



March 12, 2021

Honourable Bernadette Jordan, P.C., M.P.  
Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard  
min@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Dear Minister,

RE: Designating the Heart of the Fraser as an Ecologically Significant Area

Over the past century, a majority of the foreshore wetlands, marshes and islands within the Heart of the Fraser have been logged, diked, drained and converted to farming. In 2017, three major islands that remain un-diked – Herrling, Carey and Strawberry – were bought by developers and extensively clear cut, often to the river's edge, to the detriment of vital fish habitat. Recent news of off-roading trucks crashing through the incredibly productive channels and gravel bars of this reach of river and damaging sensitive habitat has brought to light unsustainable practices your ministry is allowing to occur. Indeed, this message is quite counter to the excellent work your ministry is also doing to improve fish passage further upstream at the Big Bar slide.

Stretching over 80 kilometres between Mission and the town of Hope, this stretch of the lower Fraser River is an extremely productive network of channels, islands and wetlands for all Fraser salmon, endangered white sturgeon and the over two dozen other species that use these waterways. Beyond its importance for fish, the Heart of the Fraser provides multiple benefits to Indigenous, commercial and recreational fisheries, ecotourism operators, regional recreation clubs and countless others. Lower Fraser Nations have on many occasions highlighted the importance of this reach of river, the songs and stories attached to it and recognize its value for their future. Indeed, we can all agree this area has tremendous value to B.C. and Canada.

The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC, Watershed Watch Salmon Society and BC Wildlife Federation ask that the Heart of the Fraser be recognized and listed as an "Ecologically Significant Area" under the *Fisheries Act*, with special focus placed on the un-diked islands as they provide important habitat for numerous species including salmon and sturgeon.

As a new tool under the modernized act, we believe there is no better initial candidate in the country than the Heart of the Fraser for the extraordinary role it has in supporting the Fraser ecosystem and the numerous threats it faces from development. This designation would result in the application of a precautionary approach to management and further strengthen the need to develop a much more thorough conservation plan with First Nations, experts and stakeholders. At present, there is no collaborative management plan for this region and without it, we know the area could ultimately suffer from severe biodiversity collapse.

While education efforts and enhanced enforcement are key to ensuring compliance with the *Fisheries Act*, this will not be enough to protect the ecological integrity of the area and ensure the future sustainability of fish populations. Considering the exceptional pressures from ongoing development activities and past habitat damage and loss, extraordinary actions are urgently needed to sustain these important ecosystems.

We look forward to having a conversation with you about how we can support the Federal Government in moving forward with this designation.

Sincerely,

Mark Angelo, Rivers Chair, Outdoor Recreation Council of BC  
Aaron Hill, Executive Director, Watershed Watch Salmon Society  
Bill Bosch, President, BC Wildlife Federation

CC:

Rebecca Reid, Regional Director General  
Andrew Thomson, Regional Director, Fisheries Management  
David Didlock, Regional Director, Reconciliation and Partnerships  
Mike Carlson, Regional Director, Conservation and Protection  
Fin Donnelly, BC Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Aquaculture