

Article rank ■■■■■

Rare slough threatened by highway

ENVIRONMENT CANADA: Report says mitigation measures near bog won't protect it

*BY KENT SPENCER
STAFF REPORTER*



An environmentally rare area beside Delta's Burns Bog would be "seriously compromised" by a proposed provincial highway that will run through it, says Environment Canada.

And there's no reason to think the man-made structures intended to ease the problem will work, it adds.

The federal agency says Crescent Slough, a rare transition zone between rotting vegetation and traditional soil, would be "severely damaged or destroyed" by the South Fraser Perimeter Highway.

In a report which has only recently come to light, Environment Canada says there is "no evidence" that the bog's natural water-regulating system "can be replaced by an engineering structure" contemplated by the province.

The proposed perimeter highway is a four-lane, 40-kilometre road connecting Highway No. 1 in Surrey to Roberts Bank in Delta.

The highway would pass on the bog's western edge through Crescent Slough, a large drainage area, and pass along its northern border.

The project must receive approval from the B.C. Environment Assessment office before proceeding with construction in 2009.

B.C. Transportation Minister Kevin Falcon said the highway will be designed to ensure the bog will not be compromised.

"The very best experts are examining the issues to minimize the damage," he said.

Mitigation measures would include eight small bridges to elevate the road so wildlife can pass, and a double-ditch system which would prevent water from draining into the bog and control the amount of water leaving it.

"The NDP wanted to pave the bog and put the PNE on it," he said. "Our government protected all 5,000 acres."

Critics say the highway will do great harm.

"The government is pushing this ahead without waiting for the scientists," said Guy Gentner, NDP MLA for Delta North.

"If the [Gordon] Campbell government proceeds with a route that plows through Burns Bog, it will make a farce of their climate change bill."

Eliza Olson, president of the Burns Bog Conservation Society, predicted the road will be a "money pit."

"They're building on a giant sponge where the peat is 15 metres deep. The road will be continually sinking," she said.