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## NEWS RELEASE

### Environmental report shows Columbia River improving – outlook positive

TRAIL- The outlook for the Columbia River is positive according to a new report released by the Columbia River Integrated Environmental Monitoring Program (CRIEMP - pronounced "kree-emp") at BC Rivers Day in Trail over the weekend.

"We're pleased with the positive trend the data is showing," said Bill Duncan, CRIEMP spokesperson. "We've compiled over ten years of monitoring data and found that changes and improvements in industry practices along the river have made a big difference to river health and ongoing monitoring programs allow us to track this and to promote continual improvement."

CRIEMP monitors sixty kilometres of the river from the Arrow Reservoir to the Canada-US border, referred to as the Lower Columbia River. This stretch of the Columbia is influenced by Hugh Keenleyside, Brilliant, and Waneta dams, and industrial operations including Zellstoff Celgar, Pope and Talbot, and Teck Cominco, which operate along its banks. The Lower Columbia River is also fed by two major tributaries with environmental impacts of their own, the Kootenay and Pend D'Oreille rivers. As well, Castlegar, Trail discharge their treated municipal wastewater into the river. Added to this, more and more people enjoy the river for recreation and want to live beside it. All this puts the river environment under considerable pressure from human activities, and makes CRIEMP's monitoring and reporting role an important component in understanding the resulting environmental impacts.

"Rivers are the lifeblood of this region," said Katrine Conroy, MLA for Kootenay-Boundary. "Not only am I happy that the Columbia River is a healthier environment today, I'm happy that partnerships like CRIEMP are encouraging communities to get involved in decisions that affect the Columbia so we can make sure monitoring results continue to improve over the next decade."

Key findings of the 2005 report include improved survival of benthic invertebrates (bugs eaten by fish), reduced levels of entrained gases related to dam spilling that can be harmful to fish, stability among most recreational fish populations, and lower levels of contaminants in sediments. Using a national ranking system, CRIEMP reports that water quality has improved from "poor - marginal" to "good" at Waneta and remains "good - excellent" at Birchbank. This means that the river is safe for recreation and aquatic life and that water from the Lower Columbia, like water from all surface sources, is safe to drink once it has undergone general surface treatment.

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CRIEMP reports that the outlook for white sturgeon in the Columbia River remains uncertain and their survival will depend upon the success of the Upper Columbia White Sturgeon Recovery Initiative to address the lack of reproductive success. Many CRIEMP members and US organizations are involved in the initiative to recover sturgeon populations in the river.

CRIEMP plans to widen its monitoring to include other contaminants, such as organic compounds from sources like pesticide applications and long range transport from other areas, and pharmaceutical compounds that can make their way into rivers through municipal wastewater discharges. "We still have challenges ahead of us, and we plan to continue working through CRIEMP and with all our partners to collect monitoring data and report on the state of the river. We can't let up now that we're seeing river health improve," said Duncan. "We need to educate the public about impacts from use of pesticides and herbicides, removal of bank vegetation, and other watershed activities that affect the river and its' tributaries."

Key stakeholders from government and industry formed the Columbia River Integrated Environmental Monitoring Program or CRIEMP in 1991 to assess the status of ecological health of the Canadian portion of the Columbia River between Hugh Keenleyside Dam and the Canada - US border. The primary objective of CRIEMP is to gather and share environmental information with the public, agencies, and industries in a coordinated and cost-effective manner. Partners now include all levels of government, local industry, First Nations, and non-government organizations from Canada and the US.

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