

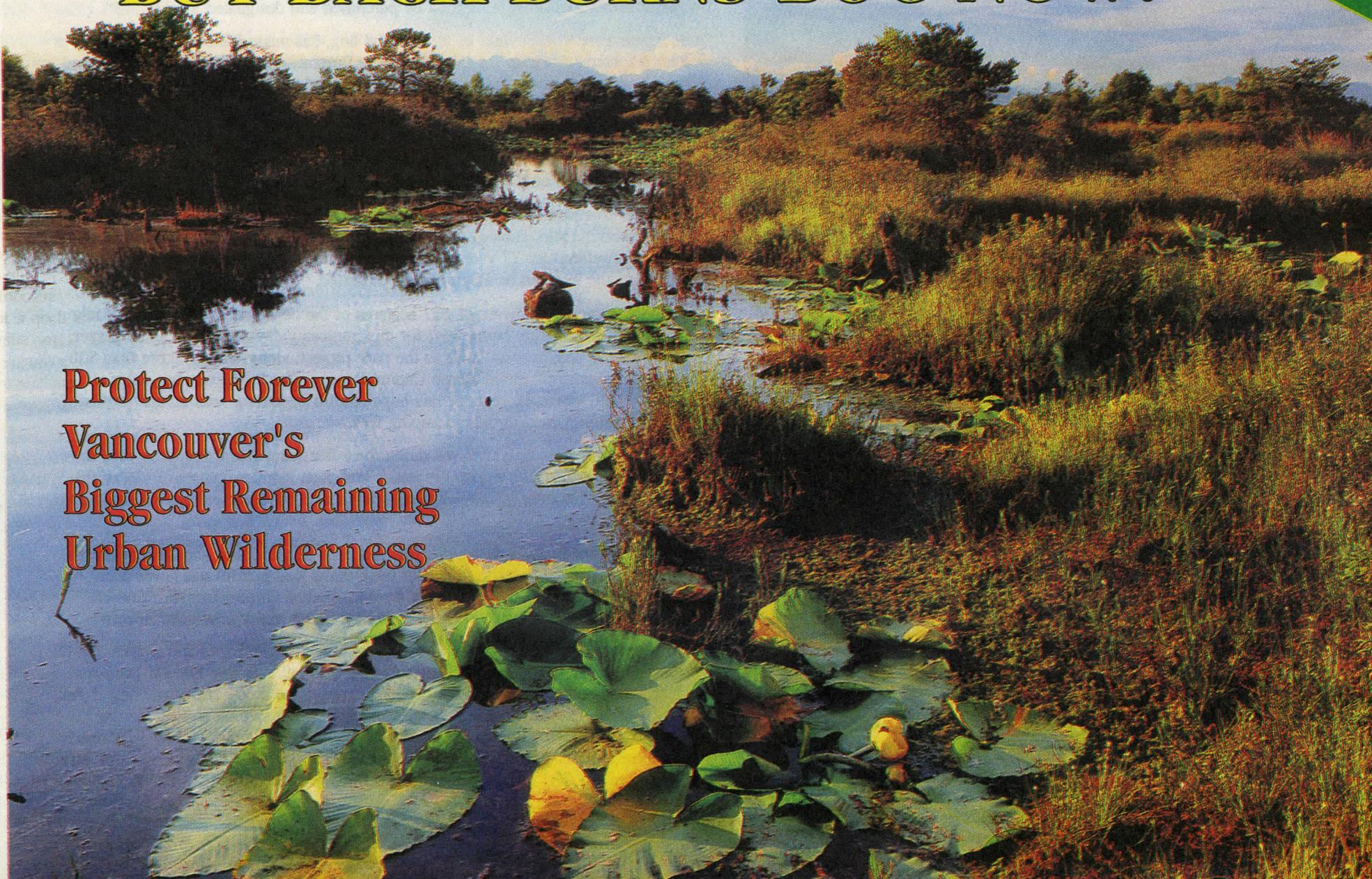
Wilderness Committee Educational Report Vol. 18, No. 3 - Spring 1999

BUY BACK BURNS BOG NOW!

FREE
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Protect Forever
Vancouver's
Biggest Remaining
Urban Wilderness

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David Suzuki says development schemes like the recent PNE/Entertainment Centre Proposal will "KILL BURNS BOG FOREVER"

The champions of Burns Bog's immeasurably valuable wildness have for many years fought one battle after another against an array of destructive development schemes ranging from ambitious to totally off-the-wall.

It's about time conservation won the war.

Burns Bog, the biggest wilderness left in urban Vancouver, would have been destroyed by the PNE-entertainment-theme park plan proposed by the B.C. Government in early February, says Dr. David Suzuki, scientist, author, broadcaster, head of the David Suzuki Foundation and world renowned spokesman for nature.

"As far as I'm concerned, this great wetland is a single, living organism," he says. "As a biologist, I think it's absurd to say it can be cut in two and survive."

The recent Disney-type development proposal included a site for the PNE, theme park, amphitheatre, film production facility and possibly housing. Like other mega-development plans before it (including a 1980s proposal for a deep sea port and industrial site, 1988 proposal for a 100,000-person city, and a 1992 proposal for a race track) this plan requires vast amounts of sand and gravel overfill and other services. Suzuki maintains, "How can you fill, pave and build on part of Burns Bog, provide a road network, bring in traffic that pollutes the air, change the water flows, and expect the rest of the bog to maintain its integrity?"

Over the centuries, Suzuki says, the world's bogs have become known as slimy, soggy, creepy places--useless wetlands to be "reclaimed". Yet in North America, bogs are one of the most endangered ecosystems, despite their great value as cleaners of the air and water and homelands for rare plant and animal life.

Burns Bog is believed to be the largest and most valuable bog on the entire continent. As well as being

home to a remarkable array of wildlife and vegetation, from sandhill cranes to carnivorous plants, the bog absorbs great amounts of greenhouse gases and stores and filters pollutants from rain water.

While much of the bog remains largely intact, it already has some ugly scars. The area is zoned for agricultural and industrial use. Around its edges are peat mining and cranberry farming and, on the west side, Vancouver and Delta operate a dump for millions of tonnes of garbage.

As many as nine private landfills are licensed along River Road at the north side of the bog. These private dumps continue to operate despite many reports of broken Ministry of Environment rules. They receive large amounts of industrial waste, including normally prohibited materials such as gyproc wallboard.

Pollutants include smelly hydrogen sulphide gas, methane, and toxic leachates, which dribble into the bog's ditches and feed into the Fraser River.

It was foolish of the Provincial Government to assume that the public would endorse its half-baked plan to save only part of the bog and allow a mega-commercial development to plug up the rest of the "lungs of Greater Vancouver". Two weeks after its announcement--following unprecedented public outcry and unanimous rejection of the plan by Delta Council--the Province, thankfully, backed off. But the bog is not yet saved.

Protecting Burns Bog will take a massive switch-around in thinking: tight environmental controls and buffer area zoning to prevent death by leaching poisons; an end to any more development within the bog itself; a phase-out of current ecosystem-wrecking land uses like garbage dumps and cranberry farms; the acquisition of private lands; and the designation of the whole bog as a Regional or Class A Provincial Park.

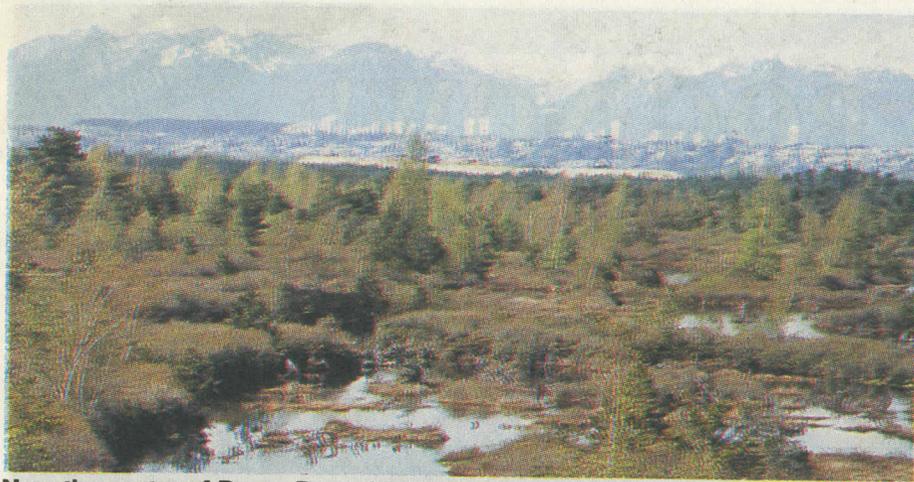
To redeem itself the B.C. Government must make public amends and arrange the deal to buy back Burns Bog now. This will require cooperation and commitment from all levels of government--federal, provincial and local--for they all have responsibilities and interests in the bog. It will also require establishing a process to determine a fair price--based on current land use and zoning, not pie-in-the-sky development schemes. A government that has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to cover fast ferry-building cost overruns and to bail out a bankrupt pulp mill can't possibly say it has no cash on hand to put towards acquiring the bog as a park. Continued public pressure to "buy the bog" will surely loosen the purse strings.

Do you want Burns Bog--the last large, wildlife-rich urban wilderness in North America--fully protected, as wildlife sanctuary, a protector of environmental quality and a quiet retreat forever? If so, speak up now!



JURASSIC CLARK

NOT THE FIRST DINOSAUR SUCKED IN BY A BOG



Near the centre of Burns Bog with Vancouver behind.

A brief history of Burns Bog

5,000 years B.P. - Burns Bog began to develop with deposits of silt and clays in the Fraser River delta. Marsh plants, such as sedges and rushes began to grow.

3,500 years B.P. - Layers of rotting plants accumulated over clay, turning to peat. Surface of Burns Bog began to rise above flood level. Shrubs became established and eventually sphagnum moss, the keystone bog species.

For Centuries - First Nations people used the area for hunting and gathering.

1882 - Marquess of Lorne, Canada's fourth Governor General, bought most of Burns Bog for \$1 per acre, under an agreement (unfulfilled) to reclaim the land.

1905 - Vancouver entrepreneur Dominic Burns bought the bog for \$26,000 and gave the bog his name.

1940s - Peat harvesting began in Burns Bog. Methods changed over time, from hand harvest (1940s) to mechanical stripping of the top layer of sphagnum (1950s and 1960s) to hydraulic harvest by dredge-like machines (1950s to 1980s). Ditches were dug to help drain off water and aid peat harvest. A narrow gauge railway was built to transport peat.

1971 - local citizens in Delta began building boardwalk trails, putting up signs and conducting tours in the Delta Nature Reserve.

1981 - McLaughlin and Associates, an Ontario-based development company, bought the bog, holding it under a "daughter" company, Western Delta Properties Corporation (Western Delta Lands).

early 1980s - Plans were developed for a \$5 billion deep-sea port and industrial development site involving about 2,000 hectares of Burns Bog. A ship canal would have been dredged into Burns Bog. Plans died when Delta Council was unable to muster enthusiasm from the federal and provincial governments.

Buy Burns Bog Now!

With the latest Burns Bog development scheme roundly rejected by the people of the Lower Mainland, we must move quickly to fully and finally protect the bog from further attempts to destroy it. It must be purchased and designated a park.

Delta Fraser Properties, owner of most of the bog, has made it clear that the "lungs of Greater Vancouver" are up for sale. But if the Provincial Government isn't interested in buying, they'll push to have the bog rezoned for development.

We have a choice. We can either buy out the private developers now and preserve a priceless piece of urban wilderness, or stand by and let development destroy the bog. **Failing to act now leaves the door open for other mega-development schemes to be floated after the next municipal or provincial election.**

Protecting Burns Bog as a park is a bit more complicated than in cases where all the lands are publicly held. Biologist and conservationist Don DeMille, a champion of this wildlife-rich wetland for 37 years, has some practical suggestions on how the privately held parts of the bog can be acquired and protected.

The City of Vancouver, owner of 627 hectares of the bog for a garbage dump (only 268 hectares of which are being used for this purpose today) would be a key player. The City should turn over its lands to the park project, along with its more than \$20 million "dump closure" (Solid Waste Capital Reserve) fund. The city has, after all, done rather well in the 38 years of this huge landfill operation, with annual profits of up to \$20 million gained through dumping fees.

The money made from operating the dump for a few more years should be used to help quickly buy out Delta Fraser Properties and other smaller owners of bits of the bog. This plan must only involve expanding the dump upwards and not outwards onto more of Burns Bog.

If Vancouver City Council thinks that this is a poor bargain, they should consider the fact that an acceptable operating plan for their Burns Bog landfill has never been submitted to the Provincial Government's environmental authorities. This kind of dump, built on unstable terrain, is now forbidden under recent provincial rules.

DeMille, who once worked for the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and the Federal Department of the Environment, also believes that Federal Fisheries Minister David Anderson should financially help save the bog. "The whole bog is fish habitat," DeMille points out, "with at least one significant salmon stream, Cougar Creek." This creek, which rises in Surrey, was diverted into a ditch in the 1970s and should be restored to its original course within Burns Bog. The lands along this course could be acquired with federal salmon enhancement funds.

Other sources of purchase funding are possible. Several years ago the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) earmarked \$5 million for bog acquisition. The Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) has un-spent money earmarked to "replace" bird habitat lost when the third runway at Vancouver Airport was built.

1988 - Burns Bog Conservation Society formed to take the lead on the fight to save the bog. Western Canada Wilderness Committee (WCWC) co-published with Burns Bog Conservation Society its first educational paper on Burns Bog.

1992 - Western Delta Lands received local government permission for a \$94 million race track on 140 hectares of the bog, but the plan never got out of the starting gate when the B.C. Racing Commission turned thumbs down.

1993 - "Burns Bog Analysis" report presented to B.C. Government by Catherine Berris Associates, assessed the bog as having high potential as a protected area: *"Burns Bog has high values to wildlife in general." "The bog contains relic plant species that are very unusual for the south coast of B.C." "Burns Bog has been cited as being the finest example of a raised bog in the northwest of North America." "The bog is unique regionally, provincially, nationally and perhaps internationally from an ecosystem perspective."*

1994 - Provincial Government offered Western Delta Lands \$27 million to buy 1,200 hectares of the bog. Western Delta Lands turned them down.

1996 - a cigarette-started fire burned about 400 acres or 4 percent of Burns Bog.

1997 - Burns Bog Conservation Society presented 25,000 name petition to the B.C. government, calling on it to preserve the bog as an ecological reserve.

April, 1998 - Western Delta Lands sold its bog lands to Delta Fraser Properties (DFP--a new company with mostly the same principal players).

Fall, 1998 - Burns Bog Conservation Society, in partnership with GVRD and other groups, came close to purchasing 1,400 hectares of DFP land, for \$10 million plus a tax receipt. DFP had defaulted on its taxes and loan payments.

Feb. 3, 1999 - B.C. Government announced its boondoggle of a Burns Bog deal, loaning \$25 million to bail out DFP in exchange for which the company would donate about 1,200 hectares of the bog to be protected and would develop about 800 ha to house the PNE and an "integrated, themed retail-leisure-entertainment centre". Delta Council would have to rezone the land.

Feb. 11, 1999 - Gordon Campbell, B.C. Leader of the Opposition, visited Burns Bog and declared his support for preserving the whole bog.

Feb. 16, 1999 - Delta Council voted unanimously to reject the Disney-like theme park for Burns Bog, urging the B.C. government to purchase or expropriate the bog and protect it against any development.

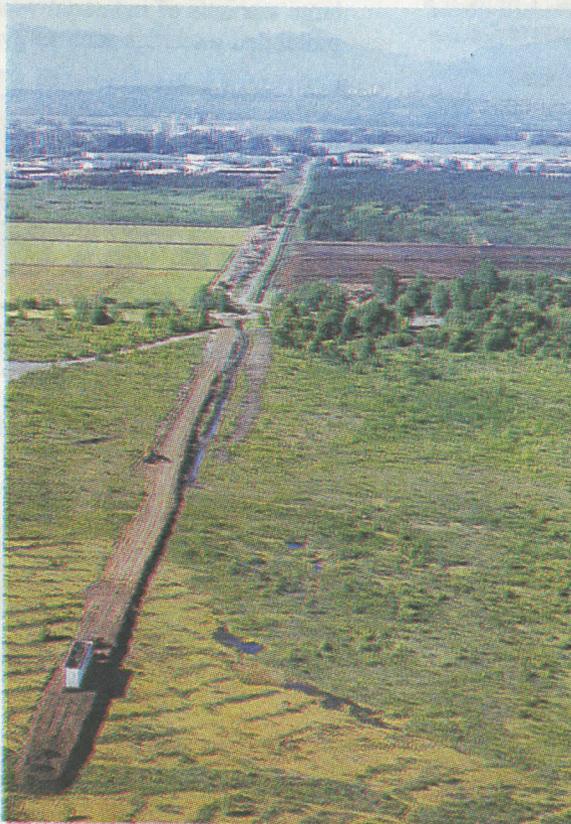
Feb. 17, 1999 - B.C. Small Business and Tourism Minister Ian Waddell said he would respect Delta's wishes and scrap plans to relocate the PNE to Burns Bog.

Feb. 20, 1999 - DFP stated publicly (reported by Larry Pynn in the *Vancouver Sun*) "The community hasn't grasped the situation. Most people think that turning down the development project means nothing will happen on the site." Before it formally applies for rezoning to allow development, the company said it wants to know if the Provincial Government wants to buy its 2,200 hectare site. "We're waiting to hear. We're just looking for a creative solution, a fair process and fair compensation. It's now essentially in the government's hands."

Fund. In addition, the Burns Bog Conservation Society is fundraising for the bog's purchase. Other good funding ideas are contained in the B.C.'s Park Legacy Project final report, presented to the Provincial Government on February 23, 1999, such as a slight increase in gasoline tax (with allocation of the increased tax revenues to parks) and establishing a new "green lottery" specifically for park acquisition.

What is a fair price for the bog? A lot less than the \$75 million figure being touted. Since the public will never allow mega-projects there, the bog's value must be based on its current zoning for cranberry farms and peat mining. Considering the strength of the public opposition to any kind of development, how much longer will the bog owners want to hold on paying some \$750,000 a year in municipal taxes plus an estimated \$160,000 per month in interest payments on the \$25 million provincial loan?

If the owners refuse to sell at a fair price, expropriation is the last resort. If lands can be expropriated for "the higher good" of reservoirs and hydro and road right-a-ways, certainly expropriation can be used to enable park protection for a unique and wildlife-rich ecosystem critical to the health of the environment for almost one-third of all British Columbians.



Left - Part of Burns Bog being destroyed in 1998 for a cranberry farm.

Below - Sandhill cranes the Bog. All photos on this page and the next by Don DeMille.



Burns Bog Facts

- * located in north Delta just south of the Fraser River.
- * 4,000 hectares (10,000 acres) in size, ten times larger than Stanley Park.
- * largest tract of undeveloped land in Lower Mainland.
- * purifies our air, produces oxygen, stores carbon and absorbs excess rainfall (which lessens flooding).
- * evidence of repeated fires. The most recent fire, which burned about 160 hectares, occurred in 1996.
- * the largest domed peat bog on the west coast of the Americas—an internationally unique ecosystem.
- * the highest point of the dome (5.5 metres above sea level) is just south of the centre of the bog; water flows north and south from there.
- * the bog contains fish habitat, including an historically significant salmon stream, Cougar Creek.
- * sphagnum moss is the bog's main plant species and occupies the central portion of the bog; pine woodland occurs just south of the core; the bog is ringed with mixed deciduous and coniferous forest.
- * other interesting plants in the bog include sundew (a small insect-eating plant), cloudberry (a unique plant species), the rare bog rosemary and crowberry, labrador tea, bog laurel, bog blueberry, huckleberry, pond lily, mushrooms, fungi and lichen, including fragile reindeer lichen that can grow to two feet high.
- * 24 species of mammals are known to use the bog. Bog animals include black bear, black-tailed deer, red fox, beaver, bobcat, coyote and spotted skunk.
- * 20 species of waterfowl, 18 species of raptors, 9 species of gulls, 9 species of shorebirds and 87 species of passerines and other birds are known to use the bog. The greater sandhill crane, found in the bog, is threatened with extirpation from the Lower Mainland. Other vulnerable bird species include the bald eagle, barn owl, great blue heron, gyrfalcon and peregrine falcon.
- * Burns Bog is home to some rare and beautiful species of insects, including the blue darner dragonfly, mariposa copper butterfly and a rare beetle (Beller's ground beetle).



- * 2,283 hectares (over one-half the bog) is owned by one private company, Delta Fraser Properties.
- * the City of Vancouver owns 627 hectares for use as a sanitary landfill (garbage dump).
- * the rest of the bog (about one-quarter) is owned by various public and private interests, including Delta School Board and the Fraser Harbour Commission.
- * the majority of the bog is zoned for agriculture and peat extraction.
- * 148 hectares (less than 2 percent of the bog) is currently protected, as the Delta Nature Reserve.

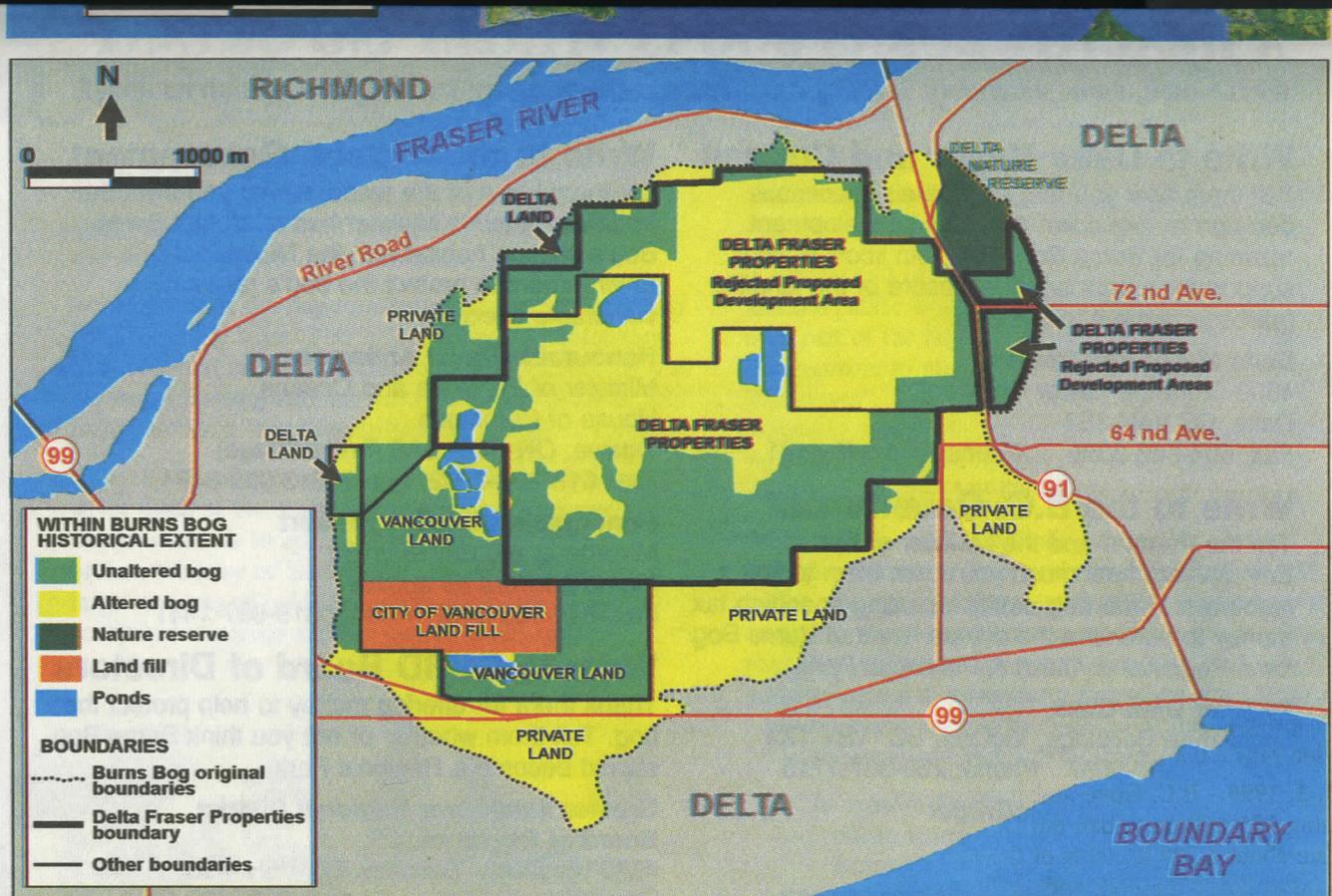
The Delta Nature Reserve

The Delta Nature Reserve covers 148 acres (less than 2 percent of Burns Bog) and is located in the northeastern corner of the bog. The reserve has boardwalk trails and gives visitors a chance to see some of the unique and wonderful plants and animals of Burns Bog. For more information, or to book a guided tour, contact the Burns Bog Conservation Society, the lead group fighting to save Burns Bog.

Phone (604) 572-0373. Fax (604) 572-0374.

Email: burnsbog@uniserve.com

Website: <http://www.burnsbog.paconline.net>



Rare Plants and Birds Live in Burns Bog

"The lungs of the Greater Vancouver Region"

Burns Bog's unique mix of water, moss, plants and trees may look to the seemingly endless parade of developers like nothing more than a chance to make buckets of money, but in fact it is linked to our very survival.

Burns Bog is the lungs and the wilderness heart of the Vancouver urban area.

After 5,000 years of development, the bog has become a giant sponge that—expressed in the simplest way—absorbs bad air and gives off oxygen. Aquatic plants that live in the bog actually absorb toxins and change them into nontoxic substances. To fill it, drain it, pave it or develop it is folly that borders on the suicidal.

Today the bog is home to a dazzling array of wildlife, from black bears to hummingbirds, from deer to a species of insect found nowhere else. Records show 200 species of birds and 26 species of mammals. There are several species of frogs, two or more kinds of snakes, two subarctic dragonfly species, assorted other reptiles, plus some of the fish species found in the Fraser River.

Among the vast variety of insects is the Beller's ground beetle, a rare species discovered recently by James Bergdahl of Seattle, a scientist who works with the B.C. Ministry of Environment and as a research associate with the Royal B.C. Museum in Victoria.

Bergdahl, incidentally, is dismayed by the kind of thinking that has subjected the bog to the biggest municipal garbage dump west of Toronto, as well as road building that already has altered the hydrology of some parts of the wetland.

The colony of about a dozen black bear is unique in that it's completely surrounded with urban development. Other mammals include the blacktail deer, coyote, bobcat, red fox, raccoon, spotted skunk, muskrat, shrew mole and northwestern jumping mouse.

Atop the list of rare and vulnerable birds is the greater sandhill crane, a magnificent bird that stands as tall as a

man's shoulder. Burns Bog is a nesting ground for a few pairs: the only other such area is the Pitt Polder near Maple Ridge. The bog has the Lower Mainland's largest population of bald eagles. There are 20 kinds of waterfowl including thousands of ducks, plus a number of trumpeter swans.

Other notable birds include the great blue heron, gyrfalcon, barn owl, peregrine falcon, least sandpiper, Vaux's swift and northern shrike—all vulnerable species.

In the beginning, five thousand years ago, a shallow lake with a water-stopping clay base formed in a poorly drained area of the Fraser delta. Successive generations of sphagnum moss and other plants grew and died, gradually building up thick layers of plant material. Among the plants were some unusual ones. While most of the tundra and boreal plants from the Ice Age were forced to "retreat" to the mountains after the ice melted, some were able to grow in the acidic, nutrient-poor damp of Burns Bog.

There was air and oxygen near the surface, with the living and recently dead moss, but down below there was little oxygen to aid bacteria and fungi in breaking down nutrients. So sphagnum moss turned into what we call peat moss—an early stage in the formation of coal.

Observations going back to 1870 indicate that fire is part of the process of Burns Bog's history. Apparently regeneration begins immediately, and plants flourish on burned surfaces.

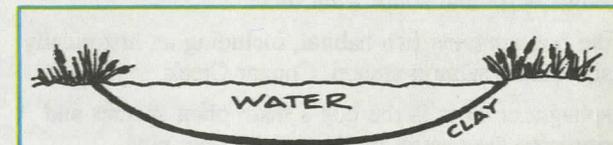
Trees grew around the edges at first and then out on the near-floating mass of moss, eventually adding to the layers of organic material. At its present stage, the bog captures and stores large amounts of carbon dioxide and releases more oxygen than a healthy forest does.

When significantly disturbed, bogs release carbon to the atmosphere and, current studies suggest, they also give off methane gas as well. Other studies show that intact

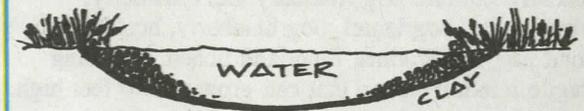
tidal bogs (like Burns Bog) enrich the tidal water around them to benefit marine life.

In many ways Burns Bog is a living laboratory where research may reveal its mysteries as one of the very few areas in the Fraser delta surviving in a natural state.

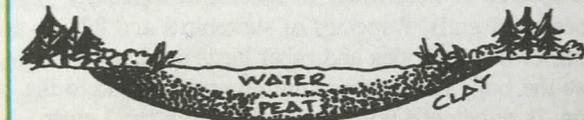
Much of the world is watching as the bog defenders squash yet another effort to impose a death sentence upon it. When will governments act with vision and protect this precious ecosystem in perpetuity?



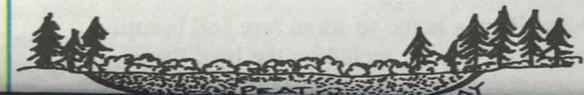
The land at the mouth of the Fraser River rebounds as the weight of the ice sheet lifts after it melts. A shallow lake forms in a depression underlined with a clay layer that holds water. With a mixture of fresh and salt water, marsh plants thrive around the lake's edges.



As the cycle of life and death of plants continues, the organic material sinks to the bottom and does not rot in the oxygen-deprived (anaerobic) environment. It starts to turn into peat. The waters become acidic.



More kinds of plants, including trees, grow in from the sides. A thick mat-covering of moss develops as the lake continues to fill in and shrink.



A HEALTHY BURNS BOG IS VITALLY IMPORTANT

Write one, two, as many letters as it takes. Have a say in the fate of Burns Bog!

Write to Delta Mayor and Council

Tell them how you feel about their unanimous decision to turn down the recent development rezoning for Burns Bog. Let them know of your support for a park and the closure of the landfills (garbage dumps) in the Bog.

Delta Mayor and Council

4500 Clarence Taylor Crescent

Delta, BC V4K 3E2

Fax: 604-946-3390 Phone: 604-946-4141

Write to the B.C. Government

Tell the Premier and the Minister of the Environment how much you'd like them to find a resolution to the bog battle, including spending tax money to purchase the private lands of Burns Bog for a Regional or Class A Provincial Park.

Premier Glen Clark

Legislature Buildings, Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Fax: 250-387-0087 Phone: 250-387-1715

Honourable Cathy McGregor

Minister of the Environment

(same address as above)

Fax: 250-387-1356 Phone: 250-387-1187

Write to the Federal Government

Let them know of the responsibility you think the Federal Fisheries Minister has to protect Burns Bog's salmon habitat and the Minister of Environment to protect the bog's rare and vulnerable species.

Honourable David Anderson

Minister of Fisheries and Oceans

House of Commons

Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6 (free postage)

Fax: 613-990-7292 Phone 613-992-3474

Honourable Christine Stewart

Minister of the Environment

(same address as above)

Fax: 819-953-3457 Phone: 819-997-1441

Write to GVRD Board of Directors

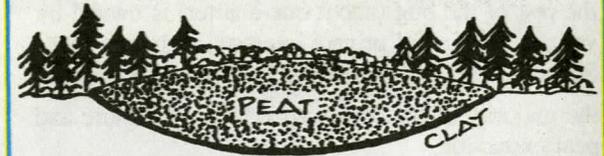
Thank them for offering money to help protect the bog. Tell them whether or not you think Burns Bog should become a Regional Park.

Greater Vancouver Regional District Board of Directors

4330 Kingsway, Burnaby, BC V5H 4G8

Fax: (604) 432-6251 Phone (604) 432-6200

The lake completely fills. The buried organic material continues transforming into peat, the precursor of coal. The thick mat of sphagnum moss continues to grow on top of itself as large trees ring the edges of the bog and mosses, shrubs and "bonsied" trees grow in the middle.



The bog grows higher forming a dome as the sphagnum dominates and the build-up of organic material continues.

CREDITS

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can
help!



Yes! I want to keep the Lower Mainland a great place to live!

I want to become a WCWC member! Enclosed is my \$30 annual membership fee.

Here's my tax-deductible donation to help save all of Burns Bog in a park and for your other campaigns to save Lower Mainland wilderness Fed. reg. charity #11929-3009-RR0001

Enclosed is \$25 \$50 \$100 \$500 Other \$ _____

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Join WCWC!

With over 26,000 members, WCWC is Canada's largest membership-based wilderness preservation group. Every member's voice increases WCWC's effectiveness at saving wilderness.

Call 683-8220 to join or donate by credit card!

or clip and send to WCWC:

227 Abbott St., Vancouver, BC V6B 2K7