

"NEWS BYTES"**Environmental Trends**

In January, the Ministry of Environment, Land and Parks released its long awaited Environmental Trends in B.C. Report that looks at 12 indicators to provide a snapshot look at the state of the province's environment. This project is the work of the State of Environment Reporting Office and is, in part, a response to the 1995 Auditor-General's report which recommended that performance measures focus on the outcomes of government efforts rather than the efforts themselves. The 12 indicators include protected areas, solid waste, species at risk, forest species, and toxic contaminants in biota. Also, the results are compared with other jurisdictions, which indicates that B.C. is faring better in regards to environmental protection. While this report indicates that the percentage of parks is increasing, air pollution is decreasing, the quantity of waste disposed is decreasing, and dioxin levels in Great Blue Heron eggs are decreasing; the indicators for water quality, greenhouse gases and wildlife do not look promising. As well, a more critical look at the indicators provided shows lack of important details and a reliance on strategies that are not yet being implemented or are insufficient. Also, some of the information has been disputed, such as the status of grizzly bear populations on the mid-coast. The Trends reporting project is ongoing, and the Ministry welcome comments and suggestions for how to improve their monitoring work. For example, an analysis of the protected area strategy implementation should look at how well low elevation, forested ecosystems are being protected, as these areas are most at risk and contain the highest levels of biodiversity.

The full report can be viewed or downloaded from this website: www.env.gov.bc.ca/spp/soerpt or to provide comments contact: Risa Smith, State of Environment Reporting, 356-2191, rbsmith@executive.env.gov.bc.ca

Rhodes Report Recommends Overhaul

A report commissioned by the Premier at the request of the B.C. Wildlife Federation that recommends sweeping changes to the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks is provoking some support and some concerns and other suggestions from many sectors, including the environmental community. The impetus for this report, prepared by Frank Rhodes, stems from a recommendation in the earlier Heywood Report that resulted in the formation of the Ministry of Fisheries last year. Rhodes recommends that the Ministry of Fisheries be restructured to include the following programs now included in the Ministry of Environment, Lands & Parks: Regional fisheries program, Wildlife programs, Habitat Protection programs, and Enforcement programs (Conservation Officer Service). He also suggests that enforcement programs should be transferred as an entire unit to the Ministry of Fisheries and, through administrative protocol arrangements, provide inspection and enforcement services for all MELP programs as required. To accomplish these changes, he advised that administrative actions are needed to integrate the organizations, facilitate efficiency, and provide protocols and MOUs for sharing support services and meeting the needs of clients. While there is support from the environmental community for the need to keep fisheries, wildlife and habitat programs together, concerns have been raised about whether the Rhode's recommendations are the best approach. Many questions remain unanswered and there clearly is a need for further consultation and study before any changes are made.

For more information, contact: Gary Wouters, B.C. government, 604-775-0001 or Doug Walker, Executive Director, BCWF, 604-533-2293.

Endangered Species Update

Recent developments add to the urgency for an effective federal law to protect endangered species. Late in February, more than 600 scientists signed a letter to Prime Minister Jean Chretien urging him to significantly strengthen the government's planned endangered-species bill or risk passing legislation that is meaningless. The letter shows that many of Canada's researchers believe that Ottawa's approach to endangered species is seriously flawed. These scientists are particularly concerned that species that range or migrate will not be protected under the new legislation. Grizzly bears, for example, are protected in the U.S. but would be in danger once they cross the border into Canada. Mark Colpitts, a spokesman for Environment Minister Christine Stewart, said that a greater emphasis would be put on habitat protection in the new bill, as well as encouragement for Canadians to look after species on private land, but insiders say it will not veer far from the course set in 1996.

Meanwhile, the U.S. federal government recently announced new protection measures for nine threatened salmon populations in the Pacific Northwest, which could become the largest and most expensive rescue effort in the 26-year history of the Endangered Species Act. The effort will inevitably require higher taxes to clean hundreds of waterways and buy open space in crucial watersheds. As well it will impose tough restrictions on new construction, farming and logging, and may even require the costly decommissioning of dams that impede salmon runs but also supply the region with cheap power. The early response from politicians and citizens has been extraordinarily positive, as salmon are not only economically important but are also a cultural icon. Already, Vice President Gore has promised a special appropriation of \$100-million to underwrite a "cooperative restoration effort." **Contact: BC Endangered Species Coalition, ksmallwood@wcel.org, 604-601-2507**

Logging Damages Watersheds Forever

At a speech to the Biology and Management of Species and Habitats at Risk conference held February 15 in Kamloops, Ministry of Environment's watershed restoration manager, Pat Slaney said most of B.C.'s watersheds that have been damaged by logging may never be adequately rehabilitated. "For years, the forest industry has logged hillsides right to the banks of streams," Slaney said. That practice, disallowed in 1988, has caused land stability problems that will be felt for decades. He explained to the audience that because of a FRBC target of completing 25 percent of high priority or key watersheds over the next 5 years, it will take 20 years at a minimum to "actively" rehabilitate the high priority one-third of damaged watersheds. Funding for restoration will be about 50 percent lower starting in 1999, owing to reduced stumpage revenues. As well, the current multi-year agreements with forest licensees restricts the number of watersheds that can be worked on. He then explained how the remaining two-thirds of the watersheds will, by default, receive largely "passive" restoration where an effective Code is to be relied on to curtail any further damage. In a 1997 article for the Water Quality Resources Journal, Slaney and Al Martin estimated that the total cost to repair B.C.'s damaged watersheds was between one and four billion dollars! *For more information, contact: Pat Slaney, 604-222-6761.*

Zero AOX at Threat

On March 10th the first public broadside was launched against B.C.'s most important piece of pulp pollution legislation with the release of a Price Waterhouse Coopers report that claimed enforcement of the law would bankrupt the pulp industry and shut it down. The 1992 Pulp Mill and Pulp and Paper Mill Liquid Effluent Control Regulation (the "Zero AOX" law) gave chlorine-bleaching mills in this province 10 years to make the necessary investments to eliminate organochlorines from their effluent. The industry opted instead to invest in half measures and economic blackmail. It is now demanding, both in public and behind closed government doors, that the law be overturned. This is the third time the pulp and paper industry has claimed pollution controls would bankrupt it and bring about the closure of every mill in the province. When the chlorine-bleaching mills were told to reduce AOX to 2.5 kilograms, they said they'd go broke. When they were told to meet an interim Zero AOX target of 1.5 kilograms, they said they'd go broke. Instead, they have had some of the most profitable years in decades. That's why they were given 10 years - so they could take advantage of the good years in the economic cycle.

Overlooked in the frenzied gloom of the Price Waterhouse Coopers report is the fact the Zero AOX law affects only those mills which bleach with chlorinated compounds. One-third of the pulp in this province is manufactured without these chemicals - and this one-third is currently the most profitable sector. Despite recent polls which show how popular the Zero AOX law and its goals are with workers and the public, there are concerns that government staff are getting ready to cave in. The government needs to be reminded again of their pledge categorically that the Zero AOX law was not up for negotiation.

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Protecting Canada's Water

The federal government's recently announced strategy for preventing the bulk export of Canada's water is notable for what it doesn't do as well as for what it does. What it does is expose just how vulnerable our water is under free trade and NAFTA. What it doesn't do is protect Canada's water from interbasin transfers by pipeline, trenches or super tankers. Canadians have good reason to be concerned about the future of their rivers and lakes. Americans are amongst the most profligate users of water in the world. California, thirsty and getting thirstier, uses 80 percent of its water in agriculture, most of it to subsidize low value crops. In effect, Canadians would be giving up their water so American agricultural corporations can grow rice in the desert. The threat to our water is not hypothetical. One California company, Sun Belt, has already served notice that it is seeking compensation from Canada of up to \$300- million using NAFTA to challenge B.C.'s law banning water exports. The federal government's strategy smacks of desperate measures, by tossing the ball to the provinces, with the hope they will all declare moratoriums on water exports.

Both these strategies provide only false hopes. The Quebec Environment Minister Paul Begin, has already stated that Quebec will not cooperate in any national moratorium. And the International Joint Commission could easily rule that water diversions do not harm watersheds, thereby providing justification for such diversions. The federal government's approach tacitly acknowledges that if it passes legislation banning bulk water exports, it will have the perverse effect of admitting that water is a commodity that can be traded. And if any province issues a bulk water export permit, the floodgates will be opened across the country. Ultimately, Canada's commitments in NAFTA will prevail over any legislation banning water exports. But in the immediate term, Canada should ban water exports because it would stop the provinces from issuing permits. Following such legislation, Canada must negotiate a clear and unequivocal exclusion for water from NAFTA.

Murray Dobbin, Council of Canadians

A Tribute to Irene Abbey

Environmental, peace, and social justice activist Irene Abbey, one of the founding members of the Raging Grannies, passed away in late December 1998. Irene devoted many years of loyal service to a variety of B.C. community groups. In the summer of 1993, Irene was arrested defending the forests of Clayoquot Sound along with more than 845 other defenders. She eloquently defended her actions before B.C.'s Supreme Court that fall. Irene Abbey's commitment to community is aptly portrayed in her appearance in the video, *Fury for the Sound: The Women of Clayoquot*. As one observer honouring her passing aptly put it, "Irene didn't rust out, she wore out."

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