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GOVERNMENT IN IMMINENT DANGER OF DESTROYING FRASER RIVER HEADWATERS

A government-directed plan to log most of the remaining forests in the upper Fraser River is a "bad joke" and must be stopped, say members of the newly-formed Fraser Headwaters Alliance. "The plan being presented to Cabinet ignores the concerns of the residents of the Robson Valley, spells the demise of the salmon, wildlife, wilderness, and scenic values in the headwaters of the Fraser River and is a threat to the world-renowned Bowron Lakes canoe circuit," said Roy Howard of the Canoe-Robson Environmental Coalition, one of the Alliance's founding organizations.

"Nearly all local participants in the Robson Valley Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) process disagree with the 'recommended' plan," Howard added. "Government approval of the current plan would represent an enormous betrayal of trust to citizens who participated in good faith in the planning process."

The Robson Valley Plan area encompasses 1.3 million hectares of the Rocky Mountain Trench, Cariboo Mountains, and Rocky Mountains southeast of Prince George, BC, and is of global ecological significance. "More than 10% of the Chinook salmon in the Fraser River system spawn in the Robson Valley," said Dr. Rick Zammuto of Save-The-Cedar League, another of the Alliance's founding groups. The area also supports a large grizzly bear population. Renowned grizzly bear biologist, Wayne McCrory, stated that the Robson Valley is "one of the last places in the Rocky Mountains of North America where you still have grizzly bears feeding on salmon in rare interior rainforests - it is globally unique."

"The Robson Valley contains the world's most extensive inland rainforest at temperate latitudes, including patches of 'antique forest' that have almost certainly had no major disturbance for thousands of years," said Trevor Goward, Curator of Lichens at UBC. These rainforests and adjacent areas represent some of the last intact habitat for mountain caribou, which are listed as a vulnerable species by the Province. Harvey Locke, a founder of the Yellowstone To Yukon Conservation Initiative, stated, "The Rocky Mountain Trench is one of the world's longest valleys, and for much of its length it has been very heavily impacted. A major exception is the Robson Valley, which remains very important for wildlife."

The Fraser Headwaters Alliance calls on the BC government to withhold approval of the proposed LRMP plan, arguing that it is completely inadequate to ensure the long-term protection of these critical resources. Instead, it argues that the government should await the results of an alternative plan that the Alliance is currently coordinating - one that respects the needs and concerns of the local community while focusing on preserving the wildlife, salmon, rainforest, and scenic resources of the area. Local conservation groups, with the support of provincial and national organizations, formed the Alliance to encourage development of a community-based, conservation-oriented alternative to the current industrial model being proposed to Cabinet by government bureaucrats.

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FRASER HEADWATERS BACKGROUNDER

BROKEN PROMISES - BETRAYAL OF TRUST

At a cost of over \$1 million, the government bureaucracy is making a bad joke of the Robson Valley Land and Resources Management Plan (LRMP). The "recommended" LRMP being presented to Cabinet is utterly disrespectful to the concerns of the residents of the Robson Valley, spells the demise of the Fraser River Headwaters, and is a threat to the world renowned Bowron Lakes canoe circuit.

Unparalleled Environmental Values in the Robson Valley:

Contains the headwaters of the Fraser River, one of the worlds great salmon rivers and virtually the heart of BC. This area is also the source of the Thompson River as well as the Canoe portion of the Columbia River.

This area is the traditional territory of the Secwepemc (Shuswap) and Lheidli T'enneh (Carrier) First Nations.

The Premier is now saying that we have "an environmental emergency in regards to Pacific salmon." More than 10% of the Chinook salmon in the Fraser River system spawn in the Robson Valley. Bull-trout, listed as "vulnerable" by the provincial government also inhabit these fragile mountain streams.

Spectacular scenery provides a magnet for tourism and the gateway to Mt. Robson Provincial Park and Jasper National Park.

The grizzly bear population in the area is healthy, but declining. This is the only place anywhere in the Rocky Mountains where grizzly still feed on salmon.

The Robson Valley contains some of the critical habitat for mountain caribou, a species at risk- listed as "vulnerable" by the province of British Columbia, and in serious decline. Despite this fact, the BC Ministry of the Environment has used the area as a reservoir for mountain caribou transplants to the United States. Scientists suspect the Robson Valley may be an important link between mountain caribou and other caribou populations to the east.

The BC government has identified the Robson Valley and surrounding wilderness as a key area for large predator/prey relationships.

The World Resources Institute of Washington DC has identified the area as a "virgin or frontier forest" which is "under medium or high threat: ongoing or planned human activities . . . will, if continued, significantly degrade these frontiers," and further states "only one-fifth of the world's original forests still qualify as frontier forest."

The Robson Valley contains a globally significant ecosystem - the world's most extensive inland rainforest at temperate latitudes, including patches of "antique forest" that have almost certainly had no major disturbance for thousands of years. These antique forests contain some of the most complete remaining records of interior BC's biological past and probably one of the longest biological traditions in the world. Large areas of these irreplaceable forests have already been logged, and many of the remaining areas face imminent destruction under the current LRMP.

The valley contains unique plants, lichens, and vegetation communities that are rare or do not occur elsewhere in the province.

The area boasts significant wilderness with little or no development which has very high scenic, wildlife, salmon, and old growth forest values. Little is known about the true biological significance of these areas, and yet, under the current LRMP, they are in danger of being compromised or destroyed before an inventory of their value has even been undertaken. These areas include:

Raush Valley - the largest intact, unprotected watershed in southern BC;

Goat River - a major Chinook salmon spawning stream that contains high grizzly and caribou densities, and connects the Rocky Mountain Trench to Bowron Lakes;

Foster, Harvey, and Dawson Creeks north of Mica Dam - very remote and almost unknown with considerable old growth rainforest;

Betty Wendle Creek and Cariboo River - flow into Bowron Lake Provincial Park. Critical in terms of water quality, fish and wildlife, and the scenic value and viability of this internationally-renowned wilderness canoe circuit; and

West Twin Creek - an area with significant caribou habitat and antique forests. However, much of the area proposed for protection has already been extensively roaded and clearcut.

The Robson Valley LRMP process failed completely:

The Robson Valley process was designated as a Commission on Resources and Environment (CORE) pilot project, but there was minimal involvement from CORE after initiation of the LRMP, and no CORE report was ever produced.

The Table was started after an assessment from an independent facilitator and a CORE representative determined that there was strong community consensus for a "bottom-up" approach. However, the process gradually became more and more "top-down" as representatives of government ministries continued to intervene in the process, and changed the rules from month to month.

The government fired the independent facilitator, despite Table consensus to retain him and possibly seek outside funding for his position.

Representatives of government ministries participating in the process repeatedly broke consensus on such issues as limiting pesticide use, protecting domestic water supplies, establishing no-staking reserves, and prohibiting large-scale hydro development or water export.

Rather than waiting for table recommendations regarding protected areas, the government set percentage "targets" for the LRMP, which became upper limits, although the table never agreed to these limits. These targets arose because the government protected some large coastal areas out of political expediency, yet still wanted to stick to its 12% provincial target. As a result, the Prince George Region - which contains about one-third of the land area of the province - was restricted to no more than 9% in protected areas, which in turn limited the amount that could be set aside in the Robson Valley.

The government further restricted the amount of area that could be protected by arguing that the area already protected in Mt. Robson Provincial Park would have to be included in the Robson Valley's percentage target - this despite the fact that Mt. Robson is largely "rock and ice" and does little to contribute to representation of the area's wide range of ecosystems.

Even outside of protected areas, the Table was restricted as to the areas that it could recommend for special management by a "percentage game" handed down as policy dictated by the Forest Practices Code.

The Table was not permitted to make any recommendations concerning the current rate of logging (Annual Allowable Cut) in the Robson Valley. The current cut is nearly double what the BC Ministry of Forests considers to be sustainable in the long term.

The Table failed to reach consensus on the LRMP as about half of the participating public sectors could not accept the excessively low limits on protected areas, the restrictions on special management considerations, and the unsustainable harvesting which is eliminating the ancient forests, wildlife and salmon habitat, and scenic vistas of the Robson Valley. These sectors argued for an additional 20% in protected areas over and above Mt. Robson Park, which in total amounts to only about 450,000 hectares - far less than the 2.5 million hectares protected in the recently declared Northern Rockies Park, and certainly as valuable in terms of wildlife and biodiversity.

A Government commissioned socioeconomic analysis for the LRMP states "Biodiversity will decline . . . most of the low elevation forests have no protected areas designation . . . harvesting in low elevations may reduce tourism income from recreation activities . . . visual quality will be eroded . . . salmon habitat is particularly vulnerable . . ."

The public has been denied access to the final government recommendations about the LRMP, despite a clearly-stated government commitment to make this a fully open public process.

With absolutely no public consultation, senior bureaucrats are currently discussing further reductions in the very small amount of area slated for protection under the "recommended" LRMP (about 7600 ha.), due to a government miscalculation regarding the size of Mt. Robson Provincial Park.

The Robson Valley LRMP process failed because of the flawed nature of the process and subsequent changes to the document made behind closed doors. This failure guarantees that the community will not "buy in" to the plan, and future conflicts are certain if this plan is approved.