



For immediate release

Fraser River debris trap well worth the cost, study finds

Vancouver, BC (January 16, 2007) An independent cost-benefit study commissioned by the Fraser River Debris Trap Operating Committee (FRDTOC) shows that the Fraser River debris trap, which prevents large amounts of wood debris from ending up in the Lower Fraser River and southern waters of the Strait of Georgia each year, saves a minimum of \$8 million in downstream damage — more than 12 times the trap's operating cost.

The FRDTOC, with assistance from the Fraser Basin Council (FBC), works annually to secure funds for the debris trap from many sources. To ensure continuity and improve efficiency, the FRDTOC recommends that the federal and provincial governments, the Greater Vancouver Regional District and the Fraser Valley Regional District facilitate a multi-year, shared funding agreement to ensure continued operation of the facility.

The Province of British Columbia has recently committed to fund one-third of the estimated operating and contingency costs on a five-year, renewable term. The current annual cost of the debris trap is \$750,000, which includes an annual operating budget of approximately \$640,000 plus a contingency reserve. Without long-term funding commitments from other levels of government, the FRDTOC may have to shut down the trap in early 2007.

"The cost-benefit study clearly shows that the Fraser River debris trap is an invaluable safeguard against conflict with human activity on the water," says Pat Cruickshank, FRDTOC Chair. "It helps ensure the safety of people and vessels on the Fraser River and Strait of Georgia during the high flows on the river in spring and early summer. It also protects shoreline infrastructure and avoids habitat damage in the Fraser River estuary, where excess accumulations of debris are already a big problem. It is now time to put in place financial certainty for this critical facility."

The Fraser River debris trap includes a specially designed fin boom that is extended into the Fraser River each spring, just downstream of the town of Hope, BC. The average volume of debris captured by the trap is between 45,000 and 55,000 m³. In a year of peak flows, as in 1999, the trap prevents an estimated 100,000 m³ of debris — some 2,400 highway logging truckloads — and enough to fill 13 football stadiums to a depth of three metres. Such high volumes of wood carried by river currents, tides and storms create a dangerous situation. The trap captures 90% of the debris generated upstream, most of it natural deadfall such as branches, twigs, bark and snags (trunks with root balls attached). Since 1979, the trap has protected people, businesses and infrastructure in the lower Fraser and southern Strait of Georgia from risks posed by free-floating wood, submerged deadheads and debris build-up on shorelines.

As a multi-stakeholder group that includes government, non-government and private sector representatives, the FRDTOC oversees the trap operations and seeks annual funding from a broad range of sources.

According to public and private stakeholders interviewed in the cost-benefit study, debris creates various costs, such as repairs to commercial vessels (propellers and sometimes hulls), repairs to infrastructure (docks, piers, foreshore buildings and bridges), debris clean-up (on beaches, marshes and log booms) and habitat restoration. Decommissioning the trap would result in at least six times more woody debris entering the lower stretches of the Fraser and the Strait of Georgia. Based on the most conservative estimate of 25,000 m³ more debris in the river if the trap is decommissioned, the study estimates the resulting costs would increase from \$1.59 million to \$9.55 million, nearly \$8 million, and that the trap consequently delivers a 12-fold return on investment.

Other costs identified but not quantified in the study could include commercial and recreational fisheries losses due to degradation of estuary habitat, pleasure boat and float home repairs, sea dike and seawall repairs, increased frequency of personal injuries and fatalities, the need for more search and rescue resources, expected increases in damages following severe storm events and loss of economic and other opportunities associated with shore-based recreational and commercial land uses.

“The Fraser River Debris Trap Operating Committee, with support from the Fraser Basin Council, has worked tirelessly to keep the trap running, but cannot assure its continued operation in the face of funding uncertainty,” says David Marshall, Executive Director of the Fraser Basin Council, which serves as secretariat for the FRDTC. “We are seeing a growing appreciation of the value of the debris trap, and it is now time for focused collaborative leadership to take the long view and sustain this facility.”

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For a copy of the independent study commissioned by the FRDTC, see *The Fraser River Debris Trap: A Cost-Benefit Analysis* at www.fraserbasin.bc.ca.

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Attachments: *Backgrounder: The Fraser River Debris Trap*
Photographs of debris trap available on request

The Fraser Basin Council

The Fraser Basin Council is a non-profit society dedicated to sustainability. Established in 1997, the FBC brings people together to find solutions to longstanding issues and conflicts, and take advantage of opportunities to advance sustainability in the Fraser River Basin, the geographical area drained by the Fraser River and its 13 main watersheds. The FBC works to ensure that the decisions British Columbians make about the Basin today will advance the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability into the future.