

Government Report, 1998

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S HERITAGE RIVERS SYSTEM

Government's Response to the BC Heritage Rivers Board's 1997 Nominations

1998

The following ministries were involved in preparing this report:

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

INTRODUCTION

British Columbia is recognised 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 recognise 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 recognise British Columbia rivers that serve as models representing the range of provincial river values, 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 foundation 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*. In June 1997 government responded by adding the Atnarko, Bella Coola, Kechika and Kettle Rivers to the BC Heritage Rivers System. Government also formally nominated the Fraser River to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System in February 1997, in response to the recommendation put forward in the Board's initial report.

In September 1997, the Board submitted to government its recommendations regarding the 1997 nominations for river recognition. These recommendations are set out in its report *Candidate Heritage Rivers: A Report of the British Columbia Heritage Rivers Board 1997*. The following is in response to that report.

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.
- To recognize the strong link between First Nations interests and river stewardship.

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, First Nations and planning tables in addressing water resource stewardship.
- To encourage co-ordination and collaboration among stakeholders and First Nations.
- 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 recognised 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 recognising 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 recognised 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 gives local groups a spotlight to illustrate community-based river stewardship practices. Benefits offered by heritage river recognition include:

- opportunity to focus government, business and community actions along the river;
- increased awareness and appreciation of river values;
- encouragement to understand, respect and celebrate historical connections to rivers;
- opportunity to enhance recreation and tourism benefits for local communities.

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

Policy Context:

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

The system leads to heritage river recognition, which is commemorative rather than regulatory. It is neither a land use decision nor a legal designation, but it is intended to provide a greater focus and profile for key rivers. It operates entirely within existing legislation, intergovernmental agreements, policies and planning processes and entails no new legislation or regulations. The system recognises provincially significant rivers for one or more of their natural, ecological, historical, economic development, First Nations, and recreational values, but 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 designated 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 in the context of meeting multiple use objectives.

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 recognised heritage river are intended as input and guidance for, not as a directive to, existing or future plans or planning processes.

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

For recognised 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 recognised heritage rivers.

THE BOARD'S 1997 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 also addressed the importance of better stewardship for all rivers in the province and nominated eight rivers for heritage river recognition.

The Board nominated the Alouette, Columbia, Middle, Peace, Prophet, Stuart and Yakoun Rivers and Mission Creek to be recognised as part of the BC Heritage Rivers System. The nomination document includes a recommended vision and management guidelines for each nominated river.

The Board also recommended that the Cowichan and Stikine Rivers be nominated to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System.

GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

Government endorses the Alouette, Columbia, Middle, Peace, Prophet and Stuart Rivers and Mission Creek as BC Heritage Rivers. River-specific visions and management guidelines for each of these are provided in the following section. The BC Heritage Rivers Board has been asked to participate in further discussion concerning the Yakoun River with the community and First Nations through the land use planning process that is commencing in 1998.

Government's recognition of these seven 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, sub-regional, or local planning processes.

The Board's 1997 nominations, for the first time, include rivers that have significant hydroelectric production - the Alouette, Columbia and Peace. In recognising these three as heritage rivers, government is acknowledging this cultural and economic heritage and endorsing the concept of a working river where economic activities can be compatible with natural heritage and recreational values.

In addition, government endorses the Board's recommendation that British Columbia nominate the Cowichan and Stikine Rivers to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. The commencement of the nominations for these two rivers will be scheduled according to

program priorities and resources. The province has the responsibility for nominating rivers to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System under the guidelines established for that system. If these rivers become formally recognised as Canadian Heritage Rivers, that recognition would in no way change existing jurisdictional mandates or responsibilities for their management.

Government reserves the opportunity for future deliberation on the potential for bestowing heritage river recognition on the Horsefly and Tatshenshini Rivers following completion of the Cariboo-Chilcotin Land Use Plan Integration Report and further discussions with First Nations.

ALOUETTE RIVER

Vision:

- A restoration of the natural, cultural heritage and recreational values of the river through adaptive management consistent with the continued operation of hydroelectric generation facilities.

Management Guidelines:

- To manage water flows and water quality to generate hydroelectric power, enhance and sustain healthy fish populations, and provide some protection against flooding of adjacent residential development.
- To encourage the development and use of a wide variety of recreational opportunities and facilities.
- To build a greater public understanding of the relationship between economic activities and the quality of river environments and to demonstrate how the two can be integrated to maintain both economic opportunities and a healthy river ecosystem.

COLUMBIA RIVER

Vision:

- A river of provincial and international historical and cultural value that has been and continues to be a significant contributor to the economy and quality of life for all British Columbians.

Management Guidelines:

- To manage the upper Columbia River (upstream from Donald Station) in a manner that emphasizes its natural characteristics and the importance of the internationally significant wildlife habitat and wetland areas.
- To manage the river downstream from Donald Station for economic activity while ensuring that the operation of the hydroelectric system pursuant to existing legislation, policies, plans and provincial or international agreements appropriately addresses natural, recreational and cultural heritage values, including the significant trout fishery.

- To continue to ensure that the management of the river includes a broad spectrum of interests who are encouraged to cooperate as responsible economic, social and environmental stewards.
- To ensure the management of the river is consistent with the Kootenay-Boundary Land Use Plan.

MIDDLE RIVER

Vision:

- A river managed to protect the integrity of its natural resources, in particular the salmon fishery and cultural resources, in recognition of its continued importance to First Nations.

Management Guidelines:

- To identify and protect sites of cultural significance along the river.
- To encourage effective management of the natural resources by First Nations people in the area which will ensure the long term viability of the river, its water quality, and healthy fish populations.
- To link conservation objectives and management strategies with those of the Stuart River to ensure consistency and to maintain the integrity of the same watershed system.
- To ensure the management guidelines for the river are interpreted consistently with the outcomes of the Fort St. James Land and Resource Management Plan.

MISSION CREEK

Vision:

- A model of community involvement in the management of an urban stream environment.

Management Guidelines:

- To encourage effective growth and activity of its broadly based, grassroots river management organization that can contribute to the long term development and management of uses along the creek.
- To monitor the development of an integrated management plan for the area that recognises the natural, cultural heritage and recreational values of the river.
- To manage the river to protect and enhance its capability as critical habitat for the endangered Kokanee salmon of the Southern Interior.
- To convey the vision to the Okanagan-Shuswap Land and Resource Management Plan and ensure the management of the creek is consistent with the outcomes of that process.

PEACE RIVER

Vision:

- A river managed for a variety of resource-based uses, including power generation, a critical cornerstone of the province's economy, while maintaining representative natural heritage qualities and recognising the historical heritage value of the river corridor to First nations and non-aboriginal people.

Management Guidelines:

- To promote a balanced approach to managing the river for its multiple uses, ensuring that the operation of the hydroelectric resources appropriately addresses natural, cultural and recreational heritage values.
- To ensure the management of the river is consistent with the Fort St. John and Dawson Creek Land and Resource Management Plans.

PROPHET RIVER

Vision:

- A river managed to retain the outstanding natural qualities and wilderness character in its upper reaches, and to recognise the need to integrate riparian, recreation and industrial uses consistent with natural and cultural heritage values in its lower reaches.

Management Guidelines:

- To contribute to the conservation of wildlife habitat of the important Northern Rockies ecosystem.
- To recognise and support the continued relationship of the Prophet River First Nation to the river and its environment.
- To emphasize wilderness and wilderness recreation opportunities as a focus of public education on the values of the upper reaches of the river.
- To recognise and support the value of the lower reaches of the river to the local oil and gas and forest industries, First Nations and water-based recreation, consistent with the Fort Nelson Land and Resource Management Plan and local land use plans for the region.

STUART RIVER

Vision:

- A river managed to sustain a diversity of conservation and integrated resource use activities.

Management Guidelines:

- To identify and protect sites of cultural significance along the river corridor.
- To encourage effective management of the natural resources which will ensure the long term viability of the river, its water quality and healthy fish populations.
- To link conservation objectives and management strategies with those of the Middle River to ensure consistency and integrity of the whole watershed system.
- To ensure the management of the river is consistent with the Fort St. James, Vanderhoof and Prince George Land and Resource Management Plans.

YAKOUN RIVER

The review response for the Yakoun River, on the Queen Charlotte Islands, indicated that further community-based consultation and discussion was required, especially with the Haida Nation. The Queen Charlotte Islands Land and Resource Management Planning Process is the appropriate forum for this discussion. The BC Heritage Rivers Board will be asked to establish the appropriate communication linkages with this process in order to determine whether or not to confirm the nomination.

BOARD MANDATE EXTENDED

The mandate of the BC Heritage Rivers Board, originally established by government for a three year period ending in April 1998, has been extended by the Minister of Environment, Lands and Parks for two years. The provincial government is impressed with the progress the Board has made with respect to developing the BC Heritage Rivers System.

With the BC Heritage River System nearing completion, the Board's role for the next two years will shift in emphasis from identification and nomination, to promotion of community based monitoring and stewardship of recognised heritage rivers.