

# **Board Report, 1995**

## ***British Columbia's Heritage Rivers: Inaugural Candidates for a Provincial System***

Prepared for:  
the Hon. Moe Sihota  
Minister of Environment, Lands and Parks

Prepared by:  
the British Columbia Heritage Rivers Board  
September 19, 1995

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The Honourable Moe Sihota  
Minister of Environment, Lands & Parks  
Legislative Buildings  
Victoria, B.C.

Dear Mr. Sihota,

We are pleased to submit this report and our recommendations regarding the inaugural candidates for the British Columbia Heritage Rivers System. As requested, we have addressed the importance of better stewardship for all rivers in the province and have identified the first eight rivers that we believe should be recognized as British Columbia Heritage Rivers.

We hope your government will respond to this report as soon as possible. In the interim, the Board will continue with its work, and extensive public consultation, towards identifying additional rivers to be recommended for inclusion in the program.

Respectfully submitted,

The British Columbia Heritage Rivers Board

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## Preamble

The health of the land and all its inhabitants are compromised without healthy rivers. Rivers are the veins and arteries of the earth carrying lifegiving waters from their origins in glaciers, snowfields, lakes and wetlands down to the sea. They provide habitat for aquatic and land species, influence geography and climate, and from earliest times have been of central importance in human existence and cultural development. Among many peoples, the place of rivers in earthly existence gives them a powerful spiritual significance.

In British Columbia, clearly "Rivers tie the mountains to the sea" (Hume). Besides the critical importance to the non-human world, this province's rivers have shaped its people's destinies. First Nations' cultures have been shaped by their associations with these great waterways, from dependence on the salmon to their use as inter-tribal trading routes. This continues to be the case. For more recent immigrants, the rivers were the means of exploring and settling the land that is now BC, and the main urban centres and routes of commerce were along rivers such as the Fraser, the Columbia, and the Okanagan.

With increasing demand for water in modern society, the significance of rivers is becoming ever more obvious and the preservation of their health ever more critical. What has been taken for granted for centuries has now to be restated: the natural, cultural, and recreational place of rivers lies at the heart of our lives as human inhabitants and stewards of the land.

All rivers are important and deserve greater recognition for their character and contribution. Stewardship of our rivers needs to be more widely promoted and accepted. Some rivers require special recognition and management because of their outstanding qualities. They can receive such recognition in the BC Heritage Rivers System.

## Executive Summary

Rivers are important in British Columbia and warrant greater attention in the management of resources throughout the province. The creation of a British Columbia Heritage Rivers System (BCHRS) was announced by the provincial government on May 2, 1995. The specific goals identified for the program are:

- \* to encourage greater public awareness of provincially significant rivers, in terms of their natural and cultural heritage and recreational values.
- \* to promote improved stewardship of all rivers throughout the province.

An Advisory Board (BCHRB) to support the program was simultaneously named and has worked since then to lay the ground work for the system and identify the inaugural rivers to be nominated for recognition. The Board was also mandated to link to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) and to advance recommendations to the provincial government with respect to BC candidate rivers for this national system.

The Board has described the attributes of natural heritage, cultural heritage and recreational values that must underlie any river's successful recognition within the BCHRS. It has also established guidelines for selection of rivers that will be named as candidates for the system. In conjunction with these, a three stage process that the Board will follow involving an Identification Phase, a Nomination Phase and a Monitoring Phase has been established to dovetail with a three stage process for government involving river recognition, planning and management and monitoring of rivers under existing land use decision-making and management structures.

The Board has worked through the process, focusing attention on a number of rivers that have had a long history of discussion in the public forum and have been addressed to a certain extent under a variety of recent land use planning processes. From this review, the Board recommends the following with further documentation contained later in the report. The rivers identified in this report represent the Board's first assessment based on past documentation and public input. The report is also a start of a full public process that will investigate possible river candidates and result in a comprehensive Heritage Rivers System.

It is recommended by the BCHRB that:

***\* the following rivers be recognized as the inaugural components of the BC Heritage Rivers System: the Adams, Babine, Blackwater, Cowichan, Fraser, Similkameen, Skagit, and Stikine***

***\* the Fraser River be put forward to the CHRS Board as a British Columbia nomination to the CHRS***

# 1. Background

## Introduction

Rivers are an important component of our natural heritage, that have influenced our history and affect our daily lives. We need to make a concerted effort to draw attention to and maintain this important heritage. In May of this year the Government of British Columbia announced the establishment of the BC Heritage Rivers System (BCHRS) and identified the Board that would provide leadership in the development of the system. It is a public board designed to generate a high profile for rivers throughout the province and to promote the importance of effective conservation and use of rivers and their surrounding area for a wide variety of natural and human benefits.

The specific goals identified for the program are:

- \* to identify and recognize provincially significant rivers, for their natural and cultural heritage and recreational values;
- \* to stimulate greater focus on provincially significant rivers in the appropriate land use planning processes; and
- \* to promote greater public awareness and improved stewardship of all rivers throughout the province.

The Government's announcement included the expectation that in a very few months, the Board would recommend a first group of rivers for recognition within the provincial system. This report is the result of the Board's work since the announcement and contains our initial list of heritage river nominations as well as an outline of the procedure followed to reach these conclusions.

The announcement of the program came after many years of activity in this province involving the identification and management of rivers with special qualities. Many organizations and individuals have worked tirelessly over the past two decades to generate greater public recognition of our stewardship responsibilities for rivers as part of the integrated resource practices which are an essential hallmark of modern society. Thus this report will not be new to many who have struggled with such issues. Rather the Board, in this report, is taking advantage of the long and well documented history of river values in British Columbia to draw together the most viable candidates in its inaugural nomination. It is anticipated that these nominations will set the tone and direction for the program as a whole.

We hope that through the public discussion about our river heritage that is beginning now, and will expand in the years ahead, that every British Columbian will come to appreciate something of the benefits of rivers and feel a part of the creation of a system that exemplifies and celebrates this heritage.

# **BC Heritage Rivers System Process**

The BCHRS will serve as a model of stewardship over our most treasured rivers. This philosophy forms the basis of the process to be followed in the identification of rivers for the program and the planning and management that affects their stewardship. It is a process that is cooperative and flexible - capturing the desires and values of the public and including them in the management responsibilities of government.

The Board, acting as a voice of the public, has a sequence of three tasks with respect to any river that may become a heritage river.

## **1. Identification phase**

\* In this phase the Board seeks widespread public input as to what rivers in the province should be considered for BCHRS status and assesses the identified rivers against the criteria outlined below.

## **2. Nomination phase**

\* In this phase, the Board will identify candidates for the system from those rivers that meet the identification criteria when the system guidelines identified below are applied. For each river a vision statement and a set of broad management objectives will be outlined as an indication of the values to be recognized by the river's nomination and what management objectives will be necessary to ensure the integrity of those values. The public will also have an important role to play in providing such a vision for the Board as part of its consideration of suitable rivers. The selected rivers will be submitted to Cabinet while the results of the selection process are also distributed to the public. This report is an example of the communications in this phase of the process.

## **3. Monitoring phase**

\* In this phase, the Board, in concert with the public, monitors the progress of planning and management as it moves toward the vision identified in the nomination of each of the rivers of the system. The Board will report regularly to Cabinet and to the public on the results of this monitoring - the successes, integrity and status of the system. It will also identify areas of weakness and actions that could reduce the inadequacies of river management.

At the same time, the provincial Government has a similar, but staggered, process with respect to the BCHRS. Its three tasks are as follows.

### **1. Recognition phase**

\* In this phase, Cabinet responds to the Board nominations (phase 2 of the Board process) by accepting, rejecting or simply taking them under advisement, the suggested rivers and the associated visions and management objectives. In the event of acceptance, Cabinet adds its voice to the acknowledged importance of these rivers and the importance of managing them in accordance with an identified vision.

### **2. Planning and management phase**

\* In this phase, Cabinet acceptance of the vision for each river accepted into the BCHRS is communicated to line agencies and the existing planning processes that will establish the management regime for rivers of the system. Management of the rivers will be applied according to existing jurisdictional responsibilities as defined through the appropriate planning processes.

### **3. Monitoring and adjustment phase**

\* Built into all government responsibilities, is a monitoring and adjustment component which will ensure the long term achievement of planning objectives established in the previous phase. This phase will coincide with the monitoring phase of the Board .

# Identification Criteria and Selection Guidelines

Criteria have been identified to assist in the selection of candidate rivers for the BCHRS. These criteria have been used to determine the suitability of an individual river for recognition within the program. They are based on those established for the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. Rivers in the BCHRS will be identified on the strength of any one, or a combination of the following values from the areas of natural heritage, cultural heritage and recreation:

## Natural Heritage Values

- \* displays along its course significant examples of physical landscape characteristics representing both past and present evolutionary processes
- \* supports along its course significant examples of representative ecosystems and/or special species of particular interest due to their concentration, vulnerability, rarity, uniqueness or exceptional characteristics

## Cultural Heritage Values

- \* influenced the historical and/or economic development of British Columbia
- \* displays along its course, significant examples of traditional territories and/or lifestyles of First Nations people
- \* is associated with people, events, movements, achievements, ideas or beliefs of significance to the cultural heritage of people today

## Recreation Values

- \* provides an environment able to support a significant level of recreational activity and accessible to large numbers and a wide diversity of recreationists
- \* provides an environment conducive to a high quality of recreational experience

It is recognized that many rivers within the province will meet these criteria since this province enjoys a rich river heritage. Thus system guidelines have also been identified to help select, among the many candidates, those which should be highlighted as examples of our river heritage within the BCHRS. In determining the list of recognized rivers and in adding to the system in the future, the Board considers:

- \* the importance of the river as a model of the benefits of integrated resource management rather than focusing on single purpose protection or use
- \* the role of First Nations in the cultural heritage of the province and their continuing role in its growth and development
- \* the level and nature of demand, constituency or public support that has developed for a river over recent years
- \* the importance of regional representation in creating a truly provincial system
- \* the diversity (i.e.. setting, size, environment, etc.) of physical types of the selected rivers
- \* the balance of natural history, human history and recreational values
- \* the ability to recognize a river in its entirety, from source to mouth, and to strive for a watershed approach to planning and management
- \* the potential of a river to achieve Board's stated vision



## 2. Rivers Nominated for Recognition in the B.C. Heritage Rivers System (BCHRS)

It is the recommendation of the BCHRB that:

*\* the following rivers be recognized as the inaugural components of the BC Heritage Rivers System: the Adams, Babine, Blackwater, Cowichan, Fraser, Similkameen, Skagit, and Stikine.*

Upon appointment, the Board was instructed to submit an initial few river nominations by the end of September to 'kick start' the B.C. Heritage Rivers System. The rivers discussed below were identified according to the criteria outlined previously. The Board considers these to be key rivers that could be potential river management models since considerable progress has been made to recognize their inherent values within the various land use planning processes conducted to date. The nominations are presented alphabetically and no priority is implied. A general overview of the character of each river and its significance is provided, followed by an identification of the selection criteria that were most important in the Board's assessment. Then a vision statement for each river accompanied by the supporting management directions which have been formulated by the Board are presented as guidelines for the future of the river as a recognized BCHRS component.

Recognition by the BCHRS should draw attention to the special qualities of the rivers. It should also reinforce the need to maintain those qualities for generations to come. While in general, the emphasis is on maintaining a diversity of uses within the watershed, a few special circumstances have led the Board to envision rivers to be 'free-flowing'. The Board's interpretation of this term means 'undammed' and does not restrict other industrial uses or bank modifications. The use of such a vision does not undervalue such water uses as energy production but does suggest that priority of other uses does exist in a selected few of our province's rivers.

### Adams River

The Adams River is divided into two distinct units, upper and lower, by Adams Lake, a long body of water caught between steep sided mountains of the Monashee's north of Sushwap Lake. The lower section of the river is clear, gravel bottomed and lined with groves of black cottonwoods, trembling aspen, white birch, spruce, fir, pine and larch. It has been recommended for protection under the Kamloops LRMP (approved in principle) for its extremely high significance to salmon protection in the province. The river has traditionally hosted huge salmon runs in October that attract thousands of visitors, providing an unparalleled public education opportunity.

The salmon also colonized the upper Adams River above Adams Lake following the glacial retreat from the area but river controls and resource activities in the area decimated populations earlier in this century. Forestry is still the dominant land use in the area. The upper Adams has also been the focus of a recent land use planning exercise resulting in a 6,000 ha. protective corridor being established. This initiative recognizes the potential of the upper Adams River as probably the most significant sockeye enhancement opportunity in the Fraser Basin.

First Nations also have a long standing interest in the area and in its resource utilization and conservation.

### **Selection Criteria**

The Adams River is a critical environment contributing to the sustainability of internationally significant salmon populations. As such it provides exceptional opportunities to help protect this resource and educate people on the importance of habitat quality and sustainability. The Adams River provides an opportunity to recognize a river that has:

- \* outstanding natural heritage values including critical wildlife habitats; and
- \* opportunities for recreation and educational experiences and activities that are compatible with an appreciation for the natural heritage values.

### **Vision**

*\* a carefully managed waterway, ensuring its integrity as the premier salmon spawning river in the province and enabling its significant contribution to the protection of BC's natural heritage and contribution to widespread public education*

### **Management Objectives**

- \* to establish and maintain water quality standards within the watershed required to support salmon production
  
- \* to manage forestry and other industrial uses within the watershed to ensure water flows (volume, quality and timing) meet the requirements of salmon production
  
- \* to monitor and control recreational use of the river to avoid impacting the fish populations
  
- \* to maintain human history values of the river corridor combined with ongoing industrial and recreational use
  
- \* to implement educational programs that communicate the special values of the Adams River fish populations

## **Babine River**

The Babine River has been the focus of considerable attention from conservationists and industry alike. Its 120 km course from Babine Lake to the confluence with the Skeena River passes through as impressive wilderness and scenic canyons as can be found in this province. A wide variety of wildlife species thrive in the river basin, with particular attention given to probably the finest grizzly viewing opportunities in the province. The Babine also supports an extremely productive fishery of anadromous fish species and has an international reputation for the steelhead population. As a result, recreational values of the area for kayaking, rafting, fishing, hunting, fish run viewing, wildlife viewing, nature study, and camping, are very high. Forestry activity in the area, particularly with its influence on access to the watershed, has been the primary industrial interest in the region.

Planing processes have sought to address the issues raised by such conflicting uses. The Babine Coordinated Access Management Plan has been developed identifying a conservation

corridor along the river. Local initiatives, including an LRUP for a portion of the river have been completed and the Bulkley and Kispiox LRMP's are currently in progress.

### **Selection Criteria**

The Babine River is most significant from a natural heritage and recreational activity perspective. Exceptional wilderness qualities and associated habitats for wildlife species such as the grizzly bear, along with a major steelhead population are prominent values. The Babine River represents an important opportunity to recognize a river that has:

- \* outstanding examples of natural environments, habitats and scenery; and
- \* opportunities for recreation experiences and activities that are compatible with an appreciation for the natural heritage values.

### **Vision**

*\* a river of outstanding natural qualities and wilderness character, specifically maintaining the world class steelhead fishery and the integrity of the grizzly populations and scenic qualities of the river corridor*

### **Management Objectives**

- \* to monitor and assess the existing plan for the river corridor to ensure its effectiveness in the management of the corridor
  
- \* to monitor and assess use levels, implementing controls as required to maintain resource values
  
- \* to strictly monitor and control fishing activity impacting on the river population, ensuring stakeholder involvement for effective management of the river's fishery
  
- \* to address conservation issues such as grizzly bear populations that extend beyond the protected corridor and special management zone along the river

## **Blackwater River**

The Blackwater River originates in the Ilgachuz Range northwest of Quesnel in central British Columbia. Draining an area of approximately 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> of varied topography, cutting a deep valley above Tsacha Lake and flowing through a series of rapids and canyons of black volcanic rock below the lake. The river drops over 900 m during its 280 km course to its confluence with the Fraser River.

The basin is a mixture of grassland and light forest consisting mostly of lodgepole pine, aspen, willow and Douglas fir. Although little settlement is present, much of the river course is accessible and the area has been utilized for forestry and, to a lesser extent, mineral exploration and development. Recreational use is widespread including a wide variety of summer and winter activities: fishing, hunting, canoeing, snowmobiling, camping, and boating.

Of particular significance is the long history of use by the Chilcotin First Nations. It was their 'Grease Trail', running parallel to and just north of the river, which had been used as a trade route with the coastal natives, that Mackenzie undoubtedly followed to the west.

A significant level of local planning has been carried out in the river corridor. LRUP's have been prepared in both the upper and lower regions and a management plan is in place for the Grease Trail. These land use directions have been incorporated into the approved Cariboo/Chilcotin Land Use Plan.

### **Selection Criteria**

The Blackwater River represents important elements of the cultural heritage of the province. The presence and activities of First Nations over centuries of occupation are dominant in the assessment of its suitability for BCHRS status. Exceptional educational and recreational opportunities are also prominent in the present use of the river corridor. The Blackwater River represents a unique opportunity to recognize a river that has:

- \* outstanding cultural heritage values representing historical themes such as First Nations cultures, and early European exploration; and,
- \* opportunities for recreation and educational experiences and activities that are compatible with an appreciation for the cultural heritage values.

### **Vision**

*\* a river corridor managed to protect the integrity of its cultural resources to communicate its significance as an integral part of the outstanding human history of the area and demonstrate its continued importance to the lifestyle of the First Nations people along the river*

### **Management Objectives**

- \* to maintain the integrity of the cultural resources of the corridor relating to the human history of the area as well as the natural characteristics which provide the context within which that activity has taken and continues to take place
- \* to maintain the historical connection and present appreciation of the link between the Blackwater River and the Alexander Mackenzie Heritage Trail
- \* to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of existing planning processes for the benefit of the recreational and educational values of the corridor
- \* to closely monitor resource use and encourage and assess the implementation of an appropriate access management plan
- \* to monitor fishing activity, assess impacts on the river's fish population and general quality of the environment and recreational experience and determine the need for a fisheries management plan

### **Cowichan River**

The Cowichan River has been described as 'one of the world's best salmon and trout rivers, although it is relatively unknown'. The river drains the heavily forested Cowichan Valley covering a vast mountain basin of about 90,000 ha or 900 sq. km. The valley supports a second growth of Douglas fir, hemlock and lodgepole pine changing to a more pastoral environment of dairy farms and hay fields as well as settlement in the lower reaches. The river actually flows from Cowichan Lake, at an elevation of 159 m, about 35 km to the east

coast of Vancouver Island on Georgia Strait.

The river is an important fishery supporting brown, cutthroat and rainbow trout as well as steelhead and salmon. Recreation is also a major use with a variety of boating, tubing and hiking activities prominent along the river corridor.

Land status along the river is a mix of many interest including parks, provincial forest, private land and First Nations interests. Local planning activity focusing on the Cowichan River and involving a full range of interests has been taking place for a number of years and has provided a basis for land use directions embraced by the approved Vancouver Island Regional Plan.

### **Selection Criteria**

Although drawing on all heritage river criteria, the cultural heritage and recreational values of the Cowichan River are dominant in the assessment of its suitability for BCHRS status. The Cowichan River represents an important opportunity to recognize a river that has:

- \* played, and continues to be a significant part of the cultural heritage of the province with outstanding examples of historical themes such as First Nations cultures, European settlement and industrial development;
- \* outstanding opportunities for recreation experiences and activities that are compatible with an appreciation for the natural and cultural heritage values; and
- \* representative examples of natural features and scenery.

### **Vision**

*\* a model of watershed cooperation among a wide variety of stakeholders to meet multiple resource use objectives, emphasizing aquatic and recreation values for the river and recreation, settlement and industrial values in the river basin*

### **Management Objectives**

- \* to monitor the implementation of an integrated management plan for sustainable resource use within the watershed that respects the natural and recreational qualities of the river corridor
- \* to ensure the integrity of fish stocks and critical habitat
- \* to maintain a high quality, year round river recreation experience
- \* to encourage grassroots support and activism now taking place as an integral part of the watershed sustainability initiative, as a model for initiatives elsewhere in the province

## **Fraser River**

The Fraser River travels 1325 km from its headwaters in eastern British Columbia to its mouth in the Strait of Georgia. The landscape it drains (Fraser River Basin) encompasses 25% of the province, accounts for 80% of the gross provincial product and is home to two thirds of the people in the province. The Fraser River valley forms a major provincial transportation corridor between the West Coast and the rest of Canada, contributing

significantly to Asia Pacific trade through the Vancouver Gateway.

As a major transportation corridor, it is historically significant in early exploration and development of the province. It remains culturally significant providing a focus for a range of transportation, industrial, manufacturing, commercial fishing and service uses. From a natural history perspective, the river is perhaps most significant for the salmon populations it supports. Many stretches of the Fraser River are also undeveloped and noted for their natural beauty. The river also provides a focus for many recreational opportunities including rafting, boating and sports fishing.

Recognizing the significance of the Fraser River, the federal, provincial and local governments established the Fraser Basin Management Program to develop a strategy for sustainability for the entire basin. The Program, three years into a five-year mandate, has created greater awareness of the Fraser River, assessed the state of the river basin, provided suggestions for many improvements and is well along the way with development of the overall strategy.

The Fraser River has been the subject of extensive consultation ranging from open houses to targeted workshops, over the past few years. This consultation suggests that there is broad public support for recognition of the Fraser River for the range of values that have been identified in this nomination.

### **Selection Criteria**

The Fraser River is a critical part of the cultural and natural heritage of the province. Exceptional recreational opportunities are also prominent in the present use of the river corridor. Although drawing on all heritage river criteria, the cultural heritage values of this major British Columbia river are dominant in the assessment of its suitability for BCHRS status. The Fraser River represents a unique opportunity to recognize a river that has:

- \* played, and continues to play, a unique role in the cultural heritage of the province with outstanding examples of historical themes such as First Nations cultures, European settlement and transportation;
- \* outstanding examples of natural phenomena, features and scenery, with overwhelming significance to BC's salmon fishery; and
- \* opportunities for recreation experiences and activities that are compatible with an appreciation for the natural and cultural heritage values.

### **Vision:**

- \* a sustainable Fraser River, and the landscape it drains, that will continue to support its diverse cultural, natural and recreational values.*

### **Management Objectives**

- \* to develop a long-term management strategy for sustainability of the river and surrounding landscape it drains
- \* to transform the status of the Fraser River from BC's most endangered river to a model of cooperative management and environmental integrity
- \* to work towards harmonized policy and legislation and economic incentives to support sustainability

\* to ensure that decision-making involves the public through multi-stakeholder advisory groups, including First Nations involvement

\* to ensure that communication and education programs enhance understanding and appreciation of the river and assist with lifestyle choices that support sustainability

\* to manage growth to minimize loss of habitats, biodiversity and wetlands emanating from land use activities.

## **Similkameen River**

The Similkameen River, whose Canadian portion of the basin is 9190 km<sup>2</sup>, is one of the last remaining large rivers in the Southern Interior which remains free flowing and largely pristine. Its headwaters are in the Englemann spruce-subalpine fir of the Cascade Mountains in Manning Provincial Park from whence it quickly moves downward into Ponderosa pine and Interior Douglas fir. About 60 km downriver at Princeton, it flows out into the broad valley of the Similkameen and into a semi-arid bunchgrass-Ponderosa pine-aspen parkland down to the US border near Osoyoos.

Its riparian habitat along this lower portion, dominated by cottonwood and shrub thickets, is increasingly rare in the Okanagan-Similkameen and critical habitat for a number of rare and endangered species. Such habitat is also critical for the survival of the healthy fish populations in the river including rainbow trout and mountain whitefish. The dramatic yearly changes in river flow, due mainly to the heavy snowpack at its origins and the arid nature of its main valley floor, are in their turn critical for the maintenance of these riparian areas.

The Similkameen is a favourite destination for river recreationists, both for the challenging character of the spring runoff and for more leisurely activities during the summer. Fishing is considered very good, with certain areas noted for their large trout,

The Upper and Lower Similkameen Bands of the Okanagan First Nations have Reserves bordering the river from Keremeos to Princeton, The river has been, and continues to be, an important part of their cultural heritage and their way of life. The non-native settlements of Keremeos-Cawston, Hedley, and Princeton have built much of their history on the flow of the river, from its use for domestic and agricultural purposes (ranching and orchards) to mineral/placer exploration and mining chiefly along its tributary streams.

### **Selection Criteria**

The Similkameen River is an important part of the cultural and natural heritage of the province. Exceptional recreational opportunities are also prominent in the present use of the river corridor. Although drawing on all heritage river criteria, the natural values of this major British Columbia river are dominant in the assessment of its suitability for BCHRS status.

The Similkameen River represents an important opportunity to recognize a river that has:

- \* outstanding examples of natural environments, and critical habitats;
- \* outstanding opportunities for recreation experiences and activities that are compatible with an appreciation for the natural and cultural heritage values; and
- \* representative examples of the cultural heritage values of the province including those of First Nations cultures, settlement, agriculture and industrial development.

## **Vision**

*\* a free-flowing river maintaining and enhancing its diverse natural character throughout its length within Canada while allowing appropriate economic and recreational activity*

## **Management Objectives**

- \* to maintain the river as free-flowing throughout its entire length in Canada
- \* to restore disturbed riparian areas while maintaining structures required for erosion control along settled sections of river.
- \* to maintain an environment conducive to high quality recreational uses, and to implement necessary controls to prevent damage such as over fishing, general wildlife disturbance, and improper garbage disposal
- \* to maintain water use for commercial operations, chiefly agriculture while improving water quality through control of livestock access and continued monitoring and control of mining activity within the entire drainage basin
- \* to continue and enhance local community involvement in the stewardship and wise use of the river

## **Skagit River**

The lower reaches of the Skagit River flow through a warm dry valley after having gathered waters from the highlands of the Cascade Mountains of Manning Provincial Park to the northeast. The major length of the river, however, is in the United States as it flows from its origin in Canada to its mouth near Mount Vernon, Washington.

The valley is the natural western limit of Ponderosa pine in Canada and home to a wide variety of wildlife species. Trout populations are very healthy and support excellent fly fishing activity. In addition, a wide variety of recreation pursuits take place in the valley including canoeing, kayaking, hiking, fishing and nature study.

The area has been managed under the direction of the Manning Provincial Park Master Plan and the Skagit Valley Recreation Area Plan. However, longstanding park status and resource use issues have resulted in a special planning initiative and a government announcement on a change in status for the area is expected soon.

## **Selection Criteria**

The Skagit River provides exceptional recreational opportunities in close proximity to the major population base of the province. Natural heritage features are also prominent in the river corridor. Although drawing on all heritage river criteria, the recreational values of this river are dominant in the assessment of its suitability for BCHRS status. The Skagit River represents an important opportunity to recognize a river that has:

- \* outstanding opportunities for recreation experiences and activities that are compatible with an appreciation for the natural heritage values; and
- \* representative examples of natural environments, and scenery.



## **Vision**

*\* a carefully managed river providing an intimate, natural recreation experience focused on the dominant river activities fishing and canoeing*

## **Management Objectives**

- \* to manage access to the river to retain the natural integrity of the corridor and ensure continuation of the intimate, high quality experience
- \* to manage the fishery of the river through regulatory techniques encouraging fly fishing and expansion of the catch and release initiative
- \* to establish and implement recreational use level restrictions as necessary to retain the quality of the experience in an area in close proximity to the Lower Mainland population

## **Stikine River**

The Stikine River originates in the Cassiar and Stikine Mountains of northwestern British Columbia and drains a 51,000 km<sup>2</sup> basin before crossing the border with the United States on the Alaska Panhandle and discharging through several channels into the Pacific. The upper portion of the river basin is a semi-arid plateau of up to 1900 metres in elevation, while the lower portion of the river drains a heavily glaciated region of the Coast Mountains characterized by high precipitation. The main tributary, the Iskut River joins the Stikine 11 km upstream from the Alaska border and accounts for about 25% of the river's flow.

A dominant natural feature of the river is the Grand Canyon of the Stikine which, beginning almost 300 km below the source, extends for almost 100 km down river. The topography of the canyon area, as well as other sites along the Stikine and its tributaries, give the basin significant potential for hydro power development. Mineral development has also been a longstanding focus of activity in the basin with rich deposits of copper, gold, silver, molybdenum and coal.

The Stikine River also supports an important fishery including all five salmon species. Its wild and natural environment has also supported a wide range of wildlife species in the basin. Hunting, fishing, hiking and river recreation have been popular recreational pursuits.

The upper portions of the Stikine basin, in Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Park have been protected under park status. Further downstream, within the Stikine River Recreation Area, the final status is yet to be determined. The lower river, from Telegraph Creek to Wrangell, has a management plan in place as a result of the efforts of the Lower Stikine Advisory Committee.

## **Selection Criteria**

The Stikine River is an important part of the cultural and natural heritage of the province. Exceptional recreational opportunities are also prominent in the present use of the river corridor. Although drawing on all heritage river criteria, the natural heritage values of this outstanding British Columbia river are dominant in the assessment of its suitability for BCHRS status. The Stikine River represents an important opportunity to recognize a river

that has:

- \* outstanding examples of natural environments, wilderness character, critical habitats, and scenery;
- \* outstanding opportunities for recreation experiences and activities that are compatible with an appreciation for the natural and cultural heritage values; and
- \* representative examples of the cultural heritage of the province including themes such as First Nations cultures, transportation and industrial development.

## **Vision**

*\* a free-flowing wilderness river, which will convey to visitors the sense of ruggedness, power, beauty and adventure characteristic of the northern regions of the province in its upper reaches, while maintaining its role as a major support for regional development and economic activity in the lower reaches*

## **Management Objectives**

- \* to ensure unobstructed flow of the river within Canada
- \* to identify and manage a significant corridor along the river to ensure wilderness and wildlife values are maintained
- \* to emphasize wilderness and recreation qualities in the upper portion of the river and to encourage integrated resource use of the lower reaches of the river while maintaining the natural character of the corridor
- \* to encourage the Lower Stikine Advisory Committee as a model of cooperative planning, in the preparation and implementation an integrated resource use plan for the lower reaches of the river that ensures acceptable standards of water quality, visual landscape integrity and compatibility of use, with recreation being the priority value while ensuring that resource potentials such as mining are realized

### 3. Canadian Heritage River System (CHRS) Nomination

It is the recommendation of the BCHRB that:

***\* the Fraser River be put forward to the CHRS Board as a British Columbia nomination to the CHRS***

It is the full intention of BC and the newly created BCHRS Board to put forward a number of the province's most significant waterways as candidates for CHRS status. British Columbia joined the CHRS in 1994 on the recommendation of the Minister's Advisory Committee. At the same time, the Committee made recommendations with respect to improvements in the current workings of the CHRS, a new approach to provincial membership on the CHRS Board, and, the development of a provincial heritage rivers system.

In its initial review of prominent rivers in this province, the Board considers the Fraser River to be British Columbia's prime candidate for CHRS nomination, and was anxious to see this recognition be part of its first report to the government. Above all others, the Board feels the Fraser River represents the most significant contribution this province can make to the CHRS. Undeniably, the size of the Fraser River, its significance to the physical geography of the province, its history and its current recreational activity, make it a logical and strong candidate for national recognition. It ranks with other major rivers of this country that epitomize the meaning of river heritage: the St. Lawrence, the Mackenzie, the Saskatchewan, and the Peace. The Board proposes the Fraser River for recognition on the basis of all heritage river criteria and because of its overwhelming prominence among the province's rivers.

The Fraser River is also suitable from the perspective of public profile and support for improved stewardship of this resource. The general public also recognizes clearly that the Fraser River requires more sensitive management. It has seen major development and continues today to be the geographical backbone of the province. It is as a result of this continuing pressure that many British Columbians are recognizing the importance of the river's future. This is clearly the intent behind the Fraser Basin Management Program, a multi-government initiative, whose Board has members from the four orders of government as well as non-government representatives, to improve the quality of the river environment and more effectively manage the watershed.

The Board recognizes the complexity of developing a CHRS nomination for a river such as the Fraser and will work in close consultation with the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board in doing so. While acceptance of rivers within the CHRS is based on the similar selection criteria, stipulations with respect to current environmental conditions will have to be addressed in the nomination and designation process utilized in the national program.

The Board also realizes that the provincial Government has stated that the Tatshenshini River will be put forward as a CHRS nomination. However, since the current discussions with First Nations affected in that initiative may delay the Tatshenshini nomination, the Board recommends that the nomination process be initiated for the Fraser River as well.

## 4. Next Steps

The first and most important next step is to encourage members of the public to put forward their ideas and suggestions about the material in this report and about further nominations of rivers for heritage status. Interaction with the public is fundamental to the successful work of the Board and will underlie all our activities, as we must effectively represent the public voice on rivers in this province to the government.

Over the next year, the Board will embark upon a widespread public campaign to solicit ideas and suggestions not only about what other candidates that should be considered for heritage status, but also how all British Columbians can become involved in the better stewardship of rivers. The Board will take steps to:

- \* raise awareness and participation in the initiatives of the Board
- \* contact and keep in touch with those who are interested in the Board's activities
- \* receive submissions and ideas about the BCHRS
- \* develop a long term strategy for the development and growth of the BCHRS
- \* share suggestions from all over the province on local stewardship initiatives
- \* become informed and be open to communications about issues and concerns with respect to river stewardship that require a public voice

To do this the Board will be involved in a variety of activities including:

- \* preparing materials for public distribution advertising the program and promoting river stewardship
- \* attending and making presentations at events and activities of organizations and groups that have an interest in the BCHRS and river stewardship generally
- \* gathering information, discussing with informed groups and individuals, and holding workshops to contribute to the long term development of the system
- \* meeting regularly to review progress and plan future action