



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

BC's Most Endangered River 2022

The “Heart of the Fraser”, a key part of the river between Hope and Mission, is in dire need of protection. Recent habitat damage to the river’s islands a major setback for salmon.

Revelstoke, BC: The Fraser River, and in particular, the “Heart of the Fraser” located between Hope and Mission, is the most endangered river in the province, according to the 100,000-member Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia (ORCBC).

Today the council released its 30th annual BC endangered rivers list. Every other year, the alliance of BC's outdoor groups puts together a list of the province's rivers that are most at risk. The list is based on input from ORCBC's 100,000-member base and environmental groups, individuals, and resource professionals and is vetted by ORCBC's endangered rivers committee.

While the 2021 endangered rivers list focused on the threats facing urban streams, including climate change, loss of riparian habitat and pollution, this year’s list focuses on Heart of the Fraser, one of the most ecologically significant stretches of river on the planet but also a part of the river that faces grave threats.

With its complex braided gravel channels and thick stands of cottonwoods, this area is among the most important salmonid and sturgeon spawning and rearing habitat in the entire Fraser River. This same stretch supports nearly 30 species of fish, BC’s very best white sturgeon spawning habitat, and BC’s largest single run of spawning salmon. This part of the river also provides essential rearing habitat for millions upon millions of fish while also being an essential migration corridor for vast numbers of salmon.

Yet, the Heart of the Fraser faces significant threats from urban encroachment, agricultural expansion, gravel removal, climate change, pollution, and commercial and industrial developments. In addition, the last un-diked islands on the lower Fraser River, such as Strawberry, Carey and Herrling, have been bought by developers. As a result, industrial logging, widespread land clearing, and diking are now threatening the most productive habitat stronghold for salmon and white sturgeon left in the entire Fraser watershed. In addition, parts of these un-diked islands become wetted during the freshet and then become crucial habitat for massive

numbers of juvenile salmon, especially young Spring salmon, who move into these wetted areas seeking refuge from high flows.

Currently, the Heart of the Fraser does not have any legislated protection or collaborative management plan.

Mark Angelo, ORCBC Rivers Chair and founder of both BC and World Rivers Day, said: "Most of the critical fish habitat in the lower Fraser has already been lost to diking and industrial development, so it's essential to protect what remains, especially within the Heart of the Fraser."

And while the ORCBC and Angelo commend governments for recent announcements that will see hundreds of millions of dollars aimed at protecting salmon and salmon habitat, Angelo added, "If we can't succeed in protecting the most important salmon habitat in the entire Fraser watershed, the goal of rebuilding salmon stocks, especially species such as Spring salmon, will be very difficult to attain."

In terms of needed steps, the ORCBC has long advocated for the need for a collaborative plan for the Heart of the Fraser. In addition, the ORCBC supports the urgent need to utilize various conservation tools to protect the area in collaboration with the nineteen First Nations within the reach. Among the tools that could be used are provincial mechanisms such as Wildlife Management Areas, federal designations such as Ecologically Significant Areas under the *Fisheries Act*, and Indigenous Conservation and Protected Areas. Local governments also have a role in terms of better protecting key areas within their boundaries.

Angelo, who is both an Order of BC and Order of Canada recipient for his river conservation efforts, added, "We are urging the provincial and federal governments, in concert with the Nations of the Heart of the Fraser, to do more to utilize these tools. In addition, the ORCBC is asking governments to develop a plan that would enable the acquisition of key threatened habitats for conservation, or ecological restoration purposes. The most ecologically significant parts of the major un-diked islands within the Heart of the Fraser would be an ideal place to start."

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Images are available [here](#):

Image 1: ORC Rivers Chair, Mark Angelo, along the lower Fraser River. ORC has been documenting the state of Fraser River habitat for decades, and this year, the "Heart of the Fraser," a key part of the river between Hope and Mission, tops the 2022 Endangered Rivers list". Image credit: Mark Angelo.

Image 2: Biologists sample part of the wetted area on Strawberry Island that is used extensively by huge numbers of young salmon in the spring and early summer as they seek refuge from high flows - these areas would be cut off to fish if dikes were to be built. The islands represent some of the last un-diked habitat in the entire lower Fraser. Image credit: Mike Pearson

The [Outdoor Recreation Council of BC](#) is an umbrella organization composed of organizational members representing the broad and diverse spectrum of outdoor recreation user groups in BC, including paddlers, hikers, mountain bikers, off-road motorcyclists, equestrians, snowmobilers, quad riders, 4WDs, anglers and nature interests. We indirectly represent more than 100,000 British Columbians. We work to promote and advocate for access to and responsible use of BC's outdoors for public recreation, build bridges between outdoor recreation groups and represent the broad interests of the public outdoor recreation community to government.