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Environmentalists and whale organizations launch underwater investigation of Robson Bight

October 19, 2007 (Telegraph Cove, B.C.) - Greenpeace, Living Oceans Society and concerned whale organizations will launch an underwater investigation of the sunken logging equipment in the Robson Bight Ecological Reserve. The investigation, to begin on October 30th, will include sending a manned submersible to inspect the state of the potentially fuel-laden wreckage.

“We are receiving reports that diesel and hydraulic fluid continue to bubble to the surface, indicating that the wreckage is still leaking petroleum into critical whale habitat,” says Jennifer Lash of Living Oceans Society. “We must get a clear picture of what is happening in Robson Bight and develop a plan that addresses impacts on the whales and marine life.”

On August 20th a barge loaded with logging equipment and a fuel truck spilled its contents into the critical whale habitat of the Michael Bigg Ecological Reserve at Robson Bight. A total of 19,000 litres of petroleum, mostly diesel, went overboard in the equipment. It is unclear how much diesel remains trapped in the fuel truck and machinery, now lying at a depth of 350 metres.

The Coast Guard, acting as lead agency on the Robson Bight spill, deems an investigation unnecessary after a technical assessment concluded that the fuel truck had likely imploded.

Environmental and whale organizations initiated a fundraising effort shortly after the spill, over concerns that the Coast Guard would downplay the significance of the incident and not take appropriate action.

“The Coast Guard may believe this wreckage is out of sight and out of mind, but people from Canada and around the world have raised over \$40,000 to get the facts,” says Sarah King of Greenpeace Canada. “No other place is as important to the Northern Resident orcas of Vancouver Island as Robson Bight.”

Government agencies with jurisdiction over the incident are divided on what should be done and appear to be deadlocked. The British Columbia Ministry of the Environment is for an assessment of the wreckage but federal government departments such as the Coast Guard and Environment Canada disagree.

“We applaud the Province’s continued support for an underwater investigation of this environmental disaster,” says Paul Spong of OrcaLab. “It remains a mystery why the Coast Guard has such certainty that most of the fuel has already been dispersed. It is disappointing and frustrating to say the least.”

Additional Information: A five minute documentary on the Robson Bight spill with footage of recent petroleum slicks is available in high resolution on DVD from Living Oceans Society or as a YouTube video online at www.livingoceans.org. For a copy of the DVD contact Geoff Gilliard at 604- 999-6273 or ggilliard@livingoceans.org

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