

## TORONTO STAR

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## Doug Ford breaks promise to kill Bala hydro plant, says it would cost 'an absolute fortune'

By **ROB FERGUSON** Queen's Park Bureau  
Wed., Aug. 29, 2018

Premier Doug Ford says he's breaking his promise to stop a hydroelectric project at picturesque Bala Falls because cancelling the power plant "would cost taxpayers an absolute fortune."

"I wish you could cancel it but the problem is you leave a big hole in the ground," Ford said Wednesday at a diner in Milton.



Speaking Wednesday at Troy's Diner in Milton, Premier Doug Ford said killing the North Bala Small Hydro Project would cost \$100 million and "leave a big hole in the ground." (RANDY RISLING / TORONTO STAR)

He estimated the cost of axing the North Bala Small Hydro Project being built by Swift River Energy Ltd. at up to \$100 million and blamed the previous Liberal government for approving it years ago, prompting local opposition from some cottagers and residents who feared diverting water from the Moon River would leave the scenic falls running dry.

"It's frustrating, to say the least," added Ford, who evaded a question on whether he was unaware of likely cancellation costs last February when he made the promise during the Progressive Conservative leadership race.

At an event with Bala area residents, Ford called the 4.7-megawatt project, providing enough power for about 4,000 homes, a "big scam" and vowed, "As premier, I will clean up this mess. I will be back here in this same spot and we will stop this project."

A local group called Save The Bala Falls has been pressing Ford not to break his promise, particularly after the PC government announced \$5 million last week for watershed protection in Muskoka and noted the hydro project, slated for completion early next summer, is proceeding.

"Doug Ford and his team chose to sell out the people of Bala instead of keeping his promise," said group spokesman Mitchell Shnier.

"He will own this broken promise personally. It will be Doug Ford's fault when this hydro development damages our local economy. It will be Doug Ford's fault when someone drowns due to the safety issues this project is likely to create," Shnier added in a statement.



Water streams over the gates of the Falls, pictured in 2014. The hydro project, slated for completion early next summer, is proceeding. (RICHARD LAUTENS / TORONTO STAR)

Bala is in the riding of Parry Sound-Muskoka, a longtime Progressive Conservative stronghold represented by MPP Norm Miller.

Matt Richter, who was the Green Party candidate in the riding for the election that vaulted Ford to power, said the new premier “misled the community ... telling them what they wanted to hear in order to harvest votes, rather than having an honest conversation about what could reasonably be done.”

Ford said the company building the hydro project ramped up the pace of construction in the run-up to the June 7 election.

“As the election went on, I understand they were working overtime 24-7 to move it forward even quicker than what we thought,” he said.

Swift River Energy began pouring concrete to build the power house in the spring and said it is “business as usual” at the construction site in Bala, which will include a park, a river overlook and extra parking.

The company said water will not be diverted from the popular falls, except during runoff periods in the spring and fall.

Ford was at Troy’s Diner in downtown Milton to announce families will see their natural gas bills drop about \$80 a year after the tax on natural gas is reduced 3.3 cents per cubic metre starting Oct. 1.

“That’s money that will stay in your pocket,” said the premier, who has pledged to fight any federal carbon taxes imposed on Ontario after his July move to scrap the previous Liberal government’s cap-and-trade program aimed at fighting climate change.

“Promises made. Promises kept,” he added.

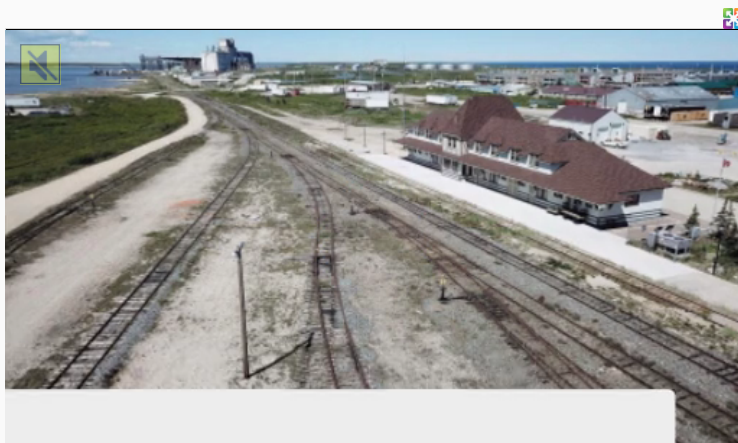
Energy Minister Greg Rickford said the new government will introduce its own plan to fight the effects of climate change later this year.

“Climate change is real,” Rickford acknowledged.

Critics have taken the government to task for axing the Liberal plan without an alternative in place.

Rob Ferguson is a Toronto-based reporter covering Ontario politics. Follow him on Twitter: [@robferguson1](https://twitter.com/robferguson1)

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