



**News Release:**

Monday, April 8, 2013

**Peace River tops BC's most endangered rivers list for 2013  
Lower Fraser and Elk Rivers follow close behind**

The Peace River near Fort St. John, which is threatened by a third major dam that would flood more than 80 km of the last largely natural stretch of this river, is BC's most endangered river in 2013. The proposed dam, known as Site C, is currently in the environmental assessment stage and approval could be forthcoming in the next year or so.

"If the dam goes ahead, it would have numerous environmental impacts, including the loss of key wintering wildlife habitat. Recreational values would also be severely diminished, many sacred cultural sites would be lost and the only class 1 agricultural land north of Quesnel would be flooded", said Mark Angelo, Rivers Chair for the Outdoor Recreation Council (ORC) of British Columbia.

Local opposition to the dam is widespread and passionate amongst both aboriginal and non aboriginal groups and all affected First Nations are unanimously against the dam. The dam also carries an 8 billion dollar price tag for a crown corporation that already has a huge debt that's close to being unmanageable.

Perhaps most significantly, the most recent BC Hydro electricity forecast shows no existing domestic need for the Site C dam and states that BC now has a surplus of power for domestic use expected to last for at least several years, if not longer.

"Given the dam's adverse impacts, the extensive local opposition and the current surplus of power recently documented by BC Hydro, the case for the dam has largely vanished" added Mark Angelo, a recipient of both the Order of BC and the Order of Canada for his river conservation efforts.

While BC Hydro forecasts show that power from Site C would not be needed for a number of years, some have stated the dam should go ahead to provide power for proposed liquefied natural gas plants (although their construction still remains very uncertain). However, to build Site C just to support a possible future LNG plant would be a huge environmental and economic subsidy that the ORC opposes. If LNG plants ever do come to fruition, alternative means to power them should be pursued.

In second spot on this year's list is the lower Fraser River with a particular emphasis on the Heart of the Fraser located between the towns of Hope and Mission, one of the most productive stretches of river in the world. "Given its proximity to greater Vancouver, this extraordinary part of the Fraser faces an assortment of development

pressures and is in severe need of a collaborative plan if its many values are to be protected”, said Angelo.

In third position is the Elk River near Fernie. This waterway is threatened by rising selenium levels that are leaching from nearby open pit coal mines. “While the province recently announced a moratorium on new coal mines until selenium pollution is controlled, there must be a much more expedited effort to reduce toxic run-off from existing mines”, stated Angelo.

Of the waterways highlighted this year as “rivers to watch” is the Coquitlam. This year marks the first time in many years that the Coquitlam has fallen off the main endangered rivers list. This is due to progress on several fronts, including the establishment of watershed round table and the implementation of a monitoring program that showed some improvement in controlling silt run-off from nearby gravel mines. However, an expanded monitoring program, under varying conditions, is required if concerns about excessive siltation are to be fully alleviated.

Also on the “rivers to watch” list is the Tamihi Creek, a small Fraser Valley waterway that has become a poster child of sorts for the need to better protect streams with exceptional recreational values from independent power projects. “There must be better planning mechanisms by which selected streams with exceptional natural or recreational values can be protected from private power development”, said Angelo.

As one scans the rivers that are profiled this year, it’s important to note that this year’s list is not meant to be all-inclusive and there are clearly other issues, such as “northern gateway”, or the Kettle River, that ORC will continue to follow. But this year’s abbreviated list focuses on those issues deemed by members to be most imminent at this point in time.

“The annual endangered rivers release, now in its 21st year, helps to create a greater awareness of the many threats that confront our waterways”, Angelo added. “And while we should be strengthening mechanisms to protect rivers, the ORC is dismayed by the recent weakening of habitat provisions in federal river-related legislation, such as the Federal Fisheries Act and the Navigable Water Protection Act”.

Each year, the ORC solicits and reviews nominations for BC’s Most Endangered Rivers from its member groups representing close to 100,000 members across BC.

#### BC’s Most Endangered Rivers of 2013:

1. Peace River (hydro-electric dam proposal)
2. Lower Fraser (urbanization, industrial development, habitat loss)
3. Elk River (development, increasing selenium levels, wildlife migration issues)

#### Rivers to Watch in year ahead:

Coquitlam River (sedimentation, urbanization – but progress evident)

Tamihi Creek – (independent power project)

**Media only: backgrounder with complete details on each river at [www.orcbc.ca/](http://www.orcbc.ca/)**

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