

Heritage Rivers Bulletin

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Minister Announces Provincial Heritage Rivers System

On April 23, a delighted crowd braved a downpour on the banks of the Cowichan River to hear the Hon. Moe Sihota announce the recognition of the first seven rivers within the BC Heritage Rivers System: the Adams, Babine, Blackwater, Cowichan, Fraser, Skagit, and Stikine. Responding to the Board's September 1995 report which nominated the rivers as the system's inaugural candidates, Min. Sihota thanked the Board for their work in initiating the system in such a timely fashion, and in such a positive environment.

Min. Sihota—who has a strong personal connection to the Cowichan—outlined the special characters of the seven rivers, and the reasons for their appropriateness as candidates for the system. "Heritage River status will draw greater attention and appreciation to the unique values of these rivers—from the rich salmon runs of the Adams, to recreation on the Cowichan, and First Nations values associated with the Blackwater," said Sihota.

MLA Jan Pullinger, also participating in the event, said: "I'm delighted that the Cowichan has been recognized as one of B.C.'s first Heritage Rivers."

Mark Angelo, Chair of the BC Heritage Rivers Board, took the opportunity to publicly thank the Minister and his government colleagues for their support of the program, and to encourage widespread public involvement in the on-going task of river stewardship in which the Board is participating. He stressed the importance of the integrated resource management approach, so necessary in effective watershed planning, and encouraged a strong commitment from a wide spectrum of government agencies, industry, and public interests in their participation in the program.

While the Board's September report included eight river nominations, the Similkameen was withdrawn in October pending further consultation. Minister Sihota indicated that while the essence of the Board's report was adopted, some modifications have been made to the detailed statements of vision and management objectives for some of the rivers. A government report on the river system and the first seven rivers recognized was released. The Board is in the midst of a further review, through which additional rivers are expected to be nominated in September, 1996.

Fraser River Headed for Canadian Heritage River System

What could be more obvious and revolutionary at the same time? In his recent BCHRS announcement, Minister Sihota gave special recognition to the Fraser as the "heart and soul of B.C." He identified the Fraser as a river of national and international significance in all aspects of natural and cultural heritage, as well as recreational value. It was on this basis that the Fraser emerged as the first river from the newly established BCHRS that will be put forward by BC as a candidate for

designation under the CHRS. Minister Sihota emphasised that such recognition was consistent with intensive efforts that have focused on the Fraser River in recent years to ensure the sustain-ability of the river, its watershed, and its contribution to the economic future of the province. The Minister was obviously pleased with the Board's recommendation for this action, and embraced the move wholeheartedly.

What is revolutionary about the Fraser as a candidate for the CHRS is the change it will bring to the face of the national system. While the CHRS has been in place for over ten years now, BC only joined the system in 1994 after a review initiated by then Environment Minister John Cashore. At that time BC took the position that while the CHRS was a valuable program to highlight our distinctive Canadian River Heritage, it was a system with limited grassroots involvement and use, that had become too dominated by wilderness and back country rivers, while ignoring the major waterways that have been the hallmarks of Canadian History. "The nomination of the Fraser will change all that and help to set the CHRS on a new course," said Mark Angelo, Chair of the BCHR Board and the provincial representative to the CHRS. "Nothing could be so 'right' as having a major river like the Fraser, recognized nationally and internationally as an example of Canada's river heritage."

ORC Hosts Riverfest V

On February 17, the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC successfully held another in the series of Riverfest events focusing attention and discussion on the river heritage of this province. Over 140 people attended representing a wide spectrum of interests and experience.

Plenary sessions in the morning provided background and challenges to the participants with presentations by a variety of river specialists, including Mark Angelo, Chair of the BC Heritage Rivers Board.

The participants then broke into three concurrent workshops with the task of identifying priorities for action in each of three key areas - legislation, management and planning. Many specific urgently needed actions were identified by the discussions including: more effective inventory and classification of rivers; better coordination and integration of policies and programs for river management; a new and improved Water Act; the development of a Sustainability Act for the province; and, the development of a national grassroots organization to support river conservation.

Premier Mike Harcourt also addressed the gathering as a final public event in his role as premier. He was warmly received as he expressed his personal commitment to river stewardship in BC as part of the larger initiatives of his government towards better environmental standards and more effective land use planning and management.

The event was another effective means of keeping the rivers agenda in the public forum and of generating more discussion of some of the crucial river issues in the province today.

Board Reviews New River Suggestions

The process for selecting new BCHRS candidates depends on contributions from the public. In the fall of 1995, the Board requested that suggestions be submitted by February 9, 1996. By that date, fourteen new rivers had been suggested as possible additions to the system. The Board has now completed its preliminary review of these rivers.

Of the many excellent suggestions, nine have been short listed for further detailed study and possible nomination later this year: the Atnarko, Bella Coola, Elk, Granby, Horsefly, Kechika, Kettle, Quesnel, and Turnagain.

For a variety of reasons, another five rivers will be kept on hold for further review at a later date, beyond the current nomination period: the Shuswap, Squamish, Tatshenshini/Alsek, Peace, and Columbia.

Unfortunately, the BCHRS can only recognize a relatively small sample of the marvelous river heritage of this province. Thus for many of the suggestions, BCHRS status will not be possible. The Board encourages improved stewardship of all rivers and hopes that public awareness of these suggestions will add to their improved management. Of the many rivers suggested for BCHRS status, the following could not be accepted: the Alouette, Ashnola, Atlintoo, Campbell, Coquitlam, Englishman, Mossom, Muskwa/Tuchodi, Nahatlatch, Nechako, Noons, Salmon, Tahsis, and Tlell.

CHRS Board Meets

The Canadian Heritage Rivers Board held its 23rd meeting in Vancouver on February 19 & 20. The Board, made up of representatives from each province and territory, and from the federal government, administer the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) presently a collection of 28 rivers. The national system, formally established in 1984, is the model upon which the BC system was developed. It will be used to provide additional national recognition for a small number of the provincially recognized rivers within the BCHRS. BC joined the CHRS in 1994 and is hoping to inject some new ideas and enthusiasm into the system. In particular, a priority is being placed on achieving a greater role for public involvement in the system.

Mark Angelo, Chair of the BCHRS Board and BC representative on the CHRS Board, gave notice of BC's upcoming nomination of the Fraser River as this province's first initiative as a new member of the system. The Board also accepted BC's offer to host a national conference on heritage rivers in 1997 in conjunction with another in the series of Riverfest meetings sponsored by the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC over the past fifteen years.

The Board members appreciated the west coast hospitality and the brief introduction to the Fraser River provided by a boat trip on the river's North Arm in conjunction with their meeting.

Similkameen Awaits Further Discussion

The Similkameen River was nominated for Heritage River recognition in the Board's first report of September, 1995. However, subsequent expressions of concern from some people along the river-chiefly about the lack of public input to the nomination-led the Board to withdraw the river from the initial list. The nomination is now on hold pending further discussion in the local communities.

In spite of these circumstances, the Similkameen remains a prominent river in B.C.'s waterscape, fulfilling most of the criteria for Heritage status and worthy of official recognition. At present, local advocates for the river's recognition are developing broad community support for a second nomination. Gaining such support will probably involve public meetings at which concerns over a renewal of the nomination can be aired openly and be addressed by the Board. This public meeting process is being followed for all rivers that are proposed for Heritage status and chosen by the Board for possible nomination.

Introducing the BC Heritage Rivers Board

Mark Angelo (Chair)

Mark Angelo is a longtime river advocate, Head of the Fish, Wildlife and Recreation Program at BCIT, and former chair of the Outdoor Recreation Council of B.C. In October 1994, he became the first recipient of the "10 Year National River Conservation Award," which is presented to the individual deemed to have best promoted the ideals of river conservation at the local, provincial, and national levels. He is also responsible for the creation of B.C. Rivers Day, which has become the largest annual celebration of rivers in North America. Mark has been an advocate for British Columbia's rivers for nearly 25 years.

Bill Bourgeois

Bill Bourgeois is the Vice-president of forest policy at Lignum Ltd. He has served as an advisor on the Commission on Resources and the Environment, and has worked in British Columbia's forests for 20 years.

Eva Durance

Eva Durance is the President of the South Okanagan Naturalists Club in Penticton, and is the Okanagan regional director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. She has 35 years of experience in wilderness travel, including more than six years guiding and instructing on leadership and outdoor skills.

Linda Thorstad

Linda Thorstad - President of the Association of Professional Engineers & Geoscientists of B.C. - is a consultant to the Fraser Basin Management Program, and served for three years as an associate on the Commission on Resources and the Environment. She has worked as a planner and advisor working toward sustainability in British Columbia for nearly 20 years.

First Nations Representative

A seat is reserved on the Board, and after consultation with First Nations organisations, an individual will be designated following the signing of the First Nations Summit Protocol.

Please Contact Us:

BCHRS Posters

The Board has recently produced a poster for free distribution as a way of increasing awareness of the BCHRS program, and river stewardship in general. If you can help by ensuring posters get displayed in prominent public areas, please give us a call.

Conference and Meetings

The Board is seeking to contact a wide variety of interests in the public concerning river stewardship. If your group's meeting could include a presentation by a representative of the Board and a display promoting river stewardship, please contact the Board. We will attempt to fulfill requests as our resources permit.

Video

A video program is currently in production which promotes river stewardship and explains the role of the BCHRS and the Board in such an endeavour. The Board would like to see extensive distribution and use of this program in reaching a broad public audience. If you have opportunities to utilize this resource or have suggestions as to how it could be circulated, please contact us.

How to Contact the Board

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