



November 1, 2011

Mayor Greg Phelps
City of Courtenay
830 Cliffe Avenue
Courtenay BC

Dear Mayor Phelps

Comox Valley Project Watershed Society and members of the Estuary Working Group have been working to protect and restore the Courtenay River Estuary since the fall of 2008 when a Symposium on the Estuary raised widespread interest about the estuary in the community. We learned at that time that there are 442 estuaries on the coast of British Columbia and that the Courtenay River Estuary stands out as one of only eight Class One estuaries in the province. This classification is based in part on its importance as a critical staging area for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds. The estuary is also a nesting and over-wintering habitat for thousands of birds, including over ten percent of North American trumpeter swans. In addition, the estuary provides critical habitat for juvenile salmon and thousands of adult salmon that pass through it each year as they return to spawn in nearby rivers, lakes and streams.

Project Watershed and the Estuary Working Group (which represents a number of local environmental groups, government agencies and individuals) launched an estuary awareness campaign in early 2010 - "*The Courtenay River Estuary – Keeping it Living*" campaign. This campaign was created to promote community knowledge of and pride in the estuary. Our Society adopted a painting of the estuary by noted local artist Bev Byerley as a symbol of our campaign with the intention of presenting the painting each year to an organization exhibiting leadership in protecting and restoring the estuary. It is understood that the organization receiving this award will display the painting in a prominent place for a period of one year.

The Board of Directors of Comox Valley Project Watershed has chosen the City of Courtenay to receive this award in 2011-12. We especially want to recognize the City for the action it has taken this past year in hiring their first Environmental Planner and their first Climate Change Specialist. The efforts of these two individuals in organizing an evening presentation on Climate Change at the Sid Williams Theatre last spring acknowledged the City's understanding and appreciation of this important environmental issue. Three hundred local residents were superbly informed of one of the most pressing global concerns of this century and one of particular significance to a coastal community such as ours.

We also note that the City held a workshop on sea level rise in the Strait of Georgia and subsequently established a new high water mark for the Courtenay River and Estuary based on a projected increase in sea levels of .8 metres expected over the next twenty to thirty years. Further, the City has recently introduced new draft amendments to the City's OCP that call for improved riparian zones for the rivers, creeks and wetlands in the city. These actions are critical to expanding protection for the Courtenay River Estuary.

Finally, we appreciate the support of the City of Courtenay for a community wide campaign to obtain National Heritage status for the Courtenay River Estuary. This designation is being sought based on the significance of the estuary as an important bird area, critical aquatic habitat and especially for the remains of extensive First Nation fish traps identified through recent archaeological research in the estuary.

The painting, together with an Honour Role of recipient organizations, will in time we hope be provided with a permanent home in a Courtenay River Estuary Interpretive, Education and Research Centre envisioned for the future.

With sincere thanks and acknowledgement of the continuing contribution of the City of Courtenay to the protection and restoration of the Courtenay River Estuary.

Paul A. Horgen
Chair, Board of Directors
Comox Valley Project Watershed Society

Don Castleden
Chair
Estuary Working Group