



News Release:

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Kettle River tops BC's Most Endangered Rivers List for 2011 - "Sacred headwaters" in second spot - list highlights issues such as the need for water policy reform and improved protection of northern rivers

The Kettle River has topped British Columbia's most endangered rivers list for 2011.

The Kettle River runs through BC's southern interior near the towns of Midway, Rock Creek and Grand Forks. This river, already suffering from excessive water withdrawals, seasonal low flows and high water temperatures, is threatened by significant new water extraction proposals near its source. The river is in dire need of a water management plan that recognizes there are clear ecological limits to the amount of water that can be withdrawn. Unless greater efforts are made to address this issue, the fate of this beautiful interior stream and its fish stocks may well foreshadow what many other streams in the region will confront in the face of ongoing climate change.

"Most importantly, the issues unfolding on the Kettle highlight the urgency of updating BC's century-old Water Act so as to ensure the needs of fish and river ecosystems are adequately considered before making decisions on water extraction for various industrial uses", said Mark Angelo, Rivers Chair of the Outdoor Recreation Council and an Order of Canada recipient. The province has just concluded seeking public input on Water Act reform, and new legislation is hoped for in the coming year. "Modernizing the Water Act creates a significant opportunity to improve the state of many waterways, including the Kettle", said Angelo.

In the second position is the area widely known to the Iskut First Nation as the "sacred headwaters" in that it nurtures the source not only of the Skeena, but also the Nass and Stikine, all great salmon-bearing rivers. Located on the southern edge of BC's Spatsizi wilderness, the sacred headwaters is home to an abundance of wildlife, including caribou, stone sheep, grizzly bears and wolves; to many, this area is the "Serengeti of Canada" said Angelo.

Yet, the sacred headwaters is also the site of a major proposal by Canada Shell to extract coal bed methane gas, a highly invasive process that would compromise the biological richness of the great rivers that flow from this area. If approved, a maze of wellheads, roads and pipelines would spread across the proponent's 400,000 hectare tenure. Given the intensity of such development, concerns include the likelihood of altered drainage patterns and increased siltation. Vast amounts of wastewater, high in salts and heavy metals, may also be generated in the extraction process. Current plans call for re-injecting this polluted water back into the ground but this is an untested method that could contaminate groundwater aquifers linked to surface flows.

While there is a temporary moratorium on coalbed methane development in the sacred headwaters, it is set to expire in 2012, at which point development could proceed. "There is widespread support for making this moratorium permanent, which would do much to protect the legacy of the great wild rivers that flow from this area", said Angelo. "The threats confronting this area highlight the need to be more proactive in protecting our great northern salmon rivers", added Angelo, who also chairs the Rivers Institute at BCIT.

Coming in at the number three position is the Peace River, currently in the midst of an environmental assessment relating to the proposed Site C dam.

In the fourth spot is the Fraser River, which for the 18th time in 19 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.

Coming in at number 5 is the Kokish River on Vancouver Island, southeast of Port Hardy. The river's salmon and steelhead stocks are jeopardized by a controversial run of river power project.

"As one scans this year's list, the issues and problems outlined are extensive and diverse, ranging from the importance of pro-actively protecting productive salmon rivers and ensuring that adequate water management regulations are in place to the need for improved riverside habitat protection," 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 and reviews 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 BC.

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

BC's Most Endangered Rivers of 2011;

1. **Kettle River** (water extraction, development)
2. **"Sacred Headwaters" of Skeena, Nass and Stikine** (coalbed methane)
3. **Peace River** (hydro-electric dam proposal)
4. **Fraser River, "Heart of the Fraser"** (urbanization, industrial development, habitat loss)
5. **Kokish River** (IPP proposal)
6. **Morice** (pipeline proposal)
7. **Taku River** (mining development, road proposal, leachate concerns)
8. **Similkameen River** (cross border dam proposal)
9. **Elk River** (development, increasing selenium levels, wildlife migration issues)
10. **Coquitlam River** (excessive sedimentation, urbanization)
11. **Bute Inlet Rivers** (IPP proposal)
12. **Atlin River** (impacts of dam and Whitehorse, Yukon energy proposal)

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

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