically over a 10 to 12-month period and will be so localized in nature as to pose no risk to nearby structures such as the heritage Stone Church, or, to people. In the unlikely event some damage does occur, SREL has committed to correcting it.

Blasting will not seriously disrupt traffic flows. Traffic interruptions will be occasional in nature and akin to the amount of time one might be stopped at a traffic light.

Will construction activities put Purks Place out of business and impede access to the public dock?

The public docks will not be restricted or compromised in any way.

SREL has offered the owner of Purks Place financial compensation recognizing that the business will be closed, temporarily. Purks Place has also been offered additional support to relocate his docks to a safer location, post-construction.

Is it true that traffic through Bala will be seriously disrupted because of lengthy road closures?

No. Road closures are expected to occur for only two one-night events (midnight to early morning between December and May) to install and remove a temporary two-lane bridge. To address concerns about emergency vehicle access during these two short periods, we will be working with the municipality to develop a suitable contingency plan.

Construction will also require that District Road 169 be narrowed to a single lane for two two-week periods. To minimize the disruption to the community, these two road narrowings are scheduled to occur during Bala's less trafficked off-season, between December and May.

Swift River Energy is committed to addressing the community's legitimate concerns about our proposed project. We are confident this project can be developed in a manner in keeping with Bala's legendary reputation, and, that it can make a lasting contribution to Bala's local economy.

Respectfully,



John Wildman | Co-Chair | Swift River Energy Limited

While the intersection of Bala Falls Road and District Road 169 near the Stone Church will have to be closed for the 12 to 18 month period of construction, we are in discussions with the municipality to ensure alternative access from Bala Rd to District Road 169 will be available.

Winter snowmobile traffic is important to Bala's economy. What effect will construction have on this winter traffic?

We are well aware of the importance snowmobiling plays in Bala's winter economy. We are in active discussions with the municipality to ensure a safe route across the island is available through the winter construction period.

What benefits will the local community realize from this project?

Our Bala Falls Small Hydro Project offers a number of short and long-term benefits to the local community. First, building this power station will require about 50 person years of labour to complete. We expect that a large part of the project's \$22 million capital costs will be spent locally employing local trades, retaining local equipment suppliers, and, drawing on local services such as restaurants, motels and gas stations. Over the long term, we have every confidence this modern, 21st century small hydro project can become a significant attraction that draws new visitors to Bala.

Is it true this project is a "done deal"? If that is the case, isn't all of this just some public relations gimmick?

This project is not a "done deal" and the commitments we are making are not some public relations gimmick. All of our claims about this project and the commitments we are making to the community will be detailed in an extensive Environmental Screening Report being prepared by professional engineers and environmental scientists. Once completed, this Report will be subject to careful review by provincial and federal regulatory authorities, as well as the public.

Should the authorities approve the Report, it will become the basis of a binding agreement between SREL and the Ministries of Environment, and Natural Resources. In effect, the Report would spell out many of the conditions by which development and operation of this proposed facility would be permitted.