
BC Parks Conservation Program

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BC Parks Conservation Program

Introduction

While conservation of natural values has been a concern since the first provincial park was established in 1911, it was not until the 1965 *Park Act* was passed that provincial parks gained a legislated conservation mandate. In 1971, the ecological reserve system, directed under the *Ecological Reserve Act*, was developed for the maintenance of biological diversity. Today, this network of protected areas is viewed internationally as a remarkable achievement in conservation and an example of the commitment to global biodiversity goals.

An Ecosystem Management Approach

Ecosystems

BC Parks will move toward an ecosystem management approach for protected areas under its stewardship, using the highest level of ecosystem knowledge available with the goal of maintaining the ecological integrity of the ecosystem. Ecosystem management requires an understanding of the interrelationships of the ecosystem's biotic and abiotic components. Much of this understanding is still in the formative stages. Several advantages to the ecosystem management approach can be identified:

- Attention is focused on interrelationships among ecosystem components such as water quality and quantity, biota, air quality, and soils, encouraging integrated management of ecosystem components.
- It has the potential to prevent negative or unintended consequences from individual management actions.
- Management attention is focused on important long-term and/or large-scale issues and promotes greater continuity in management efforts.
- It fosters a holistic view of the environmental system and of many environmental problems and conservation management issues.
- It encourages interagency cooperation in that ecosystems generally extend beyond traditional jurisdictional boundaries.
- It offers an important mechanism for integrating science and management.

Biodiversity

The conservation of natural biodiversity will ensure the maintenance of ecosystem, species, and genetic diversity, and the processes that shaped them. Protected areas are an essential element in conserving natural biodiversity. To maintain natural biodiversity, several elements should be considered:

- a system of core protected areas,
- a gradation of intensity zones that surround protected areas,
- linkages that interconnect protected areas, and
- the creation of small refuges within intensively managed areas.

Endangered, Threatened, or Vulnerable Species

Although an ecosystem management approach will be applied to parks and ecological reserves, an area with an endangered, threatened, or vulnerable species will be managed with the protection of that species as the primary objective.

Legislation Guiding BC Parks Conservation Management

Park Act and Regulations

In accordance with the *Park Act* (1996, RS Chap. 344, also includes *Park Amendment Act*, 1997):

- Parks are dedicated to the preservation of their natural environments for inspiration, use, and enjoyment [Section 5(3)].
- A park use or a resource permit is required to authorize an action or a course of behaviour or conduct, or the occupancy, use, development, exploitation or extraction of a natural feature in a park or recreation area [Sections 8, 16, and 20].
- Natural features in a Class A, Class B or Class C park are protected from consumptive use (except fish and wildlife in accordance with the *Wildlife Act*) [Section 9(1)].
- BC Parks has jurisdiction over all matters concerning parks and recreation areas, including natural features in parks and recreation areas [Section 3(1)].
- The *Park Act* is subject only to the *Environment and Land Use Act*, the *Environmental Assessment Act*, the *Waste Management Act*, the *Heritage Conservation Act*, Section 23 of the *Mineral Tenure Act*, the *Wildlife Act* (subject to the *Park and Recreation Area Regulations*) and the *Forest Act* (regarding disposal of timber) [Sections 2 and 15].

- Provisions for offences and penalties are provided [Section 28],
- Park use permits may be issued for existing use (except commercial logging, mining or hydroelectric development) for new parks listed in Schedules D and E [Section 30],
- There will be continuation of existing grazing and hay cutting tenures in new parks described in Schedules D and E to be managed by Ministry of Forests under the *Range Act* [Section 30],
- Existing park use permits issued before the *Park Amendment Act* 1995 will continue [Section 31].

Further, the *Park and Recreation Area Regulation* (B.C. Reg. 180/90) outlines specific legislated ordinances with regard to:

- permits (Division 2),
- control of animals (Division 3, Sections 18-20),
- hunting and fishing (Division 5), and
- preservation and waste management (Division 6).

Ecological Reserve Act and Regulations

In accordance with the *Ecological Reserve Act*:

- Ecological reserves are established for ecological purposes including: representative examples of British Columbia's natural ecosystems; protection of rare and endangered plants and animals in their natural habitat; preservation of unique, rare, or outstanding botanical, zoological, or geological phenomena; and for scientific research and educational uses [Section 2].
- Areas established as ecological reserves are not subject to any further disposition under any other act [Section 5].
- Regulations can be made regarding anything necessary to protect the ecological reserve (Section 7).

Further, the *Ecological Reserve Regulations* specify:

- restrictions and prohibitions to ecological reserves (Section 1),
- that permits will authorize the type of educational and research use [Sections 2-6], and
- that foreign and exotic species are restricted [Section 8].

Environment and Land Use Act (BC)

Establishes and enables the Environment and Land Use Committee which ensures that all aspects of preservation and maintenance of the natural environment are fully considered in land administration.

Resources Inventory Committee Standards (BC)

The Resources Inventory Committee (RIC) is responsible for establishing standards for inventories of natural and cultural features, including collection, storage, analysis, interpretation and reporting of inventory data.

Conservation Goals – Parks

Representation

- To contain viable representation of all the natural and cultural heritage diversities across the province in order to conserve sustainable ecological values.

Special Features

- To protect the special natural and cultural heritage features of British Columbia. These have been identified as physical, biological, or cultural elements.

Conservation Goals – Ecological Reserves

Representation

- To preserve representative examples of British Columbia's natural ecosystems and perpetuate important genetic values.

Special Features

- To protect rare and endangered plants and animals in their natural habitat.
- To preserve unique, rare, or outstanding botanical, zoological, or geological phenomena.

Research and Education

- To promote scientific research and educational uses associated with the natural environment.

Guiding Principles for Conservation: BC Parks' Commitment to Conservation

A set of conservation management principles has been developed to guide BC Parks in its management of the natural and cultural values in British Columbia's protected areas system (which has been established through an open and public process). The principles are founded on the knowledge that British Columbia is the most geographically and biologically diverse province in Canada. BC Parks has statutory obligations for the protection of the natural environment; the preservation and maintenance of recreational values; and to preserve representative and special natural ecosystems, species, features and phenomena. BC Parks, therefore, has a commitment to protect, present and manage, for all time, the natural and cultural heritage conserved in the provincial protected areas system. The lands, and cultural and natural values which are protected in British Columbia's protected areas system are dedicated to the people of British Columbia, Canada, and the world.

BC Parks will uphold this trust by:

1. Conserving and managing representative examples of British Columbia's ecosystems within the provincial protected area system designated by government.

The system of protected areas will contain significant parks and ecological reserves which conserve representative natural, recreational, and cultural values of British Columbia.

2. Maintaining essential ecological processes and variety in nature through the conservation and management of complete and functioning ecosystems.

Protection of watersheds and ecological units is required to ensure that natural processes can function. BC Parks will manage the park and ecological reserve system in a manner that respects natural ecological systems.

3. Conserving variety in nature (biological diversity) at all levels, giving rare, threatened, and endangered species special management attention.

The ecological diversity and richness in British Columbia is unique to Canada and to many other parts of the world. Protecting this incredible variety within the province's park and ecological reserve system is a vital contribution to national and global conservation efforts.

4. Showing leadership in cooperation and coordination with other agencies, aboriginal people, and the public to protect and manage lands and natural and cultural values within, and adjacent to, the province's parks and ecological reserve boundaries.

BC Parks cannot work alone in the protection and management of natural values, be they within or outside of park and ecological reserve boundaries. In some instances, formal cooperative management agreements may be required to ensure adequate levels of protection. We will work closely with other

conservation agencies and other governments, including First Nations, recognizing the similarity of many provincial and federal program goals and objectives.

5. Recognizing a limited knowledge and understanding of ecosystems, natural processes will be allowed to predominate whenever possible.

As part of a commitment to biodiversity, natural ecosystems within parks and ecological reserves will be allowed to evolve from stage to stage. In this manner, we will try to increase the knowledge and understanding of the natural ecosystem. Only in specific instances, where the arrest of a natural process is necessary to protect other outstanding values, will BC Parks interfere.

6. Encouraging environmental learning and the sharing of knowledge within and between BC Parks' staff and the public, and working toward the resolution of issues through conservation.

BC Parks' conservation message is the essential mainstay of work to improve public understanding of the environment. BC Parks will continue to help the public understand BC Parks' role and its commitment to conservation through management programs and the promotion of research within British Columbia's park and ecological reserve system.

7. Giving priority to conservation in BC Parks' planning and management through: environmental evaluation, sound decision making, and by encouragement and support of research and education.

Until the 1980s, BC Parks focussed on recreation management rather than on the management of the natural environment in protected areas. More recently, and to be further enhanced in the future, BC Parks has committed to progressive environmental inventory and conservation research, results of which will be used in management and made accessible to others.

8. Respecting aboriginal peoples' traditional harvesting and cultural activities in parks and ecological reserves, and seeking a special relationship honouring their cultural heritage.

Most often, areas of considerable value to First Nations' governments can be traced to their traditional importance for sustaining life and culture. In recognition of this fact, BC Parks will continue to encourage cooperative conservation of natural values within British Columbia's park and ecological reserve system, and the preservation of culturally important traditions.

9. Practicing recycling, re-using, and reducing consumable goods and products in all aspects of parks and ecological reserves operations, and selecting environmentally friendly products and practices whenever possible.

BC Parks is proud of its role in global conservation, environmental management, and nature education. We will sustain exemplary, ecologically responsible practices in the operation and maintenance throughout British Columbia's park and ecological reserve system.