

ENDANGERED RIVERS 2008 as reported by Mark Angelo, CM, OBC of the Outdoor Recreation Council of B.C.

The Kettle was again on the list, this time at #6

For details on all of the listed endangered rivers, go to the Outdoor Recreation Council website at www.orcabc.ca

6. Kettle River – (excessive water extraction, development, small scale hydro development)

The Kettle River is confronted by an array of threats ranging from development and excessive water withdrawal in its upper reaches to a controversial small scale hydro proposal in cascade canyon. Just as worrisome, the events unfolding on the Kettle may well foreshadow what other streams in the region might be confronted with in the face of ongoing climate change. Last spring, despite an above average snow pack, there was no noticeable runoff or peak in the entire Kettle River system for the very first time. In the view of many locals, this was a clear indication of water extraction pressures and yet, new proposals continue to come forward. Among these are large scale condo development, golf courses and ever expanding land development and settlement.

Last summer, the River was at an all-time low flow (so low that locals couldn't even tube down stretches of it). Such low flows result in increased temperature, increased algal growth and the deterioration of habitat for fish and other aquatic organisms.

To further complicate matters, there is a proposed water use application from Big White that would extract 350 million gallons of clean water from the existing Kettle River supply (this would represent a 228% increase in their existing license). This is tied to expansion plans for the ski hill and would entail the construction of upstream storage dams. This would, in all likelihood, mean less water available for existing downstream residential and agricultural users. In addition, local stakeholders, such as the village of Midway, have expressed concern about the ecological impacts of such storage dams as well as the impacts to the stream associated with a huge volume of urban effluent that would find its way into the Kettle.

In an effort to deal with these impacts, there is a need for the provincial government to establish a Watershed Management Plan for the Kettle River. This is essential in the view of many given the seemingly unbridled development now taking place within the upper watershed. It's also important to note that there are many authorized licenses that were not fully utilized during last year's period of record low flows and yet, their right to extract water remains in effect. On top of that, there appears to be an increasing number of unauthorized withdrawals. In light of all this, the development of a management plan must recognize that there are clear ecological limits to water withdrawal from the Kettle River system.

Another area of concern centers on cattle grazing and an apparent relaxation in the requirements of range-use plans that is resulting in greater degradation of riparian zones and general water quality. These effects are most significant in dry land zones such as those in the Kettle watersheds.

And finally, the river is also threatened by a planned independent power project on the Kettle River at Cascade Canyon (in the southern interior of BC about 20 km east of Grand Forks), a beautiful setting with significant recreational values.

The proposal, the Cascade Heritage Power Project, calls for the development of a 25 MW run-of-the-river dam on the Kettle River, just above the Cascade Canyon, and about 20km east of Grand Forks. It involves the construction of a rubber weir above the canyon, and some 800 meters of tunnel to a powerhouse at the base of the canyon. During low water flows, the amount of water that will be allowed to flow through the canyon will be reduced to 4 cubic meters per second or less.

An independent socioeconomic survey conducted by Yarnell and Associates (2001) determined that this power project “does not create significant long-term employment opportunities or other benefits for the community... [and is] inconsistent with commitments to respect neighbors, local land-use plans and First Nations” and that “the project would compromise the aesthetic value of the falls and general area, which is essential to the community’s economic and social wellbeing”.

Aside from cultural and tourism concerns, the Kettle River is also home to at least three red-listed and five blue-listed species of fish. One of these species is the speckled dace (*Rhinichthys osculus*) which is being considered for listing under the Species at Risk Act, and the bulk, if not all of the Canadian population, is found in the Kettle River watershed. The IPP proponent states that impacts to these species-at risk will be minimal, but in the mind of many, any potential risk to species-at-risk and their habitat is unacceptable.

The ORC believes that the Cascade Canyon should be preserved as a Goal 2 (Special Feature) provincial park as recommended by the Regional Protected Area Team for West Kootenay-Boundary through BC’s Protected Area Strategy, and as an Inter-agency Management Committee was considering in the late 1990s

Outdoors Recreation Council of BC was founded in 1976. The ORC works on behalf of its 25 provincial member groups, representing more than 120,000 individuals, as well as the greater public to protect the Bc outdoor recreation way of life. ORC is the only organization that represents the full range of public outdoor recreation users of BC’s land and water.

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