

**Skeena Region**

# **MANAGEMENT DIRECTION STATEMENT**

**November 2003**



**for Damdochax Protected Area**

Ministry of Water, Land  
and Air Protection  
Environmental Stewardship  
Division

# Damdochax Protected Area

## Approvals Page


### Forward

This management direction statement for Damdochax Protected Area provides management direction until Environmental Stewardship Division revises the plan or prepares a more detailed management plan. Ongoing consultation between Environmental Stewardship Division and First Nations may require changes to this management direction statement. Aboriginal traditional activities and uses are honoured and respected within the protected area.

Implementation of strategies identified in the management direction statement (MDS) will be dependent on available funding and Environmental Stewardship Division priorities.

Ongoing consultation with First Nations may result in the need to amend this plan in the future.

### Approvals

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Manager  
Skeena Region  
Environmental Stewardship Division

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Environmental Stewardship Division

**Environmental Stewardship Division developed this management direction statement through direction received from the Fort St. James Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP)**

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# **Damdochax Protected Area**

## **Management Direction Statement**

### **Introduction**

#### **Purpose of the Management Direction Statement**

Management direction statements (MDS) provide strategic management direction for protected areas that do not have an approved management plan. Management direction statements describe protected area values, management issues and concerns, a management strategy focused on immediate priority objectives and strategies, and direction from other planning processes. While the MDS identifies strategies, the completion of all these strategies is dependent on funding and funding procedures. All development associated with these strategies is subject to the BC Parks and Protected Areas Impact Assessment Process.

#### **Context**

The provincial government established Damdochax Protected Area by an Order in Council 523/2001 under the *Environmental Land Use Act* in April 2001. The Fort St. James Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) identified Damdochax Protected Area as a Goal 1 protected area in recognition of its important wildlife habitat, riparian values and salmon population. The provincial government designated Damdochax Protected Area to allow the possibility of road development in the future.

Damdochax Protected Area covers 8,129 hectares of the broad Slamgeesh River Valley, headwaters of the Skeena River, and next to the headwaters of the Nass River, about 130 kilometres north of the Hazelton communities and about 80 kilometres east of Highway 37. The protected area is remote and accessible by air.

The protected area lies within the asserted traditional territory of the Gitx̄san First Nation. Damdochax is an altered Gitx̄san word meaning “black water”.

At the junction between two of the largest watersheds in northern British Columbia, wildlife use the Damdochax Protected Area as a travel corridor. The protected area contains important cultural heritage values including ancient First Nations village sites and trails. A portion of the Telegraph Trail runs through Damdochax Protected Area. Outdoor recreation use is limited to wilderness opportunities because of the protected area’s remote location. Sustut Provincial Park and Sustut Protected Area to the east and a concentration of provincial parks and protected areas, including Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Provincial Park, Gladys Lake Ecological Reserve, Tatlatui Provincial Park and Stikine River Provincial Park to the north, also conserve remote landscapes and provide outstanding wilderness outdoor recreation opportunities.

## Protected Area Attributes

### Conservation

- Conserves a portion of the Omineca Mountains Ecoregion, Eastern Skeena Mountains Ecoregion. 9% of this ecoregion is protected in five different protected areas; Damdochax Protected Area contributes 8% to the overall protected area representation of the Eastern Skeena Mountains Ecoregion.
- Contributes minimally (2%) to the overall protected area representation of Northern Skeena Mountains Ecoregion. Only 3% of this ecoregion is protected, with Swan Lake Kispiox River Provincial Park (56%) and Ningunsaw Provincial Park (30%) being the largest contributors to this under-represented ecoregion.
- Protects conservation values of Damdochax/Slamgeesh area of interest that the Prince Rupert Regional Protected Areas Team ranked as “very high”.
- Protects a range of ecosystems; about 6,000 hectares of SBSmc2 (Sub-boreal Spruce moist cold biogeoclimatic subzone, Babine variant); approximately 1,000 hectares of ESSFwv (Engelmann Spruce Sub-alpine Fir wet very cold), ESSF mc (Engelmann Spruce Sub-alpine Fir moist cold), AT (alpine tundra); negligible ICHmc1 (Interior Cedar-Hemlock moist cold, Nass variant).
- Contributes minimally to the overall protected area representation of 4 under-represented biogeoclimatic subzones: ESSFmc (Engelmann Spruce-Sub-alpine Fir moist cold), ESSFwv (Engelmann Spruce-Sub-alpine Fir wet very cold), ICHmc1 (Interior Cedar-Hemlock moist cold, Nass variant), and SBSmc2 (Sub-boreal Spruce moist cold, Babine variant). Damdochax also contributes negligibly to the overall protected area representation of the well-represented Alpine Tundra subzone.
- Contains extensive and productive lake and wetlands in a broad valley.
- Protects the most important coho salmon run in the upper Skeena River system along with a small but important sockeye run.
- Conserves steelhead that may move between the Skeena River and Nass River systems at the Slamgeesh/Damdochax boundary (genetically identical stock; drainage distinction is indistinct and may change following flooding).
- Preserves the major grizzly bear (blue-listed) travel corridor in the area; seasonally high concentrations of grizzlies—salmon populations are high at different seasons in the Damdochax and Slamgeesh rivers (chinook in August in the Damdochax River; coho in October in the Slamgeesh River), extending feeding opportunities for bears.
- Protects wolverine (blue-listed) habitat.

### Recreation and Tourism

- Contains outdoor recreation, use and appreciation values that the Prince Rupert Protected Areas Team ranked as “high”.
- Presents excellent backcountry recreation opportunities including hiking, wildlife viewing, fishing and hunting in a broad valley with a mountainous setting.
- Includes a portion of the Telegraph Trail running along the Damdochax River Valley, the Slamgeesh River Valley and then to the Skeena River (Gitx̱san House Wing Chief has cleared 10 kilometres of trail and will be clearing more).



## **Commercial Business Opportunities**

- Provides moderate to high commercial business opportunities for guided hunting and fishing activities. (See Appendix 1 for activities allowed in this protected area).
- Provides moderate commercial business opportunities for guided interpretation tours focused on the cultural heritage and wilderness special features of this protected area. The remoteness of the protected area is a major obstacle for potential businesses.

## **Cultural Heritage**

- Protects an extremely important First Nation cultural heritage site comprising a small village site on Slamgeesh Lake (Galaahlgiiist). This village site linked with larger village sites on Damdochax Lake and the central village at Gitangasx on the Skeena River upstream of the Slamgeesh River mouth.
- Contains a wealth of Git<sub>x</sub>sanimux place names (for village and camp locations, aquatic and terrestrial features) that reveal a long history in the area.
- Protects First Nations cultural heritage values including several old village sites (two ancient), trails, trapping stops, cache pits and three archaeological sites that contain obsidian arrowheads.
- Conserves land and water used for First Nation hunting, fishing and gathering; Git<sub>x</sub>san people travelled to the Slamgeesh in October to catch coho that they dried for their winter's food. They also travelled along traplines. Git<sub>x</sub>san House members still use the area for traditional cultural activities.
- Preserves prehistoric and historic (e.g., the Telegraph Trail) travel and trading routes. A Telegraph Trail cabin site lies within the protected area.

## **Significance in the Protected Areas System**

- Protects coast – interior ecosystems and a critical wildlife travel corridor between two of northern British Columbia's largest watersheds.
- Protects some of the most diverse cultural features in the Skeena Region; cultural features ranked highly diverse and moderately rare in Conservation Risk Assessment.
- Provides exceptional wilderness recreation and cultural heritage education opportunities.

## **Land Uses, Tenures and Interests**

### **Access**

Access is by aircraft. No road access exists. Highway 37 is 80 kilometres to the west of Damdochax Protected Area.

### **Existing Tenures, Alienations and Encumbrances**

- Covered by three trapping licenses - 617T001, 617T002, 617T003. Environmental Stewardship Division has not issued any park use permits for trapping activities.
- One guide-outfitting tenure; the tenure is under a 10-year lease to Git<sub>x</sub>san House Gwinin Nitxw. Environmental Stewardship Division has not issued a park use permit to allow guide-outfitting in the protected area.



## **Existing Land Use Activities and Facilities**

- Used seasonally by Git<sub>x</sub>san House members for hunting, fishing and gathering.
- Contains three guide-outfitter cabins and a woodshed on Slamgeesh Lake. Git<sub>x</sub>san fisheries researchers use another guide-outfitter cabin at Damsilgwit Lake from the end of April until the beginning of November.
- Contains old collapsed cabins which indicate prior human occupation.
- Both the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and the Git<sub>x</sub>san Watershed Authority conduct fisheries management activities (i.e., mark/recapture studies) at Slamgeesh Lake and at a weir on Damsilgwit Lake.
- Receives little recreational use at present (use is further north of the protected area in the Damdochax Valley).



## Adjacent Patterns of Land Use

- The northern edge of the protected area borders the Damdochax River watershed, the headwaters of the Nass River. This area is within the Kalum Forest District. The Damdochax River watershed was part of the original proposed protected area (i.e., Damdochax/Slamgeesh area of interest) and remains an area of interest, awaiting a Nass land and resource management planning table. Wilderness outdoor recreation use of the Damdochax River watershed is higher than in the Slamgeesh River watershed.
- The western edge of the protected area borders Canyon Lake Resource Management Zone designated by the Fort St. James LRMP as a multi-value management area because of important wildlife habitat and lack of knowledge about the area. A Co-ordinated Access Management Plan will be developed.
- The eastern edge borders the Sustut Resource Management Zone designated by the Fort St. James LRMP as a multi-value management area. This management zone will emphasize special management for fisheries and wildlife values. In addition, a Co-ordinated Access Management Plan will be developed with access management attention given to those areas next to Damdochax Protected Area. Access management must “...consider Park Management Plan objectives when planning/developing industrial access immediately adjacent to the protected area”.
- River rafting tours float down the Sustut and Skeena rivers south of the protected area.

## First Nations Interests

- Gwinin Nitxw and Wii Minosik Houses of the Gitx̄san First Nation have an interest in the protected area because it lies within their asserted traditional territory.
- Gwinin Nitxw House is interested in the protected area because of their plans for cultural, ecological and heritage management over the entire House territory which includes Damdochax Protected Area.
- Other First Nations interests include:
  - Maintaining a traditional lifestyle including trapping, fishing and acting as caretakers of the land;
  - Recognition of the House system;
  - Co-management; “working together in terms of all decisions”;
  - Designation of the protected area as a cultural heritage protected area providing opportunities for cultural renewal for youth, cultural tourism, a living museum on the land;
  - Ecological protection, including protection of grizzly bear, wolf, beaver, spawning salmonids and other wildlife;
  - Cultural heritage protection;
  - Maintenance of traditional berry patches;
    - ⇒ First Nations maintained shrub communities (low-bush blueberries and huckleberries) by burning, until about 50 years ago, and consider some sites as having excellent potential for burning.
  - Protection of an adjacent area to the north (Wii Minosik House territory along Damdochax Valley).

## **Other Agency Interests**

- The Department of Fisheries and Oceans Conservation and Protection branches have an interest in salmonid values. Slangeesh Creek is the site of salmon enhancement and monitoring.
- The Ministry of Water Land and Air Protection, Skeena Region Fish and Wildlife Science and Allocation Section, has an interest in wildlife, particularly grizzly bear. No wildlife inventories have been completed in the protected area to-date.
- The Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, Archaeology Branch has an interest in the archaeological sites.
- The Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, British Columbia Conservation Data Centre (CDC) has an interest in the species at risk in Damdochax Protected Area.

## **Private and Public Stakeholder Interests**

- Trapline holders have an interest in the protected area because their traplines fall within the protected area.
- The guide-outfitter (currently under lease to Gitx̱san House) is interested in the protected area because it lies within his guide-outfitter territory.
- Backcountry wilderness users are interested in the protected area because of its outstanding backcountry outdoor recreation opportunities and natural values.
- Ecologists are interested in the protected area because of its significant natural values, particularly mammals and salmon.

## **Damdochax Protected Area Role Statement**

The primary role of Damdochax Protected Area is to conserve an interior temperate rainforest and sub-boreal and subalpine ecosystems in a broad river valley with productive lakes, extensive wetlands and high wildlife values. The valley, situated between two of the largest watersheds in northern British Columbia, is particularly important to salmonid fish species and grizzly bear. The presence in the area of extremely significant cultural heritage features, including important archaeological sites, ancient First Nations trails and village sites, a part of the Telegraph Trail and areas used today for hunting, fishing and gathering, further enhances Damdochax Protected Area's conservation role.

Damdochax Protected Area performs a secondary, but important, outdoor recreation role. The protected area presents impressive outdoor recreation opportunities in a relatively undisturbed natural wilderness setting. Moderate to excellent opportunities exist for backcountry hikers, fishers and hunters who are able to reach this remote river valley.

Damdochax Protected Area also plays a tertiary role for research and education; providing opportunities to study the extensive natural and cultural heritage values conserved within its boundaries.

## Management Commitments and Issues

### Direction from Previous Planning

The Fort St. James LRMP recommended Damdochax Protected Area for protection in 1999 because of its wildlife habitat, riparian and sockeye values. The LRMP does not provide specific management direction for Damdochax Protected Area, but does provide general direction for all protected areas (See Appendix A of the Fort St. James LRMP).

### Management Issues

Environmental Stewardship Division identified the following management issues.

Theme	Issue
Protected area expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Damdochax Protected Area does not include some of the original area of interest in the Nass River watershed because the Fort St. James LRMP could only consider that portion within the Fort St. James Forest District.</li> </ul>
Protecting ecological values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The flora and fauna of Damdochax Protected Area are relatively unknown because an inventory of these values is incomplete.</li> <li>• The protected area's ecological integrity may be jeopardized by the development of a proposed road through the protected area to provide access to Damsilgwit forest values or as part of the Stewart – Omineca Resource Road (one proposed route runs through the Damdochax River Valley).</li> </ul>
Protecting outdoor recreation values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wilderness outdoor recreation and cultural heritage opportunities may not be sustained or achieved without collaboration between Environmental Stewardship Division, the Gitx̄san Houses and wilderness recreation businesses.</li> </ul>
Protecting cultural heritage values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing visitor use may place archaeological sites at risk to vandalism.</li> <li>• Linking the Telegraph Trail to the Sloane Connector Road (a proposed road to the south of the protected area) increases the risks to cultural heritage values from vandalism.</li> </ul>
Protecting First Nations' values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The best management regime for the protected area values may not be achieved because Environmental Stewardship Division and the Gitx̄san Houses have not developed a management agreement (as full partners) for management of the protected area.</li> <li>• The renaming and possible redesignating of Damdochax Protected Area to Damdochax Cultural Heritage Protected Area remain unresolved because the government established the protected area so recently.</li> </ul>

### Management Direction

The vision for Damdochax Protected Area is of a remote wilderness valley, home to salmon and grizzly bear, and a site for sensitive cultural and ecological education. The following table describes management strategies to deal with identified management issues. In addition, Appendix 1 contains a list of acceptable activities, uses and facilities for this protected area.

## Priority Management Objectives and Strategies

Objective	Strategy
To expand protected area boundaries to achieve a more complete protected area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support expansion of the protected area to include Damdochax Valley (as defined in the Regional Protected Area Team, Area of Interest report) and the Damsilgwit drainage.</li> <li>• Support the implementation of a Nass land and resource management planning table.</li> <li>• Work with Gitxsan House representatives to expand protected area boundaries.</li> </ul>
To protect the protected area's natural values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake an inventory of the fauna and flora in the protected area.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Focus the highest priority on an accurate survey of salmon and other fish populations and their habitats;</li> <li>➢ Direct the second priority at compiling data on grizzly and black bear populations and their habitat; and</li> <li>➢ Complete this inventory before any commitment to road access is considered.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Collaborate with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Gitxsan Watershed Authority to inventory, monitor and manage fish, as necessary.</li> <li>• Collaborate with the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Skeena Region Fish and Wildlife Science Allocation Section to inventory, monitor and manage grizzly bears as necessary.</li> <li>• Investigate the potential effects on the protected area's natural environment should industrial interests propose road development through the protected area.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ Work cooperatively with the BC Environmental Assessment Office, the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection (i.e., Skeena Region Fish and Wildlife Science and Allocation Section), the Ministry of Energy and Mines and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to document and mitigate for the potential effects of road development within Damdochax Protected Area.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Contact the trapline owners to place their trapping operations affecting the protected area under valid park use permits.</li> <li>• Contact the guide-outfitter to place this operation affecting the protected area under a valid park use permit.</li> </ul>
To enhance the protected area's outdoor recreation opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Gitxsan House representatives and wilderness recreation businesses to design sensitive, sustainable and appropriate wilderness recreation and cultural education opportunities for the protected area.</li> </ul>
To conserve the protected area's cultural heritage values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with Gitxsan House representatives to investigate and collate existing information on cultural heritage values.</li> <li>• Work with Gitxsan House representatives to monitor cultural heritage values (particularly archaeological sites and artifacts) and act appropriately to protect these values; develop a cultural heritage management plan in conjunction with Gitxsan House representatives.</li> </ul>

Objective	Strategy
To protect First Nation interest and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with Gitx̄san House representatives to discuss management actions within the protected area and to develop ecological and cultural heritage protection activities, as necessary.</li> <li>• Investigate the possibility of renaming and redesignating the protected area as “Damdochax Cultural Heritage Protected Area”.</li> <li>• Collaborate with Gitx̄san House representatives to encourage a Gitx̄san presence on the land to minimise vandalism and the loss of cultural heritage values.</li> <li>• Control outdoor recreation visitor use of the protected area to minimise potential vandalism and destruction of cultural heritage values.</li> <li>• Consult with Gitx̄san House representatives before undertaking any development activities</li> </ul>
To provide information to the public about the protected area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure information about Damdochax Protected Area on the official Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection web site is accurate and current.</li> <li>• Emphasise the protected area’s conservation role rather than its outdoor recreation themes.</li> </ul>

## Consultation and Future Planning

Environmental Stewardship Division will continue consultation with Gwinin Nitxw House and initiate consultation with Wii Minosik House about the protection of conservation and cultural heritage values, boundary expansion, and the renaming and re-designation of the protected area. Environmental Stewardship Division will consult with the Gitx̄san Houses and with wilderness recreation businesses to plan opportunities for wilderness recreation and cultural education.

## Zoning Plan

All of Damdochax Protected Area is zoned Wilderness Recreation (see Figure 3 - Zoning Map) which entails the following:

**Objective:** To protect a remote, undisturbed natural landscape and to provide backcountry recreation opportunities dependent on a pristine environment where air access may be permitted to designated sites.

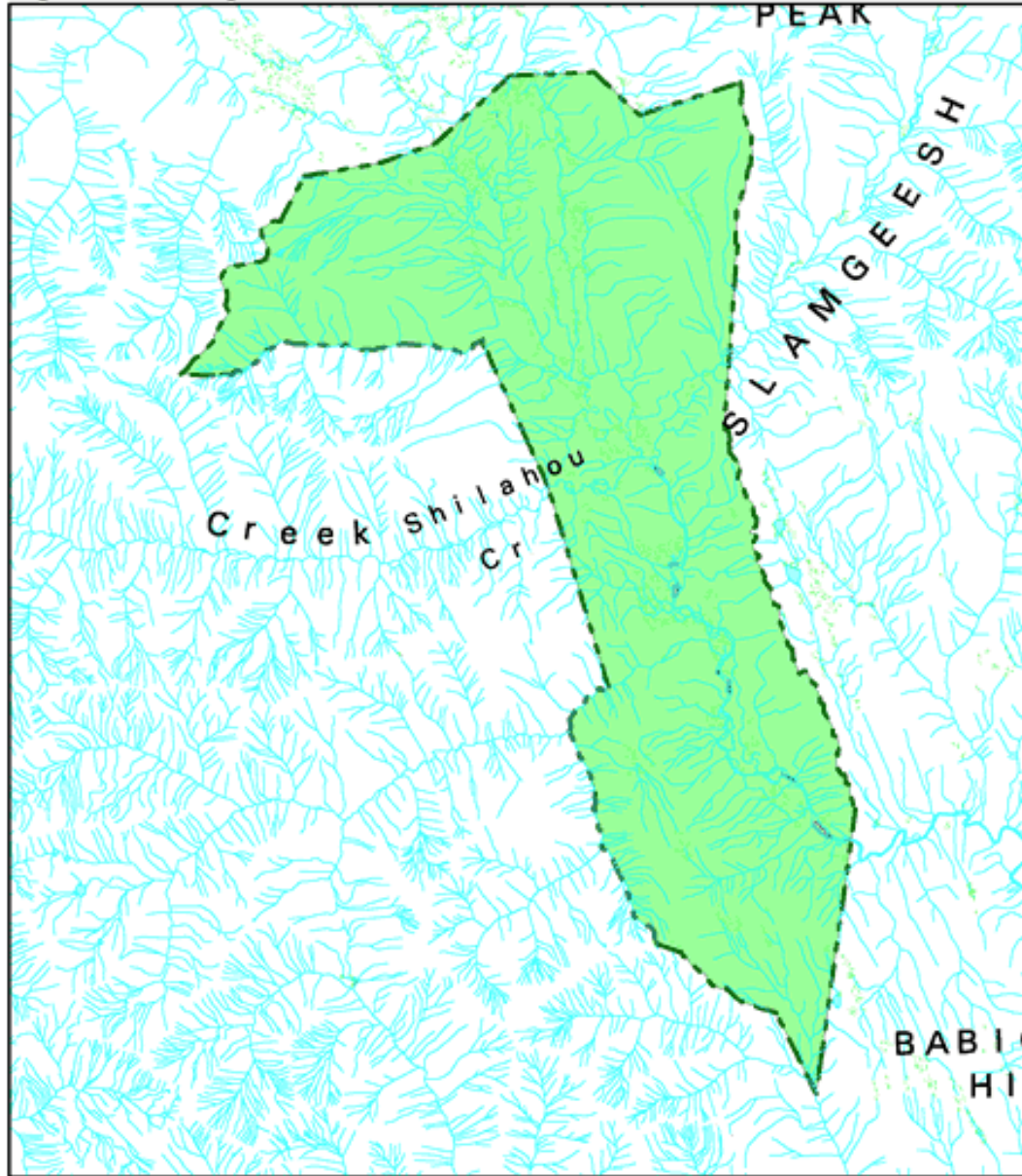
**Zone Description:** Covers the entire protected area (8,129 hectares).

**Management Guidelines:** Oriented to protecting a pristine environment. Management actions are minimal and not evident. Managed to ensure low visitor use levels. Visitor access may be restricted to protect the natural environment and visitor experience.

If a road is located in the protected area a Natural Environment Zone should be considered along the road corridor.



Figure 3: Zoning

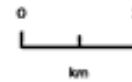
Damdochax Protected Area



Projection: UTM Zone 9  
Datum: NAD83



 Wilderness Recreation  
 Protected Area Boundary



Produced in Jan 2003 for Ministry  
of Water, Land and Air Protection

This is a visual representation  
only and should not be used for  
legal purposes.



**Appendix 1. Damdochax Protected Area  
Table of Acceptable Uses, Activities and Facilities**

Activity/Use/Facility	Acceptable Uses
Aboriginal traditional activities and uses	Y
Hunting	Y
Fishing	Y
Trapping	Y
Grazing (domestic livestock)	N
Recreational gold panning/rock hounding	N
Utility corridors	N
Communication sites	N
Horse use/pack animals	M
Guide outfitting (hunting)	Y
Guide outfitting (fishing)	Y
Guide outfitting (nature tours)	Y
Guide outfitting (river rafting)	N
Cat-assisted skiing	N
Ski hills	N
Commercial recreation (facility-based)	N
Commercial recreation (non-facility-based)	Y
Backcountry huts	M
Water control structures-for fish assessment only	Y
Fish stocking and enhancement	M
Road access subject to LRMP direction and appropriate review process	M
Off-road access (snowmobiling)	N
Off-road access (motorised)	N
Off-road access (mechanical activities)	N
Motorised water access	N
Aircraft access	Y
Fire management (suppression) – subject to fire management plan	Y
Fire management (prescribed fire management)	M
Fire management (prevention)	N
Forest insect/disease control	N1
Noxious weed control	N1
Exotic insect/disease control	N1
Scientific research (specimen collection)	M
Scientific research (manipulative activities)	M

Y = allowed subject to conditions identified in the management direction statement or management plan

M = may be permitted if compatible with protected area objectives

N = not allowed

N1 = allowed for expressed management purposes only

N2 = present and allowed to continue, but not normally allowed