

STRATHCONA PARK PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING AGENDA

October 20, 2006 6 PM – 10 PM

EVERGREEN SENIORS LOUNGE, FLORENCE FILBERG CENTER, COURTENAY

Present – Ron Quilter (B.C. Parks), Andy Smith (B.C. Parks), Anne Fiddick (chair), Sandy Briggs, Barb Baker, Gary Schaan, Frank Hovenden, John Wilson, Paul Erickson, Warrick Whitehead, Dave Vincent, Anne Fiddick,

Absent – Rick Rollins),

John Milne (secretary),

Members of public – Lindsay Elms, Val Wooton, Ruth Masters, Jim Fiddick, Anya McLeod (VIMSS), Ken Rodonets, Evan Loveless., Steve Smith arrived later.

1. Opening Remarks- Anne Fiddick, introductions
2. Confirm Previous Minutes – accepted, Warrick spoke about delay in getting minutes out. Ron accepted responsibility and will try and get minutes out sooner.
2. Additions/Deletions to Agenda – added below.
3. Review Previous Minutes
 - a) Paradise Meadows Trailhead Relocation and Visitor Center – Ron updated the committee, Andy spoke in more detail.

The Vancouver Island Mountain Sports Society (VIMSS) rep was not available at this time but showed up later in the meeting. The trail has been capped with new mix to make wheelchair usable, and will be finished by end of October, to be officially opened in spring. The old trail head will be decommissioned by the end of October – facilities will be taken out, the road right-of-way blocked off, thus the new trail head will be the only access in this area accessible by vehicle. The old trail will be left to provide access by foot from the Mount Washington village. Hiking patterns will be monitored to see how many use each access. A pit toilet will be installed at the new trail head. Mount Washington's donated land now belongs to the Crown, but has not yet being added to park. It will be by Order in Council when the legislature sits. A Park Use Permit (PUP) is being worked on to allow snow storage and utilities on crown land which was part of the donation agreement. If spring snow is a problem for access to the parking lot in the future, its removal will be written into the PUP.

Andy recognized that there is still an issue with winter back country visitors finding parking. It is difficult for Mount Washington Resort to find an area for them that doesn't interfere with snow removal. Sandy noted that information about overnight parking needs to be communicated to Resort employees. They have not been advising members of the public what their options are. Andy said overnight parking needs some kind of permit to put in windows of cars. Warrick noted that going into Raven Lodge is not workable because the lodge is not always open. Warrick also mentioned having to get a pass to access backcountry, and stated that hard, compacted snow interferes with access on skis. A system should be created that is completely separated from Raven Lodge. Ron noted Parks do not have funds to keep access open in winter. If it wasn't for the Resort, access would be inhibited because back country skiers could not drive up the road. Gary spoke about how well done the new trail development is.

Andy spoke about fundraising for outdoor/visitor's center, ACT Now funding, and Vancouver Island Mountain Sports Soc. So far no decision has been made to award funding by the minister responsible. Andy expects to hear something next week.

Anya arrived at the meeting and spoke about VIMSS – what its vision is for the development around the mountain. She referred to the Visitors' Center as an outdoor center. Andy and Ron clarified the name change. It was done for the purposes of fundraising, and it will include educational and programming

components. Andy is asking for \$150,000 to cover up to next spring for design purposes for both buildings. \$300,000 more is being asked for towards building structures.

Actions - Gary is the liaison between SPPAC and VIMSS. He will be added to VIMSS contact list and will choose which meetings to attend. Ron reminded the group that they would be involved in recommendations about design, etc. There is still need for a business plan to be developed to operate the building.

Ron complimented Andy for all his work and success in getting this partnership going.

Entrance sign – Andy showed an artists conception of site. The location of the sign location will be further to the right up against the bank created approximately along the park boundary. He showed a sketch of the proposed design which meets park standards and looks very nice. Andy is waiting for more quotes, so it won't be completed until next year. Anne recommended a contractor in Gold River who may be available to do the rock work.

Andy said the design of building is not yet done the location will be up against retaining wall to provide access from the upper parking lot. This reduces the separation of the public visitor's center from the commercial lodge to the minimum. It will be very close to the property boundary between the Park and the Resort.

b) Bedwell Trail/Clayoquot Wilderness Resort

An update was given by Ron. There was an onsite inspection with parks staff. Dave Vincent was retained to evaluate the condition of various river crossings.

Dave summarized his report. The Gayle McGee suspension bridge is in good condition. Some roofing shingles have been fastened to the bridge deck to make it less slippery. Most of the rest of the trail is on solid gravel and rock – an old roadbed. Dave said he was speaking as an engineer, and was not taking park values into consideration. The party made it almost to the Ashwood Creek crossing. A problem exists at the canyon, i.e., existing log bridge is rotten. Its main timbers are sound, there is 1 ½ meter of gravel on the bridge timbers. Underneath some cedar posts holding it up are disappearing, and a stringer has fallen off. This bridge will fall into the river at some time in the future, maybe in 5 to 10 years. The vegetation growing on the bridge should not be removed because it's holding its surface together. Currently this bridge is unsafe but passable. BC Parks has signed the bridge closed due to public safety concerns. If money is to be spent on this crossing, it should be done before the bridge collapses because it is easier to work on a new crossing when the existing one can still be used.

The trail crossing at Noble Creek crossing is satisfactory as a route, and a bridge is not necessary, however it would be nice. At Twin Falls canyon there is some slide slope slippage that should be watched. Warning signs were posted on crossings.

Dave concludes that horses would not cause significant erosion on road bed. Question: What about areas where the road bed has washed out and a new trail must be built?

Frank showed photos of impacts horses have had on parks in the South Chilcotin Provincial Park, specifically at Spruce Lake, and the trail to Bertha Lake in Waterton Lakes National Park.

At Spruce Lake Frank concluded that horse impact on wet trails was significant. He noticed there was little impact where trails were dry. There was much more erosion in the alpine areas. Parties he met were 12 in number, mostly comprised of German clients. There were significant mud holes at some points. Some logs put at side of trail for hikers to walk on through the mud. The climate in this area is on the edge of the dry interior area of B.C.

At Waterton Lake National Park trails were well maintained, there were lots of water control devices to keep the trails dry (water bars and cross ditches). The climate here is drier than the Chilcotin being in the rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains. Horses not allowed on these trails at some times of year. Frank was conditionally positive about horses in parks where properly done.

The discussion on the Bedwell area resumed. – Ron has asked Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge for a more detailed proposal. He will meet with them in late November. He is asking them to set up 1 – 2 public meetings to comment on their proposal; also Ron suggested they re-engage SPPAC and FOSP in providing them more information. There is interest in this proposal from senior management because of the positive outcome of work on bridges and trail, and support from Strathcona Park Lodge. (Note: In the past there has been discussion of the two lodges working together to conduct trips from one lodge to the other). CWL has not been available for meetings for awhile. They are meeting with other ministries about additional activities outside Strathcona Park, e.g. the Ursus Creek valley.

Anne pointed out SPPAC has not yet made any recommendations regarding this issue. Ron mentioned a PUP would contain rules covering the use of trails. Andy mentioned Peter Rothermel's work party was turned down because of the unsafe condition of the bridge over the canyon. This begs the question – if the bridge was fixed would work parties other than CWL's, be allowed to work on the trail in the area? The answer would be yes – if the bridge was fixed, the trail would be re-opened for public and work parties.

Warrick was also at Spruce Lake and observed the interaction between mountain bikers, horses and hikers. He noted the differences between the climates in the Chilcoti and Vancouver Island. Anywhere it was wet, there were huge problems with the trails. His conclusion was that all parks cannot be all things to all people. Planes fly bikes into this area, and riders spend the day riding out. He saw foreign plant species growing there, most likely from horses. Is there potential for pollution of water sources from horse use? His conclusion is Strathcona Park not suitable for horses or mountain bikers.

Barb - would the public be able to use this trail, if this proposal does not go ahead? - Absolutely. Ron mentioned the road is hard as cement and the impact of horses on the road/trailbed would be minimal. Park Use Permit conditions could alleviate any other potential issues such as sterilized feed that are used in other areas of the province.

John Wilson asked about public involvement. The suggestion is for one to be held in the Clayoquot Sound area, and one in Victoria. Andy mentioned there could also be a web based survey. There was no mention of one in Comox Valley or other island centers. John suggested information available at the meeting should be available on line. Andy mentioned the public involvement process is to gather public sentiment and get a feel for the public's interest in this proposal.

Barb suggested having unfettered access to the park from this area. This access needs to be a condition of the proposal. A donation or a legal easement was suggested. Ron said that may not be possible. This is a much different situation than the Mount Washington access. Andy said that CWL stated that if trail was rerouted through Native reserve land, and they charged for it, CWL would be willing to allow access again through their land.

Action – Ron to forward a copy of Dave's engineering report to members. Once BC Parks meets with CWR, SPPAC will be notified about next steps.

c) Marmot Reintroduction –

Ron sent out an email as an update. Don Doyle will update SPPAC more at our next meeting after the Vancouver Island Marmot Recovery Team meets to determine its plans for next year. . SPPAC's concerns will be addressed after that meeting. There will be further opportunity for SPPAC to comment on their operational plans.

Warrick spoke with Andrew Bryant today (Oct 20) to get additional information on this topic. Nobody currently has up to date information about how things will proceed. Andrew is getting more information for this planning meeting, and it will come to SPPAC later. Warrick wants Andrew to attend the next SPPAC meeting to answer questions. He is feeling optimistic about the success of these programs.

Action – Invite Andrew and others from the Marmot Recovery Team to the next meeting to update on progress on next years plans

d) Unfettered Access –

Warrick had sent email out on this topic. Frank has a list of Gold River area accesses – several logging roads, active and not. The Pamela Creek area has some access to park. Andy mentioned Comox Glacier access is restricted due to logging operations. TimberWest will be logging by the Comox Glacier trail by 2007. TimberWest is willing to keep trail to glacier clear, and the outdoor clubs will be allowed in to mark stumps along the trail. SPPAC needs specifics on this issue. Evan mentioned a letter from Minister Penner showing some interest in acquiring the trail. Ron said this is not an active issue because parks have nothing to trade that TimberWest wants. Evan mentioned legal research is being done into the access issue with West Coast Environmental Law. Evan said there was an agreement with Fletcher Challenge and Parks at the time federal government funding was spent on Glacier Trail regarding access.

Warrick would like to look at future possibilities for unfettered access.

Ken Rodonets pointed out that Glacier trail access is a priority in the Master Plan.

Ron agreed and said Parks would have to purchase land because no land available from any government department of interest to TimberWest.

d) Membership –

Ron followed up on the direction from the last meeting and contacted members with poor attendance records. Rick is in Africa and will return in December, and will talk to Ron then.

4. New Business

a) North Vancouver Island Drill Program –

NVI has submitted a Notice of Works to Provincial Mines for a drill program in their permit area. All drill sites are along existing roadways and impacted areas. This is similar to past drill programs. A map was distributed showing two sites are within the mine operations area, and three are along an old access road closer to Buttle Lake. See handout.

B) Gold Lake Access –

Andy was contacted by the Ministry of Forests regarding the forest access road to Gold Lake. The logging company wants to deactivate it. This is the only access to Gold Lake, so Parks would like to keep it open. The road is rough, bridges are good for a while, and some culverts need to be taken out. Could a swale be put in place of culverts so it's still drivable? Without road access it is a 7 km hike. Parks have had management problems in this area in the past with fire rings being created, and garbage left by users...

Frank suggested keeping this access be kept open because there is so little access to the park in this area. SPPAC recommends that Parks pursue keeping this access open.

C) Adjacent Logging –

Barb is on a woodlands advisory committee in Port Alberni. The committee is talking to Island Timberlands about logging standards adjacent to parks. She asked if there is an agreement with timber companies. Ron stated there is no formal agreement but that plans are typically communicated to parks about what will be occurring next to park lands. Are there standards about falling, etc? Ron handed out adjacency checklist used by park's staff. Frank said this is out of date, and that 5 year plans are no longer done. There is a forest stewardship plan instead. This gives forest companies a lot of flexibility to change their plans. Ron said logging companies can't trespass into the park at all. B.C. Parks encourage companies to do legal surveys when operating adjacent to parks. Andy said TimberWest now does a legal survey when working next to park, because of what happened before (1998 trespasses near Buttle Lake). Andy gets a copy of the survey which goes to their department and typically walks the boundary line with staff, Andy checks during operation, and after they are finished. This is not the case with all companies surrounding the boundary.

d) Strathcona Center for Fisheries excellence – (see handout)

A proposal has been received from Craig Wightman in fisheries. He has done work in Buttle Lake before. This proposal is to establish a research centre at the park headquarters buildings near Buttle Narrows. Ron handed out a draft proposal to be reviewed and commented on. Park headquarters are now being used by the park facility operator, and any proposal would have to be negotiated with the PFO. Partnerships are being looked into. SPPAC members are asked to send their reactions to Ron. This could combining with a potential visitor center at Buttle Narrows. Craig could possibly be invited to future SPPAC meeting. Paul feels favourably towards this proposal. Dave wonders about a fish hatchery being the next step.

Action – invite Craig to talk at the next meeting, provide feedback to Ron on proposal

e) Nature Conservancy update –

Central Coast and North Coast Land Use plans were implemented last year. In the central and north coast the new title for protected land is a Conservancy, not a park. This is different from a nature conservancy. The Nature Conservancy's are now officially called Designated Wildland Areas under the park act. The three Nature Conservancy areas in Strathcona Park remain the same with the same level of protection. This Nature Conservancy allows for more protection than the wilderness conservation zone provides.

Warrick would like a copy of this act, or send out link on line.

F) NVI meeting – to be held in January? Andy to discuss with NVI and provide date.

g) Expense forms – Ron handed out.

5. Park Update –

NVI name change is still on going. New park use permit fees have been implemented province wide and parks is working with NVI to see what changes may affect them. Fees may be charges by square footage, or on facilities and what type they are. . Current permit fees are \$60 per permit = \$180 total for the three NVI permits. These fees go to general revenue.

There was talk of putting a gate at the mine site before. This could not be restrictive, and limit access to the public.

Tennant Lake trail – snow fall prevented work being done on the upper trail. This upper part of the trail still needs redefining. There will be more work done next year.

The toilet project at Crest Creek is almost complete.

The draft plan for the Crest Creek climbing area is almost ready to be implemented.

Backcountry operations – old boardwalks are being moved to repair various wet areas, specifically between Battleship Lake and Lady Lake, and between Battleship and Lake Helen McKenzie. The Lady

Lake and Murray Meadows bridge railings were broken by snow, and have now been replaced with removable railings on one side of each bridge only.

Toilets – Elk River trail toilet and Arnica Lake toilet – Digging a pit in the ground is not feasible, and fly out toilets are expensive. This problem needs addressing in future. Composting toilets are being looked at with some problems having been experienced. They need daily maintenance which is not possible in these locations. New portable toilets (Zebest thrones) in other areas have been successful

Croteau Lake – The proposed group site is still being worked on

Alexandra Creek culvert on Western Mine Road is being replaced, and fish habitat is being enhanced as part of this work.

ATV licensing – cabinet has put off licensing ATV's. Sandy mentioned ATV tracks have been seen on the trail to Mount Becher. Ken mentioned the gate was broken open, and people do get in there with ATV's. Parks use this gate to access the area for maintenance and work. The problem with keeping people out of these areas was discussed.

6. Public Question Period -

Evan – asked about toilets at Crest Creek. Andy said this has been worked out.

Lindsay Elms is concerned about back country skiing near Raven Lodge – There needs to be an information sign near the old Nordic lodge with information for backcountry skiers about where to park.

- Horses used to be used on Mount Becher with much damage done by them. They have worn the trail down to bedrock.
- Future park access – When the mine closes, what happens to trail access through the mine site? Ron replied that the decommissioning plan covers this.
- What standards would CWL's bridges be if they are allowed in? Ron's response was that this wouldn't be a problem. Bridges would be built to BC Parks standards and would be built to a 200 year flood standard, and adequate snow load requirements would be in place.
- There is still treated timber between Bedwell Lake and Cream Lake laying there that needs removing
- The mine has dropped pipes into a small lake above Tennant Lake, and they have been there a while.
- The Frog Pond needs an outhouse. It is a heavily used area. Andy replied that this is being planned, but parks are not sure where to put it. He would like feedback. Ken said about 35 people were up there on the Labour Day weekend. Many dogs were off leash as well. Dogs and swimmers were seen in the Frog Pond. Parks needs new signs about the water quality of the Frog Pond. Andy said Parks are not supposed to put boil water signs up unless there is a water system in place.

Ken – The next TimberWest cut block is located below Castle Crag Mountain.

Warrick asked about snow testing in park. Ron said B.C. Hydro has a permit to assess snow levels.

Warrick also asked about slippery boardwalks. Andy said mesh is being added to help provide traction.

Next Meeting: - February 16, 2007 – Parksville office

Frank Hovenden – Frank has now been on SPPAC for seven years which is the maximum term allowed in the terms of reference so he is stepping down, and he won't be here in for the February meeting.

Action - Ron will provide Frank some form of recognition for his effective work on SPPAC. Ron will review current SPPAC terms and update at next meeting.