

# **Board Report, 1996**

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

Prepared for:  
the Hon. Paul Ramsey  
Minister of Environment, Lands and Parks

Prepared by:  
the British Columbia Heritage Rivers Board

September 19, 1996

The Honourable Paul Ramsey  
Minister of Environment, Lands & Parks  
Legislative Buildings  
Victoria, B.C.

Dear Mr. Ramsey,

We are pleased to submit this second report and our recommendations regarding our 1996 nominations for the British Columbia Heritage Rivers System and our activities over the past year. We have put a major emphasis on gathering public support and comment for the program and are pleased with the response.

It is difficult to select candidate rivers with so many rivers put forward by the public with such convincing concern and commitment. While we have chosen only a few rivers to nominate, we strongly support the public's concern for the future of the rivers they have suggested and the importance of better stewardship for all rivers in the province. We hope that your government will continue to work diligently to improve planning and management processes with respect to river integrity throughout the province.

We hope your government will respond to this report as soon as possible. In the interim, the Board will continue with its work of extensive public consultation towards identifying additional rivers to be recommended for inclusion in the program and our increasing roles and responsibilities with respect to monitoring rivers already within the system.

Respectfully submitted,

The British Columbia Heritage Rivers Board

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## Preamble

The health of the land and all its inhabitants is 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, rivers were the means of exploring and settling the land that is now British Columbia, 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 must now be advocated: 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 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.

# 1. Background

## Introduction

Rivers are a vital part of British Columbia - both its landscape and its culture. Rivers help define who we are and the lifestyle choices available to us. Healthy rivers mean a healthy environment and abundant, pure water for plants, animals, human consumption, industry, and recreation. With such plentiful water resources in B.C., we must present a model of water stewardship for Canada and the world. We must make every effort to integrate all uses and management of rivers, to support a common goal of maintaining healthy natural water systems for generations to come.

As a contribution to this common goal, the Government of British Columbia announced the creation of the BC Heritage Rivers System (BCHRS) in May, 1995. To head the program, a public Board was appointed which aims to draw public attention to rivers throughout the province and to recognize those rivers which serve as outstanding examples of a variety of heritage values. The specific goals of the BCHRS are:

- to identify and recognize provincially significant rivers for their natural, 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 BC Heritage Rivers Board issued its first report in September, 1995, naming eight nominees as the inaugural candidates for the BCHRS. One river was subsequently withdrawn from the list of nominees pending further public discussion. The Government responded in May, 1996, accepting the seven rivers nominated, thereby establishing the foundations of the system.

The Board has continued to work with the public and the government to expand and improve the BC Heritage Rivers System and to promote responsible stewardship of all rivers. This report outlines the second set of rivers nominated by the Board for heritage river status and is submitted to Government for review and action in contributing to the BC Heritage Rivers System.

This report also draws attention to those rivers which, although not nominated for recognition within the BC Heritage Rivers System, are nonetheless valuable components of our provincial river heritage. Better stewardship of all rivers throughout the province is something the Board strongly encourages. Local action and wider support for responsible land and water use practises are essential ingredients for maintaining the future integrity of our rivers. It is up to us all to recognize and act on this responsibility.

# Identification Criteria and Selection Guidelines

Criteria have been established to help the Board determine the suitability of an individual river for recognition within the BCHRS. These criteria are based on those of the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS). Rivers proposed for the BCHRS will be nominated on the strength of any one, or a combination of the following natural, cultural heritage, and recreation values:

## 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 is accessible to large numbers and a wide diversity of recreationists
- provides an environment conducive to a high quality recreational experience

The Board recognizes 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 from among the many candidates, those which should be highlighted within the BCHRS. In determining the list of nominated 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 (eg. 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 the Board's stated vision for the river

## **BC Heritage Rivers System Process**

The BCHRS will serve as a model of stewardship over our most treasured rivers. Thus, identifying rivers for the program and providing for the planning and management that affects their stewardship is an important process requiring many different contributions. 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, reports directly to the Minister of Environment, Lands and Parks and through him to Cabinet. In addition, it works in concert with an Interagency Technical Advisory Committee (ITAC) representing various Ministries within the provincial government to ensure that all aspects of river planning and management are addressed with respect to any river that may become a heritage river.

Together the Board and the ITAC follow the process illustrated and described here.

### **Identification**

- \* the Board seeks widespread public input on what rivers should be considered for BCHRS status and assesses the suggested rivers against the identification criteria
- \* public contributions are the foundation of the program; rivers are suggested to the Board from public sources and are dependent upon public commitment and support to be carried through the process
- \* from their extensive knowledge, data and experience base, ITAC provides input to the Board regarding the qualities of the suggested rivers measured against the criteria

### **Nomination**

- \* the Board identifies candidates for the system from those rivers that meet the identification criteria and best satisfy the selection guidelines. For each river a vision statement and a set of broad management guidelines will be outlined as an indication of the values to be recognized by the river's nomination and what management guidelines will be necessary to ensure the integrity of those values
- \* the public has an important role to play in providing as much information as possible in support of their vision for the suggested rivers
- \* the ITAC reviews and comments on the information and issues relating to each of

the rivers under consideration and provides feedback on the Board's assessment  
\* the Board documents and nominates the selected rivers to the BCHRS by reporting to Cabinet; this report is also distributed to the public

### **Monitoring**

\* 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.

### **Recognition**

\* Cabinet responds to the Board nominations by accepting, accepting with modifications, rejecting, or simply taking under advisement, the nominated rivers and the associated visions and management guidelines. In the event of acceptance, Cabinet acknowledges the importance of these rivers and the importance of managing them in accordance with an identified vision

### **Planning and management**

\* Cabinet acceptance of the vision for each river accepted into the BCHRS is communicated to the line agencies and 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

### **Monitoring and adjustment**

\* 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 reports regularly to Cabinet and to the public on the results of this monitoring - the successes, integrity and status of the system. It also identifies areas of weakness and actions that could reduce the inadequacies of river management

\* all relevant government agencies, working in concert with the Board and public groups connected with each river in the system, also monitor the system and adjust their management and regulatory actions to ensure the achievement of the long term planning objectives established for heritage rivers

## 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 for their heritage, recreation and natural values and be added to the BC Heritage Rivers System: the Atnarko, Bella Coola, Horsefly, Kechika, and Kettle.*

Upon appointment, the Board was given a mandate to nominate a significant number of rivers to the B.C. Heritage Rivers System. Widespread public notice of this mandate was communicated throughout the province and many suggestions were received. The nominated rivers discussed in this report met the established criteria and were considered highly suitable under the selection guidelines. The Board considers these to be key rivers that could be potential river management models and contribute significantly to the BC Heritage Rivers System.

The nominations are presented alphabetically and no priority is implied. An overview of the character of each river and its significance is provided followed by the selection criteria that were most important in the Board's assessment. A vision statement for each river follows accompanied by the supporting management directions formulated by the Board. They are presented as guidelines for the future of the river as a recognized BCHRS component.

Recognition within the BCHRS will draw attention to the special qualities of the rivers. It should also reinforce the need to maintain these qualities for generations to come. While the emphasis in the system is on maintaining a diversity of uses within the watershed, a few special circumstances have led the Board to envision certain rivers to be 'free-flowing'; meaning 'undammed'. This does not, however, restrict other industrial uses or bank modifications. Such a vision does not undervalue the use of water for energy production, but does suggest that some of our province's more exceptional rivers have other more critical uses.

### **Atnarko River**

From its origin in Charlotte Lake to its junction with the Telchako River where the Bella Coola River begins, the Atnarko is approximately 100 kilometres long. For much of its length, the Atnarko River flows through the southern end of Tweedsmuir Provincial Park. The river has cut a fairly steep sided valley through a landscape characterized by a complex geology of volcanic activity, sedimentary folding and granite intrusions. Tributaries tend to be in hanging valleys.

Wildlife populations thrive in this environment. Native species found in the area include grizzly and black bear, moose, mule deer, mountain goat, cougar, wolf, coyote, red fox, and river otter.

In addition to its wildlife habitats, the Atnarko River supports many human activities. The



river's fish stocks are among the most important of its economic qualities, as they support a Native food fishery, and a large sport fishery. The Atnarko River also supports recreational uses, such as camping, canoeing, wildlife viewing, hunting, and mountain biking. The wide variety of recreational interests supported by the Atnarko system make it a popular area for tourists and recreationists of all types. In the river's upper reaches beyond Tweedsmuir Park, logging is the dominant industrial interest although little activity has taken place to date.

A wide variety of interest groups are active on behalf of the Atnarko River including conservationists, commercial guides, anglers, and boaters. The local First Nations, the Nuxalk and Ulkatcho Bands, also have a continuing interest in the Atnarko. These groups have focused their attention on initiatives such as salmon enhancement programs, protection of grizzly bear habitat, and maintenance of the river as a high quality recreational and tourism corridor, especially in light of road development proposals in the valley. A new road corridor proposed up the valley could significantly impact on the qualities identified as important heritage values.

### **Selection Criteria**

The natural values of the Atnarko River make it an excellent candidate for heritage status. They also provide recreationists with numerous opportunities for active enjoyment of the river. The Atnarko River provides an opportunity to recognize a river that:

- has along its course significant examples of natural ecosystems and wildlife representative of rivers of the Coast Mountains
- is an important part of the traditional land and lifestyle of First Nations people in the area, containing some significant heritage trails
- provides an environment conducive to significant numbers of recreationists, and provides high quality experiences for a variety of activities

### **Vision Statement**

- *a model of natural, cultural, and historic heritage values to be maintained and enjoyed for its recreational values.*

### **Management Guidelines**

- to promote the responsible harvesting of steelhead in order to preserve the population
- to promote awareness of the historic values of the river corridor
- to monitor use levels and maintain a balance between tourism and recreation and conservation of the river's natural qualities
- to ensure the preservation of natural characteristics necessary to the salmon and grizzly populations supported by the river
- to complement and support the important protected area status currently in place along portions of the river

## **Bella Coola River**

From its beginning at the junction of the Atnarko and the Talchako, to its mouth on North Bentinck Arm, the Bella Coola River runs for about 70 kilometres, draining an area of approximately 1,600 square kilometres.

The Bella Coola River represents a typical coastal watershed with a predominantly natural vegetation cover. The watershed is also home to a rich variety of wildlife, such as grizzly and black bear, moose, black tail deer, mule deer, mountain goat, cougar, wolf, coyote, red fox, and river otter. The river supports fish populations of various types, including salmonids such as sockeye, pink, chum, chinook, and coho, as well as steelhead, cutthroat, Dolly Varden, and rainbow trout.

Land use along the Bella Coola River is primarily agricultural, particularly in the lower reaches of the river. Logging is also important in the region and along many of the river's tributaries. The river itself supports both a commercial fishery and Native food fishery.

Central to the character of the river are its historical values as it is part of the Nuxalk-Carrier Grease Trail used by Alexander Mackenzie on his journey to the west coast in the late 18th century. Also found along the course of the river are petroglyphs carved by early First Nations inhabitants of the area descendants of whom continue to have a dominant presence in the valley. In addition to its cultural heritage values, the Bella Coola River is a popular recreational destination, enjoyed by anglers for its salmon and steelhead populations and popular for boating. Other recreational interests supported by the Bella Coola River include camping, canoeing, wildlife viewing, hiking, hunting and mountain biking.

### **Selection Criteria**

The Bella Coola River was an important part of the traditional lands of First Nations in the area, and later played a key role in the early exploration of the province. Today, the Bella Coola River is valued for its fish stocks, and the recreational opportunities it provides. The Bella Coola River provides a unique opportunity to recognize a river that:

- supports significant examples of natural ecosystems
- supports wildlife species including an important steelhead population
- is associated with people and movements important to the cultural heritage, particularly First Nations archaeological sites, traditional use areas and early exploration
- is able to support a variety of recreational activities

### **Vision Statement**

- *a watershed managed to encourage the recreational use and enjoyment and historic appreciation of the river while ensuring the maintenance of the river's natural qualities.*

### **Management Guidelines**

- to encourage recreational use of the river in concert with and supported by the local

guiding and boating operations and First Nations interests

- to ensure that the grizzly habitat for which the river is critical is maintained through land use planning processes
- to actively manage the riparian zone of the river to ensure adequate habitat for and the maintenance of salmon and steelhead populations in the river
- to conduct resource extraction activities in ways compatible with recognizing and maintaining the recreational values of the watershed

## **Horsefly River**

Perhaps the dominant feature of the Horsefly River is that it provides some of the most important sockeye salmon and rainbow trout spawning habitat in the Fraser River drainage area. In addition, the river possesses outstanding recreational values because of its scenic and undisturbed qualities. From its origins in the Quesnel Highlands, the Horsefly River flows approximately 98 kilometres through a variety of landscapes. The gradient of the river also varies considerably and includes a ten-metre-high waterfall about 55 kilometres downstream from the river's source.

While a variety of land uses such as agriculture, forestry, and mining are evident along stretches of the Horsefly, significant stretches of the river also provide an atmosphere of wilderness and a rich diversity of wildlife over much of its course. The river's salmon run is an important component of the valley's ecosystem providing a major food source for a variety of mammals and birds that are typical of the central mountain ranges of B.C. At least seven species of fish are supported by the river habitat including rainbow trout, Dolly Varden char, sockeye salmon, chinook salmon, coho salmon, and mountain whitefish.

The river is a critical part of the sockeye salmon run which passes through the Fraser River, making the Horsefly River a popular fishing river. Other recreational uses include kayaking, and canoeing, with sections of the river suitable for paddlers of varying ability, and hunting in the surrounding areas. For many years there has been an annual canoe race on the lower Horsefly in late July.

The Horsefly River played an important role in British Columbia's cultural heritage. The area was part of a north-south travel route used by First Nations prior to the arrival of Euro-Canadian settlers and later by all inhabitants of the area. In 1859, the first gold discovery in the upper Cariboo region was on the Horsefly River.

Present economic activity in the Horsefly River drainage area includes logging, mining, ranching, trapping, and recreational resorts. Regional interest groups concerned with the Horsefly River include commercial guides, anglers, canoe clubs, farmers and cattlemen's groups, and First Nation Bands such as Soda Creek, Williams Lake, and Canim Lake. Land use within the area was broadly defined in the Cariboo Land Use Plan and all interests are seeking effective implementation of resource management actions consistent with the plan.

### **Selection Criteria**

The Horsefly River is an excellent example of the balance of heritage values to be found in a heritage river. The river has not only played a significant role in the human history of British Columbia, but also continues to feature some prime examples of wilderness and natural ecosystems. The Horsefly represents a unique opportunity to recognize a river that has:

- significant examples of landscape characteristics that represent biophysical processes
- special species of significant concentration and their supporting habitat
- influenced the historical development of British Columbia as part of a travel route for First Nations and early settlers
- played an important part of the traditional areas of local First Nations people
- an environment conducive to a high quality and wide variety of recreational experiences.

### **Vision Statement**

- *a model of combined heritage values which has public interests committed to the health of the river system, especially its fish populations, balancing integrated resource development and the river environment's natural qualities.*

### **Management Guidelines**

- to manage resource development activities so as to recognize and protect the wilderness recreational values of the corridor
- to encourage recreational activities, and use of the river compatible with the identified conservation values
- to protect the sockeye salmon run, which constitutes an integral part of the river's characteristics, through appropriate management of industrial uses



## **Kechika River**

The Kechika River watershed remains one of British Columbia's finest examples of wilderness and undisturbed wildlife habitat. Over its 230 kilometre length, the Kechika River drops approximately 610 metres in elevation and drains a total area of close to 2,700 square kilometres. The river winds its way through an impressive wilderness area in the northern boreal mountains, including the Kechika Mountains, the Cassiar Ranges, Western Muskwa Ranges, and Liard Plains. Along with a number of waterfalls and lakes associated with the river, landscape features such as mineral licks can be found along its course.

Of international significance are the wildlife populations and ecosystems which flourish around and along the river. Characterized by large, open valleys and mountains with little forest cover, the area is home to an abundance of large mammals and other wildlife including moose, caribou, Stone sheep, mountain goat, grizzly and black bear, wolf, and elk. Not only is the river corridor pristine, but the valley as a whole remains largely free from roads, leaving the Kechika River as the largest remaining undisturbed watershed in British Columbia.

In the history of Euro-Canadians, the Kechika River was part of key trade and travel routes to the north used by Samuel Black and many others since. Of particular interest is the use by the North West Mounted Police in their exploration for a route from Edmonton to the Klondike in 1898. The area also has a significant history of mineral exploration based on extensive documented mineralization, although no mines have actually been developed in the Kechika valley. The river is part of the traditional territory of the Kaska Dene, who continue to draw on the resources of the watershed.

Today the Kechika River is the focus of a major campaign promoting environmental protection of the Muskwa Kechika region, by commercial guides and by recreational and conservation groups. Recreational uses such as rafting, riverboating, trapping, and hunting are currently the primary land uses in the area. Tourism values of the river are already a central interest for numerous groups, and improved access is currently under discussion. The present LRMP process is working to accommodate a wide variety of interests in the region and will provide important direction for land use, access and resource management strategies for the future.

### **Selection Criteria**

While the Kechika River provides many opportunities for recreational pursuits, such values are superseded by the natural heritage values of the river. The Kechika River is recognized as a river which has:

- outstanding examples of diverse wildlife populations, ecosystems, and natural wilderness
- a river corridor in pristine condition
- territories of cultural significance to First Nations groups
- the ability to provide a high quality recreational experience

### **Vision Statement**

- *a river treasured for its outstanding natural features, wildlife populations, wilderness qualities, and cultural significance to First Nations to be enjoyed by people as one of British Columbia's finest examples of undisturbed natural beauty.*

### **Management Guidelines**

- to ensure public use and enjoyment of the river in ways that will preserve the remoteness and natural values which people seek to experience
- to monitor access and use levels and ensure that use of the river does not compromise the achievement of the vision
- to ensure the integrity of wilderness areas, wildlife habitats and ecosystems surrounding the river consistent with the outcomes of the LRMP for the area

## **Kettle River**

The nominated river is the mainstem or West Kettle River. Stretching 290 km from its headwaters in the Monashee Mountains to its confluence with the Columbia River, the Kettle River system drains a total of 9,800 square kilometres. Of this area, 8,300 square kilometres are within British Columbia while the remaining 1,500 square kilometres lie across the international border in Washington State. The Kettle River initially drops 190 metres in elevation within its first 60 kilometres, before assuming a more gradual gradient and meandering across a wide valley for the remainder of its course.;

The most significant land uses within the Kettle River Valley are agriculture, rural homesteading and ranching. However, forestry, transportation, mining and quarrying interests are also present along the river. The river itself supports numerous water licenses for domestic use, irrigation and power generation.

The Kettle River is an extremely popular recreational river, good for trout fishing, and also for canoeing because of its accessibility, scenic qualities and lack of natural hazards. Many stretches of the Kettle River are adjacent to roads, making the river accessible to activities such as picnicking and other shoreline activities. Historically, the river valley has been important to the Okanagan and Shuswap First Nations. It has also been significant in the development of the Dewdney Trail, an important overland route between the Kootenays and the coast that followed parts of the river in the lower portion of the valley near the border.. Similarly, the Kettle Valley Railway, was another important early transportation link in British Columbia using the valley. More recently agriculture has been the primary activity that has characterized the landscape and human activity of the valley.

The Kettle River is in a transition zone in the Okanagan Highlands between Okanagan Valley and the Monashee Mountains. Indigenous species of vegetation include subalpine fir, interior coastal western hemlock, ponderosa pine, douglas fir, and montaine spruce. The river is home to a rare species of fish named the Umatilla dace, and also supports a number of other trout and salmon species. Wildlife found in the area includes moose, elk, deer, and bear.

### **Selection Criteria**

While the Kettle River possesses historical heritage values related to mining, it stands out primarily for its recreational and natural heritage characteristics. The Kettle River represents an opportunity to recognize a river that has:

- a significant example of fish species of particular interest and rarity
- outstanding examples of pristine water flow
- an environment conducive to accessible quality recreational experiences
- historical importance to British Columbia's agricultural traditions and transportation development

## **Vision Statement**

- *a carefully managed river which balances a variety of resource-based uses while maintaining representative natural qualities, and is maintained through the cooperative efforts of many users and interest groups committed to the integrity of the river.*

## **Management Guidelines**

- to protect habitat for rare fish species
- to establish and maintain an integrated sustainable approach to land and water use within the watershed, with specific consideration for the agriculture industry
- to protect and monitor the health of natural processes in the river
- to manage and monitor recreational use so as to maintain the current quality of the experience with minimal environmental impact

### 3. Progress Report

The BC Heritage Rivers System is now well established in its second year. Seven rivers have been recognized as part of the system, another five rivers nominated in this report now await review, and a growing list of new suggestions is being assembled for consideration as 1997 nominees. As the process of nomination and recognition continues to add to the BC Heritage Rivers System, more and more emphasis must be placed on ensuring that the river visions and necessary management actions are being achieved. Continued vigilance on the part of the Board and the public supporters for the rivers within the system is needed. The Board is anxious to hear from any member of the public who has concerns about or supports the progress of all these rivers towards better stewardship of their recognized values and their suitability as models of provincial stature.

The Board's first report in September 1995 introduced the inaugural nominees for the BC Heritage Rivers System. The seven nominated rivers were subsequently recognised with modifications by the provincial government as heritage rivers: the Adams, Babine, Blackwater, Cowichan, Fraser, Skagit, and Stikine. The Similkameen, listed in the report, was withdrawn to allow for further public consultation and review.

The second set of rivers nominated by the Board for the BCHRS is contained in this report: the Atnarko, Bella Coola, Horsefly, Kechika, and Kettle. These nominations have been presented to government through the release of this report and will await a Cabinet decision regarding recognition and their addition to the system.

Decisions by the Board on a number of suggested rivers were deferred at earlier stages in the process for various reasons including: the complexity surrounding resource use issues, the degree and nature of public support for heritage river status, the overall balance of regional representation of nominated rivers, and other matters pertaining to the BCHRS selection guidelines. These rivers, along with other new submissions, will be reviewed during the 1996/1997 period for possible nomination in September, 1997. The rivers that have been held over are: the Columbia, Elk, Peace, Quesnel, Squamish, Shuswap, Tatshenshini, and Turnagain.

Those rivers which were suggested for heritage river status, but have not been nominated, are: the Atlintoo, Campbell, Cariboo, Coquitlam, Englishman, Granby, Mossom, Noons, Pitt, Salmon, and Tahsis. The specific reasons for these rivers not being nominated to be part of the BCHRS varies, but a number of key factors strongly influenced the Board's decision.

The strength of the heritage values outlined in the identification criteria is obviously a crucial consideration. Sometimes Also, support from local public groups and individuals was not very strong, or representativeness from a wide cross section of the interests involved with the river was missing. Issues, commitments or future plans for development related to the use of the river and surrounding lands can also be complex and potentially not compatible with the objectives of the BC Heritage River System. In every case, however, members of the public were concerned about river values and strongly committed to ensuring better stewardship of the rivers in their locality. For this they are to be commended and the Board fully supports and encourages local stewardship action.



## **4. Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS)**

British Columbia joined the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS) in 1994 on the recommendation of the Minister's Advisory Committee. The following year, the BC Heritage Rivers System (BCHRS) was developed, with the intention not only to create a provincial heritage rivers system, but also to put forward some of the province's most significant waterways as candidates for the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.

The first report by the BCHRS Board in 1995 made the recommendation that the Fraser River be nominated to the CHRS. The Board felt that the Fraser was a prime candidate for the CHRS, as one of the province's premier watershed systems. The Fraser River is significant to B.C. and to Canada for its size, physical significance to British Columbia, and its historical, cultural, recreational, and economic values. Public awareness of the need for improved stewardship in British Columbia and for sensitive management of the Fraser, also makes the river suitable for the CHRS. The Fraser River links a vast area of the province not only by the flow of its water, but also through all aspects of the ecology of the watershed and the human and economic systems that depend on that ecology. The continued development of the Fraser system and the variety of groups who must integrate their use of the river have created a need for more effective management.

Since the time of the Board's first report in 1995, the provincial government supported the Board's recommendation and has formally registered its intention to nominate the Fraser River to the CHRS. The government is preparing a formal nomination to be presented to the CHRS Board. Progress reports on this process will be provided in future editions of the Heritage Rivers Bulletin.

## **5. Next Steps**

As the BC Heritage Rivers System continues to grow and mature, the most important step for the Board is to continue an on-going relationship with the public as well as its liaison with government agencies. The successful maintenance of a provincial heritage rivers system is based on an open, interactive and cooperative relationship among the public, the Board and government. Public interest in and support for heritage rivers assists the Board in river identification and development of nominations to the system. Government support and advice is also critical in the establishment of an effective system.

The Board will continue to encourage the public to propose rivers for possible addition to the provincial rivers system and welcomes all suggestions. However, especially with the expansion of the system, the need for monitoring and assessment of progress towards the vision identified for rivers within the system will be critical. All parties can take an active role in ensuring that stewardship of rivers in British Columbia markedly improves.

With these goals in view, the Board will take steps to:

- contact and keep in touch with those who are interested in the Board's activities and the Heritage Rivers program
- be open to ideas and suggestions about issues and concerns with respect to river stewardship
- maintain on-going communication with local organizations involved with stewardship issues on heritage rivers
- encourage local initiatives to raise awareness about river stewardship

To achieve these goals, the Board will be involved in a number of activities including:

- attending and participating in local events connected with rivers throughout the province
- gathering and sharing information and ideas about river stewardship with interested members of the public through workshops and meetings
- documenting progress towards achieving accepted visions of British Columbia's Heritage Rivers and working with government to ensure effective river stewardship
- publishing regular issues of the Heritage Rivers Bulletin to publicly report on progress and to encourage widespread appreciation for the BCHRS and river stewardship in general
- meeting regularly to review the progress made by the BCHRS and plan future action

## **6. Activities**

### **Riverfest V:**

In February, 1996 the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia (ORC) hosted Riverfest V. The BC Heritage Rivers program was a prominent focus in this event and the discussion that took place. Riverfest provided an excellent opportunity for the Heritage Rivers Board to increase public awareness, discuss ideas in a public forum and gather a base of support for the Heritage Rivers System.

### **CHRS Meeting:**

In conjunction with Riverfest V, British Columbia also hosted a regular meeting of the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board in Vancouver. This event helped to establish a cooperative relationship between the provincial and national systems. It also gave CHRS Board members a first hand look at the lower Fraser River and a chance to discuss the up-coming Fraser River nomination and new approaches being instituted in the BCHRS.

**Board Member Activities:**

Members of the Heritage Rivers Board have been active in a wide variety of events, meetings, and personal interviews in the interests of the Heritage Rivers program. While time and resources are understandably limited, the Board members are anxious to speak to interested groups about the program and would welcome invitations. If your group would like to hear more about the program and to be able to discuss it with one of the Board members, please contact the Secretariat to the Board to make arrangements.

**Minister's Announcement:**

In May, 1996 the Honourable Moe Sihota (then Minister of Environment, Lands & Parks) announced the recognition of the seven inaugural rivers of the BCHRS. The announcement was made at a gathering at a site along the Cowichan River, one of the rivers recognized.

**Heritage Rivers Bulletin:**

The Board initiated the production and distribution of a regular newsletter called the Heritage Rivers Bulletin. Two issues have been circulated so far in 1996. The Bulletin is intended to reach as broad an audience as possible to report on progress and to promote the goals of the Board. If you wish to receive a copy and do not currently get one, or if you know someone who would be interested, please contact the Secretariat to the Board to add names to the mailing list.

**Video:**

"Rivers for the Future" is a video program produced this year to educate the public and to promote the BC Heritage Rivers System. The video combines a comprehensive description of the program, its structure, and its goals with an illustrative assortment of slides and film footage from around the province. Copies are available on loan or for purchase through the Secretariat to the Board.

**Display:**

A display was also created for the BCHRS this year complete with a ten-foot-square background structure, and a short-loop video, "The Living River," to be viewed with the display. This display has been used at various events throughout B.C. during the year, and has accompanied members of the Board to local presentations. The display is also available to organizations interested in borrowing it for local events.

**Posters:**

Heritage Rivers posters were designed early in 1996, and are available free of charge. The poster draws attention to the important qualities of rivers in our environment and creates a greater awareness of the BCHRS. Posters can be ordered through regional offices of the provincial government, the Heritage Rivers Board, or the Secretariat to the Board.

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