

Government Report, 1996

BC's FIRST HERITAGE RIVERS

Government's Response to the BC Heritage Rivers Board's Nominations

April 1996

The following ministries were involved in preparing this report:

- Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks
- Ministry of Forests
- Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources
- Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
- Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture

INTRODUCTION

British Columbia is recognized nationally and internationally for its rich natural and cultural heritage. This heritage includes the province's rivers and lakes which are the lifeblood of its land and its people. From the Fraser, the largest river in the province, to tiny creeks too numerous to count, waterways are a source of pride to British Columbians.

In January 1984, Canada established the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. The purpose of this system is to recognize Canadian rivers that are of national or international significance, and ensure that they are managed for their outstanding heritage values for the benefit and enjoyment of Canadians.

In June 1993, British Columbia joined the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. This was done in response to the recommendations of an advisory committee appointed by the Minister of Environment, Lands and Parks. The committee's recommendations are set out in its March 1993 report *What's in it for the River?*

In May 1995, British Columbia established the BC Heritage Rivers System, and a BC Heritage Rivers Board (the "Board"). The purpose of this system is to promote good stewardship of all rivers, identify and recognize British Columbia rivers that are of provincial significance, and nominate to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System British Columbia rivers that are of national or international significance.

In September 1995, the Board submitted to government its initial recommendations regarding river recognition. Its recommendations are set out in its report *British Columbia's Heritage Rivers: Inaugural Candidates for a Provincial System*.

OBJECTIVES AND OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The objectives of the BC Heritage Rivers System are:

- To raise awareness and promote good stewardship of British Columbia's rivers.
- To encourage public discussion of the heritage values of rivers.
- To identify rivers in British Columbia that reflect a diversity of natural heritage, cultural heritage and recreational values.
- To ensure that river stewardship is addressed in existing and future plans and planning processes.

The operating principles of the BC Heritage Rivers System are:

- To operate within existing legislation, policies and planning processes.
- To provide input and guidance that is not regulatory or directive in nature.
- To focus on the primary stem of the river.
- To reinforce the work of stakeholders and planning tables in addressing river stewardship.
- To encourage coordination and collaboration among stakeholders.
- To monitor river management to determine whether river management guidelines are being achieved.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Roles and responsibilities for the BC Heritage Rivers System have been set out to enable the Board and government to work together in a cooperative and flexible manner. Each has a role to play in executing a series of linked phases leading to the identification, nomination, recognition, planning and management, and monitoring of British Columbia's most significant rivers.

The Board's Roles and Responsibilities:

The Board was established to provide a voice for heritage river values at the community level and to encourage the consideration of those values in land use planning.

The Board's roles and responsibilities are:

Identification: The Board identifies rivers for possible nomination to government by seeking public input, assessing rivers that are brought forth and identifying those rivers that meet its identification criteria.

Nomination: The Board nominates rivers for possible recognition by government by evaluating identified rivers and submitting to government the rivers that meet its selection guidelines. The Board also distributes the results of its identification and nomination phases to the public. The Board's identification criteria and selection guidelines are set out in its September 1995 report.

Monitoring: The Board, together with the public and government, monitors the planning and management of heritage rivers in relation to a vision and management guidelines approved by government for each recognized heritage river. The Board reports annually to government and the public.

Government's Roles and Responsibilities:

Government publicly responds to the Board's nominations by accepting them, rejecting them or deferring a decision on them pending further consideration. Acceptance may include acceptance with modifications.

In the event of acceptance of the Board's nominations, government's roles and responsibilities are:

Recognition: Government acknowledges the significance of the rivers that the Board has nominated by recognizing the rivers as "BC Heritage Rivers" through Order-In-Council proclamations for commemorative purposes. Government also approves a vision and management guidelines for each recognized heritage river.

Planning and management: Government communicates its approved vision and management guidelines to land use planning tables and resource management agencies by providing the vision and management guidelines as input and guidance for their consideration in existing or future plans and planning processes.

Monitoring and adjustment: Government monitors the long-term achievement of the vision and management guidelines for each heritage river, and, where appropriate, makes adjustments.

HERITAGE RIVER RECOGNITION

Heritage river recognition operates within the following policy and planning context:

Policy Context:

The BC Heritage Rivers System provides a framework for recognizing British Columbia rivers with provincially significant natural heritage, cultural heritage or recreational values.

The system leads to heritage river RECOGNITION. Recognition is commemorative rather than regulatory. It is neither a land use decision nor a legal designation. It operates entirely within existing legislation, policies and planning processes and entails no new legislation or regulations. Recognition of a river as a heritage river does not preclude future land use decisions that may modify the present character of the river.

The recognition of a river within the BC Heritage Rivers System is without prejudice to any aboriginal rights that aboriginal people may have. It is without prejudice to the position British Columbia or First Nations may take in future treaty negotiations. Heritage river recognition shall not diminish or restrict the use and enjoyment of a river by aboriginal people.

Where a heritage river flows through a protected area, the river will be managed to retain its free-flowing character. Where a heritage river flows outside a protected area, the river will be managed to give consideration for maintaining its free-flowing character.

Local community groups, stakeholders and public officials are encouraged to celebrate each heritage river recognition with commemorative events such as river-side ceremonies, the unveiling of plaques and the development of information material. In years to come, heritage rivers will no doubt play an important role in promoting river-related recreation, cultural heritage and tourism throughout the province and increasing world-wide recognition of British Columbia's rich river heritage.

Planning Context:

Heritage river recognition represents government's commitment to raise awareness of the heritage values of provincially significant rivers. Heritage river recognition is neither another level of planning nor a new planning process. Government's approved vision and management guidelines for a recognized heritage river are intended as input and guidance for, not as a directive to, existing or future plans or planning processes.

For recognized heritage rivers within areas covered by approved land use plans, the vision and management guidelines for each river must be consistent with the approved plans.

For recognized heritage rivers within areas covered by on-going planning processes, or not yet subject to land use planning, the vision and management guidelines for each river are intended to serve as input and guidance on river management issues for resource managers and planning tables.

THE BOARD'S NOMINATIONS

The Board's report described the attributes of natural heritage, cultural heritage and recreational values that underlie a river's recognition within the BC Heritage Rivers System. The report addressed the importance of better stewardship for all rivers in the province and nominated eight rivers for heritage river recognition.

The Board nominated the Adams, Babine, Blackwater, Cowichan, Fraser, Similkameen, Skagit and Stikine Rivers to be recognized as the inaugural candidates for a provincial system. The Board recommended a vision and management objectives for each nominated river. In addition, the Board recommended that the Fraser River be put forward as a British Columbia nomination to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.

Subsequent to the release of its report, the Board withdrew its nomination for the Similkameen River, as it felt that further consultation and discussion was required at the community level.

GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

Government generally endorses the remaining seven rivers nominated by the Board. However, government has modified the Board's river-specific visions and management objectives to ensure their consistency with plans and planning processes. Government has also renamed the Board's "management objectives" to "management guidelines" to clarify that these are intended as input and guidance, rather than as a directive, to plans and planning processes.

In addition, government endorses the Board's recommendation that British Columbia nominate the Fraser River to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. The province has the responsibility for nominating rivers to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System in accordance with the Canadian Heritage Rivers System guidelines. In the event of formal recognition of the Fraser as a Canadian Heritage River, that recognition would in no way change existing jurisdictional mandates or responsibilities for managing the river.

Government's recognition of the Board's seven inaugural heritage rivers acknowledges and builds on the efforts of existing and on-going planning processes that have generated greater public awareness of the need for good stewardship of rivers. In most cases the management guidelines for specific heritage rivers consist of steps and actions that have already been initiated by various stakeholders through regional or local planning processes.

The visions and management guidelines set out below represent government's response to the visions and objectives put forth by the Board, with modifications to ensure consistency with plans and planning processes.

The government-approved vision and management guidelines for each of the seven rivers nominated by the Board for heritage river recognition are as follows:

ADAMS RIVER

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 British Columbia's natural heritage and contribution to widespread public education.

Management Guidelines:

- To establish and maintain water quality standards required to support salmon production.
- To manage forestry and other industrial uses to ensure that the volume, quality and timing of water flows meet the requirements of salmon production.
- To monitor and control recreational use of the river to avoid impacts on fish populations.
- To maintain human history values of the river, combined with ongoing industrial and recreational use.
- To implement educational programs that communicate the special value of the Adams River fish populations.
- To manage the river, where it flows through a protected area, to retain its free-flowing character. Otherwise, to consider maintaining its free-flowing character.
- To ensure that river recognition will not diminish or restrict the use and enjoyment of the river by aboriginal people.
- To ensure that these management guidelines are consistent with the management objectives of the protected area and special resource management zones outlined in the Kamloops Land and Resource Management Plan decision document.

BABINE RIVER

Vision:

- A river of outstanding natural qualities and wilderness character, specifically maintaining the world class steelhead fishery and the integrity of the grizzly bear populations and scenic qualities of the river.

Management Guidelines:

- To monitor and assess existing plans for the river to ensure their effectiveness in the management of the river.
- To monitor and assess use levels, implementing controls as required to maintain resource values.
- To monitor and control fishing activities that impact on fish populations, ensuring stakeholder involvement for effective management of the river's fishery.

- To manage the river, where it flows through a protected area, to retain its free-flowing character. Otherwise, to consider maintaining its free-flowing character.
- To ensure that river recognition will not diminish or restrict the use and enjoyment of the river by aboriginal people.
- To ensure that these management guidelines are consistent with government's protected area decision for the Babine and with the on-going Kispiox and Bulkley Land and Resource Management Plan tables.
- To ensure that these management guidelines are consistent with the management objectives for the special management zone outlined in the Babine River Interim Local Resource Use Plan and the Babine Coordinated Access Management Plan once finalized and approved.
- To ensure that these management guidelines are consistent with, and support, the objectives and actions of the Babine Local Resource Use Plan Monitoring Committee.

BLACKWATER RIVER

Vision:

- A river managed to maintain the integrity of its cultural heritage resources, 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 aboriginal people along the river.

Management Guidelines:

- To maintain the integrity of the river's cultural resources as these relate to the human history of the area as well as the natural characteristics which provide the context within which human activity 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/Nuxalk Carrier Grease Trail.
- To monitor the implementation and effectiveness of existing planning processes as these pertain to the recreational and educational values of the river and trail corridor.
- To monitor resource use and determine the need for an access management plan.
- To monitor fishing activities and assess their impacts on the river's natural fish populations and the quality of the environment and recreational experiences, and determine the need for a fisheries management plan.
- To manage the river, where it flows through a protected area, to retain its free-flowing character. Otherwise, to consider maintaining its free-flowing character.

- To ensure that river recognition will not diminish or restrict the use and enjoyment of the river by aboriginal people.
- To ensure that these management guidelines are consistent with the Cariboo-Chilcotin Land Use Plan, the Alexander Mackenzie Heritage Trail Management Plan and the Lower and Upper Blackwater Local Resource Use Plans.
- To recognize and incorporate First Nations traditional knowledge and values and encourage First Nations participation in the on-going management of the Blackwater River.

COWICHAN RIVER

Vision:

- A model of watershed cooperation among a wide variety of stakeholders to meet multiple resource use objectives, emphasizing aquatic and recreational values for the river, and recreational, settlement and industrial values for the river basin.

Management Guidelines:

- To monitor the implementation of integrated management plans for sustainable resource use within the watershed that respect the natural and recreational qualities of the river.
- To enhance the integrity of fish stocks and critical habitat.
- To maintain a high quality, year round river recreation experience.
- To encourage the grassroots support and activities that are currently taking place as an integral part of current watershed sustainability initiatives, as a model for initiatives elsewhere in the province.
- To manage the river, where it flows through a protected area, to retain its free-flowing character. Otherwise, to consider maintaining its free-flowing character.
- To ensure that river recognition will not diminish or restrict the use and enjoyment of the river by aboriginal people.
- To recognize the value of the river for future local development, including agriculture.
- To ensure that these management guidelines are consistent with the Vancouver Island Land Use Plan.

FRASER RIVER

Vision:

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

Management Guidelines:

- To develop a long-term management strategy for sustainability of the river and surrounding landscape it drains.
- To manage the Fraser as a model of cooperative management and environmental integrity.
- To work towards harmonized legislation, policy and economic incentives to support sustainability.
- To ensure that decision-making for the river involves the public through multi-stakeholder advisory groups, including First Nations involvement.
- To ensure that communication and educational 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.
- To manage the river, where it flows through a protected area, to retain its free-flowing character. Otherwise, to consider maintaining its free-flowing character.
- To ensure that river recognition will not diminish or restrict the use and enjoyment of the river by aboriginal people.
- To ensure that these management guidelines are consistent with the Cariboo-Chilcotin Land Use Plan, and on-going Land and Resource Management Plans and local planning in areas through which the Fraser flows.

SKAGIT RIVER

Vision:

- A carefully managed river providing an intimate, natural recreational experience focused on the dominant river activities such as fishing and canoeing.

Management Guidelines:

- To manage access to the river to retain the natural integrity of the corridor and ensure continuation of the intimate, high quality recreational experience.
- To manage the fishery of the river through existing regulatory techniques, encouraging fly fishing and expansion of catch and release initiatives.

- To establish and implement recreation use level restrictions as necessary to retain the quality of the recreational experience in an area in close proximity to the Lower Mainland population.
- To manage the river to retain its free-flowing character.
- To ensure that river recognition will not diminish or restrict the use and enjoyment of the river by aboriginal people.
- To ensure that these management guidelines are consistent with the management plan for Skagit Valley Park and government's September 21, 1995 commitment to designate up to 30 000 hectares of the Skagit Valley as Class A Park and allow mineral exploration in 2 500 hectares outside the new park boundaries.

STIKINE RIVER

For the Purposes of this discussion, the Stikine is divided at the community of Telegraph Creek into upper and lower reaches.

Vision:

- A river which, in its upper reach, will convey to visitors the sense of ruggedness, power, beauty and adventure characteristic of the northern regions of the province while maintaining, in its lower reach, its role as a major support for sustainable regional development and economic activity.

Management Guidelines:

- To manage the river, where it flows through a protected area, to retain its free-flowing character. Otherwise, to consider maintaining its free-flowing character.
- To ensure that river recognition will not diminish or restrict the use and enjoyment of the river by aboriginal people.
- To ensure that river recognition will not preclude future land use decisions that may modify the present character of the river.
- To manage the entire river to ensure wilderness, wildlife, commercial and recreational fisheries and cultural heritage values are maintained.
- To emphasize wilderness and recreation qualities in the upper reach of the river and to encourage integrated resource use of the lower reach of the river.
- To support the Lower Stikine Management Advisory Committee in its efforts to complete and implement an integrated management plan for the lower reach of the river.

For additional copies of this report, contact.-

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