

Heritage Rivers Bulletin

Vol. 2 No. 2, Summer, 1997

Government Accepts Four More River Nominations

On June 1, the Honourable Cathy McGregor released the government's response to the BC Heritage Rivers Board report from last fall. Four of the five nominations made by the Board, the Atnarko, Bella Coola, Kechika and Kettle rivers, were accepted by the government as new additions to the Heritage Rivers System. The fifth river, the Horsefly, was deferred pending local land use planning decisions. The government made a commitment to review the Horsefly nomination, based on the further advice of the Board, once the Cariboo-Chilcotin Land Use Plan Integration Report has been completed.

The Honourable Corky Evans made this announcement in conjunction with the Great Salmon Send-off on the Alouette River, saying: "Heritage River status is meant to draw more attention to the exceptional values of these rivers". Mark Angelo, Chair of the Board was in attendance and responded on behalf of the Board: "We are pleased to see the expansion of the Heritage Rivers System in new areas of the province with such important examples as these. It will certainly promote community awareness and appreciation, providing the base for improved river stewardship."

The Alouette River celebration was an appropriate setting for the announcement. Thousands of chinook smelt were released into the river to mark the rehabilitation of the river's important salmon habitat. Under a new agreement, BC Hydro is releasing more water into the river, making it capable of supporting salmon once again. River enthusiasts working in a variety of local organizations and agencies organized the event and were on hand to celebrate a new future for the Alouette River. The Alouette is one of the remaining 13 rivers still under consideration by the Board for possible nomination later this year.

Board Meets in Prince George

Generously hosted by the Environmental Studies Department of UNBC, the BC Heritage Rivers Board went to Prince George to launch the public consultation program on the remaining river candidates for this year's nominations. During the course of the day the Board held a press conference, an open house and a regular Board meeting. Press coverage was encouraging, and the event was an important step in reaching out to more regions of the province.

Board members also had a valuable opportunity to hear presentations from proponent groups for the Middle and Stuart rivers, which are among the 13 rivers still under consideration. It was helpful to meet people, including members of the Carrier Sekani First Nation, who are strongly committed to the heritage values of these rivers and who so actively support their recognition through the BCHRS.

Public Comment on River Candidates

A good cross section of opinion was received in response to the Board's request for feedback on the 13 rivers remaining under consideration for possible nomination to the Heritage Rivers System this fall. Letters, response forms and telephone calls were received from individuals, groups, local governments and First Nations who offered their opinions on the identified rivers.

Particularly great interest in response to certain rivers warrants acknowledgement. The Peace River, for example, had extensive support from many individuals and groups, but especially noteworthy were the discussions and decisions taken by local councils in support of the nomination. Similarly, the Columbia generated strong support from probably the most diverse group, including individuals, conservation groups, community councils, chambers of commerce, First Nations and regional districts.

While not as widely known, the Yakoun River garnered support from a strong group of local interests all very anxious to see the importance of this critical area recognized not only within the regional land use context of the Queen Charlotte Islands but also provincially.

From another perspective, public input was not always supportive. Along with noteworthy support, the Flathead River also received considerable opposition. The mining industry, specifically, does not support its nomination, feeling that Heritage River status would constrain industry's operations in the area and would negatively impact employment and the local economy.

People are often concerned about the implications of Heritage River status. However, their fears are unfounded. The BCHRS is a non-regulatory approach to improving river stewardship throughout the province. While heritage river status would result in a greater focus on the river, actual management activities would remain consistent with those identified under existing land use planning processes.

Taylor Hosts Heritage Rivers Meeting

In conjunction with the Board's visit to Prince George, Eva Durance represented the Board at a meeting in Taylor and met with the media in Ft. St. John. The District of Taylor had invited the Board to come and discuss with them the possibility of the Peace River being selected for Heritage River status. The meeting was open to the public and a good turnout listened to a brief presentation and entered into a lively discussion concerning the Peace River.

Interest in the Peace River has been noteworthy during the recent public consultation process, and communities and groups have been discussing the prospect of Heritage River status. The many submissions received, illustrates the importance of collaboration between the Board and local people in generating discussion about the program and its objectives.

River Profile: The Blackwater

**Article by: Andy Motherwell
Quesnel, B.C.**

If you are looking for a river rich in some of British Columbia's most colourful and diverse history, consider the Blackwater River, which empties into the Fraser River 60 kms north of Quesnel.

Its path, through a narrow valley, sometimes widening to form several lakes, provided one of the most used but now forgotten routes from east to west. Its easy grade going west, led to its becoming an ancient grease trail connecting the Nuxalt First Nations of Bella Coola with the interior Carrier people. Archaeological studies of a sizeable village at the outlet of Punchaw Lake have confirmed trading activity between the First Nations people of the area and ocean-going Spanish, British, American and Russian ships before Mackenzie's travels in 1793. In recognition of its historic significance, the Nuxalt-Carrier Grease Trail (Alexander Mackenzie Heritage Trail), following in the valley of the Blackwater River was designated in 1986 as British Columbia's first heritage trail.

Hundreds of Carrier pit dwelling sites can be found on the benches of the Westroad River (its official name) as well as rock dams for fishing, tool-making sites with obsidian chips and the deeply indented Grease Trail. In more recent times, an attempt to link North America with Asia and Europe by the Collins Overland Telegraph crossed the Blackwater Valley in 1866. Then, during the Klondike rush of 1890's, the line was re-activated and extended to the Yukon. Lengths of wire and insulators can still be found.

The Westroad River is the mainstem of a system that drains hundreds of thousands of hectares of lovely winding streams, meadows, lakes, benchlands, poplar, pine, fir and spruce forests, mountains and snowfields.

Visitors delight in the richness of plant growth along the river including an interesting array of huckleberry, blueberry, saskatoon, gooseberry, cranberry, wild rose strawberry, kinnikinik, soopalallie, honeysuckle, all manner of clovers, timothy, fescues and more. Many grouse, in particular, thrive on this abundance, and their drumming fills the woods. Attracted by the richness of the river environment, a wide diversity of other wildlife also depend on the valley and its resources. The river and lakes of the Blackwater system support many species of fighting fish. The wetlands of the valley also provide habitat for trumpeter swans and thousands of migratory ducks and geese, while the valley as a whole is home to moose, deer, wolves, coyotes, fox, grizzly, black bear and the occasional wild horse.

Many recreationists use the valley, winter and summer, especially those looking for long distance experiences - hiking, horse riding, cross country skiing, snowmobiling, fly-in fishing, rafting, kayaking and canoeing. There are several fly-in fishing lodges and several backcountry ranches which cater to wilderness travellers. Protected areas along the river reflect the importance of the recreational opportunities of the area. Kluskoil Lake is one of the latest protected areas to be created.

The Kluskus Band have developed their traditional village at Kluskus Lake. This village is among at least nine First Nations reserves along the river. All present a window into the culture and traditions of the First Nations people of the area and offer an opportunity for visitors to interact with the occupants.

The Blackwater is truly a special part of British Columbia's history and a worthy representative within the BC Heritage River System. As W. Hillen remarks, "Paradoxically, although this river was the earliest discovered outlet to the Pacific, it remains the least known."

You must experience it, but be careful - you may never want to leave.

Board Member Profile:

Mark Angelo

Mark is British Columbia's best known river advocate. He has been at the heart of river conservation and stewardship for the past 20 years in this province and has provided the kind of inspired leadership that has drawn a considerable following. Mark has been involved with the Outdoor Recreation Council (ORC) since its beginning, and he formerly served as Council Chair, and as Chair of both the Rivers and Shorelines Committee and the Ten Most Endangered Rivers Committee. It was in his volunteer role with ORC that he founded BC Rivers Day, the largest event of its kind in Canada involving over 120 celebrations in communities all across the province. Similarly, he has organized most of the major river conferences that have occurred in BC over the past 20 years, including the Riverfest conference series and the 1986 International Rivers and Trails Congress.

Professionally, Mark has communicated his love of rivers as an outdoor leader, teacher and writer, presently serving as the Program Head of the Fish, Wildlife and Recreation Program at BCIT. He has paddled hundreds of rivers throughout Canada and much of the world and has authored over 100 articles pertaining to river conservation and management. Mark speaks regularly at conferences in Canada and internationally and offers his expertise and advice to many organizations working to support effective river conservation in their own countries.

Mark has also been recognized with many awards for his contribution to river conservation. In 1994 he was the first recipient of the "10 Year National River Conservation Award" as Canada's outstanding river conservationist of the past decade, and just recently he was awarded the BC Minister of the Environment's Environmental Award (1997), as well as being recognized by ORC with an award for 20 Years of Outstanding Volunteer Service.

On the basis of his outstanding record and personable and dynamic leadership, Mark was appointed to the Minister's Advisory Committee, set up by then Environment Minister John Cashore, which recommended BC membership in the CHRS. Subsequent to BC's announcement of its membership in CHRS in 1995, Mark was appointed as Chair of the BC Heritage Rivers Board and BC's representative to the CHRS Board.

BC Rivers Day

Sunday, September 28, 1997

Each year the Outdoor Recreation Council coordinates BC Rivers Day - an annual, province-wide celebration of BC's river heritage. Community events and activities such as river clean-ups, historical tours, paddling trips, art and photo exhibits, writing competitions, riverside picnics, fish hatchery tours, stream habitat surveys, habitat restoration, and community festivals are initiated by individuals, clubs and organizations all around the province.

If you would like to find out more about BC Rivers Day, or if you would like to organize a BC Rivers Day event this year, please contact Karen Hodson at the Council's office: tel. (604) 737-3058 fax (604) 737-3666 e-mail: outrec_council@sport.bc.ca

Please Contact Us

The Heritage Rivers Board is always interested in hearing from the public. Please let us know your ideas, concerns and suggestions about how we can help improve river stewardship throughout British Columbia.

BC Heritage Rivers Board Secretariat
2034 Casa Marcia Cres Victoria, BC, V8N 2X3
Tel: (250) 477-5333 Fax: (250) 477-5325