

Friends of *Morice Bulkley*

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Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Transport and Communications Regarding Bill C-48, the Oil Tanker Moratorium Act

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Dawn Remington, Chair

Based in Smithers BC, *Friends of Morice Bulkley* is a community group formed around a kitchen table in 2010 in response to the Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline and tanker proposal. As with most community-based groups, we're a range of young and old with varied backgrounds and professions. The connection to our river, the Bulkley, and wild salmon are what unite us. The proposed Enbridge pipeline route ran contiguous with the Morice, which empties into the Bulkley River, itself a major tributary to the Skeena. The pipeline route was set to cross steep, landslide-prone terrain¹, leading us to fear a diluted bitumen spill endangering critical salmon spawning and rearing habitats, as well as our drinking and recreational waters. Soon after we formed, Enbridge's Kalamazoo oil spill, the largest and costliest inland oil spill in US history, reinforced our fears and provided evidence that bitumen sinks.

We continue to be active as there are now numerous proposals for rail transport of tar-sands oil in various factions. The Canadian National rail line follows the Bulkley River from headwaters to its confluence with the Skeena. An accidental spill of petroleum products into a waterway would cause great ecological, social and economic harm. If Bill-48 is not passed into legislation, we fear the possibility of oil trains filled with diluted bitumen derailing or even exploding, which have similar characteristics to the Bakken shale oil that exploded in Lac Megantic, Quebec.

A second reason our region opposed the Enbridge Project was the fear of a spill from oil tankers on the north coast. Most northerners have experienced these notoriously dangerous and difficult to navigate waters. On BC's north coast, winter storms will frequently see wave heights of 20 metres, occasionally higher. Enbridge's over-confident assessment of their ability to launch swift, effective oil spill response in these waters left northerners incredulous. Enbridge's proposal produced one of the greatest public outcries in recent history in northern BC. It united a broad cross-section of the region – loggers and conservationists, conservative and progressive voters. Wild salmon are what unites us in this northwest region.

There are reasons why people 450 kilometers by road away from the coast support the Oil Tanker Ban. What happens on the coast impacts all of us upstream. Pacific salmon and a unique race of summer-run steelhead migrate through our region each year. These anadromous fish are

¹J. Schwab. 2011. *Hillslope and fluvial processes along the proposed pipeline corridor, Burns Lake to Kitimat, West Central British Columbia*. Prepared for Bulkley Valley Research Center, Smithers. www.bvcentre.ca

born in our river systems, migrate to the coast, and return to their freshwater birthing grounds to spawn and restart the cycle. It is possible to angle for and land a salmon or steelhead within the town boundaries of Terrace, Hazelton, Wit'set, Smithers, Telkwa, Houston, as well as many of the Indigenous communities along the corridor. Wild salmon are a part of our diet and culture; this is particularly true for Indigenous peoples.

In fact, from a poll done in 2011, 70 per cent of the province believe that wild salmon are as culturally important to British Columbians as the French language is to the people of Quebec².

Another reason wild salmon are important to us is economic. Beginning with the publication of Fennelly's *Steelhead Paradise*³ in 1963, the Morice and Bulkley have been steelhead fishing legends. Sport fishing tourism is a significant economic driver in our region. According to the IBM Business Consulting 2006, the annual valuation of the wild salmon economy of the Skeena watershed was \$110 million. The value of freshwater angling came to \$9 million annually and salmon related tourism was valued at \$7.6 million⁴. During steelhead fishing season, flights in and out of Smithers are full; fishing guides and sporting goods stores are busy. Of the nine fisheries management regions in British Columbia, the Skeena region has the highest proportion of international visitors, measured in sport fishing days⁵. Sport-fishing tourists support hotels and restaurants, while others are transported to all-inclusive wilderness steelhead lodges. We are a salmon culture, a salmon economy and a salmon nation.

Pipelines and oil trains hauling to either major port, Kitimat or Prince Rupert, must traverse landslide-prone mountainous terrain, thus increasing the probability of spills into salmon supporting rivers. The marine shipping routes to either port pass through numerous islands and, in the case of Kitimat, through complex, confined channels. This increases the spill hazard and would trap spilled oil in the path of migrating salmon. Salmon that are essential to our lifestyle, culture and economy.

The Skeena estuary is the second largest in BC after the Fraser and is the most important ecologic, socio-cultural, and economic zone on the BC north coast. The Skeena estuary is large, extending from far upriver down through the mouth and flaring into Chatham Sound. The Port of Prince Rupert exists within the Skeena Estuary. Circulation patterns are complex due to the broad range of Skeena River flows, some of the largest tides in the world and unusually high wind speeds and wave heights. Containment of spilled oil would be extremely challenging in these conditions.

A lack of understanding of Skeena estuarine ecology and the lack of an estuary management plan contributed to the annexation of Flora Bank into the Port of Prince Rupert jurisdiction in 1997. This happened despite Environment Canada studies in the 1970s that identified the

² Angus Reid Poll. Globe and Mail, Mark Hume, April 25, 2011. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/bc-residents-consider-salmon-a-cultural-touchstone-survey-finds/article594381/>.

³ Fennelly, John F 1963: *Steelhead Paradise*, Mitchell Press Ltd. 114 pp.

⁴ IBM Business Consulting Services, 2006: *Valuation of the Wild Salmon Economy of the Skeena River Watershed* prepared for Northwest Institute for Bioregional Research, Smithers BC.

⁵ Freshwater Fisheries Society of BC, 2013: *BC Freshwater Sport Fishing Economic Impact Report* www.gofishbc.com/PDFs/Footer/2013_bc_freshwater_sport_fishing_economic_impact_r.aspx

eelgrass beds of Flora Bank, specifically, as critical estuarine habitat for Skeena juvenile salmon⁶. (Critical habitats are those essential to the conservation of the species.)

More recent studies as a result of a proposed (and now defunct) LNG liquification marine terminal with causeway and berth impinging on Flora Bank demonstrated that some individual juveniles of all wild salmon species feed and reside on Flora Bank for days to weeks. Sampling from numerous sites around the estuary found that areas proposed for development nearest the Port had the highest densities of migrating salmon. For example, juvenile sockeye salmon were 2-8 times more abundant on Flora Bank than elsewhere in the estuary. Genetic studies demonstrated that captured salmon originated from rivers throughout the Skeena watershed. In addition, some sockeye salmon came from the Nass, Stikine, Southeast Alaska and other rivers on the north and central coasts of BC⁷.

This small region of the Skeena Estuary serves as an extended stopover habitat for particularly high density of migratory salmon from populations originating throughout the vast Skeena watershed and beyond.⁸ The idea of a special corridor leading tankers into Prince Rupert compounds the risk when the Port itself encompasses critical habitat for migrating Skeena salmon.

As residents upstream, our grassroots community group strongly supports a legislated moratorium on oil tankers to BC's north coast that compliments the Coastal First Nations enacted tanker ban of March 2010. Because wild salmon and steelhead are essential to the cultures and economies of our region, we urge the Senate Transport Committee to support Bill C-48 as passed by the House of Commons.

⁶ Hoos, LM 1975: *The Skeena Estuary: status of environmental knowledge to 1975*, Special Estuary Ser. No 3, Env. Can.

⁷ Carr-Harris, C., A.S. Gottesfeld, J.W. Moore 2015: *Juvenile Salmon Usage of the Skeena River Estuary*. PLoS ONE 10(3): e0118988. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0118988

⁸ Moore, J.W., J. Gordon, C. Carr-Harris, A.S. Gottesfeld, S.M. Wilson, J.H..Russell 2016; *Assessing estuaries as stopover habitats for juvenile Pacific salmon*. Mar Ecol Prog Ser Vol. 559: 201–215.