

Skeena District

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION STATEMENT

September 2000

for Kitwanga Mountain
Provincial Park



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Ministry of Environment
Lands and Parks
BC Parks Division

Kitwanga Mountain Park

Approvals Page

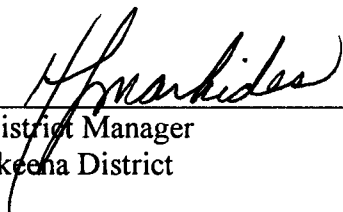
Forward

In the early 1990s the Prince Rupert Regional Protected Areas Team (RPAT) recognised the Sedan / Wilson Watersheds as having very high conservation values. Kitwanga Mountain, lying partially within the Sedan Watershed, provides a sample of some of the conservation values identified by the Protected Areas Team. Due to the RPAT evaluation and the presence of a recreational trail, a recommendation was made to the Kispiox Land and Resource Management Plan Table Members that part of Kitwanga Mountain be set-aside as protected area. The final 1996 Kispiox Land and Resource Management Plan approved the recommendation of park status for Kitwanga Mountain and Class A Park designation was granted with the passing of the *Park Amendment Act* in 1997.

This management direction statement for Kitwanga Mountain Provincial Park provides direction until such time as a more detailed management plan is prepared.

Further consultation with the Gitx̱san First Nation may result in the need to amend this plan.

Approvals



District Manager
Skeena District



Assistant Deputy Minister
Parks Division

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

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Introduction

Purpose

This management direction statement (MDS) provides management for newly created Kitwanga Mountain Park. It identifies key strategies that will be ranked according to priority and completed as funding permits. Implementation will be dependent on available funding and agency priorities. All development associated with these strategies is subject to BC Parks Impact Assessment Policy.

Setting and Context

Kitwanga Mountain Provincial Park is located 4 km west of Kitwanga Village. The 720 ha park protects a south-facing deciduous forest containing a range of biogeoclimatic zones along an elevational gradient in the Skeena River Valley. The park lies within the asserted traditional territory of the Gitx̱san people. A hiking trail leading into the Nass Ranges is a noteworthy feature of this park.

Protected Area Attributes

Conservation

- Nass Ranges Ecoregion; elevational gradient of biogeoclimatic zones—ICHmc3 (interior cedar hemlock), CWHws2 (coastal western hemlock), ESSFi (Engelman spruce-subalpine fir), AT (alpine tundra)
- potential to maintain ecosystem connectivity with adjacent forest land
- a mix of south facing deciduous stands
- south-facing dry rocky slopes protecting potential habitat for rare vascular plants
- moose and bear habitat, with high value grizzly habitat in the subalpine

Recreation and Tourism

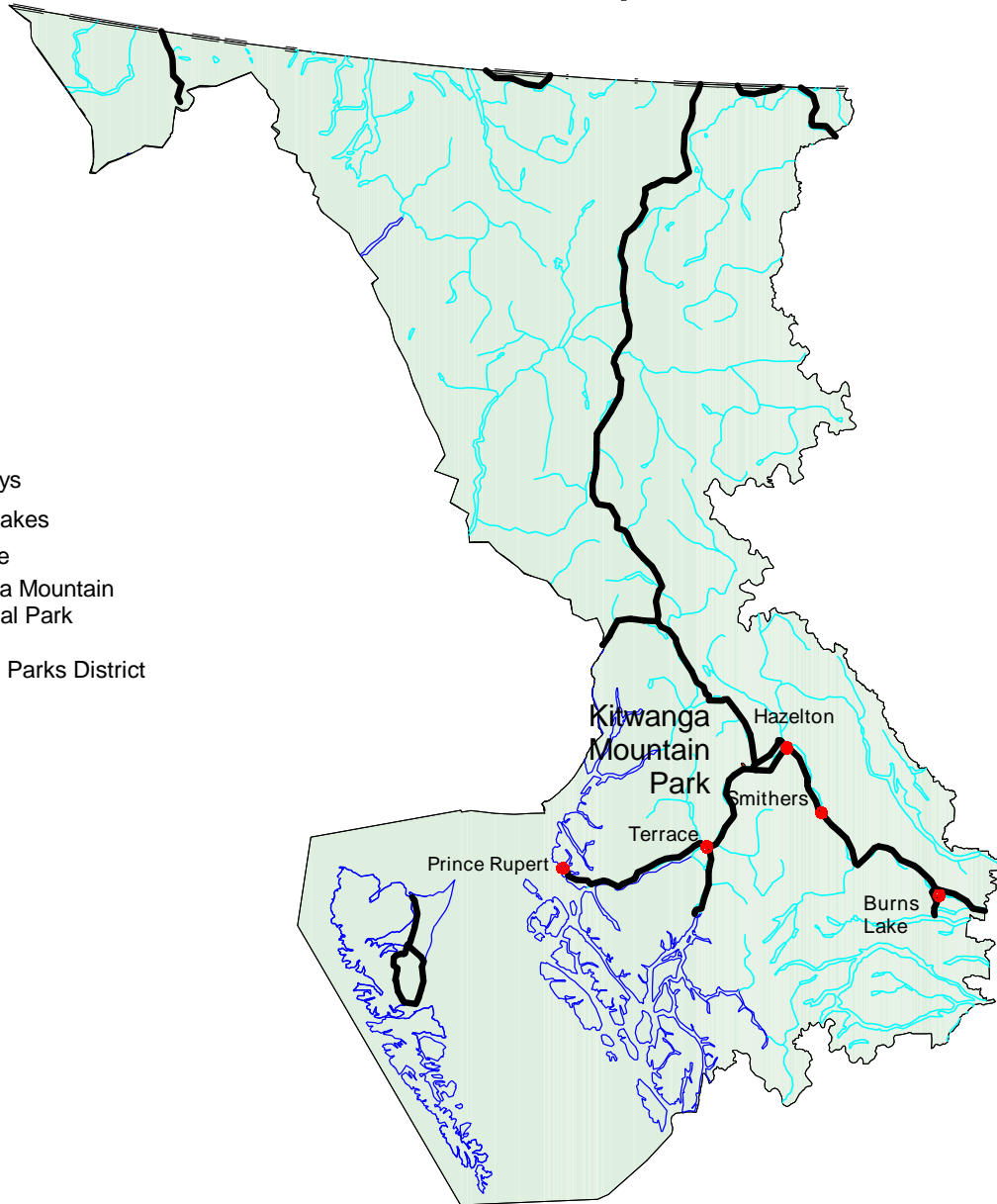
The recreational focus of this park is on a foot trail to the alpine. The relatively steep hike is rewarded with magnificent views of the Seven Sister Mountains, the Skeena River Valley and with access to a ridge system heading 20 plus km north.

- 5.5 km of trail (2.5 km of old logging road and 3 km of trail)
- scenic views of the Seven Sister Mountains
- access to a ridge system for further hiking and exploration outside of the park
- hike passes through a variety of vegetation types as it leads from near valley bottom up to the alpine
- south facing aspect of the trail provides one of the few hikes in the area where late spring early summer hiking is available
- lower elevations provide excellent migratory bird viewing opportunities

Cultural Heritage

- asserted Gitx̱san Traditional Territory - identified by the Gitx̱san Treaty Office as Haakxw and Sakum Higookxw territory
- likely, that a grease trail traversed the lower portion of the park

Kitwanga Mountain Provincial Park Locator Map

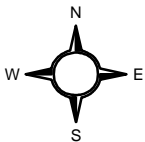


Legend

- Highways
- Rivers/Lakes
- Coastline
- Kitwanga Mountain Provincial Park
- Skeena Parks District

0 100 200 300 Kilometers

Scale 1:6,000,000



- other attributes unknown

Significance in the Protected Areas System

- protects a variety of hardwood stands along a south facing slope
- representation of a variety of biogeoclimatic zones and subzones along an elevational gradient in the Nass Basin Ecosection
- protection of habitat for potential rare vascular plant species in the alpine and on the dry rocky slopes
- Along with the new Seven Sisters protected area provides the only hiking trail access to alpine between Smithers and Prince Rupert in the protected area system

Land Uses, Tenures and Interests

Access

To access the park, turn off highway 16 onto Highway 37 North, at Kitwanga. Drive 1 km until the railway tracks are crossed and then immediately turn west (left) onto the Cedarvale – Kitwanga Road. On the right hand side, less than 5 km along the road (at the top of a hill) immediately after the third bridge, a 2.5-km access road (impassable for most vehicles) leads into the park. At the end of the access road, a 3-km hiking trail heads up into the alpine.

Existing Tenures

- Ministry of Transportation and Highways Road Number 17 (Cedarvale – Kitwanga Road) crosses through but is excluded from the lower portion of the park
- an access road leads into the park near the southeast boundary
- No Staking Reserve, BC Regulation 161/96, is superseded by the *Park Amendment Act 1997*
- Guide Outfitting License 610G001
- Trap Lines 0615T019, 0615T020

Existing Land Use Activities and Facilities

- near the eastern boundary an access road leads into the park
- a small cutblock, entirely within the park, is at the end of the access road
- two small parking areas exist within the cutblock
- stretches of the access road have previously been logged
- a hiking trail leads from the road up into the alpine
- part of Ministry of Environment Lands and Parks Wildlife Management Unit 6-15
- no other formal facilities exist

Adjacent Patterns of Land Use

- east, west and portions to the south of the park are provincial forest within the Kispiox Timber Supply Area and under forest licence A16833 (chart area 58) to Kitwanga Lumber

- the southeastern access road into the park passes through District Lot 1411 held in favour of Ministry of Transportation and Highways and subgranted to Ministry of Forests for road use (BC Lands file 0230883 and file [0134186](#))
- abutting the park to the south is a right of way for Canadian National Railways rail line (Prince Rupert Land Title Office Plans 1228 and 1156)
- Fairhaven Farm Association, a non-profit organisation, owns District Lot 2392 and provides training and employment in a variety of activities including wood remanufacturing, a market garden and a bakery
- other lots adjacent to the southern boundary are managed by BC Lands

First Nations Interests

- asserted traditional territory of the Gitx̄san First Nation - noted by the Gitx̄san as Haakx and Sakum Higookxw Houses
- aboriginal rights are honoured subject to conservation and safety concerns
- The Gitx̄san have expressed an interest in co-management on all parks within their asserted territory

Other Agency Interests

- BC Environment administers trapping and guide-outfitting tenures and has an interest in wildlife habitat and management in the area
- Ministry of Forests maintains the lower portion of the access road into the park, manages adjacent forest land, and possible has an interest in evaluating tree growth within the old cutblocks
- BC Land administers District Lots along the parks southern boundary

Private and Public Stakeholder Interests

- recreational users: hikers (Terrace Hiking Club, Mount Remo Back Country Society, Bulkley Valley Outdoor Recreation Co-operative, Bulkley Valley Backpackers, Bulkley Valley Mountain Club)
- local residents: Kitwanga and Hazelton communities, Kitwanga Community Association
- Gitwagak Band Council, Regional District of Kitimat - Stikine
- Kispiox Land and Resource Management Plan Table Members
- trapline and guide outfitter permittees, Northwest Guides and Outfitters Association
- Fairhaven Farm Association
- Northern British Columbia Tourism Association
- BC Wildlife Federation
- Kitwanga Lumber
- Bulkley Valley Naturalists

Role of Kitwanga Mountain Park

The primary role of Kitwanga Mountain Park focuses on protecting special features including a variety of hardwood stands along a south facing slope, habitat for potential rare vascular plant species in the alpine and on the dry rocky slopes and important wildlife habitat, particularly high quality habitat for grizzly. In addition, the park's

conservation role includes the preservation of a variety of biogeoclimatic zones and subzones along an elevational gradient in the Nass Basin Ecosection.

Kitwanga Mountain Park's recreation role provides backcountry-hiking opportunities that take visitors from low elevation to alpine environments. The park's hiking trails are the only trails providing access to alpine between Smithers and Prince Rupert. In addition, the park's recreation role is enhanced by the opportunity for visitors to experience panoramic views over the Seven Sisters area and the Skeena River Valley. Excellent migratory bird viewing opportunities are found in the park's lower elevations.

Management Commitments and Issues

Direction from Previous Planning

Gap analysis by the Prince Rupert Regional Protected Area Team (RPAT) recognised the Sedan/Wilson watersheds as having very high conservation value. Some of the values recognised by the RPAT are present within the park including the seral hardwood forest and an elevational sequence spanning from the valley bottom up into the alpine. In 1996, the Kispiox Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) approved park designation as part of their final report; however, the area was one of a few Special Features Protected Areas presented to the table after consensus recommendation was reached, and as a result little direction has been provided. The finalised LRMP objectives for this park read protection of “a south-facing deciduous forest on Kitwanga Mountain to protect a range of forest ecosystems along an elevational gradient in the Skeena River Valley and a hiking trail”. Management of the park should maintain the values recognised by the RPAT and the LRMP.

Management Issues

The following issues require management action.

| Theme | Issue |
|--|---|
| <p>Protecting ecological values</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inventory of natural features is incomplete • active firewood cutting within the park adjacent to the Cedarvale – Kitwanga Road • unknown effect of recreational access and hiking on the park’s vegetation especially in the sub-alpine and alpine areas • lack of information identifying potential wildlife / human interaction problem sites along the existing hiking trail • park vegetation is susceptible to natural and human induced fire |
| <p>Protecting recreational values</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access road impassable by most vehicles • access road has only one lane with very few passing locations • no formal parking area at the bottom of the access road • hiking trail head is difficult to locate • hiking trail does not meet BC Park’s standards • park enforcement activities are hindered by the |

| Theme | Issue |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| | <p>difficulty of determining the park boundaries on the ground, especially in relation to the hiking trail</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no adequate map showing the route of the hiking trail exists |
| Protecting cultural values | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural features not identified to BC Parks |
| First Nations Involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gitksan desire for co-management and involvement in park operations |
| Public safety | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access road is one lane and unmaintained and there are very few passing locations for vehicles moving in opposite directions • potential for visitors to become lost due to poor condition of existing trail • dangerous rock cliffs lie to the west of the hiking trail • the existing hiking trail was not designed for the protection of vegetation or to reduce wildlife/human interactions. For instance, the hiking trail parallels the edge of an avalanche chute that provides good grizzly forage • winter avalanche danger |

Management Strategy

| Priority Management Objectives | Priority Strategies |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure Kitwanga Mountain Park is safe for public use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review options to manage access into park in consultation with affected users and stakeholders and implement an appropriate strategy (e.g. establish parking lot and close off a portion of the road, signage and/or gating) • Work with Ministry of Forests to create an appropriate parking area at the bottom of the access road on District Lot 1411 • Reduce the potential for human/wildlife interactions; identify wildlife safety hazards • Identify and mitigate potential physical safety hazards |
| <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; identify rare vascular plants during park visits • Minimise visitor impacts on the park's vegetation and sensitive areas; post signs identifying the protected area and prohibiting tree cutting; increase enforcement; discuss co-operation for monitoring with Ministry of Transportation and Highways and the Ministry of Forests • Complete vegetation and wildlife impact assessments before substantially improving or promoting the hiking trail • Prepare a fire suppression and fire evacuation plan; otherwise, allow natural processes to predominate • Investigate potential to adjust the park boundary along the east following the tributary |

| Priority Management Objectives | Priority Strategies |
|---|--|
| | that leads into Mill Creek to increase the ability for enforcement |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the park’s recreational values | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain hiking trail with access to the alpine; conduct visitor use and satisfaction surveys to determine if trail should be upgraded; map trail, noting areas passing outside protected area |
| <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 (based on Gitx̱san interests and desires) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve First Nations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work with the Gitx̱san under the Gitx̱san --British Columbia reconciliation agreement • Finalise BC Parks consultation appendix as part of the reconciliation agreement • Follow ministry guidelines on consultation |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop appropriate facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain trail (see above) |

Consultation and Future Planning

BC Parks will review this MDS in about 5 years to account for increased knowledge about visitor use, environmental impacts and changes in adjacent land use. Meanwhile, BC parks will consult with local groups to determine promotion, information and volunteer strategies. A local meeting will inform the public about the park and encourage public involvement with BC Parks. Future meetings will be considered as necessary. BC Parks will meet with Haakx and Sakum Higookxw Chiefs to determine heritage and cultural values. BC Parks will consult with Ministry of Forests and Ministry of Transportation and Highways about the possibility of providing a parking area at the beginning of the access road and about monitoring firewood cutting within the park and adjacent to the Cedarvale – Kitwanga Road.

Preliminary Zoning

Kitwanga Mountain Park will eventually be zoned entirely as Wilderness Recreation to provide protection for its wilderness values and provide for backcountry recreation opportunities. Initially, however, the access road will be zoned as Natural Environment prior to development of a parking lot by the highway.

Appendix I Kitwanga Mountain 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 | N |
| 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) | N |
| Backcountry huts | N |
| Water control structures | N |
| Fish stocking and enhancement | N |
| Road access | Y |
| Off-road access (snowmobiling) | N |
| Off-road access (motorised) | N |
| Off-road access (mechanical activities) | N |
| Motorised water access | N |
| Aircraft access | N |
| Fire management (suppression) | Y |
| Fire management (prescribed fire management) | M |
| Fire management (prevention) | M |
| Forest insect/disease control | N1 |
| Noxious weed control | N1 |
| 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