

Abstract Submission for 5th Canadian River Heritage Conference

Title of Presentation:

A BC perspective on Transboundary Cooperation

Category: Panel Discussion

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Abstract

Tatshenshini-Alsek is considered to be one of the most magnificent river systems on earth, and forms the basis of the British Columbia provincial park that bears its name. Tatshenshini-Alsek Park contains nearly one million hectares of glacier-cloaked peaks, wild rivers, grizzly bears and unusual plant communities. Situated in the very northwest corner of British Columbia, it nestles between Kluane National Park and Reserves in the Yukon and Glacier Bay & Wrangell-St. Elias National Parks and Preserves in Alaska. Combined, these parks comprise the largest protected area in the world, approximately 8.5 million hectares. The Tatshenshini-Alsek Park has been designated as a [World Heritage Site](#) by UNESCO. The Alsek and Tatshenshini rivers are responsible for much of what's special in the area. The great gap they've carved through the coastal mountains allows cool, moist ocean air into the cold interior. The quick change from ocean to interior environment, frequent floods, landslides and avalanches, a varied geology and great elevation changes have together created an exceptionally diverse range of habitat conditions.

Cultural Heritage

The park is on the traditional lands of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. Numerous aboriginal fishing villages were located along the Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers, although today only Klukshu, Yukon is still occupied. Preliminary archaeological studies of the area have been completed and will likely continue. Here is more information on the [Champagne and Aishihik First Nations](#) web site.

Modern History of Tatshenshini-Alsek:

One of the earliest European travelers in the area was Edward James Glave from Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper. He wanted "to be the first white man to erase from the map the hypothetical and fill up the blank area with the mountains, lakes and rivers which belong to it". In 1890 a party set out that included Glave, an Alaskan scout named Jack Dalton, and a Tlingit man called Shank; the men traveled over the Chilkat Trail and then paddled the Tatshenshini in a 20-foot dugout canoe. At the end of the trip Glave said that the Tatshenshini had "such an incessant display of scenic wild grandeur that it became tiresome".

Transboundary Management

These two river systems flow through five jurisdictions, generally beginning on Champagne-Aishihik First Nations settlement land, through Yukon Territorial, BC Parks, Kluane National Park and both rivers emptying in Glacier Bay National Park (AK). The inter-relationships and transparent management regimes are key to the success of these special lands.

Biographical sketch:

Hugh Markides

Hugh is married to his lovely wife, Levica for the past 35 years. They have three married children and two grandchildren all living in Alberta. He is completing his 40th year working for the Province of B.C. He plans to retire in July, 2007. While completing post secondary education at the University of Victoria and the BC Institute of Technology, Fish, Wildlife and Recreation program, he began work as a summer student in 1968, for the BC Parks Branch. In 1973, his first fulltime opportunity with the Parks Branch surfaced in north- west BC as an Area Supervisor. The following year, a promotion led to an Assistant District Manager in Houston, BC. Later working in the lower mainland at Golden Ears Park and subsequently in the Okanagan rounded out his base credentials for management. In 1987, he became the District Manager in the Peace country at Fort St. John followed by a transfer to the Skeena District located in Smithers. In 2002, government re-organized the Ministry for the umpteenth time and he is now in charge of Regional Operations for the Fish, Wildlife, Ecosystems & Parks sections of the Ministry of Environment.

The Skeena Region, one of nine in B.C. covers an area 31% (29.5 M ha) of the total land mass of the province. This is larger than Idaho, Washington, Oregon or Montana. The region has a world renowned wild Steelhead fishery, most of the mountain goat population in the world and the heart of grizzly bear habitat remaining in Canada. The parks and protected areas in this region total more than 40 % of the total provincial parks equalling more than 5.5 million ha and including names like Spatsizi, Tweedsmuir, Mt. Edziza, Naikoon, Kitlope Nisga'a and Tatshenshini-Atsek. The government has recently announced an additional 500k ha of protected areas under new Conservancy designation on the north coast in the Great Bear Rainforest.