

2.0 The Role of the Protected Areas

2.1 Provincial and Regional Context

Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains, and Cariboo River parks straddle three ecosections – the Bowron Valley (BOV), Quesnel Highland (QUH) and the North Columbia Mountains (NCM). With the new protected areas designated through the *CCLUP*, and the Robson Valley and Prince George LRMPs, 23% of the NCM ecosection is currently protected, 3% of the BOV ecosection is protected, and 12% of the QUH ecosection is protected.

In the Bowron Valley ecosection, Bowron Lake Park is the main protected area, with a contribution of 19,330 hectares. Barkerville and Wendle parks add very minor contributions.

In the Quesnel Highland ecosection, Wells Gray is the largest park, with 64,298 hectares in the ecosection. All 3,137 hectares of Cariboo River Park, 11,412 hectares of Bowron Lake Park and 15,529 hectares of Cariboo Mountains Park are also in the QUH ecosection. Other small parks in the Quesnel Highland include Canim Beach and Cedar Point.

The huge North Cariboo Mountains ecosection includes a variety of existing and new protected areas. 83,669 hectares of the original Bowron Lake Park, 97,686 hectares of Cariboo Mountains Park, 270,249 hectares of Wells Gray Park and 129,366 hectares of Glacier National Park are all located in the NCM.

In addition to these four existing parks, new protected areas from the Prince George LRMP in this ecosection include, the 5,200 hectare Wolverine addition to Bowron Lake, Sugarbowl/Grizzly, Ptarmigan Creek, Erg Mountain, and Slim Creek. Some of the new protected areas from the Robson Valley LRMP in this ecosection include the 6,060 hectare Upper Cariboo River addition to Bowron Lake Park, the 14,415 hectares Betty Wendle addition to Bowron Lake Park, the Upper (Middle) Raush River, the Lower Raush River, portions of the West Twin Protected Area and the upper portions of the Foster Arm Protected Area.

Other smaller parks in the NCM ecosection include Goosegrass Creek, Martha Creek and the Upper Adams River.

Across British Columbia, Bowron Lake and Cariboo Mountains Park are similar to many large mountainous parks. Bowron Lake Park to the north provides a world class canoe circuit, while Wells Gray Park to the south draws visitors for both canoeing and backcountry hiking. Cariboo Mountains Park offers good backcountry recreational and tourism opportunities for wilderness oriented activities such as hiking, wildlife viewing, hunting, and fishing. Cariboo Mountains also offers provincially significant helicopter skiing opportunities.

[Click to view Regional Context and Ecosections Map](#)

2.2 Significance in the Protected Areas System

Cariboo Mountains

The 113,092 hectare Cariboo Mountains Park contains natural and recreational values of both provincial and regional significance.

Cariboo Mountains Park is located in the interior wetbelt of British Columbia, in an area often referred to as a “snowforest” for its very productive ecosystems, large trees and high snowfalls. The interior wetbelt stretches from the Kootenays to just north of Bowron Lake, where the Cariboo Mountains eventually flatten out into the interior plateau. Cariboo Mountains Park protects a number of complete and partial watersheds in the Cariboo Mountains, linking Bowron Lake Park to Wells Gray Park. The complete Niagara Creek watershed, from its headwaters in the icefields of the Quanstom Glacier in Cariboo Mountains to the shores of Quesnel Lake is included in the park. The majority of the very diverse Mitchell Lake watershed, from Roberts Glacier to the ecologically diverse Lower Mitchell River, is also included within the park boundary. The headwaters of the Matthew River flowing into Ghost Lake are part of Cariboo Mountains Park, as well as the headwaters of a number of tributaries of the Matthew River in the Matthew River Valley adjacent to the park.

The park contains a diverse range of landscapes, including old western red-cedar and hemlock forests on valley bottoms/lower elevations and old spruce and subalpine fir forests at higher elevations. It also includes large lakes, tarn lakes, slow meandering rivers and wetlands, highland plateau areas with grasses and sedges, alpine forests, and glaciers and icefields. This range of landscapes represents an excellent example of the interior wetbelt rainforest.

Click to view plate 7: Looking northeast across the Matthew River Valley towards Ghost Lake. The approximate park boundary is indicated by the dotted line.

In addition to its wetbelt vegetation and range of landscapes, Cariboo Mountains contain provincially significant wildlife and fisheries populations. The park supports one of the few viable populations of grizzly bears to have access to an abundant run of spawning sockeye salmon in an undeveloped and natural setting. The park is also home to the recently red-listed mountain caribou population, as well as the blue-listed wolverine and blue-listed bull trout.

Recreationally, Cariboo Mountains has a provincially significant catch and release angling experience on the Mitchell River, which supports the large bull trout and genetically unique Quesnel Lake rainbow trout, which grow up to 20 pounds. Other recreational activities are only considered regionally or locally significant. The difficult access, distance from communities, and very rugged terrain make the park a challenge to use, but also supply excellent wilderness opportunities for those willing to make the effort.

Bowron Lake

This 139,776 hectare park contains a mix of natural and recreational values of regional, provincial and international significance.

The park contains many intact watersheds, with waters that flow both north and southwest from the park. Waters from the Betty Wendle, Wolverine, Cariboo River and other valleys on the eastern side of the park drain into the Cariboo River, which then joins the Matthew River (draining portions of Cariboo Mountains Park) and eventually combines with the Quesnel River and then into the Fraser River at Quesnel. Waters from the northeastern and western portions of the park drain north into the Bowron River, which then continues in a northerly direction to join the Fraser River east of Prince George.

Like Cariboo Mountains Park, most of the eastern portions of Bowron Lake Park are located in the interior wetbelt, characterized by rugged topography, high snowfalls in winter and significant rainfall in summer. The landscape of the eastern section of the park is dominated by Isaac Lake, a very deep, cold, lake overlooked by steep, snowcapped mountains. The northwestern portions of the park are quite different. The landscape is dominated by rolling terrain, extensive wetlands and shallow, warm lakes.

Bowron Lake Park contains a diversity of landscapes, including a regionally significant range of lower elevation old spruce/subalpine fir, pine, western red cedar/hemlock forests and higher elevation spruce and fir forests. Large/deep and small/shallow lakes, alpine ridges, steep valley slopes, gently sloping valley bottoms, and large and small wetlands are distributed throughout the park. The park also contains a range of low, medium and high gradient streams.

In addition to its wide variety of vegetation and landscape features, Bowron Lake Park also contains significant fisheries, wildlife and waterfowl values. It is one of the few protected areas in the province that offers a sanctuary for wildlife. This, combined with the excellent summer and winter moose habitat, small populations of the red-listed mountain caribou, habitat for black bears and the blue-listed grizzly populations and limited access and use of the center of the park, make the park a very significant wildlife refugia. The park contains wild stocks of bull trout, lake trout and kokanee. It also has a population of genetically unique, very large rainbow trout similar to the Gerrard and Quesnel Lake rainbows. The upper Bowron River supports a large population of spawning sockeye salmon which in turn support the large populations of grizzly bears making their home in the Bowron River watershed. The kokanee fishery at Bowron Lake has been popular as a food and sport fishery since the first Cariboo Gold Rush in the 1860s and continues to be a draw for anglers across the region.

Recreationally, Bowron offers an internationally recognized wilderness canoe circuit, the largest of its kind across British Columbia's protected area system. Other regionally or locally significant recreational opportunities in the park include day boating, angling, wildlife viewing, two and three day canoe trips, and some limited hiking.

Cariboo River

Cariboo River Park contains the highest value moose winter range in the Cariboo Region. This park is primarily a portion of the Cariboo River Valley from Cariboo Lake to Kimball Lake. It protects extensive wetland habitats, riparian forests and coniferous forest habitats. Because it is significantly lower in elevation than the wetlands in Bowron Lake and the Matthew River valley, this area is a draw to moose, who leave these higher areas in winter to feed on the extensive willow shrub and herbaceous vegetation along the Cariboo River.

While the major reason Cariboo River was protected is because of the excellent critical moose winter range, the area also contains one of the three most significant areas for waterfowl in the Cariboo

Mountains. It ranks above both the Mitchell wetlands and the Bowron wetlands for migratory bird and waterfowl values.

It protects a significant amount (10%) of the wet cool Interior Cedar Hemlock biogeoclimatic zone (ICH wk) in the Quesnel Highland ecosection and is one of the few places in the Cariboo Mountains that contain Douglas-fir and spruce forests.

Recreationally, Cariboo River has excellent access for river-based activities such as driftboating, fishing, canoeing and wildlife viewing.

Click to view plate 8: Looking south down Cariboo River Park. Kimball Lake is in the foreground. Approximate park boundary marked in dotted line.

2.3 Protected Area Roles

Cariboo Mountains Park

Conservation Role

- Cariboo Mountains is representative of the Interior Cedar Hemlock (ICH), Engelmann Spruce Subalpine Fir (ESSF) and Alpine Tundra (AT) found in the Bowron Valley and Quesnel Highland ecosections. It contains six biogeoclimatic subzones and variants, including:

Biogeoclimatic Subzone or Variant	Total Amount in Province (ha)	Total Amount Protected in Province (ha)	Amount Protected in Cariboo Mntns. (ha)	% of Provincial Total Protected in Cariboo Mntns.
ESSFwk1	615,621	73,320	19,392	26%
ESSFwc3	271,842	88,873	24,978	28%
AT	18,187,590	3,787,438	46,632	1%
ICHwk1	36,093	80,208	17,627	22%
ICHwk2	142,175	16,136	16,073	>99%
ICHwk4	57,210	23,481	2,914	12%
Lake	2,295,198	280,416	3,098	1%
Total			113,092	

- Protects large unroaded predator-prey ecosystem of the Cariboo Mountains in conjunction with Wells Gray and Bowron Lake parks.
- Provides critical spawning, rearing and foraging habitats for many salmonids, and maintains populations of sockeye, chinook, coho, kokanee, bull trout, and rainbow trout. Sockeye are the major anadromous species, with a run of up to 200,000 in high cyclic years.
- Supports and maintains significant numbers of the sport fish populations in Quesnel Lake.
- Contains critical winter habitat for moose, as well as some of the most productive areas for waterfowl in the Cariboo Mountains.

- Protects habitat of a portion of the “Wells Gray North” subpopulation of mountain caribou. This herd of less than 200 has recently been red-listed. The park contains areas of early winter, summer, calving and late winter habitat.
- Includes excellent habitat areas for blue-listed grizzly bear and wolverine populations.
- Incorporates mountain goat winter ranges throughout the park in addition to habitat and populations of black bears, wolves and moose.

Tourism and Recreation Role

- The recreation role (public and commercial) of Cariboo Mountains is focused on providing recreational opportunities dependant upon a remote, rugged wilderness setting. Hiking, mountaineering, and hunting will be based from logging roads that access cutblocks adjacent to the park. Most of the camps and inholdings in the park are accessed by floatplane.
- The significant fish and wildlife values provide opportunities for wildlife viewing, river angling and hunting in a roadless, wilderness setting.
- Motorized recreation occurring at the time of the park creation provides opportunities for very remote, skilled snowmobiling in several high elevation areas, as well as helicopter skiing in more remote areas of the park.

Cultural Heritage Role

- Current information² indicates a number of bands may have used the park in the summer and fall on the *seasonal round* for a combination of hunting, fishing, and gathering of food plants, making the most efficient use of the seasonally available resources.
- Little is documented of the First Nations or more recent European settlement or use of the area, making its role in the system unclear.
- First Nations use of the area is not clearly understood at this time.

Bowron Lake Park (including additions)

Conservation Role

- Bowron Lake is representative of the Interior Cedar Hemlock, Engelmann Spruce Subalpine Fir, Sub-boreal Spruce and Alpine Tundra found in the Bowron Valley, Quesnel Highland and North Columbia Mountains ecosections. It contains six biogeoclimatic subzones and variants, including:

Biogeoclimatic Subzone or Variant	Total Amount in Province (ha)	Total Amount Protected in Province (ha)	Amount Protected in Bowron Lake Park (hectares)	% of Provincial Total Protected in Bowron Lake Park
ESSFwk1	615,621	73,320	35,949	49%
ESSFwc3	271,842	88,873	25,676	29%
AT	18,187,590	3,787,438	22,238	<1%

² *A Cultural Heritage Overview of the Cariboo Forest Region.* Diana Alexander. March 1997.

SBSwk1	829,807	31,885	25,682	81%
ICHwk4	57,210	23,481	17,644	75%
ICHmk3	105,166	4,347	4,035	93%
Lake	2,295,198	280,416	8,552	3%
Total			139,776	

- Protects an unroaded and pristine salmon/grizzly ecosystem with little human intervention, access or hunting; the only such opportunity in the interior of British Columbia.
- Protects a large, intact and unroaded predator-prey ecosystem with no hunting (except in the additions). The predator-prey system also includes the adjacent Cariboo Mountains Park and Wells Gray Park, resulting in the fifth largest system of contiguous protected areas in the province.
- Protects habitat of a portion of a subpopulation of mountain caribou. The park contains areas of early winter, summer, calving and late winter habitat.
- Provides critical spawning, rearing and foraging habitats for many salmonids. Sockeye are the major anadromous species.
- Bowron wetlands contain some of the most productive areas for waterfowl in the Cariboo Mountains.
- Includes excellent habitat areas for blue-listed grizzly bear and wolverine populations.

Tourism and Recreation Role

- Protects an exceptional backcountry canoeing opportunity, which can be started and finished at one road accessible point. Other activities, such as wildlife viewing, nature interpretation and fishing, combine to enhance the experience.
- Provides a year-round, road accessible area for winter recreational activities, including snowshoeing, dogsledding and skiing in particular.
- Provides a year-round corridor (dependant upon feasibility studies) for recreational hikers, horsebackers and snowmobilers wishing to traverse between the Robson Valley and the Cariboo.
- A secondary role of the park is to provide day use opportunities at Bowron Lake. Fishing, boating (power and paddling), wildlife viewing in the Bowron wetlands, interpretation, short hikes, swimming and picnicking are all popular activities.
- The chain of lakes, along with Barkerville Historic Town, have the key role of being a regional marketing tool as many of the 6,000 - 9,000 visitors a year to the area are targeted by other tourism operators, hotels, restaurants and services.

Cultural Heritage Role

- Protects cultural heritage (archaeological and historic) resources of regional significance.
- Represents an excellent example of the trapping and guiding history of the first Cariboo Gold rush era, as well as providing an example of early grass-roots conservation efforts.
- Represents a number of First Nations archaeological and traditional use sites typical of an interior lake with salmon.
- First Nations use of the area is not clearly understood at this time.

Cariboo River Park

Conservation Role

- Represents the Interior Cedar Hemlock wet, cool subvariant found in the Quesnel Highland Ecosession. Includes one of the few areas with large Douglas-firs at low elevation valley bottoms in addition to extensive riparian areas (including wet spruce forests and shrub and herbaceous wetlands).

Biogeoclimatic Subzone or Variant	Total Amount in Province (ha)	Total Amount Protected in Province (ha)	Amount Protected in Cariboo River (ha)	% of Provincial Total Protected in Cariboo River
ICHwk4	57,210	23,481	2,923	12%
Lake	2,295,198	280,416	215	<1%
Total			3,138	

- Includes the highest value critical moose winter range across the Cariboo Region.
- Wetlands are categorized as Class 3M in the Canada Land Inventory for waterfowl and migratory birds, the highest value area across the Cariboo Mountains.

Tourism and Recreation Role

- Provides road access to an area of very rich wildlife values. Rough logging roads travel parallel to the park and the main 3100 Road crosses the park via a bridge.
- Cariboo River primarily provides a roaded, mid-country type of recreation experience. The easy road access via the 3100 Road (less than one hour from Wells and Likely) makes this park ideal for summer commercial recreation opportunities, including wildlife viewing, hunting, driftboating, canoeing and fishing. The easy access also supports the same uses by the public.
- The rich wildlife values of this area are similar to those found in the Mitchell and Bowron wetlands, but without the significant bear-human conflicts and access challenges of those areas.
- Lack of suitable foreshore in the riparian area and potential displacement of wildlife limits backcountry camping opportunities.

Cultural Heritage Role

- First Nations use of the area is not clearly understood at this time.
- The area had been used for mineral exploration, placer mining, trapping and hunting, but lacks good interpretation values such as those found at Bowron Lake, Barkerville or Quesnel Forks.

Click to view plate 9: Typical backcountry in Cariboo Mountains Park. This is the height of land separating Bowron Lake Park from Cariboo Mountains Park .

2.4 Vision Statements

The vision statements outlined below are intended to provide direction for the long-term management of Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains and Cariboo River parks. **The vision statements describe the condition of the parks 50 years from now if the intent of the management plan is followed. They**

are not meant to describe the current condition of these parks. The vision statements are used to provide context and guidance for park managers to make decisions about stewardship, recreation and other activities in the parks. The appropriateness of any new activities that may not have been contemplated when the plan was written should be considered in the context of these vision statements.

Vision for Bowron Lake Park

The primary role of Bowron Lake Park is to protect a large, benchmark area as a wildlife refugia while providing an internationally significant wilderness canoeing opportunity around the chain of lakes. Management of the area reflects its importance as a preserve for grizzly and black bears, mountain caribou, moose, waterfowl and songbirds, salmon and other fish species, as well as other species that managers may not yet know about.

Recreation in the area continues to focus on the chain of lakes, with only casual and unstructured use in the interior and periphery of the park. User numbers on the chain itself are managed very carefully in order to support the internationally significant wilderness experience. Facilities to support summer use are being repaired and upgraded for safety reasons, but no new structures have been built since the new millennium began. Increased opportunities for spring and fall shoulder season use have occurred as the result of increased education and public information. As such, overall annual user numbers are up and visitors are still enjoying quality wilderness experiences. As more areas around the province become roaded and “developed”, the carefully managed wilderness of Bowron Lake Park has become more valuable and important across British Columbia’s system of protected areas.

Winter use of the park has also increased since the turn of the new century. Skiers, snowshoers, dog-sledders and other non-motorized recreationists use the chain of lakes. Cabins were improved and upgraded as use slowly increased. While snowmobiling has not been permitted throughout the park, park managers worked closely with snowmobile groups to establish a snowmobile corridor that connected the Cariboo to the Robson Valley through the park.³ Studies were jointly conducted to ensure the corridor was safe, met the needs of the snowmobiling community and had negligible impact on the wildlife in the area.

Vegetation in the park is well on its way to having its natural mosaic of age classes reestablished. It is envisioned that the population of beetles that peaked around the turn of the new millennium will return to its natural cycles, and that lightning-caused fires have been allowed to burn in the interior of the park. These natural landscape disturbances have been explained and interpreted in the Registration Center, and park visitors are very supportive of permitting these natural processes to unfold.

Another result of the management plan completed in 2001 was that the local and regional community has had a greater sense of stewardship in the park. A day use area, better public information and a series of trails were developed around the entrance to the park, and local residents use the lake for fishing, boating, canoeing and other forms of low-impact recreation. Visitors stay a few extra days to enjoy these amenities as well as those provided by the private sector. Local residents meet on a regular basis with park managers to discuss surveys, potential user conflicts and issues, and ways that the community can be involved in the management of the area.

³ Note this corridor is subject to a feasibility study. The vision statement does not presuppose an outcome of the study.

The three areas that were added to the park in 1999 (Betty Wendle, Wolverine, and Upper Cariboo River) continue to have pre-existing uses occurring, including hunting, heliskiing, trapping and guiding.

Vision for Cariboo River Park

The vision for Cariboo River Park is primarily focused on the critical moose wintering grounds and the wetland values located along the Cariboo River. Research and monitoring has increased understanding and knowledge of this important riparian area and the migratory bird and waterfowl values in the area. The herbaceous vegetation and wetlands along the Cariboo River are managed to ensure they are in proper functioning condition, and recreational activities, both commercial and public, are managed to ensure the ecological integrity of the area is maintained.

The Cariboo River corridor is a destination area for people wishing to see wildlife in a natural setting, and is also used for fishing, drift boating, canoeing and kayaking as well as trapping and hunting. Local guides take people on various tours, and the communities of Likely and Wells, in recognition of the prominent role this park plays on the 3100/8400 road, have taken a role in providing information on the user ethics and values of the area.

Vision for Cariboo Mountains Park

Cariboo Mountains Park is managed primarily to protect its remote, virtually intact wildlife, fish and bird habitat values while allowing its lands and waters to be available for recreation activities that take their meaning from the isolation, rugged landscapes and wilderness values of the park. The management of the area reflects the importance of the habitat for the mountain caribou, grizzly bear, mountain goat, moose, wolverine, salmon, bull trout and waterfowl populations in addition to other ecosystem interactions. Park management also reflects the historic use of the area by guides, fishers, hunters, First Nations, private land owners, trappers, snowmobilers, heliskiers and other recreational users.

The endangered mountain caribou continues to recover as the result of careful management both inside and outside the park. This recovery was due in part to innovative changes in logging practices in areas adjacent to the park as well as new procedures for the management of predators throughout the Cariboo Mountains. Public and commercial recreational groups have worked cooperatively with government to increase shared knowledge about interactions with all wildlife and have worked to manage and monitor their activities in a way that minimized impacts from traditional uses on wildlife.

Recreational use of Cariboo Mountains Park has increased, as the wilderness values contained in the park became increasingly rare across the province. The isolation, difficult access, very rugged terrain and high wildlife values in the park however, all combined to place a natural cap on the number of users using the park. Many of the activities are guided, which has provided jobs for residents in surrounding local communities while ensuring a high degree of compliance around attempts at minimizing human-wildlife conflicts. Hiking, mountaineering, wildlife viewing, camping, boating, fishing, sightseeing and some limited helicopter skiing and snowmobiling are all activities occurring in the park.

Private landowners are continuing to use their property as they desire and have rights to access and develop these lands subject to relevant regulations.

2.5 Relationship with First Nations

Portions of Bowron Lake, Cariboo Mountains, and Cariboo River parks have been identified in the asserted Traditional Territories of four First Nation groups. They include the Red Bluff Band, Lheit-Lit'en Nation, Soda Creek Band and Williams Lake Indian Band.

BC Parks will continue to work with these bands on the implementation of the plan. All discussions with the bands will be consistent with the “government to government” relationship between the Province and First Nations.

This plan will not prejudice any treaty negotiations.

Click to view plate 10: Canoeist preparing to enter Kibbee Lake after the first portage on the Bowron Lake canoe circuit