

# **Government Report, 1997**

## **BRITISH COLUMBIA'S HERITAGE RIVERS SYSTEM**

### **Government's Response to the BC Heritage Rivers Board's 1996 Nominations**

**1997**

The following ministries were involved in preparing this report:

- Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks
- Ministry of Forests
- Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
- Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture
- Ministry of Employment and Investment

# 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 Ministry 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 those 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 Rivers: Inaugural Candidates for the Provincial System*. Government responded in May 1996, accepting seven nominated rivers, thereby establishing the foundations of the system. These rivers are the Adams, Babine, Blackwater, Cowichan, Fraser, Skagit and Stikine.

In September 1996, the Board submitted to government its recommendations regarding the 1996 nominations for river recognition. These recommendations are set out in its report *Candidate Heritage Rivers: A Report of the British Columbia Heritage Rivers Board 1996*.

## 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 the stewardship of rivers is addressed in existing and future land use planning and management 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, rather than on the broader river corridor or the entire watershed.
- To reinforce the work of stakeholders and planning tables in addressing water resource stewardship.
- To encourage co-ordination and collaboration between 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 against selection guidelines 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 and 1996 reports.

**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 "B.C. Heritage Rivers" through Order-In-Council proclamations for commemorative purposes. Government also endorses a vision and management guidelines for each recognized heritage river.

**Planning and management:** Government communicates its endorsed vision and management guidelines to land use planning tables and resource management agencies as input and guidance for 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.

Recognition gives local groups a spotlight to illustrate community-based river stewardship practices. Heritage river recognition could also lead to enhanced recreation and tourism benefits for local communities.

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 will be encouraged to celebrate each heritage river recognition with commemorative events such as river-side ceremonies, the unveiling of plaques and development of information material. In years to come, heritage rivers will no doubt come to play an important role in promoting river-related recreation, cultural heritage and tourism throughout the province and increased world-wide recognition for 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.

Planning tables and planning processes, such as Land and Resource Management Planning (LRMP), will themselves provide a forum for continued and broader discussion and consultation about visions or management guidelines for recognized heritage rivers.

## **THE BOARD'S 1996 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 five rivers for heritage river recognition.

The Board nominated the Atnarko, Bella Coola, Horsefly, Kechika and Kettle Rivers to be recognized as part of the BC Heritage Rivers System. The Board also recommended a vision and management guidelines for each nominated river.

## **GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE**

Government endorses four of the rivers nominated by the Board, including river-specific visions and management guidelines for these rivers. The four rivers are the Atnarko, Bella Coola, Kechika and Kettle Rivers. A decision on the Horsefly River has been deferred.

Government's recognition of these four additional heritage rivers 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 many cases the management guidelines for specific heritage rivers consist of steps and actions that have already been initiated by the various stakeholders through regional or local planning processes.

The government-approved vision and management guidelines for each of the four rivers endorsed for heritage river recognition are as follows:

### **ATNARKO RIVER**

#### **Vision:**

- A model of natural and cultural heritage values to be maintained and enjoyed for its recreational values.

#### **Management Guidelines:**

- To promote the responsible management of steelhead in order to maintain the population.
- To promote awareness of the cultural heritage values associated with the river.
- To monitor use levels and maintain a balance between tourism, recreation and conservation of the river's natural qualities.

- To ensure the maintenance 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.
- To ensure the management of the river is consistent with the Cariboo-Chilcotin Land Use Plan and the Central Coast LRMP.

## **BELLA COOLA RIVER**

### **Vision:**

- A river managed to encourage the recreational use and enjoyment, and cultural heritage appreciation of the river while ensuring the maintenance of the river's natural qualities.

### **Management Guidelines:**

- To encourage recreational use of the river to be 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 manage the riparian zone of the river to ensure adequate habitat for and the maintenance of salmon and steelhead populations in the river.
- To promote awareness of the cultural heritage values associated with the river.
- To conduct resource extraction activities in ways compatible with recognizing and maintaining the recreational values of the river.
- To convey the vision to the Central Coast LRMP and ensure the management of the river is consistent with the outcomes of that process.

## **HORSEFLY RIVER**

The Horsefly River was nominated by the BC Heritage Rivers Board. Until the completion of the Cariboo-Chilcotin Land Use Plan Integration Report, the management regime around the Horsefly River is not known in sufficient detail to determine if the management guidelines recommended by the Heritage Rivers Board are appropriate. The BC Heritage Rivers Board will be asked to review their Horsefly River nomination when the Integration Report is completed.

## **KECHIKA RIVER**

### **Vision:**

- A river treasured for its outstanding natural features, wildlife populations, wilderness qualities, and cultural significance to First Nations to be carefully managed to maintain the natural and cultural heritage values.

### **Management Guidelines:**

- To ensure public use and enjoyment of the river in ways that will maintain the remoteness and natural values which people seek to experience.
- To ensure access and use levels are consistent with the vision.
- To ensure the integrity of wilderness, wildlife habitats and ecosystem values along the river.
- To ensure the management guidelines for the river are interpreted consistently with the outcomes of the LRMP for the area.

## **KETTLE RIVER**

This applies to the entire Kettle River within the Province of British Columbia only.

### **Vision:**

- 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 the many users and interest groups committed to the integrity of the river.

### **Management Guidelines:**

- To maintain habitat for rare fish species.
- To establish and maintain integrated and sustainable uses through existing and future planning processes with consideration for traditional and historic activities, and with specific consideration to the agriculture industry.
- To maintain 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.
- To ensure the management of the river is consistent with the Kootenay-Boundary Land Use Plan.