

The Protection of Boundary and of The  
Agricultural Lands on its Littoral

The Municipal community plan, Delta Looks Ahead (1986), recognizes Boundary Bay as a "unique landscape" and as "the single most important aquatic bird habitat in British Columbia" (p.25). Both the Fraser estuary and Boundary Bay have tidal habitat zones that "generate large quantities of nutrients and food organisms extremely important for the high level of food production that dictates the size of fish and wildlife the estuary can support." Thus these areas are of "prime economic, recreational and biological importance...significant for the commercial salmon and sport fishery, and as a hunting, tourist and passive recreation attraction." At the same time, the rich and biologically productive estuaries, "that occupy 90 per cent of the municipality's borders, tend to be sensitive and easily disrupted ecosystems." "Boundary Bay is the most readily recognizable ecologically sensitive area".

"Pasture and farmlands adjacent to dykes provide a useful buffer zone between development areas and heavily utilized foreshore areas". Furthermore, the Community Plan points out that the farmlands not only provide "excellent habitat for hawks and owls" but also "feeding area for migratory birds". (p.26)

The Municipality's policy is that "agricultural land shall be preserved for agriculture." This results from a number of factors, including "a strong feeling in Delta among urban dwellers as well as farmers, that agricultural land should be preserved for the food production needs of future generations" (p.13). But in spite of such beliefs and of the traditional and social importance agriculture has had in the history of the municipality, the community plan recognises that it is "increasingly vulnerable to a variety of pressures". These include "high land costs, pressure for conversion to non-agricultural uses and a whole range of problems arising from proximity to urban development." The community plan rightly points out that "carefully designed protective measures" are necessary to ensure the viability of agriculture, however these have been made increasingly difficult by the decision to permit the development of golf courses in the Agricultural Land Reserve.

That this could be the thin edge of a very large wedge was recently illustrated by the statements of the representative a development company. While urging several farmers along the dyke of Boundary Bay to give his company an option to buy their land, he mentioned hopes of constructing, not only a 36 hole golf course, but also a condominium block, a hotel and a marina.

Such intentions clearly exceed the provisions of the Order in Council allowing golf courses in the ALR. Nevertheless, experience elsewhere in the lower mainland suggests that persistent attempts to erode the ALR may succeed. Yet the creation of a recreational complex on the ALR beside Boundary Bay would not only undermine the municipality's goal of maintaining agriculture in Delta, it would also change the character of the "unique landscape" on the bay. Furthermore, it would conflict with the hopes, expressed in a recent study for the Provincial Environment and Tourism Ministries, that Boundary Bay will become a "world class wildlife viewing area".

It is very clear that within a few years the dykes of Boundary Bay could resemble those of Lulu Island where they are lined with an unappealing mixture of residential blocks, golf courses and run-down farms. This can be prevented only by immediate adoption of a clear policy of landscape protection. To this end the Fraser Wetlands Habitat Committee confirms its full support for the policy expressed in Delta's Community Plan, and recently endorsed on Public Cablevision by Mayor Douglas Husband, that "Agricultural land shall be preserved for agriculture". To achieve this the Committee urges the rejection of applications for golf courses on viable farms, especially those remote from suburban developments and located in areas with high ecological values and landscape qualities on the littoral of Boundary Bay. To clarify this policy we suggest that selected parts of the ALR in Delta and Surrey might be defined as "environmentally sensitive areas". This would afford them the "highest form of protection" recently recommended in the Canadian Wildlife Service Occasional Paper No.65 by R. W. Bulter and R. Wayne Campbell for the farmlands between the Boundary Bay dyke and Highway 99. It would also be in keeping with the Open Space policy of the "Livable Region," designed to preserve the rural and semi-rural character of the Lower Mainland that encouraged so many of the residents of this area choose to live here in the first place.

Keeping golf courses out of the Boundary Bay littoral would also avert future conflicts over the presence of large flocks of birds on the greens. Farmers can respond to such flocks by increasing hunting pressure, but this will obviously not be possible in golf courses. It would be tragic if wildlife management personnel and the already slender budgets of the wildlife agencies have to be diverted in part from conservation to deal with "nuisance wildlife." Surely the best answer is to avoid such problems by first adopting an overall recreational management plan for the Boundary Bay area in which golf courses are sited in places where they are least likely to invite concentrations of birds.

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