

## **Watershed Watch Salmon Society and Shuswap Environmental Action Society**

Media Release  
June 2, 2009

### **Massive Shuswap Lake Development Faces Fisheries Charges**

A massive 220 acre residential resort development called Old Town Bay has been on hold for over a year after the Department of Fisheries and Oceans launched an investigation regarding the destruction of fish habitat. Now this investigation has turned into charges against the developer, Twin Anchors Houseboats. The site, which was the original town site for Sicamous, was previously owned by the local forestry company, Federated Cooperatives.

“We applaud the DFO and the federal government for taking action to charge a developer for damaging the environment,” said Jim Cooperman, Shuswap Environmental Action Society President. “For too long, out of control development has ravaged the community of Sicamous with giant condo towers, huge marinas and too many houseboats, so it is refreshing that finally the public and other potential developers can see there are consequences for not following the regulations,” Cooperman added.

In the case of Old Town Bay, the District of Sicamous approved a plan that showed protection for the riparian area adjacent to the biological rich Eagle River estuary that is high value salmon habitat. The original environmental assessment recommended that the developer “conserve more high sensitivity broadleaf forest...and not all homes will have frontage on the lagoon.” Apparently the biologist who prepared the original assessment was dismissed and a new biologist was hired. It is not clear if a second assessment was done and attempts to get a copy of a revised assessment from the District of Sicamous were unsuccessful.

There are six marina developments in various stages of development from the conceptual stage to condos now for sale. Some of these projects still await approval for the marina component. Despite the concerns of many residents the town council has approved every one including Old Town Bay. “The District of Sicamous can also be blamed for the wetland destruction at Old Town bay, as it has approved this development along with many others that are negatively impacting Mara and Shuswap Lakes, as well as the rights of long time property owners,” added Cooperman.

Until the economic downturn, the Shuswap faced a gold rush mentality over land development. There has been a push to develop properties adjacent to Shuswap water bodies because of the demand for recreation properties. Developers are only too keen to develop every square inch to maximize their profits, which has resulted in high density developments with massive marinas that threaten the health of the lakes. The Shuswap Lake Integrated Planning Process was developed in part to address the many concerns

over development. That plan is complete, but implementation has been stalled due to the lack of funding from the provincial government.

“The news of these federal charges against a foreshore developer should remind all levels of government yet again of the need to implement the Shuswap Lake Integrated Plan,” said Cooperman.

Hopefully, the news that DFO has charged one developer will result in more attention given to the issue of development on Shuswap Lake. Whether it is the water-ski slalom course planned for Turtle Bay on Mara Lake, or the estimated 1200 proposed marina boat slips, it is clear that foreshore development on Shuswap and Mara Lakes needs to be better controlled.

“Fish and fish habitat always seem to be the losers in our relentless pursuit to develop this planet,” said Craig Orr of Watershed Watch. “We need more good news stories of governments willing to protect fish if we really want wild salmon in our future,” Orr added.

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Photos available upon request