

T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation Program and Activities 2000-2001



***Speaking up for
fish habitat conservation***

***Involving fishermen
in habitat protection***

***Working to preserve
fish for the future***

INTRODUCTION

The T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation has been working hard this past year for upgrades to sewage treatment in Greater Vancouver and Greater Victoria, strong riparian protection standards on the Central Coast and full implementation of the Fish Protection Act.

This work has been greatly enhanced through funds from the Commercial Fisheries Conservation Stamp, a major contribution from the Vancouver Foundation and through fundraising efforts of the T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation. This report details the accomplishments of the last twelve months in strengthening fish habitat protection in the province of British Columbia.

SEWAGE POLLUTION CAMPAIGN

Even small amounts of the most hazardous chemicals found in sewage can cause irreparable harm to fish, particularly juveniles. The result is not immediate and visible like the aftermath of an oil spill. Dead and dying fish are simply eaten by other marine organisms.

Some chemicals suppress the immune system allowing the onset of disease. Heavy metals, pesticides, persistent organochlorines, plastics, surfactants and aromatic hydrocarbons can disrupt the endocrine system interfering with sexual and bone development. There is evidence that these chemicals can also disrupt the complex hormonal processes as juvenile salmon acclimatize to the saltwater ocean environment.

The toxins found in sewage can also change fish behaviour, inhibiting normal swimming, schooling and migration in ways that significantly reduce their chances for survival. The Pacific Salmon Commission is currently investigating whether sewage pollution may have had some effect on late run sockeye salmon that are entering the Fraser River far too early resulting in significant mortalities.

Some heavy metals and persistent chemicals that stay in the body biomagnify as they work their way up the food chain. Larger fish eating large numbers of contaminated smaller fish can end up with thousands or millions of times the level of toxins than the organisms that first absorbed them.

In the spring of 2001, the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) adopted a long-term sewage plan that allows massive volumes of minimally treated sewage

to be dumped into Georgia Strait and Burrard Inlet from the Iona and Lions Gate Sewage Treatment Plants. This constitutes the largest pollution input into Georgia Strait. The plan also allows continued dumping of raw sewage from dozens of combined sewage outfalls with an unacceptable clean-up timeline of 2050.

The plan violates the intent of the new provincial sewage pollution regulation which is designed to move sewage treatment towards secondary treatment levels throughout the province.

Both Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Environment Canada, the two federal bodies responsible for safeguarding the marine environment, have told the GVRD that their sewage treatment plan is inadequate. T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation generated a front page story in the Vancouver Sun on the sewage issue and the conflict with the federal Fisheries Act.

On the other side of Georgia Strait more than 45 million litres of raw sewage are discharged annually by Greater Victoria's Capital Regional District. Effluent tests show that the sewage is toxic to fish. The outfalls are located on a major salmon migration route. An extensive area is closed to shellfish harvesting. The seabed near the outfalls shows increasing levels of heavy metals and toxic organic contaminants over the last two decades.

The T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation appeared at the GVRD Sewage and Drainage Committee to press for their sewage plan to be substantially improved to include secondary treatment at the Iona and Lions Gate sewage plants. We called for a ten-year timeline for the elimination of raw sewage dumping. We also spoke as a delegation to Vancouver City Council on the issue and met with individual city counselors.

The Foundation also issued a warning letter to the GVRD Board of Directors stating that we are investigating potential legal action under the *Fisheries Act*. Sierra Legal Defence Fund is providing legal and technical backup for this investigation. We are in the process of gathering evidence and establishing legal options.

Through an Access to Information request, we have obtained an underwater video taken by the Port of Vancouver of the Clark Drive combined sewage outfall. It shows a huge build-up of raw sewage on the ocean floor in Burrard Inlet around the outfall. This is a clear violation of the *Fisheries Act*. We have produced multiple copies of the video to be available for the media and concerned environmental groups.

We have communicated our position on the need for Vancouver and Victoria sewage upgrades to the previous Minister of the Environment, the Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for pollution prevention and the new Minister of Water, Air and Land Protection.

The T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation sponsored a strategy session to bring together groups concerned about the sewage pollution issue and we are confident that a number of citizen groups will continue to work with us over the coming year to ensure that sewage upgrades remain on the public agenda.

RIPARIAN PROTECTION

T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation continued negotiations at the Central Coast Land and Coastal Resource Management Process (CCLCRMP) to demand tough riparian protection standards. The CCLCRMP is a land and marine planning process looking at land use, marine use and sustainable economic development for the Central Coast.

T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation called for an end to logging steep slopes, for a reduction in forest cut levels and for large buffer zones to protect salmon streams. We insisted on a continued moratorium on oil and gas exploration. We introduced strong wording in the plan to protect against salmon farm impacts.

We attended selected meetings where salmon impacts were under discussion and where we were able to influence the outcome in a significant way. We worked cooperatively with a number of marine and forest conservation groups to ensure a strong conservation voice at the planning table.

The Central Coast LCRMP concluded with a consensus stakeholder land and marine use plan that incorporates most of our input. A new two year forest ecosystem planning process has been set up to augment the work of the CCLCRMP through more detailed watershed planning, including more specific riparian protection mechanisms. This new process is based on stronger environmental principles and will be aided by an independent science team.

One of the core principles adopted at the CCLCRMP is the need to protect "hydoriparian" zones around streams, a concept that the T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation spearheaded. This is a much stronger notion than narrow streamside buffer strips. All the area under the influence of water in a stream must be protected. This includes the surrounding area that benefits from the groundwater supply. This area may be as much as 200 feet on each side of

stream. The whole watercourse must be treated as a continuous ecosystem. This takes into account streams impassible to salmon that need protection so that sediment and debris cannot flow into salmon-bearing waters. We pushed hard for this approach to be adopted and we are confident that this will give us a much higher level of protection than the Forest Practices Code affords.

This work on the Central Coast is being shared with conservation groups entering a similar process on the North Coast and T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation has pledged to assist those involved in the North Coast process to incorporate some of the same riparian standards.

OTHER FISH PROTECTION ACTIVITIES

Pitt River

We have helped the Pitt River and Area Watershed Network to work towards a community driven watershed plan, to go beyond the successful fight to stop gravel mining on the Pitt and to construct a plan to restrict harmful development in the Pitt watershed in the future. The Pitt River is home to the only remaining healthy wild coho run in the Lower Fraser.

CN pesticide spraying on the Skeena

T. Buck Suzuki lodged a formal complaint to the Ministry of Environment during the pesticide application process in 2000 when CN wanted approval for a major herbicide spraying between Prince George and Prince Rupert along the Skeena and Nechako Rivers. We were successful in getting some wider buffer zones for fish bearing waters and mandatory Ministry of Environment observers on board all train-mounted sprayers throughout the spraying operation. The issue was highlighted on a significant afternoon radio talk show.

Nechako River

T. Buck Suzuki continues to be part of the Nechako River Alliance, working for a cold water spillway at Kenney dam with all "freed up" water resulting from the spillway to go to an improved water flow regime for the Nechako. Alcan's latest drive is to get the western end of the reservoir dredged to allow more water in the reservoir for dry years. Local residents are strongly opposed as the increased drawdown would make some docks and streams inaccessible.

Toxins

T. Buck Suzuki has been involved for a number of years in a coalition of groups working to ensure that all pulp mills move to zero organochlorine discharge. We have been active on a provincial Pollution Prevention committee whose goal is to reduce toxins in the workplace and to switch to less toxic alternatives. We also

assisted the Labour Environmental Alliance in setting up the Cleaners, Toxins and Ecosystems Project, which is identifying harmful toxins at fish plants and other workplaces and working towards converting to alternatives, thereby reducing the toxic loading on the sewage treatment system.

B.C. Hydro

T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation Executive Director David Lane was appointed to the Board of Directors of B.C. Hydro and the B.C. Hydro Environment Committee in the spring of 2001. This has allowed a new level of influence on salmon protection and conservation concerns.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

SalmonWatch

The T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation produced a new edition of SalmonWatch, highlighting sewage pollution, urban stream protection and forest practices.

Articles included a report on the DFO-sponsored streamkeeper Workshop 2001, forest eco-certification and stormdrain concerns.

SalmonWatch was distributed through conservation and streamkeeper groups and directly to commercial fishermen and commercial fishing groups. Over 3,000 copies were distributed. Feedback from this year's edition was extremely favourable with many organizations asking for additional copies for distribution.

Sewage pollution booklet

A twelve-page booklet was researched, written, designed and produced explaining the impacts of sewage pollution on fish and other marine organisms in Georgia Strait. Over 2,000 copies were distributed in the Lower Mainland and Greater Victoria areas. There has been a lot of positive feedback about the booklet and many organizations and individuals have been contacting T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation for additional copies.