

**STRATHCONA PARK PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE
(March 4, 2016 – BC Parks Office, Miracle Beach)**

SPPAC MEMBERS: Philip Stone, Darren Saare, Hardolph Wasteneys, Jan Hesselung, Paolo Tancon, Sandra Borton, Kevin McPhedran, Greg Johnson.

BC Parks: Andy Smith, Don Cadden, Aaron Miller.

Recorder: John Milne.

Public: Jennifer Pass, John Wilson, Marlene Smith, Bob Brock, Leroy McFarlane, Alan Agopsowicz from the Climbers Access Society of BC.

Guest Presenters: Mount Washington Alpine Resort - Marc Lyster & Don Sharpe, Nyrstar – Nicole Pesonen & Shannon Campbell (GM).

AGENDA

Introductions

- All present were introduced.

Approve Agenda

- The agenda was approved as circulated. The previous meeting's minutes were approved via email and posted on BC Parks website.

Strathcona Update

- The Park update is appended following these minutes. Andy reviewed a few main points from the update. One of the main topics of interest was the Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge's withdrawal of their proposal to take horses into the Bedwell Valley and the subsequent cancellation of the Park Use Permit allowing them to do this.

New Items:

Nyrstar Update

- Shannon Campbell, Nyrstar Myra Falls General Manager introduced himself. He has worked at Myra Falls in the past. The mine is now for sale and is in a state of suspended operation.
- Nicole Pesonen provided a PowerPoint presentation which will be given to Andy to distribute to SPPAC members. Some of her information is available in the park update. She spoke of three environmental incidents which have taken place at the mine in the past year. Future activities are working towards preventing such incidents. She showed graphs of drinking water test levels. Some mine structures have been removed this year. The tailings dam assessment results show that the

dam is stable. More work is being done to improve water treatment system in the future. Some projects will have to be left for the future owner. An updated closure plan is to be submitted to Ministry of Mines by December 31, 2016.

Two closure options are being considered at this time, but as the mine is for sale, the final plan which will be chosen cannot be confirmed until the new owners are in place and further discussions with all stakeholders can be completed.

Andy advised that BC Parks does have input into which closure plan is chosen, as BC Parks acts as the stewards of the protected area. The final plan which is chosen will have to ensure that the area remains safe.

- There is a lot of interaction with the Ministry of Mines, especially since the Mount Polley disaster. Due to the Mount Polley mine incident, there are potentially more ramifications in terms of policy, guidelines and/or regulations yet to come.
- The Lynx facility is status quo for now.
- Concerning the depressed prices for minerals with respect to closure. Shannon advised that current incremental projects supporting or leading to the long term closure are already funded and are proceeding. These are required and also take care of liability.
- A question was asked about reports being made available to the public. Nicole said it depends on which report. Jennifer Pass, an attending visitor, will email Nicole to ask for certain reports referenced in other reports, already available to the public.
- Shannon advised that a buyer of the mine is being sought and that a well maintained operating mine is easier to sell than one that is closed. About 100 companies have shown preliminary interest. Shannon believes the mine could sell by the second half of 2016. Some of those interested are substantial corporations. Nyrstar is moving into phase two of the selling process by following up on the initial interest. It should be noted that Nyrstar has multiple mines throughout the world which they are trying to sell as a group, but which are also available individually. These mines were bought by Nyrstar a few years ago. Nyrstar, who were primarily a zinc smelting company, currently cannot afford to keep all these mines operating. Any potential new owner needs to be a company who wants to get into the zinc market, has the money, and can make the mine sustainable for less than it would take to start a new mine.
- The transfer of Mining Permits and BC Parks Land Use Permits have to be approved by the respective government agencies prior to being transferred to a new owner. The existence of closure/reclamation bonds continue without gaps between one owner and the next. The closure bond has to be large enough to finance the cost of closure. The declining value of the Canadian dollar is another factor in the mix. Myra Falls is a “high cost” producer. There are 8-9 years of proven reserves available now but potential to find other deposits. Surface tailings storage capacity is the most limiting factor and underground storage provides the best solution, however it can be more expensive to put tailings there. Successfully dealing with tailings increases productivity and the life of the mine.
- 50 people are currently working at the mine site, down from 350 during full operations.

- Andy commented that clean fill is an important element of the closure plan (volumes may change depending on what scenario is pursued) and BC Parks has concerns about where that fill will come from (don't want to impact one area to reclaim another). Nicole confirmed that a "clean fill" sourcing study is underway. One possibility is to get fill from underground, but it must be non-potential acid generating (PAG).
- Concerning power issues, Shannon advised that he isn't interested in the power production part of the operation and is more focused on mining. This brings up the question and possibility of subcontracting out power production, which in turn, brings up the potential issue of the subcontractor wanting to export power from the park to increase revenues. This is a "red flag" for those concerned about the park. Diesel power is required when the water supply for hydro runs low.
- Philip mentioned the mine's record of helping out in the park. He encouraged the movement of the powder magazine and the possibility of a new public access to the trail heads sited away from the mine site in the location where the magazines were or alternatively, undertaking some cleanup and landscaping at the current parking lot (i.e., removal of old pipes, broken asphalt, a mural on the back of the brown clad building, etc.) This is already being considered by the mine but decisions will be left for the new owner.
- A member of the public asked about the possibility of earthquakes being caused by pumping tailings underground. Shannon confirmed that this procedure is not like fracking under pressure so there is no potential for earthquakes. Tailings are mixed with a binder and pumped underground where they harden like concrete.
- The yield from the ore is high, but the cost to produce it is also high, so it's not profitable at current prices. If costs can be reduced and the mine can increase the ore being mined, the mine will continue to be profitable.
- Water quality was questioned. Flood events help to dilute the concentration of minerals in runoff. Problems with high concentrations occur when it's dry or frozen and dilution doesn't/can't occur. A more useful number to consider is the total loading of minerals, not the concentration. Sampling is done in several places, but not at tributaries running into Buttle Lake other than Myra Creek.
- There was a question for BC Parks regarding what point the mine should officially shut down if it continues to stay closed. Don Cadden commented that it would not likely be a BC Parks decision, but more probable a political decision. How long can a closure be considered temporary before becoming permanent? There really isn't an exact answer. It is dependent on many variables and much input and discussion from all key stakeholders and agencies.
- A final closure plan was done in 2014 using a more traditional approach of stabilizing tailings facilities, contouring, covering and planting, however, Nyrstar wanted to explore all options in order to confirm what scenario may be the best from all perspectives, As a result the new plan is being developed assessing all possible approaches which they hope everyone can support.
- If a buyer is not found, would the mine remain open, or would a new closure plan be created? Shannon doesn't know what the next step would be. If a new owner is found, then Parks would engage with them the same way they have with Nyrstar. Any new company would be obligated to use the last closure plan on file with the

Ministry of Mines until they create a new one. As a key stakeholder and land owner, BC Parks would continue to have the same input into the closure plan referral process.

- Andy noted that there is an end to the current Park Use Permit for the mine which expires in 2032. At that time, a new permit would have to be renegotiated. If the mine was not operating at that time, discussions would likely take place with all stakeholders and authorities regarding the decision to carry on or close the mine. Such a decision could be a political one.
- There was a question about past owners leaving a mess and taking what profits they could from the mine. Shannon says the underground infrastructure is in better shape than he expected, although there is still a lot to be done to improve the underground operations. He cannot comment on previous owners.
- Shannon explained that Myra Falls is attractive to a buyer because of its high grade ore, cost cutting programs and the mine's close proximity to a port for export.
- The reclamation bond is renegotiated every five years along with the closure plan. Improvements towards site reclamation can be offset by reduced payments into the bond.
- The interim Closure Plan was previously posted online where it may or may not still be available.

Discussion on bolting & other impact mitigation/education

- Last year SPPAC discussed bolting in the park. Philip drafted a document with recommendations which were sent to Don Cadden. Concerns expressed also apply to activities other than climbing (i.e. unauthorized trail building and flagging, signage, snowmobiling, etc.) The climbing community will be provided the opportunity to suggest an approach to a policy related to bolting.
- Climbing is permitted in the park, but damage to resources or the leaving behind of infrastructure (i.e. bolts/pitons), is not allowed under the Park Act without authorization. While such activities may be considered and approved in some zones, the Wilderness Conservation Zone does not support any development or facilities. Is a piton infrastructure? Drilling for bolts is more of a concern. There is no "board of variance" to allow something not permitted. What are the short term considerations? The Park Act does not permit any damage to resources or development of any kind unless authorized – this included the installation of bolts.
- Don Cadden reviewed the zoning map for Strathcona and with the zoning matrix and explained what is allowed in each zone. The BC Parks Zoning Matrix describes what "may" be allowed in each zone, not necessarily what "is" allowed. The majority of Strathcona is Wilderness Conservation which is the most protected of the zones. The zoning matrix for the Park is the guiding document for what may happen, not necessarily what does happen. No facilities are allowed in Wilderness Conservation Zone which would include bolts. Don Cadden will write a letter to major, local climbing stakeholders (ACC-VI, CASBC) to clarify this with the wider climbing community.

- There was a question about the other areas of the Park which are not Wilderness Conservation Zone. Don would like information on the history of use in other non-Wilderness Conservation areas of the Park and what the climbing public might want. He would like to see a small committee of stakeholders from the climbing community & SPPAC created to explore this in more detail. Don spoke with other areas in the province where similar issues are present. The Best Practices Guide developed for the Squamish Chief area does not deal with bolting. Alan Agopsowicz (guest) has been involved with this and with the Heathens. Don suggests 2-3 interested people help him to work on policy for this topic. Alan and Philip are invited to be on this committee. A communication strategy should be part of this. An ACC rep would also be good. Philip will look for other climbers to help on this subcommittee.
- The Park Management Plan is a policy document. The *Park Act* is the foundation legal document for what happens in parks. The Management Plan, coupled with the Park Zoning guides what may be considered with the appropriate authorization. An amendment to the Master Plan while supporting an activity or development, doesn't in itself preclude approval which only comes from appropriate adjudication of any proposal. The Regional Director is the Statutory Decision Maker designated by and representing the Minister for most park related authorizations required. A case can be made for bolting associated for rescue purposes. Don would like experts from the climbing community to help come up with policy on this. There are opportunities outside the park for bolted routes which could leave the park bolt free.
- The majority of park visitors follow the laws. Philip says there is not a big problem in the park presently with compliance, but this could quickly change. Should rock climbing using infrastructure (i.e. bolts/pitons etc.) be considered in some specific areas with appropriate zoning? This issue transfers to other things such as fires in the park, flagging, snowmobiles, mountain biking, etc.
- Information is available on the BC Parks website but one must seek it out. How should this information be publicized? There are not enough resources in the Parks budget for this. There are no interpreters, little enforcement, and no budget for publishing information. Parks must use other ways to do this such as social media, education, and mentorship. Since there are few government resources, we need to find other ways to inform visitors about these issues.
- Communications is the responsibility of BC Parks. What does this look like? Sandra would like to work on communication and outreach. Don will connect her with the proper park staff.
- Darren would like this to be expanded into concerns other than bolting. The illegal fire pit issue has become well publicized and many people are now removing those they find. Most people know nothing about park zones and this is one area that could be publicized. Parks must be careful about publicizing zoning advising what may or may not be allowed as this could be confusing, especially considering that what "may" be allowed might "not" be allowed depending on impacts and other considerations. Most climbing opportunities are in the very restrictive Wilderness Conservation Zones, so the idea of allowing bolting somewhere else in another zone may be moot. Maybe the focus should be on the

Wilderness Conservation Zone because that is where the problems are, also it represents the majority of the Park.

- Crest Crags, located in the Intensive Recreation Zone, is a very popular area for climbers so they do have opportunities to climb there. Philip asked how SPPAC turn the tide on such ongoing issues.
- Mountain biking is allowed in a few areas of the Park on roads and a feasibility study was proposed in the Master Plan. This has never been pursued by BC Parks, but may be considered if there was significant pressure. Currently, there is no interest in pursuing this. Mountain biking on snow with fat tires is a new activity that may gain momentum in future.

Snowmobiling & other mechanized incursions

- This topic was not discussed due to time limitations and may be moved to the agenda for the next meeting.

Mt Washington operations & New Ownership Update - Don and Mark

- Mount Washington Resort was owned by local people since its creation in 1989. The Pacific Group from Park City Utah bought the resort last November. They are very experienced in operating ski resorts. The other resorts that the Pacific Group operate are; Wisp near Pittsburgh, Wintergreen in Virginia; and Ragged in New Hampshire. They are all Four Seasons Resorts. The company is currently getting up to speed with operating in Canada. So far it has been a smooth transition. The company has a hands-off approach to operating the Mount Washington Resort. There have been no changes in operation or staff. The biggest example of change is a new purchase order system with 3 levels of approval. While the other owned resorts have golf courses, there is no golf course planned for Mount Washington. No more lifts are being planned. Three new things that may be coming are; snow making; mountain biking and changes to the lodge. Future mountain biking would be as it was a few years ago. No chemicals will be used in snow making. Overall, there won't be much change from previous practices.
- Cross country mountain biking may be added to downhill mountain biking. Previously mountain biking was suspended because it became too expensive to run with too few customers. Biking was not the attraction they were hoping for. Late snow kept bike trails closed some years. Current mountain biking is different than it was a few years ago.
- Snowmaking should increase the amount of skiable days in the future. The goal is to have people extend their days spent on the mountain, not necessarily add visitors from elsewhere. The resort will not be trying to attract Europeans and others, but rather focus on more of the domestic market.
- Access through the resort to the backcountry is increasing in use. Existing trail systems will remain the same. The resort tries to locate snowshoe trails away from backcountry access routes to avoid conflict. Procedures of access and parking will remain the same as before. The resort's snowshoe clientele will stay relatively close to the resort and not going further into the backcountry. Adding more trails costs the resort more money. Snowshoe trails and ski trails are kept separate for the most part.

- Silt coming from construction on site and road sanding used to be a problem for water quality. Work has been done on inventorying creeks. Catch basins are used to catch sediment. Assessments are done annually and catch basins cleaned out if required. This should be monitored.
- New snow cats are wider than old ones which can cause problems on trails. Plans are to keep using old ones in the Park. Trails have been closed early in the past to prevent damage from grooming.
- Don and Mark are available to answer any questions SPPAC may have.

Ongoing Topics

Heathens Crest Creek

- See the park update about letters which were sent out to the Heathens. Not all members of the group are of a like mind. There will need to be some monitoring of the Crest Creek area to ensure no unauthorized work is being done.. Climbing and cleaning of the rock climbing “routes” is permitted, but no trail building is allowed without a Volunteer Agreement and no camping is allowed at Crest Creek (some temporary camping had been allowed once annually if associated with authorized volunteer work). As Crest Crag is within the Park Operator’s operating area, they will be responsible for monitoring and compliance issues, supplemented and supported by Ranger staff.
- Existing bolts at Crest Creek should be checked for safety as some have been in place for some time. If possible, an inventory of routes and their ages should be passed to new people who get involved. There are resources available from other groups to help pay for upgrading old bolts. Other parks haven't had this done.

SPPAC Recruitment

- Paolo is leaving for a job and will be retiring from the committee. There is potential to recruit two new SPPAC members. Philip previously put a request for new members on social media with no results. Andy would still like to try a word of mouth approach. SPPAC members can send out emails to contacts. There is a need for more women to join SPPAC.

Strathcona Projects List

- There was not enough time to discuss this topic.

CWR helicopter landings

- There was not enough time to discuss this topic either, but Andy has confirmed he spoke to the General Manager at CWR who confirmed that no trips had been planned or authorized within the park. He would discuss with staff and ensure no such landings are made.

Legacy Fund

- This was not discussed.

Next Meeting: Thursday, June 9, 2016