

MANAGEMENT PLAN

February 2002



for Bowron Lake, Cariboo
Mountains and Cariboo River
Provincial Parks



BRITISH
COLUMBIA
Ministry of Water, Land and Air
Protection
Environmental Stewardship
Division

Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains and
Cariboo River Provincial Parks

MANAGEMENT PLAN

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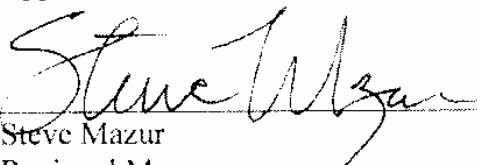
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Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains And Cariboo River Provincial Parks

Management Plan

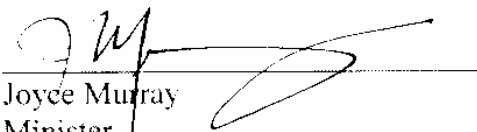
Approved by:


Steve Mazur
Regional Manager

Date: February 28, 2002


Bob Dalziel
A/Assistant Deputy Minister

Date: March 4, 2002


Joyce Murray
Minister

Date: March 4, 2002

This Management Plan is a component of the *Cariboo-Chilcotin Land-Use Plan*, the *Robson Valley Land and Resource Management Plan* and the *Prince George Land and Resource Management Plan* and was developed through direction from those land use plans.

The Management Plan has been endorsed by the Cariboo Mid-Coast Interagency Committee and the Cariboo-Chilcotin Regional Resource Board as being:

“Consistent with the spirit and intent of the *CCLUP*”

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Plate 1: The dramatic landscape around Mitchell Lake in Cariboo Mountains Park.

Management Using Ecological Integrity Principles

Today, as pressures for land and natural resources increase, there is an awareness that British Columbia's protected areas are being relied on more than ever to restore and conserve the natural biological diversity of landscapes and protect species at risk while providing sustainable and accessible recreation and tourism opportunities.

Throughout the Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains and Cariboo River management planning process, the public emphasized the importance of using ecological integrity principles for the management of these parks. As such, the plan recognizes that the primary purpose of this particular block of parks is conservation and protection of species at risk. BC Parks will use the best available science and information to manage for the long-term protection and ecological integrity of the parks. An ecosystem-based management approach will ensure that the significant recreation and tourism opportunities outlined in the plan highlight British Columbia's parks as jewels of the tourism industry.

Planning and managing using ecological integrity principles means managing areas so that the function of ecosystems is unimpaired by the potential stresses induced by human activities and ensuring the ecosystems' biological diversity and supporting processes are likely to persist. The end result is managing the parks so that they can remain as natural as possible. The actual application of these principles will vary depending on the nature of the zone and other management objectives.

Management using ecological integrity principles includes allowing for natural disturbance patterns to prevail, protection of species and their habitats such that they can continue to exist in numbers sustainable over time, and the recognition that humans are very much a part of the ecosystem. As part of an ecological integrity approach to planning and management, human recreation is embraced as long as it does not harm or diminish the natural ecosystem composition, structure and function over time.

An important part of managing protected areas using ecological integrity principles is recognizing that protected areas must be considered within the larger landscape context. As such, BC Parks has committed to working with land and water managers from other agencies and industries to share information when making decisions regarding the greater landscape.

Management decisions should be guided by the best available science; working towards closing information gaps with the goal of restoring and conserving the natural biological diversity of landscapes and protecting species at risk. The use of the best available science will ensure sustainability, accountability, and responsibility in decision making.

Finally, management using ecological integrity principles demands a long-term focus. The time scale at which ecological processes exist (e.g. 200 - 800 year fire cycles, 100 year floods, etc.) needs to be considered in the management of protected areas. Ecosystems and their processes are dynamic, and applying long term goals for protected areas is vital to effectively manage for ecological integrity.

This management plan for Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains and Cariboo River parks exemplifies the focus on management using ecological integrity principles. The plan will reflect many principles and highlight specific examples of management strategies that work toward maintaining a healthy park ecosystem. Decisions regarding human use in these parks were made to build on the values of the public and stakeholders, and will reflect the long-term goal of sustaining healthy and dynamic ecosystems.

Click to view plate 2. Avalanche tracks at the headwaters of the Mitchell River in Cariboo Mountains Park provide excellent foraging areas for grizzly bears.

Plan Highlights

Cariboo-Chilcotin Land-Use Plan Commitments

- ✓ This management plan for Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains and Cariboo River provincial parks was developed with the direct involvement of an Advisory Group comprising a wide variety of interests and perspectives. The Advisory Group will be invited to meet once a year to monitor and review the implementation of the plan.
- ✓ These parks will be managed for their provincially significant conservation (including species at risk) values, in particular the red-listed mountain caribou and blue-listed grizzly bear and bull trout. Sustainable public and commercial recreation will be encouraged in the parks and will be managed on an ecosystem basis using the best available science so that risks to these conservation values are minimized.
- ✓ The right to hunt, trap, guide-outfit and fish has been confirmed as acceptable uses in Cariboo Mountains and Cariboo River provincial parks. Existing levels of commercial recreation, such as wildlife viewing and helicopter skiing, will be maintained.
- ✓ Trapping is confirmed as an acceptable use in Cariboo Mountains, Cariboo River and the Wolverine addition to Bowron Lake Provincial Park. Vacant areas in the Upper Cariboo River and Betty Wendle additions will be closed.

- ✓ Existing snowmobile use has been confirmed as an acceptable use at Ghost Lake and in the Roberts Peak area of Cariboo Mountains Provincial Park. A new snowmobile corridor has also been confirmed through the Z-Road in the Mitchell River area.
- ✓ The right to access private property at the north end of Quesnel Lake via the Z-Road has been confirmed, as well as aircraft access to private inholdings at the east end of Mitchell Lake.
- ✓ An additional +/- 8,000 user days of public and commercial recreation opportunities have been identified across this block of parks. Commercial opportunities will be offered to the private sector for their consideration as market conditions and demand warrant.
- ✓ There are no grazing or mineral tenures in these parks.

Management of Natural and Cultural Values

- ✓ Over 36% of the area of this block of parks will be managed as a Wilderness Conservation Zone (all within Bowron Lake Provincial Park) with no hunting and very limited human use and access.
- ✓ The majority of the area of these parks (57%) will be managed as a Wilderness Recreation Zone, where existing public and commercial recreation activities such as hunting, fishing, helicopter skiing, guide-outfitting, and hunting will be permitted.
- ✓ The Mitchell River Special Feature Zone comprises less than 1% of the area of the parks, but captures one of the most ecologically diverse and recreationally important areas in the block of parks. The focus of this area will be on increasing knowledge about grizzly bear, bull trout, rainbow trout and migratory bird/waterfowl values, as well as working with the public and tourism operators to carefully manage ecosystems and recreational experiences.
- ✓ Active management of bark beetles and fire will be undertaken in the “Fire and Forest Health Management Zone”, comprising about 25% of the area of the parks. This management will ensure park infrastructure, recreational opportunities and adjacent commercial forestry values are protected. The remaining 75% of the parks will allow natural processes such as fire and disease to unfold with little management intervention. These natural processes will be monitored and intervention may be used where risks to other park values or adjacent commercial forests are identified.
- ✓ A program of ecological research and monitoring will be implemented in order to gain an increased understanding of wildlife and fish populations, population trends and habitat requirements.
- ✓ An Archaeological Overview Assessment will be completed on the Bowron Lake canoe circuit.
- ✓ The themes to be used in interpreting the history of these parks are “First Nations, fur trade, guide-outfitting and early efforts in grassroots conservation.”

Management of Recreation and Tourism

- ✓ Approximately 5.2% of these parks are zoned as Natural Environment. This zone allows for motorized recreation and higher levels of human use. This zone is located on Mitchell and Ghost lakes, Cariboo River, in the Roberts Peak snowmobile area, along the Wolverine corridor and on

Bowron Lake.

- ✓ The Intensive Recreation Zone is located in two areas – one at the north end of Bowron Lake, where the campground, Registration Center and staging facilities are located, and the other at the Ghost Lake campsite. The Ghost Lake site will be upgraded and a small boat launch constructed as demand increases.
- ✓ New day use trails will be considered at Bowron Lake – one to Sugarloaf Mountain and the other to Devil’s Club Mountain. These trails, in conjunction with better access to fishing docks and a new day use area adjacent to the canoe dock, will make Bowron Lake more accessible to visitors and local users.
- ✓ Approximately 8,000 new user days for both public and commercial recreation have been identified in the plan. These opportunities include snowmobiling, wildlife viewing, air access hiking, fishing, boating, mountaineering, horseback riding, skiing, dogsledding and others. Commercial opportunities will be offered for private sector consideration as demand and market conditions warrant.
- ✓ The planning process considered the expansion of existing helicopter skiing operations in Cariboo Mountains Provincial Park. The plan recommends that new or expanded helicopter skiing will only be considered when it can be demonstrated, through scientific research and consistent with the Provincial Mountain Caribou Recovery Plan, that helicopter skiing can be done in a manner that is not detrimental to the local population of mountain caribou.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Management Planning Process

This strategic plan is prepared by BC Parks as a document to guide park management over a ten-year term, while looking at least 50 years into the future. Under the direction provided by the *Park Act* and the *Park and Recreation Area Regulations*, the plan sets out objectives and strategies for conservation, development, interpretation and operation of these parks. The plan relies on social and technical information relating to such things as natural values, cultural activities, and recreation uses in addition to activities occurring on surrounding lands. The process for preparing the plan involved analysis of the overall goals of the parks, patterns of use, natural, cultural and recreational values, management objectives and possible sources of conflict among park policies.

The strategic plan not only establishes long-term management direction for the parks, but also deals with immediate issues. This means that the plan contains numerous statements describing management actions to be undertaken. Since BC Parks cannot carry out every task at the same time, the plan also sets out a schedule for implementation.

BC Parks endeavours to prepare plans with a high degree of public involvement. In the case of Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains, and Cariboo River provincial parks, two main bodies provided direction on the creation of the plan - the Advisory Group, and a series of smaller Task Groups.

In the spring of 2000, letters were sent to approximately 100 people inviting them to participate in an Advisory Group to help in the development of a plan for Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains, and Cariboo River parks. These people represented a broad cross section of interests and perspectives. As the process continued, an additional 180 people requested to be placed on the mailing list and to attend the Advisory Group meetings.

The Advisory Group met for the first time in May 2000 in Wells to discuss the planning process. At this meeting, the Advisory Group identified a number of key issues to be addressed in the plan. In an effort to minimize the numbers of meetings people would have to attend, a number of sub-committees of the Advisory Group (called Task Groups) were formed to explore these issues in more detail and to make recommendations back to the Advisory Group. The rationale behind this was that those individuals most interested/knowledgeable in a topic could devote time to a particular issue and not attend meetings on topics they were not interested in. In this way, people could choose their level of involvement in the process – just reviewing minutes and plan drafts from home; attending broad Advisory Group meetings; or attending detailed meetings where objectives and strategies were developed.

The next meeting of the Advisory Group was scheduled for November 2000, with additional meetings in February and September 2001. In between these meetings, the various Task Groups worked to define issues and develop detailed objectives and strategies.

The Task Groups included:

1. Fish and Wildlife Management
- 2a. Non-motorized Recreation
- 2b. Motorized Recreation
3. Public Information¹
4. Access/Adjacency
5. Cultural Heritage
6. Bowron Lake
7. Bowron Lake canoe circuit
8. Mitchell River
9. Forest Health

For a number of these Task Groups (i.e. Bowron Lake, Bowron Lake canoe circuit, Mitchell River, Cultural Heritage) the members met several times to identify specific issues and concerns, explore interests, and to develop recommendations. In these Task Groups, there was consensus on recommendations. For a number of the other more technical Task Groups (i.e. Fish and Wildlife, Forest Health) it was considered too time consuming to have the public develop technical objectives and strategies. Instead, government resource staff put together draft words for the Task Groups to consider, review and edit.

In the remainder of the Task Groups (Motorized and Non-Motorized Recreation, Access and Adjacency), the members had a diverse range of opinions and could not come to agreement on recommendations. In these cases, the “scenario” approach was used, where the Task Groups developed a range of possible scenarios that would “solve” an issue. These scenarios, which included descriptions of the activities and how they might be managed, along with the pluses and minuses, were distributed several weeks prior to the Advisory Group meeting.

At the Advisory Group meetings (attended by anywhere from 20 - 120 people), the recommendations or scenarios from the Task Groups were reviewed. In the case where the Task Group had agreed upon its recommendations, the Advisory Group had the opportunity to examine and ask questions about certain recommendations. When scenarios were used, each scenario, along with the pluses and minuses, was presented and discussed. At the end of the meeting, each scenario was placed on flipchart paper and posted on the wall. Advisory Group members were given stickies and asked to place their stickie, marked with their name and affiliation, on their preferred scenario. The meetings ended with a discussion of the preferred options of the group. This formed part of the recommendations of the Advisory Group to BC Parks.

Based on recommendations from the Advisory Group, a first draft of the plan was written in June 2001. BC Parks planning staff continued to meet with groups to clarify interests and fine tune the draft plan. The draft was distributed to the Advisory Group by mail and was discussed at a final Advisory Group meeting in September 2001.

¹ This Task Group never met.

1.2 Background

Bowron Lake Provincial Park

Bowron Lake Provincial Park originally attracted the attention of conservationists around the turn of the last century, many of whom were concerned about declining fish and wildlife populations and felt the area would be popular as a tourist destination. In 1925, a number of local pioneers, including Joe and Betty Wendle, Louis Lebourdais, Thomas and Eleanor McCabe, and John Babcock were successful in having the area designated as a Game Reserve with no hunting permitted. As the area's natural beauty and abundant wildlife became renowned, the Parks Branch took an interest, placing part of the area under reserve in 1948. Staff reconnoitered possible boundaries during the 1950s, and in 1961 established Bowron Lake Provincial Park.

In 2000, Bowron Lake Park was enlarged by the addition of three areas that were recommended through the Regional land use plans adjacent to the park. These areas included the Wolverine drainage, the Betty Wendle drainage, and a tributary of the Upper Cariboo River drainage. These three areas became part of Bowron Lake Class A Provincial Park through the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act* following recommendations by the Prince George and Robson Valley Land and Resource Management Plans (PGLRMP and RVL RMP). These areas were added to the boundaries of Bowron Lake Park, creating one park.

Cariboo Mountains Provincial Park

Cariboo Mountains Park was originally proposed for protection through a number of planning processes including Parks Plan 90, Parks and Wilderness for the 90s, a Ministry of Environment Wildlife Management Area/Wilderness Area proposal, the Protected Areas Strategy, the Cariboo Chilcotin Commission on Resources and Environment (CORE) and the Ministry of Forests' Wilderness Program. The park received Class A designation through the *Park Amendment Act, 1995* on July 12, 1995 following recommendations by the Cariboo-Chilcotin Land-Use Plan (*CCLUP*).

Cariboo River Provincial Park

Cariboo River Park was originally proposed for a Fish and Wildlife Reserve in the 1970s. In 1984 the Province designated it as a Wildlife Management Area. It was proposed for upgrade to a Class A Provincial Park through the Cariboo Chilcotin Commission on Resources and Environment (CORE) and received Class A designation through the *Park Amendment Act, 1995* on July 12, 1995 following recommendations by the Cariboo-Chilcotin Land-Use Plan (*CCLUP*).

The *Park Act* and *Park and Recreation Area Regulations* provide the legal framework for the management of these provincial parks. While Cariboo Mountains, Cariboo River and the additions to Bowron Lake Park were created to protect their ecological values, these parks, like others designated through the regional land use plans, have a commitment that activities such as recreation, hunting, trapping and backcountry tourism should continue to take place.

1.3 Relationship with Other Land Use Planning

Cariboo-Chilcotin Land-Use Plan

In 1995, the *Cariboo-Chilcotin Land-Use Plan* created 17 new parks and protected areas. The *CCLUP 90 Day Implementation Process Report* contains a significant amount of direction on the management of these new areas. Direction included:

- Dominant ecological values should be protected, and that uses such as recreation, cattle grazing (except Junction Sheep Range), hunting, trapping and backcountry tourism, will be allowed.
- Mining tenures fully within the boundaries will be extinguished. Fair compensation will be established through negotiation between the Provincial government and the affected tenure holders.
- Hunting and trapping will continue to be allowed.
- The park[s] will be available, in principle and where appropriate, for commercial tourism and recreation. Development opportunities will be identified during area-specific management planning which will recognize the protection of the special natural values of each area and the provision for public non-commercial recreation. In some circumstances, development opportunities may include “fixed roof” accommodation.
- Existing approved levels of cattle grazing will continue. The maximum level of animal unit months (AUMs) will be set at the existing level of authorized AUMs as of October 24, 1994.
- Existing approved levels of cattle grazing will continue in all protected areas. Opportunities for enhancing grazing for expressed management purposes may be addressed in subsequent management plans, which would be developed in consultation with affected operators.
- No private land will be included within protected areas unless the government negotiates a mutually-agreed purchase. Existing landowner use, development and access rights will be unaffected by protected areas.

Click to view plate 3. Looking south down Niagara Creek in Cariboo Mountains Park.

Robson Valley Land and Resource Management Plan

The *RVLRMP* recommended the protection of the Upper Cariboo River and Betty Wendle areas, which have since been added to Bowron Lake Provincial Park. Direction for these two areas states the following:

Betty Wendle

- Before resource activities are approved adjacent to protected areas, referral comments from BC Parks will be considered.
- Honour [the] existing heliski license.
- For heliskiing, minimize the number of logged helipads by using natural openings where possible and where necessary allow minimal tree falling for safe helicopter landings.
- Honour [the] existing guiding and trapping tenures.
- Where resource development is planned close to protected area boundaries, the resource tenure holder(s) are responsible, through appropriate survey methods, to ensure development is outside protected area boundaries.
- Watershed restoration project is approved and can proceed in this protected area. [This line appears to have been a mistake, as no watershed restoration projects have been proposed in the watershed].

Click to view plate 4: Looking east into the Betty Wendle drainage. Isaac Lake is in the foreground.

[Upper] Cariboo River

Same as above, but add

- Review [the] no staking reserve once proposed protected area is approved.

Click to view plate 5. Looking northeast into the Cariboo River addition to Bowron Lake Park.

Prince George Land and Resource Management Plan

The *Prince George LRMP* recommended the Wolverine River addition to Bowron Lake Park. The *PGLRMP* document includes the following specific recommendations on activities in this area:

Activity	Allowed/Not Allowed
Hunting	Deferred to BC Parks planning process
Fishing	Allowed
Fish Stocking/Enhancement	Not allowed
Trapping	Allowed
Horse Use and Pack Animals	Deferred to BC Parks planning process
Cattle Grazing	Not allowed
Commercial Guiding (hunting)	Limited to current tenure use or to designated areas
Lodges/Cabins	Limited to current tenure use or to designated areas
Snowmobiling	Deferred to BC Parks planning process
Mechanized activities	Deferred to BC Parks planning process
Water-based motorized activities	Deferred to BC Parks planning process
Aircraft Access	Limited to current tenure use or to designated areas
Heli-skiing	Not allowed
Heli-hiking	Not allowed
Commercial guiding (non-hunting)	Allowed

In relation to a potential road corridor, the *PGLRMP* states:

“A road has been proposed through this area which would connect Highway 16 (near McBride) with Highway 26 (near Wells). The road is not feasible at this time, however, and therefore, a corridor has not been delineated. In the event that it becomes feasible in the future, the corridor location and the impacts on the protected area will be considered and addressed at that time.”

Click to view plate 6: Looking northeast up the Wolverine Creek addition to Bowron Lake Park. The cutblocks were logged in the mid 1980s and are visible from the canoe circuit on Isaac Lake.

