

# MANAGEMENT PLAN

February, 1999



for Elk Lakes and Height of the  
Rockies Provincial Parks



BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

Ministry of Environment,  
Lands and Parks  
BC Parks Division

Elk Lakes & Height of the  
Rockies Provincial Parks

MANAGEMENT  
PLAN

Prepared by  
BC Parks  
Kootenay District  
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*This management plan is a component of the Kootenay - Boundary Land Use Plan and was developed through direction received from the Kootenay -Boundary Land Use Plan.*

Height of the Rockies and Elk Lakes  
Provincial Parks

# Management Plan

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**Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data**

BC Parks. Kootenay District

Elk Lakes & Height of the Rockies  
Provincial Parks management plan

Cover title: Management plan for  
Elk Lakes and Height of the Rockies  
Provincial Parks.

ISBN 0-7726-3904-3

1. Elk Lakes Provincial Park (B.C.)  
2. Height of the Rockies Provincial  
Park (B.C.) 3. Parks - British  
Columbia - Planning. 4. Parks -  
British Columbia - Management. I.  
Title. II. Title: Management plan  
for Elk Lakes and Height of the  
Rockies Provincial Parks.

FC3815.E447B32 1999333.78'3'0971165C99-960186-7  
F1089.E44B32 1999

# Acknowledgments

This plan was prepared by the consulting firm Pathmaker Consultants under the direction of BC Parks Kootenay District staff. The planning process was coordinated by Greg Chin, District Planner. Wayne Stetski, District Manager, provided general direction with technical assistance provided by Will Van Delft, Elk Area Supervisor, Glenn Campbell, Columbia Area Supervisor and Mike Gall, Resource Officer. Contributions were also made by Ida Cale, Extension Officer, Len Robbins, Operations Officer and Roger Tierney, Recreation Officer. Thanks to Roger Norrish, Management Planning Coordinator and all the other BC Parks staff in Victoria for their assistance.

BC Parks would like to give special recognition to the members of the public and the following organizations that provided helpful direction throughout the planning process.

BC Environment, Fish and Wildlife  
BC Snowmobile Federation  
BC Wildlife Federation.  
East Kootenay Environmental Society  
Elkford Rod and Gun  
Elkford Snowmobile Association  
Elk Valley Bighorn Outfitters  
Friends of the Purcells  
Ministry of Forests, Invermere District  
Palliser Wilderness Society  
Sparwood Snowmobile Club

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# Plan Highlights

- This management plan incorporates the guidelines of the Kootenay-Boundary Land Use Plan Implementation Strategy (KBLUP-IS).
- 98.45% of the combined area of both parks is zoned Wilderness Recreation.

Commitments for the management of natural values include:

- Conduct inventories and assessments for key park values; e.g., red and blue-listed species, fish and threatened plant communities;
- Develop specific management plans for mountain goats, fish, specific vegetation and range values;
- Develop a coordinated management approach with other government agencies for inside, and adjacent to, the parks' boundaries; and,
- Recognize the role of natural disturbances in maintaining natural ecosystem diversity.

Commitments for the management of cultural values include:

- Inventory and assess the cultural and archeological features in concert with First Nations and BC Archeology Branch; and,
- Adopt BC Archeological Assessment Guidelines whenever development may potentially disturb archeological resources.

Commitments for the management of the recreational values include:

- Retain existing level of facilities;
- Assess conditions and monitor the impacts of horse use to minimize impacts on natural values and other visitors;
- Ensure management of trailheads and other access; and,
- Restrict snowmobile and mountain bike use to the Abruzzi corridor, subject to the BC Parks Impact Assessment Process Policy.

# Introduction

## The Management Planning Process

A management plan is a document created to guide a park's management for the future. It sets objectives and actions for conservation, development, interpretation and operation of the park. This plan relies on current information relating to park values obtained from the background report. Additional information is gathered from park managers, permittees, other government agencies, previous reports, public interest groups, First Nations and from the general public. It is important to be familiar with the background report to fully understand this management plan.

Preparation of a management plan involves a thorough analysis of the overall goals of the park, levels of use, and management objectives. Through this process, various options for managing the park are developed and assessed.

BC Parks prepares management plans with a high degree of public involvement. The general public and public-interest groups have opportunities to provide comments to BC Parks through a variety of means, including public meetings and mail-outs.

In the case of Height of the Rockies and Elk Lakes provincial parks, the management plan has been prepared by an independent consultant with direction and input from BC Parks staff. Additional information was gathered from the Kootenay-Boundary Land Use Plan (1995) and Implementation Strategy (1997) and Draft Management Direction Statement (1996).

Public consultation was conducted by BC Parks primarily through a series of open houses held in various communities near the parks. Most of the comments were provided through letters and comment forms that were received following these meetings. Details of the public consultation process are included in Appendix D.

The following management plan focuses on management issues, objectives and recommended actions. There are six main sections in this document:

- 1) Introduction - highlights planning issues and provides a background summary of the park.
- 2) Role of the Park and Vision Statement - Describes the importance of the park and the overall guiding principles for management.
- 3) Park Zoning - Establishes management zones in accordance with the *Park Act*.
- 4) Objectives and actions for managing the various natural and cultural values.

- 5) Objectives and actions for managing the various outdoor recreation opportunities and for providing information about the park.
- 6) Priorities for implementing the management actions.

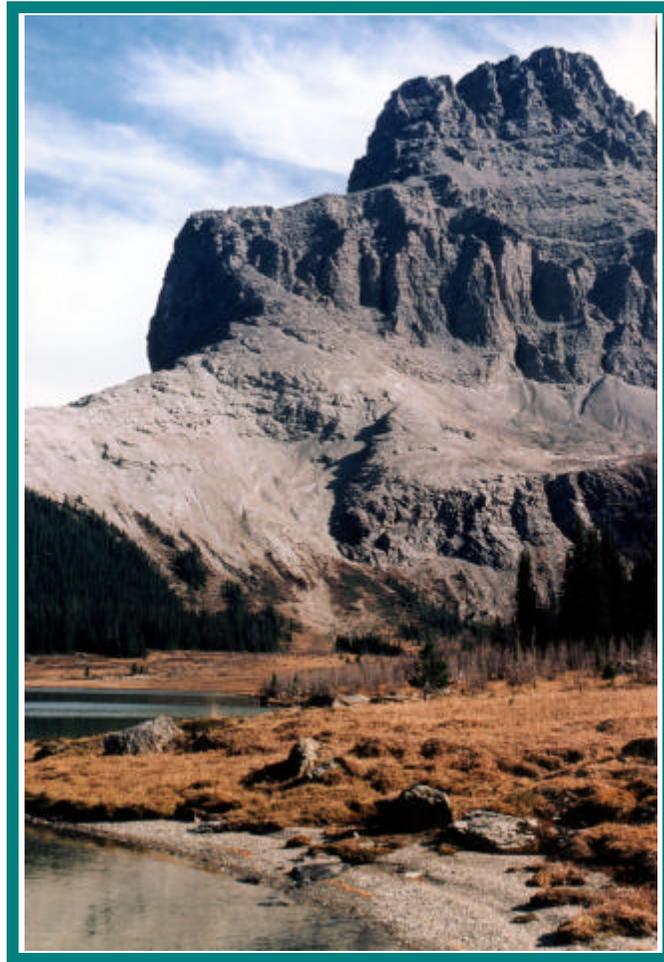


Plate 1 : Mount Queen Mary in Height of the Rockies Provincial Park

# Background Summary

Height of the Rockies and Elk Lakes parks protect 71,532 hectares of mountain wilderness located along the Great Divide on the British Columbia-Alberta boundary. The two parks border on Banff National Park and Peter Lougheed Provincial Park to the north in Alberta. Important features include 26 peaks over 3000 metres, over 60 alpine and sub-alpine lakes, 25 glaciers, extensive alpine meadow areas, valley bottom meadows, and several old growth stands. The area provides very high quality habitats for mountain goat and grizzly bear. It also protects habitat for black bear, bighorn sheep, mule deer, white-tailed deer and moose, along with a variety of small mammals, birds and fish. These parks play an important role in the representation of the Southern Rockies eco-section.

Elk Lakes Provincial Park provides day hiking, climbing and fishing with the greatest amount of use around the Upper and Lower Elk lakes. The Cadorna Creek area (formerly the Elk Lakes Recreation Area) and the Height of the Rockies Park provide opportunities for long wilderness backpacking and horse packing trips with lower levels of use. The first third of the Great Divide Trail - stretching from Connor Lakes to Mt. Robson Provincial Park - lies within Height of the Rockies Provincial Park.

The parks are generally sparsely developed with a few guide-outfitter camps, established trails, numerous wildlife trails and several primitive campsites. Elk Lakes Provincial Park has a walk-in campsite a few minutes walk from the trailhead.

Interest in the recreational and wildlife values of Elk Lakes began with the establishment of the White River and the Elk River Game Reserves in the 1920s. In 1955, a reserve on Crown land for recreation was established on 1555 ha around the Elk Lakes. The Elk Lakes Reserve became a Class A Park in 1973. In 1977, an assessment of Cadorna Creek resulted in the area becoming a Recreation Area in 1982. Class A Park designation occurred during the follow up to the Regional Land Use Planning Process in 1995. The first management plan for Elk Lakes Provincial Park was developed in 1976.

The history of establishing Height of the Rockies Provincial Park is more complex. In the 1970s the Palliser Wilderness Society, a group of diverse interests including ranchers, outfitters, hikers, horse users and hunters proposed that the Palliser Wilderness Area be established. It included all the high country from the south edge of Assiniboine Park to Brule Creek east of Elkford. A second proposal, involving a smaller area, led to the establishment of Height of the Rockies Wilderness Area in 1987. As the Forest Service administered this area they developed a detailed management plan in 1993. In 1995, the Height of the Rockies Wilderness Area became a Class A Park following the recommendation of the Kootenay and Boundary Land Use Planning Process.



# Planning Issues

This Management Plan addresses a number of planning issues identified by BC Parks through previous land use planning processes and through consultation with other government agencies, First Nations, user groups, and the general public.

The former Height of the Rockies Wilderness Area was managed by the Ministry of Forests as a wilderness area "where human influence is substantially unnoticeable." (MOF, 1993) The former Elk Lakes Recreation Area was similarly managed with minimum trail maintenance and signage. Confirmation that these two areas should continue to be managed for wilderness and backcountry recreation was provided in the Kootenay Boundary Land Use Plan Implementation Strategy (KBLUP-IS)

The overall challenge for the management of these two parks is to seek a balance between conserving and protecting important wilderness values while providing visitors with a high quality backcountry experience. The choice between emphasis on wilderness and conservation values or recreational and tourism use affects many aspects of planning and management. The following main issues have been identified.

## Natural Values Management:

### Wildlife

The parks play an important role in protecting wildlife populations and habitat while adding to the biodiversity and connectivity values of the Southern Rockies ecosystem. There is a need for current information on the numbers and the health of all the wildlife species that use these two parks, especially mountain goat and grizzly bear that have international importance.

Wildlife populations and habitat requirements transcend park boundaries. It is critical for the continued health and viability of the wildlife in these parks that cooperative management strategies are developed with adjacent land managers.

### Vegetation

Natural disturbances such as fire, disease and insect infestations are fundamental in maintaining ecosystem complexity. While allowing natural phenomena to occur without interference is consistent with wilderness management, this strategy contains an element of risk to facilities in the parks and to adjacent managed forest lands.

Height of the Rockies Provincial Park contains a number of low elevation alpine meadows. This habitat type is important for a number of wildlife species, is vulnerable to human impact and is not well represented in other protected areas.

## **Fisheries**

BC Parks must consider several issues relating to the fisheries values in these parks. These include the stocking of lakes, the removal of brood stock from Connor Lakes for the Kootenay Fish Hatchery, and the use of regulations and closures to ensure viable populations.

## **Boundaries and Access**

Several trails and trailheads in both parks are outside the parks' boundaries in areas administered by the Ministry of Forests. Cooperation among BC Parks, the Ministry of Forests and forest licensees is required in order to determine appropriate levels of access to the parks and the management of trails and trailheads beside the park boundaries.

It is also important to address the potential pressures that may arise from the imposition of new user fees and other restrictions in the national parks and anticipated fee in Alberta parks within the next two years.

## **Grazing**

One of the main impacts on the range resource is over-use by horses. Over-grazing has occurred in some areas as a result of inadequate horse management and sheer numbers of horses at popular camp locations.

## **Adjacent Land Management**

It is important to coordinate planning for commercial and non-commercial uses surrounding Height of the Rockies and Elk Lakes parks to fully manage impacts. Equally important is the coordination of park management with land use planning outside the park. Currently there are plans to harvest the forests adjacent to the park as well as proposals to initiate the issuing of coal tenures in the upper Elk Valley.

## **Cultural and Archaeological Values**

These two parks have a rich First Nations and post-contact history; however, there has been relatively little research conducted in the area. First Nations traditional use and archeological sites need research and documentation.

## **Paleontological Values**

There are significant fossil deposits in Height of the Rockies Park and Elk Lakes Park. Management direction needs to ensure protection of these deposits in their current natural condition and undisturbed. The *Park Act* prohibits fossil collecting unless authorized by Park Use Permit for research or education purposes. Commercial and/or personal collecting is prohibited.

## **Visitor Management**

### **Levels and Types of Recreational Opportunities**

Although a wide range of potential recreational opportunities exists, it is important to maintain the natural undisturbed character of the parks' backcountry. Ensuring that recreation activities have minimal affect on the landscape, including minimizing interactions between visitors and wildlife, is a high priority.

### **Horse Use**

Horses have used the parks for a long time; however, horse use can damage trails and sensitive riparian areas. While horses provide an enjoyable way to see the parks, they can also conflict with other visitors, such as hikers. Care must be taken not to over-use areas or damage the parks' sensitive natural areas.

### **Mechanized Activities**

Mechanized forms of recreation, from helicopter access to snowmobiles and mountain bikes, have increased substantially in popularity, thus making it difficult to retain wilderness values. While air access is not permitted in either park except for management purposes, mountain biking and snowmobiling continue in portions of Elk Lakes Provincial Park.

## Relationship with Other Land Use Planning

Land use planning for land resources and conservation in the Kootenay-Boundary region of southeastern British Columbia entered a new era with the provincial government initiative to prepare a strategic land use plan, the Kootenay-Boundary Land Use Plan (KBLUP). A major component of this plan was the designation of various land uses, including protected areas, over the entire region. Although park and recreation area designations of Elk Lakes Park pre-date the KBLUP, it was through the land use plan that the Elk Lakes Recreation Area became a Class 'A' Park. Also, the boundaries of the former Height of the Rockies Wilderness Area changed and this area was designated Class 'A' at the same time.

In addition to allocating land use, the KBLUP also established land use management guidelines through an Implementation Strategy (KBLUP-IS). These guidelines help to integrate land use management with a variety of government strategic policies from the *Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act* to the Provincial Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy. They are intended to provide broad, corporate guidance to managing agencies. With respect to protected areas, the KBLUP-IS emphasizes the importance of cooperative management of values within both the parks and adjacent areas "to ensure that parks can effectively protect sensitive values contained within them." (KBLUP-IS) To this end, general management objectives and strategies associated with environmental, recreation and tourism values are provided for inclusion in park management.

The specific areas the KBLUP considers include:

- Park Planning
- Pre-Existing Tenures
- In-Holdings
- Natural Occurrences
- Park Management.

Details for each of these sections are in Appendix C and specific actions are in this management plan. The KBLUP-IS also defines, in general terms, the management emphasis for the parks. In the case of Height of the Rockies Park, management will emphasize a balance between conservation and backcountry recreation; for Elk Lakes Park, management will balance conservation with general recreation.