



December 10, 2013

Jeff Juthans MRM
Land & Resource Specialist
Regional Initiatives Office
South Coast Region
Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
Suite 200 - 10428 153rd Street, Surrey, BC V3R 1E1
Tel: (604) 586-4287 Fax: (604) 586-4434
E-mail: Jeff.Juthans@gov.bc.ca

Dear Mr. Juthans:

Re: Proposed Harrison-Chehalis Wildlife Management Area

BC Nature (Federation of BC Naturalists) supports the proposed Harrison-Chehalis Wildlife Management Area. We are pleased that the Ministry is finally acting to establish this designation.

We fully endorse this Wildlife Management Area designation and have supported this proposal for the past twenty-three years. Our organization wrote in 1990 to the Wildlife Branch, Ministry of Environment, asking that Crown land be reviewed in this area, with a view to protection for wildlife. The reply in January 1991 stated the Ministry's intentions "to secure Harrison-Chehalis under a Section 101 transfer, with a WMA in mind". Designation was unfortunately not finalized although the management plan was agreed upon. In 1998 representatives from BC Nature participated in the Fraser Lowlands Protected Area Study Working Group, initiated by the Lower Mainland Inter-Agency Management Committee and including representatives from government, industry and public interest groups. That Working Group recommended the establishment of the Harrison-Chehalis Wildlife Management Area.

As you well know, the Harrison-Chehalis is a critical area for protection, especially as the Fraser Lowlands Ecosection is under-represented in the provincial protected areas. This was recognized by the Lower Mainland Protected Areas Regional Public Advisory Committee in 1996 when that group recommended that approximately 1,000 hectares of Crown land be designated for protection within the Fraser Lowlands. It was a very positive action in 2009 when the Bert Brink Wildlife Management Area was designated. It too had been one of the areas identified for protection (then named McGillivray Slough) within the Fraser Lowlands Ecosection.

Naturalists and ecotourists are drawn to the large number of eagles feeding and perching along the Harrison-Chehalis at this time of year. The salmon, sturgeon, and other fish species that thrive in this wetland complex, drive the food web and benefit numerous bird species and many other species. The extensive wetlands of the confluence of the Chehalis with the Harrison River, the Morice Creek wetlands, and the large Harrison Bay area provide very important habitat for many species.

In the past decade public interest and recognition of the values of the “Heart of the Fraser” have grown considerably. The proposed Harrison-Chehalis Wildlife Management Area contributes substantially to the wildlife habitat of the Heart of the Fraser.

Local citizens have named this area the “Chehalis Flats Bald Eagle and Salmon Preserve” with focus to develop some etiquette and understanding about “how we can all live together most harmoniously by incorporating some seasonal rules, to reduce human impact, so we do not ‘love this wonderful place to death!’”

One suggestion to government, given the extent of increased interests and pressures on these wetlands, is to review and update the 1997 management plan. BC Nature would be pleased to assist.

As your background information notes, the area is recognized as internationally significant for birds, through the Important Bird Area designation, Chehalis River Estuary (#BC033). Its global significance is ‘Congregatory Species’, meaning concentrations of birds during one or more seasons. The Chehalis River Estuary Important Bird Area supports large numbers of wintering bald eagle and trumpeter swans. Nature Canada and Bird Studies Canada are the Canadian partners for Important Bird Areas, and BC Nature coordinates the caretaker program in BC together with Bird Studies Canada.

In conclusion, BC Nature is pleased that government is proceeding with the designation of this Wildlife Management Area. We look forward to the announcement that the designation is complete.

Sincerely,



John Neville
President
Federation of BC Naturalists (BC Nature)

cc
Chilliwack Field Naturalists
Abbotsford Mission Naturalists
Important Bird Area Caretaker
Nature Canada
Bird Studies Canada
The Nature Trust
Chehalis Flats Bald Eagle and Salmon Preserve