

## *Polar Outbreak*

*by Ross Davies*

November in the Kanaka watershed is typically dark and wet, as relentless parades of maritime weather systems dump almost continuous rainfall as they ascend the western slopes of the coast mountains. The many small feeder streams have quadrupled in size, making room for the tributary-spawning coho salmon. It is late fall, and the Pacific is exerting its influence on the land more now than during any other season. However, occasionally the land pushes back.

Far to the north, in the Yukon, the jet stream is beginning to send out the first push of cold Arctic air of the season. Even as the Pacific storms continue to batter the southern coast, the dome of polar air is accumulating and strengthening. The frigid mass begins to advance southward, probing for a way out to the coast as high pressure builds.

On the Lower Mainland, night is falling as the polar outbreak starts to announce its arrival. The wind increases to 40km/h, then 60, in wave after wave as the Arctic air makes its mad rush down the mountain passes from the Interior and into the Fraser Valley. Somewhere off in the hills, the coyotes are howling under the moonlight.



By morning, the temperature has dropped from plus seven to minus three in a matter of hours. This is not the familiar damp, misty and frosty chill, but rather an iron, arid cold that removes every last trace of moisture from the air. The Arctic push has driven away the clouds, and the sky is a brilliant shade of blue as the seabirds ride the wind against the perfect early winter sky.



The cold air will eventually retreat, but as it does it will interact with Pacific moisture and transform the landscape again. Winter has come to the lowlands.

