



Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council

Conseil pour la conservation des ressources halieutiques du pacifique

For Immediate Release

Save the Heart of the Fraser River from damaging development, Fisheries Council urges governments

(November 19, 2007 – Vancouver) The Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (PFRCC) today released a report that calls on all governments, notably the Province of British Columbia, to take immediate action to protect key habitats and areas along the Fraser River, especially the reach running from Hope to Mission, known as the “Heart of the Fraser.” The report is titled *Saving the Heart of the Fraser: Addressing Human Impacts to the Aquatic Ecosystem of the Fraser River, Hope to Mission, British Columbia*.

“The lower Fraser River’s floodplain and channels represent some of Canada’s most biologically significant riverside and aquatic ecosystems, but this part of the river lies at the doorstep of over two million people in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia,” says Mark Angelo, Deputy Chair of the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (www.fish.bc.ca) and co-author of the report. “This has created extreme pressure from development activities and many habitats have already been modified and lost, while others are under imminent threat.”

The Heart of the Fraser, with its complex system of islands, gravel bars and vegetation, supports an amazing array of life. This includes the largest single spawning run of salmon in BC, pink salmon, and a migration corridor for some of the largest spawning runs of sockeye salmon in North America. The area is also home to more than 30 other different species of fish including at least eight fishes that are considered to be at risk, and many other non-fish species of animals, including rare birds like hawks, herons, eagles and sandhill cranes.

The report notes that the area is already suffering the impacts of land clearing, watercourse draining, forest harvesting, mining, urbanization, dykes, industrial development and agricultural expansion.

“Urgent measures must be taken to purchase, manage and protect these sensitive lands,” says Angelo. “This is one of the most productive stretches of river on Earth, yet many other parts of the province are receiving more attention in terms of coordinated management efforts aimed at ensuring environmental sustainability.”

The Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council recommends setting up a multi-stakeholder task force to create an action plan of immediate measures to stem the losses of these irreplaceable ecosystems. Where possible, governments and others should purchase key private lands of high ecosystem value and place them in trust for protection. Crucial crown lands along the Heart of the Fraser need to be identified and collaborative efforts to protect them pursued. The Government of British Columbia must also clearly set out direction that it will stem the removal of designated agricultural land from within the Heart of the Fraser for development purposes.

The report praised recent actions by a number of private individuals, institutions and environmental non-governmental organizations that together have created an informal coalition with the objective of saving the Heart of the Fraser. This coalition is pursuing private-land purchases and donations and protecting them through the auspices of The Nature Trust, a non-governmental environmental land-management agency.

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But all four levels of government must become more involved in the acquisition, or similar protection through other means, of key lands from within the Heart of the Fraser if these ecosystems are to be sustained. A collaboratively developed, enforceable management plan is required to link the various aspects of land purchases and habitat protection into one complete program. Council is also advising government to effectively enforce existing laws and regulations, notably the federal *Fisheries Act*, to protect the environmental attributes in this section of the river.

A full copy of *Saving the Heart of the Fraser: Addressing Human Impacts to the Aquatic Ecosystem of the Fraser River, Hope to Mission, British Columbia* by Dr Marvin L. Rosenau and Mark Angelo can be downloaded at www.fish.bc.ca.

The Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (www.fish.bc.ca) was created in 1998 and is an independent advisory body whose mandate is to alert and inform the federal and provincial governments and the public on issues that threaten Pacific salmon and their habitat.

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