

NOTES FOR FREMP'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY

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It is a great pleasure to be asked to help celebrate FREMP's 20th birthday. Believe me, there were times when it seemed in doubt whether we would ever make it this far, but we have achieved a great deal through this intergovernmental partnership.

To understand the magnitude of the achievement, you have to go back to the dilemmas the governments of the day 25 or 30 years ago were facing in respect to managing the estuary. They realized that the estuary was a unique and vital link in the Fraser River and Pacific Ocean ecosystems. It is the place where fresh water and salt water mix, where migratory species of fish and birds rest and rejuvenate in migrations that are thousands of kilometers in length, and where there is an abundant diversity of native species

The threats to the estuary were well documented in those days: urban development pressures, industrial development, wastewater discharges, damage to habitat from log storage and many more. Just the sheer complexity of governance for the estuary gave rise to the possibility that permanent damage would be caused simply through lack of coordination and cooperation.

There were some who held the view that the solution lay in creating a super-agency and vesting in it all the powers of

the various jurisdictions with a role to play in the estuary. But it was quickly realized that this would be a mammoth task, that such an agency would have to be able to function as an environmental regulator, as a port authority, as a local government and as a land manager. The alternative that was chosen was to bring the interests of all the government agencies together in a partnership to facilitate a coordinated approach to issues that would bring the various jurisdictions to bear in a consistent way.

Over the years, we have come to recognize some of the basic principles of a partnership, and I want to touch on three of these for a moment. First, partnerships exist when all the partners realize that they cannot achieve their goals as effectively acting alone as they can through the partnership. Second, in a partnership, all partners are entitled to equal treatment regardless of their status in the constitutional scheme of things. And third, partnerships are multi-faceted relationships in which no single issue can be allowed to threaten the relationship as a whole. As our working relationship evolved, the partners in FREMP discovered the importance of these principles of partnership.

My role in FREMP was to represent the Greater Vancouver Regional District, which was invited to join FREMP in 1990. The invitation came at a time when we were reviving regional planning and developing the Livable Region Strategic Plan, and we saw in FREMP the opportunity to coordinate the policies and plans of local government for the “dry” side of the dike with those of the

federal and provincial authorities responsible for the “wet” areas of land and water outside the dike. As Lazslo Retfalvi used to say, we “spiritually transcended the dike,” which is a big accomplishment for a bunch of bureaucrats.

Looking back, I am amazed at the amount of work that has been done by FREMP. Some highlights are:

- Preparation and adoption of the Estuary Management Plan with the “Living, Working River” theme, which anticipated the concept of balancing social, economic and environmental aspects through sustainability
- The habitat inventory and classification system
- The log storage guidelines
- The sediment budget
- Area designation agreements with 6 of the 12 municipalities
- The Coordinated Project Review process - revamped in 2001 and now enjoying a 90% satisfaction rating from users – which processed 2180 projects between 1985 and 2004.

So there has been a lot of *effort*, but what about *impact*, which is often harder to measure?

Here the record is also impressive:

- Water quality has improved, as evidenced by decreases in fecal coliform counts and reduced contaminants in Great Blue Heron eggs
- There has been improved recreational access to the estuary as measured by the increase in the amount of shoreline with recreational access and the expanded

number of regional parks and higher intensity of regional park use

- There are higher volumes of marine cargo moving through the estuary, reflecting the importance of the “working” element of the “Living, Working River.”
- There has been a net gain in productive fish and wildlife habitat amounting to more than 92,000 square metres.
- We have seen 100% compliance with FREMP’s Log Storage Guidelines
- And we have had sustainable sediment removal where the sediment removed from the estuary is less than the amount of sediment deposited in the annual freshet.

You don’t get those kinds of results without learning how to work together collaboratively and resolve conflict. And you only learn that by forging strong human relationships. In preparing for this talk, I thought about how many people I have got to know well enough that I could call on them to help with any problem I had – FREMP-related or not. At the top of this list are three fine people who are no longer with us but who we are all remembering today: Rick Pearce, Jim McCracken and Brian Wilson. But there are many others: Allan Domaas, George Colqhoun, Vic Niemela, Dale Paterson, Mike Henderson, Pablo Sobrino, Brian Clark, Athana Mentzolopoulos, Joe Stott, Marian Adair, Hugh Kellas, Anna Mathewson, Ken Lambertson, Mike McPhee, Dianna Colnett, Valerie Jones, Pat Weber, Mike Nassichuck, Sharon Peters and Leslie Beckmann, and I am sure I have missed a few.

I would also be remiss if I did not mention some of the pioneers from before my time, such as John Wiebe, and the people from the community who have been so supportive, including Bert Brink, June Binkert and Dick Stace-Smith.

We worked through some difficult issues together, including the provincial approval and federal tolerance for the Liquid Waste Management Plan, the revamping of the Project Review process and the downsizing of the organization to fit the requirements of some of the partners. Along the way we devised our own conflict resolution mechanism in the form of the “Steering Committee,” an awesome and brooding body to which we would only take conflicts as a last resort.

If and when the history of this period of our management of our estuary is written, I think three things will stand out. First, we protected and enhanced environmental quality while welcoming and facilitating industrial and urban growth. Second, we made the estuary more accessible to people and increased their sense of stewardship for this magnificent waterway. And third, we set a new standard for intergovernmental cooperation in Canada and the world. Not bad. And not to say that challenges aren't there – all of us would like to be more confident about the continued stable abundance of our salmon resource, and we have some distance to go before First Nations and other Canadians come together in management of the river's resources.

But we can certainly celebrate the fact that this estuary is far more vibrant and healthy in every way than it would have been without FREMP, and I think we can all drink a toast to that.