

*The*  
**HEART**

*of the*  
**FRASER**

A key part of the world's greatest salmon river deserves better protection

**VALUES WORTH PROTECTING**

*Renowned for its biodiversity, this stretch of the Fraser sustains 30 species of fish, including BC's largest single run of spawning salmon*

*Canada's largest population of White Sturgeon live here, growing up to 6 metres in length*

*Hundreds of bird and other wildlife species thrive on the Fraser and its lush forests*

**The Hope to Mission Stretch**

*"This part of the Fraser may well be the most productive stretch of river in the world"*  
— Mark Angelo, renowned river advocate, Order of Canada recipient

**Protection Plan**

Learn more about protecting the Heart of the Fraser at our Web site:  
[www.heartofthefraser.bcit.ca](http://www.heartofthefraser.bcit.ca)

Photo: Bob Stewart

Inset photos, top to right: Ministry of Environment, Water and Heritage; The Nature Trust; Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council; BCIT

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## THE HEART OF THE FRASER

A new initiative aims to better protect the Hope to Mission section of the Fraser River, perhaps the most productive stretch of river anywhere in the world.

By Mark Angelo

The Fraser River is BC's largest and most ecologically diverse waterway. At its very heart, lies a meandering stretch between Mission and Hope that is one of the most productive stretches of river anywhere in the world.

Commonly called the 'Gravel Reach' because of the gravel and cobbles deposited there by the torrential currents of the Fraser Canyon, it wanders across a complex, ever-changing landscape of floodplains, side channels, wetlands and backwaters, screened by native black cottonwoods and cedars and hidden far from the constant din of Highway 1.

The humble name belies a rich ecosystem that supports an exceptional diversity of fish, birds and other wildlife, a truly unique natural bounty that, in turn, underlies extensive cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, recreational and economic values for First Nations, local communities, and indeed for all Canadians.

But the heart of the Fraser is also increasingly at risk. Situated at the edge of BC's busiest metropolis, the growing pressures of urbanization, agricultural expansion, resource extraction and land development are rapidly claiming the remains of this once extensive ecosystem.

To counter this, several individuals, along with the Nature Trust of British Columbia, the North Growth Foundation, the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council and the BCIT Fish and Wildlife Program are leading an initiative to bring together political, corporate and public interests to restore and protect what's left of these aquatic habitats and landscapes for future generations.

### Exceptional Abundance

The Fraser is a river of exceptional abundance. It remains the world's greatest Salmon River and the Hope to Mission stretch is widely viewed as the heart of the watershed, sustaining BC's (and perhaps North America's) largest single salmon run. More than 10 million Pink salmon will often reproduce in the main channel of the Gravel Reach while some of North America's largest runs of Sockeye salmon migrate annually through this corridor to spawn upriver. Chum salmon also spawn in the side channels while juvenile Chum and Chinook salmon feed along its gravel bars.

All told, the Gravel Reach supports more than 30 species of fish, including several considered at risk. It has the largest population of white sturgeon in North America of any river corridor not influenced by dams. As the largest and longest-living freshwater fish in North America, sturgeon can grow to over six meters long, weigh more than 600 kilograms, and can live for 150 years or more.

The list of species supported by this remarkable ecosystem goes on and on, seals, sea-lions, beaver, martin, bears, deer, cougar and coyote. Extensive bird populations include red-tail hawks, green and great blue herons, bald eagles and turkey vultures. It's also home to amphibians such as the Oregon spotted frog, western red-backed salamander, and the Pacific giant salamander.

This extraordinary abundance has sustained First Nations for thousands of years and today provides exceptional cultural, recreational, aesthetic, and economic values for all of southwestern British Columbia. All this is made possible by the wild, rambling nature of this stretch of the Fraser, the very attributes we have so often sought to tame.

While this complex mix of land and waterscapes continue to nurture and sustain much of the Fraser's abundance, it also faces increasing developmental pressures. Particularly worrisome is the lack of any collaborative plan or vision to safeguard its many values and, despite past studies and recommendations to preserve remaining habitat, governments of all levels have not yet been able to effectively protect this world-class ecosystem.

In contrast, downstream from Mission, there has been progress in mitigating impacts to the Fraser through initiatives such as the Greater Vancouver Regional District's (GVRD) 'Greenway Network' and the Fraser River Estuary Management Plan (FREMP).

In a similar vein, decisive and quick action is now needed to protect and maintain the ecosystem values of the Gravel Reach before they are lost forever. The Heart of the Fraser initiative seeks to achieve this with a multi-pronged approach that includes boosting public awareness of the area's outstanding ecological, cultural and recreational attributes while promoting the need for a collaborative plan for the corridor.

In addition, a major focus of this campaign, in conjunction with the Nature Trust, is on the acquisition of key private lands to be set aside for conservation purposes. With some progress already being made on this front, groups leading this initiative hope this will encourage various levels of government and First Nations to explore collaborative approaches to protecting key crown lands, such as Abbotsford's McGillivray Slough.

The Heart of the Fraser initiative signals hope that we can avoid the mistakes that have been made in so many other parts of the world, where once productive habitats along great rivers have been lost, or severely damaged. Few places on Earth still have such a rich and intact stretch of river so close to a major urban centre. Consequently, we have a chance to do things differently, but there is an urgent need for action if we are to protect the heart of one of the world's greatest rivers.

To find out more about the Heart of the Fraser campaign, visit: [www.heartofthefraser.bcit.ca](http://www.heartofthefraser.bcit.ca) or [www.fish.bc.ca/](http://www.fish.bc.ca/).

If you'd like to make a donation towards the acquisition of key private lands, contact the Nature Trust of BC at 604- 924-9771.

Mark Angelo is an internationally renowned river advocate. He is the Deputy Chair of the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council and heads BCIT's Fish, Wildlife and Recreation program. A recipient of the Order of Canada and the Order of BC for his river conservation efforts, he also founded BC Rivers Day and chairs World Rivers Day.

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