



Bridge River Delta Park

Management Plan

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BC Parks

Bridge River Delta Park Management Plan

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Management Vision

This vision statement describes the future state and management that is desired for Bridge River Delta Park. The park vision provides long-term direction for park managers while aiding them in making decisions regarding current issues.

Healthy wildlife populations continue to thrive in and around Bridge River Delta Park, using it as a core area where wildlife are largely undisturbed. The park continues as an important spring feeding area and habitat connection for Grizzly Bear that draws bears from the surrounding landscape. The section of the Bridge River that flows within the park remains an unimpaired example of a braided river system with associated riparian values.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Management Plan Purpose

The purpose of this management plan is to guide the management of Bridge River Delta Park. This management plan:

- articulates the key features and values of Bridge River Delta Park;
- identifies appropriate types and levels of management activities;
- determines appropriate levels of use and development;
- establishes a long-term vision and management objectives for the park; and
- responds to current and predicted threats and opportunities by defining a set of management strategies to achieve the management vision and objectives.

1.2 Planning Area

Bridge River Delta Park is 992 hectares in size and situated on the Bridge River at the west end of Downton Lake (Figure 1). The park is approximately 30 kilometres west of the town of Gold Bridge, accessed by the relatively rough Bridge River Forest Service Road on the south side of Downton Lake. The Bridge Glacier, the source of the Bridge River, is approximately 14 kilometres upstream of the park.

The park is situated in a narrow, steep-walled valley between high mountains. The forested slopes adjacent to the park are managed for timber production. Downton Lake is a reservoir with fluctuating water levels that is used by BC Hydro to generate electricity. Heli-skiing takes place in the adjacent mountains and a heli-skiing fueling station is located just within the park on the southern boundary. Recently, the upper Bridge River and its tributaries have become of interest for small hydro developments that would involve water diversions, generation facilities and a transmission line connection.

1.3 Legislative Framework

Bridge River Delta Park (Figure 2) was recommended through the Lillooet Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) and formally established as a Class A park by the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Amendment Act, 2010* on June 3, 2010. The park is presently named and described in Schedule D of the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*.

Class A parks are Crown lands dedicated to the preservation of their natural environments for the inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public. Development in Class A parks is limited to that which is necessary to maintain the park's recreational

values. Some activities that existed at the time a park was established (e.g., grazing, hay cutting) may be allowed to continue in certain Class A parks¹ but commercial resource extraction or development activities are not permitted (e.g., logging, mining or hydroelectric development).

1.4 Management Commitments/Agreements

The Lillooet LRMP identified the main features of the park as valley bottom/braided stream ecosystems and as critical habitat for Grizzly Bears. The following guidance was provided for park management during development of the Lillooet LRMP:

- Maintain the environment in a natural, undisturbed condition and maintain the natural gene pool of species in the area.
- Provide long term opportunities for research activities and ecological education that do not impact natural qualities.
- Coordinate management with actions for Grizzly Bear in the Grizzly Bear population unit and the surrounding area.
- Consider negotiating the removal of trapping and guide outfitting.
- Consider development of fire and forest pest management plans.
- Limit recreational activities to those that are non-consumptive and of low intensity and impact (e.g., nature studies, photography, etc.).

The main concern raised in the Lillooet LRMP was “balancing conservation of Grizzly Bear habitat with use of the area (grazing, trapping and hunting).” The suggested management category was “natural environment” and “strict preservation.”

¹ Applies only to Class A parks listed in Schedule D of the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*.

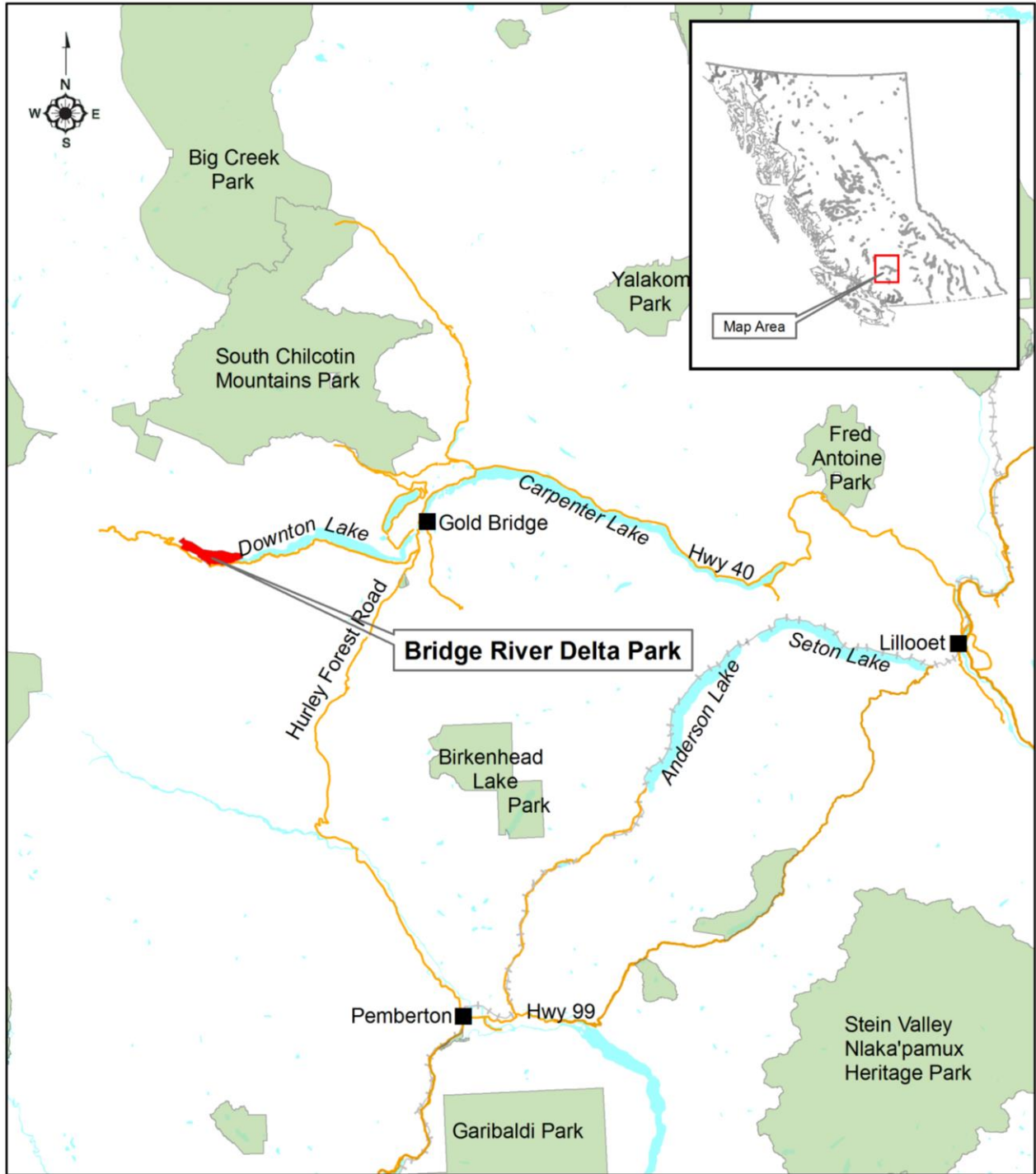


Figure 1: Context Map for Bridge River Delta Park

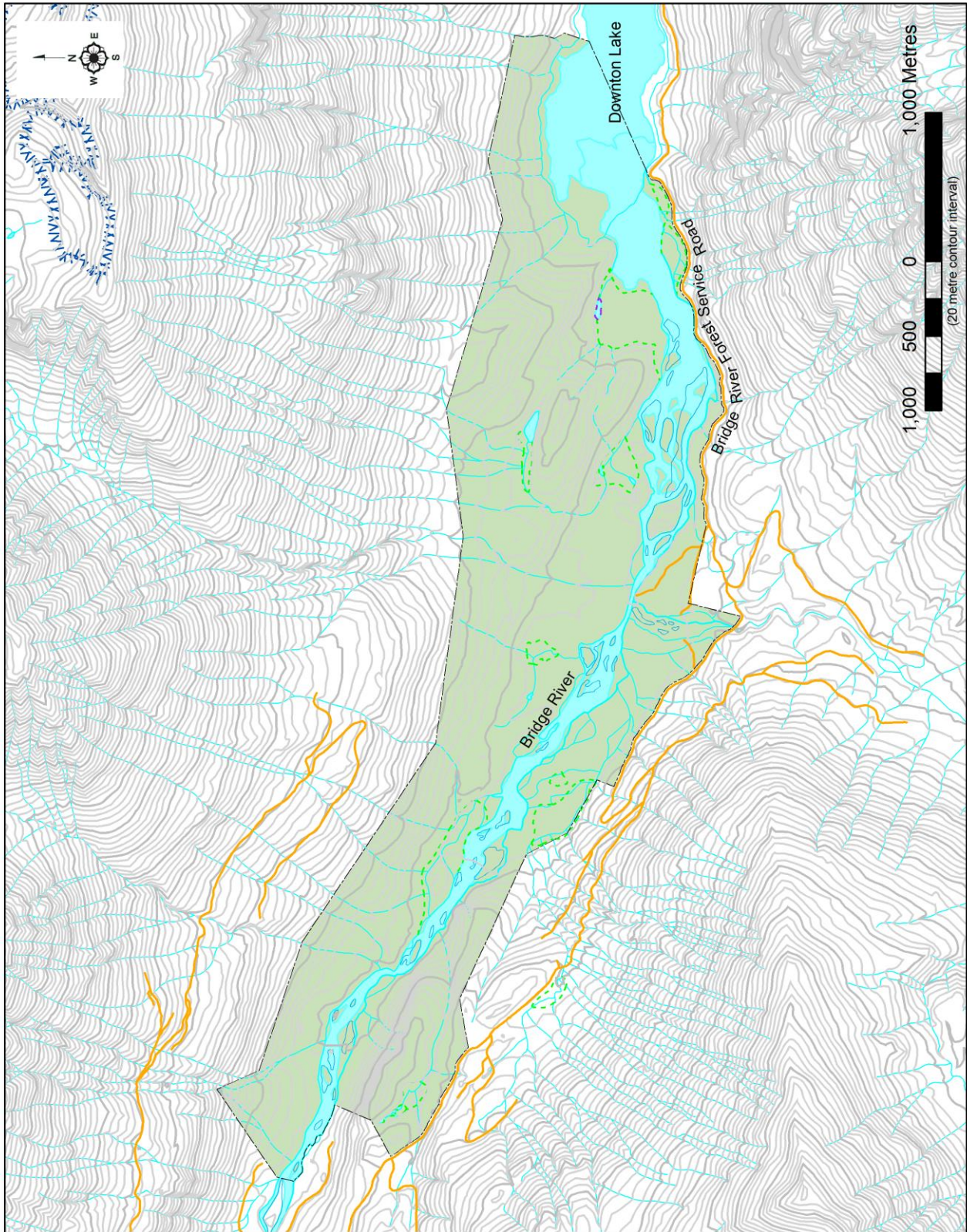


Figure 2: Park Map

1.5 Management Planning Process

BC Parks consulted with other government agencies, public interest groups, stakeholders and the general public in the development of this management plan. Summaries of the input received from various groups were posted to the BC Parks website as they became available. BC Parks obtained information on values, uses, present and future desired activities, the desired experiences, public and commercial recreational uses, issues and items needing management attention.

1.6 Relationship with First Nations

Bridge River Delta Park is situated within the traditional territory of the St'at'imc Nation. BC Parks seeks an ongoing relationship with First Nations to find common interests and direction for the future management of Bridge River Delta Park.

2.0 Values and Roles of the Protected Area

The significance of Bridge River Delta Park within the protected areas system of British Columbia lies in its representation of a broad valley, glacial-fed, braided stream complex that remains in a natural condition. It is a benchmark for the research and understanding of natural processes and an opportunity to compare with similar ecosystems that have been modified by human disturbance.

The key values of the park include the old river channels and extensive gravel bars that support extensive cottonwood stands and riparian habitats. Both the Bridge River and feeding tributaries are an example of intricately braided streams within the Bridge River watershed. The ecosystem type of large Douglas-fir and valley bottom riparian conditions was essentially eliminated outside the park by flooding of valley bottoms by BC Hydro developments.

Tree cover consists largely of mixed old-growth Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine stands with some stands or a component of stands consisting of Englemann spruce, western white pine, subalpine fir, black cottonwood and trembling aspen. Shrubs and herbaceous vegetation cover some of the seasonally inundated gravel bars on the floodplain.

The park contains two Biogeoclimatic Ecosystem Classification variants. It contains 226 hectares of Interior Douglas-fir (IDFdc), or 4.2% of the 5,345 hectares that is protected in British Columbia. Similarly, the park contains 660 hectares of mountain spruce (MSmw2) or 9.7% of the 6,828 hectares that is protected in the province. The remaining 106 hectares of the park is water. It is also within the Southern Chilcotin Ranges

Ecosection, protecting 992 hectares, or 1.1% of the portion of this ecosection that is found within protected areas.

Cold, down-flow winds from the upstream glacier give rise to plants especially adapted to colder conditions.

The park provides spring habitats and cross-valley connections for Grizzly Bear, and habitat for Moose, Mule Deer, Wolverine, Mink and Harlequin Duck. The park is heavily used by Grizzly Bear, especially in the spring when they feed on fresh vegetation before moving upslope to avalanche chutes and alpine areas outside of the park. It is in a key location (between a large lake and ice field) for north/south connectivity and movement of bears and in an area that provides all required seasonal habitats within a relatively short distance. Park habitats are especially important due to previous losses when the Downton Lake reservoir was flooded.

Downton Lake and Bridge River contain Rainbow Trout and Mountain Whitefish. Bull Trout were historically found in Downton Lake, but may now be extirpated; if they still exist here, their population is very low.

No recreational activities are known to occur in Bridge River Delta Park, although it is within a guide outfitting territory and accessible by road for those who wish to visit.

3.0 Management Direction

3.1 Management Objectives and Strategies

The Lillooet LRMP identified the conservation of Grizzly Bear habitat and the associated population as the primary interest in the park. Maintaining the park in an undisturbed condition and maintaining the natural gene pool of species in the area is a priority, with limited use and intrusion by people. Bridge River Delta Park is within the South Chilcotin Ranges Grizzly Bear Population Unit where Grizzly Bears are classified as threatened. Recovery of this population is a provincial objective. The park is well placed to contribute a significant role in this recovery effort.

The character of the flood plain in the park is largely determined by the annual melting cycle and sediment load of the upstream Bridge Glacier. This glacier has receded approximately 1.3 kilometres since 1970, so long-term flows may be affected by changes in climate. However, the contributing ice field is large, which will likely sustain flows well into the future.

Potential impacts of a proposed small hydro development adjacent to the park were raised as a concern. Proposed upstream water diversions could impact riparian function and braiding characteristics by altering the transport of streambed materials and flow characteristics within the river channel. Construction and operation of facilities (e.g., pipes, generating buildings, transmission lines) could impact use and suitability of the area by wildlife. Improved access could attract more visitors, resulting in higher disturbance.

The Downton Lake reservoir has an annual water level fluctuation of approximately 30 to 40 metres. At maximum level, the lake backs up into the park by approximately two kilometres. When drawn down the lake does not enter the park. This impacts approximately 20 percent of the length of the Bridge River that is within the park, altering the natural sediment deposition process and vegetation in this zone.

There is an Environment Canada hydrometric station with associated small building and cable car crossing in the park.

Management Objective	Management Strategies
<p>Ensure the management of the park maximizes Grizzly Bear habitat that contributes to maintaining populations in the area.</p>	<p>Work closely with adjacent land managers to ensure that the bears can continue to migrate uninterrupted to and from the park. Ensuring continuity of movement corridors and screening cover near the park would help maintain effective habitat.</p>
	<p>Work with other agencies to minimize disturbance adjacent to the park.</p>
	<p>Discourage use of the park when Grizzly Bears are present. Support the existing <i>Wildlife Act</i> motor vehicle closure that includes the area surrounding the park.</p>
	<p>Consider adding lands to the north and east to include the full range of known seasonal Grizzly Bear use in the area (e.g., avalanche chutes for summer habitats and higher elevation denning areas) – the full extent would be determined only after detailed inventory of suitable habitats.</p>
<p>Ensure a level of protection that maintains the characteristics of the natural environment.</p>	<p>Work with other agencies to co-ordinate resource management within and adjacent to the park to protect wildlife populations.</p>
	<p>Inventory the park to determine species requirements and ensure required characteristics and features are maintained.</p>
	<p>Provide input to small hydro proposals to determine potential impacts, ensuring that all aspects of species’ requirements are assessed, that adequate mitigation is implemented and ongoing monitoring occurs. Ensure that the cumulative effect of climate change is also considered.</p>
<p>Ensure the park is a secure area for wildlife.</p>	<p>Do not promote the park for recreational activities.</p>
	<p>Inform visitors of the sensitive nature of the park values.</p>
	<p>Implement bear aware strategies.</p>
	<p>Allow only non-destructive and minimally intrusive research and educational activities and low impact recreation, such as hiking, fishing or wildlife viewing.</p>
	<p>Work with other land managers and interested parties to limit access to the park. Allow continued access and maintenance to the hydrometric station but close the access road to the public.</p>
	<p>Allow only day-use visitation (i.e., no overnight opportunities).</p>
	<p>Recommend prohibition of aircraft landings and takeoffs.</p>
	<p>Undertake a consultation process with stakeholders respecting discontinuing hunting and trapping in the park.</p>



3.2 Zoning Plan

In general terms, a zoning plan divides a park into logical management units within which certain activities/uses are permitted and a particular set of management objectives apply. Zoning is often used to physically separate incompatible activities or uses within the park and provides visitors and managers with a quick visual representation and appreciation of how a particular park is managed. Zones are designed to reflect the physical environment, existing patterns of use and the desired level of management and development in a given management unit.

Bridge River Delta Park is zoned in its entirety as Special Natural Feature. The objective of this zone is to protect and present significant natural values, features or processes because of their special character, fragility or natural value. The goal is to protect the natural features found within the park with minimal impact. There are no facilities and recreation will not be promoted. Only research, education or low-intensity activities that are minimally intrusive are encouraged.

4.0 Plan Implementation

4.1 Implementation Plan

Specific projects will be evaluated for priority in relation to the overall protected areas system. BC Parks will continue to approach First Nations in an effort to collaborate on park management. Where needed, BC Parks will seek project-specific funding and partners to implement management strategies.

4.2 High Priority Strategies

The following strategies have been identified as high priorities for implementation:

1. Work closely with adjacent land managers to ensure that the Grizzly Bears can continue to migrate uninterrupted to and from the park.
2. Provide input to small hydro proposals to determine potential impacts, ensuring that all aspects of species' requirements are assessed, that adequate mitigation is implemented and ongoing monitoring occurs. Ensure that the cumulative effect of climate change is also considered.

4.3 Plan Assessment

In order to ensure that the management direction for Bridge River Delta Park remains relevant and effective, BC Parks staff will ensure that the management plan is assessed on a regular basis (at least every 5 years). Minor administrative updates may be identified and completed at any time (e.g.: correct spelling errors, update protected area details where needed), and will be documented according to BC Parks guidelines.

If an internal assessment reveals that the management plan requires updating or substantial new management direction is needed, a formal review by BC Parks may be initiated to determine whether the management plan requires an amendment or if a new management plan is required.

The management plan amendment process or development of a new management plan includes an opportunity for public input.

Appendix 1: Appropriate Use Table

The following table summarizes existing and potential future uses in Bridge River Delta Park that are and are not appropriate in each zone. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all uses that may be considered in this park in the future.

Please note that many appropriate uses are geographically restricted (i.e., only allowed in certain areas of Bridge River Delta Park) or are only appropriate at certain times of the year. Please ensure that you are well informed of any use restrictions as indicated in the table. It is a good idea to review relevant sections of the management plan where indicated in the table.

Appropriate Use Table Legend		
N	Not an appropriate use	The use is not appropriate in the indicated zone. If the use currently exists but the management planning process has determined that the use is no longer appropriate in all or part of the protected area, the management plan will include strategies for ending the activity (e.g., phasing out, closing).
Y	<u>May</u> be an appropriate use	Some level or extent of this use may be appropriate in the zone(s) indicated. If the activity/use already exists, the management plan provides guidance on the appropriate level of use and may address specific restrictions or planned enhancements (e.g., capacity, designated areas for a particular activity, party size, time of year, etc.). For new or expanded uses, this symbol indicates that the use <u>may be considered</u> for further evaluation and approval. The appropriateness of some activities may not be confirmed until a further assessment (e.g., BC Parks Impacts Assessment Process) or evaluation process (e.g., park use permit adjudication) is completed.
Y1	Appropriate use as per section 30 of the <i>Park Act</i>	Indicates that the use is not normally appropriate in a park but was occurring pursuant to an encumbrance or Crown authorization at the time the park was established

Activity/Facility	Special Natural Features Zone	Comments
Recreational Activities/Uses		
Aircraft Landing/Takeoff	N	Recommend placing in Schedule A of the <i>Park, Conservancy and Recreation Area Regulation</i>
Boating (human powered and electrical)	Y	Downton Lake only
Boating (combustion engine)	Y	Downton Lake only
Camping (designated sites)	N	
Camping (wilderness style-undesignated sites)	N	
Fish Stocking	N	
Fishing	Y	
Hang Gliding and Para Gliding Launching	N	
Hiking	Y	
Hunting	Y	See strategies on page 8.
Land-based Mechanized Activity (e.g., mountain biking)	N	
Land-based Motorized Activity (e.g., 4x4, motorcycles, ATV-not including snowmobiles, snowcats or aircraft landings)	N	
Horse and Pack Animal Use	N	
Skiing (downhill and cross-country track based)	N	
Skiing (backcountry)	Y	
Snowmobiling	N	
Snowcat Use	N	
Recreation Facilities/Infrastructure		
Boat Launches	N	
Boat Wharves and Docks	N	
Cabins, Huts and Shelters (as defined in the Fixed Roof Accommodation Policy)	N	
Lodges (as defined in the Fixed Roof Accommodation Policy)	N	
Campgrounds (vehicle accessed))	N	
Picnic Areas (vehicle accessed)	N	
Designated Camping Sites (not vehicle accessed)	N	
Mooring Buoys	N	
Parking Lots	N	
Roads	Y1	Existing road to water monitoring structure only, but not for public use.
Ski Facilities (vehicle accessed and serviced)	N	
Trails	N	
Visitor Information Buildings	N	

Activity/Facility	Special Natural Features Zone	Comments
Other Activities/Infrastructure		
Commercial Filming	Y	
Grazing	N	
Trapping	Y	See strategies on page 8.
Utility Corridors	N	