



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## ***Columbia Wetlands – Natural Inspiration***

*Art show celebrates Columbia Wetlands, works to save them*

Golden B.C. — Wildsight and the Art Gallery of Golden (AGOG) present a mixed-media art exhibit that explores the Columbia River and Wetlands. *Columbia Wetlands — Natural Inspiration* opens on January 31, 2009 to commemorate World Wetland Day (February 2, 2009.)

Top studio artists from the Columbia Valley, the Kootenays and Calgary are represented, including Jane Tevelein Doel, one of B.C.'s best clay artists.

“Those of us living side-by-side with the Columbia Wetlands have a chance to passionately speak up for one of the last wild stretches of a once-wild river, in whatever way we are able,” said Tevelein Doel. Her piece, *Mother Columbia*, is composed of raku-fired clay tiles. Some of the tiles contain clay the artist dug from the banks of the Columbia River.

“An artist can respond to beauty in a landscape, and the viewer responds,” Tevelein Doel said. “But today, the shadow of something urgent accompanies the experience of both artist and viewer alike: the very being of the landscape is threatened.”

Threats to the wetlands include invasive species, motorized recreation, loss of habitat, nearby development and pollution. The “shadow of urgency” Tevelein Doel talks about will only grow larger in coming years.

Bill Usher, Executive Director of Kicking Horse Culture/Art Gallery of Golden, also believes that the exhibit will create a long-lasting effect. “Artists derive inspiration from the Columbia Wetlands and create lasting legacies from that inspiration,” he said. “The gallery exhibit, print catalogue and the website exhibit will all facilitate long-term appreciation of both the artists' work and this wild and powerful place that we are blessed to live beside.”

Wildsight program manager Ellen Zimmerman explained why a conservation organization and an art gallery came together on the exhibit with a Columbia Wetlands theme: “Wildsight believes that conservation gains are achieved through public education and raising awareness. Artists in all media have a unique vision. The environmental science is very important, but art can engage our senses and stir our feelings.”

“*Natural Inspiration* will touch people’s hearts,” Zimmerman added, “and inspire us all to help sustain the Columbia Wetlands. We hope that the project will move viewers to a greater understanding, appreciation and stewardship of this natural treasure. It is also an opportunity to support local artists.”

The work in the gallery exhibit is for sale. A limited edition, full-colour, 32-page print catalogue will be available for sale through the gallery. *Columbia Wetlands — Natural Inspiration* will also be published on the internet at [www.kickinghorseculture.ca/agog](http://www.kickinghorseculture.ca/agog) providing access to the exhibit to visitors from around the world.

Robert Bateman, Canadian wildlife artist and conservationist, contributed to the exhibit with a limited edition print and a foreword to the catalogue. The Golden Community Foundation, Columbia Basin Trust and the Columbia Wetlands Stewardship Partners support the project.

*Columbia Wetlands — Natural Inspiration* opens on January 31 with a reception from 4pm to 6pm at the Art Gallery of Golden and runs through until March 28.

— 30 — (See below for contact and background information)

**Contact:**

Ellen Zimmerman, program director, Wildsight  
250-348-2225 • [ellen@wildsight.ca](mailto:ellen@wildsight.ca)

Bill Usher, executive director, Kicking Horse Culture/Art Gallery of Golden  
250-344-6186 • [info@kickinghorseculture.ca](mailto:info@kickinghorseculture.ca)

Jane Tevelein Doel, artist  
250-348-2347 • [janetevelein@gmail.com](mailto:janetevelein@gmail.com)

**About the Art Gallery of Golden**

First opened in February 2007, the AGOG is a public art gallery established by Kicking Horse Culture, a.k.a. Golden District Arts Council. Moving down the street in June, 2008 to an enlarged and newly-renovated space on the main street of downtown Golden, AGOG and the new Studio Gift Shop are a primary outlet for the visual arts in Golden and the Columbia Valley. For more information, please visit [www.kickinghorseculture.ca](http://www.kickinghorseculture.ca)

**About Wildsight**

Wildsight works locally, regionally and globally to protect biodiversity and encourage sustainable communities in Canada's Columbia and southern Rocky Mountain region. This area is internationally recognized as a keystone to conservation in western North America. For more information, please visit [www.wildsight.ca](http://www.wildsight.ca)

**About the Columbia Wetlands**

If you live in the Pacific Northwest, there’s a good chance each time you turn on the tap, you’re connecting with the Columbia Wetlands. As nature’s water filter, these wetlands play a key role in keeping our water clean and pure. They store excess water and slowly release filtered water back into the groundwater table to remove many harmful impurities. The wetlands, along with the Columbia

River water system, are the primary source of fresh water to over 15 million people in the Pacific Northwest.

The Columbia Wetlands are more than 180 kilometres in length — making them some of the longest intact wetlands in North America. They are critically important wildlife and migratory and resident birds. This biologically-diverse expanse is the headwaters of the Columbia River, the largest river flowing into the Pacific Ocean from North America

They were chosen as Ramsar Wetlands of International Significance in 2005. These 25,000-hectare wetlands represent one of the few remaining intact portions of the Pacific Flyway, a crucial path for migrating birds.

Because so many of the wetland ecosystems on the Columbia River have been lost through damming, draining and flooding, the Columbia Wetlands are even more important for wildlife and migratory birds. During spring and fall migration periods, tens of thousands of birds representing hundreds of species can be found resting and feeding in the Columbia Wetlands.