

Strathcona Provincial Park Master Plan Review

RE: Horse Use in Park

Tofino Public Meeting

27 May 2008

Tofino Meeting Summary

Attendance: 35 participants + 6 BC Parks staff & consultants

Participants were primarily from the Port Alberni/Tofino area. The introduction emphasized that this meeting was about horse use in Strathcona and, particularly, about defining criteria for determining the appropriateness of any horse use in the park. A number of participants used the CWR Bedwell Valley proposal as an example either of an environmentally acceptable plan for horse use, or, as an example of an inappropriate area for horse use on both environmental and park access grounds. Nonetheless, criteria were proposed for determining horse use anywhere in the park. Of those who spoke, comments for or against horse use were about equal in number. Not all present spoke. Some comments were directed for and against the CWR proposal, while others addressed the pros and cons of horse use in the park generally. Three members of the Ahousant First Nation spoke eloquently on their connections to the land that is now the park and the requirement and obligation for them to be consulted in any matter relating to this land.

Public Meeting Notes*

**Please note that we have alternated black and blue coloured font to define new speakers and/or discussions*

Welcome

I am the facilitator for this public meeting. I am a biologist by training and have worked in parks, national, provincial and US for over 30 years doing studies, interpretation and management plans. We are looking forward to hearing all of your comments tonight.

First of all I must apologize for the material that went out earlier, and I would like to clarify why we are here:

- We're not here to determine the CWRs proposal's acceptance or decline at this time.
- This is not a referendum for commercialism in BC parks. It's the big picture, for all of Strathcona Park regarding horse use.

The thought in BC Parks is that they do not have the tools to make the best decision with regards to horse use in the park. The example is that the Master Plan and its Amendment is already completed. As an outsider reading these documents in the last two weeks I don't see an absolute comment on whether or not horses should be in the park and what the criteria are for making that decision.

Besides this public meeting, we have a number of comment forms for you to fill out. You can take hard copy to fill in with you, go to the BC Parks website to fill in the comments forms, or send emails to the addresses provided at the BC Parks website, or to the email address included on the comment forms and business cards. We need these comments by June 20th 2008.

What we want is a better system and set of criteria to decide whether horse use is appropriate or not appropriate. Should they be in the park at all? So your thoughts and ideas are very important.

I'm going to go across the rows in order to hear everyone who wants to speak to speak. Please just speak the once until everyone has gone through, then you can go again. I ask you as well that when we get to the back rows that you come up and face everyone. I'm setting for the first go, 3 minutes for your statements or questions. Please respect that length of time.

Introductions:

Sharon Erickson, MOE, Planning Section Head for Vancouver Island Section
Peggy Burfield, MOE, Planning, works with Sharon Erickson
Ron Quilter, BC Parks, Provincial Parks Section Head for Northern Vancouver Island
Andy Smith, BC Parks, Area Supervisor for the Strathcona area

Meeting Notes:

Speaker:

It was mentioned that this was not a meeting about the CWR horse use in the Bedwell, I'm sorry about that I had a lot more to say. About the use of horses for transportation in the parks: I look at horses as on the planet for pleasure like dogs are. The potential for using the horses for pleasure and riding them. Horses broke this country open. All over the province pioneers used horse trails to open this country up. I'm seeing smaller and smaller places to ride.

I think there is a criteria for using horses to get out into the fresh air and get stimulated. When done with respect, responsibility and sensitively it can benefit the outdoors and getting people out there to use them. Parks are designated for people now and for future generations to use. Horses on parkland can be coordinated in the parks if done properly and can be a benefit to parks and BC.

Speaker:

I've been working at CWR for 6 seasons. I think for the provincial parks to get assistance from outside sources is a benefit for recreational use. Not only will our organization be helping build and maintain trails for our use, but for others to use too. Many go out to maintain and use trails for good reasons (horse) on our own time.

Speaker:

I've been a resident of this area for over 40 years. I was part of the creation the Friends of Strathcona Park and SPPAC. I have a long history with this park; I've fought mining, logging and horse use in the alpine. I knew when the park was being mined and logged that I had to do something to protect it. I'm now starting to see a different possibly in this area that will be a benefit all users and enable people to get out to places in the park they may not normally get to. I am supportive of horses especially on logging roads and keeping an eye on what's going on in the park. If these groups weren't in there, Parks wouldn't know what was going on in there. Wildlife don't know where the boundaries are in the park, but people do. I would like to see use of horses in areas that would not be harmful to the environment.

Facilitator:

Thank you, I want to point out how does this comment fit into a criteria. We are not looking at a specific spot but the ideas in saying what and why you think or don't think horse use is an acceptable activity in the park

Speaker:

I am a member of the Friends of Clayoquot. Horses do not belong in fishing streams, or in the alpine or on the trails. I do not have problems in guided hiking, self-propelled activity in the park. I have been part way up the Ursus, where there is lots of horse use, and bears. There is not a roadbed to put a trail on in the Bedwell.

There is no need to bring in horses to have a wilderness experience. Someone has a love of horses at the resort but that doesn't belong here in the park. There are so many other ways to enjoy nature; horses don't belong in the park. They are tramping through salmon streams, bring invasives; attract cougars and wolves. I wouldn't want to camp near You Creek with a horse corral nearby. I think the CWR can survive just fine without going into the Bedwell. I understand and appreciate the stewardship and work with salmon streams they have done, but drop the horses. One has to cross private land then 6km of Crown land for a commercial recreation tenure on there, and can deak off into the Ursus to ride. I'm not in favour of horse use, but I am in other things the resort does.

Speaker:

First of all thank you for allowing us here today, and the subject that you are talking about today might be Strathcona Park, but it is part of our territory. We were not consulted properly by the federal government, by the Provincial government or Parks that this was going to be a park and we have written a letter on behalf of our Chief to Premier Campbell, the federal government and BC Parks that we need to be consulted and accommodated and this is where Ahousant stands. You are talking about our territory and if you want to talk to about our territory you need to come to Ahousant, and that is an invitation.

Yes there are many things that are happening there, forest species, poop, not first nations poop, your poop – that is a foreign species, you bring something that is foreign into our land.

So where do you draw the line? You come and see us there. We have seen the plan and CWR has come to our community and showing us your plan, we respect what you have done, and we honour you and we thank you.

There is going to be court cases about consultation and cooperation and compensation. We have been here for thousands of years; there are burial sites, there, there is a range of mountains where our speakers used to go where once they hit all the of the tips of the mountains knew they would be speakers for our Chief. There are sites up there where there are wind chimes, there are sites for hunting and where our hunters would talk to the creator and hunt, it wasn't a killing but humble the sounds made to the creator.

We know this area, all of our land is here; we used it, we've seen it raped, our mother, seen our mother taken away from us by parks and provincial and federal government. Our mother who is hurting. It was a pristine area for thousands and thousands of years.

There is a story that goes back to the ice age, not the last one, but the one before, the first one, of two brothers that helped our people survive. Our Chiefs carry their name, and we have buried a lot of people up there. And will be for a long time to come. Seen mining come and go and forestry come and go and we are still here. I can guarantee you today that this man's children, their great, great grandchildren and their great, great, great grandchildren will be here cause we're not going anywhere cause we're are rooted here.

That's where we're coming from.

Thank you very much for allowing us here tonight to speak.

Speaker:

I am a tourism operator and farmer from Port Alberni and am also backcountry horseman. We're always looking for opportunities to ride, with respect to the environment, in the backcountry areas. Always looking that the opportunities are explored and that appropriate trails are be used. I do farm work with my horses, write for agricultural group publications that talk about a movement to bring horse use back to the forefront. Horse riding doesn't need to be a problem if done properly. I want to see the potential explored.

Speaker:

We have about 5 Canadian horses, and we have a lot of bears and cougars that travel through our property that never bother our horses. The Backcountry Horse Association motto is leave no trace. We use high lines and corrals and clean up wherever we are. Have ridden all my life in the temperate rain forest and have not disturbed the forest or environment at all.

Speaker:

I'm with the Horse Council of BC. We gather information, and, also like backcountry folks, are always interested in preserving areas where horses can be used. We don't want to go in areas that are environmentally sensitive but there are a lot of old logging roads that are prime for horse use; with the proper management plan so that off of the trails doesn't become damaged, unlike the use of ATVs etc that isn't properly managed. Horses are not tearing up the wilderness and that is how it should be.

Speaker:

I would like to ask Parks: do you not have a liaison with the Nuchalnuth, as a lot of the park is in their territory? How does the parks handle that and if they have a liaison with the Nuchalnuth where are those discussions?

BC Parks:

Although we don't have a liaison person we have a responsibility to have a formal conversation and a formal consultation with your nation, and your coming here is not part of that although we are honoured that you are here. We also have a formal process that we will be undertaking with all First Nations within the park

Speaker:

I'm from Port Alberni and a member of SPPAC. The issue at hand is whether or not there should be any expanded horse use in the park. There is current horse use in the park and that was supposed to be used to assess impact, that monitoring has not been done. It would be prudent to monitor current horse use before making any decisions for new areas.

Facilitator:

I want to specify that this for all of the park. This is a test of a goal where the proper criteria and the agencies know what the criteria are that will determine what is appropriate use in the park. I also see another criteria, First Nations. This is for all users, not just commercial applicants who would have to comply to the criteria for a level playing field.

BC Parks:

I am hearing some very interesting criteria so far in this meeting. One of the reasons we haven't monitored is because no one has come forward to monitor and we're not even sure that anyone has been there on horses. The EIA is going to look at the Kunlin area and what impacts are there but not sure as those who used the area have moved away from this area.

Speaker:

I am a CWR employee. With regards to horse use in the park, some areas are not feasible. But the Bedwell is one of the ideal areas as it is a hard bed area to ride. There have not been horses in the river, washouts, etc. There are areas where you cannot have horses but the Bedwell is an ideal place especially with these plans.

Speaker:

There is also the length of park use permit of 30 years which is very long to have a permit. I know that the public is attached to parks as well as First Nations, specially here where we have wilderness parks where others do not. I do not agree with privatization and commercialism of BC Parks. What is the average duration of permits?

BC Parks:

When the CWR applied part of the application was to for infrastructure. We have never heard of 30 year permit duration. A term of 10-15 years might be negotiated. There are about 20 to 25 Park Use Permits in the park now.

Speaker:

I'm concerned about continued public access to the park particularly if controlled by a private company at the entry with horse use. That some public use would be discouraged.

Speaker:

The concept that I see as opposed to what we are seeing in Clayoquot and Strathcona – are dealing with things that have permanent damage. There are some things that can't be turned around mining, loss of salmon, big trees – these are big issues. We're looking at something that can be removed. We have to look at how we can be financially viable and live here. Have an economic base and something that can be beneficial, not destructive.

Speaker:

I've been a CWR employee for 10 years. I see elk trails and the natural impact would be less by a horse than by a person.

Speaker:

The bridges and roads are not part of the private property so CWR would have no say who enters and there are two accesses anyway so would not impact entry into the park.

Speaker 1:

We have been around the table and have heard a lot of issues that are really small. We are talking about an animal walking though the forest – what is the problem? The imprint they leave on the ground is minimal or no more than large animals that live there. I have heard

about issues with dealing with at temperate rainforest and that horses are not part of this area – they are all over the planet. My horses are as healthy as anywhere in Canada.

If I take the land we have between our land and the Park boundary – there is a mining road that goes 6km and then another 12km jump to You Creek, that is what we'll be riding on.

Speaker 2:

I would go here if we all get to go here ...

Speaker 1:

I will talk about horses on roadbeds I ...

Facilitator:

I want you to speak or think about an environment that is or is not appropriate. We understand that these things will come back and move forward and recover.

Speaker 1:

The horse use on a hard road bed, whether crossing an appropriate spot in the river or road bed the impact of a shod horse is not noticeable, but once taken off of a hard road bed it is noticeable. Trails in a temperate forest will gradually pack the earth down – packed down six to eight inches where packed down. Once a trail is established horses will not leave the trail. Crossing a river – horses have crossed rivers all over BC and in the parks, over river rock, not in sand, you don't take them across these places – only a hard bed location as they do not do well in sandy river bottoms. If a horse poops in the river – most of the rivers can use nitrogen and their poop is a grass basis. Any horse in the park managed properly needs to be fed on organic weed and sterilized feed for at least a week prior to going into a park so that there will be no introduced species

Speaker:

Has the formal consultation with first nations begun? Is there any action?

BC Parks:

No, informal only and how they would like to be involved in the process.

Speaker:

Would it be fair to say you are in the beginning of the process?

BC Parks:

Yes

Speaker:

I have a question for Ahousant First Nation: the horse council would be interested to know if you are in agreement to horse use in this park? So for future reference for them in considering horses in the area.

Ahousant First Nation:

We are not against progress here that is not our stance, we are here to protect our place. If we can be shown it will be done in a very safe manner we will look at it and would like to be part of the monitoring process.

Speaker:

I would like to see that there is access for our horses in Strathcona Park.

Speaker:

I have an issue of precedence brought forward as criteria. We know that the Provincial Government in general would like to see greater commercialism in the parks but the public would not. When, if, this is to be granted it will open the door to many places to do the same thing. It would provoke the process again and again. This approval is like a Pandora's Box that shouldn't be opened.

Facilitator:

I have talked about this in the beginning of the meeting. This is unlikely to be a precedence because commercialism has been going on for 40 years in the Parks system.

Speaker:

There are some times where we should say no to ourselves because some places should remain wilderness places. Perhaps we should say there will be wilderness places. If we value wilderness then we should keep the bar down.

Speaker:

Thank you for your input tonight. We will look at it carefully. We are very serious about what you and we are doing here. We talked about human contact about 3000 years ago, had land in this area there are about 6000 of our relatives out there who lived there and kept it pristine. There are people who never came out of the valley, but stayed in that valley that kept it pristine. This is what we are saying and what we will do. There are thousands of Indians who lived there and used and kept it safe. If you are looking for public consultation, come sit with us, take a day or two months to sit and iron out these details.

We are not against people coming to see us, sending ideas to us, helping us, letting us help you. This is one thing we all have in common. We have listened to everybody we all want to keep it pristine, it can happen, 15 000 of our relatives did it 5000 years ago, we can do it now and in the future. We didn't have to mine or log; just did what needed to do to keep it prosperous.

Thank you and thank you and your relatives for honouring us here today.

Speaker:

I just ran out to my car. As a resident of Vancouver Island I wanted to show you the following that focuses on possible criteria: (showed a series of photographs)

- I don't think horses should be allowed in areas with road beds, they don't need to leave a road bed to cross a river
- Cross where the only option is what used to be a road bed and is not a rock face
- Navigate terrain
- It is incumbent on BC parks to establish criteria for where horses should be in. Criteria for establishing non-invasives and water purity. No horse passage through water areas
- No introduction into new areas in Ahousant territory without their permission
- Precedence needs to be a criteria, sought and set for horse use park use permits in area
- Recreation and First Nation impact
- Separate trails for hikers in areas where the two will possibly meet

- The surfaces where the two are, are stable existing logging road; access roads so everyone can have equal access

Keep existing Master Plan because it was vetted through the public process. Changes should be made publicly with adequate notice. I think that there should be 5 years park use permit only.

Monitor and assess Kunlin and other areas currently in use

13% of Vancouver Island is protected territory there are lots of places to ride horses in the other areas (87%)

Please keep focus on the criteria and not the current park use permit application

Speaker:

Thank you for the information and glad that there are there to protect the smaller areas of Bedwell. We want you to know that 97% of the Ahousant territory is protected

Facilitator:

This has been an eye opener and a very useful exercise. We are ahead of time and comfortable if you want to get up and talk to other people or with us.

Speaker:

Would you mind letting people know what the mechanisms are for adding to your comments?

Facilitator:

The ways to contribute information: if you pick up the comment form, please answer it and it will tell you how you can get stuff to us. The comment form will be up and running on the BC Parks website by Friday. We will be having another open house and public meeting in Courtenay tomorrow night and a stakeholder meeting Thursday evening.

Speaker:

RE: Stakeholders: Who would these people be? People who would profit by this venture?

BC Parks:

No, we have invited the Strathcona Resort, BC Wilderness Tourism Association, Friends of Strathcona, Strathcona Park Advisory Committee (SPAC) and further mix of conservation and recreation groups.

Speaker:

RE: Horse groups: Have any of horse councils been invited?

BC Parks:

No, no provincial or federal level groups been invited.

Speaker:

It would be an appropriate invitation where you are talking about criteria that would impact a very valuable group. We are talking about Strathcona Park – a provincial park. If provincial groups aren't stakeholders and are not considered important as input that would impact their use, then that is wrong. I spoke to a counterpart in Courtenay who is coming to the meeting.

BC Parks:

I would accept someone from this region as opposed to a provincial body. If you want to leave your name as a stakeholder I will give you the information you need for the meeting.

Speaker:

On behalf of the Ahousant we thank you for hearing us out today and thank the people for your input and important information that allows us to have a good look at what is happening. Quite often it doesn't happen that way. We see mining without consultation without any mind for the environment. As I said before, 97% of Ahousant territory is like a park to us and has been for thousands of years, we need to keep it that way. We are not against progress as long as it is done in an appropriate way, not here to fight anyone, hear to tell you it is Ahousant land you are talking about. That is our statement today. We will use your input from everyone; it was a fruitful meeting for us and we will take it back to our chief and council to consider. Safe travels and have a good life.