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BURNS BOG AND FRASER RIVER DELTA DECLARED WETLANDS OF “INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE”

The Burns Bog Ecological Conservancy Area and vast expanses of the Fraser River estuary have now been recognized on the world stage as a “Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.”

The Convention on Wetlands is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. It was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and is the only global environmental treaty that deals with a particular ecosystem.

On Sept. 22, 2012, the Switzerland-based Convention Secretariat announced it had approved Canada’s application for a Ramsar designation for the ecological conservancy area and natural areas in the Fraser River estuary.

Delta Mayor Lois E. Jackson, a Metro Vancouver Director, said the Corporation of Delta has been working towards achieving this Ramsar designation for many years.

“Our hard work has finally paid off and we are so pleased to have achieved this important designation for wetlands in and around Delta,” Mayor Jackson said. “This designation is a significant step in our ongoing focus of protecting the environment in Delta and will ensure the security of our wetlands for generations.”

“The wetlands where the Fraser River meets the sea are the most important bird and fish habitat on the west coast of Canada,” said Metro Vancouver Board Chair Greg Moore. “This Ramsar designation puts a regional treasure on the international map.”

Delta played an integral role in the negotiations for the 2004 acquisition and protection of Burns Bog with three other levels of government and promoting the goal of a Ramsar designation for Burns Bog through the Burns Bog Management Plan. After many years of lobbying senior levels of government, including delegations to Ottawa in 2010 and 2011 during which Mayor Lois E. Jackson, Councillor Ian Paton and George V. Harvie, Chief Administrative Officer met with the Honourable Peter Kent, Minister of Environment, an application to the Ramsar secretariat was submitted in early 2012.

“The Government of B.C. appreciates this international recognition of our ongoing efforts to protect provincial lands, including our designation and ongoing management of the Sturgeon Bank, South Arm Marshes, Boundary Bay and Serpentine Wildlife Management Areas,” said

Steve Thomson, Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations. “We work hard with our conservation partners to ensure sensitive wetlands are preserved for future generations.”

Heather Deal, the Chair of Metro Vancouver’s Environment and Parks Committee, said Burns Bog is one of Canada’s largest undeveloped land masses within an urban area.

“It supports distinctive bog vegetation communities and recognized rare and endangered plant and wildlife species,” she noted. “Research work is well underway with a goal to achieving a 100-year vision of a self sustaining raised bog ecosystem. Metro Vancouver and the Corporation of Delta are committed to restore the raised bog ecosystem and maintain its integrity in accordance with the best scientific principles and stewardship practices of the time.”

Most of Burns Bog became a protected area in 2004 when the Corporation of Delta, Metro Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia and the Government of Canada contributed a total of \$73 million to buy more than 2,000 hectares of privately-owned lands. Over the years, Burns Bog had been a proposed site for a superport, industrial lands and other commercial developments.

Metro Vancouver now manages Burns Bog Ecological Conservancy Area, as a closed area with no public access, while Delta is responsible for drainage management and fire management.

The Corporation of Delta will continue to pursue opportunities to protect and preserve its natural areas. For example, Council recently approved the addition of some 405 hectares to the Burns Bog Ecological Conservancy Area.

The Government of Canada has vastly extended the existing Alaksen Ramsar Site in Delta, which was first designated in 1982, from 586 hectares to 20,682. The resulting Ramsar Site, now renamed “Fraser River Delta”, is formed by six components: the Burns Bog Ecological Conservancy Area (BBECA), Sturgeon Bank, South Arm Marshes, Boundary Bay, Serpentine, and the former ‘Alaksen’ Ramsar site.

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