

OUTDOOR RECREATION COUNCIL OF BC

News Release

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Cheakamus River ties with Georgia Basin steelhead streams for dubious honour of BC's Most Endangered River of 2006

After a year marked by a train derailment and subsequent toxic spill that killed hundreds of thousands of fish, it's no surprise that the **Cheakamus River** heads the list for BC's most endangered river of 2006.

"This spill had deadly consequences, killing up to half a million fish, including salmon, steelhead and trout," notes Mark Angelo, Chair of the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC's Rivers Committee. "Its effects on local fish stocks will be felt for many years, if not decades, and this may well be the most catastrophic spill that has taken place in BC over the last several decades."

What may come as a surprise, however, is that the fate of the **Greater Georgia Basin steelhead streams** was considered so equally critical that it tied with the Cheakamus for first place on this year's list.

"The steelhead, which many think of as a sea-going trout but which is in fact a salmon, is a great symbol of BC and has garnered a passionate following among river stewards across the province," says Angelo. "Yet, despite its many attributes, steelhead stocks are in decline or considered 'at risk' on a number of streams in the southern part of the province, including the Seymour, Capilano, Coquihalla and Cheakamus rivers, as well as streams on Vancouver Island such as the Englishman and Puntledge.

"While changing ocean conditions are certainly a factor, we can't overlook the importance of protecting freshwater habitat. In fact, protecting or restoring rivers and increasing their productivity are important tools in trying to compensate for cyclical reductions in marine survival."

The **Fraser River**, which topped last year's Most Endangered Rivers list (and which has been in the top five Most Endangered Rivers 13 times in the last 14 years) sits at the number three position in 2006. Along with long-standing threats to the health of the river including urbanization, industrial pollution, agricultural run-off, gravel extraction and damaged riparian habitat are newer issues such as missing sockeye salmon, low summer flows and reduced protection for many urban stream tributaries.

In the number four spot is BC's most threatened wilderness river: the **Taku River**. Located 100 km south of Atlin, this waterway faces the prospect of a proposed mine and access road, which will have significant impacts on the health of the river, its riparian areas and the species that inhabit both.

The **Coldwater River**, one of the tributary streams of the Nicola River system, takes the number five spot on this year's list. While there have been some improvements on the Nicola River system over the past 18 months, the Coldwater River remains a source of concern. Low summer flows have resulted in increased summer water

temperatures that can be lethal for fish and excessive water extraction (for irrigation, agricultural and tourism use) is a major issue.

(To find out which other rivers made this year's BC Most Endangered Rivers list, please see below.)

"The problems outlined in this year's list are extensive and diverse, ranging from toxic spills and low summer flows to the need to restore damaged habitats and rebuild threatened fisheries," explains Angelo. "These issues highlight the fact that you cannot separate the health of our fish stocks from the health of our rivers; they are completely inter-dependent. And within any given watershed, if river habitat is destroyed or significantly damaged, you lose any chance you may have to protect or rebuild fish stocks. Yet while the waterways on this year's list face many habitat-related problems, things can still be turned around if there is a strong enough will to do so."

Each year, the Outdoor Recreation Council solicits nominations for BC's Most Endangered Rivers from its member groups, which total 120,000 members, as well as the general public and resource managers from across the province. Submissions are reviewed by a panel of some of BC's best-known river conservationists.

For more detailed information on the threats to – and possible solutions for – BC's Most Endangered Rivers of 2006, please see the backgrounder on the Outdoor Recreation Council's website at www.orcbc.ca

BC's Most Endangered Rivers of 2006

1. (tied) **Cheakamus River** (toxic spills, significant fish kills, low flows)
1. (tied) **Greater Georgia Basin steelhead streams** (historically low steelhead stocks, habitat loss through urbanization, water extraction, water contamination, destabilization of steep banks, low summer flows, high water temperatures)
3. **Fraser River** (urbanization, sewage, pollution, lower summer flows, gravel extraction, agricultural impacts, reduced protection for urban stream tributaries)
4. **Taku River** (habitat loss because of mining activity and road building, acid mine drainage)
5. **Coldwater River** (excessive water extraction, low summer flows, high water temperatures)
6. **Coquitlam River** (excessive sedimentation, gravel extraction, urbanization, urban runoff)
7. **Chehalis River** (proposed placer and gravel mining, concerns about siltation)
8. **Okanagan River** (channelization, water extraction, urban encroachment, riparian habitat loss and the building of dams and weirs)
9. **Kettle River** (potential dam, potential for reduced water flows from proposed power project, species at risk)
10. (tied) **Salmon River** (declining fish stocks, agricultural pollution, flash floods, falling water tables, urbanization)
10. (tied) **Iskut/Stikine** (impacts of proposed power project, loss of habitat through road-building, possible mining activity)

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Media only:

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