

## **News Release**

### **If Auditor could review the Canada Foundation for Innovation rabies research grant, she would find:**

**A programme of little or no value to Canadians.  
A demand for funds with no available business plan.  
A money sink hole funded entirely by taxpayers.**

### **Now we know why the Auditor General is calling for greater public scrutiny of foundations.**

**Toronto, February 16, 2005:** "The Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) would have had a much harder time handing over questionable grants to rabies research if the federal government had responded to past calls from the Auditor General for greater public scrutiny of foundations," said Liz White, spokesperson for the Ontario Wildlife Coalition. "The Coalition strongly supports the recent report from the Auditor General, arguing that a lack of accountability has allowed the CFI to waste millions of dollars funding low-priority research programs that have little or no value for Canadians."

The Coalition is opposing CFI's decision to grant \$3.6 million to Trent University for a research centre which will house the DNA Cluster Project. "Already, the DNA Cluster project has managed to suck up more than \$10.5 million in taxpayers' dollars to date, with another \$12.5 million pending. And there is no end in sight as the demand for more funds increases," continued White. "It's a money sink hole funded entirely through tax dollars."

"A central focus of the centre is rabies, one of the lowest public health risks in Canada and the United States. Even vaccine manufacturers do not consider it a serious threat on this continent," says Barry MacKay, Canadian Representative for the Animal Protection Institute and a member of the Coalition. "This is a shocking waste of taxpayer dollars that could be better used to support health, education and other social programmes being cut for lack of public funding."

The CFI grant is conditional on matching funding from the Ontario government, and \$2 million from the City of Peterborough. The Trent Central Student Association at Trent University has waged a very public campaign to stop the project. "The Auditor General is so right in arguing lack of accountability," said Shantel Ivits, Vice President of University Affairs, TCSA. "The process surrounding this project has been secretive and exclusionary from the onset. Millions of dollars in public funding continue to flow into this project and we have yet to see a formal business plan."

In fact at a recent Peterborough Council meeting, Trent refused to produce a business plan, expecting Council to commit the \$2 million taxpayer's dollars on faith. "The whole process demonstrates why greater public scrutiny is so desperately needed. It's

irresponsible that City Council would not require that it be provided with a business plan before committing funds and it is equally irresponsible for the university to pursue a project that risks becoming a white elephant to our already cash-strapped institution," continued Ivits.

"Fear mongering and misinformation about rabies by the OMNR have proven highly successful in building the largest research program of its kind anywhere in North America. Not only are millions of public dollars being squandered on the buildings that will house the DNA project at Trent but taxpayers will continue to be on the hook for ongoing operating costs for unwarranted rabies programs," says Donna DuBreuil, President, Ottawa-Carleton Wildlife Centre.

The new DNA centre, scheduled to begin construction soon, will house Trent University's Natural Resources DNA Profiling and Forensic Centre, the commercialization offices of the DNA Cluster, and the Rabies Research and Development Unit of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

"Raccoon rabies research is big business in Ontario, despite the fact that only one person in North America has died of the disease since it was discovered fifty years ago. To put the virtually non-existent rabies risk in perspective, consider that 60 people die from lightning strikes and 40 or more die from hornet and wasp stings annually in the U.S.," says DuBreuil. "This research has absolutely no public benefit."

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