Skeena District

**MANAGEMENT DIRECTION STATEMENT**

November, 2001

for Tatshenshini - Alsek Park
Tatshenshini-Alsek Park

Approvals Page

Forward

Tatshenshini-Alsek Park was established in 1993 by the government of British Columbia in recognition of its outstanding wilderness, biophysical, cultural heritage and recreational values.

The park lies entirely within Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (CAFN) traditional territory and is managed under the terms of the 1996 Tatshenshini-Alsek Park Management Agreement signed by the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations and the Province of British Columbia.

This Management Direction Statement (MDS) is intended to provide management direction until a comprehensive management plan is prepared. The Tatshenshini-Alsek Park Board, comprised of BC Parks officials and Champagne and Aishihik First Nations officials, consider this action necessary to ensure compliance with the protection and conservation principles outlined in the Tatshenshini-Alsek Park Management Agreement (1996).

Approvals

Date

Nov 29, 01

Chief Bob Charlie
Champagne and Aishihik First Nations

Date

Nov 29, 2001

Joyce Murray, Minister
Water, Land and Air Protection

Date

Nov 29, 01

Lawrence Joe, Director
Lands and Resources
Champagne and Aishihik First Nations

Date

29 Nov, 2001

Hugh Markides, District Manager
BC Parks Skeena District
Water, Land and Air Protection
Acknowledgements

This Management Direction Statement has been prepared by the Tatshenshini-Alsek Management Board.

Board Members are:

- Ron Chambers
- Sarah Gaunt
- Hugh Markides
- Peter Levy

Lawrence Joe of CAFN and Gordon MacRae of BC Parks were also directly involved in the preparation of the MDS.

The Board would like to thank Don Stone and Paula Banks who provided assistance in drafting this MDS. Appreciation is given to those individuals and agencies that reviewed the draft Management Direction Statement and provided comments to the Board. The Board, to the extent possible, incorporated changes in the draft MDS in response to those comments.

The Board would like to also acknowledge the contribution of Mike Murtha of BC Parks who was a valued member of the Board during its initial years and whose work helped establish the foundation for preparation of this Management Direction Statement.
# Table of Contents

## Introduction

**Purpose of the MDS** ................................................................. 1  
**Setting and Context** ............................................................. 1

## Protected Area Attributes

**Conservation** ........................................................................ 5  
**Recreation and Tourism** ....................................................... 6  
**Cultural Heritage** ................................................................. 6  
**Significance in the Protected Areas Systems** ......................... 7

## Land Uses, Tenures and Interests

**Access** .................................................................................. 8  
**Existing Tenures** ................................................................. 8  
**Existing Land Use Activities and Facilities** ......................... 9  
**Adjacent Patterns of Land Use** ........................................... 9  
**First Nations Interests** .......................................................... 9  
**Other Agency Interests** .......................................................... 10  
**Private and Public Stakeholder Interests** .............................. 10

## Role of Tatshenshini-Alsek Park

................................................................. 11

## Management Commitments and Issues

**Direction from Previous Planning** ......................................... 12  
**Management Issues** ............................................................. 14

## Management Strategy

**General Strategy** ................................................................. 15  
**Priority Management Objectives** ........................................ 16  
**Future Planning and Consultation** ....................................... 18  
**Preliminary Zoning** ............................................................. 19

## Figures

**Figure 1 Location of Tatshenshini-Alsek Park** ......................... 3  
**Figure 2 Tatshenshini-Alsek Park Map** .................................. 4  
**Figure 3 Park Area Zoning** ................................................... 20  
**Figure 4** Tatshenshini-Alsek Park Table of Acceptable  
Activities, Uses and Facilities .................................................. 21

## Appendixes

**Appendix I** Tatshenshini-Alsek Park Management Agreement .......... 22  
**Appendix II** Red and Blue Listed Vertebrates and Vascular Plants  
**Appendix III** Zoning Description
Tatshenshini-Alsek Park
Management Direction Statement

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this management direction statement (MDS) is to provide management direction for Tatshenshini-Alsek Park. This new protected area requires direction in the interim until a full management plan is prepared. The Tatshenshini-Alsek Management Board will begin the public planning process for the management plan in the next 2-3 years. A background report for the management plan is at a draft stage.

While key strategies are identified in this MDS, the completion of all these strategies is subject to funding and funding procedures. As such, strategies will be completed as funding permits and according to priorities assigned by the Board. As well, all development associated with these strategies is subject to the BC Parks Impact Assessment Policy and the Tatshenshini-Alsek Park Management Agreement.

Setting and Context

The Tatshenshini-Alsek Park is located in the northwest corner of British Columbia and encompasses an area of 9,455 square kilometers (Figure 1). The park boundaries are determined on the north by the Yukon / British Columbia border, on the west and south by the British Columbia / Alaska border and on the east by the length of the Haines Road in British Columbia. The northern park boundary lies 258 kilometers (160 miles) southwest of Whitehorse via the Alaska Highway and Haines Road and the southern boundary some 72 kilometers (45 miles) north of Haines, Alaska, along the Haines Road. (Figure 2)

The Tatshenshini-Alsek Park is one of more than 250 new parks created in British Columbia since 1992. By the end of 1998, the Government of British Columbia was approaching its target of designating 12% of the provincial land base as “protected” – a goal established under its Protected Areas Strategy. The Tatshenshini-Alsek Park contributes 1/12th of this objective.

In December 1994, Tatshenshini-Alsek Park was officially designated a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The designation recognized the global significance of the park and, with adjacent parks in Alaska and Yukon, formed the largest contiguous protected area and the largest world heritage site in the world.

Over the past two decades, the Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers have become highly valued wilderness river rafting destinations. The first attempt to run the Alsek River occurred in the early 1960s; the Tatshenshini River in the mid-1970s. Since then, the most popular rafting river has become the Tatshenshini. In 1994 (peak year) 1319 river rafters descended the Tatshenshini
and Alsek Rivers from launch sites in Yukon (most from the Shäwshe / Dalton Post site) with take outs at Dry Bay, Alaska. Since the mid-1980s, the U.S. National Parks Service, in cooperation with Parks Canada, BC Parks, Government of Yukon and the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, has implemented a mandatory river rafting permit system for commercial and private rafting on the Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers.

When the Province of British Columbia announced the creation of Tatshenshini-Alsek Park on June 22nd, 1993, a proposal to extract a rich body of copper ore from a site in the high Alsek Ranges was under consideration by the government of British Columbia. Known as the Windy Craggy project, environmental groups at home and abroad argued that such a project would destroy the unusual wilderness values and present an extraordinarily high risk to the Tatshenshini-Alsek river system and its fisheries. The BC government opted to create a Class A wilderness provincial park covering most of the Tatshenshini-Alsek watershed and, in doing so, effectively halted the Windy Craggy project. Since 1993, the BC government has been compensating mining companies involved in Windy Craggy, and other mining interests operating within the park, for lost economic opportunities.

In the early 1990s, the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (CAFN) filed a land claim with the federal government that covered the area now demarcated as Tatshenshini-Alsek Park. On December 15th, 1993, CAFN filed a Statement of Intent with the British Columbia Treaty Commission.

The federal and provincial governments agreed to engage the CAFN in resolving outstanding land claims in British Columbia, including the entire park area, in February 1994. On August 14, 1995, the CAFN and Canada signed a Framework Agreement to proceed with land claims negotiations in British Columbia. On April 29th, 1996, the CAFN and the Government of British Columbia signed the bi-lateral Tatshenshini-Alsek Park Management Agreement (Appendix I) which, in part, directed CAFN and BC Parks to jointly manage the park. To bring the Agreement into effect, the British Columbia government passed Order-in-Council 555/96. An amendment to the Environment and Land Use Act in 1997 changed the name of the park from “Tatshenshini-Alsek Wilderness Provincial Park” to “Tatshenshini-Alsek Park”.

The creation of a Tatshenshini-Alsek Park Board, comprised of two members representing the Province of British Columbia and two representing the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, was a vital component of the Tatshenshini-Alsek Park Management Agreement (Appendix I). Since 1996, the Park Board has been directing the management of the park, in accordance with the British Columbia Park Act and the management principles set out in the Agreement. Section 4.1, below, captures the aspirations of both parties to the Agreement.

It is the intention of the Parties to protect the natural wilderness environment and heritage values of the Park in perpetuity and to maintain and make use of the Park in a way which recognizes the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations rights, culture and history and protects and conserves the area for the benefit, education and enjoyment of all peoples in accordance with its designation as a Class A Park and the terms of this Agreement.

(Tatshenshini-Alsek Park Management Agreement, 1996, Section 4.1)
Protected Area Attributes

Conservation

- The Tatshenshini-Alsek Park is renowned for its outstanding wilderness qualities – spectacular mountains, massive glaciers, wild rivers, precipitous canyons, forested valley bottoms, grizzly and glacier bears, Dall sheep, eagles and Pacific salmon
- In conjunction with adjacent Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (Alaska), Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve (Alaska) and Kluane National Park and Reserve (Yukon), the Tatshenshini-Alsek Park forms the world's largest internationally protected area (approximately 13,926 square kilometers). Please refer to Figure 1.
- The Tatshenshini-Alsek Park is the only park in British Columbia to contain an entire ecoregion – the Icefield Range Ecoregion
- Most of the Tatshenshini Basin Ecoregion and the Alsek Ecoregion lies within the park
- Unique representations of alpine tundra vegetation and coastal western hemlock, boreal white and black spruce and spruce-willow-birch forests are found within the Tatshenshini Basin and Alsek Ecoregions of the park
- Outstanding natural features include the lower Alsek River that breaches the high St. Elias Mountains; Melbern, Tweedsmuir, Vern Ritchie and Battle glaciers provide some of the largest in BC; Turnback Canyon is one of BC’s most scenic – exposing massive walls of granite; impressive alluvial fans are found at Detour and Sediment Creeks in the Tatshenshini River valley; thick alluvium and eolian deposits are found in the Tatshenshini River valley; medial and lateral moraines are common in both ice-filled and ice-free valleys; the high volume Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers transport large quantities of sediment annually; floodplains and river terraces dominant the lower portions of the Tatshenshini and Alsek river valleys
- British Columbia’s highest mountain (Mt. Fairweather at 4,663 meters or 15,298 feet) and only tidewater glacier (Grand Pacific Glacier at Tarr Inlet) are located in the park
- One of British Columbia’s most dynamic geomorphic environments; a number of geomorphic processes have altered the physical and cultural landscape of the park in recent times; valley glaciers have advanced and retreated (e.g., Grand Pacific Glacier); ice dams have broken and released large volumes of water that flooded old settlements (e.g., the old Tlingit village of Tínix Ání, at the confluence of the Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers, is believed to have been washed away when the Lowell Glacier [Yukon] ice dam broke in the mid-1800s); river channels change frequently (e.g., Tatshenshini River)
- Highly valued sockeye, coho and chinook salmon runs on Tatshenshini River and its tributaries; runs vitally important to First Nations subsistence fishery; old Tlingit and Tutchone fishing sites along the Tatshenshini
- High value habitat (largely untouched / remote) for grizzly bear, black bear and the rare glacier bear
- Significant populations of Dall sheep, mountain goat and moose
- Only population of Dall sheep in a protected area in B.C.
- Significant populations of gray wolf, wolverine, marten, beaver, arctic ground squirrel, hoary marmot, red fox, coyote, lynx and snowshoe hare, mice, voles, shrews, pika, raptors and passerines
- Significant populations of golden eagles, ptarmigan and raven
- Threatened or endangered birds include the peregrine falcon and gyrfalcon
Sensitive or vulnerable birds include the great blue heron, bald eagle, arctic tern and northern shrike

Several rare and endangered plant species as per Appendix II

Three rare and endangered vertebrates as per Appendix II

Recreation and Tourism

- Outstanding mountain scenery from the Haines Road corridor, from aircraft overflights and from the Tatshenshini and Alsek River corridors, especially at the confluence of the two rivers
- Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers provide river rafters with two of the world’s finest wilderness rafting experiences
- Sport hunting, angling and outfitter guiding
- Snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and dog-sledding opportunities in the winter adjacent to the Haines Road
- Hiking, horseback riding, outfitting and cycling along trails and old mining roads within the park
- Excellent opportunities to view grizzly bear, bald eagles and salmon
- Potential for cultural tourism, (e.g. joining First Nations’ members involved in traditional activities in the park)

Cultural Heritage

- Part of the traditional territory of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations; traditional economy based on hunting, fishing, gathering, trapping and trading; these activities took place throughout the park; largest fishing village at Nughayik on the Tatshenshini River; park area remained under aboriginal control until non-native outsiders arrived in the early 1890’s
- Indigenous population badly affected by mid-nineteenth century epidemics introduced by non-native contact on the Alaska coast
- Klondike Gold Rush of 1898 altered First Nation harvesting and land use patterns
- Establishment and enforcement of non-aboriginal geo-political boundaries (Canada-USA; Yukon-BC) affected First Nations land use and settlement patterns; population shifted northward into Yukon; this trend continued with the construction of the Alaska Highway and Haines Road in the 1940s; by mid-twentieth century, no permanent settlements or year-round First Nations residents in the park; land and resource continued to be used on a seasonal basis by Champagne and Aishihik First Nations families
- Champagne and Aishihik First Nations continue to practice traditional and economic pursuits e.g. (hunting, fishing and gathering); the park is one of the areas within the traditional territory where these activities take place
- The park’s cultural heritage resources are not well known; some work has been done towards identifying the nineteenth century fishing village; many First Nations caches, campsites and cabins remain to be located
- Some archaeological sites, including one petroglyph, have been documented
- Inter-and intra-regional trails, not thoroughly documented to date, may be the park’s most important cultural heritage resource (e.g. Chilkat Trail and secondary trails)
- Progress has been made towards researching and synthesizing First Nations history of the park; aboriginal place names provide an important record of First Nations history; initial oral history research has documented some place names, as well as land use patterns and family
 histories related to the area

- Mining roads and airstrips provide evidence of former trading, exploration, wildlife harvesting, quartz mining (e.g., Windy Craggy), placer mining (e.g., Squaw Creek) and recreational activities within the park
- Culturally appropriate programs for interpreting the park’s human history to the CAFN community, and to wider audiences, remain to be developed; appropriate programs for the research and management of the park’s cultural heritage resources, particularly those related to First Nations history, remain to be advanced

**Significance in the Protected Areas System**

- British Columbia’s second largest Class A Park
- Comprises the world’s largest international protected area, together with neighboring protected areas in Yukon and Alaska
- A designated United Nations World Heritage Site
- Contains British Columbia’s highest mountain and only tidewater glacier
- Contains British Columbia’s largest and most extensive set of valley glaciers and icefields within a provincial park
- The region’s two longest and most powerful rivers the Tatshenshini and the Alsek, have, carved deep wide valleys through extremely high mountain ranges, including the Icefield, Alsek, Noisey and Fairweather Ranges
- Tatshenshini and Alsek Rivers are the only major protected rivers in northwestern British Columbia
- Tatshenshini River and the lower Alsek River support major salmon spawning runs
- Provincially significant salmon, grizzly bear, rare glacier bear, black bear, Dall sheep, mountain goat, moose and gray wolf populations
- One of a small number of BC Parks co-managed by BC Parks and First Nations; this is a new relationship for both First Nations and the British Columbia Government
- Outstanding mountain scenery and wildlife viewing
- Tatshenshini and Alsek rivers provide two of the world’s finest river rafting experiences
- Provides licensed hunting and angling opportunities and a wide range of summer and winter backcountry recreation activities
- Potential for cultural tourism