Columbia River Basin
BIODIVERSITY ATLAS

Backgrounder ~ February, 2011

A new version of the Columbia River Basin Biodiversity Atlas is now available at www.biodiversityatlas.org. Originally focused on the East Kootenay region of B.C., the Atlas now covers almost all of the Columbia River Basin in Canada (except the Okanagan and Similkameen). The biodiversity information included has also increased significantly. Currently, 32 species of management concern, three ecosystems, and three related topics or "influences" (conservation, restoration, history) are featured.

The Atlas helps improve conservation planning and decision making by providing science-based information in an easy-to-understand format. Through text-based profiles and the latest in Geographical Information System (GIS) technology, the Atlas links biodiversity information to specific locations within the Basin.

Though the Atlas first came to life in 2001, a User Needs Assessment process was initiated in 2008 to determine what users would like to see in a subsequent version. The findings of this survey, which helped inform the development of the current Atlas, are available for viewing online, here (on the Biodiversity Atlas website).

Columbia River Basin Biodiversity Atlas Mission:

To positively influence decision making through education and awareness - in both the public and private sectors - regarding native biodiversity in the Columbia Basin by providing high-quality, relevant integrated geospatial information that is comprehensive and easy to access.

What is Biodiversity?

Biodiversity is defined in the Canadian Biodiversity Strategy as: "…the variety of species and ecosystems on Earth and the ecological processes of which they are a part." Many people use the term interchangeably with "nature"—something which thrives in the Columbia River Basin.

Columbia River Basin
BIODIVERSITY ATLAS

Biodiversity around the Globe

There is a growing understanding globally of the importance of biodiversity for sustaining human societies through the provision of food, medicines, fuel, clean air and water, and other vital services. There is also a realization that all around the world biodiversity is currently being lost at an accelerated rate. The hope is that the more we know about the diversity of life and the way human activities can impact biodiversity, the better we will be able to protect and nurture the incredible diversity of life on our planet. The U.N. International Year of Biodiversity just came to a close at the end of 2010. To get an idea of all the amazing biodiversity conservation and awareness initiatives around the world, visit the website at: http://www.cbd.int/2010/welcome/. To learn about the organization behind the Year of Biodiversity, go to the Convention on Biological Diversity website.

Biodiversity in the Columbia River Basin

The Columbia River Basin is the fourth largest watershed in North America. The Columbia River drains a 67 million hectare (ha) basin that includes territory in seven states (Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Wyoming, and Utah) and British Columbia.

Although humans have lived along the Columbia River for more than 10,000 years, modern engineering in the 19th and 20th centuries has dramatically altered the Columbia River.

The Columbia River Basin in Canada is a very biologically diverse ecosystem.

- 67% of vertebrate species in British Columbia and 48% of total vertebrate species in Canada live in the region.
- Most of the animal species and many of the broad ecosystems found throughout the Canada-U.S. Columbia Basin are found in the British Columbia portion of the Basin - several are found only in British Columbia.
- Species diversity is high for all known groups of organisms.

Columbia River Basin
BIODIVERSITY ATLAS

Helping Preserve British Columbia's Biodiversity

The information available in the Biodiversity Atlas, through its dynamic maps and data, will help protect British Columbia's biodiversity by providing important information to resource managers, groups and individuals pursuing conservation efforts in the Columbia Basin.

For example, acquiring land for conservation purposes is a primary tool to offset accelerating loss of habitat. Groups acquiring land for conservation purposes can now make decisions about what additional lands should be conserved and how best to manage land already acquired for conservation, based on the data now available through this project.

Private landowners will be better able to gauge the impact of their land management by considering their decisions in a broader context. Local governments will now be able to consider this information in their water and land-use planning decisions.

Any individual, group or agency concerned about biodiversity – and protecting the rich and diverse species and habitats found in the Columbia Basin – can now access a range of data in one, on-line location.

Resource managers in Canada and the United States recognize that open, honest communication and effective information sharing are important foundations for resolving land and water use conflicts, and are essential to economic and environmental sustainability in the Columbia Basin.

The clear layout and language of the Atlas makes it accessible to a wide audience, including school children and college students. Raising the general public awareness and knowledge about the native species and ecosystems in this region will increase the profile of biodiversity in all public planning processes.

Columbia River Basin
BIODIVERSITY ATLAS

Partners:

The Columbia River Basin Biodiversity Atlas was initially funded and developed by the Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program (FWCP) in 2001. In 2007, FWCP collaborated with Selkirk College's Geospatial Research Centre (SGRC) to continue development and provide interactive map hosting. Today the Atlas is managed by the SGRC in partnership with major funders including the FWCP, Columbia Basin Trust, The Nature Trust of BC and a multi-stakeholder steering committee, whose members' names appear below:

Agency	*Participant*
B.C. Ministry of Environment	Albert Chirico
B.C. Ministry of Natural Resource Operations	Marcin Haladaj
B.C. Hydro Water Use Planning	Doug Adama
Columbia Basin Trust	Rick Allen
Consulting Biologist	Jakob Dulisse
Consulting Biologist	Marlene Machmer
Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area	Marc-Andre Beaucher
Fish & Wildlife Compensation Program	Amy Waterhouse
FortisBC	Sheila Street
Golden Councillor	Chris Hambruch
Golder & Associates	Bob Westcott
Ktuxana Nation Council	Dan Wigle
MOE Revelstoke	Cory Legebokow
Nature Conservancy of Canada	Pat Field
Parks Canada	Derek Peterson
Regional District of Central Kootenay	Meeri Durand
Selkirk College	Ian Parfitt
The Land Conservancy	Emily Nilsen
The Nature Trust of BC	Leanna Warman
WildSight	Rachel Darvill

Columbia River Basin
BIODIVERSITY ATLAS

For more information and/or to explore partnerships, contact:
Ian Parfitt, Coordinator
Selkirk Geospatial Research Centre, Selkirk College
email: info@biodiversityatlas.org
phone: (250) 304 6524

For media inquiries, please contact:
Andrew Creighton
Abaca Communications
Email: communicate@biodiversityatlas.org
Phone: (250) 551 0305