

**STRATHCONA PARK PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE
(June 19, 2015 – BC Parks Office, Miracle Beach)**

SPPAC MEMBERS: Philip Stone, Hardolph Wasteneys, Jan Hesseling, Paolo Tancon, Sandra Borton (Sandra joined the meeting at 7:55pm), Kevin McPhedran, and Greg Johnson

Regrets: Alison Mewett, Darren Saare

BC Parks: Andy Smith

Recorder: John Milne

Members of the Public: None

AGENDA

Introductions: All + Public

Approve Agenda: All

Minutes: The last meeting's minutes were previously approved by email.

Strathcona Update - Andy

See Strathcona Update attachment appended below.

Discussion

Nyrstar: Tennant Pipeline - Damage in the area is being worked on and the trail is to be assessed. A leak in the penstock is being dealt with. Any damage to the trail will be remediated.

The attached Nyrstar update neglects to mention that a gate is being installed to control access through the mine site. The public is still welcome to pass through the site. The gate will be near the CRAB (core shacks). There will be more room for parking there. A gatehouse will be staffed however, if nobody is there, an intercom can be used for people to gain access. Plans are yet to be submitted to Andy. There needs to be signage welcoming the public so they don't turn back, as they often did with the previous gate arrangement.

Disappointment was expressed that trees will be removed at the mine site as part of the tailings facility upgrade. There will also be more disturbances where the diversion ditch is being worked on.

Helen McKenzie trail: The Helen McKenzie trail to the Ranger Cabin upgrades are being put on hold due to lack of capital funds to make a significant improvement. Hopefully a larger amount will be available in 2016 to do a much more comprehensive upgrade. There is still discussion about the possibility of relocating the trail higher up the hill to solve some drainage problems. BC Parks is reluctant to pursue this relocation due to the high cost, the unknown impacts, and the fact that there is another route to the same area via Kwai Lake. Maybe signage could be put up to encourage people to use the other higher quality trail. There is a possibility of using counters to monitor the use of each route in order to have some hard data to base decisions on. Andy will follow this up with the PFO to try and pursue this.

A trail upgrade/relocation could possibly be considered as a volunteer project over several years. Any upgrades or relocation must be done properly to avoid the same deterioration as the current trail. A new trail would probably be built to a Class 3 standard.

Many users make a loop out of the Helen Mackenzie/Kwai Lake trails, going out via one route and back by the other.

SPPAC could get more involved in this topic in future, if or when upgrades are being considered.

Price Creek Trail: Andy would like to decommission the trailhead due to lack of use. Search and Rescue has said people tend to get lost in the area as it's quite overgrown. Andy would remove the signs and leave the trail as is. A post would be erected on the other side of the creek saying the trail is not maintained and the preferred route is the Bedwell Trail. The trail would not be closed. The Price Creek trail will never be upgraded after the mine closes. The elk continue to use this area consistently.

The road to the Bedwell Lake trailhead will not be maintained after the mine closes so quality of road access may change. The Bedwell Lake Trail access road could always be walked if the condition eventually becomes undrivable.

SPPAC supports Andy's idea of decommissioning the Price Creek trailhead.

Croteau Lake Group Site: The planned Croteau Lake group site is a priority for BC Parks this year due to the support of the Nyrstar donation. BC Parks headquarters offered to help create a business plan in cooperation with the Park Facility Operator (43K) and regional staff. As part of the new "Service Plus" initiative in Park Facility Operation Agreements, new services and improvements to existing services will be explored. The group shelter is only planned as a seasonal facility to be taken down each fall. While there are no plans at this time for a permanent structure, should funds become available and supported by a strong business case, this could be considered.

New PFO agreements province wide now include operational standards. Because there is a new operator in Strathcona Park (43K), the new agreement protocol was implemented. The group campsite while identified in the Request for Proposals, wasn't included in the original agreement

and therefore, once built, will require funds for maintenance. It is hoped that the revenue generated from the new group site will not only cover the maintenance costs, but help to reduce the deficiency payment paid to the PFO. The PFO will market and promote the group site. Due to legalities associated with the “group site” terminology, this site will be classified as something else (to be determined).

The "Trailrider" program: This week, the Comox Valley Echo printed an article promoting the program. It is hoped that as people learn more about this program, use will continue to rise and Strathcona will become a key destination for accessible wilderness.

New “No Fire” Signs: Phillip got some feedback on the interpretive style “No Fire” signs, saying they are “too wordy”. However, most people agreed they are good as is. The "No Fires" message should be promoted in various ways. Andy would like to add some more signs at specific backcountry campsites where this is a consistent problem. Andy has been talking to Carol Hunter about involving the school groups and putting student's signs up at campsites. Some school group signs were put up in Elk Falls Park and on Cortez Island.

Ongoing Topics

- Private Lands Access into Strathcona - letter to Don Cadden

There has been no response yet from Don. He said he will respond to Andy (*Note this has since happened*). SPPAC felt Philip's letter was excellent, which made reference to the British system. This is a start. Some landowners are inconsistent with allowing groups access to their lands.

- Strathcona Projects List - This is an ongoing topic and was not discussed at this meeting.
- Huts within park - The Alpine Club applied to take over the Ranger Hut. What came to light after the fact was that this project may have been an attempt to get a “foot in the door” by operating this hut with the thought of expanding to other new huts in this and other parks. BC Parks and SPPAC should be cautious if other applications are received in the future.

(Note: Perhaps a zoning matrix could be given to SPPAC members for their information – *This has since been done*). This has been done in the past and helps members understand what is allowed in the different zones of the Park. Strathcona is largely untouched wilderness. Huts do not fit into the zoning for most of it).

A philosophical discussion ensued about “wilderness” vs “use and development”. Andy pointed out that Master Plans are no longer reviewed at set times. Management or Master Plans are monitored and should BC Parks, or other parties identify issues that should be discussed for possible changes, then those sections of the plans will be addressed. Whole

Master/Management Plans are not commonly opened up for a complete review as they were in the past.

There is no indication of any other proposals for the Ranger Cabin. It's still an issue. The PFO uses the cabin in the summer. If the PFO wanted to do more, they would have to make a proposal and SPPAC would have an opportunity to discuss and provide input if needed.

Sandra asked about the relationship between Parks, SPPAC and the ACC. Andy explained that relations are good and BC Parks as well as SPPAC were surprised when they withdrew their proposal. The ACC Hut Committee are now looking at hut opportunities outside of parks which is in closer keeping with guidelines suggested by the Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC.

- Kevin asked about the Spine Committee and its proposals. Andy said they want to build a trail from Harris to Circlet Lake. BC Parks does not support a new trail and would like them to use existing trails. There is no application for a new trail yet. They are concentrating outside the park at the moment. Andy asked what SPPAC thinks about a new trail as proposed. Sandra does not support it.

Philip thinks the Spine Trail spends too much time in the lowlands and not enough in the high country as other trails in the world. He believes that too much of it is on old logging roads.

“Open Street Maps” is a website that has GIS info on trails all over the world. Some of Strathcona Park's trails are on it.

SPPAC would like to be notified early on of any proposal before it gets too far without the opportunity for SPPAC input. These proposals eventually do come before SPPAC and are dealt with however, influencing the proposal before it goes too far may save problems in the end.

It was suggested that the Spine Trail Committee be invited to speak to SPPAC and provide an update.

New Items

- SPPAC Overnight Hike - Phil

A SPPAC hike has been suggested for two nights in August or September. The public could be invited for the first day and SPPAC members would stay overnight. It could be from Friday to Sunday or Saturday to Monday. If this moves forward, the trip needs to be structured properly regarding liability. It was decided that Flower Ridge would be a suitable location with a target date of August 29 – 31.

- Nyrstar Mine Tour - All

A mine tour is being pursued. There is room for 8 people. The suggested dates are June 27 and 28. Four or five people are interested. Nicole might be the one to conduct the tour. Jan, Sandra and Paolo are available for Sunday, June 28 at about 1pm. Darren and Alison may also be interested. There may be a possibility of two tours. Andy will contact Nicole and let her know. One of the Park Rangers (Adam) may also be available to drive and accompany the group.

- Climbing Bolts/Development - Phil

Philip circulated a document which is a start to a strategy on the use of climbing bolts in the Park. There is a lot of interest in climbing in Strathcona Park. Climbing is generally a fairly low impact activity. Bolts create higher impact as they are permanent, and their use is contentious among the climbing community. In Strathcona there are lots of bolts and infrastructure in the Crest Crag area. In the backcountry there are very few but debate online indicates bolting may be a growing practice in areas where their use is unacceptable. This is an issue of "Leave No Trace".

Bolting is a difficult practice and takes a lot of effort, but it is starting to happen in a few alpine areas outside of the park. There is no consensus among climbers about this practice. This contravenes the Park Act. Bolting is not mentioned in the Master Plan.

Parks have let bolting go on, specifically in the Crest Creek Crag area.

The climbing culture is debating this issue. Locally there hasn't been too much of a bolting issue, but the practice is starting to occur here. Parks needs to take the initiative and work with the climbing community to educate and inform them that bolting is not an acceptable practice within the Park(s).

The public also needs to speak up on this.

Jan likes to encourage visitation and use of the Park, promote tourism and the economic development it would bring.

Philip spoke about maintaining the wilderness values in Strathcona and how such values make the park special. What attracts people to this park are the differences between it and the rest of the world.

The enforceability of the prevention of bolting was discussed. It was also mentioned that engaging climbers at Crest Crag is important in order to educate them about impacts in other park zones. This is a preemptive approach which is better than trying to deal with a problem later.

Andy said no zoning specifically allows this, so a policy would need to be developed. The recommendation is to engage the climbing community in this discussion. Such a park policy should be developed province wide. It's not just an issue specific to Strathcona.

There are many opportunities for bolting outside the Park. Philip will write a letter on this topic and circulate it to SPPAC. This letter will be sent to Don Cadden with the hope that it will initiate a province wide movement to deal with this topic (*This has since happened*).

Sandra is interested in public outreach. Andy will connect her with Tawney as she was working on improving outreach prior to her retiring from SPPAC .

- Myra Falls Mine - Hardolph/Phil

Hardolph has been reviewing the closure plans over the last few years. The source of materials for closure needs to be looked at. One source site being looked at is at the CRAB (by the core shacks), but these materials are already being used up resulting in the need to find large volumes of new clean fill material from somewhere else within the mine site. Some source sites have been mapped in the past but not fully assessed and confirmed. This planning has not been done to date and raises the question of whether there is a conscious mine strategy to leave this issue until there is a crisis, leaving no choice but to deal with it right away. Dirty fill has been used in the past for the tailings dam which must be kept covered. SPPAC needs more information about clean fill sources. Hardolph has spoken with John Wilson (previous SPPAC mine representative) about this. The only practical option is accessing clean fill on site. In the past, closure was perhaps considered too far away to focus much attention, but closure is now getting much closer. It should be realized that a large area needs to be covered which will take a lot of clean fill and where is that going to come from? The mine has acknowledged this as important but advises that until a closure plan preference has been confirmed, they don't know how much total clean fill they'll need.

The paste plant plan for moving waste back into the underground has not been fully implemented. Only some paste is being returned to the underground. The mine is running out of room to store tailings as was discussed at the previous meetings. Paste is hard to pump so is difficult to get underground to the far reaches of the tunnels.

SPPAC needs to have these concerns expressed to Nyrstar so that they can make it a higher priority.

SPPAC is still waiting for a response from Nyrstar regarding comments made on the closure plan. SPPAC needs to be patient, but should a response not be received soon, BC Parks should follow up with the Ministry of Mines. The Ministry of Mines is perhaps not used to operating in a Park.

Hardolph reviewed the Mount Polly disaster. Hardolph believes allowing them to change the tailings facility was the reason why it failed. In his opinion it was an issue of profit over safety. However, this incident has prompted more assessments in many places and forced Nyrstar to drill under the current tailings to confirm substrates and identify any potential issues.

- SWI Funding Request – Andy

SWI would like to access Centennial Expedition Legacy Funds to support the training of two people at “Leave No Trace” workshops. This would give SWI an ongoing capacity to deliver programs to school groups and others. It would cost \$4,200 for this training.

While the funds are accounted for within a BC Parks Park Enhancement Fund account, the expenditures of the funds was intended to be controlled by SPPAC. However, currently there are no criteria for distributing it.

Andy thinks a Legacy Fund should be used to leave a legacy for the Park, and while training does help a couple of people, it doesn’t directly provide any legacy for the Park. One obvious issue was that there is no guarantee or mandate that the people trained will continue with SWI or remain in the area. Jan suggested there could be a “subject to” clause guaranteeing the trainees stay for a certain length of time.

Should there be criteria set first? The SPPAC unanimously agreed - Yes.

SWI is a worthy organization and deserves support. This proposal would use approximately half the balance in the Legacy Fund. More details about how this program would work for SWI and the park are needed. Why not use the trainers already available in the Comox Valley? Time may be important here. Their deadline is August 17.

Andy read out the proposal and its budget. SPPAC felt it is very expensive for what it is.

Does SPPAC have any need for funds to do outreach and other activities? There is no separate budget for this.

If Legacy Funds criteria are set, a request for proposals could be sought.

Andy mentioned a previous idea he had, where SWI could potentially train Permittees prior to being allowed to operate in the park. This would ensure all commercial use Permittees operate with the same knowledge of concerns and policies. This could be a potential source of additional funds for SWI.

Philip gave an overview of where the money came from for this fund (Centennial Expedition Sponsors and donors).

Sandra suggested criteria be established at the next SPPAC meeting. This should be done without the pressure of a proposal.

There was a suggestion that perhaps SPPAC could approve part of the money. Also, perhaps SWI could use some of the funds as a loan which could be repaid from their revenues. The return on benefit for this investment is nebulous, with no hard physical results to be measured.

Philip suggested giving a \$1,000 with the offer of the possibility of more if there was a plan for paying it back.

How often is this course offered? If they miss this deadline, will they be able to sign up for another? Do the instructors get paid, or is SWI to get paid?

Another suggestion was to develop criteria and a process before anyone gets any money from this fund. It was agreed that Philip would write a letter to this effect. SWI may apply for funding at a future time when criteria has been developed.

Sandra is going to research some micro finance options for the future.

Next Meeting:

October 2, 2015 at the Miracle Beach Office

Bring your own cups to the next meeting please.

Strathcona Update for SPPAC
June 19, 2014 (BC Parks Black Creek Office)

Strathcona Staffing

Park Facility Operator - Jerry McArthur, Windy Park Operations, has now started his last season under the current contract. The Strathcona Backcountry Maintenance contract is being re-tendered and will be awarded by November 2014.

Seasonal staff - one Senior and a "shared" Regular Ranger have now started. Jeff Hoy is returning as the Senior Ranger (Peter Hehl has now left BC Parks) with a term of April 28th to November 7th. Adam Vojnic, as the shared Black Creek Ranger, is new to BC Parks with a term of June 2nd to September 3rd.

1) New Backcountry Maintenance Contract – the new BC Parks "PRISM" program (Parks Recreation Integrated Services Management) is being implemented this year resulting in many new maintenance contracts being re-tendered throughout the Province. The new contracts while focussed mostly on Frontcountry Operations, also include Backcountry Operations, i.e. Strathcona and Cape Scott. The opportunity to bid on the Strathcona Backcountry contract has been posted as a Request for Proposals (RFP) on BC Bid (<http://www.bcbid.gov.bc.ca/open.dll/welcome>). There will be a Bidders meeting at Black Creek on July 2nd. Closing date is August 1, 2014. The term of the contract will be for 10 years.

2) Nyrstar

- Nyrstar hosted a Mine Closure meeting for all key stakeholders and authorizing agencies in Campbell River on May 13, 2014. BC Parks, Andy Smith and SPPAC representative, Hardolph Wastenays attended and provided comments. While the meeting provided all closure plan information as previously presented to SPPAC on February 7, 2014, it was interesting to hear comments and questions from the other authorizing agencies. The presentation did provide some further clarification, especially concerning the "wetland" option. The wetland label was applied to this only to describe how the tailings were going to be below the water table and not necessarily how the surface was going to be completed/treated. The tailings would be spread out on the valley floor and after construction of a dam at the lower end, the ground water would back up enough to keep the tailings material below the water table, thereby rendering tailings inert. The surface could be planned as a "wetland" but it is our understanding at this time that the surface could also be planned as a forest ecosystem. This is only one of several options being considered at this time, but greater analyses is still required to be able to confirm the feasibility and weigh pros and cons. The other options that have and are being considered are "traditional", involving the contouring, covering with clean fill and then planting; lake, involving the building of a much larger dam to create a lake in the Myra valley (not likely practical, too costly and little support at this time). As the preparation of a closure plan is a Ministry of Mines requirement, it is up to them to approve or reject plans. The meeting concluded with the Ministry of Mines representatives advising that with the need for Nyrstar and their consultants to gather more information, analyse data and consult public, prior to concluding which option is best, the Ministry will most likely consider this plan to be an interim working plan with a much more defined plan to be submitted in the future, i.e. 3 years. Ministry of Mines will confirm this by letter to Nyrstar sometime this summer.
- Jim Mitchell Lake Dam modification project – Nyrstar is ready to start construction and waiting for BC Parks final approval. While we have already given the company approval last year, because of some design changes BC Parks requested an amendment to the Level 2 Impact Assessment to ensure all changes and potential impacts were identified and considered. The company provided an amendment and BC Parks completed their review the first week of June requesting a response to some further questions. As there weren't any major concerns with the changes, once BC Parks receives the response, it is anticipated the Regional Director will issue another letter of approval. Work should commence in July 2014.

3) Capital Projects - Funding has been confirmed allowing for the completion of the 1/3 portion of Battleship/Kwai Lake enhancements (2/3 of this project was completed in 2013). The 2014 work will be completed by the same contractor "Great Installations" and will begin late August. In addition, some design/planning funds have been secured to prepare a plan for enhancements along the Helen Mackenzie Lake trail (between lake junction and west where trail starts up headwall towards Ranger Cabin). Only the worst sections of this trail will be focussed on as it is not practical to invest a significant amount of funds in a costly complete upgrade.

4) CWR Park Use Permit – CWR has confirmed that they will start planning and developing work plans for the Bedwell Valley trail enhancement project this Spring and Summer season. BC Parks hope to review draft in early Fall to allow for ground trothing and modifications to plan if needed. No trail enhancement work can begin without BC Parks approval of plans.

5) Croteau Lake Group Site – BC Parks hopes to complete Level 1 Impacts Assessment process in June. The Level 1 will dictate the need of a Level 2 if warranted. If a Level 2 is required, that will be pursued this summer season. If no Level 2 is required, design plans will be developed for the site and if time permits, there is a possibility that some development may occur during the Fall (when contractor is on site for the completion of the trail enhancement project).

6) Backcountry

Bedwell Lakes Trail Upgrades – No new progress since last update. The project to repair/replace the long section of boardwalk that skirts the Baby Bedwell lake shore, while completed in 2013 did not meet standards and will be modified by contractor in Spring 2014.

The toilet at Main Bedwell Lake is starting to rot and an assessment is scheduled for early this season to determine if the toilet can be repaired or should be replaced.

A new area map sign will be developed for the two information shelters located at Baby and Main Bedwell Lakes. The new map sign will show trails and surrounding peaks, lakes and rivers.

Elk River Trail Upgrades – The only new worked planned for this season is to fly in two new aluminum food caches to replace old style cable caches. The aluminum bins have been modified to provide hooks on the inside for people to hang their supplies around inside perimeter rather than placing bags on the bottom on top of each other. BC Hydro may assist with fly in during their met station replacement project nearby.

Arnica Lake – No new progress. The human waste issue continues. Rangers will be directed to explore yet another new z-best toilet site again this season (new site flooded in 2013). If unsuccessful a different solution will need to be explored, i.e. fly-out; new type of alpine composter (haven't found one yet that would work).

Repairs to some of the tent pads and a bridge replacement are still required. We will continue to look for adequate PRV (maintenance) budget to address these issues.

Gold Lake Access – No new updates. The logging road leading to the eastern access trail to Gold Lake is getting very rough and needing 4x4 or at least trucks. Most vehicles will not be able to access the last 1.5 km. Coincidentally, the Ministry of Forests contacted BC Parks to advise that the last approximate 5-6 km of road past Grilse Creek was going to be decommissioned, probably in 2014 due to unsafe bridge and lack of forestry need. The road will probably remain accessible to ATV and/or trail bikes, but not vehicles. Use has been declining at Gold Lake due to poor access, so this may reduce use to minimal leaving the question as to what, if anything we should do about this trail.

Della Falls Trail - It is hoped that the Port Alberni Search and Rescue team will again offer their support by providing volunteers for a trail brushing/ windfall clearing weekend. Confirmation and the details have to be worked out.

7) Park Enhancement Funds (PEF) – The Island Region was allocated additional funds for 2014 and Volunteer Groups had the opportunity to submit proposals for park projects up to \$3500 each. Like previous years, all proposals were assessed by the Regional Management Team and they made their final selections the first week of June. The supported projects specifically including Strathcona are: Strathcona Wilderness Society (SWI) - Program Support = \$1,000; Royal BC Museum - Study of High Elevation Invertebrates in Vancouver Island Provincial Parks = \$5,000. In addition to the regional PEF program, BC Parks is also supporting SWI with the acquisition a TrailRider and partnering with them to establish the long term envisioned Strathcona Park TrailRider Program. The TrailRider is a one wheel all-terrain wheelchair powered by volunteer “sherpas”. SWI has applied for a grant which if successful will be used to purchase the unit and if unsuccessful BC Parks will cover at least half of the \$7,000 unit. The 2013 PEF, Friends of Strathcona Park new “NO Fire” sign initiative is still ongoing, but at fabrication stage. Five new interpretive style signs will be installed at key trailheads this summer.

8) Volunteer Community Engagement Services Contract

Jeff Hoy, Senior Ranger was contracted for 10 weeks over the Winter/Spring to provide assistance to local Volunteer groups in clarifying and preparing new Volunteer Agreements to those that needed/wanted them. The Comox District Mountaineering Club finalized a new agreement in May, while the Comox Lake Bluffs Ecological Reserve Wardens completed a new agreement in April. Although the Strathcona Wilderness Institute was provided an option to transfer their existing permits into a Volunteer Agreement, because they had an existing permit there was no real benefit for doing a transfer. Both the Natural History Society and the Friends of Strathcona Park were also offered the opportunity to develop a long term volunteer agreement, but because they have no current work plans for within the park, they declined the offer at this time. The Heathens Mountaineering Club were also asked to enter into an agreement for their work at Crest Creek Crag, but although they do require one to provide the necessary authorization, they have not only declined but have turned the requirement into a hot issue that has led to their withdrawal of volunteer efforts at the Crag. BC Parks continues to offer the opportunity to the Heathens but they are refusing to cooperate resulting in the need to advise the group they can no longer work in the park. The Strathcona Park Lodge has suggested a climbing day/BBQ be offered at the Crag to bring members of the climbing community together to discuss the future of the Crest Creek Crag area and how to move forward rather than backwards.

10) Strathcona Potential Projects List – No update (waiting for SPPAC member response). A list and corresponding location map was developed and presented to SPPAC identifying potential projects and initiatives within Strathcona Park worth considering for future implementation. The non-prioritized list was developed only to identify projects and intended to be used to add to or delete as more input and discussion takes place. The projects do not have any committed funds associated with them, although current Park Enhancement Funds in Strathcona’s account could be a potential funding source should various projects be supported. Some of these projects or initiatives could also be pursued in partnership with local support groups if they are interested.