January 29, 2020

Honourable George Heyman
Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy,
525 Superior Street, Victoria, BC V8V 1T7
Via Email: ENV.minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Heyman,

I write to you on behalf of BC Nature (the Federation of BC Naturalists), which represents more than 50 naturalists’ clubs and 6000 members province-wide. Our membership consists of dedicated naturalists, including scientists, who are connected to, have expertise in, and concern for the preservation of British Columbia’s landscapes and the diversity of organisms that inhabit them. We support any effort to promote the integrity of our natural ecosystems, not only to protect their biodiversity, but also our lives and the lives of our descendants in British Columbia.

Members of BC Nature (Federation of BC Naturalists) are concerned about the impact of off-road/all-terrain motorised vehicles in the wetlands of the Fraser River estuary. It has recently come to our attention that amphibious off-road vehicles are in use in the South Arm Marshes Wildlife Management Area (WMA), one of four WMAs in the lower Fraser estuary. As you know, the estuary is an internationally-significant Important Bird and Biodiversity Area www.ibacanada.com, part of the Fraser delta Ramsar Site www.ramsar.org and a globally-significant Western Hemispheric Shorebird Network site www.whsrn.org. Tens of thousands of Lesser Snow Geese rely on the marshes at the mouth of the Fraser during winter periods. These geese breed on Wrangel Island, Russia, where they are considered an endangered species. While their populations are currently doing well, it is incumbent on British Columbians to maintain the staging habitats used by these geese during their migration stopovers. The South Arm Marshes WMA is vital habitat for numerous other waterfowl species as well as other wildlife. In addition, wetlands at the mouth of the Fraser have supported Indigenous people for thousands of years,

Recently an amphibious off-road vehicle was witnessed coming ashore from Ladner Marsh in the South Arm Wildlife Management Area. The witness, a waterfowl hunter, who describes this area as “a jewel of unique wilderness, full of birds”, spoke to local provincial Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy staff and once informed that no laws or regulations were violated, contacted BC Nature.
We understand that BC Reg.24/2015 for the coastal Fraser River Estuary WMAs (Boundary Bay, South Arm Marshes, Roberts Bank and Sturgeon Bank) does not currently include prohibition of amphibious off-road vehicles. We feel strongly that this should be added to the regulations. BC Nature members are also anxious to have all Fraser Estuary WMAs Wildlife Management Area Plans updated, to ensure the future of wildlife in our province. Recreational and other pressures are increasing all the time. A comprehensive update would bring all WMA plans in line with current ecological knowledge, climate change prognoses, and the conservation directions of neighbouring municipalities e.g. Delta’s Birds and Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (www.delta.ca), Richmond’s Ecological Network Management Strategy (www.richmond.ca) and Metro Vancouver’s Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (www.metrovancouver.org). Members of BC Nature would be pleased to meet with you or your staff to discuss these issues further. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours truly,

Cornelis (Kees) Visser, Ph.D., P. Geol.
President, BC Nature