
Approved:



Effective Date: August 6, 2025

Relationship to Previous Policy: This policy replaces all previous policy regarding permits for ecological reserves

Ecological Reserves

Ecological Reserve Permits

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out where permits may be issued, and for what activities, within established ecological reserves. This policy will provide direction on permit requirements and restrictions for allowed activities within ecological reserves.

Scope

This policy applies to ecological reserve permits, and activities and use of ecological reserve lands that require a permit. Park use permits and resource use permits, as well as activities and use of parks, protected areas, recreation areas and conservancies that require a permit, are not addressed by this policy.

Definitions

“**ecological reserve**” for the purpose of this policy means Crown land established or continued as an ecological reserve under the *Ecological Reserve Act* or the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*

“**ecological reserve permit**” means a permit issued under section 5.1 of the *Ecological Reserve Act* authorizing use and occupation of an ecological reserve for ecological scientific research or educational purposes

“**ecological scientific research**” means research that is concerned with any aspect of the ecology of an ecological reserve

“**educational purposes**” means use of an ecological reserve to educate the public on the natural features and functions of the ecological reserve, and on the provincial network of ecological reserves, and may include an educational program run by an institution, individual, organization or business

“**park**” for the purpose of this policy means Crown land established or continued as a park, protected area, recreation area, or conservancy under the *Park Act*, the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*, or the *Environment and Land Use Act*, and does not include ecological reserves

Policy

1.1.1 Requirement for Ecological Reserve Permit

Ecological scientific research and educational activities may only take place within an ecological reserve as authorized by a valid ecological reserve permit. Park use permits do not apply within ecological reserves and do not authorize activities within ecological reserve boundaries. If an application proposes activities that will occur both on land within a park and within an ecological reserve, a separate application for a park use permit must be submitted for activities within a park.

1.1.2 Activities Authorized Under Ecological Reserve Permit

Ecological reserve permits can only be issued for ecological scientific research or educational purposes that are consistent with the purposes for which ecological reserves may be established. Use of an ecological reserve for ecological research or educational purposes may be permitted for the study of:

- a) productivity and other aspects of the natural environment;
- b) representative examples of natural ecosystems in British Columbia;
- c) recovery of a natural ecosystem that has been modified by human beings;
- d) rare or endangered native plants and animals that are preserved in their natural habitat;
or
- e) unique and rare examples of botanical, zoological or geological phenomena.

Proposed research or educational activities that are not consistent with the purposes listed under section 2 of the *Ecological Reserve Act* cannot be permitted.

1.1.2.1 Conditions included in Permit

Conditions will be included in the permit to protect the ecological reserve and its natural resources from potential impacts. Where collection of plant and animal specimens, soil samples, etc., are permitted, restrictions may be included in the permit on where collections are to be housed (e.g., public museums or post-secondary institutions).

1.1.2.2 Access

Where necessary and incidental to the purpose for which a permit is issued, entry into and access through an ecological reserve may be authorized, and the means of conveyance/transportation specified in the permit. Authorization of motorized vehicles or equipment will only be approved in exceptional circumstances and where a BC Parks Impact Assessment confirms adverse impacts to the ecological reserve are not likely to occur. Exceptional circumstances would include those where the applicant can demonstrate that there is no other feasible means of access to the study site other than via motorized vehicle.

1.1.2.3 Introduction of species

Introduction or re-introduction of a species may be permitted if necessary and incidental to the purpose for which a permit is issued, where the purpose of introduction or re-introduction is supported by the BC Parks Conservation Policy, and no adverse impacts are identified through the BC Parks Impact Assessment process.

1.1.3 Application for Ecological Reserve Permit

Applications for ecological reserve permits must be received in writing on the BC Parks Application form (signed and dated) and must contain the following information:

- a) a description of the proposed use;
- b) a description of the areas of land to be affected, with an accompanying map, including UTM coordinates of study areas if applicable;
- c) a description of the means of access to be used;
- d) the duration of the proposed use;
- e) the ecological impact of any activities that will be undertaken within the reserve under the permit;
- f) the number of individuals that will be entering the reserve under the permit and, where possible, their names; and
- g) the name of the individual who will direct the proposed research or educational program.

The form must be filled out with enough detail to describe the proposed use, the areas being applied for, and be signed and dated by the applicant or someone authorized to sign on behalf of the applicant.

1.1.3.1 Permits for Educational Purposes

Applications for a permit for educational purposes must include an educational program plan. The educational program plan must outline, in addition to the general application requirements, the following information:

- a) the purpose of the program;
- b) how the program will teach participants about the natural features and functions of the ecological reserve; and,
- c) how the program will educate participants on the role of the particular ecological reserve(s), both as a separate designation and in the context of the provincial system of ecological reserves and protected areas.

1.1.3.2 Eligibility

Applicants must be eligible to hold an ecological reserve permit. The legal entities described below are eligible to hold an ecological reserve permit:

- Individuals who are 19 years of age or older;

- Corporations which are incorporated or registered in British Columbia¹ (under the *Business Corporations Act* (BC));
- Registered partnerships, cooperatives, and non-profit societies (a society incorporated under the *Societies Act* (BC) which are formed under the relevant provincial statutes;
- Educational Institutions;
- First Nations peoples applying through band corporations or Indian Bands and Tribal Councils (Band or Tribal Councils require a Band Council Resolution a) authorizing the council to enter into the permit, and b) giving the signatories of the permit document the ability to sign on behalf of the Band); or
- Municipalities, regional districts, other government entities, and associations.

Where an administrative penalty under the *Ecological Reserve Act* has been imposed, and the person fails to pay the administrative penalty according to the requirements of s7 of the Administrative Penalties (Ecological Reserve) Regulation, they are not eligible to apply for a new ecological reserve permit or to amend an existing permit. Applications received by persons ineligible to hold an ecological reserve permit will not be accepted.

1.1.3.3 Review of Applications

The adjudication period for all permit applications will be 140 days from time of receipt of application. If there are expected delays in adjudication due to the complexity of the application and/or management required for the specific ecological reserve, BC Parks will notify the applicant.

Applications may be subject to consultation with First Nations. The Province of British Columbia has a legal duty to consult and, where required, accommodate First Nations when a Crown activity or decision may adversely impact claimed or proven Aboriginal Rights and Title, as well as Treaty Rights.

1.1.3.4 Criteria for Review

All applications will be reviewed to determine whether, in the opinion of BC Parks, the application meets the following criteria.

- i. The activity is compatible with the identified management objectives for the ecological reserve(s) involved in the proposal.
- ii. For applications for research activities, that the research will contribute to:
 - The scientific knowledge of the ecological reserve itself, or
 - Scientific knowledge of ecological values across the broader landscape (e.g., by serving as an “reference site” of relatively low anthropogenic disturbance, studying recovery of an ecosystem from human disturbance, etc.), or
 - The preservation of unique specimens within the ecological reserve for future reference and study.

¹ We are aware that not all businesses need to register to do business in BC, as there are some exemptions under the provincial *Business Corporations Act*. Applicants are informed at the time of permit validation that it is their responsibility to be in compliance with the *Business Corporations Act* (BC), which may include registering their business if they are an extra-provincial corporation.

- iii. The research activities or proposed educational uses will not cause significant adverse impacts. Impacts of a permit application will be assessed using BC Parks Impact Assessment Policy and Procedures. This may include consideration of cumulative effects of disturbances on the ecological reserve over time.
- iv. The research or educational activity proposal demonstrates that it is necessary to locate the research project or study within an ecological reserve, as opposed to other locations.
- v. Any impacts to the ecological reserve from the scientific research or educational activities will be outweighed by the benefits to the ecological reserve.
- vi. For applications for educational purposes, the ecological reserve(s) on the application are not included on the schedule of closed reserves in the Ecological Reserve Regulation.

1.1.4 Compliance with Other Legislation

An ecological reserve permit authorizes use and occupancy of land within an ecological reserve for purposes outlined in the permit. The Permittee is responsible for obtaining any other authorizations required in order to conduct the activity.

1.1.5 No Transfer, Sub-license or Assignment of Permit

An ecological reserve permit will not be transferred, sub-licensed or assigned to another party. Any person wishing to conduct activities within an ecological reserve must apply to the Province for a permit in which rights may be granted to them for use and occupancy of the land.

1.1.6 Insurance Requirements

All permits will be assessed in respect to risk to the Province as a result of the use and/or activity authorized in an ecological reserve permit. As part of the review process for a new or renewed permit application, insurance requirements will be assessed to ensure:

- Insurance requirements in the permit are consistent with provincial standards;
- Protection for the Province is provided; and
- There is clear direction regarding whether insurance is required or not, the type of insurance and the appropriate amount of insurance.

The Permittee must obtain and pay for all insurance as required by the permit. The Province, its officers and servants must be added as additional insured under the policy with respect to the Permittee's operations as authorized by the permit, and the insurance policy must also contain a cross-liability clause.

1.1.7 Term Length

Ecological reserve permits must be issued with a finite term length. Permit terms will be defined in years, months or days with a predetermined expiry date, and may be limited to a single entry. Term lengths will be determined by the nature of the activity and should not exceed what is reasonable for the proposed research or educational activity to be completed.

1.1.8 Expiration

Expiry of an ecological reserve permit occurs on the day that the 'expiration date' of the permit has been reached. The expiration date will clearly be stated in the permit document. All rights granted under the permit will cease to exist on expiration or termination of the permit, but the permit may specify where obligations of the Permittee survive the expiration or termination. If a Permittee wishes to renew their permit, application to renew must be received prior to the expiration date. If

no renewal application has been received prior to the expiration date of the permit, and the Permittee wishes to continue their activities, the Permittee must submit an application for a new permit.

1.1.9 Suspension, Cancellation or Modification of Ecological Reserve Permit

An ecological reserve permit may be suspended, cancelled or modified if it is considered advisable by the minister for the protection of the ecological reserve or its natural resources. A permit may be cancelled for reasons including:

- a) activities authorized by the permit may cause, or have caused, unauthorized or unanticipated damage to the reserve;
- b) a beneficial use is not being, or has not been, made of the permit;
- c) the terms or conditions of the permit have been broken, or the regulation has been violated by the Permittee;
- d) the Permittee has willfully misrepresented information; or
- e) the ecological reserve is closed by the Province.

The minister is not required to conduct a hearing before suspending, cancelling or modifying a permit.

A permit may also be cancelled by mutual agreement between the Province and the Permittee.

1.1.10 Ecological Scientific Research Reports Required

Where research has been permitted within an ecological reserve under an ecological reserve permit, a report must be submitted within 6 months of completion of the project. The obligation to submit a report will survive the expiration or termination of a permit. Reports are to be submitted to FrontCounter BC according to the address specified in the issued permit, and must include, at a minimum, the following information (if applicable to the project):

- a) a statement of the methodology used in the research;
- b) an inventory of any plants or animals identified during the research;
- c) geographic coordinates (UTMs) for any unique plants, animals or geological forms;
- d) a description of land forms and soil conditions in the research area; and
- e) a statement of the results obtained and any conclusions or recommendations reached as a result of the research.

Permittees may also be required as a term and condition of their permit to submit a copy of other materials produced as part of the overall research project, including journal articles, theses, reports, etc. These materials, which may include reports or data, may be required to be submitted to provincial systems to contribute to public knowledge on ecological reserves.

1.1.11 Acknowledgement of Use of the Ecological Reserve

Where any press release, announcement, publication or report is released by the Permittee relating to the activity authorized by the ecological reserve permit, the Province, and the ecological reserve, must be acknowledged therein.

Related Guidance/Considerations

BC Parks Conservation Program Policies

<https://intranet.gov.bc.ca/env/card/parks-policy-manual/conservation-management>

BC Parks Impact Assessment Process:

<https://bcparks.ca/conservation/impact-assessment-process/>

Ecological Reserve Act

https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96103_01

Ecological Reserve Regulation

https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/196_2023

APPROVED AMENDMENTS:

Effective Date:	Summary of Changes:
2025-08-06	Updates to the policy to align with changes to the <i>Ecological Reserve Act</i> and Ecological Reserve Regulation brought into effect in May 3, 2024 and July 18, 2023, respectively.