

Fraser Headwaters Alliance
Robson Valley, BC

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**FRASER RIVER HEADWATERS AT RISK: GOVERNMENT MUST WITHHOLD
APPROVAL OF FLAWED ROBSON VALLEY LAND-USE PLAN**

Nearly all local participants in the Robson Valley Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) process disagree with the "recommended" plan put forward by the government bureaucracy. "Government approval of the current 'recommended' plan would represent an enormous betrayal of trust to citizens who participated in good faith in the planning process," said Roy Howard of the newly formed Fraser Headwaters Alliance. Local conservation groups, with the support of provincial and national organizations, formed the group to encourage development of a community-based, conservation-oriented alternative to the current industry model being presented to Cabinet by government.

Logging rates in the Robson Valley continue to be unsustainable, guaranteeing future job losses. The rate of cut is nearly twice the rate that wood can be grown, according to Ministry of Forests estimates. "Unsustainable logging is destroying our economic, social, and environmental future," stated Dr. Rick Zammuto, also of the Alliance. "Current logging is destroying the globally-significant, 'antique' rainforests of the Robson Valley found nowhere else in the world, except British Columbia. Chinook salmon, grizzly bear, and mountain caribou habitat are being seriously impacted, threatening the survival of these species," added Zammuto.

A major increase in conservation emphasis would protect the environmental values and the quality of life that residents, visitors, and wildlife groups value so highly. "For example, additional protected areas would contribute to a more diversified economy, and would relieve pressure on the overcrowded mountain parks of Jasper, Banff, and Mt. Robson," added Howard.

The Fraser Headwaters Alliance calls on the B.C. government to withhold approval of the proposed Robson Valley LRMP, stating that it is completely inadequate to ensure the long-term protection of the area's valuable resources. Instead, government should support a plan for a sustainable, diversified economy that respects ecological limits and involves local communities.

For further information contact:
Julie Zammuto (250) 553-2325
Roy Howard (250) 968-4410

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FRASER HEADWATERS BACKGROUNDER

Unparalleled Environmental Values in the Robson Valley:

Contains the headwaters of the Fraser River, one of the world's 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.

Traditional territory of the Secwepemc (Shuswap) and Lheidli T'enneh (Carrier) First Nations. More than 10% of the Chinook salmon in the Fraser River system spawn in the Robson Valley. Bull-trout, listed as "vulnerable," and white sturgeon, listed as "endangered," by the provincial government also inhabit the area.

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 in the Rocky Mountains where grizzly still feed on salmon in ancient cedar forests.

The Robson Valley contains some of the critical habitat for mountain caribou, a species at risk-listed as "vulnerable," and in serious decline.

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" and 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. This forest consists of large, ancient Western Redcedar and Western Hemlock, similar to coastal rainforests, and also includes patches of "antique forest" that have almost certainly had no major disturbance for thousands of years.

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

The area boasts significant areas of wilderness with little or no development which have high scenic, wildlife, salmon, and old growth forest values, but are under immediate threat.

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 the Park.

West Twin Creek - an area with significant caribou habitat and antique forests.

The Robson Valley LRMP process failed because:

About half of the participating public sectors could not accept the excessively low limits on protected areas, the restrictions on special management considerations, and unsustainable harvesting.

A Government commissioned socioeconomic analysis for the LRMP states that "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 Table was started after an assessment from an independent facilitator and a CORE representative determined that there was strong community support 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, breaking consensus and changing the rules from month to month. For example, the government fired the independent facilitator, despite Table consensus to retain him and seek outside funding for his position.

The LRMP Table was forced to work with a very small "cap" on new protected areas, despite the rich ecological and scenic values in the area, and the fact that the table never agreed to these limits.

The Prince George Region - which contains about one-third of the land area of the entire province - was restricted to a cap of 9% in protected areas, which in turn limited the amount that could be set aside in the Robson Valley.

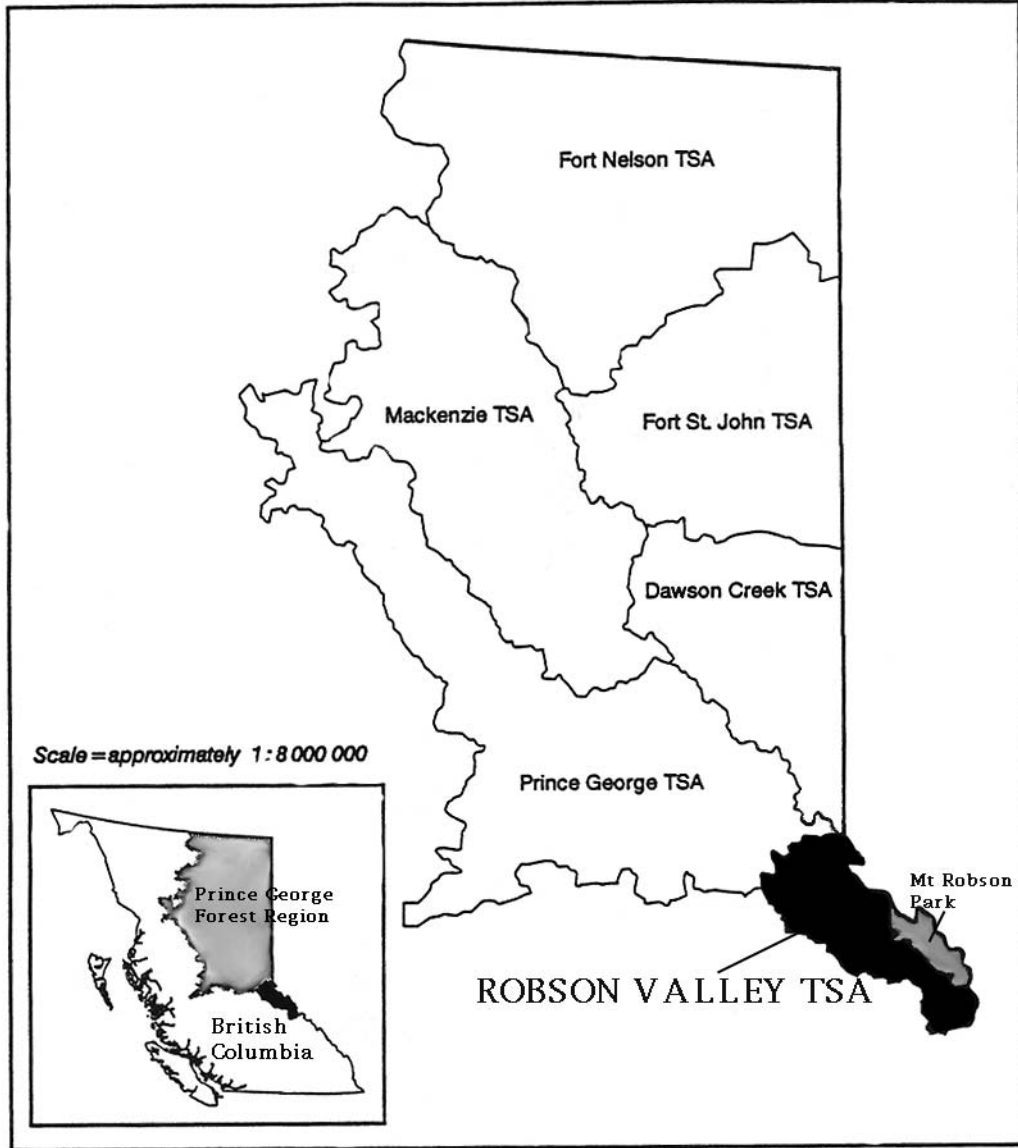
The government further restricted the amount of area that could be protected by including the area already protected in Mt. Robson Provincial Park in the Robson Valley's percentage cap, although Mt. Robson is largely "rock and ice."

The Table was also restricted as to the area that it could recommend for special management by a "percentage game" handed down as policy that was dictated by the (now severely weakened) Forest Practices Code.

The current rate of logging is nearly double what the BC Ministry of Forests considers to be sustainable in the long term, but as in the rest of the province, the Table was not permitted to make any recommendations concerning the Annual Allowable Cut.

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 significant reductions in the small amount of area slated for protection under the "recommended" LRMP, due to a government miscalculation regarding the size of Mt. Robson Provincial Park.



Robson Valley TSA (aka Plan Area) within the Prince George Forest Region