



News Release:

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Flathead River heads BC's Most Endangered Rivers List for 2009 - Kettle River and Glacier/Howser Creek follow closely behind

The Flathead River, which flows through southeastern BC into Montana, tops British Columbia's most endangered rivers list for 2009 due to concerns about a controversial proposed open pit coal mine. The Flathead, which was number two on last year's list, is widely considered one of North America's wildest and most beautiful waterways. "The Flathead supports important trans-boundary fish populations while also sustaining the highest density of inland grizzly bears anywhere in North America", said Mark Angelo, Rivers Chair for the Outdoor Recreation Council and an Order of Canada recipient.

Yet, while the US section is protected, the BC stretch faces a number of threats, the most prominent being the proposed Cline open pit coal mine. Given the size and location of the mine in the river's headwaters, water quality would be impacted and recreational, wildlife and wilderness values would be greatly compromised. For these reasons, the public's response during the review process has been overwhelmingly against the proposed coal mine and recent public opinion polls show more than 70% of the region's residents support the protection of the Flathead valley. Other threats to the river include coalbed methane development, roads and pipelines.

"The Flathead River is an amazing waterway worthy of protection" notes Mark Angelo, who also chairs the newly established Rivers Institute at BCIT. "No other region along the Canada/US border sustains such a diversity of wildlife and ecosystems," he added. Angelo also notes that "other existing coal mines in adjacent valleys have significant potential for expansion so it makes much better sense to pursue those options rather than industrialize a new pristine valley such as the Flathead.

In the number two position is the Kettle River in BC's southern interior that runs near the towns of Midway, Rock Creek and Grand Forks. This river, already suffering from seasonal low flows, is threatened by significant new water extraction proposals in its headwaters. Unless an effort is made to better address these issues through improved watershed planning that recognizes ecological limits, the fate of this beautiful interior stream may well foreshadow what other streams in the region will confront in the face of ongoing climate change.

Coming in at the number three position is the Glacier/Howser Creek system, located near Kaslo. Glacier/Howser Creeks are threatened by a controversial independent power project along with a 91 km transmission corridor that would impact important fisheries and wildlife habitat. The area that would be affected by the project also has significant recreational and ecological values and is part of a long standing park

proposal.

In the fourth spot is the Fraser River, which for the 16th time in 17 years, finds its way into the top half of the endangered rivers list. "Of particular concern this year are the development pressures facing the 'Heart of the Fraser' between Hope and Mission, one of the most productive sections of river anywhere in the world", said Angelo.

In the fifth position is Brohm Creek, one of BC's most productive steelhead streams. Located near Squamish, the area adjacent to the creek is the site of a controversial all season resort. Among several issues of concern is the potential for excessive water extraction that would severely impact steelhead stocks. "Brohm Creek is a jewel amongst steelhead streams and yet, there remains much uncertainty as to whether the planned development will incorporate the steps needed to properly care for this very significant river", said Angelo.

"As one scans this year's list, the problems outlined are extensive and diverse, ranging from controversial dam proposals and low summer flows to the need for improved riverside habitat protection and better collaborative planning," explains Angelo. "The list also helps to create a greater awareness of the various threats that confront our waterways", he added. "These issues highlight the fact that you cannot separate the health of our fish stocks from the health of our rivers; they are completely inter-dependent".

Each year, the Outdoor Recreation Council solicits nominations for BC's Most Endangered Rivers from its member groups, which total close to 100,000 members, as well as from the general public and resource managers from across the province. Submissions are reviewed by a panel of some of BC's best-known river conservationists.

For more detailed information on the twelve rivers listed, please see the endangered rivers backgrounder at www.orcbc.ca

BC's Most Endangered Rivers of 2008;

1. **Flathead River** – (proposed coal mine, coalbed methane development)
2. **Kettle River** (water extraction, development, power project proposal)
3. **Glacier/Howser Creeks** (power project proposal)
4. **Fraser River** – (urbanization, industrial development, pollution)
5. **Brohm River** (new development, excessive water extraction)
6. **Peace River** (hydro-electric dam proposal)
7. **Coquitlam River** (excessive sedimentation, urbanization)
8. **Bute Inlet rivers and streams** (massive multi-river power project proposal)
9. **Coldwater River** and other Thompson River Plateau streams (water extraction, development)
10. **Klinaklini River** (power project proposal)
11. **Somass River** (prone to drought and low flows)
12. **Elk River** (development, increasing selenium levels, wildlife migration issues)

Media only: backgrounder details on each river is found at www.orcbc.ca

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