

'Habitat banking': BC's newest buzzword?

By **BOB MACKIN**

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"Habitat banking" may become the new buzzword as British Columbia's government seeks to turn more land over to oil, gas and mining industries.

An Oct. 9. tender published by the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations seeks "Habitat Banking Policy Options." Proposals are due Nov. 10.

"The objective of the project is to research and provide advice on considerations and options for using Crown land to offset habitat impacts from development projects," said the tender document.

The document said habitat banking "is but one tool in the hierarchy of mitigation of impacts."

Others are avoiding or minimizing impacts, on-site habitat restoration, off-site restoration/enhancement or payment in lieu. The paper is expected to consider "potential for selling habitat bank credits to third parties and how the sale of credits may relate to rentals charged."

The document explained that an emerging use of Crown land is for habitat banking, which is also known as biodiversity banks or habitat conservation banks.

"Habitat banks involve the creation or enhancement of habitat that may then be used to offset the impacts of one or more development projects," said the document. "Although there are examples of using public or Crown land for habitat banking purposes in other jurisdictions, this is not a land use for which the province of B.C. has developed a policy framework. In order to equitably and consistently consider requests for using Crown land for this purpose, the ministry is interested in developing such a policy."

The land involved in habitat banking is removed from Crown land inventory that may be used for future development. Lower impact economic, recreational and cultural uses may still occur in habitat-

banked areas. "With major industrial projects proposed in several areas of the province, habitat banking proposals are likely to become more common as a means of off-setting impacts for foreshore and near-shore developments."

The document calls habitat banking a "proponent-led process whereby the proponent creates or enhances habitat for species of concern on Crown land in order to compensate for future habitat losses on privately-owned land due to development activities. Generally, habitat banking is done in order to obtain the necessary authorization under federal or provincial environmental, fish or wildlife protection mandates."

The report doesn't mention where habitat banking would take place, but the Kitimat area is subject to numerous LNG and oil project proposals.

The Ministry wants a contractor to research and write a policy options paper that includes examples of habitat banking in other jurisdictions, how it fits with the Ministry of Environment's Mitigation Policy and Procedures, and the challenges for using Crown land for habitat banking.

The government wants to sign the contract Nov. 28 and have a draft report by Jan. 28, with a final report by Feb. 20.

Habitat banking is already in use by Port Metro Vancouver. A Sept. 24, 2013 report to the Port Community Liaison Committee showed a map of 10 proposed projects from North Vancouver to Tsawwassen.

The 2013 project confirmation for Boundary Bay and Roberts Bank signed by PMV's Habitat Banking Program project manager Gord Ruffo and DFO project biologist Brian Naito said the Delta project would involve "careful removal and proper disposal of excessive woody debris" from three kilometres of shoreline.

"Once the woody debris is removed, the broader range of ecological functions associated with productive salt marsh habitats will be restored," said the project outline. "Removal of woody debris will increase habitat productivity by allowing the re-establishment and expansion of salt marsh and by improving tidal flushing within the marsh."

The project outline said that after removal, the woody debris would be sorted on the dike into piles for re-use, such as First Nations carving, recycling or disposal. A metal detector would be used to detect nails and spikes while plastics and other debris would be disposed at an approved facility.

In the Richmond News on March 14, former senior DFO biologist Otto Langer [slammed](#) the Port's habitat banking program, noting that habitat was removed in 2012 from the Fisheries Act and environmental assessments were delegated to PMV.

"Now the port is the developer who does environmental reviews and approvals of projects they will promote and profit from," Langer wrote.

"PMV, with the help of the DFO, is now essentially free to commodify publicly held habitat and sell it in the marketplace."

North Vancouver-based journalist Bob Mackin, a regular contributor to The Tyee, has reported for local, regional, national and international media outlets since 1990. Find his Tyee articles [here](#).

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