
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS*

**SUBJECT: SUPPORT FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE WILD SALMON RIVERS
OF NORTH-WESTERN BC**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council express its support for the responsible management of fisheries resources in north-western BC.
2. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to the Provincial and Federal Ministers of the Environment.
3. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to Rivers Without Borders and the Western Canada Wilderness Committee.

REPORT

The Environment Committee, at its meeting held on 2008 April 08, received and adopted the *attached* report seeking Council endorsement for the responsible management of the wild salmon rivers in north-western BC.

This report provides additional information given the environmental, economic and cultural importance on four watersheds in north-western BC, and the request by RWB and WCWC for expressions of support for responsible fisheries management to be directed to senior levels of governments.

Copied to:	City Manager Director Planning & Building Director Engineering Director Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services
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To: His Worship, the Mayor and Councillors
From: Environment Committee
Re: SUPPORT FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE WILD
SALMON RIVERS OF NORTH-WESTERN BC
2008 April 09 Page 2

Burnaby and other local jurisdictions have an interest in preserving the integrity of these wild salmon rivers, as impacts to watersheds in north-western BC may impact the robustness of Pacific salmon populations and other wildlife along our coast.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor D. Johnston
Chair

Councillor P. Calendino
Vice Chair

Councillor L. Rankin
Member

TO: CHAIR AND MEMBERS
ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: 2008 April 03

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING & BUILDING

FILE: 31000-01
Reference: Water Resources

SUBJECT: **SUPPORT FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE WILD SALMON RIVERS OF NORTH-WESTERN BC**

PURPOSE: To seek Council endorsement for the responsible management of the wild salmon rivers in north-western BC.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council be requested to express its support for the responsible management of fisheries resources in north-western BC.
2. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to the Provincial and Federal Ministers of the Environment.
3. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to Rivers Without Borders and to the Western Canada Wilderness Committee.

REPORT**1.0 BACKGROUND**

This report responds to a request for information arising from a 2008 March 11 Environment Committee meeting in which correspondence was received from two non-governmental environmental organizations: Rivers Without Borders (RWB) and the Western Canada Wilderness Committee (WCWC). These organizations have jointly published information to raise awareness for the importance of north-western BC watersheds, and more specifically, possible future threats to the Taku Watershed.

RWB and WCWC are seeking support from BC municipal councils to ensure that there is responsible and comprehensive management of the “wild salmon rivers” of Canada. This report provides information on the campaign by RWB and WCWC with respect to four watersheds in north-western BC, and requests that Council express its support for responsible fisheries management of these wild salmon rivers.

2.0 THE WILD SALMON RIVERS OF CANADA CAMPAIGN

The RWB and WCWC have launched a nation-wide information campaign consisting of letter mailings, petitions, a *Wild Salmon River of Canada* report (dated Spring/Summer 2007), web site information, and other media. This campaign is intended to call upon local governments and other interested parties to lend support for the sound management, and long-term protection of north-western BC watersheds, which may be impacted by industrial development proposals.

In addition to the proposed metal mining activities in the Taku River watershed, industrial development is also being proposed in the Skeena, Stikine, and Nass River watersheds. The proposed developments include the extraction of coal bed methane gas – a process that may involve the release of polluted groundwater into aquatic systems, as well as coal mining and other power production initiatives. These projects would result in significant changes to north-western BC, including the establishment of transmission lines, the construction of roads, and likely, the cumulative release of pollutants. These changes would not only fragment the sensitive ecosystems in these areas and potentially reduce their ability to cope with change, but may also increase the pace of further industrial development. As such, Burnaby and other local jurisdictions have an interest in preserving the integrity of the wild salmon rivers of Canada, as impacts to watersheds in north-western BC may impact the robustness of Pacific salmon populations and other wildlife along our coast.

3.0 NORTH-WESTERN BC WILD SALMON RIVERS

3.1 *Taku River Watershed*

The Taku River watershed is the largest pristine and unprotected watershed on the Pacific coast of the Western Hemisphere (*Figure 1 attached*). The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC has recently rated the Taku River as the third most endangered river in BC, as indicated on its most endangered rivers list for 2008 (released 2008 March 24).

The immense Taku Watershed contains some of the richest wildlife habitat on the west coast of North America and is home to grizzly and black bear, moose, sheep, caribou, mountain goat, salmon, and many species of migrating birds and bald eagles. These species thrive here in large numbers due to the large, uninterrupted landscape that is currently without permanent roads or major human disturbance.

The Taku Watershed has been the focus of much fisheries research and management planning by the Taku River Tlingit First Nation, Alaska, BC, and Canadian government agencies. Many of the most recent research efforts have been in direct response to the proposed Tulsequah Chief Mine development by Redfern Resources of Vancouver (parent company Redcorp Ventures Ltd.), which is seeking to reopen this mine (closed since 1957) to produce zinc, lead, gold and silver. This project, if approved, would also

require new access through the watershed. Although initial proposals called for the construction of a 160 km road spanning the Taku watershed, in 2008 January, Redfern Resources announced that it had abandoned plans to build a road, instead deciding to use the Taku River to transport goods to and from the mine site. Although the option of barge transport would be less impactful to wildlife in the watershed, any increased access may have long-term negative impacts on fish and wildlife habitat, and the ecological integrity of adjacent wilderness areas in both BC and Alaska. Concerns over unabated acid mine drainage from previous mining activities are also of concern to local residents and environmental groups.

The Provincial government is currently engaged in land use planning negotiations with the Taku River Tlingit First Nation that includes the Taku watershed. RWN and WCWC are seeking BC municipal government support to ensure that the area's long-term environmental values are not compromised by the Tulsequah Chief Mine development and other future industrial development proposals.

3.2 Iskut-Stikine Watershed

Located south-east of the Taku, the Iskut's unique hydrological and riparian characteristics make it extremely productive of wild salmonids, and is considered to be one of the most valuable rivers in the north-west. The watershed's unique environmental and recreational values, which include wilderness tourism, fishing, trapping, and guiding, may be threatened by increased industrial activity and road access in this area. The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC has recently rated the combined headwaters of the Stikine, Nass, and Skeena Rivers as being fifth on its most endangered rivers list for 2008.

3.3 Nass Watershed

Located south of the Iskut-Stikine, the Nass River is the third largest watershed in British Columbia, and supports a variety of fish species including all species of Pacific salmon and cutthroat trout. Unlike watersheds further south, there is minimal development and relatively low pressure on freshwater habitats in the Nass, however improved conservation strategies may be needed in order to protect weaker stocks in this watershed.

3.4 Skeena Watershed

Located south-east of the Nass, the Skeena Watershed is the second largest watershed in BC. Over the course of the last century, fish populations in the Skeena and its tributaries have suffered declines from over-fishing, habitat alteration and possibly climate change. Unlike the Taku River watershed, salmon populations in the Skeena Watershed already face environmental challenges from high rates of logging, highway and other transportation development, and to a minor extent from mining, farming and urban development.

To: Environment Committee
From: Director Planning & Building
Re: Support for the Protection of the Wild Salmon Rivers of North-Western BC
2008 April 03 Page 4

4.0 CONCLUSION

Arising from a 2008 March 11 Environment Committee meeting, this report provides additional information on four watersheds in north-western BC, and the request by RWB and WCWC for expressions of support for responsible fisheries management to be directed to senior levels of governments.

Future metal mining in the Taku River watershed, along with proposed power production initiatives in the Skeena, Stikine, and Nass River watersheds, have the potential to fragment the sensitive ecosystems in these areas, reduce their ability to cope with change, and increase the pace of further industrial development. As such, Burnaby and other local jurisdictions have an interest in preserving the integrity of these wild salmon rivers, as impacts to watersheds in north-western BC may impact the robustness of Pacific salmon populations and other wildlife along our coast.

Given the environmental, economic and cultural importance of the Taku, Iskut-Stikine, Nass and Skeena River watersheds to north-west BC and the Province as a whole, this report recommends that Council express its support for the responsible management of the wild salmon rivers of Canada, and that copies of this report be sent to the Provincial and Federal Ministers of the Environment, and to Rivers Without Borders and the Western Canada Wilderness Committee.



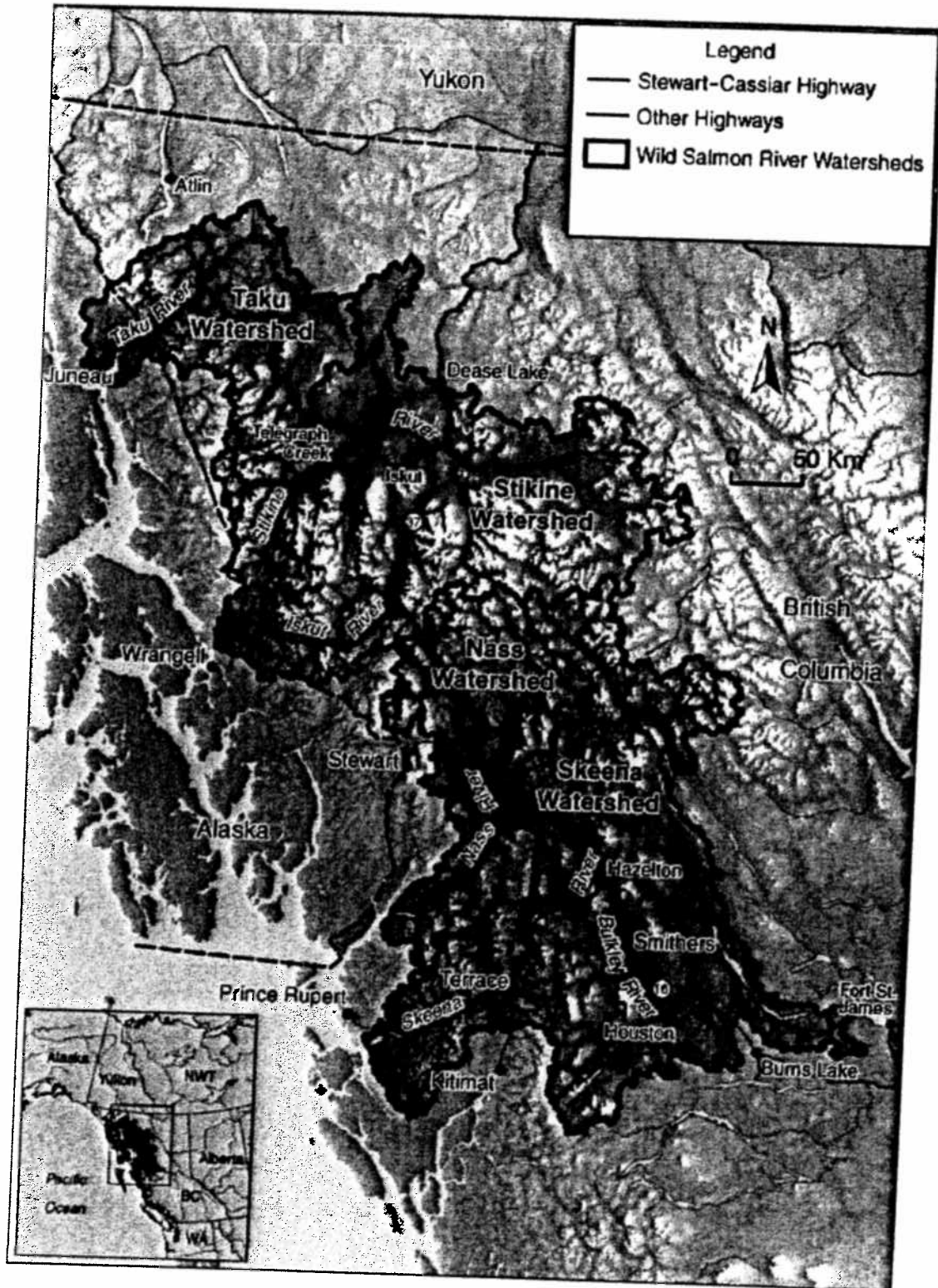
B. Luksun, Director
PLANNING & BUILDING

YH/jc
Attachment

Copied to: City Manager
City Clerk
Director Engineering
Director Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services

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Figure 1: Map of the Taku, Iskut-Stikine, Nass and Skeena River Watersheds



(Source: *Wild Salmon Rivers of Canada*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Spring/Summer 2007.)