

STRATHCONA PARK PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE
(October 2, 2015 - BC Parks Office, Miracle Beach)

SPPAC MEMBERS - Philip Stone, Darren Saare, Hardolph Wasteneys, Jan Hesselting, Paolo Tancon, Sandra Borton, Kevin McPhedran, Greg Johnson

Regrets - Hardolph Wasteneys, Kevin McPhedran, (Note: Alison Mewett retired just prior to this meeting).

BC Parks - Andy Smith, Aaron Miller

Recorder - John Milne

AGENDA

Introductions - Alison Mewett has retired from SPPAC due to changes in her personal life.

Last meetings minutes - These minutes were adopted as circulated and will be posted on BC Parks' website.

Approve Agenda - This agenda was approved.

Strathcona Update - The complete update circulated by Andy is appended below.

The new Backcountry Park Operator who started this year, responsible for the Bedwell Lakes, Plateau, and Elk River Trail areas has split in two, with the park component being named "43K Wilderness Solutions" (it is still staffed with the same people). The transfer of the Agreement to "43K" had to follow a BC Parks review process prior to being approved.

Nyrstar - The mine is still on a temporary shutdown. An announcement on the current status is expected in the near future. It looks like most of company's plans are on hold while the mine is shut down. The test drilling tied to the closure plan is also on hold. Previously proposed activities are expected to resume when the mine starts operating again.

The proposed 2015 upgrades to the trail around the north side of Helen McKenzie Lake were postponed due to insufficient funds. What capital funds there were, have been diverted to help support 3 other ongoing projects - the vermi-composting toilets (Croteau Lake and Bedwell Lake), Battleship Lake Accessibility upgrades, and the Croteau Lake group campground.

The Croteau Lake group site, while still supported, has been delayed due to the involvement of the BC Parks Service Plus Program, which is a component in all new

operating agreements. The Program is designed to encourage existing operators to explore and develop new public services, which will increase revenues and help decrease “deficiency payments” (difference BC Parks makes up between revenues and cost of maintenance operations). The Croteau group site project is one of the first to be proposed and has therefore, been impacted by delays while the program and processes are worked out between BC Parks and the Park Operator. Complicating things further was learning that 43K’s proposed maintenance costs were going to be higher than the anticipated revenue. Both parties are exploring ideas to reduce costs or increase revenues prior to finalizing group site plans. One identified costly maintenance task is the labour intensive set up and take down required with the proposed temporary shelter.

43K is exploring the potential of adding a few yurts to the group site concept. While just an idea at this time, the thought would be to provide the yurts for overnight rental during all seasons, including winter for those interested in ski touring. From an environmental impact, although yurts may only be negligibly different than the use of standard tent pads, BC Parks would like SPPAC's input regarding this concept prior to making any final decision.

Jan suggested asking a yurt company to donate or subsidize the cost in return for publicity. While the idea was supported, the fact that yurts are used in many parks, may not provide the marketing leverage required to entice such companies to donate or subsidize the project.

Sandra asked about the experience of the company in providing this kind of facility. She would like to see a detailed business plan and wondered about the question of snow load on a yurt. She likes the idea but has concerns about the logistics. Andy advised that the company does have experience with yurts from a use and maintenance perspective, but perhaps only limited knowledge from a rental perspective.

If a shelter for the group campground is not feasible, perhaps the money could be used for building some yurts.

Philip thinks there needs to be more concrete plans before responding. Maybe SPPAC should consider it conceptually only at this point. Andy commented that while BC Parks would like input, he is concerned about how long SPPAC has taken to develop a recommendation in the past.

Darren noted the Master Plan doesn't allow for this proposal, but it does support a cabin at Cirlet. Should there be one at each location? What size should they be? How many could stay in the yurt? What would be the yurt's heat source in the winter? Andy said the current proposed group site was planned to have 10 tent pads as well as a seasonal shelter. Yurts would only help enhance the site by expanding the service to match different clients and possibly extend the rental season to all year. No plans have been made as to how many would be installed, but it would likely only be 2 to 4.

Sandra asked about the Service Plus component of the agreement. What allows parks to have a say over what is allowed? Sandra would like to see the language of the agreement. Andy says BC Parks has to approve whatever happens. This is a partnership between parks and the operator. While any arrangement could be proposed, one scenario is for BC Parks and the PO to share costs and risks as well as revenues. An example of a Service Plus type of agreement is the bike rental at Miracle Beach park and the nature house where additional revenue is brought in, which then is shared to reduce the deficiency payments. There is a concern about who the target is for this. Would it be a high end accommodation and therefore, out of the reach of many average people? Would the yurts be for school groups? If SPPAC supports the concept, the proposal may have more acceptance with others. Philip suggested that 43K should review past notes and concerns raised regarding the proposal made by the Alpine Club of Canada, Vancouver Island, regarding the modification and use of the existing ranger cabin for day use and overnight winter accommodation. While completely different, (i.e. building already exists and it is currently an underutilized government facility), some of the previous discussions may have some applicability thus avoiding unnecessary duplication in discussions. Accessibility is a key issue Andy asked members just out of curiosity, what they thought a reasonable amount may be. Andy suggested that from what he has experienced with accommodation in remote areas, \$150-\$200/night (for the entire unit) would not be surprising.

BC Parks advised that due to problems associated with the Park Act, schedules, and the definition of group site, they are trying to find a new general name for this type of group style camping in the backcountry.

The PFO needs to be aware of what the Master Plan says about this. However, while yurts or a tent style accommodation has never been discussed as part of the Master Plan, their temporary nature is not unlike tents on tent pads which has already been discussed and supported.

Vermi - composting toilets: The new pilot toilets have now been constructed at Bedwell Lake and Croteau Lake. Another is planned for Battleship Lake which would accommodate the TrailRider (a one wheel, wheel chair for mobility challenged visitors). The Battleship design is similar to the others but allows the TrailRider to be pushed completely inside, allowing the visitor to comfortably transfer in privacy and out of variable weather conditions. If successful this design could be used in front country situations and be fully wheelchair accessible.

CWR permit – BC Parks did their ground truthing by hiking the entire trail in September. CWR's draft work plan will now be amended to reflect the field trip discussions and returned to BC Parks for final review. The work plan will be shared with SPPAC and FOSP.

On their hike, Parks staff came across flagging along the entire Bedwell trail, from the alpine to ocean. Much of the flagging was not necessary as the trail was completely visible. As previously discussed at other SPPAC meetings, unauthorized flagging is not

supported from a legal or ethical perspective and was therefore removed. However, Andy advised that whoever is marking this trail has now added metal markers, by nailing them into trees with large nails. Flagging and markers were found on both the existing official trail and on what was the temporary FOSP route. Andy emphasized there was no BC Parks or SPPAC support for a second alternate route. It was pointed out that FOSP may or may not be involved. While FOSP are the only known group who have flagged and promoted this route previously (BC Parks has asked them several times to remove flagging), it is understood that it is possible that anyone could have put the flagging and markers up.

Nails and metal markers are considered trail building by BC Parks.

Andy said members of the Ahousaht First Nation will be the Bedwell trail maintenance crew and he is considering hiring them to remove all the metal markers and flagging and help monitor the area as part of their Guardian Watch Program. Andy said it would be unfortunate to have to use his limited resources to spend on such enforcement/compliance measures

SPPAC shares BC Parks concerns about unsanctioned trail construction and has stated so in the past. However, the general public is not fully aware of the implications to park values or the legalities involved so the onus should be on BC Parks to use their tools of enforcement to make the matter clearer.

Crest Creek Crags and Heathen's Volunteer Agreement Issue – After having tried numerous times to resolve this issue by addressing concerns and exploring compromises, it has now been referred to the Regional Director who has sent a letter to the Heathen's spokesperson advising that no work can continue within the park without signing the necessary volunteer agreement (a draft agreement was sent which was based on a proposed 10 year plan submitted by the Heathens). BC Parks have asked for compliance but have had difficulty communicating with the Heathens and finalizing any agreement. It was also noted that there was an unauthorized camp behind the Crest Lake day-use area. This camp, while permitted in the past to help facilitate volunteer work, was subject to annual approval. It appears that this issue is nearing the end with either an agreement being signed by those who wish to work in the park, or all unauthorized work ceasing.

Philip asked about Elk River trail repairs. Andy confirmed that the Park Operator had posted a sign at the trailhead advising of the undercut bank that Phil had identified early in the year. No trail upgrades were planned or done this season.

Ongoing Topics

Setting Criteria for Legacy Funds

This was talked about at a previous meeting before the SWI application. While the funds are retained in the BC Parks, Park Enhancement Fund account, it is understood that SPPAC can decide how the funds are used. The committee discussed what the intent was

for using these surplus funds, which total about \$8,000. SPPAC doesn't think that the general public know about this money. Andy commented that, while SPPAC may not want to be inundated with applications, there is no obligation to support anything, and hearing proposals may lead to identifying a project that everyone supports. Is there a rush to spend it? Should the funds be available to organizations and/or individuals? People who read the SPPAC minutes may be inspired to apply. These funds could be used to leverage other funds. They could be used for a stewardship type of proposal, or could be part of funding for a volunteer agreement.

A legacy fund infers something with a long term impact, leaving a legacy.

These funds are under the purview of SPPAC for legacy type projects. The Legacy Fund website states that "the Strathcona Legacy Fund aims to build secure financial sources for enhanced stewardship, capital infrastructure projects, land acquisitions and environmental rehabilitation for Strathcona Park."

This fund can be added to by donations and other sources of income. It could be promoted on SPPAC's Facebook page. Philip will follow up on this.

A discussion took place about what kind of projects might be suitable to allocate the funds toward but no decision was made on inviting applications.

Mitigating Impacts of Climbing

Philip previously circulated a document for discussion between SPPAC members. The key recommendation is to communicate to the climbing community that bolts and other climbing impacts are not exempt from the prohibition of un-permitted developments or infrastructure in the Park Act. Strathcona has a wealth of climbing routes which haven't been bolted and this should continue to be the status quo. Unbolted 'traditional' climbing has just as much appeal as bolted routes and is the appropriate fit for Strathcona. This needs to be communicated to the climbing community. Andy said there is no specific policy in park documents allowing and/or prohibiting bolts in any zone, but agreed that in principle, perhaps there should be. Philip added that time is of the essence to head off illegal bolting before damage is done. Some parks in the system have many bolted climbing routes. The Bugaboos are an example of this but it is noted that 93% of the park is zoned 'Natural Environment.' Keeping the Strathcona wilderness conservation areas bolt free keeps a balance between true wilderness with no infrastructure and park areas with intensive recreational facilities. The zoning matrix could help guide permitting of climbing route development should it be accepted as an appropriate activity in certain areas.

Education around zoning and the Master Plan is being done informally by SPPAC when opportunities arise. However, explanations specifically to the climbing community need to be done to educate them about the environmental impacts and park regulations.

As most of Strathcona's pristine climbing areas are contained within the wilderness conservation zone, new signage at the Bedwell, Elk River and other trailheads explaining what the intent and restrictions are within this zone would help. The zoning matrix gives further relevant information. Such signs should also identify the bolting problem.

It is hoped that Don Cadden, Regional Director, can discuss this issue with other Regional Directors around the province to confirm how big of an issue this is and see if there is an appetite to change or create a provincial policy to deal with this problem. Strathcona is different than many other parks in the province as to what is allowed. Signage about bolting could follow a similar design approach as was done for the new "No Fires" signage created and installed recently at key trailheads.

The most recent Strathcona Park zoning map can be found within the 2001 Master Plan amendment document posted on the Strathcona Park website. This version is more up to date and detailed than the one in the original Master Plan document.

Action - Philip will write a letter on this topic to Don Cadden.

Nyrstar Update

This was covered above.

Parks Zoning Matrix Requested

The Zoning Matrix, explaining each park zone, was previously circulated by email to SPPAC members.

Recruitment

Alison Mewett has retired from the committee after completing a 4 year term. While a replacement member doesn't have to be recruited immediately, if anyone knows of a good candidate that they would like to have considered, they should contact Andy. It would be good to have another female representative on the committee.

New Items

Fish Farm Application adjacent to Strathcona Park

Philip found out about a new proposed fish farm in Herbert Inlet on the west coast, north of Tofino near the mouth of the Moyeha River (which runs into Strathcona Park). This is a very special place which should be protected. An industrial activity like this next to the park is worrisome. Andy passed on Philip's concerns to Erica McClaren, BC Parks Conservation Specialist and Lesley Fettes, Aquaculture Section Head with the Ministry of Forest, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO) and learned that BC Parks can be placed on a referral list for proposed farms adjacent to the park. SPPAC should be apprised of these kind of applications. This specific fish farm has been approved, but not

yet built. Both Clayoquot Sound and Nootka Sound are areas adjacent to the park and of concern. Fish farms have impacts within the park as the fish return to the river within the park.

Does SPPAC want to be in the loop on this type of issue? SPPAC has no power in this, and BC Parks have limited influence outside of the park. BC Parks have a responsibility to comment on issues happening outside the park which influence it. There is no obligation for those operating outside the park to notify BC Parks of their operations.

Andy will discuss further with Erica McClaren, to see if she can follow up getting placed on a referral list and to review any that may have potential impacts on the park.

SPPAC has already been empowered by Don Cadden to consider adjacency issues. Andy will try to get BC Parks on the referral list for any future applicable applications and in turn, share these with SPPAC. It was noted that SPPAC would have to fit into the referral time lines, so there wouldn't necessarily be a SPPAC meeting to discuss any referral. Discussion would have to be done by email.

Andy will report back on this at the next SPPAC meeting.

SPINE trail update

Philip previously circulated an email about the trails progress. SPPAC will be kept informed about what is happening.

Helicopter Landings

Lindsey Elms reported a helicopter landing what he believed to be CWR guests possibly in the park. Philip will email information to Andy. Andy is aware of CWR's permitted "Cloud Camp" located close to, but outside the park. However, Andy will follow up to confirm that the resort is not landing in the park.

Unsanctioned Bedwell Trail construction - Andy

This was discussed above.

Next Meeting

January 22, 2016
Miracle Beach, 6 - 10 pm

Strathcona Update for SPPAC
October 2, 2015 (BC Parks, Black Creek Office)

Strathcona Staffing

Seasonal staff – Adam Vojnic (seasonal Ranger – shared position) finished working September 4th. Senior Ranger, Jeff Hoy, started working June 29th and will continue until October 23rd.

1) New Backcountry Maintenance Contract

The new Park Operator – Strategic Natural Resources Consultants split their company and as a result, the Backcountry Maintenance Agreement has been transferred to a new formed company (same staff) called “43K Wilderness Solutions.”

2) Nyrstar (information provided by Nicole Pesonen)

- Mine Shutdown status – Nyrstar is working on a detailed plan but not yet prepared to share it with the public, as the details have not been finalized or approved.
- Nyrstar Mine Closure Plan – Nyrstar received comments from the Ministry of Mines June 7, 2015. Nyrstar has not yet completed responses to these comments, but expect to have those submitted to MEM relatively soon.
- New Gate Proposal – There is not currently any budget for this work, however it has not been abandoned.
- Drilling Program –The drilling program for the rock-fill embankment/wetland has been postponed until spring of 2016. Nyrstar will request approvals again once they have a comprehensive plan and related information. This was delayed due to the shutdown, but is still planned for completion next year.
- Tennant Lake Penstock repairs/modification – Nyrstar weighed the various options, decided to repair the penstock, replacing sections as required, but removing the older infrastructure rather than leaving it in place until closure of the facility. Removing the old penstock will keep the footprint as it currently is. There will be some areas where the trail will be improved to address minor washouts and where the vegetation has become too dense to access the pipe.
- Explosive Shed move –There was no budget for this currently, and therefore this project will be delayed. This wasn't considered a critical path item for start-up, and won't be done until such time that Myra Falls is operational again.
- Jim Mitchell Lake project status –This project is being put on hold for the time being. Some work was done to stabilize the dams for winter, but no work was done to raise the dam or install the Obermeyer gate this year. There were some repairs that were more pressing that needed to be completed first.

3) Capital Projects

- As indicated at the last meeting, the 2015 Capital Funds will be used to compliment the 3 main Strathcona construction projects being pursued this season (vermi-composting toilets; Croteau Group Site; Battleship Lake Accessibility and

Enhancement project). All 3 projects have been started but while the Toilets and Accessibility project should be completed, it is doubtful the new group site will be.

4) Croteau Lake Group Site

The new vermi-composting toilet should be complete by Oct 10th. Building of the rest of the facilities has been delayed due to discussions and negotiations regarding the Service Plus aspect within their new agreement. It is hopeful that even if no construction takes place this season, materials might be purchased ready for construction next spring.

5) Vermi-Composting Toilet Pilot Project

The first toilet was completed at Main Bedwell Lake in August. It appears to be operating well although with any new design, some minor modifications have been identified which will also be incorporated in the Croteau Lake toilet. We have since been approved to replace the old toilet at Battleship Lake as part of the Accessibility project. This specific toilet will be designed to accommodate a TrailRider unit, used to transport mobility challenged visitors to the area. While both Croteau and Bedwell toilets will be completed, it is probable due to the late decision, that the Battleship toilet won't be constructed until next year. No worms are being added to the toilets this year as they aren't required until more waste has accumulated.

6) Battleship Lake Accessibility Project

This project is behind schedule currently, but is still planned for completion (less the toilet replacement), by early November. The scope of this project has been expanded to take advantage of the Federal Grant and support from the Capital Program. The full cost of all facilities is approximately \$95K.

7) CWR Park Use Permit

A joint inspection of the entire Bedwell Valley Trail was done in mid-September. BC Parks staff along with CWR staff and consultants assessed the current trail and the proposed work as submitted by CWR in their draft Concept Plan. Discussion took place regarding what trail improvements would be required and confirmation as to the need and type of drainage crossings. The draft plan will now be amended to capture the field decisions and sent back to BC Parks at that time for final review. BC Parks will share the document once it has been finalized. No ground work can commence until BC Parks has approved the work plans.

NOTE: It should be noted that while completing the field inspection, it was discovered that the entire trail had been heavily and inappropriately flagged again. BC Parks had requested any recreational users, not to flag any proposed/desired or existing trail. Not only were numerous bags filled with unnecessary flagging, but metal fluorescent markers were also hammered into trees with 2" spikes. This act constitutes "trail building" and is an unauthorized activity. BC Parks and SPPAC have confirmed there is no support for a second trail and its associated impacts this area.

8) BACKCOUNTRY

Bedwell Lakes Trail – No major improvements have been done to this trail. The new Park Operator, 43K, has focused this year on getting oriented to all operating areas and developing ideas on what needs to be done and how to address it. As mentioned above, a new vermi-composting toilet has been completed at Main Bedwell Lake. However, to maximize efficiencies, we are looking for ways to reduce or eliminate fly-outs still needed at Baby Bedwell Lake. Some exploratory probing done recently suggests there may be an opportunity to install a Z-Best toilet on the forested bench immediately above the campsite. If that is confirmed, together with the use of an extra TAJ toilet, it may be possible to limit fly-outs to as little as once in the next 5 years. That would give us time to confirm efficiency of the new vermi-composting toilet and if operating as planned, budget for a similar toilet at Baby Bedwell. Suspension Bridge and Thelwood wooden bridge will be inspected by an engineer this fall. We try to do formal inspections of major bridges every 5 years.

Arnica Lake – No change since last update.

Gold Lake Access – An inspection was completed in late August. The bridge at or near Grilse Creek has still not been removed however the creek drainage closest to the trailhead has been impacted by storm events and cannot be crossed by most 4x4's (small wheel base or ATV's may still get through). The Trail does have a lot of blowdown and while lack of use does not warrant much maintenance work with restricted budgets and staff, we will consider doing some small enhancements in 2016 to perhaps keep the trail open.

Della Falls Trail – Bridge repairs and brushing of main trail was completed in August. There was no time to do any brushing or clearing of windfalls on the Love Lake trail. We will try to schedule this work in 2016 dependent on resources. Approximately 1,000 visitors hiked this trail in 2015.

Forbidden Plateau Traverse Trail – The Comox District Mountaineering Club have not contacted us with any update this season, so not sure if they have done any maintenance/enhancement work in 2015.

9) Park Enhancement Funds (PEF)

BC Parks was able to provide some funding to SWI again this year in the amount of \$1,500. This funding is to help support their valuable programs and visitor information services.

10) Heathens and Crest Creek Climbing Area

After careful assessment of the entire situation by the Regional Director, a letter was sent to Chris Barner (current spokesperson of Heathens) acknowledging the Heathens' past contributions in the development of the Crest Creek Crags climbing area, but confirming the need for any volunteer wishing to work in the park to sign a volunteer agreement. A draft agreement, along with draft project description was sent with the letter. A response was requested by August 14th but due to a delivery error, additional time has been given.

BC Parks is still supports climbing in the area and the continuation of volunteer work, provided all volunteers sign an appropriate volunteer agreement which specifies what work can and can't be done in the area. BC Parks is hopeful that the Heathens members and all other volunteers who wish to work in the park, will understand the need, and cooperate with current requirements.

11) Strathcona Potential Projects List

Nothing further since the SPPAC meeting in April, when the committee started discussing the project list.

12) SWI Hut at Buttle Lake

SWI did manage to recruit a volunteer to manage this information hut during the 2015 season. However, due to volunteer time constraints, it was only open during weekends. No further discussions have taken place with SWI about exploring other options for managing this facility, (i.e. partnering with Park Operator and/or Strathcona Park Lodge).