

CANADIAN HERITAGE RIVERS

A year ago in the summer of 1991, a study was done in Prince Edward Island on seventeen rivers which had perhaps some potential for national recognition in the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. That study produced a comparative rating of the values of each of the rivers and set the stage for further work in 1992.

The second study, conducted last summer, focused upon the three rivers at the the top of the values ratings, the Hillsborough, the West (Eliot), and the Morell. Human heritage, natural heritage, recreation potential and management feasibility on these three rivers had been top-rated in 1991 and the further background studies were aimed at determining whether these individual rivers met specific values and guidelines set by the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board for river nominations. Prince Edward Island does not currently have a designated Canadian Heritage River and we have something to offer the system not currently recognized with most of our watercourses being estuarial.

Background studies are expected to be completed this month and the draft reports indicate that all three rivers meet the requirements for nomination. Each however has particular strengths and a nomination for one would be justified quite differently from each of the others.

The Morell River appears to meet all of the recreational value selection and integrity guidelines. There is support for a nomination in the human heritage values in the lower watershed and in the natural heritage values in the middle watershed. The Hillsborough River was found to meet all of the human heritage values and the historical integrity guidelines. It could also support a nomination based on recreational values on the entire watershed and upon natural values in the middle watershed. The West River also was found to meet all of the human heritage values and historical integrity guidelines plus the recreational value guidelines and integrity.

This was only a part of the consultant's role in preparing the background studies. Contact with communities along the rivers was also initiated. The process of understanding what it means to have a Canadian Heritage River in the province is a very necessary one as no nomination will be presented to the Board without community support. It is not known therefore at this time if a nomination will proceed on any of these rivers. The requirement from this point involves the preparation of a nomination document and a formal presentation to the Board, after which a management plan is prepared for use by communities and interest groups in looking after their resource or in making improvements. These remaining activities could take up to four years.

All studies referred to above have been conducted by Island Nature Trust as a consultant to the Parks Branch of the Department of Tourism, Parks and Recreation.

-Doug Murray