For immediate release

2007 funding in place, long-term funding urged

Fraser River debris trap will operate this spring

Vancouver, BC (April 2, 2007) The Fraser River debris trap – a facility near Hope that prevents large volumes of mostly natural wood debris from floating into the lower reaches of the Fraser and Strait of Georgia – will operate again this spring, thanks to funding commitments from the provincial government, the federal government, the Vancouver Port Authority and the Fraser River Port Authority, as well as contributions from Translink, BC Ferry Corporation and District of West Vancouver.

While pleased that last-minute funding could be secured, the committee that oversees the debris trap says that the trap's future hangs in the balance each year, and it's time to end this precarious situation.

"A study we commissioned last year shows the trap pays for itself 12 times over by keeping navigation safe and preventing damage and clean-up downstream," said John Schnablegger, who co-chairs the Fraser River Debris Trap Operating Committee (FRDTOC). "This year is a good example of why the trap has to be ready to go each spring. With a higher snow pack this year, there is the potential for high peak flows on the Fraser. That could mean even more wood coming down the river and a more dangerous situation for vessels and foreshore structures."

The Fraser River debris trap includes a specially designed fin boom that is extended into the Fraser and captures between 45,000 and 55,000 cubic metres of debris each year. In a year of high flows, as in 1999, the trap prevents an estimated 100,000 cubic metres of debris of mostly natural origin — some 2,400 highway logging truckloads — and enough to fill 13 football stadiums to a depth of three metres.

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 cubic metres 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. At an annual operation cost of $750,000 (including contingency allowance), this translates into a 12-fold return on its cost.

Recently, the provincial government has made a long-term funding commitment to the debris trap – to pay $250,000 a year over the next five years, or one-third of the trap's annual operating cost, including contingency allowance.

"The trap delivers concrete benefits in terms of public safety and cost savings, so long-term leadership from all funders is critical," says Bob Purdy of the Fraser Basin Council, which provides secretariat, financial management and communications support to the FRDTOC. "The committee wants to devote less time to fundraising and more to ensuring the trap continues to follow best practices and delivers widespread benefits."

Those best practices include high environmental standards. "The Committee has worked hard in recent years to ensure best of the debris, and that is why it is chipped and ground for hog fuel rather than burned on the site as used to be the case," says Purdy. "It also wants to be responsive to potential ecological needs for large woody debris downstream of the facility." He notes, for example, that the trap now offers large pieces of debris for stream restoration projects, and that the Committee is interested in exploring other ways to achieve ecological objectives while protecting public safety and foreshore infrastructure.

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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.