



Langford Lake Cave

BC Speleological Federation City of Langford - Spencer Road Interchange

Media Advisory
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Summary:

The BC Speleological Federation (BCSF) has been negotiating in a spirit of cooperation with the City of Langford to protect Langford Lake Cave at the site of the planned Spencer Road Interchange. The BCSF is concerned about damage to the cave and other karst features in the area, and is advocating for a relocation of the interchange. The group recommended a complete geotechnical assessment, which the city has not done. The city has also failed to protect the cave and other natural features.

The new interchange "will completely and irreversibly alienate a substantial portion of the karst unit within which the cave is located and will destroy any as-yet unidentified cave passages which may exist within the affected area. In addition, the City has advised that blasting will take place to a depth of 2 - 7 metres at a distance of only 9 metres from the most easterly point of the surveyed cave. In the view of Federation representatives who have examined the cave, the potential for damage to, or even destruction of, the cave as a result of the proposed blasting is extremely high."

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BC Speleological Federation

City of Langford - Spencer Road Interchange

The BC Speleological Federation ("the Federation") represents the broad interests of active caving organizations in British Columbia. As such, the Federation has a clear mandate from its members to speak out for the caving community on matters relating to cave and karst (limestone terrain) conservation within the Province.

Vancouver Island includes some of the most significant cave and karst resources to be found anywhere in Canada. The Greater Victoria area is among the few Provincial and State capital regions in North America having cave and karst features within its boundaries. The Federation takes the view that this distinctive ecological feature of the Greater Victoria area sets it apart from other capital regions and hence should be conserved to the maximum extent possible, as indeed should cave and karst resources everywhere given the fact that such features take many millennia to form and are thus irreplaceable once lost or damaged.

The Federation has taken a close interest in the interchange project currently being pursued by the City of Langford, reportedly to serve the nearby Bear Mountain development. That development has already resulted in the loss of one cave which formerly lay within the Bear Mountain project area. This was SPAET Cave, the destruction of which has been amply documented in the media.

It was therefore with great concern that the Federation learned in early 2007 that the proposed location for the new interchange coincided with a substantial and well-known area of karst in the vicinity of Spencer Road. This area of karst includes the longest currently-accessible limestone cave in the Greater Victoria area - Langford Lake Cave. The area is considered to have a significant potential to contain other cave passages as yet undiscovered.

From the outset, the Federation has taken the view that the loss of even one cave to a specific development is indefensible in a community which prides itself on its ecological setting and that the loss of (or damage to) a second cave to a road project apparently being pursued largely in support of the same development would simply add insult to injury. Accordingly, the Federation has strongly advocated the relocation of the interchange project to an area in which cave and karst features do not exist. As long ago as May 2007 the Federation recommended that prior to any final decisions being taken with respect to the location and design of this project, a detailed karst inventory of the proposed site be undertaken by qualified karst specialists in accordance with the "Karst Inventory Standards and Vulnerability Assessment Procedures for British Columbia" and other relevant standards.

To the present knowledge of the Federation, no such inventory was ever undertaken. Indeed, the Federation has been informed by the City of Langford that the geotechnical consultants retained by the City to assess the project site did not even enter the cave. Proper assessment of the cave is clearly impossible under these circumstances.

To at least partially make good this deficiency, the cave was re-surveyed (mapped) in more detail by members of the Vancouver Island Cave Exploration Group (a Federation member group) at their own expense. The resulting map survey was made available to the City at no charge for their consideration in the planning of the project. The new cave map supplements much older maps of the cave, including one produced by cavers in 1975 which was also made available to the City.

Despite the recommendations and actions summarized above, which were undertaken in a sincere spirit of co-operation in the expectation that they would be given full consideration, no further karst studies appear to have been undertaken, and the Federation has now been informed by staff of the City of Langford that the location of the Spencer Road interchange has been finalized in its published form notwithstanding the clear negative implications of the project upon cave and karst resources within and adjacent to the site.

The location published on the City's web site will completely and irreversibly alienate a substantial portion of the karst unit within which the cave is located and will destroy any as-yet unidentified cave passages which may exist within the affected area. In addition, the City has advised that blasting will take place to a depth of 2 - 7 metres at a distance of only 9 metres from the most easterly point of the surveyed cave. In the view of Federation representatives who have examined the cave, the potential for damage to, or even destruction of, the cave as a result of the proposed blasting is extremely high. In addition, the project as presently understood will pose as-yet undocumented risks to the LLC site's natural ecological integrity as a result of the proximity and ongoing use and maintenance of the projected road as well as possible impacts upon the groundwater hydrology of the area.

The City recently made a verbal commitment to the Federation that they would undertake a last-minute karst inventory, primarily to identify potential mitigation measures which might reduce karst impacts. While mitigation of unavoidable impacts is desirable, the fact remains that avoidance of such impacts in the first place should always be the primary goal. With the reported finalization of the project design and location, the opportunity for impact avoidance has now passed. Although the proposed study may identify measures for the mitigation of physical impacts to the cave itself through measures to reduce blast-related ground acceleration, there is no way in which mitigation can be provided for the direct loss of karst features and associated ecosystem which will be removed to make way for the interchange.

It is the opinion of the Federation and its member organizations that a project such as this which is located on public land and is understood to be receiving public funding should be subject to the exercise of due diligence with respect to all aspects of its planning and design. It has yet to be demonstrated to the Federation that due diligence has been exercised with respect to the cave and karst issues associated with this project.

Accordingly, the Federation and its member organizations wish to go on the public record as being opposed to the Spencer Road Interchange project at its present location.