

# **The Hwlitsum First Nations Traditional Knowledge at Canoe Pass**

Public Hearing for the proposed Roberts Bank Terminal 2 Project

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## Introduction

I am Chief Jim Hornbrook. I am the elected Chieftain of the Hwlitsum First Nation. As such, I speak the wisdom of our ancestors and descendants. Today I am here to share some of Hwlitsums traditional knowledge and culture in an effort to preserve what is left of our way of life and a part of our Traditional territory. The Traditional territory I speak of is Canoe Pass<sup>1</sup> located just north of the proposed project, the Roberts Bank Terminal 2.

### Who is the Hwlitsum First Nation and How did we get here?

The Hwlitsum First Nation pursuant to our laws and spiritual beliefs, are charged with special rights and responsibilities as stewards of their Traditional lands. The Hwlitsum First Nation, as it exists today, is the continuation of, and successor to, the Lamalchi First Nation as it existed at the time of contact. The Hwlitsum (like their ancestors the Lamalchi) are part of the greater Hul'qumi'num Mustimuhw. Like most Coast Salish people, prior to contact the Hul'qumi'num Mustimuhw employed a seasonal cycle spending the spring, summer and fall fishing, hunting and harvesting plants from the vast resources of the Lower Fraser River estuary.

The Creator provided the river delta its sloughs, waterways and marshlands as a source for all the necessities of life. The river's mainstream and numerous tributaries accommodated some of, if not the largest salmon runs in the world. While the estuary was a valuable rearing ground for salmon, it is also an important stopping point for migrating birds on the Pacific Flyway. The tidal marshland and surrounding areas are also home to other bird species including but not limited to; raptors, gulls, herons, loons, Canada Geese and Sandpipers

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<sup>1</sup> Reference Appendix A.

all using the estuary and surrounding uplands for rest, feeding and nesting.

The industrialization of the fishery began with the advent of canning. The First Nations way of fishing for food, social and ceremonial purposes changed. The Canneries provided shelter at camp-villages, employment for fishers and non-fishers alike. In 1901, there were 49 cannery camp-villages operating on the Fraser river from New Westminster to the mouth of the river.<sup>2</sup>

Being salmon people and fishers, our ancestors were attracted by the socio-economics and the opportunity to live near and get compensated for doing what they always had done. In the early 1900s Members of Hwlitsum took up residency full time at Canoe Pass and Brunswick Point. At the fishing village that developed around the Brunswick Cannery.<sup>3</sup> Our people have been born and raised families at Canoe Pass. Fishing the Lower Fraser and approaches long before any industrialization of the fishery. Our people hunted and gathered in the surrounding areas then and still have a presence there today. In 2015 there were only three fishing docks west of the Westham Island Bridge. Two of the three were owned or occupied by Hwlitsum First Nation members. The area offered a good way of life and our people prospered.

### Changes to the Landscape

Our Elders witnessed how the building of the early dyke system by land owners to prevent flooding, was the start of the demise of the marchlands. Today's dykes and training walls are made up of rip/rap material and are designed for flood control, bank protection and in some cases land reclamation. The training walls in particular are used

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<sup>2</sup> Diane Newell, *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries*, 73

<sup>3</sup> Reference Appendix A

to control the direction of flow in the river. By the late 1950s major industrialization started to transform the Fraser River and its approaches at Roberts Bank.

In the Fraser River the Deas Island Tunnel, now named the George Massey Tunnel linking Richmond and Delta via the tunnel under the river. This not only disrupted the flow of the river but also accelerated the urban development on both sides of the river. To achieve the crossing, significant tidal marsh habitat was reclaimed and lost forever.

On Roberts Bank, first came the B.C Ferry terminal causeway that juts out from the foreshore. Directly influencing the prevailing tidal flow at the time our elders wondered why no culverts were incorporated into the design. Allowing the prevailing tidal current to flow its natural course. Our Elders feared that the changes to the landscape would affect the inter-tidal marsh lands and foreshore habitat.

A few years later the original Roberts Bank Terminal was developed to the north of the ferry terminal. Since their inception both have seen expansions. Training walls of rip/rap material and extensive dredging have changed the main flow of the main arm of the river. The dredging is in order to maintain depths that allow larger ships to service industries up river. As such the training walls and dredging in the estuary have destroyed aquatic, intertidal and terrestrial habitat causing substantial losses of valuable marshlands. The training walls also increase the turbidity of the water which aids in flushing sediment and pollution. Pollution introduced from Metro Vancouver's Lulu Island Waste-water Treatment Plant with its expansion and another outlet further up river at Annacis Island.

From the Hwlitsums point of view these alterations to the landscape and the continued expansion of industry and development on and

around the Lower Fraser River Basin have had a significant affect on the environment. More importantly an effect on our culture.

### Cumulative Effect of Incremental Projects on the Fraser River System

One of our biggest concerns is the disappearance of critical fish habitat. River foreshore and marshlands have been lost to the industrialization of the Fraser Rivers ecosystem. As Fig.11 of the Coastal Geomorphology Study<sup>4</sup> demonstrates, there has been significant growth of delta marsh in and around the mouth of the Fraser River. The growth witnessed by Hwlitsum Elders, from being at Canoe Pass for over 100 years, has been the loss of critical marine environment and marshlands. The areas many sloughs and deeper pockets of water, holding areas for fish, have been over whelmed by sediment. So much so, that sacred fishing spots and holes are no longer viable. The sloughs have filled to the point that they are now impassable. The deeper holes where fish tend to gather the are now too shallow. Shallow water increases the water temperature, fish don't like to hold in warm water. The effects of sedimentation have allowed invasive species to begin take over in some areas having a direct and harmful impact on traditional and native plant species. Of particular concern is *Lythrum salicaria* commonly known as Purple Loosestrife. Hwlitsum is of the view that the growth correlates directly to the industrialization of the Fraser River and it surrounding areas.

### Project Specific Concerns

We know from the Oral History handed down from Our Elders, that any changes to the estuary will have an effect to the whole environmental landscape. This knowledge enables us to speak of how the industrialization of the Fraser River and foreshores of Roberts Bank and the Cumulative effects to date have affected the Estuary over all.

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<sup>4</sup> Proposed Roberts Bank Terminal 2 Technical Report: Coastal Geomorphology Study (Northwest Hydraulic Consultants, March2014) at pg 38

Given our proximity to the proposed Project; Hwlitsum has concerns as to the proposed Project and the cumulative impact that the developments to date have had on Canoe Pass. We are concerned of the alterations to the prevailing tidal flow by the development of the B.C. Ferry causeway, Roberts Bank Terminal and the changes caused by rip/rapping the dykes, altering the river flow of the main river channels. To date, the cumulative effects to the area have significantly impacted our way of life. Our Elders note a correlation of the subsequent reduction of viable fish habitat and the dwindling fish population. The resident orca population is endangered due to lack of food sources. Their preferred diet is Chinook Salmon.

Our Elders Question what will/could happen if the wetlands of the estuary are lost or wiped out by careless development, haphazard industrialization or pollution. Will the birds that depend on the area survive? What about the fish or the people that depend on the fish? Will our youth be able to engage in the same cultural practices that our ancestors have since time immemorial?

The mouth of the river and its approaches are an extremely sensitive and ecologically significant part of the Fraser River Delta System. It is the gateway to the whole river system and any impacts will cause repercussions on the entire Fraser River. We are suggesting the River estuary has not yet recovered from all the industrialization to date. Not only the immediate area around the proposed Project will be impacted but the entire Fraser River Basin will be affected by the cascading adverse impacts of another development.

## Summary

Based on Hwlitsums proximity to the Project, our Oral History handed down by Our Elders, we have concerns regarding any more changes to the Fraser River system. We have concerns over:

1. The Projects potential impacts on Canoe Pass;
2. The Projects adverse impacts on the mouth of the Fraser River and potentially the whole Fraser River Basin;
3. The impacts of increased marine traffic;
4. The loss of critical fish habitat;
5. How the culmination of all these factors could potentially affect our ability to exercise our Rights and Traditions

We hope that sharing our Traditional Knowledge points out the need to look at any proposed project through the lens of cumulative impact. Any project's reference point determining cumulative impact should be a point before any industrialization rather than an individual projects potential impact.

## Appendix A



The Blue mark shows the entrance to Canoe Pass at Brunswick Point.  
The chart is #3450 Published by the Canadian Hydrographic Service  
New Edition June 15 1948.

My name is Zoe (Harris) McCrystal. I was raised in Canoe Pass in a little Fraser River dike house. If you know this area, you will remember two dike houses there. The one I lived in is now yellow & white striped: one of the last inhabitants to live in this house sold smoke fish from there. I lived in that house from the time I was born, 1949, and even after moving with a family of my own, I spent much time at the house as mom & dad lived there until the river flooded in December 1982. My mom was born in this same little house. My grandparents lived in this dike house also, before they moved into the main family home across the road. My great grandfather built the main family home in 1904. This is where our grandparents were raised: I mean the children were raised there, but for a time they weren't in that house, as they were forced to attend residential school. Great Great Grandfather Jack Wilson lived in a 'lean to' type building on the dike in Canoe Pass before that.

I am part of a large fishing family from Canoe Pass, the Wilson family. My mother was the oldest daughter of Andy & Rose Wilson. Their land, along with the land of other family members and the farming families in the area was expropriated by the Roberts bank when I was 17 years old. It was never used.

Back to the dike house I was raised in. When I was a little girl there was a bridge that connected our little dike house board walk to a wharf that ran all the way from our place down to what we later referred to as Uncle Terry's net shed, the green shed with its own float that still stands. My dad who is still alive, thought the wharf to be 400 ft long or possibly

even 500 ft. There were always people coming across our boardwalk to cross over to that wharf. You could also enter down by Uncle Terry's net shed. There was a house by this green net shed that different members of our family lived in. This house burned down.

In our house my mother always had coffee on with some type of food. Her brothers, parents, aunties & uncles were always passing through to go to the wharf to work on nets, do boat work, etc. They would stop in for coffee and whatever she had baked for the day. The dike house next to us that Toody & Ivan Wilson lived in, served as a grocery store for the boats.

There was a gate that closed off the bridge to the wharf from our boardwalk. It was made to remind us little kids not to go over to the wharf. I remember standing at the end of the boardwalk, to open up the gate for my uncles to come to the house when suddenly the bridge fell, actually the bridge didn't fall, it sunk down slowly. I started hollering at my mom to tell her of this excitement. The shore was always eroding. Apparently before I was born there was another little apartment attached to our house, but that caved in because of the shore erosion. The boulders were eventually brought in stop this erosion.

Down at the end of the road at the Brunswick was the big fishing camp & net shed owned by BC Packers. This was just a hive of activity. Men were always there, working on nets, working on their boats and playing cards. The cannery had a 'ways' to bring the boats up from the water to scrape, paint etc. The men that came and worked there were not just

from Canoe Pass, but other parts of Ladner also. Us kids were allowed to play in the huge net shed. You would never know it now, but there were family homes at the Brunswick. There was also a gas dock, so there was enough boats that fished Canoe Pass to warrant this gas dock.

Canoe Pass was a good fishing area. There were always boats travelling up and down the river in front of our house. I remember as a little girl and teenager looking out our bedroom window, especially at night to watch the many boats waiting in line waiting for their set. It was like a little city out there. The line up for men waiting for their turn to set was very long. Dad said there could be as many as thirty boats waiting their turn as the Ladner and Steveston fishermen came there also.

In the summer many of the men would head off to other parts of the coast to fish. When the fleet was away aunties would come from Vancouver Island & little Reid Island to Canoe Pass in the summer. The ladies would come to can fish and also just to spend time together. They would bring their children with them and sometimes the kids would stay in Canoe Pass for the summer. It was good. We got to be close to the cousins from out of town because of those summers.

Here is something else I remember about our end of the Delta. In the summer us kids would walk down to the end of 34<sup>th</sup> St. to what is now called Goose Bay to swim. No one can swim there now. That and Tsawwassen Beach off Tsawwassen First Nation was good swimming at that time.

I remember the elders saying that when the Robert's Bank causeway comes in things are going to change. They tried to speak about this, but no one seemed to hear. I remember my family and the Ladner fishermen speaking about this on the news. The causeway ruined the Canoe Pass fishery. The construction of the Robert's Bank causeway also interfered with the sturgeon path and their entrance to Canoe Pass. The sturgeon would come up from the direction of Point Roberts and follow the shore line in front of Tsawwassen First Nation and into Canoe Pass. The causeways stopped this.

I do take a car ride down to my old home sometimes. With the house that my Uncle Rocky Wilson lived in gone (that is the house I referred to being built in 1904) & my Aunt Dolly & Uncle & Frank Wilson's house gone also, to me it is like a ghost town down there. I was walking on the dike down there one day, and some people were wondering about the pilings at the end. I started to tell them much of what it was like at Canoe Pass once. I realized that it is hard to believe that such a vibrant little community existed. So this is my snapshot of our life in Canoe Pass, from my recollection as a child raised on the Fraser.