TO: The Honourable Glen Clark, Premier of B.C.

FROM: Boundary Bay Conservation Committee

DATE: March 19, 1999

RE: Two letters

1. Sale of Crown Lands Purchased for Conservation in the Boundary Bay Ecosystem
2. Sale of Roberts Bank Back-Up Lands with no protection of wildlife habitat

NO. OF PAGES: 3 plus cover

cc: Hon. Corky Evans, B.C. Minister of Agriculture and Food
Hon. Cathy McGregor, B.C. Minister of Environment, Lands and Parks
Hon. Joy McPhail, B.C. Minister of Finance
Jim McCraken, B.C. Min. of Environment
Kirk Miller, Chair, Agricultural Land Commission
Paul Skyte, Greater Vancouver Regional District
Ron Erikson, Pacific Estuary Conservation Program
Mayor and Council, Corporation of Delta
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Mike Harcourt, Sustainable Development Institute
Hon. Christine Stewart, Federal Minister of Environment
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BOUNDARY BAY CONSERVATION COMMITTEE
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Attention: The Honourable Glen Clark
Premier of B.C. Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

March 19, 1999

RE: Sale of Crown Lands Purchased for Conservation in the Boundary Bay Ecosystem

Dear Premier:

The B.C. Government is currently discussing the sale of crown lands purchased for conservation purposes in the Boundary Bay ecosystem. It is incomprehensible to the Boundary Bay Conservation Committee (BBCC) why the B.C. Government is considering the sale of lands that they have recognized as crucial to the protection of internationally and nationally significant wildlife habitat.

Under different programs, lands in Delta and Surrey were purchased by the B.C. Government for conservation purposes. One program was the Greenbelt Properties purchased under the Greenbelt Protection Fund Act initiated by Premier W.A.C. Bennett in 1972. Another program was the Farm Program Properties of 1974. At least two of these are waterfront properties on Boundary Bay in Delta. According to the Delta Agricultural Study of 1992, there are 639 hectares (1,579) acres of these crown lands in Delta. There are also several properties in Surrey. It is our understanding that many, if not all, of the Surrey properties are on the shores of Mud Bay beside the estuaries of the Nicomekl and Serpentine Rivers.

To our horror we have learned that these properties have been lumped together with formerly expropriated lands and are in imminent peril of being sold. The conservation lands were transferred from the Land Commission to Property Management in Cloverdale under the Ministry of Agriculture many years ago. Then they were sent to the Ministry of Lands in Victoria.

Now these lands are being prepared for sale by the B.C. Assets and Lands Corporation which appears to be unaware of their history and their international significance as wildlife habitat.

To sell these lands would be a total betrayal of the public trust. These lands were purchased with taxpayers' money. It was also taxpayers' money that funded several studies of Boundary Bay. In 1995, Premier Harcourt declared Boundary Bay a Wildlife Management Area and, under the Nature Legacy Program, spent $9.6 million of taxpayers' money (all levels of gov't) to acquire 143 hectares (353 acres) around Boundary Bay in recognition of the extraordinary wildlife values.
If the B.C. Government intends to have integrity with its declaration of the importance of the Boundary Bay ecosystem, then it is essential to take immediate action and retain provincial ownership of these crown lands in perpetuity. The lands adjacent to Boundary Bay should be transferred to the Boundary Bay Wildlife Management Area under the Ministry of Environment. Other crown lands purchased for conservation should be protected and managed jointly by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment.

Your attention to this issue is crucial to the future of the Boundary Bay ecosystem.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Susan Jones
Director: BBCC

cc: Hon. Corky Evans, B.C. Minister of Agriculture and Food
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Gordon Hugg, MLA, Surrey-White Rock
The Boundary Bay Conservation Committee (BBCC) is concerned to learn that the Roberts Bank Back-Up Lands (expropriated in 1968/69) are being sold to farmers without safeguards for wildlife habitat. This is in contradiction of all agreements made regarding these lands. The responsibility for the dispersion of these lands is in the hands of the B.C. Assets and Lands Corporation which appears to be unaware of their international significance as wildlife habitat. The staff are disregarding the Boundary Bay Studies and their recommendations for covenants that would protect wildlife habitat in perpetuity. One example is recommendation 2.9.2 of the B.C. Government's Roberts Bank Back-Up Land Study of 1993:

"In such cases where land is returned to private ownership, stringent conservation covenants registered on the land title defining a management plan for the lands which protects and enhances sustainable agricultural and wildlife habitat values would be required."1

The fact that this and similar recommendations are being ignored makes a mockery of the cooperative process of the past ten years during which taxpayers' money was spent studying the Boundary Bay ecosystem. It also makes a mockery of the Nature Legacy program which declared Boundary Bay a Wildlife Management Area in 1995 and spent $8.6 million acquiring 143 hectares around Boundary Bay in recognition of the extraordinary wildlife values. All levels of government contributed to the studies and purchases and, therefore, should be very concerned about the B.C. Government's apparent disregard of cooperative agreements and funding. Why isn't the B.C. Ministry of Environment ensuring soil-based farming and habitat protection on these lands?

It would be tragic to see the B.C. Government initiate sales of these lands in a manner which removes the government's power to ensure appropriate farm practices which will protect internationally and nationally significant wildlife habitat.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Jones, Director: BBCC

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The Honourable Glen Clark  
Premier of B.C.  
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Victoria, B.C.  
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17 March 1999

RE: Sale of Vital Crown Wildlife Habitat and Farmland In the Boundary Bay Ecosystem

The most important stopover in Canada for birds migrating on the Pacific Flyway, the Fraser River delta in B.C., is under threat from provincial government plans to sell Crown Lands around Boundary Bay in Delta.

Even though 75 to 80% of the Fraser delta wetlands have already been lost to development, up to 5 million birds from twenty countries on three continents still depend on this vital stopover. Populations of many of these migrants are suffering from loss of habitat in other stopovers e.g., 30 out of 45 shorebird species that regularly occur in Canada may be in decline.

A well-informed and vigilant public together with committed wildlife agencies has encouraged previous governments to protect vital Pacific Flyway habitats in Boundary Bay:

- A far-sighted provincial government introduced legislation in 1972, the Green Belt Protection Fund Act, "to encourage the establishment and preservation in perpetuity" of green belts.

- The province was offered and bought key farmlands on Boundary Bay as Green Belt "because being on the waterfront, the land has great conservation value" said chair of the Land Commission in 1974 (Delta File #2404040, #2404041; Surrey File #2404000, #2404001, #2404002, #2404003).

- BC Premier Harcourt declared the 11,000 hectares of Boundary Bay outside the dyke as a Wildlife Management Area in 1995. He said "how we protect this wonderful place in the face of development and economic demands is a measure of how future generations will judge us".

- In a 1995 partnership with Environment Canada, the Greater Vancouver Regional District and the Corporation of Delta, the province purchased another 142 hectares in Delta to "enhance habitat protection" on the Bay stated the BC Environment Minister. This $9.8 million initiative was part of the Lower Mainland Nature Legacy.

As well as being a vital Pacific Flyway stopover for migrants the area also supports the largest winter populations of shorebirds, waterfowl and birds of prey in Canada. The close to half a million wintering waterfowl and shorebirds move daily between foreshore marshes and upland farmland. Two studies have shown that the waterfowl take over 420 tonnes of green plant material from cover crops on Delta farm fields over winter.

A diligent and appreciative public together with willing farmers and government agencies has recognized the wildlife values of the delta ecosystem and encouraged governments to appreciate the cost to Delta farmers of supporting most of the wintering waterfowl grazing in the ever diminishing Fraser delta.
The Nature Trust

Delta initiated a study of human activity and the environment around Boundary Bay in 1980. This was followed by the 9 issue specific Boundary Bay Area Studies (2 federal, 6 provincial, 1 Delta funded, totalling between a quarter and a half million dollars).

In 1991 the Greenfields cover crop program was established. This partnership of government and farmers plants over 1,000 ha of winter cereals on Delta farmland for soil conservation and waterfowl winter grazing.

After the loss of 350 ha of wildlife habitat to the Vancouver Airport third runway, $2.25M was deeded to the Delta Farmland and Wildlife Trust in 1985 to fund stewardship projects for wildlife habitats on farmland in perpetuity.

One Boundary Bay Area Study concentrated on the Roberts Bank Back-Up Lands, the 4,212 acres of farmland that were expropriated by the government in 1987 for superport backup development. The study concluded that; “the public interest in the Roberts Bank Back-Up Lands require their immediate commitment to long-term agricultural and wildlife habitat use”. An Advisory Committee was established in 1996 to draft long term leases for farmers on the Backup Lands, to develop policies and management plans that encouraged sustainable, soil based agriculture and to provide support for wildlife habitat stewardship on the Crown farmlands in Delta. The committee of eight was co-chaired by the Agricultural Land Commission and BC Lands; it met for 6 months, but was suddenly terminated.

Now, through a new crown body the BC Assets and Land Corporation, the provincial government is planning to sell the Boundary Bay Green Belt lands at low, Fraser Valley prices. Further, buyers will be able to resell in five years for speculative market prices. Also the government has abandoned its commitment to long term leases on the Roberts Bank Back-Up Lands and plans to sell the farmland without any restrictions to ensure soil or habitat conservation thus succumbing to the pressure for greenhouse development.

These actions are complete reversals of government policy at all levels and contradict the spirit of all the initiatives outlined above. Fiscally such a move would appear irresponsible considering the cost of previous Initiatives. The loss of the good will of so many dedicated and committed people whether conservationists, farmers, or government employees will be catastrophic.

The squandering of Green Belt lands, the conversion of open soil farmland to greenhouses; and the invitation to speculators after five years will threaten the viability of the remaining soil based crop farmers. The resulting loss of habitat and fragmentation of remaining habitat will endanger the integrity of the Fraser delta ecosystem and its ability to sustain Pacific Flyway migrants and over wintering bird populations. The consequences could be an environmental disaster of global significance that will be felt up and down the Pacific Flyway and render Canada’s commitment to national and international environmental treaties a farce.

I would suggest that the government act immediately and:

- impose a moratorium on the sale of Green Belt lands in Delta and Surrey,
- transfer Green Belt properties bordering Boundary Bay and Mud Bay to the Boundary Bay Wildlife Management Area
- re-consider conditions on the sale of Roberts Bank Backup Lands
- if any Backup Lands are not wanted by original owners, lease long term to soil based farming
- declare Roberts Bank a Wildlife Management Area

Yours sincerely,

Mary J. Taitt