

## Western Canada Wilderness Committee Educational Report

## TSITIKA / ROBSON BIGHT

## NATURE'S MYSTERY DESERVES PROTECTION

Robson Bight is a small bay on the east coast of British Columbia's Vancouver Island. It is one of the most significant killer whale habitats in the world, yet it is threatened by industrial development.

Every year from June through September killer whales inhabit the ocean around Robson Bight in the most predictably high concentrations known on earth. Robson Bight is a focal point for their movements, and is considered by scientists to be an important place where almost all the family groups of whales in the area relax and socialize.

As a result Robson Bight has become a focus for international whale research, as well as for an expanding whale-watching industry. In a globally unique behavior not yet understood by whale researchers, the whales rendezvous at Robson Bight every summer day to rub themselves on the pebbles of several small underwater beaches. Anywhere from three or four to over 100 whales will appear at the same time and line up to "have a rub" within several metres of the shore!



Robson Bight also cradles the mouth of the Tsitika River. Industrial giant MacMillan Bloedel Ltd. wants to log the forests in the lower Tsitika Valley around Robson Bight starting in 1991. The company has pushed its publicly-funded logging road to within 5 kilometres of Robson Bight, and with the support of the B.C. Ministry of Forests, plans to start up road construction again toward the ocean some time in the spring of 1990.

Almost all the mountainsides around Robson Bight are slated for eventual logging by MacMillan Bloedel except for a thin strip along the ocean shore.

MacMillan Bloedel says it knows how to log Robson Bight without disturbing the whales. However, environmentalists and many scientists ask, "How can anyone say logging won't affect the whales when no-one knows for sure why the whales even come to Robson Bight?"

Many British Columbians believe the lower Tsitika Valley should see NATURE'S MYSTERY - Page 4

Adrian Durr



# TSITIKA - ROBSON BIGHT - WILDERNESS TREASURES

The Tsitika Valley used to be the last completely untouched watershed on the east coast of Vancouver Island.

In 1978 the B.C. government decided to open the Tsitika to industrial development, and 12 years of environmentally damaging logging have now progressed to the edge of the still-intact lower reaches of the Tsitika Valley.

As one of the last survivors of a diminishing non-renewable natural

recognize and protect them now.

## Old-Growth Forests Harbor Secrets

The Lower Tsitika valley is the last unlogged segment of a valley on the east coast of Vancouver Island.

As the last survivor of an otherwise extinct natural resource, it automatically has a much higher value to society if preserved than if logged, even if its forests were just average.

But the lower Tsitika old-growth forests are not average - they are special and unique in their own right!

As the Tsitika River flows past the last industrial logging roads and clearcuts in the upper watershed, it enters a wild and spectacular canyon, hidden on either side by brooding ancient forests of cedar, hemlock, balsam, and even the occasional Sitka spruce and Douglas fir.

The roar of the canyon is muffled by thick beds of light green moss that carpet the ground everywhere. Flowing over long-fallen logs like a pillowy-soft, continuous mattress, the moss supports and is supported by an underlying layer of life-giving decomposition that fuels the powerful nutrient-cycling engine of an old-growth forest.

The rain falling through the deep, complex old-growth forest canopy lands softly on the mossy forest floor in clearings, and in bushy areas it patters gently on the leaves of salal, huckleberry, and blueberry.

The narrow valley bottom gives way quickly to steep, jagged hillsides clad with balsam, mountain hemlock, and yellow cedar. These mountain ecosystems, with

their thin fragile soils and harsh alpine climates, are too sensitive to log, and take up much of the area in the proposed Lower Tsitika wilderness area.

Back down in the valley bottom, thick



Roosevelt elk like this one (not from Tsitika) need the lower Tsitika for winter habitat. Thomas Kuehn

source for the black-tailed deer and Roosevelt elk that live in this last undisturbed valley bottom sanctuary.

Many other animals live here as well, including black bears, cougars, marten, the elusive wolf, and possibly even the rare Vancouver Island wolverine.

Some of these animals can eventually move back into second-growth forests after logging, at least for a few years before the forests are logged again, but many of them won't - the marten, wolverine, and others can survive only in old-growth forests.

The lower Tsitika forests must be spared from logging. As the last surviving fragment of an intact valley ecosystem on the east coast of Vancouver Island, the lower Tsitika represents the last living example for future research and understanding.

The Lower Tsitika also represents the last chance for an old-growth forest wildlife sanctuary, where elk, deer, and other animals can follow their ancient seasonal movements between valley bottoms and mountain forests, free from the disruptive and damaging effects of logging.

## Ocean Wilderness Experience Precious

Robson Bight attracts many whale-watchers, who come from around the world to see the unusually high number of killer whales frequenting the area every summer.

Some whale-watchers arrive in private boats, but many more arrive on one of the whale-watching tours currently being operated out of local communities. In addition, cruise ships plying the scenic

Inside Passage carry many more thousands of people hoping to see the whales.

The people come to see the whales, but they also come for the scenery. The sight of killer whales in the wild, framed against the spectacular backdrop of the unlogged lower Tsitika Valley forests, makes for an unforgettable ocean wilderness experience available nowhere else in the world.

The sight of those rugged mountains sheathed in an unbroken green carpet of forest from ocean waves to alpine peaks seems to have an effect on people. It joins them with the whales for a few precious hours in a bond between water and land that is both timeless and mysterious.

To destroy this with the scars and impact of industrial logging would be a tragedy, the full extent of which we may not realize until it is too late.

## International Scientific Research Crucial

The Robson Bight area provides a globally unique opportunity for studying killer whales.

Nowhere else in the world are so many of these magnificent creatures found so predictably in their natural environment. As a result, the Robson Bight area has been the center of increasingly intense international killer whale research over the last 12 years.

Scientists and students from around the world have come to this uniquely accessible area to make new discoveries about killer whale communication, population dynamics, social structure,

evolutionary biology, behavior, and habitat use.

Killer whales are highly intelligent animals - perhaps even as intelligent as us! Insights into their complex and



Big Sitka spruce in the lower Tsitika. Clifton Webb

mysterious ways can teach us how to coexist harmoniously on this planet with these and other fellow warm-blooded animals.

Robson Bight is a crucial location for this important research because the whales visit the rubbing beaches to rest, feed, socialize among themselves, and rub on the underwater pebble beaches every day they're in the area.

Logging the steep mountains around Robson Bight could jeopardize the whales' use of the area through the inevitable impacts of nearby logging: industrial disturbance and increased access by people from roads. If the whales were affected, a globally significant research opportunity would be lost forever.

Adding insult to injury, the appearance of clearcut logging on the scenic mountains overlooking this internationally valued outdoor classroom and research lab would reinforce B.C.'s growing reputation as a destroyer of its own "Super Natural" heritage.

## Whale-Watching Industry A Winner

Since 1980, a growing number of companies have operated whale-watching tours out of nearby communities such as Telegraph Cove and Alert Bay.

Many other whale-watchers arrive at Robson Bight from other ocean tour companies, or in private boats ranging from tiny kayaks to large ocean-going yachts.

In addition, up to four or five cruise ships a day plying the scenic Inside Passage carry over 200,000 more people a year hoping to see the killer whales.

The cruise ship companies advertise the Robson Bight whale-watching as a highlight of the tour, and the ships all slow down or even stop in front of Robson Bight to give the passengers a view of the killer whales.

The Robson Bight whale-watching industry has an economic impact already conservatively estimated at over \$2 million a year in tourist expenditures, and

that doesn't even include economic spin-offs such as charter company employment!

Robson Bight whale-watching is an industry that is both "environment friendly" and truly sustainable, but it requires the scenic backdrop of the untouched lower Tsitika Valley to keep its world-class potential.

The sight of killer whales in the wild, framed against the spectacular backdrop



Seeing killer whales in their natural environment is an exciting experience. Peter Thomas

of the unlogged lower Tsitika Valley forests, makes for an unforgettable ocean wilderness experience available nowhere else in the world.



Stunning waterfall and canyon in lower Tsitika. Dennis Kaganami

resource, this ancient forest wilderness guards many treasures which could bestow riches on us and future generations, if we are wise enough to

# Tsitika / Robson Bight Chronology

- 1972 - B.C. Fish and Wildlife Branch proposes entire Tsitika watershed be made into an ecological reserve. The proposal stated, "This is the last untouched watershed on the east coast of Vancouver Island, and as such is an invaluable study area."
- 1973 - B.C. government institutes a logging moratorium covering 120,000 hectares (463 square miles) in the Tsitika valley - Schoon Lake area, including the 39,000 hectare (150 square mile) Tsitika watershed.
- 1974 - B.C. government forms the NISG (North Island Study Group), an interdepartmental civil service study team to assess management options for the logging moratorium area.
- 1975 - NISG recommends management of the Tsitika watershed for ecological research, either permanently preserved as a "benchmark" study area, or left untouched for at least a further five-year research period followed by strictly controlled logging only in limited areas of the watershed to be determined by the research.
- 1976 - public hearings about the fate of the Tsitika Valley held in several northern Vancouver Island communities, while conservation groups continue fighting for preservation of the entire watershed.
- 1977 - B.C. government decides to open Tsitika valley to logging, and appoints the TPC (Tsitika Planning Committee) to prepare a multiple use logging plan for the watershed. The TPC is originally composed of representatives of government, the logging industry, and unions. After public pressure the TPC is expanded to include one public representative, who is also an employee of MacMillan Bloedel.
- 1978 - MacMillan Bloedel plans are revealed for a log dump at the Tsitika River estuary at Robson Bight. TPC submits multiple use logging plan for the Tsitika to B.C. government, entitled the Tsitika Watershed Integrated Resource Plan (TWIRP). Plan makes no mention of killer whales' use of Robson Bight, and provides for the logging of over 95% of the productive forest land in the watershed. The TWIRP provides for the establishment of seven ecological reserves totaling 5% of the watershed area, but the TPC chairman stated "We have endeavored to put all the ecological reserves in areas of non-productive land."
- the UFAWU (United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union) representative on the TPC does not endorse the TWIRP because it put "all other resource values of the watershed subordinate to forest management for the primary production of timber."
- whale researchers convey concern about potential damaging impact on the killer whales of the proposed MB log dump at Robson Bight.
- 1979 - TWIRP is approved by B.C. government, MB begins building roads and logging in the upper Tsitika Valley. MB contravenes the TWIRP guidelines and obliterates a section of a creek in the upper Tsitika. Provincial fisheries department lays charges.
- 1980 - B.C. government establishes the TFC (Tsitika Follow-up Committee) as a watchdog to monitor the adherence of the Tsitika logging to the TWIRP.

The UFAWU refuses to participate, stating that "the cutting plan is totally incompatible with the preservation of the Tsitika as a wildlife, salmon, and recreational habitat and we have no desire to preside over the desecration of the last major watershed area that fleetingly had some hope of retaining its natural state."

1981 - Sierra Club proposes that a provincial park be established covering the lower reaches of the Tsitika watershed.



MLPH (B.C. Ministry of Lands, Parks, and Housing) completes a park feasibility study for the lower Tsitika recommending that a Class A Provincial Park be established covering 3,400 hectares in the lower Tsitika valley as well as 1,200 hectares of Robson Bight marine waters and foreshore. Report withheld from public for four years. B.C. government-appointed study team recommends against MB's proposed log dump at Robson Bight.

1982 - MLPH decides against preservation of the lower Tsitika in a park, and instead establishes an ecological reserve at Robson Bight covering 1,248 hectares of water only! (the provincial government has no jurisdiction over either marine waters or mammals - these come under the jurisdiction of the federal department of fisheries and transport). high winds cause "timber blow-down" around the edges of MB's clearcuts in the upper Tsitika. MB salvages the blown down timber, and in doing so removes the buffer strips between the logged areas, leaving massive clearcuts over 500 hectares (850 football fields) in size. Parks Canada recommends the Robson Bight area, including all of the killer whale core habitat, be designated as a Natural Site of Canadian Significance, and that the Robson Bight area also be considered as a Canadian Landmark. Report states "Logging of the upper and lower

Tsitika watershed may lead to deterioration of core killer whale habitat and the surrounding area."

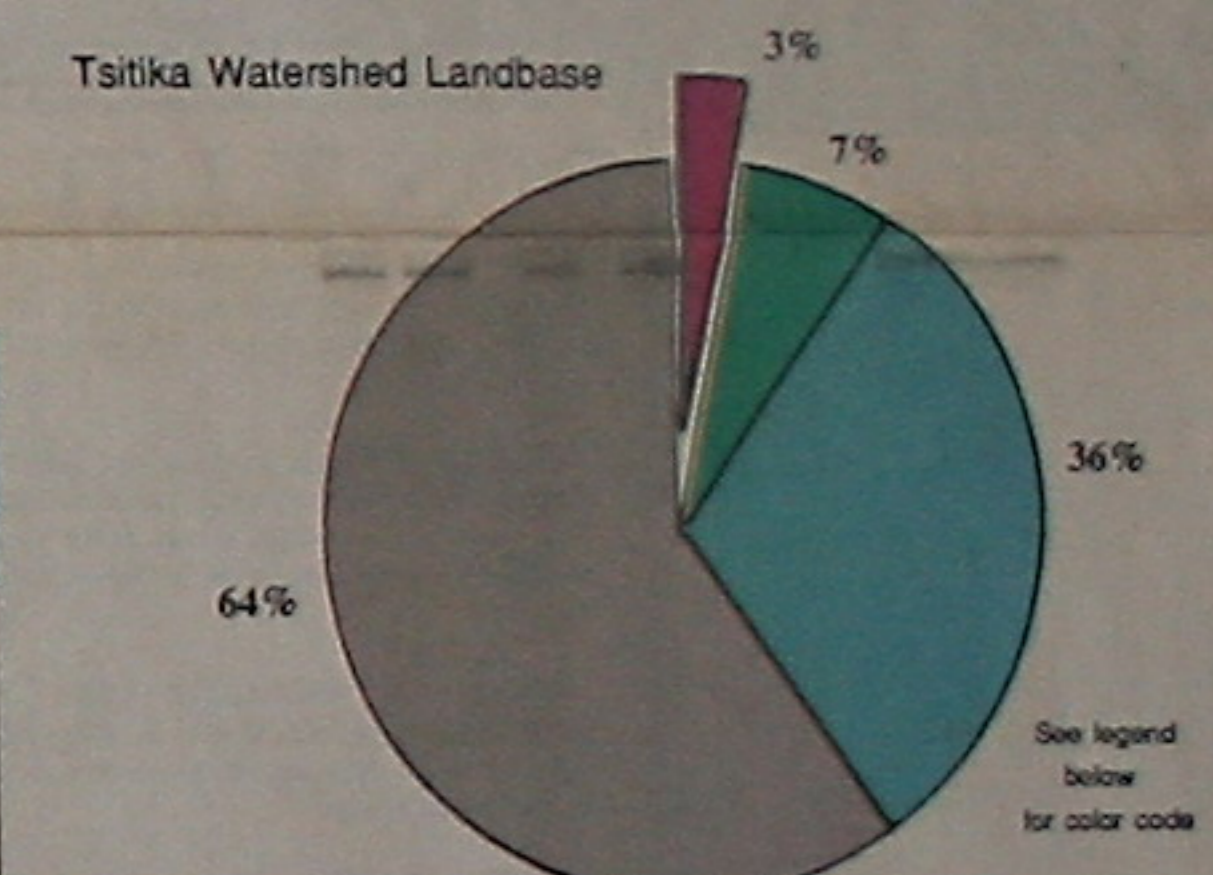
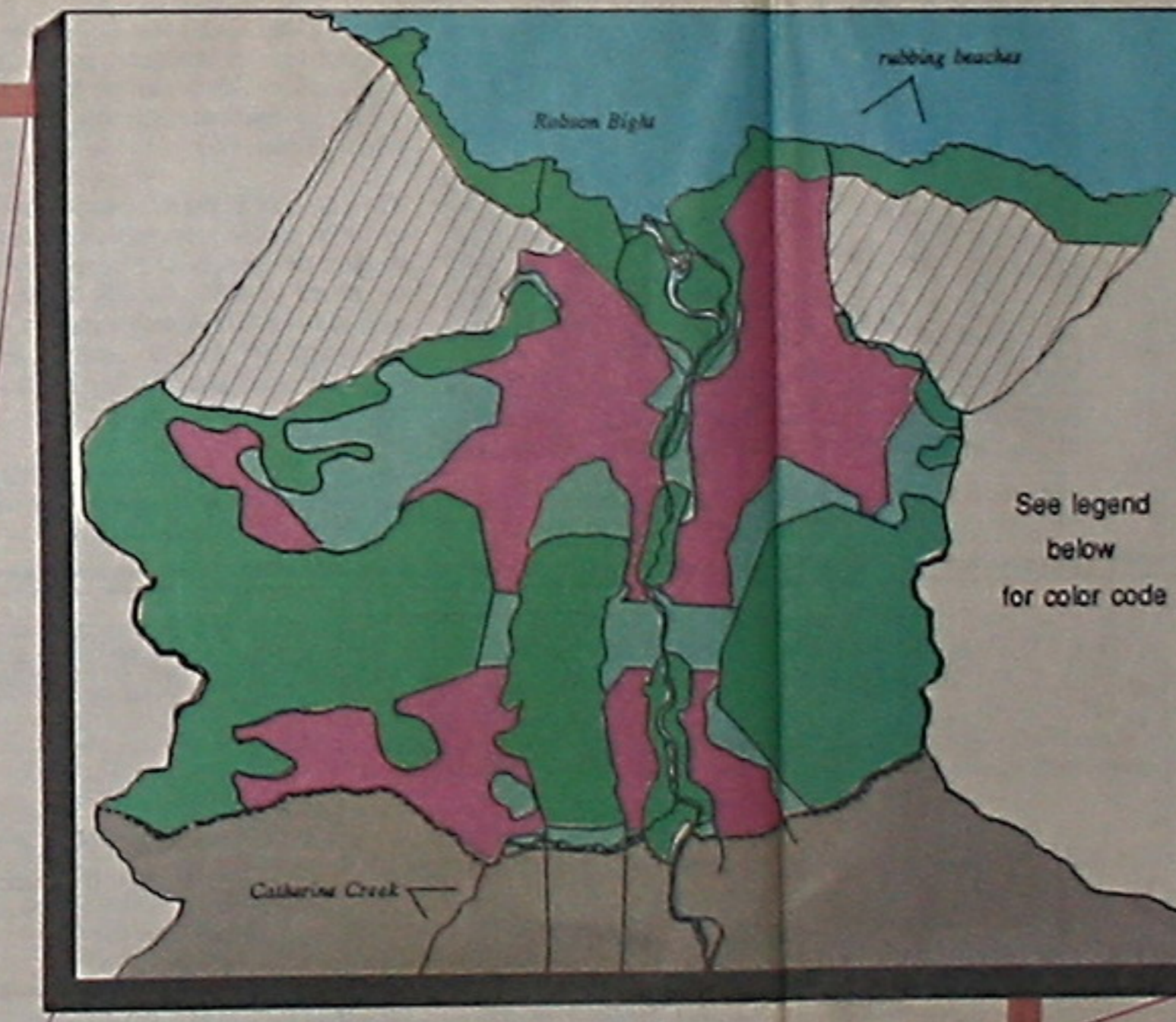
- 1983 - B.C. Ministries of Environment and Forests produce a draft report for public comment assessing the need to preserve old-growth forests on northern Vancouver Island for critical winter habitat for deer and elk. The report notes that currently identified winter ranges are only temporarily reserved from logging whereas they need to be permanently preserved to maintain deer and elk populations. Report also notes that with the amount of winter range currently identified only half the deer and elk would survive a severe winter. The draft report was shelved, and the issue of how much winter range to set aside, and for how long, has never been resolved.
- 1987 - private lot at the Tsitika estuary purchased for \$450,000 from MB with joint funding from Wildlife Habitat Canada, the Nature Trust of B.C., and the B.C. government. The 38 hectares of primarily alder scrub was originally bought by the logging company previous to MB for \$1 in 1931.
- 1988 - 412 hectares of land added to the 1248 hectares of water in the Robson Bight ecological reserve. Final 100 hectares of land added in 1989 to complete the narrow oceanic land buffer (average width 200-400 metres).
- 1989 - September - Robson Bight issue explodes in media when Premier Vander Zalm says he'll do "whatever it takes" to stop MB's plans to clearcut log around Robson Bight. MB defies Vander Zalm's stand, saying it will proceed with plans to clearcut areas visible from the water. November - public and media outcry when TPC approves a proposed MB clearcut that would be visible to whale-watching tourists and cruise ship passengers. November - WCWC fact-finding expedition documents environmental damage caused by MB's Tsitika logging operations. December - MB displays proposed Tsitika logging plans for public viewing in several logging-dependent northern Vancouver Island communities, but refuses to release a copy to WCWC for technical analysis. MB also refuses to bring the plans to Victoria and Vancouver for public viewing before they are approved by the MOF (B.C. Ministry of Forests). MOF supports MB decisions.
- 1990 - January - widespread media coverage of joint WCWC-MB Tsitika tour examining areas of environmental damage caused by MB logging. February - in a precedent-setting move, the MOF requires MB to release a copy of MB's Tsitika logging plans to WCWC after WCWC begins legal proceedings to obtain the plans. March - WCWC publishes 150,000 copies of Tsitika newspaper, calling for a permanent halt to all industrial development, including rebuilding, in the lower Tsitika/Robson Bight area, as well as stronger guidelines and enforcement for the protection of the whales at Robson Bight.

Sometime in spring 1990 - MB plans to begin clearcutting a 36 hectare area two kilometers inside the proposed lower Tsitika wilderness area, as well as resume road construction toward Robson Bight in preparation for clearcutting two areas visible from the water beginning in 1992.

## LOWER TSITIKA WILDERNESS PROPOSAL

The value of the timber volume growing annually in the proposed additional area to be preserved is generally estimated to be about \$700,000 per year. By comparison, the economic value of the Robson Bight whale-watching is already conservatively estimated to be over \$2 million per year in direct tourist revenues - and that doesn't even include economic spin-offs such as tour company employment!

Even using the criterion of cold, hard cash, it is clearly in the best interests of society to save the lower Tsitika from logging - for the whales, for the whale-watching, for the old-growth forests, and for the future.



## 3% MORE SAVES IT ALL

Environmental groups are calling for an immediate and permanent halt to all industrial development of the lower Tsitika Valley below Catherine Creek (see map at left). As shown by the pie graph above, this would involve preserving only 3 percent of the Tsitika watershed in addition to what is already reserved from or unsuitable for logging. This 3 percent, consisting of only 1,300 hectares of forest land suitable for logging, is a small area to remove from the industrial forest land base considering the priceless values at stake. Preservation of this area would:

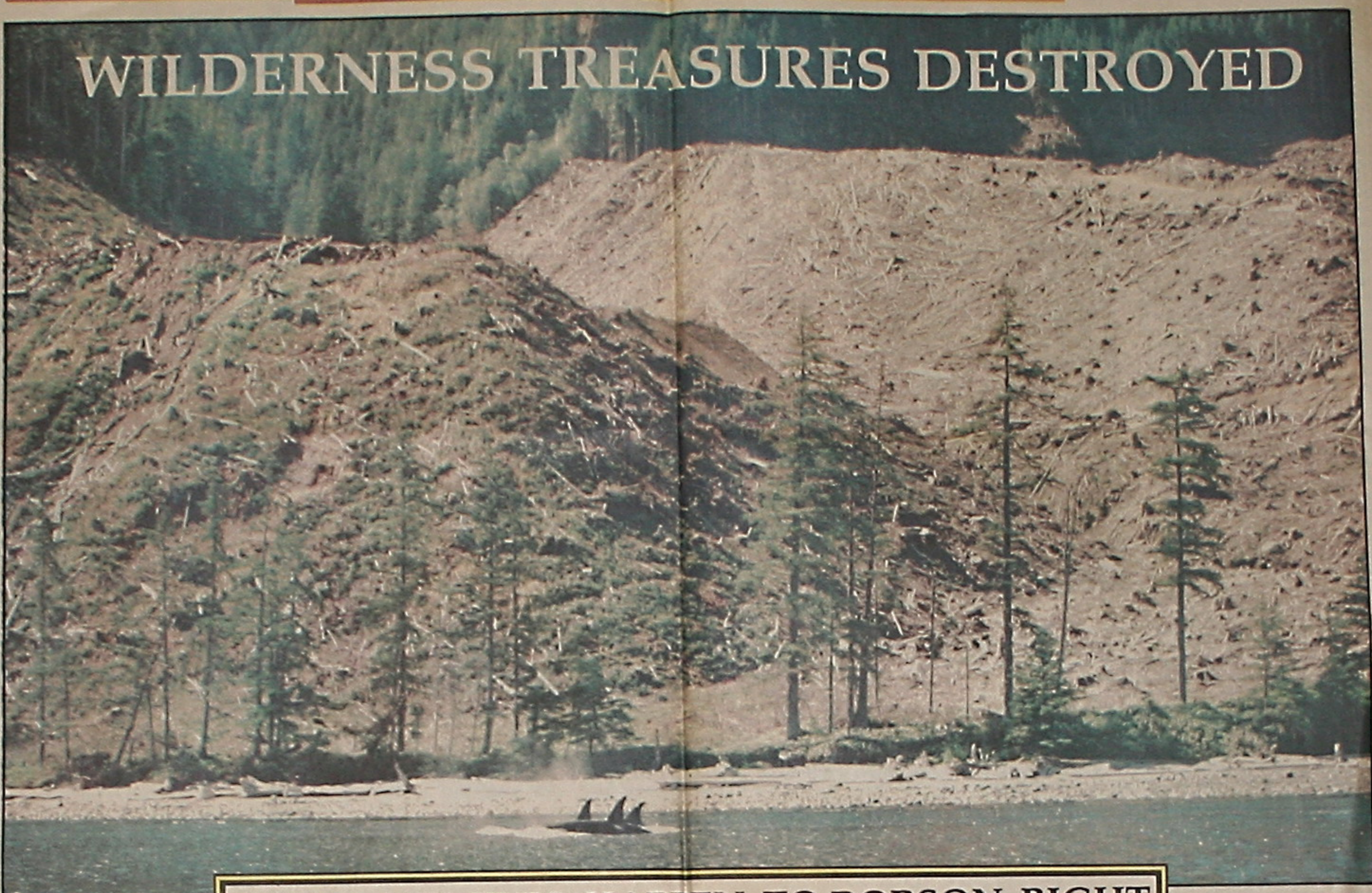
1. Serve as a protective buffer for the killer whales.
2. Preserve the scenic splendor of the Robson Bight ocean area.
3. Preserve the last untouched segment of a valley on the east coast of Vancouver Island.

In fact, of the total 4,400 hectares in the proposed wilderness area, 70 percent is already preserved in ecological reserves or has been identified in the Tsitika logging plan as being too environmentally important or sensitive to be logged!

Due to increasing public pressure, 60% recycled newsprint is finally available in British Columbia. We are proud to use it for the first time in the publication of this newspaper.

1972-1990

# WILDERNESS TREASURES DESTROYED



Peter Thomas

## DON'T LET THIS HAPPEN TO ROBSON BIGHT

The photo above shows what could happen if MacMillan Bloedel is allowed to log the steep mountainsides of the lower Tsitika Valley around Robson Bight.

The unlogged forests in the lower Tsitika around Robson Bight have many signs of natural forest "blow-down" from high winds in the past, and would be even more prone to blow-down after logging.

Clearcuts around Robson Bight could uncontrollably expand in size as they did in the Upper Tsitika, resulting in massive scars extending to the ocean's edge.

MacMillan Bloedel wants to log almost all the mountainsides around Robson Bight, including the steep slopes directly above the rubbing beaches. Logging could interfere with the whales' use of

Robson Bight through the inevitable impacts of increased erosion and siltation, disturbance from



Clinton Webb

blasting and heavy logging equipment, and especially easy access for people provided by

nearby logging roads.

Research has found that the whales leave the rubbing beaches whenever people approach them from land, which would be impossible to prevent if logging roads are extended any further into the lower Tsitika Valley.

The situation is urgent. MacMillan Bloedel wants to finish pushing its publicly-funded logging road the rest of the way to Robson Bight some time in the spring of 1990, directly threatening a globally unique killer whale rendezvous, a world class whale-watching industry, and the last remaining fragment of an intact valley ecosystem on the east coast of Vancouver Island.

If you believe it is our responsibility to the world to prevent the desecration of this natural treasure, make your voice heard today!

### From Page 1 NATURE'S MYSTERY

be saved from industrial development. This is the last chance to preserve even a small segment of a wilderness valley on the east coast of Vancouver Island. It is also the last chance to prevent logging from interfering with the killer whales' use of Robson Bight, and from destroying the pristine visual backdrop that gives the Robson Bight whale-watching industry its world class status.

Ancient forest wilderness, a mysterious whale rendezvous, and a spectacular tourist draw for centuries to come - together these are surely gifts of a national treasure we cannot afford to lose.

## WHALE-WATCHING CAN BE WHALE FRIENDLY

Robson Bight whale-watching is an industry that is truly sustainable.

Not only is it non-polluting and non-damaging to the environment, but with proper management it can continue to grow and still retain its harmonious coexistence with the whales.

The whale-watching industry has so far avoided negative impacts on the whales thanks in large part to the conscientious self-policing of local

whale-watching tour companies.

In addition, the whale-watching follows guidelines established by the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans. For example, boats are not allowed closer than 300 metres from shore when the whales are visiting the rubbing beaches.

Information officers are employed by the B.C. Ministry of Environment during the summer to patrol the whale-watching activities and encourage curious visitors to follow the guidelines.

Dr. Dave Duffus, a professor of geography at the University of Victoria, has been studying the effects of whale-watchers on killer whales in the Robson Bight area for the past four years.

Dr. Duffus sums up the situation this way: "With some common sense management and regulation, whale-watching in the Robson Bight area is an unparalleled and sustainable opportunity for contact between people and whales."

**YES!! I want to keep industrial activity OUT of the lower Tsitika Valley and Robson Bight!**



( ) Please put my tax deductible gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ toward the WCWC campaign to save this internationally significant natural treasure (Revenue Canada tax reg. no. 0587113-21-28).

( ) Here is \$8 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (special introductory offer, regular price \$10) for the WCWC Tsitika/Robson Bight Wilderness Treasures full-color poster (B.C. residents add 6% tax). Poster is in production, likeness not exactly as shown at right.

**ALL PROCEEDS GO TOWARD SAVING TSITIKA/ROBSON BIGHT**

( ) I would like to become a member of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, here is my \$25 annual membership fee.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



Please make out your cheque or money order to Western Canada Wilderness Committee and send it to: WCWC, Victoria Branch, #101 - 1002 Wharf Street, Victoria, B.C. V8W 1T4, Telephone: 388-9292 FAX #388-9223

## WHALES NEED PROTECTION

Even though whale-watching in the Robson Bight area has avoided negative impacts on the whales so far, the boating guidelines for the area, and their enforcement, are probably inadequate to handle the inevitable future increase in whale-watching activity.

Possibly worse, the guidelines apply only to the whale-watchers and other recreational boaters, and not to commercial fishing boats which frequently venture too close to the rubbing beaches.

The Western Canada Wilderness Committee proposes the following changes to the boating guidelines and general management of the

Robson Bight area to ensure that the natural activities and movement patterns of the killer whales are not interfered with:

### Recommendations:

1. The boating restriction zone should be expanded and shown on updated marine charts.
2. No boats should be allowed inside the restricted area at any time, including commercial fishing boats.
3. The federal government must be in charge of the enforcement of the whale protection guidelines using properly trained and empowered enforcement officers. The current guidelines are at this
4. The entire ocean area around Robson Bight that is frequented by killer whales, including the upper Johnston Strait and Blackfish Sound areas, should be the subject of a joint federal-provincial task force study to examine the adequacy of the current whale protection guidelines.

time being enforced by B.C. Ministry of Environment (MoE) summer employees who have no enforcement powers. The MoE itself has no jurisdiction over either marine boating traffic, or the water and the animals that live in it. Only the federal government has these powers under the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Department of Transport.

### WRITE YOUR LETTER TODAY!

Let B.C.'s tourism-conscious premier know how you feel about logging and road-building in the lower Tsitika Valley!

Premier Bill Vander Zalm  
Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

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