

# Green Scene: Celebrating our Rivers and Waterways

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[photograph]

[caption: Paddling from Grant Narrows regional Park in Pitt Meadows to Widgeon Slough north of Minnekhada Park is one of the best ways to explore local waters and enjoy Rivers Day.  
Cliff Kelsey photo]

[Title in Tri-City News: Celebrate our rivers - keep them clean

Sub-title: BC Rivers Day on Sunday a good time to reflect on rivers' value to our lives]

This coming Sunday, September 28 is BC Rivers Day. Started in 1980 by Mark Angelo, a biologist at BCIT with a passion for rivers, Rivers Day is now celebrated around the world in over 30 countries. Although this Sunday will be the 4<sup>th</sup> year since Rivers Day became a worldwide event, our province remains one of the best places to enjoy and appreciate the countless benefits provided by our waterways.

We all seem to have an innate attraction for water whether we enjoy a day at the beach or a stroll along a riverside trail. Rivers, of course, bring us far more than mere delight. For example, in the early days of this province, they were our only highways. Even today, they remain important for transportation. In BC, many of our rivers sustain runs of salmon that, in turn, sustain us. We rely on rivers for drinking water and, in the dry interior, for water to irrigate our crops. Rivers are so fundamental to civilization that most cities only become established in places where rivers initially attracted people to their banks.

Locally, the Coquitlam River probably best epitomizes the many values of rivers. Almost a hundred years ago, its waters were dammed and diverted through a tunnel to Buntzen Lake and down to Indian Arm to generate electricity. Today, we still rely on that electricity although we now need far more than can be generated by this river alone. We also use the water in Coquitlam Lake for our drinking water in most of the Tri-Cities area. Coquitlam Lake is the largest reservoir of the three that supply Metro Vancouver and typically supplies the best quality drinking water. The glaciers that once carved their way through the Coquitlam valley into the Straight of Georgia left behind rich deposits of silt and gravel along the banks of the lower Coquitlam River that now provide a wealth of building materials for our roads and homes. Despite the fact that we have dammed, diverted and dirtied the waters of the Coquitlam, it still provides us with salmon and an abundance of recreational opportunities. On any hot day this summer, you could find dozens of people dabbling in the waters of the Coquitlam River. It is also the place where you are most likely to see wildlife that manages to survive in our suburban areas.

When rivers flood, as they do on a seasonal basis, they leave behind rich deposits of soil. All the productive agricultural areas of the Fraser Valley, including those at the mouth of the Coquitlam River were created over hundreds of years by the annual spring freshets that spread fertile silt over the floodplain. It seems that just about every facet of our lives has been enriched by the rivers around us.

As much as we love and rely on our rivers, we don't treat them well. For far too long the solution to pollution has been thought to be dilution – with water, of course. In Metro Vancouver, we still treat our sewage minimally and then dump it into the mouth of one of the greatest salmon rivers in the world.

Whatever we deposit in our rivers ends up eventually in the oceans where there is plenty of evidence this is causing problems. Recent scientific reports have documented growing number of dead zones in coastal areas around the world thought to be caused by excessive amounts of fertilizers and sewage discharged from populated areas. Far out in the ocean, where the currents slow and nullify each other, plastic debris continues to collect. One such area in the Pacific is now thought to be as large as Texas. Some of this material might have been originally discarded on a sidewalk and than carried by rain into a storm sewer and thence downstream to the ocean. The many cleanups that take place this time of year as part of the great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup can help to keep some of this debris out of the ocean...as can anyone out for a stroll who picks up litter from the street on any day of the year.

Locally, Rivers Day celebrations will be held this Sunday from noon to four pm at Peace Park in Port Coquitlam (near the intersection of the Mary Hill Bypass and Coast Meridian). There will be opportunities to take a trip on a paddle wheeler, enjoy a working boat parade, take a guided nature walk along the Pitt River and participate in other activities.