

Fraser Estuary wildlife at risk from habitat destruction, say BC's naturalists

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BC's naturalists are calling on the federal Environment Minister to act quickly to protect wildlife habitat in the Fraser River estuary, by acquiring and designating additional land as a National Wildlife Area (NWA). In a unanimous vote at its Annual General Meeting in Salmon Arm the Federation of BC Naturalists (FBCN) endorsed a resolution urging Stephane Dion, federal Minister of Environment, to develop a strategy that would include immediate and comprehensive purchase and designation of land in the Fraser River estuary.

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Jeremy McCall, President of the FBCN, sees the situation as critical. "Environment Canada must act quickly to prevent the breakdown of the Pacific Flyway, used by millions of migrating birds travelling between the Arctic and South and Central America," he said. "The Fraser estuary is losing habitat rapidly, from urbanisation, industrialisation of farming and from port development." Anne Murray, the coordinator of the Fraser Estuary Campaign, noted: "As we speak, the decision is being made on whether the Vancouver Port Authority can expand its facilities yet again at Roberts Bank. This is one of the critical areas for shorebirds, waterfowl and raptors, as well as essential habitat for endangered Fraser River salmon and white sturgeon. We cannot stand by and watch it be lost."

The naturalists recommend a minimum of 1400 ha of Fraser Delta floodplain be designated as a National Wildlife Area, equivalent to three times the area of the present NWA at Alaksen on Westham Island. They also call for an end to habitat loss on intertidal areas outside the dykes. Ms Murray explained the positive economic value of such a designation: "By safeguarding wildlife and habitat, we generate economic and social benefits. When last surveyed, wildlife-related recreation such as birding in the US generated one million jobs, \$24 billion in employment income and \$85.4 billion in economic output. Natural areas raise property values and produce measurable health benefits for local communities. We need to evaluate other developments against this."

The FBCN represents 48 naturalist clubs with over 4,000 members throughout BC. The Salmon

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Arm AGM was attended by 175 naturalists, representing nearly all these clubs.

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