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Ross Wiens
to represent B.C.
in Pennsylvania.

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Our second in a
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grizzly bear.

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Refinery decision looming

By CHRISTIANA WIENS

Free Press staff writer

A decision to exclude land for a \$200 million ethanol refinery from the agricultural land reserve is expected to be announced this week.

Land Reserve Commission employees were in Prince George in a closed meeting Thursday to make their decision.

"I expect we'll release something from that next week," says Vicki Shillington, of the commission. She refused to release their decision saying the commission needs time to inform the applicants in writing before talking to the media.

The refinery needs 48.5 hectares of land just north of the Rustad Mill removed from the agricultural land reserve to allow the land to be rezoned from its current future use designation to heavy industrial use before the project can begin.

Council has already given its approval to have the land removed from the reserve last spring but if the commission refuses to remove the land, Birchwood Plaza, the company behind the proposed refinery, may have to look toward finding a new home for the project.

The project is being kick started by Dean Ward and Gordon Biddle who own the site on the BC Rail lands in Prince George, and feel that the property would be the cheapest, most convenient place to build the plant.

"We are trying to get some kind of verbal commitment from them, but they told us they don't do that," says Dean Ward. "They said we'll have our answer in letter form in one week."

He says commissioners said they have all the information they need to make a decision.

"I can't see any reason why they wouldn't do it, we can't use the land for anything else and that's what they're there for. All we can do know is wait," he says.

The partners are currently looking for investors willing to help start up the province's first refinery.

The plant would employ 180 people and turn wood chips to a clean-burning gasoline additive through a chemical distilling process and would be the first of its kind in North America. Wood-based ethanol has never been tested commercially, and technology developed by former UBC-professor Dr. Leo Paszner has yet to be patented.

At a UNBC exclusion hearing in May, commissioner Gus Horn said the applicant would have to ensure the project was economically viable before the commission would forever remove it from B.C.'s agricultural land reserve.

Soccer/Minis



Six and seven-year-olds at the PG Youth Soccer Association's summer camp chase the ball on Wednesday during a scrimmage. JOHN MCKENZIE/FREE PRESS

Dead forests may be used to sway public

B.C.'s pine beetle-ravaged parks may be used to sway public opinion in the Lower Mainland, says Cariboo North MLA John Wilson.

The Liberals say they are not yet prepared to allow Tweedsmuir and Manning parks to be logged, but they are working on it.

The parks are some of the hardest hit areas in the pine beetle attacked areas that stretches from 100 Mile House to Houston, and loggers have long been saying they could control damage by getting at some of those trees.

Beetle-attacked pine gradually die, moving from loggable green-attack, to red, to fire-susceptible grey shells in a number of years.

"Tweedsmuir Park is gone, it's toast," says John Wilson, chair of the newly established pine beetle task force. "We

may just take them for educational purposes. They were our prize jewels but if we have to sacrifice the parks and that's what it takes to change public opinion we'll do it."

Mr. Wilson was speaking to a room of loggers and industry representatives at a Prince George mountain pine beetle workshop Wednesday, where loggers, Chamber of Commerce representatives and others argued for lifting the logging ban in provincial parks.

The province's long-time strategy for park management has been to leave natural areas alone, even in the face of such events as pine beetle attacks or forest fires.

"At this point we are not dealing with parks," added Mr. Wilson. "Once public perception changes we may do something."

The Liberals have said any changes made will follow already existing standards set up in the Forests Practices Code and exclude areas inside provincial parks.

Logger Terry Campbell argued for more leadership, saying that wasn't good enough.

"You people have to do something, it's up to you, you're responsible for the public forests," says Mr. Campbell. "You don't take a little three-year-old and tell them to read a book, you have to read it to them."

But Prince George North MLA Pat Bell suggested the Liberals were working their way toward making a decision on the ban.

"As we continue down this road, my sense is that it will culminate in a decision," says Mr. Bell.