

Green Scene: A Tale of Two Rivers

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[photograph]

[caption: Boulders in the riverbed and shade from streamside trees create excellent habitat for salmon. Do you know where this part of the Coquitlam River can be found?

Kiyoshi Takahashi photo]

[Title in Tri-City News: A tale of two rivers]

The announcement of BC's most endangered rivers by the Outdoor Recreation Council was awaited with considerable interest this year. The Upper Pitt River, placed at the top of the list, faces a formidable threat from seven proposed run-of-river water power projects in the Upper Pitt River valley. The subsequent media attention may have convinced the Environment Minister to not allow the construction of a transmission line for this project across Pinecone Burke Park. Unfortunately, however good his announcement was for the park, it may not stop the power project. The project proponents had already identified a transmission route option down Pitt Lake in an underwater cable and then west through northeast Coquitlam to join the grid at the Meridian substation. If this - or another route - is found to be feasible, the Upper Pitt's outstanding wild salmon habitat will still be at risk.

A little closer to home, our much-maligned Coquitlam River appeared on the endangered rivers list again, this year in the number seven spot. I can't remember a time in recent history when the Coquitlam River has not appeared on this list - it seems to be the perennial candidate suffering from continual problems of siltation and urbanization. Despite these problems - or maybe because of them - the Coquitlam River now has a growing number of stewards committed to improving its health. In fact, given all this interest, I think the future of the Coquitlam River bodes well.

We make many uses of Coquitlam's water. Upstream beyond the end of Pipeline Road, a dam constructed shortly after the turn of the last century diverts water through a tunnel to Buntzen Lake and then into turbines on Indian Arm where electricity is generated for our use. Some of the Coquitlam's water is also diverted into pipes that deliver high quality drinking water to our homes. In past years, not enough water was left in the River for salmon - but times have changed. BC Hydro is now committed to ensuring sufficient water flows downstream to keep the river productive for several species of salmon. In fact, we are now into a lengthy experiment to determine which of two new water flow regimes will be best for salmon. A few years ago, BC Hydro brought all community stewards together to develop a Water Use Plan for the River. Out of this has flowed not only more water for the River but also a number of valuable studies to monitor fish productivity, enhancement projects to create more habitat for salmon in side channels and a renewed appreciation for the Coquitlam River ecosystem.

The original stewards of the Coquitlam River, the Kwikwetlem First Nation, are again coming forward to assume their rightful leadership role in taking care of this River. Among a number of initiatives, they are working with BC Hydro and other stewards with an amazing plan to restore the once-extinct sockeye salmon to the River. Community volunteers including the members of the Maple Creek Streamkeepers and the Hoy/Scott Streamkeepers are working to improve habitat, educate the community and increase

fish populations on important tributaries of the Coquitlam River. Groups such as Coquitlam River Watch and the Coquitlam River Watershed Society monitor wildlife and support public awareness initiatives. The City of Coquitlam has convened a Task Force to examine siltation problems and is monitoring water quality in the River. It's clear that many people care about the River's plight.

Despite its problems, the Coquitlam River remains a remarkably beautiful waterway that slices through our community. In some places, it becomes almost invisible and hidden behind a curtain of trees in forgotten corners of Coquitlam and Port Coquitlam. In other places, such as where it slides under the bridge on the Lougheed Highway, it appears as raging river during rainstorms with its putrid yellow colour and excessive load of silt. Upstream, the Coquitlam is transformed into a rushing river of cobble and boulders with riffles and pools where salmon take refuge. Once it reaches Colony Farm Regional Park just before it joins the Fraser, it becomes a placid meandering stream with a silty bottom. Along the River there are innumerable trails that invite your exploration and allow you to experience the River's many faces. Now that spring is finally here, why not take some time to get outdoors and acquaint yourself with some of this River's many charms?