

Section Six

Recreation Opportunities and Management



Recreation Opportunities and Management

Introduction

This section of the management plan describes the strategies for managing outdoor recreation and access in Naikoon. The main theme of this section is to define how Naikoon contributes to people's enjoyment of the outdoors, in communing with nature, and in recreation. It looks at how both tourists and the Island community can experience what Naikoon has to offer and how

BC Parks plays a role in balancing use of Naikoon with protecting its features and values for future generations. This section also deals with how people gain access to different areas of Naikoon.

General Concept

BC Parks has four "outdoor recreation goals" which are achieved through a provincial system of parks. All of these goals are represented in Naikoon, providing:

- 1) a range of regional recreation opportunities;
- 2) outstanding backcountry recreation opportunities;
- 3) a tourist destination for outdoor recreation; and,
- 4) recreation opportunities along a major travel corridor.

The majority of Naikoon's use is concentrated at the beach areas at the north end and in the Tlell area. Local residents contribute the most use and enjoy Naikoon's

opportunities year round. During the summer months, tourist visits to Naikoon increase in number and often the campgrounds are near capacity. Campground use has been steadily increasing with 4,612 parties counted in 1993 and many of these campers were first time visitors. Detailed information on visitor use is found in the background document.

The management of visitor services must address current needs but must also consider how to manage for changing visitor patterns and how tourism strategies for the Queen Charlotte Islands/Haida Gwaii might affect Naikoon's use. The importance of Naikoon to the Island community is a major consideration in how the area is managed. The general concepts for managing recreation are discussed in two parts: the frontcountry and the backcountry.

Frontcountry Concept

Naikoon has two main areas where most of the visitor use is concentrated. First, in Tlell where there is the Misty Meadows campground, trail to the Pesuta shipwreck, trails to the Tlell beaches, and the Park Headquarters. The south end of Mayer Lake is near Tlell and is a popular staging site for boating, picnicking, and fishing on the lake.

The second area of concentrated use is in the Tow Hill-Agate Beach campground area where trails lead to the top of Tow Hill and through old-growth forests and interior bogs to Cape Fife. North Beach is a popular feature for picnicking, beachcombing, relaxing walks, clam digging, or driving up the beach to explore further. These frontcountry sites are also used as starting

points for those who backpack to Rose Spit, East Beach, or Cape Fife.

The frontcountry areas have the potential for additional interpretive opportunities covering natural, cultural and historical features. Facility development for recreation in this area for a variety of activities is consistent with Naikoon's zoning and concentrates most of the use to a small proportion of Naikoon. In summary, visitors to these sites of Naikoon can expect general evidence of human presence, with constructed facilities and a variety of easily accessible outdoor activities.

Objectives

- To provide facilities at Tlell, Misty Meadows, Tow Hill, and Agate Beach for easily accessible, educational, and safe outdoor recreation opportunities for local residents and visitors.
- To utilize Tow Hill and Agate Beach as a staging area for recreation opportunities into Naikoon's backcountry.

Actions

- Refer to sections in this plan covering zoning, outdoor recreation opportunities, and communications.

Backcountry Concept

Naikoon provides backcountry opportunities in two different environments. By far the most popular is the beach environment that provides day hikes and multiple day backpacking trips. The Cape Fife trail provides backcountry hikers an opportunity to visit the interior old growth forest and bog

environments. Often the two environments are experienced in the same backcountry trip.

The natural undisturbed character of the backcountry is important to maintain and a high priority will be placed on ensuring that recreation activities have minimal effects on the landscape. In essence, along trails, people will see some evidence of human presence while most of the backcountry will be primarily free of evidence of human presence.

Objectives

- To provide backcountry recreation opportunities that are compatible with conservation objectives and respectful of Haida cultural values.

Actions

- Refer to sections in this plan covering zoning, outdoor recreation opportunities, and communications.

Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

Introduction

Naikoon's natural features provide an attractive setting for a variety of opportunities for outdoor recreation and nature interpretation. These activities must be managed so that they are compatible with the zoning, are not detrimental to natural or cultural resources, and are consistent with visitor's expectations. The underlying principle is that visitor's use of Naikoon must not be detrimental to Naikoon's natural or cultural resources. This section describes

what types of activities Naikoon provides for recreation, for people's enjoyment of the outdoors, and for communing with nature.

Naikoon has two campgrounds which meet current demands for vehicle camping. The Misty Meadows campground is within a forest stand, whereas the Agate Beach campground is located next to the beach and is quite exposed. Both campgrounds also provide tenting sites.

The Agate Beach campground frontage has been eroding over the past few years. This creates uncertainty about the long-term viability of the campground.

A cleared area of Naikoon in the Tlell area is used for group camping but is also the same area needed for the annual Tlell Fall Fair and for other local community groups. BC Parks ensures that the area is available for the fair and allows other community events to be reserved. As group camping and community interests in the area both increase in popularity, there will be a need to monitor these overlapping uses to see if conflicts arise.

Objective

- To provide facilities for frontcountry camping at the south and the north end of Naikoon.

Actions

- Maintain the current level of camping sites and related facilities.
- Monitor erosion of the Agate Beach campground frontage. If the campground is threatened, investigate an alternative location for a replacement campground.

Also, investigate jointly with the Old Masset Village Council, establishing camping facilities on the Hiellen and Yakan Point "Indian Reserves".

- Monitor uses of the area used for group camping and community events to determine if there are significant conflicts. If conflicts become a serious issue, investigate other possible sites for a group campground.

Frontcountry Walking and Beach Activities

Most of the frontcountry walking occurs on Naikoon's northern beaches and the beaches at Tlell. Many of these people are drawn along the beaches to search for natural and human artifacts that have washed ashore. Many tourists and local residents come to the beaches hoping to find the heavily sought-after glass balls. The beaches also provide an opportunity for those that want to be close to the ocean, to watch for whales and marine birds, and to relax and play in the sand and drift logs. Some people look for opportunities to walk sections of beaches away from vehicles.

Other popular frontcountry walking opportunities are found along the shore of the Tlell River, following the trails to the Tow Hill viewing platform and to the erosion features below Tow Hill, and through the meadows near the Misty Meadows campground. The walk from the highway pull-off at the Tlell River to the Pesuta shipwreck is also popular. The trail winds through mature forests and then along the beaches on the west side of the Tlell River.

Objective

- To acknowledge frontcountry walking opportunities as an integral part of peoples' experience of Naikoon and to play a role in their enjoyment of Naikoon's diverse natural settings.

Actions

- Ensure that trail maintenance and use, both authorized and unauthorized, does not impact in a negative way on Old Masset Reserves and cultural sites.
- Maintain the current trails up to the Tow Hill viewpoint, to areas below Tow Hill, to the Pesuta shipwreck, using boardwalks where protection of the ground surface is necessary.
- Establish certain areas for frontcountry beach walking opportunities during the warmer months which are free of vehicles (see Access Strategy section).
- Protect the dune environment adjacent to the Misty Meadows campground where the beach access trail cuts across a dune formation.
- Investigate a possible short trail to be developed near the Agate Beach campground that would provide interpretive opportunities related to Naikoon's wetlands.

See Figure 10 in the Naikoon Map Folio

Backcountry Hiking and Backpacking

The Cape Fife Trail, North Beach and East Beach provide the best areas for hiking and backpacking opportunities in Naikoon. The beach routes can be started from either the Tlell area or the Tow Hill area of Naikoon. The Cape Fife trail begins from the Tow Hill parking lot.

The East Beach hike has traditionally been the most publicized backcountry trek, usually taking about six days. Hikers are expected to be prepared for an extended outing without facilities and possibly without fresh water. Although many of the hikers enjoy the experience, for some, it is not what they expected. Some find it unexpectedly grueling to hike along the beach for six days with a full pack and others find that after a few days the beach hike becomes monotonous. As well, hikers are vulnerable to changes in tides and sudden changes in weather that can occur any time of the year, particularly along East Beach which is quite exposed to the elements.

An alternative route that can be completed easily in two to three days is the loop including the Cape Fife Trail to East Beach then to Rose Spit and back to Tow Hill. This route passes through a variety of environments, from mature forests and wetlands to the dunes at Rose Spit and includes stretches of beaches as well. Hikers will need to be informed about using the defined route through the Rose Spit Ecological Reserve or following the beach around the spit in order to avoid hiking through the sensitive habitat in the reserve.

There are a couple of undeveloped routes in the northern interior of Naikoon that follow

historic wagon roads. These have not been maintained by BC Parks, however, a few local residents know the locations of the routes and walk them occasionally.

Objective

- To provide information and minimal rustic facilities to assist people who hike and backpack in the backcountry areas of Naikoon.

Actions

- Maintain established rustic facilities along East Beach for hikers and backpackers and ensure that visitors have appropriate safety and survival information to plan their trip (see Communications section).
- Ensure hikers are informed about using the defined route through the Rose Spit Ecological Reserve or following the beach around the spit in order to avoid sensitive habitat within the reserve.
- Maintain the Cape Fife Trail in order to minimize effects on the natural environment.
- Work with the Old Masset Village Council to increase visitor awareness that their reserves and private property are not part of Naikoon.

Angling

Opportunities for angling are found on the Sangan, Hiellen, Tlell, Mayer, and Cape Ball rivers and on Mayer Lake. The main species of interest to the sport angler are coho, steelhead, cutthroat, and Dolly Varden. Local residents familiar with Naikoon, surf

cast for Halibut at the base of Tow Hill, although this can be hazardous.

The most popular angling occurs on the Tlell River, primarily because it is the most accessible. Conflicts between anglers have occurred during peak times. For example, riverbank anglers competing for space with boating anglers.

Mayer Lake provides opportunities for anglers with small boats (car-toppers).

Objective

- To maintain angling opportunities without jeopardizing native fish populations and which are compatible with conservation objectives.

Actions

- Continue to work in cooperation with the Haida Fisheries Branch, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the Fish and Wildlife Branch, and the Queen Charlotte Islands-Haida Gwaii Freshwater Sport Fisheries Advisory Board to manage sport fishing in Naikoon. The Tlell, Hiellen, Cape Ball, and Oeanda rivers are the most important to monitor because they are the most frequented fisheries. Mayer Lake will also be monitored for angling activity to ensure that the regulations are in keeping with the conservation objective for Naikoon.

Hunting

Hunting is allowed within Naikoon except for certain areas which have specific regulations. For example, the area around Naikoon's headquarters, campgrounds, and the mouth of the Tlell River, are closed to

hunting from April 1 to September 13 because of public safety concerns. A 50 metre strip along the southeast banks of the Tlell River is open only to shotguns and shot to allow hunting of ducks. As well, a hunting closure is in effect within 400 metres of Highway 16 and the Tow Hill Road. There is also a no shooting area designated over a small area at Tow Hill. Ecological Reserves are closed to hunting at all times.

Most hunting occurs along the fringes of Naikoon and both residents and tourists are primarily after deer but occasionally a bear is taken. The deer populations, which were introduced to the islands are considered stable and there is no concern about over-harvesting the species.

Objective

- To maintain current opportunities for hunting within Naikoon in accordance with provincial hunting regulations.

Actions

- Continue to work with the Fish and Wildlife Branch and the Conservation Service Officer to regulate hunting activities to ensure public safety and healthy populations.
- Continue to honour traditional hunting rights of the Haida as they may apply in Naikoon.

Boating

Opportunities for boating are not extensive in Naikoon. Mayer Lake and the Tlell River are the two main places this activity is active and are suitable for small boats only. A small wharf is provided for boaters on Mayer Lake.

Objective

- To maintain current facilities for small boating opportunities for Mayer Lake.

Actions

- Apply to establish a boat motor size restriction for Mayer Lake.
- Maintain small dock at the south end of Mayer Lake.

Horseback Riding

Horseback riding is enjoyed by a few people along the beaches in Naikoon. Disturbances to the natural environment are negligible. Most of the trips last only a few hours and involve single riders. Horse drawn buggies are occasionally driven on the beaches.

Objective

- To allow horse use in Naikoon as long as conservation objectives and Haida cultural values and sites are not adversely affected.

Actions

- Allow responsible horse use in Naikoon. Work with people who take their horses into Naikoon to ensure that they keep out of the campground areas and that effects from horse use are not detrimental to Naikoon. Horses will be kept to the designated route while passing through the Rose Spit Ecological Reserve. Monitor this activity to ensure conservation objectives are not being affected and close if damage occurs.

Mountain Biking

The best mountain biking opportunities in Naikoon are along the tidal flats of North Beach where the sands are naturally compacted at low tides. Some people have been known to take mountain bikes along the Cape Fife trail and the trail to the Pesuta shipwreck, however, the trails are not designed for this activity. The numbers of bikers who travel these trails is small and this has meant there has been little or no problem with them. Increased use on these trails could lead to problems.

Objective

- To allow limited mountain biking opportunities in Naikoon as long as conservation objectives are not affected.

Actions

- Monitor the condition of the trails for any signs of damage from mountain biking and keep a record of complaints about the use. If necessary, close trails to mountain biking to protect the trail environment or safety of hikers.

Nature Study

The potential for nature study opportunities are extensive in Naikoon. Although there is no interpretive trail and interpretive information is minimal, visitors have opportunities to view and study numerous natural resources independently. For many people, nature study is an important part of any recreational outing in Naikoon. This aspect of recreation is linked with

interpretive strategies detailed in the Communications section.

Objective

- To continue to provide means for delivering information that encourages nature study.

Actions

- Investigate the development of an interpretive trail near the Agate Beach campground in order for people to be able to visit and learn about a portion of Naikoon's wetland ecosystem.
- Develop a nature study guide for Naikoon's natural resources and features (see Communications section).

Recreation Guiding

Recreation guiding can enhance some visitors' enjoyment of Naikoon. Guiding is a commercial activity and requires a Park Use Permit from BC Parks. Some forms of recreation guiding such as guided hiking are compatible with Naikoon and the objectives of this plan. Generally, guiding opportunities are judged on their possible effects on natural resources, facilities and trails, the wilderness character, and other visitors. In essence, protection of the natural resources is a high priority and as such, limitations or restrictions on recreation guiding may be implemented.

Objective

- To allow limited recreation guiding where compatible with conservation and recreation objectives and where suitable,

information exists in order to judge their possible effects.

Actions

- Assess proposals for recreation guiding for how they affect the conservation and recreation goals of Naikoon. Recreation guiding may be acceptable on a limited basis where the activity does not conflict with conservation objectives, or with other visitors, and the activity does not degrade the natural environment. Only low impact, non-consumptive recreation guiding operations will be considered. Examples that might be considered include: sightseeing tours; guided hiking and bird watching; cultural/history tours; and horse trips.
- Decline applications for any proposal using vehicles on the beaches, for helicopter access, or for guided hunting.
- Proposals for guided angling may be considered if: 1) there is sufficient biological information that indicates that the activity will not degrade the natural fish populations; 2) that the Haida Fisheries Branch, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Fish and Wildlife Branch each recommend approval; 3) there are limited conflicts with the sport fishing public; and, 4) that the Queen Charlotte Islands-Haida Gwaii Sport Fishery Advisory Board recommends approval of the application.

Opportunities for Special Needs People

Naikoon's frontcountry has the potential to provide opportunities for people with special

needs, however, no such facilities are currently available. People in wheelchairs have been known to fish the Tlell River from its gently sloping banks.

With much of Naikoon characterized by low relief, there is potential to incorporate trail standards for people in wheelchairs, seniors and sight-challenged people in some sections of frontcountry trails. Special needs facilities should be considered in a regional context to determine where such facilities are needed most.

Objective

- To consider special needs people in the management of Naikoon’s frontcountry.

Actions

- Incorporate, where possible, facility standards for special needs people in the management of Naikoon’s frontcountry with consideration to what is available for special needs people in a regional context.

Access Strategy

The access strategy is presented in two parts. First, the plan provides information and strategies for the various means in which people travel to and within Naikoon along designated roadways. Second, the management of vehicle access along Naikoon’s beaches is presented.

Access Strategy - Designated Roadways

People can reach a number of areas of Naikoon by vehicle, however, most of these access points are along the outer fringe of Naikoon. In the Tlell area there are a number of vehicle access points. Beitush Road follows the lower Tlell River bank where anglers enjoy easy access to excellent frontcountry fishing opportunities. A highway pulloff on the north side of the Tlell River can be used for people wanting to hike a trail to the mouth of the Tlell River and the Pesuta shipwreck. The road into the Misty Meadows campground area ends a short distance from the Tlell Beach and another road from Highway 16 leads a short distance into Mayer Lake.

Also in the Tlell area is the locally known “road-to-nowhere” which has been blocked off and allowed to revert back to nature and currently provides a short walking opportunity. The road was originally built before Naikoon was designated and was to provide access to a picnic site above the Tlell River. When Naikoon was designated and picnicking and camping opportunities were developed at Misty Meadows, the road was blocked off.

There is continued debate among local residents and BC Parks about the merits of re-opening the “road to nowhere”. On one hand, extending and opening the road would create a route to East Beach, but on the other hand, construction of a road would significantly affect the forest habitat and could lead to problems with managing vehicles on East Beach. In essence, developing the “road to nowhere” might solve some issues (vehicles crossing the Tlell River) but might create other issues. There is

also concern about considering this type of development without knowing all the consequences such as effects on wildlife, possible Haida archaeological values, and blowdown problems.

There are a few locations where logging roads have been developed from the highway to the western boundary of Naikoon. There are no facilities for visitors at the ends of these logging roads and no significant recreation values at these points.

At the north end, Tow Hill road winds its way through magnificent overhanging, moss laden trees and ends at Tow Hill. This road also travels close to the beaches and brings people to the Agate Beach campground, picnicking area and shelter. At the end of the Tow Hill Road, people can park their vehicles and walk to Tow Hill, North Beach or into the forest along the Cape Fife Trail. The main issue with respect to Tow Hill Road is balancing the scenic beauty of the road with BC Highway's management concerns regarding flooding, maintenance, and safety along the road.

Objective

- To provide a reasonable level of access for visitors to experience Naikoon while minimizing effects on the environment, wildlife, and visitor's enjoyment of Naikoon.
- To maintain the scenic qualities of roads within Naikoon and to minimize adverse effects from vehicle users through the Hiellen Reserve.

Actions

- Work with BC Highways to establish management guidelines for Tow Hill Road and Beitush Road which protects the roads' unique scenic character. BC Parks supports those upgrading plans which minimizes the alterations or removal of trees along side of the current road surface.
- Continue to allow the "road to nowhere" to revert back to forest, allowing for opportunities for short walks through the forest.
- Work with the Old Masset Village Council regarding the management of the road through the Hiellen Reserve⁶.

Access Strategy - Vehicles on Beaches

Vehicle use on Naikoon's beaches is most popular at the north end and the Tlell end. Vehicle use along the length of East Beach is relatively lower in numbers. People are informed by signs that they are to keep vehicles below the high tide line where effects on the natural environment are minimized.

Driving vehicles on the beaches within Naikoon has long been a popular activity for local residents and tourists to the islands. People use their vehicles to: reach the clam beds in the tidal flats just beyond Naikoon's boundary; reach isolated areas for hunting; salvage lost fishing equipment and crab traps; reach scallops after a storm has washed them ashore; undertake search and

⁶ The Old Masset Village Council and the Ministry of Transportation and Highways are currently negotiating the status of the section of road leading to North Beach and which passes through the Hiellen Reserve.

rescue missions; and, reach remote beach areas that would take a number of days to reach by foot. For the Haida, vehicles are important for harvesting and other purposes. As well, people use vehicles to travel the beaches during times when the weather is not suitable for hiking. People involved in four-wheel driving for recreation enjoy the social and “fun” aspects of driving on the beaches.

These activities are an important part of the lifestyle of many residents. The objectives of the management plan are to recognize this historical use, control the routing and focus vehicle use so that it does not damage critical and sensitive natural park and ecological reserve values and improve user understanding of and commitment to the actions needed to meet conservation objectives and build the trust necessary to achieve long term compliance. All of these actions are to be implemented within the framework of authorities provided through current legislation and regulations and managed to capitalize on available management resources.

BC Parks and the local study team have explored the various issues and believe that the following course of action will have the greatest effect in achieving the goals of this management plan.

Objective

- To allow for managed vehicle beach use while ensuring that effects on natural resources and features and conflicts with other users are minimized. This objective must conform to the conservation objectives and strategies stated elsewhere in this management plan.

Actions

- Maintain beaches as open to vehicles below the high tide line. Define the historic access corridor connecting North Beach with East Beach as a vehicle corridor under the *Park Act*, once the corridor is removed from the Rose Spit Ecological Reserve. Two sections of beaches are identified as “closed to vehicles” from June 1 to August 15. The two areas are: 1) Agate Beach; and, 2) the Tlell beach located from the Tlell River mouth to the southeast corner of Naikoon. It is also recognized that there are times when vehicles need access through the “vehicle free” areas and these are acknowledged. Examples of these needs include:
 - ⇒ salvage of lost fishing equipment, boats, logs, or crab traps;
 - ⇒ access to commercial shellfish harvesting;
 - ⇒ search and rescue purposes; and
 - ⇒ access for residents who access the foreshore in front of their own property.

These “closed to vehicles” sections are identified to provide opportunities during warmer periods for people to enjoy easily accessible beaches for walks and picnicking away from vehicles. The vehicle closure period avoids the dates when salmon fishing from the beaches is popular and maintains year round access to most of Naikoon’s beach areas and, in particular, the most popular areas such as North Beach to Rose Spit and East Beach.

- Identify South Beach as a “courtesy beach” where, during the summer months, the primary use is recognized for non-motorized activities such as picnicking and beach walking. Although vehicles are allowed below high tide line, people will be asked to avoid driving South Beach during the summer months as much as possible. This courtesy beach is voluntary and intended to acknowledge interests of both vehicle users and non-vehicle users. Information signs will be posted.
- Work with the Haida, the Naikoon Advisory Committee and the four-wheel drive club to deal with vehicle beach use issues should they arise. The intent is for the group and BC Parks to develop on-going management strategies as needed that are supportable by local residents. For example, the closure dates will be reviewed periodically to determine if they need to be adjusted. As well, a periodic review will be conducted on BC Parks’ ability to administer and implement these strategies and the effectiveness of the overall vehicle management objective.
- Work with the Haida, the Naikoon Advisory Committee and the four-wheel drive club to develop specific initiatives to inform and increase awareness about vehicle use etiquette for Naikoon. The intent is to encourage all vehicle users to avoid sensitive areas such as the dunes and bird habitat of the Rose Spit Ecological Reserve, beach grass ecosystems, and the Tlell River crossing at certain times of the year. Initiatives might include a pamphlet, school programs, public meetings, and advertisements and articles in the Observer. This initiative is particularly important for young drivers and tourists

who are new to beach driving. In this way, all people who use Naikoon can play an important role in its stewardship.

- Establish a method with the local volunteer group and the four-wheel drive club to establish a method for citizens to “observe, record, and report” people who abuse the use of vehicles in Naikoon. This will provide a means for people who use the area to become effective guardians in protecting the natural values of Naikoon.
- Monitor the dunes and habitat in the Rose Spit area to determine if damaging uses are continuing. In addition, monitor other areas on Naikoon to determine the effects of recreational use on natural values and conservation objectives established in this management plan. Also develop, with the local volunteer group, means to mitigate the damage and to better protect sensitive sites.
- Ensure that the public is adequately informed of the hazards associated with beach driving and that only experienced and well prepared people should undertake the activity.

Management Services in Naikoon

Naikoon is administered out of the Skeena District parks office in Smithers, the Zone office in Terrace, and Naikoon’s Headquarters in Tlell. Staff ensure that various management responsibilities are carried out according to the *Park Act* and its regulations, the *Ecological Reserve Act*, this management plan, and established policies

and procedures of the Ministry. This includes such priorities as: regulating public use to ensure safe and appropriate use of Naikoon; maintaining designated trails and facilities; managing permits covering commercial businesses operating in Naikoon; minimizing affects from visitor uses; and, assisting in resource management projects and collecting data.

Objective

- To carry out management responsibilities in cooperation with the Haida and according to the *Park Act*, regulations, and this management plan.

Actions

- Provide a seasonal ranger to be based at the north end of Naikoon as funding allows. Rangers will be involved with educating visitors about how to use Naikoon without damaging natural features, maintain facilities, monitor perimeters and contractors, and collecting resource information.

See Figure 11 in the Naikoon Map Folio

See Figure 12 in the Naikoon Map Folio