

Skeena District

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION STATEMENT

August 2000

for Driftwood Extension to Babine
Mountains Park



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Ministry of Environment
Lands and Parks
BC Parks Division

This management direction statement was developed through direction received from the Bulkley Land and Resource Management Plan.

Driftwood Extension to Babine Mountains Park

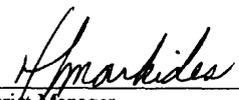
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Forward

In 1999, the Provincial Government extended Babine Mountains Park to include 6,500 ha of rolling forest to the southwest. The addition increases the integrity of conservation and recreation values of the area by including low elevation forest ecosystems to the existing subalpine and alpine ecosystems. Meadows and south-facing aspen-dominated stands provide abundant browse for moose and deer from spring until late fall, and the area provides year-round habitat for grizzly and black bears and wolves. The extended park is the primary backcountry recreation area close to Smithers, supporting high levels of regional use. This Management Direction Statement will complement the Babine Mountains Recreation Area Master Plan, which is applicable to the rest of Babine Mountains Park.

Implementation will be dependent on available funding and agency priorities.

Approvals



District Manager
Skeena District



Assistant Deputy Minister
Parks Division

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Introduction

Purpose

This management direction statement (MDS) provides management for the newly created extension to Babine Mountains Park. It identifies key strategies that will be ranked according to priority and completed as funding permits. All development associated with these strategies is subject to BC Parks' Impact Assessment Policy.

Setting and Context

Driftwood Extension covers 6,500 ha to the southwest of Babine Mountains Park. Driftwood Extension extends along a forested ridge between Driftwood and Reisetser creeks at elevations ranging from 900 to 1300 metres. The extension is bound by Reisetser Creek to the north, and mostly private land along the Telkwa High Road to the south. Babine Mountains Park lies 12-km northeast of Smithers, which has a population of about 12,000. (See Figures 1 and 2 for geographic description). The extension lies within the asserted traditional territory of the Wet'suwet'en people.

The rolling forest habitat of Driftwood Extension complements Babine Mountains Park that is mostly rugged terrain dominated by subalpine forest and parkland and tundra, ranging from 1300 – 2300 m in elevation. The entire area offers extensive backcountry recreational opportunities. Other parks near Smithers provide wilderness river recreation opportunities (Babine River Park) and full-facility camping facilities (Tyhee Lake Park). Several small parks, including Burnt Cabin Bog, Driftwood Canyon, Netalzul Meadows and Waterfall protect a diversity of special natural features, Call Lake provides a range of day-use recreational activities and Rainbow Alley offers world-class trout fishing.

Protected Area Attributes

Conservation

- Southern Skeena Mountains Ecosection; SBSmc2 (moist cold sub-boreal spruce subzone, Babine variant)
- Saskatoon-slender wheatgrass scrub-steppe community above Newitt Creek (red-listed)
- subalpine meadows, shrub-carrs and fens, and south-facing aspen-dominated forests provide important spring to early winter range for moose and mule deer
- year-round habitat for grizzly and black bears and wolves

Recreation and Tourism

- regionally-significant recreation opportunities (backcountry hiking, horseback riding, backcountry skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, hunting)
- provides spring and fall hiking and horse riding opportunities, currently limited in the region due to late snowmelt and early snowfall

Figure 1

Babine Mountains Provincial Park Locator Map

Legend

- Highways
- Rivers/Lakes
- Coastline
- Babine Mountains Provincial Park
- Skeena Parks District

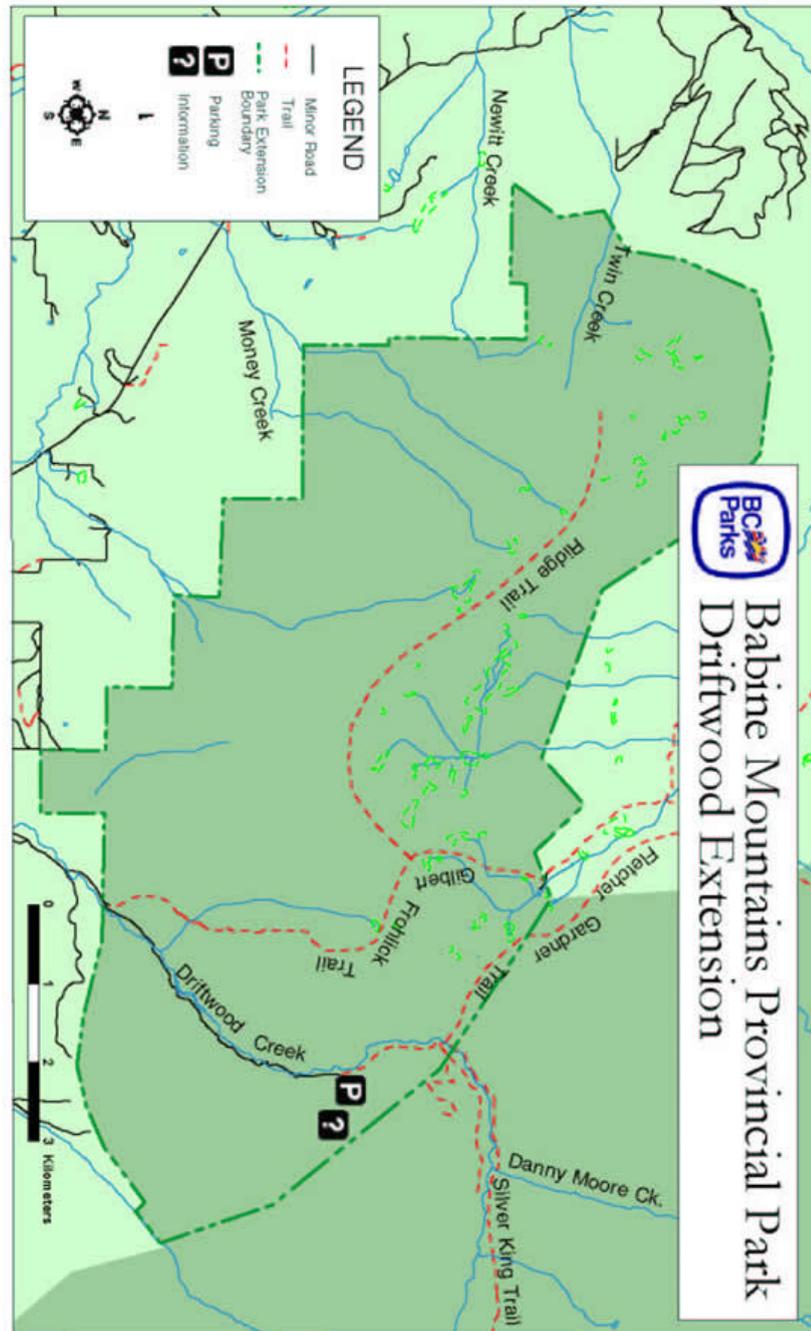


0 100 200 300 Kilometers

Scale 1:6,000,000



Figure 2



Cultural Heritage

- likely history of anthropogenic burning for berry production
- trail along ridge-top is likely of First Nations origin
- other attributes not identified to BC Parks

Significance in the Protected Areas System

- protects mid-elevation under-represented SBSmc2 within Southern Skeena Mountains Ecosection
- protects red-listed scrub-steppe community
- increases integrity of Babine Mountains Park by including mid-elevation forested recreation settings

Land Uses, Tenures and Interests

Access

Main access route is via Driftwood Creek Road: in winter, the road is ploughed to a parking lot just outside the extension boundary; in summer, road access extends a further 6 km to a gate 1 km south of Sunny Point. More westerly access routes require permission from property owners to cross private land.

Within the park extension, several skid roads have been used since the 1940's by hikers and horseback riders as trails. Use has declined over time as brush has encroached. Such trails run north of Dieter and Adams Roads to "Deer Meadows" and "Moose Meadows". Snowmobile routes have been cleared and flagged and used for over 20 years: the Ridge Trail accesses a viewpoint about 7 km along Driftwood Hill, with short side spurs to Deer Meadows and Moose Meadows and return loop to Dieter Road; the Frohlick/Gilbert Trail forks off the Ridge Trail and extends 20 km to the Lower Harold Price Meadows (only the first 3.5 km is within the extension). A trail along the height of land is presumed to be a traditional First Nations trail. Reisetser (Two-Bridge) Lake Trail, an old mineral exploration road, extends into the eastern portion of the extension, climbing out of Driftwood Creek drainage and dropping into Reisetser Creek drainage. This trail exits the park extension and passes through crown land for 4 km until entering Babine Mountains Park.

Existing Tenures

- radio repeater site near Newitt Creek (*Land Act* Reserve 966003)
- two traplines within the extension
- one guide-outfitter operates within the extension

Existing Land Use Activities and Facilities

- series of trails along old skid roads; First Nations trails
- no other facilities exist
- use includes hiking, horseback riding, snowshoeing, cross-country ski-touring, snowmobiling by a few local residents, some hunting for bear and moose, access route to goat hunting in Babine Mountains

Adjacent Patterns of Land Use

- Babine Mountains Park, wilderness recreation zone, forms the northeast boundary
- Reiserer Creek special management zone (managed for water and visual quality— low impact, low intensity logging practices) forms the north and west boundary
- private property, grazing leases (632132, Newitt Creek drainage; 631994, 1 km west of boundary) and licenses (RAN072843, 1 km west of boundary, RAN072842, vacant) and a woodlot license (1506, Lyon Creek drainage) abut the south and southwest portion of the extension
- crown land, subject to integrated resource management, lies to the southeast

First Nations Interests

- part of the asserted traditional territory of the Wet'suwet'en
- Aboriginal Rights will be honoured and protected subject to conservation and safety concerns
- Wet'suwet'en staff have indicated the plan is acceptable to the Wet'suwet'en Chiefs following a review of the draft plan and a meeting with BC Parks staff.

Other Agency Interests

- BC Environment has an interest in winter range for moose and deer and in ptarmigan wintering habitat in wetlands
- Ministry of Forests has a concern for tree health throughout the Bulkley Valley— balsam bark beetle and mountain pine beetle occur in endemic levels through extension; numbers of pine in extension do not warrant excessive concern
- Ministry of Forests manages forestry and grazing activities on adjacent crown land

Private and Public Stakeholder Interests

- recreational users: hikers, backcountry skiers, horseback riders, snowmobilers, hunters (Bulkley Valley Backpackers, Back Country Horsemen Society of BC, Northern Saddle Club, Smithers Snowmobiling Association, BV Rod and Gun Club, BC Wildlife Federation)
- local residents: Smithers and Telkwa communities, particularly park neighbours
- commercial users: trappers, guide-outfitter, Mountainview Trailriding
- Bulkley Valley Naturalists, Sierra Club

Role of Driftwood Extension Park

Driftwood Extension Park serves important conservation and recreation roles in the British Columbia protected areas system. The extension protects about 3,000 ha of representative upland moist cold sub-boreal spruce (SBSmc2) ecosystems, including a red-listed shrub-steppe plant community. Protection of these upland ecosystems complements the narrow strip of riparian SBSmc2 forest in Babine River Corridor Park. Driftwood Extension Park's linkage to the adjacent subalpine and alpine ecosystems protected by Babine Mountains Park increases its conservation importance.

Driftwood Extension Park is the primary backcountry recreation area close to Smithers, supporting high levels of regional use. It also provides a range of backcountry

opportunities including relatively accessible and safe backcountry day use and overnight use along informal trails, and winter access to more remote areas for backcountry skiing. Recreation management recognises traditional activities and use patterns for hiking, ski touring, horseback riding, hunting and snowmobiling.

Management Commitments and Issues

Direction from Previous Planning

The Bulkley Valley LRMP recommended adding the Driftwood Extension to Babine Mountains Park in 1998, with the objective “to protect the resources of this area for a wilderness recreation park as part of the Protected Areas system”. The LRMP directs that ATV access be maintained on the existing road up to Harry Orm’s cabin until a formal management plan is written for the protected area.

Management Issues

The following management issues require attention:

Theme	Issue
Public safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> area poses usual safety concerns for backcountry recreation in a wilderness environment
Protecting ecological values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inventory of natural features is incomplete status of red-listed ecosystems is unknown livestock may graze inside park boundary, with unknown impacts (red-listed scrub-steppe ecosystem is of particular concern) snowmobiles may impact ptarmigan populations in wetlands ATV use damages Driftwood Creek (existing foot bridge at Sunny Point is too narrow)
Protecting recreational values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> history of use by local residents for hiking, skiing, horse riding, snowmobiling, hunting local residents travel through small section of extension on ATVs to reach Harry Orm’s cabin brush encroachment limits accessibility of trails motorised winter use of unplowed Driftwood Road would conflict with historical non-motorised use
Protecting cultural values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cultural features unknown

Management Strategy

The following table describes management strategies to deal with outstanding issues raised. In addition, Appendix 1 contains a list of acceptable land and resource uses for this park.

Priority Management Objectives	Priority Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Driftwood Extension is safe for public use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider adopting BC Outdoor Recreation Council’s code of ethics for trail use between use groups • Identify safety issues of concern in consultation with local stakeholders • Follow bear-people conflict prevention guidelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the park’s natural values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory fauna and flora; prepare Ecology Information Summary • Assess biotic integrity of red-listed ecosystems • Assess potential issue of livestock grazing inside park boundary, particularly in the scrub-steppe ecosystems on south-facing slopes above Newitt Creek • Develop ecologically appropriate beetle plan in conjunction with fire management plan; until then, do not manage balsam bark beetle, manage mountain pine beetle as necessary according to the <i>Park Act</i> (no harvesting), suppress wildfire • Consider implementing Conservation Stewardship Program • Upgrade bridge across Driftwood Creek at Sunny Point to allow ATV crossing • Limit ATV use to travelling 6km along Fletcher-Gardiner trail to Harry Orm’s cabin for “traditional use” as recommended by LRMP/Community Resources Board; winter motorised use is not permitted on the Fletcher-Gardiner trail • Complete backcountry recreation impact management studies on motorised trails
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the park’s recreational values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inventory and map trails and routes • Allow snowmobiling along Ridge Trail and Gilbert -Frohlick Trail; do not develop new routes; trail users are responsible for maintenance; trail improvements are prohibited; access is through private land—permission for access must be given by land owners • Review motorised use during Management Plan development, or earlier if necessary to protect the park’s natural values. It is noted that forest development may provide alternative access to the Gilbert/Frohlick Trail to Harold Price Meadows for snowmobilers, and alternative ATV access to the Harry Orm cabin • Prohibit motorized use on the Driftwood Road during winter months. • Develop trail etiquette guidelines • Monitor user group conflicts as preparation for Management Plan development • Encourage the use of low impact camping equipment and techniques

Priority Management Objectives	Priority Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the park’s cultural heritage values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate and collate existing information on cultural heritage values; prepare Cultural Features Information Summary in consultation with Wet’suwet’en • Inventory logging history, mapping old mill sites and hauling trails
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop appropriate facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No facilities are anticipated

Consultation and Future Planning

The Bulkley LRMP directs current uses in the Driftwood Extension to continue until a full Management Plan is developed. When the Management Plan for Babine Mountains Park is reviewed, the Driftwood Extension will be incorporated. At that time, issues of access, recreational use and ecosystem management planning will be addressed for the entire area.

In the interim, BC Parks will continue to work with adjacent landowners and the Community Resources Board to resolve immediate issues. BC Parks will continue to consult with Wet’suwet’en people about their use of the area and future site management actions.

Preliminary Zoning

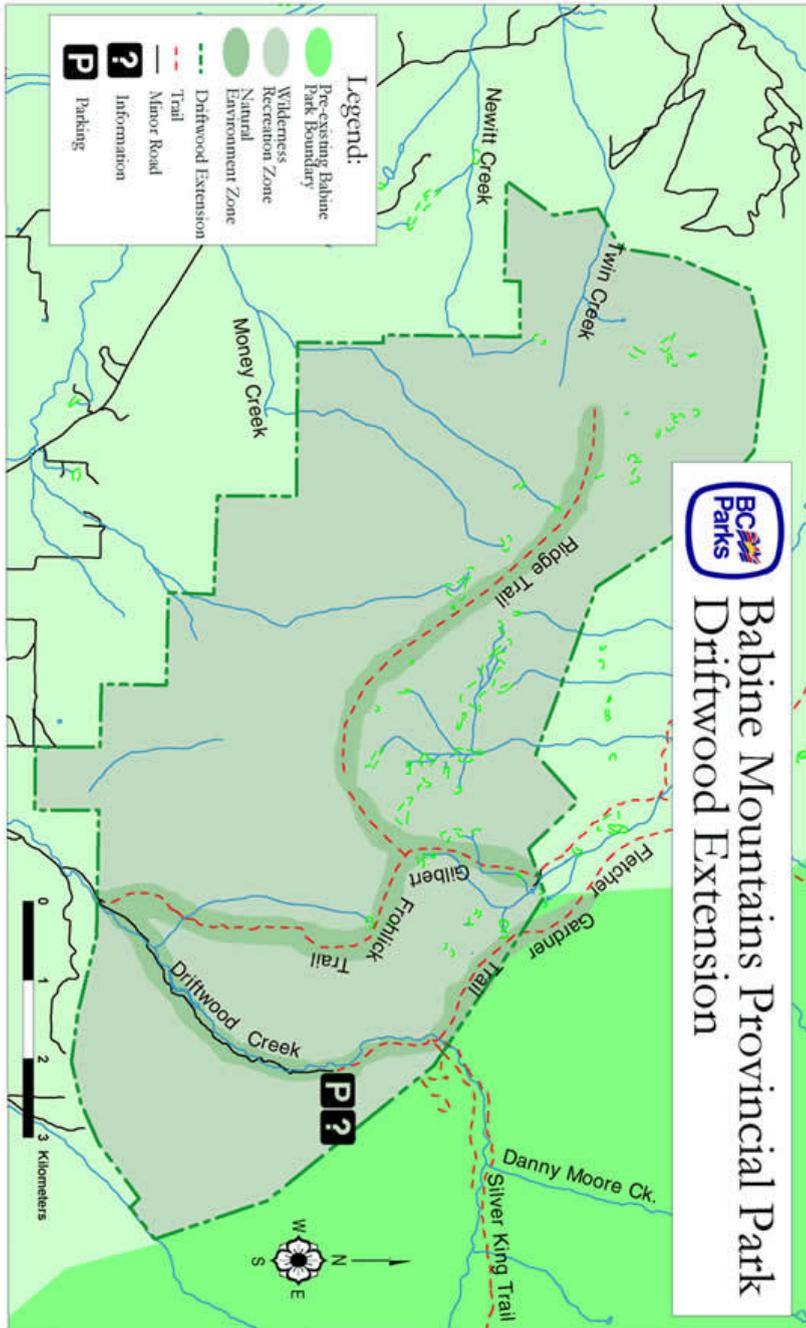
The majority of the extension is zoned as Wilderness Recreation to promote a remote, undisturbed natural landscape and to provide backcountry recreation opportunities dependent on a pristine environment.

The following trails are designated as natural environment:

- Driftwood Road as far as the parking lot/gate to accommodate motorized vehicles (not ATV’s) during summer months.
- the first 6 km of the Fletcher-Gardiner Trail as far as Harry Orm’s cabin to accommodate ATV use during summer months for traditional purposes

Snowmobile use during winter months will be permitted along the Ridge Trail and the Gilbert-Frohlick Trail as an exception to the Wilderness Recreation Zone.

Figure 3



Appendix I Driftwood Extension Park - Table of Acceptable Activities, Uses and Facilities

Activity/Use/Facility	Acceptable Uses
Aboriginal Rights	Y
Hunting	Y
Fishing	N
Trapping	Y
Grazing (domestic livestock)	N
Recreational gold panning/rock hounding	N
Utility corridors	N
Communication sites	N
Horse use/pack animals	Y
Guide outfitting (hunting)	Y
Guide outfitting (fishing)	N
Guide outfitting (nature tours)	Y
Guide outfitting (river rafting)	N
Cat-assisted skiing	N
Ski hills	N
Commercial recreation (facility-based)	N
Commercial recreation (non-facility-based)	Y
Backcountry huts	N
Water control structures	N
Fish stocking and enhancement	N
Road access	N
Off-road access (snowmobiling)	N2
Off-road access (motorised)	N2*
Off-road access (mechanical activities)	M
Motorised water access	N
Aircraft access	N1
Fire management (suppression)	Y
Fire management (prescribed fire management)	M
Fire management (prevention)	M
Forest insect/disease control	M
Noxious weed control	Y
Exotic insect/disease control	N1
Scientific research (specimen collection)	M
Scientific research (manipulative activities)	M

Y = allowed subject to conditions identified in the management direction statement or management plan

M = may be permitted if compatible with protected area objectives

N = not allowed

N1 = allowed for expressed management purposes only

N2 = present and allowed to continue, but not normally allowed

* only as specified in management strategies