



MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Malaspina Governors and City of Nanaimo Urged to Act Responsibly

NANAIMO, BC – Sierra Legal Defence Fund and a local ecological group, the Friends of the Cat Stream are calling on Malaspina University-College's Board of Governors and the City of Nanaimo to take the steps necessary to ensure that development of lands near provincially registered, environmentally sensitive wetlands is done properly.

The wetlands in question are vital habitat for a number of rare and threatened species including birds like the Virginia Rail, plants (Vancouver Island Beggar Tick) and amphibians (red-legged frog). They also form the headwaters of Cat Stream Creek, a fish-bearing stream.

Sierra Legal Scientist John Werring has written a letter to Malaspina University-College, a partner in the development project, outlining several concerns relating to the potential impacts of building six sports fields next to the wetlands. "Our concerns relate to the potential impacts of this project on the environment and on human health and safety," wrote Werring. "This is exemplified by the City's apparent refusal to consider affording an 80 metre set back on the property to protect the habitat of the Virginia Rail, a rare migratory bird."

"If Malaspina University-College was sincere about applying their environmental standards they would follow the sound advice of Dr. Courtney Conway, a renowned expert on the Virginia Rail and Associate Professor of Arizona University who advised the developers of the sports fields to apply an 80 meter leave strip to protect the wetland habitat of the Rails", said Rory Rickwood, spokesperson for Friends of the Cat Stream.

This is not the first time that Malaspina's activities have raised environmental concerns. "On January 17, 2000, Malaspina University-College pleaded guilty for releasing fish-threatening sediment into the Cat Stream Creek when trying to construct playing fields on Malaspina campus," said Rickwood. "I believe it would be a sad day for the environment if a university is party to eliminating vital wetland habitat."

The human health and safety issues relate to the possible public exposure to lead contamination because the project site was a former skeet shooting range and because there are huge coal mining voids with few pillars of support directly below the proposed sports fields. "We think the community needs an answer about whether it's safe to use these fields and about what might happen to the fields during an earthquake," said Rickwood.

"One would think that, as an institution of higher learning, the College's support for this project would be predicated on sound environmental and human health and safety principles," said Werring.

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