



## *COMMUNIQUÉ*

### **Resolving agriculture conflicts in Fraser Valley essential to protect salmon says new report**

Tax incentives, environmental farm plans, preserving key riverside areas some of the solutions

**June 13th, 2005, Vancouver, B.C.** – Intensive farming in the eastern Fraser Valley is threatening to destroy what little remains of the rich riverside habitat along the Fraser River which salmon stocks depend on for survival, but it's not too late to protect these vital areas, says a new report released today by the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council (PFRCC).

In the report, entitled **Conflicts Between Agriculture and Salmon in the Eastern Fraser Valley**, authors Dr. Marvin Rosenau and Mark Angelo examine how more than 100 years of farming activity in the area between Mission and Hope have impacted salmon and steelhead habitats. Recognizing that the growth in intensive farming as well as the re-zoning of land for residential and industrial activity will continue, the authors offer some solutions that would allow farms and fish to co-exist more peacefully.

“There aren't too many places in the world where a great city like Vancouver is located in such close proximity to an incredible stretch of river, such as the Hope to Mission section of the Fraser River, that remains largely in a natural state,” says Angelo. “However, many of the values of this great river will continue to be lost unless we act quickly to protect areas along the Fraser and its tributaries that support salmon stocks. There is a great opportunity for many partners, including government, farmers, First Nations and conservation groups, to work together to protect this valuable natural asset.”

The Fraser River watershed supports some of the world's largest salmon runs. At the same time, the valley is one of B.C.'s most significant agricultural production areas, generating more than \$1 billion annually in gross farm receipts. The report found that if nothing is done to address the impact of intensive farming and its related activities, such as clearing native vegetation along river banks, and channelization, diking and diversion projects along the Fraser, Chilliwack and Harrison Rivers and their floodplains, it could prove to be the final straw for the area's valuable wetlands and riparian zones which have been under pressure from agricultural activities since the mid-19th century.

Riparian zones are the places alongside streams and rivers where native grasses, shrubs and trees protect fish by providing food and shelter and helping to regulate water temperature and water quality by acting as a buffer from pollutants on land. The report highlights the strides that have already been made by senior and local government agencies in dealing with the fish-agriculture conflict such as improving the way manmade ditches and channelized streams are cleaned and maintained to reduce the impact on fish, and introducing the BC Environmental Farm Plan initiative, but it concludes more needs to be done.

The report's recommendations include:

- Expanding the BC Environmental Farm Plan program – currently a voluntary initiative for individual farms – to be more systematically applied throughout the Eastern Fraser Valley and perhaps made compulsory.
- The purchasing of key private land with high riparian value along the Fraser and Chilliwack rivers by governments or private conservation groups.
- Introducing tax incentives to encourage the restoration and protection of small streams alongside intensively cultivated fields.
- Developing a land use plan for the Hope to Mission stretch of the Fraser, based on input from all stakeholders, aimed at protecting and better managing key riparian areas. This could include initiatives such as establishing greenway belts along larger streams similar to what many other communities worldwide are now doing.
- Discontinuing deep-pit gravel mining on the Fraser River floodplain near areas with high riparian values and, where feasible, decommissioning the rip-rap (i.e. concrete armouring used along streambanks to prevent erosion) in favour of more innovative approaches such as set back dikes.
- Curtailing further development for intensive farming purposes in marginal agricultural lands with high wetland values.

**TO OBTAIN A COPY OF CONFLICTS BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND FISH AND TO VIEW PHOTOS FROM THE REPORT, VISIT: [www.fish.bc.ca](http://www.fish.bc.ca)**

Established in 1998, the PFRCC is an independent body with a mandate to report annually on the status of B.C.'s salmon stocks, their habitat and related ecosystems. PFRCC reports advise the public and governments on salmon conservation issues, and provide recommendations with a long-term strategic focus.

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