



# **Planning Future Directions**

## **For BC Parks:**

# **BC Residents' Views**

## **Summary Report**

**Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection**

**Province of British Columbia**

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# Introduction

British Columbia's provincial parks protect large areas containing representative examples of the broad range of ecosystems in the province and they also protect those special features - natural, cultural, historic and recreational - that are unique to British Columbia.

The Parks and Protected Areas Branch (BC Parks) of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection is the provincial agency responsible for the environmental stewardship of a large and diverse provincial park system and for the provision of outdoor recreational opportunities in provincial parks located throughout the province.

This system encompasses 807 provincial parks, recreation areas, ecological reserves and protected areas totaling more than 11.4 million hectares throughout the Province (about 12 percent of British Columbia's land base). In 2001, the provincial park system contained over 13,800 campsites and received about 24 million visits.

Currently, BC Parks is in the process of identifying future management directions for these provincial parks. One component of this process is finding out what improvements or changes, if any, British Columbians would like to see in the management of provincial parks over the next few years.

To better understand British Columbians views about the management of provincial parks, BC Parks conducted a province-wide mail survey with a random sample of 4,198 adult BC residents. The key objectives of the survey were to:

- identify some of the benefits that British Columbians feel they receive from having provincial parks;
- determine if British Columbians were satisfied with the way BC Parks has carried out several management responsibilities;
- identify those park programs which British Columbians would like to see more emphasis given to in the next few years; and
- determine British Columbians' views about alternative ways to fund park programs.

Of the 4,198 residents that were sent a questionnaire, 2,856 returned a useable questionnaire. The response rate was 72 percent.<sup>1</sup>

Following are the initial findings from this survey.

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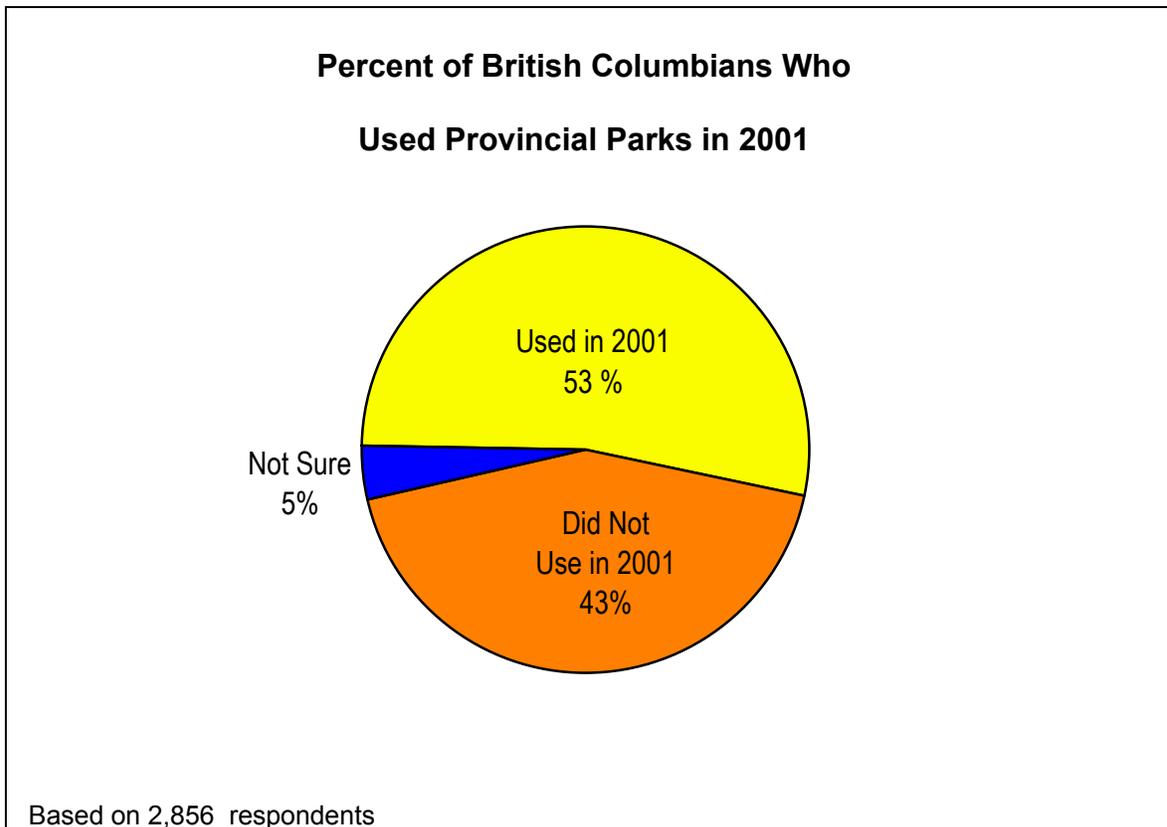
<sup>1</sup>The results of 2001 survey are based on a systematic, random sample of adult (18 years and over) British Columbians throughout the province. Names and addresses for the sample were drawn by and obtained from the Dominion Directories Company. BC Parks received questionnaires between September 18, 2001 and January 11, 2002. The potential number of respondents was reduced to 3,959 because 239 respondents were physically or mentally incapable of completing the questionnaire, were deceased, had moved from the community or were not residents of British Columbia. The margin of error is about +/- 2%.

# Findings

1. Slightly more than 5 in 10 British Columbians (53%) indicated they had used a provincial park in 2001.<sup>2</sup>

The types of parks used by the largest number of British Columbians in 2001 were day use areas (37%) and provincial park campgrounds (30%) followed by backcountry or wilderness areas (15%), visitor centres (13%) and marine parks (12%).\*

Nearly 9 in 10 BC residents (86%) indicated they had used a provincial park at sometime in the past.



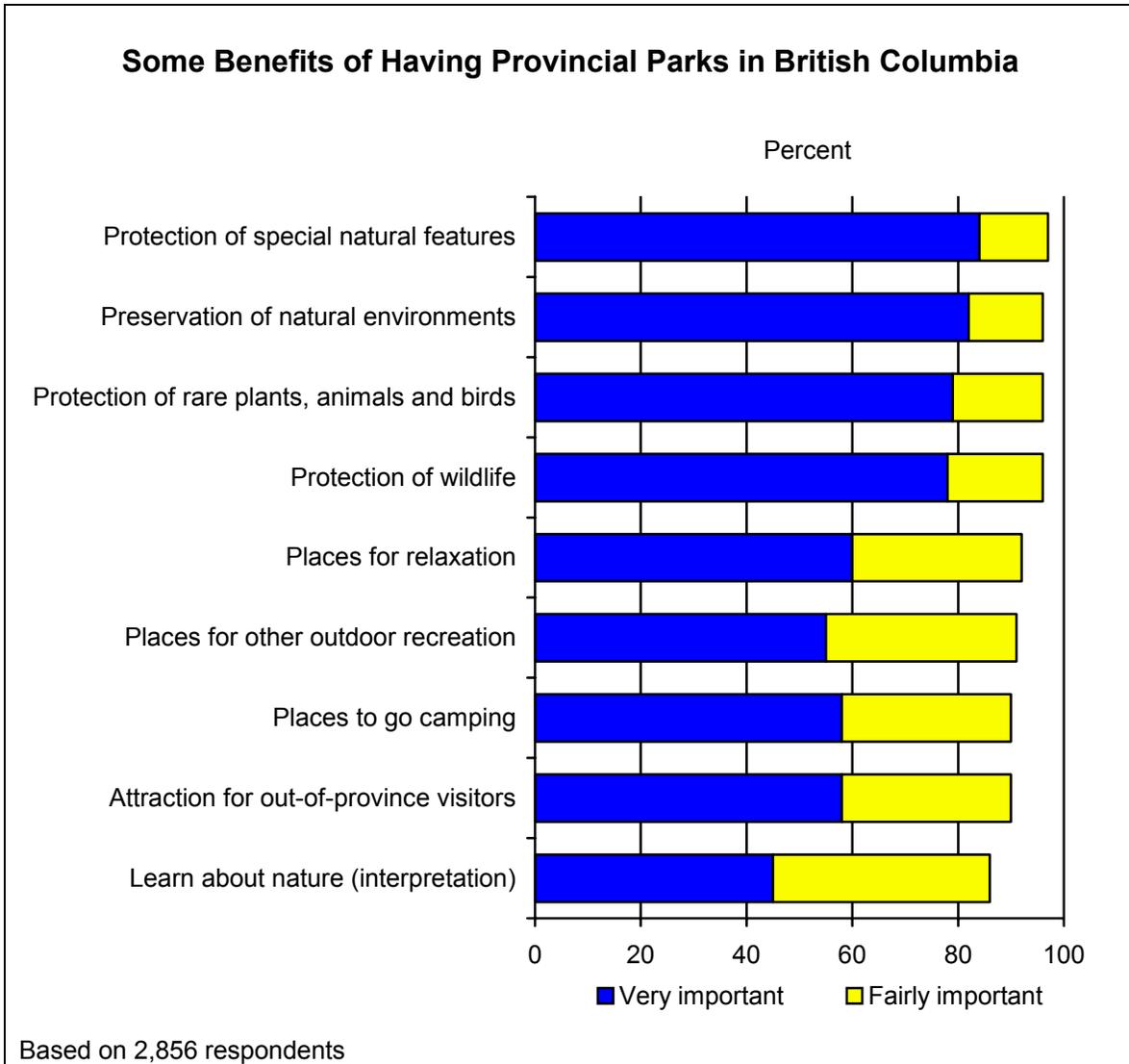
<sup>2</sup> The questions were: Did you use any BC provincial park in the year 2001? Response categories were: no, not sure and yes.

(If yes) which of the following types of parks or facilities did you use in 2001? Response categories were: marine park, provincial park campground, wilderness or backcountry areas, day use areas (beach/picnic areas), visitor centres.

First, have you ever used any provincial park in British Columbia? By provincial park, we mean a park managed by the provincial government and not a neighbourhood, city, regional, or national park. The response categories were: no (9%), not sure (5%) and yes (86%).

\*Note: Adds to more than 100 percent because some people used more than one type of park.

2. Slightly more than 8 in 10 British Columbians identified the protection of special natural features (84%) and the preservation of natural environments (82%) as being very important benefits of having provincial parks in British Columbia.<sup>3</sup>

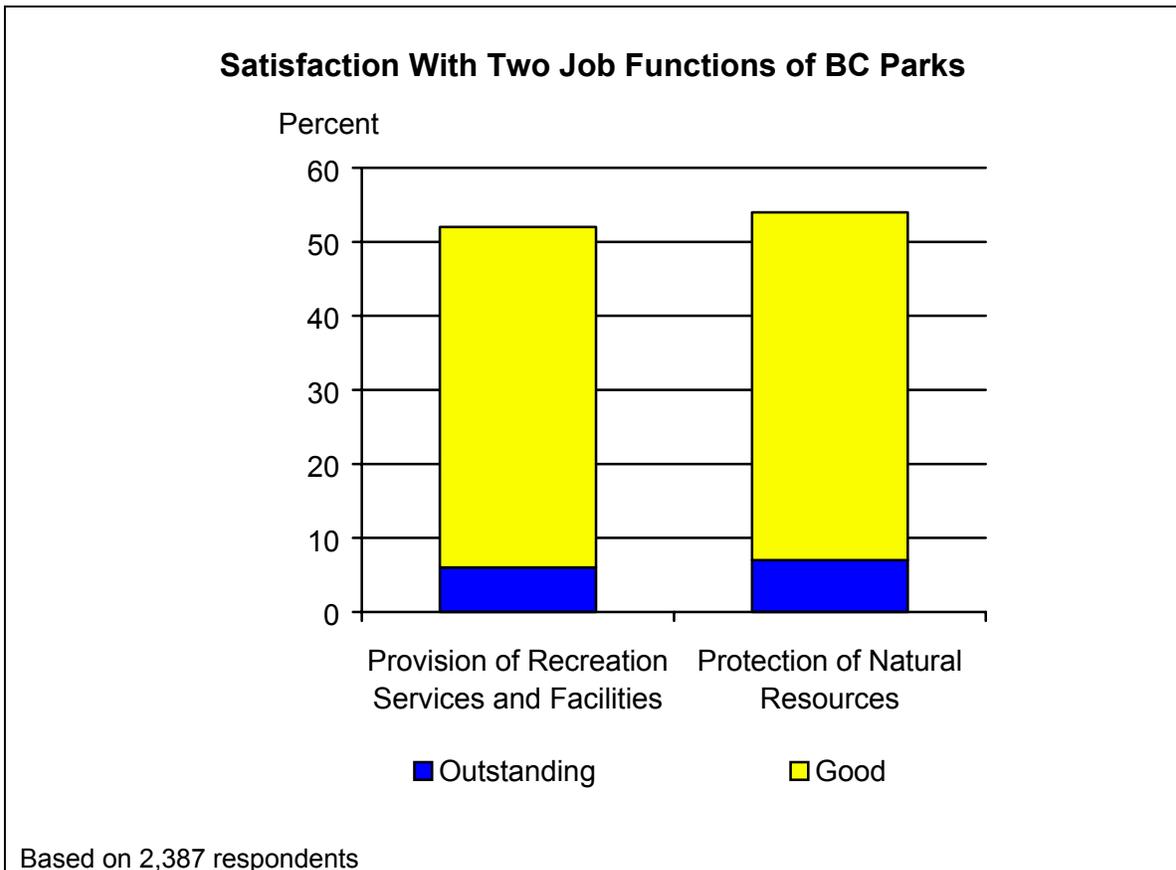


<sup>3</sup> The question was: Listed below are a few benefits that some British Columbians have told us they feel they receive from having provincial parks in British Columbia. For each benefit, please indicate if you think it is not a very important benefit, a fairly important benefit or a very important benefit to British Columbians? The response categories were: very important benefit, fairly important benefit, not very important benefit and don't know.

While an attempt was made to leave the exact wording of benefits in the above graph, some benefit statements were shortened for presentation purposes. In the questionnaire the wording of these benefits were: Protection of wildlife; Places to go camping; Places for outdoor activities other than camping; Preservation of natural environments (forests, etc.); Places for relaxation; Protection of special natural features (waterfalls, etc.); Places to learn about nature through interpretation programs (nature walks, slide shows, etc.); Protection of rare plants, animals and birds; Attraction for out-of-province visitors to British Columbia (bring in tourism revenue, etc.)

3. A slight majority of British Columbians (52%) feel that BC Parks has done an outstanding or good job in providing recreation services and facilities over the past two years. By contrast, 24 percent of residents indicated that BC Parks has done an average job while 3 percent indicated either an unacceptable or a poor job.

A similar number of British Columbians (54%) feel that BC Parks has done an outstanding or good job in conserving and protecting the natural resources in provincial parks over the past two years. By contrast, about 20 percent of residents indicated that BC Parks has done an average job while about 3 percent indicated either an unacceptable or a poor job.<sup>4</sup>



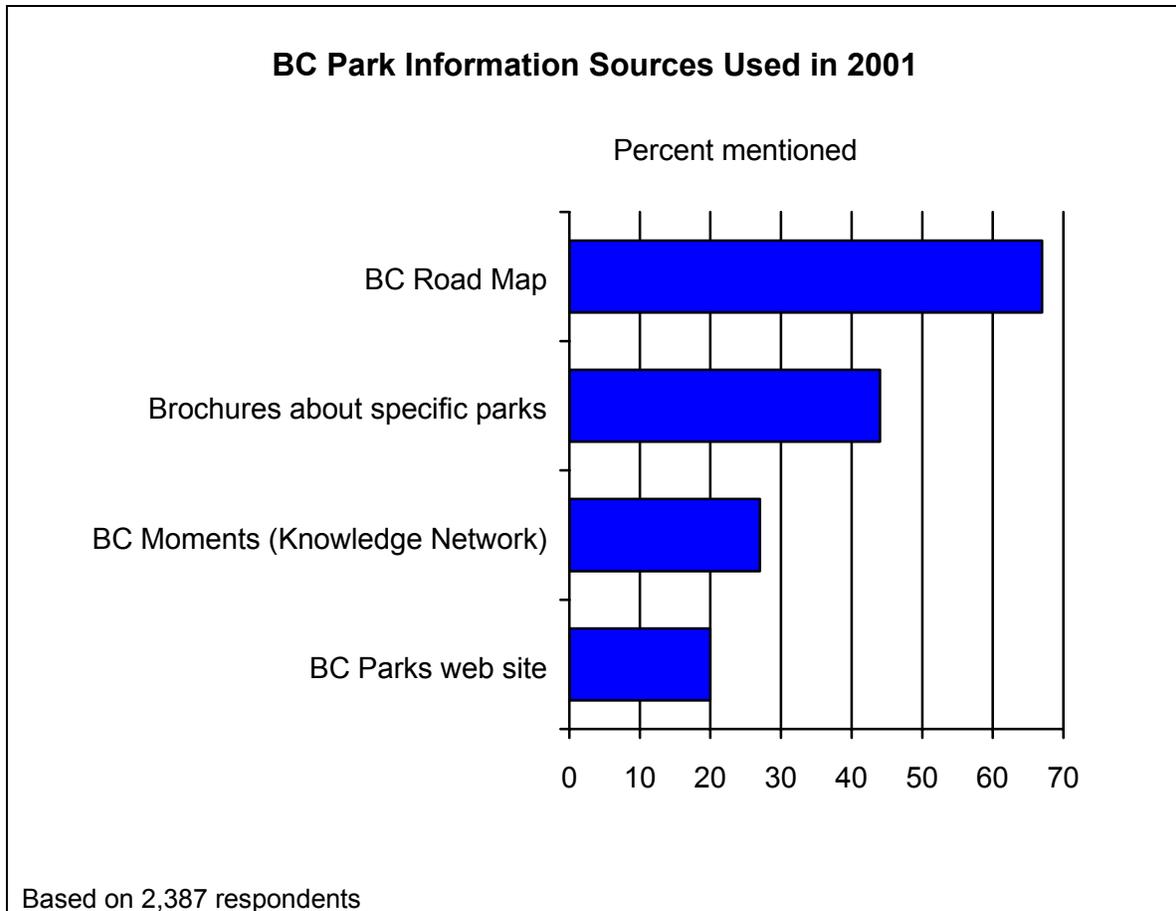
<sup>4</sup> The questions were: One job of BC Parks is to protect the plants, animals, water, air and natural features in provincial parks from activities that could damage the natural conditions of provincial parks. Overall, how would you rate BC Park's performance over the past two years in conserving and protecting the natural conditions of provincial parks? The response categories were: unacceptable (1%), poor (2%), average (20%), good (47%) and outstanding (7%) and not sure (23%).

Overall, how would you rate BC Park's performance over the past two years in providing recreation facilities and services in provincial parks. The response categories were: unacceptable (1%), poor (2%), average (24%), good (46%), outstanding (6%) and not sure (21%).

Note: The results from pages 4 to 13 are based on 2,387 respondents. These respondents expressed some interest in parks or had recently used them.

4. Nearly 7 in 10 respondents (67%) indicated they had used a BC Road Map in 2001. This map shows the location of provincial parks and the types of facilities provided in these parks.

Advice from friends and relatives (52%) was the most preferred information source in planning an overnight trip to provincial parks. This was followed by the BC Road Map (39%), BC Park brochures (35%), BC Parks Web site (31%) and advice from travel centres (20%).<sup>5</sup>



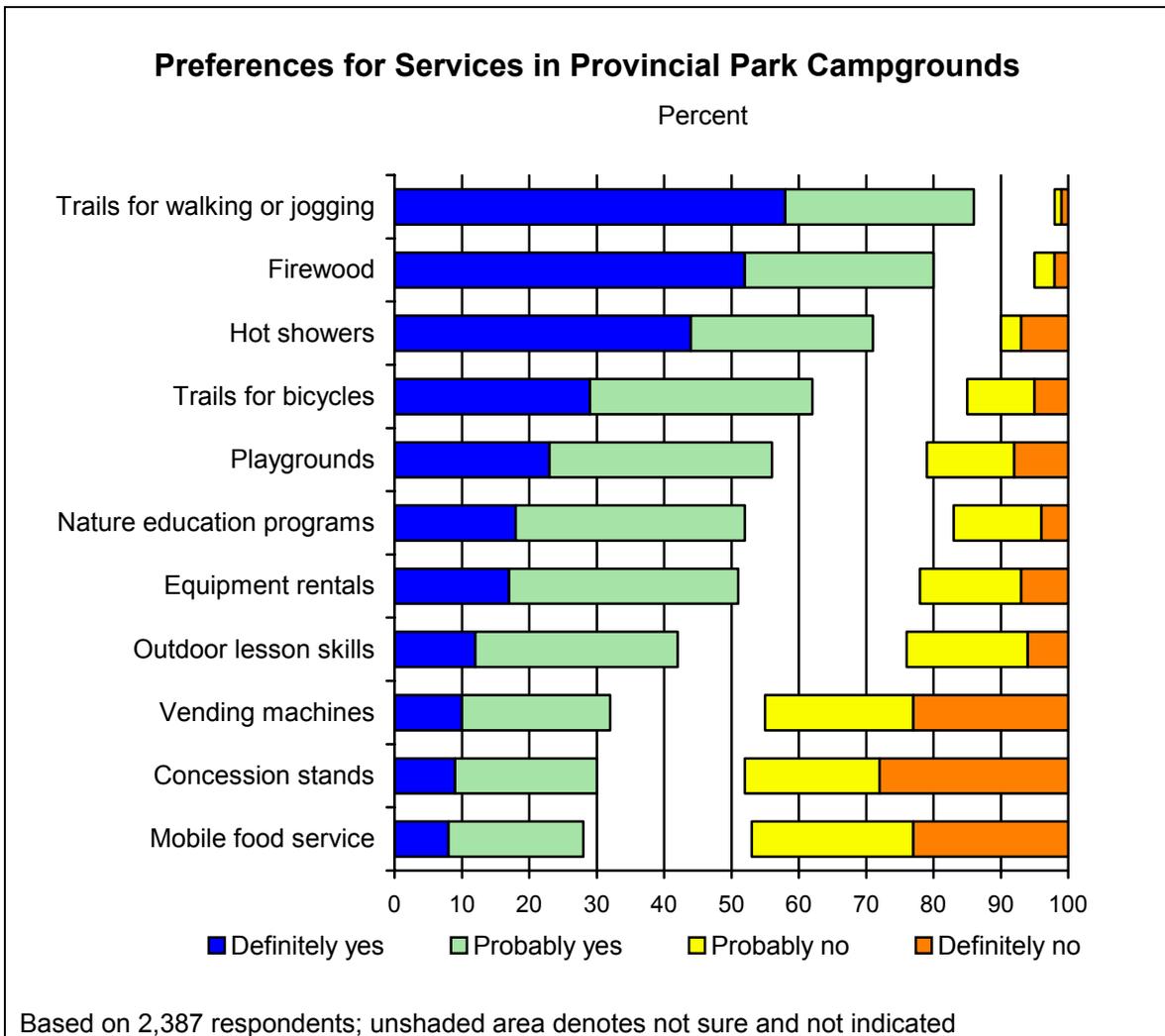
<sup>5</sup> The questions were: To the best that you can recall, did you look at or read any of the following during the year 2001? (Circle number of all that apply). The response categories were: BC Road Map showing provincial parks and facilities; brochures on specific BC provincial parks; BC Parks web site; BC Moments about provincial parks (Knowledge Network on television); other; none of the above.

Suppose you were planning an overnight trip to a provincial park in the next two years. Which of the following information sources would you most prefer to use to plan this trip? The response categories were: most prefer; and second most prefer. The response alternatives were: advice from friends and relatives; advice from staff at travel information centres; BC road map showing provincial parks and facilities; brochures on specific BC provincial parks; BC Parks web sites.

- The most preferred service in provincial park campgrounds was trails for walking or jogging (86% indicated definitely yes and probably yes).

This was followed by a preference for firewood (80%) and showers (71%).

There was considerably less interest in having food-related services such as vending machines (32%), concession stands (30%) and a mobile food service (28%).<sup>6</sup>

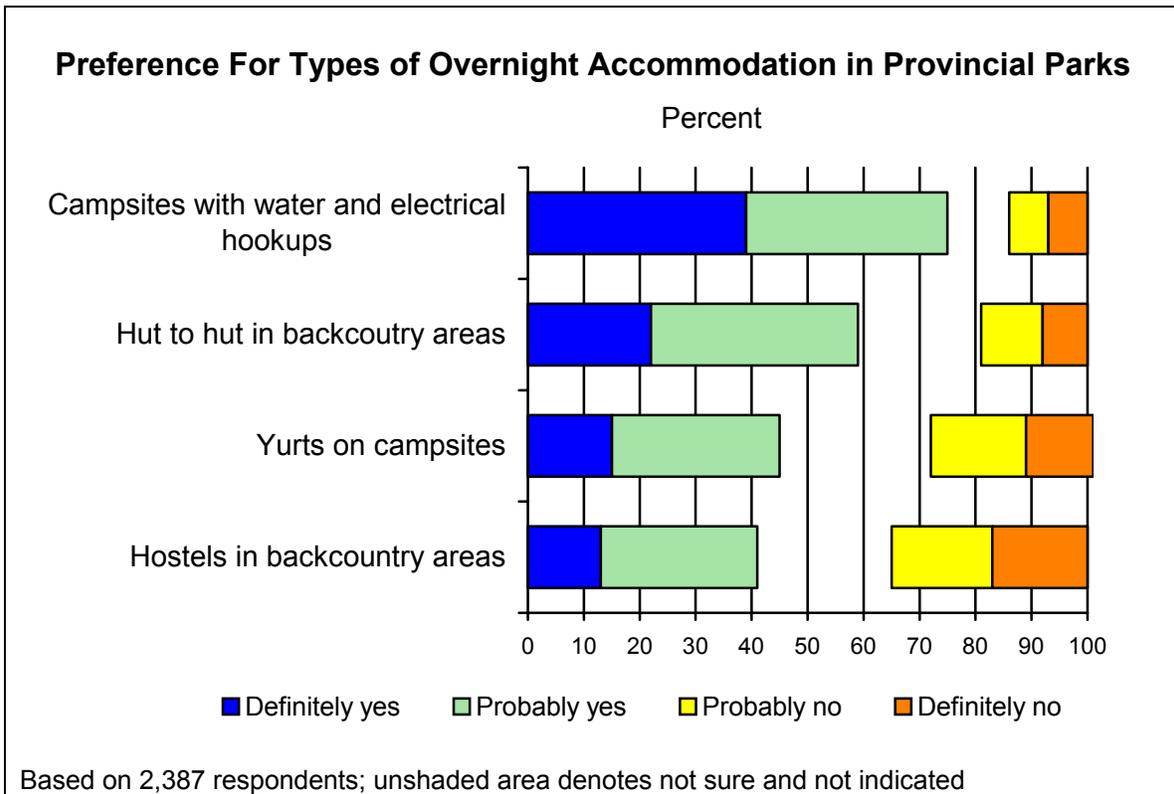


<sup>6</sup> The question was: Here are some specific services that some people want and others do not want in provincial park campgrounds. Please indicate if you would like to see or not like to see each of the following services provided in provincial park campgrounds? The response categories were: definitely no, probably no, not sure, probably yes, definitely yes.

The wording of services were: playgrounds, trails for walking and jogging, trails for bicycles, hot showers, firewood, nature education programs by a naturalist, lessons on outdoor skills (how to kayak, etc.), rental of recreation equipment (canoe, etc.), vending machines (ice, pop, etc.), mobile food service (van providing milk, bread, etc.), concession stands (hot dogs, etc.) in beach areas.

6. Campsites with water and electrical hookups (75% indicated definitely yes and probably yes) and hut to hut (59%) are two types of accommodations that a considerable number of respondents indicated they would like to see in some provincial parks.

When respondents were asked if they would consider using these type of accommodations at specified fee levels over the next five years, the highest response was for campsites with water and electrical hookups (61%) at \$25 - \$30 per night. About 37 percent of the respondents also indicated they would consider using hut to hut accommodations at \$15 to \$20 per person/per night.<sup>7</sup>



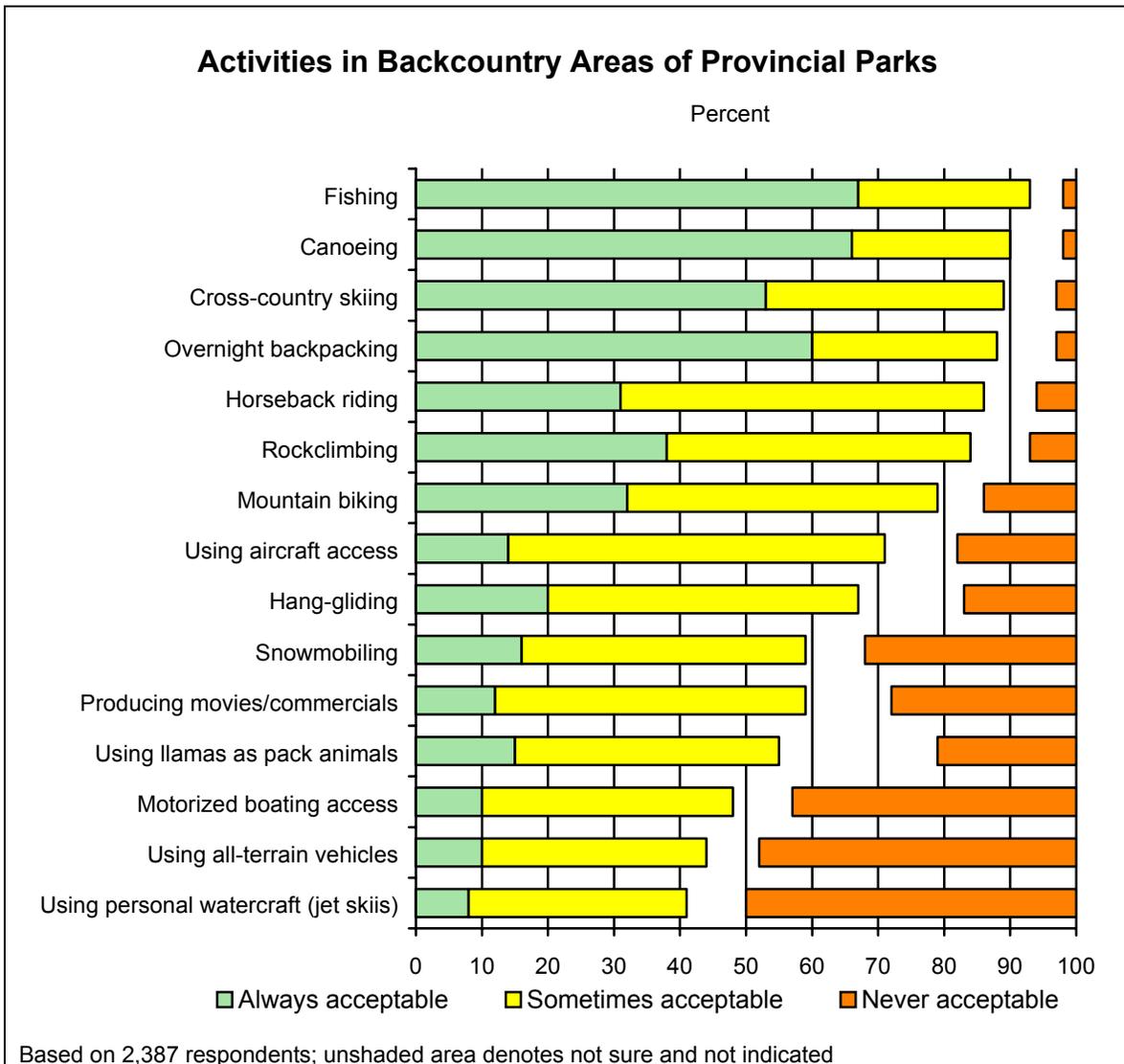
<sup>7</sup> The questions were: One type of overnight accommodation in provincial parks is campgrounds (with showers, without showers, walk-in). Below are some other types of accommodation that some British Columbians would like to see in provincial parks. Please look at each of the pictures and then indicate the extent to which you would or would not like to see each of these in some provincial parks? The response categories were: definitely no, probably no, not sure, probably yes, definitely yes. The wording of the types of accommodations were: campsites with water and electrical hookups (accessible by car; showers); yurts on campsites (accessible by car; canvas tents on platforms; beds; showers); hut to hut (accessible by foot, water or air; bring own food and bedding; about 6-8 people); hostels (accessible by foot, water or air; showers; common cooking areas; bring own food and bedding; about 20 people).

Which of the following accommodation, if any, would you consider using over the next five years? The response categories were: first choice and second choice. The wording of the choices were: campsites – water and electrical hookups (\$25 - \$30 per night); yurts on campsites (\$45 - \$60 per night), hostels (\$20 - \$30 per person/per night).

7. In general, British Columbians viewed non-motorized activities as being more acceptable than motorized activities in the backcountry areas of provincial parks.

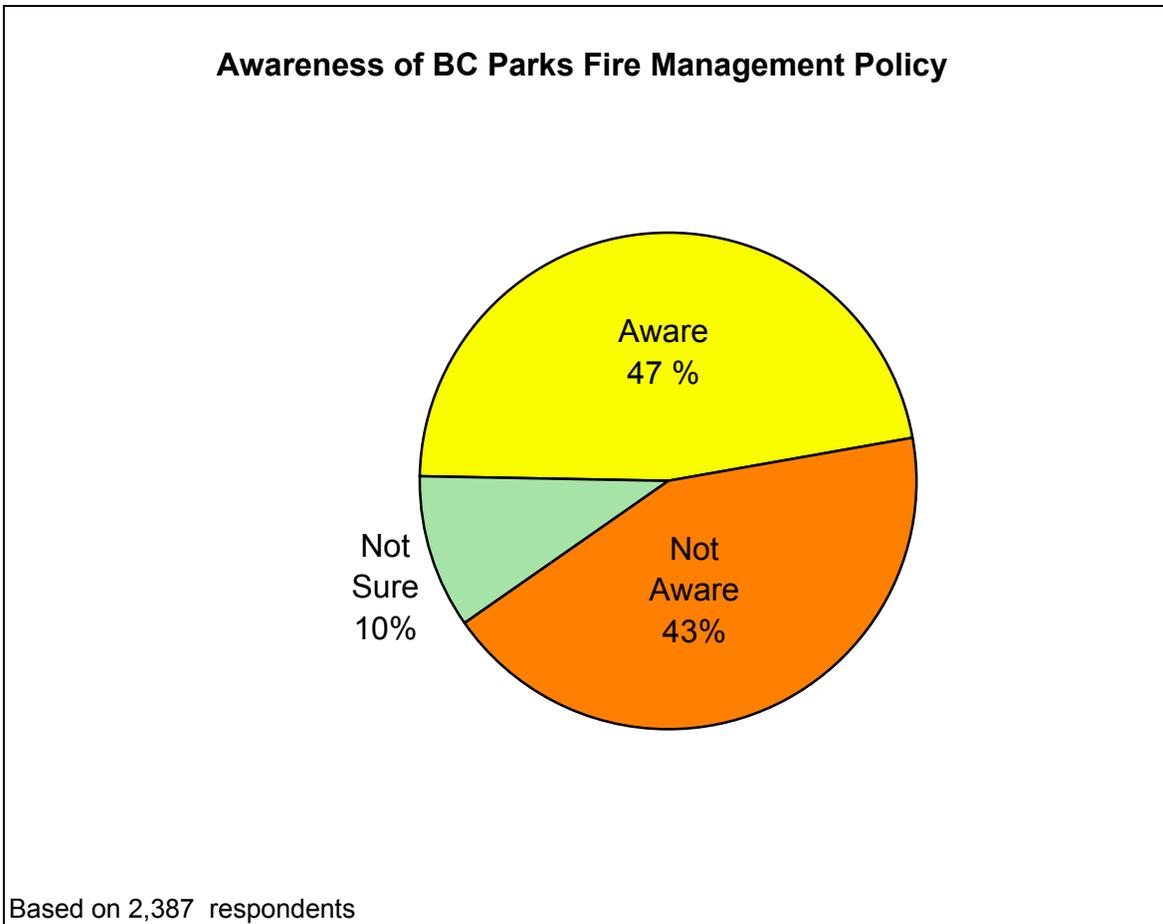
A majority of respondents viewed four of the fifteen activities as “always acceptable” in wilderness or backcountry areas of provincial parks. These activities were: fishing (67%), canoeing (66%), backpacking (60%) and cross-country skiing (53%).

By contrast, 10 percent of the respondents, or less, felt that three activities were “always acceptable” in backcountry areas of provincial parks. These activities were: motorized boating access (over 10hp: 10%); using all-terrain vehicles (10%); and using personal watercraft (jet skis; 8%).<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup> The question was: Next, some large provincial parks contain wilderness or backcountry areas. People have different views about the kinds of activities that should occur in these areas. Please indicate the extent to which you feel EACH of the following activities is acceptable in backcountry areas of provincial parks? The response categories were: never acceptable, sometimes acceptable, always acceptable and not sure.

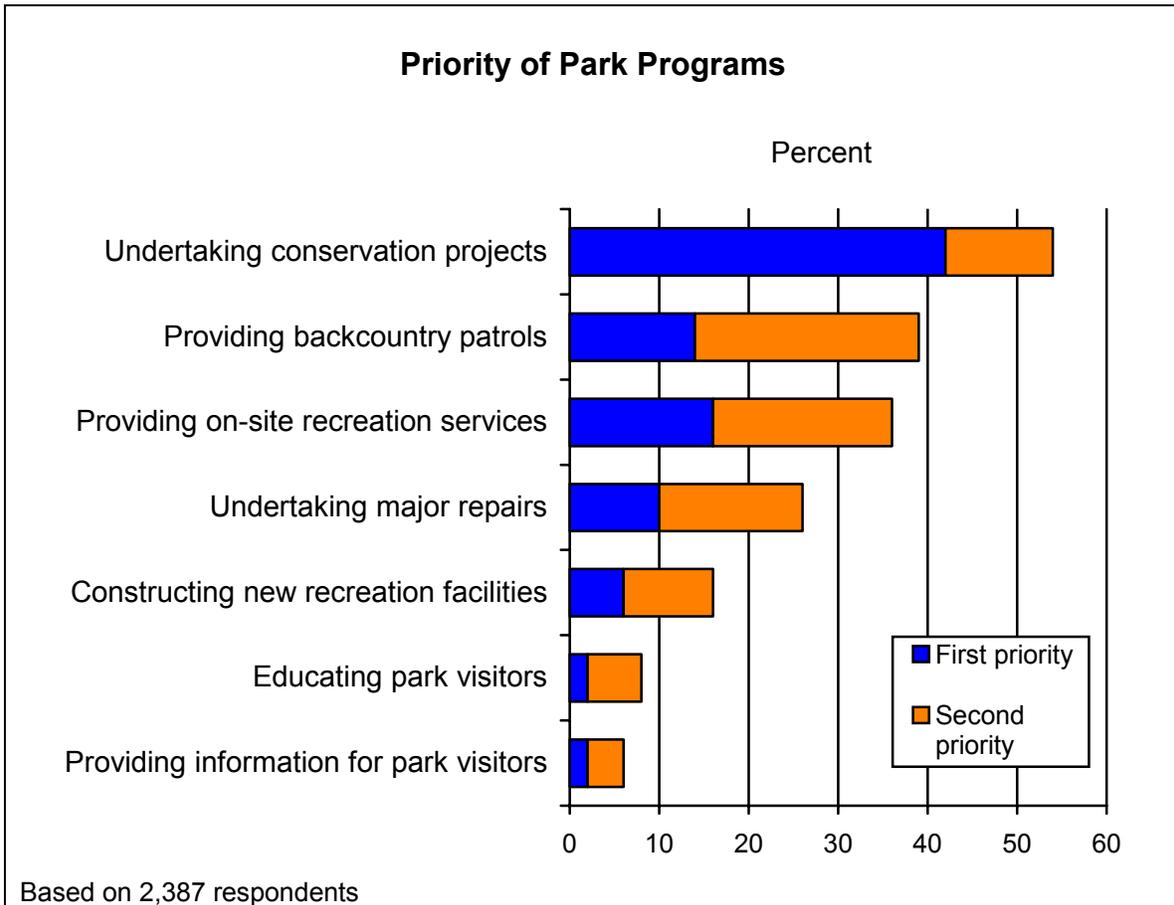
8. Less than half (47%) of BC residents were aware of the BC Parks fire management policy.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>9</sup> The question was: BC Parks currently has a two-part fire management policy for backcountry areas. First, this policy allows fire started naturally by lightning to burn itself out when it is not a threat to people's lives or personal property. Second, it allows the occasional use of prescribed fire, a method of conservation management, when it is not a threat to people's lives or personal property. By prescribed fire, we mean a fire started and controlled by staff. Prior to this survey, were you aware or not aware of this policy? The response categories were: aware, not aware and not sure.

9. The undertaking of specific conservation projects to protect animals and plants was the program that British Columbians felt BC Parks should give the highest priority to in the next few years (54%).

The next highest priorities were for the provision of backcountry patrols (39%) and the provision of on-site recreation services (36%).<sup>10</sup>



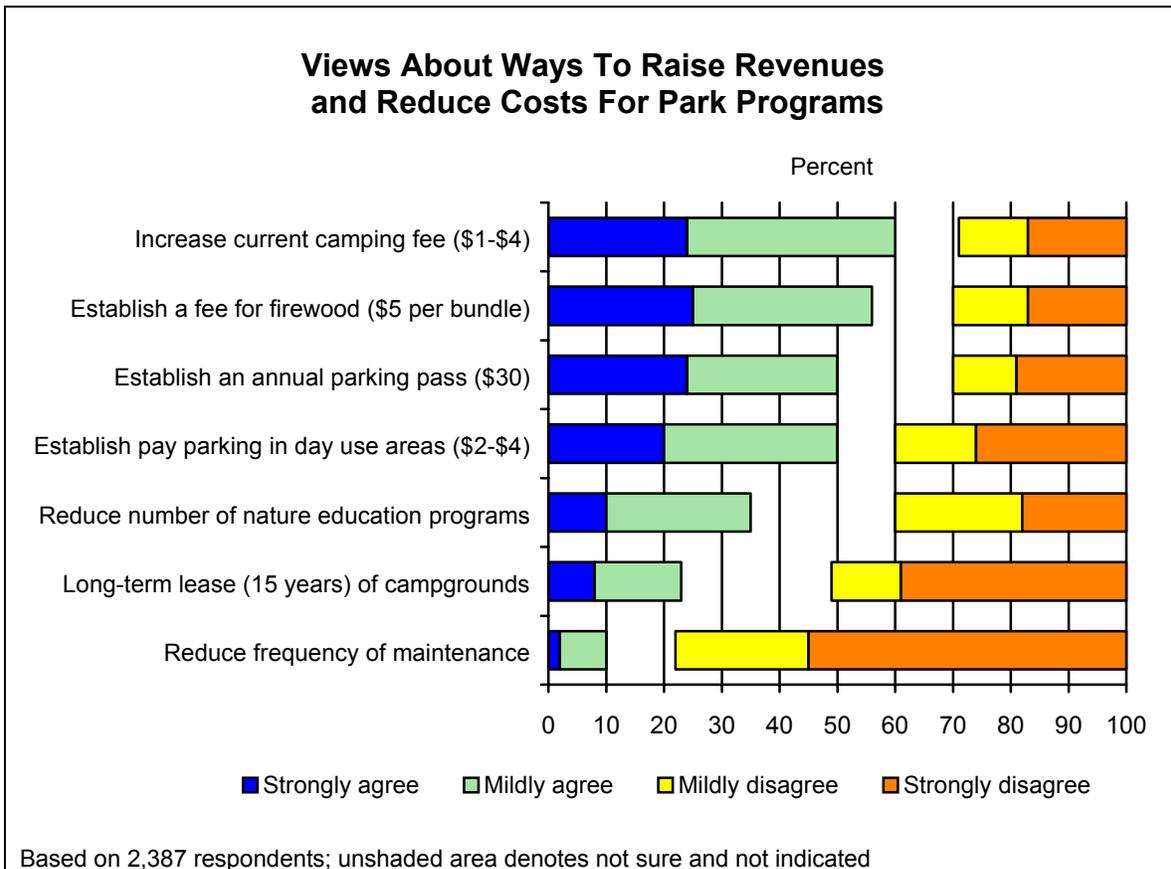
<sup>10</sup> The question was: Now, we would like to know which of the following provincial park programs you feel BC Parks should give the highest priority to over the next few years. (Put letter in appropriate box)

The wording of the programs were: undertaking specific conservation projects to protect animals and plants (control forest infestations, identify rare plants and animals, restore damaged environments); providing backcountry patrols (prevent illegal activities like poaching, provide emergency services, trail upkeep, maintenance); providing security services, cleaning and maintenance in high use areas (campgrounds, day use areas); constructing new recreation facilities (showers, wharves, trails); undertaking major repairs of existing facilities (campgrounds, wharves, sewage system); providing public information for park visitors (facilities, things to see and do); educating park visitors and citizens about park values (talks or slide shows about plants, animals and history of park).

10. When respondents were asked about seven alternative ways to fund park programs, there was generally greater support for new and increased fees than for reducing costs through service reductions or long-term leases.<sup>11</sup>

The highest support (60% agree) was for a small increase in the current camping fee followed by establishing a fee for firewood (56%), establishing an annual parking pass (50%) and establishing a daily parking pass (50%).

There was considerable opposition to reducing costs by reducing the frequency of maintenance (78% disagree) and providing long-term leases of campgrounds (about 15 years) to private businesses (51% disagree).

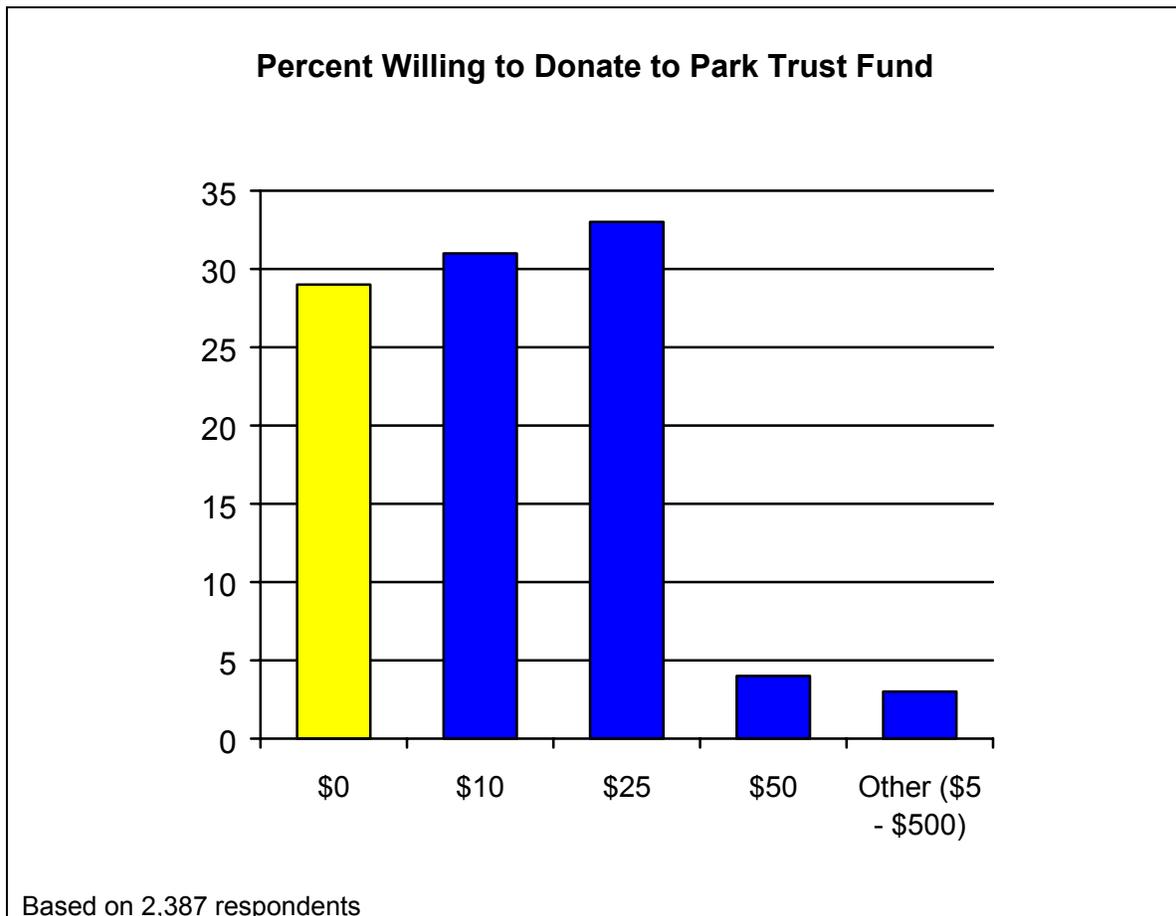


<sup>11</sup> The question was: Here are a few specific suggestions for funding BC Parks programs. That is, ways to raise revenues and ways to decrease costs. Please tell us if you would disagree or agree with EACH of the following? The response categories were: strongly disagree, mildly disagree, not sure, mildly agree and strongly agree.

The wording of the items were: increase current camping fees in provincial parks campgrounds by \$1-\$4 per night (current fees: \$8.00 to \$18.50); establish pay parking in heavily used day use or beach/picnic areas (\$2-\$4 per day); establish an annual parking pass for day use areas and backcountry trailheads (\$30 per year); establish a fee for firewood (\$5 per 1 1/2 cubic ft bundle of firewood; that is, about 1 1/2ft wide by 1 1/2ft long by 1 1/2ft high); reduce the number of nature education programs that are provided; reduce frequency of maintenance (garbage pick-up, cleaning); long-term lease (about 15 years) of provincial park campgrounds to private business operators.

11. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of British Columbians thought it was a good idea to establish a park trust fund that people could donate to for specific in-park services or projects.

About 71 percent of the respondents indicated they would be willing to donate to such a fund if it was established.<sup>12</sup>



<sup>12</sup> The questions were: Another suggestion for funding BC Parks programs is to establish a special trust fund (e.g. a "Park Trust Fund") that people could donate to. It would be run by an independent foundation and the funds would be used for specific in-park services or projects. In general, do you think establishing a "trust fund" for BC Parks would be...? The response categories were: a good idea (73%); not a good idea (7%); not sure (17%). About 3 percent did not answer the question.

Suppose such a special trust fund was established for BC Parks. It is estimated that a donation of \$25 per household to this fund would raise the additional \$40 million required by BC Parks. How much, if anything, would you be willing to donate to such a trust fund per year? (Put an "X" in an appropriate box; if none, put "0" in the last box). The response categories were: \$10; \$25; \$50; Other \$.

## Conclusions

Based on these initial findings, several conclusions may be drawn. First, provincial parks provide a variety of benefits for British Columbians. Two main benefits are the preservation of natural environments and the protection of special natural features.

Second, a slight majority of British Columbians are satisfied with the job BC Parks has done in protecting the natural resources in provincial parks. A slight majority of British Columbians are also satisfied with the job BC Parks has done in the provision of recreation services and facilities in provincial parks.

Third, British Columbians would like to see BC Parks give the highest priority to undertaking specific conservation projects to protect animals and plants. This includes controlling forest infestations, identifying rare plants and animals and restoring damaged environments.

Fourth, a high priority was given to providing backcountry patrols that prevent illegal activities like poaching and provide emergency services and trail upkeep. In managing human uses of these areas, there is considerable support for allowing most forms of non-motorized recreation. By contrast, there is less support for activities that are either motorized, have a high-risk element or potentially could have a detrimental effect on the natural resources.

Fifth, a high priority was given to providing on-site recreation services (security, cleaning, maintenance) of high use areas (campgrounds and day use areas). There was a strong preference for having traditional services (walking trails, firewood, showers) in provincial park campgrounds. At the same time, there is considerably less interest in having food-related services in provincial park campgrounds.

Sixth, there is considerable interest in having some alternative forms of accommodation in provincial parks, particularly campsites with water and electrical hookups. Many British Columbians are interested and would be willing to pay for this new type of accommodation in provincial parks.

Seventh, British Columbians are generally supportive of alternative ways of funding park programs. When it comes to increasing revenues, there is strong support for raising camping fees and establishing a fee for firewood. There is also strong support for establishing a Park Trust Fund that would be run by an independent foundation and would be used for specific park projects. A considerable number of British Columbians are willing to donate to this fund if it were established. When it comes to reducing costs, British Columbians strongly oppose a reduction in park maintenance (cleaning, garbage collection) and long-term leases (15 year) of provincial park campgrounds to private businesses.