

Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy Management Plan

February 2012



Squamish Nation



Cover photo: View of Mt. Ossa and Pelion from the Conservancy.

Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy Management Plan

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Acknowledgements

The Squamish Nation and BC Parks jointly prepared this management plan. The management planning process was coordinated by Vicki Haberl, Regional Planning Section Head, BC Parks, Ministry of Environment. Bryan Evans of Dovetail Consulting Inc. prepared management plan drafts for review by BC Parks and the Squamish Nation, under contract to BC Parks.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Management Plan Purpose

The purpose of this management plan is to guide the management of the Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy. The management plan:

- establishes long-term strategic direction for the conservancy;
- sets out a vision for the future state of the conservancy;
- addresses current issues affecting that long-term vision;
- guides management of the natural environment;
- identifies social, ceremonial and cultural uses by the Squamish Nation;
- defines appropriate levels and types of recreational activities and the location and kinds of facilities that will be developed to accommodate those uses; and
- identifies acceptable uses of the conservancy's natural resources.

1.2 Planning Area

The Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy is approximately 1,112 hectares in size and is adjacent to the northern boundary of Tantalus Park in southwestern British Columbia. The conservancy represents approximately 12% of the 9,164 hectare Esté-tiwilh <u>K</u>wé<u>k</u>waye<u>x</u> Kwelháynexw ta S<u>kwx</u>wú7mesh Temixw, or Squamish Nation Wild Spirit Place, on the west side of the Squamish River between the Ashlu and Elaho watersheds (See Figures 1 and 2).

The conservancy is also adjacent to Yelhixw, a Squamish Nation village site, at the confluence of the Squamish River and Ashlu Creek.

1.3 Legislative Framework

The Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy was established in 2008, under Schedule E of the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act.*

The management and development of Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy will be based upon land use and collaborative management agreements between British Columbia and the Squamish Nation (as described below), the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*, the *Park Act*, the *Park, Conservancy and Recreation Area Regulation*.

Conservancies are set aside for four reasons:

- (a) The protection and maintenance of their biological diversity and natural environments;
- (b) The preservation and maintenance of social, ceremonial and cultural uses of First Nations;
- (c) The protection and maintenance of their recreational values; and
- (d) To ensure that development or use of their natural resources occurs in a sustainable manner consistent with the purposes of paragraphs (a), (b) and(c).

Sections 8 and 9 of the *Park Act* direct that any interest in land and most uses of a natural resource in a conservancy must be authorized by a park use permit. A park use permit can only be issued if the use or activity will not restrict, prevent or inhibit the development, improvement or use of the conservancy in accordance with (a), (b), (c) and (d) above.

The *Park Act* further states that a park use permit must not be issued to authorize commercial logging, mining, or hydro electric power generation, other than local run-of-the-river projects. "Local run-of-the-river projects", in relation to a conservancy, means hydro power projects supplying power for use (a) in the conservancy, or (b) by communities, including First Nation communities, that do not otherwise have access to hydro electric power.

1.4 Management Commitments

The Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy is within the traditional territory of the Squamish Nation. In 2001, the Squamish Nation completed their land use plan, *Xay Temixw: Sacred Land*. The Squamish Nation land use plan identified several areas in Squamish Nation traditional territory to be set aside as protected areas, called <u>K</u>wé<u>k</u>waye<u>x</u> Kwelháynexw ta S<u>kwx</u>wú7mesh Temixw, also known as Squamish Nation Wild Spirit Places.

In June 2007, the Squamish Nation and British Columbia entered into the Agreement on Land Use Planning between the Squamish Nation and the Province of British Columbia. Under the agreement, the Province agreed to establish new protected areas, including Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy. The agreement sets out the purposes and objectives for the conservancy, as follows:

- The primary objectives for the conservancy shall be the protection and maintenance of the biological diversity and natural environments, including wildlife habitat values, the preservation and maintenance of social, ceremonial and cultural uses by the Squamish Nation, and the protection and enhancement of any cultural and heritage resources.
- The conservancy will be collaboratively managed between the Province, pursuant to the *Park Act*, and the Squamish Nation, pursuant to its equivalent Squamish Nation legislative or administrative mechanisms, through a Collaborative Management Agreement to be entered into between British Columbia and the Squamish Nation.
- Industrial logging, mining, hydro-electric development, new roads, and commercial development in the conservancy are prohibited.
- Squamish Nation and British Columbia may, by mutual agreement, identify development activities that they will recommend are acceptable uses within the conservancy.

In June 2007, the Squamish Nation and British Columbia entered into a *Collaborative Agreement for the Management of Protected Areas in Squamish Nation Traditional Territory* to promote collaboration and communication between them in the management and planning of protected areas in Squamish Nation traditional territory. The 2008 Sea-to-Sky Land and Resource Management Plan and the land use planning agreement provide high-level direction for land use in the conservancy and on adjacent lands.

The development of this management plan has been guided by, and is consistent with, the *Agreement on Land Use Planning between the Squamish Nation and the Province of British Columbia* and the collaborative management agreement. Where there is an inconsistency between this management plan, the land use planning agreement and the collaborative management agreement, the latter two will take precedence.

1.5 Planning Process

The Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy falls within the traditional territory of the Squamish Nation. Under the collaborative management agreement, the parties have committed to joint development and/or review of protected area management plans. BC Parks and the Squamish Nation have jointly developed this conservancy management plan consistent with the collaborative management agreement.

A Terms of Reference jointly developed by BC Parks and the Squamish Nation has guided this conservancy management planning process. Bryan Evans of Dovetail Consulting Inc. prepared management plan drafts with input from BC Parks and Squamish Nation representatives. Following completion of a complete first draft, agency, stakeholder and other First Nation review of this management plan was undertaken. The draft management plan was posted online for public comment with notification in the local papers. Copies were also made available to the public at several local libraries, including in Squamish and North Vancouver. Revisions to the management plan were made as necessary to reflect comments received on the draft management plan.

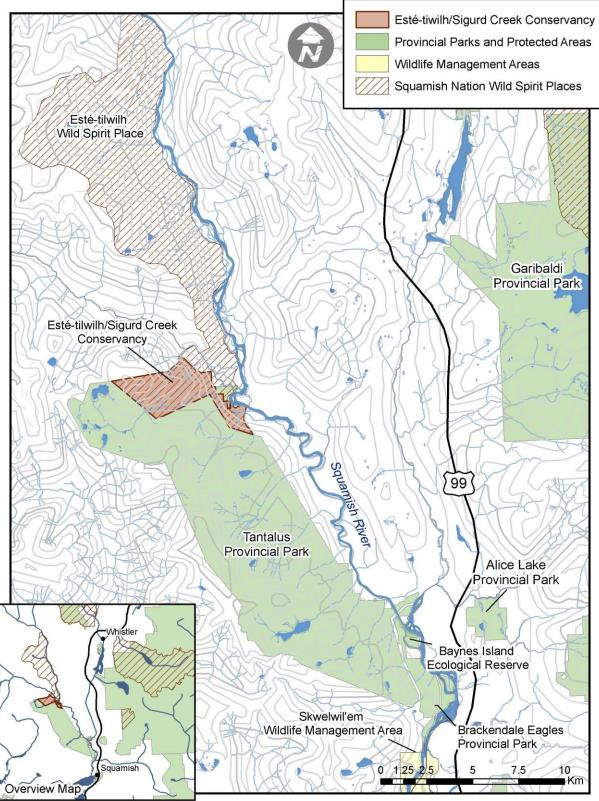


Figure 1: Regional Context Map

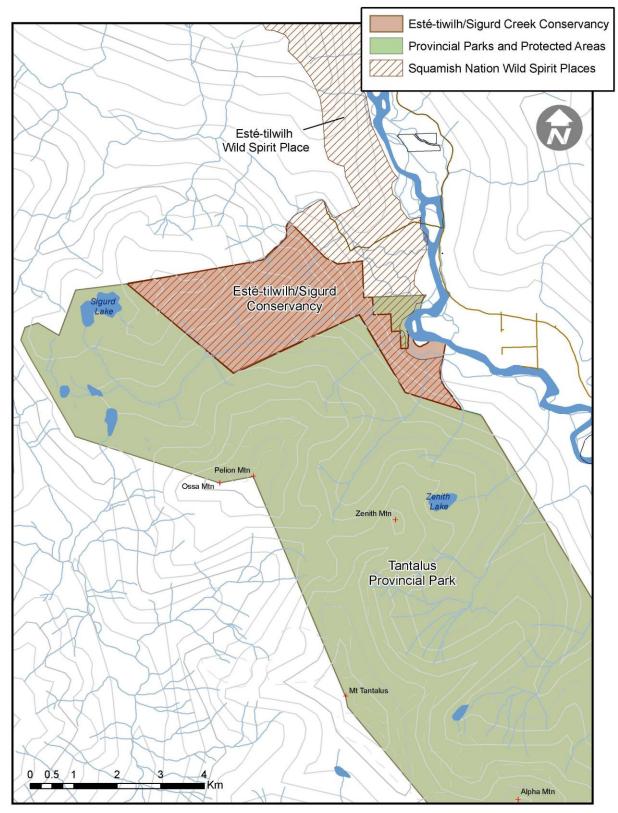


Figure 2: Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy Map

2.0 Roles and Values of the Conservancy

2.1 Significance and Role in the Protected Areas System

The Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy contributes to the protection of cultural features and landscapes of importance to the Squamish Nation. The primary role of the conservancy is to protect an important area identified by the Squamish Nation as a <u>K</u>wé<u>k</u>waye<u>x</u> Kwelháynexw ta S<u>k</u>w<u>x</u>wú7mesh temixw, or Squamish Nation Wild Spirit Place. The conservancy also:

- complements the existing Tantalus Park by protecting an additional 1,100 hectares and completing the protection of the Sigurd Creek watershed;
- protects known secure routes for Grizzly Bear from spring/summer forage locations to the salmon forage locations on the Squamish River floodplain;
- contributes to protection of habitat for species such as American Black Bear, Elk, Black-tailed Deer, Cougar, Mountain Goat, Grey Wolf, Grizzly Bear and Wolverine;
- contains some mid and high elevation old-growth forests; and,
- provides for public enjoyment and recreation.

As is stated in the Agreement on Land Use Planning between the Squamish Nation and British Columbia, the primary objectives for the conservancy are the protection and maintenance of the biological diversity and natural environments, including wildlife habitat values; the preservation and maintenance of social, ceremonial and cultural uses by the Squamish Nation; and, the protection and enhancement of any cultural and heritage resources.

2.2 Cultural Heritage

The conservancy is one component of the larger Squamish Nation Esté-tiwilh Wild Spirit Place WSP, identified in the Squamish Nation's land use plan, *Xay Temixw: Sacred Land* (2001). Wild Spirit Places were identified and designated for the purpose of protecting pristine landscapes for their natural qualities and for the continuation of Squamish Nation cultural practices and traditional resource harvesting activities that depend on remoteness, naturalness and solitude.

Traditional use in the Sigurd Creek watershed specifically is not well documented although it is well known that Squamish Nation hunters accessed higher elevation forests and mountains in the area to hunt, especially for Black-tailed Deer and Mountain Goat. Mountains and higher elevation lakes and forests are important landscapes for cultural journeys and spiritual quests, and are used for training Squamish Nation youth in traditional cultural practices.

Skwxwú7mesh Chiyaxw represents Squamish Nation traditional laws governing lands and resource use and management, as well as Squamish Nation cultural and spiritual uses. Skwxwú7mesh Chiyaxw will guide Squamish Nation members' cultural and traditional renewable resource harvesting activities in the conservancy.

Cultural and traditional renewable resource harvesting activities include:

- gathering traditional Squamish Nation foods;
- gathering plants used for medicinal and ceremonial purposes;
- hunting, trapping, and fishing;
- cutting selected trees for ceremonial or artistic purposes;
- conducting, teaching or demonstrating ceremonies of traditional, spiritual or religious significance;
- seeking cultural or spiritual inspiration; and,
- construction and use of shelters (such as camps and longhouses) essential to the pursuit of the above activities.

2.3 Biological Diversity and Natural Environment

Given its small size (1,112 hectares), the conservancy does not contribute significantly to representation of the ecological diversity of the region in the provincial protected areas system. The conservancy does contribute to protecting Sigurd Creek as an intact watershed, which is rare in southwestern British Columbia.

The conservancy also adds to the regional scale biodiversity protection provided by the complex of adjacent or contiguous protected areas that includes Tantalus Park, Baynes Island Ecological Reserve, Brackendale Eagles Park and Skwelwil'em Squamish Estuary Wildlife Management Area. Collectively, these areas represent 14,043 hectares of protected lands in the lower Squamish River watershed.

Sigurd Creek and numerous smaller creeks drain east through the conservancy into the Squamish River. The terrain is steep with fast current flows, especially following periods of heavy precipitation. Fisheries values are considered low. Water quality and aquatic habitat information are not available for the conservancy at this time.

The conservancy lies within the Southern Pacific Ranges Ecosection and contains portions of the Alpine, Mountain Hemlock and Coastal Western Hemlock biogeoclimatic zones. Vegetation in the conservancy is typical of these zones and ranges from alpine parkland to large coastal western hemlock and western redcedar stands. Most of the forests in the conservancy have been subject only to natural disturbance and are considered old-growth trees.

Detailed vegetation inventory is not available for the conservancy area and it is therefore not feasible to identify whether rare or unique species, values or plant communities are present. There are no rare or endangered species or plant communities identified within the conservancy by the Conservation Data Centre (CDC). However, it is possible that due to the old-growth values of the conservancy that rare or unique values and plant communities may occur here.

The conservancy contributes to or contains the habitat requirements for species associated with its three biogeoclimatic zones in coastal British Columbia. These species include Grizzly Bear, American Black Bear, Grey Wolf, Wolverine, Mountain Goat, Elk, and Black-tailed Deer. Other species such as Tailed Frog, Spotted Owl, and Marbled Murrelet may also occur within the conservancy. Portions of

the eastern slopes of Tantalus are recognized as potential Spotted Owl and Marbled Murrelet habitat, which may extend into Sigurd Creek and the conservancy.

Some of the species mentioned above are red or blue listed by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). Many of the wildlife species will utilize habitat both within and outside the conservancy, and adjacent Tantalus Park. Management of wildlife values will, therefore, need to be based on cross-boundary values.

2.4 Recreation

The Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy, and the adjacent areas within Tantalus Park, offer opportunities for hiking, backcountry camping, mountaineering, and backcountry skiing. The conservancy enhances the recreational and tourism values of the adjacent Tantalus Park by providing additional protected landscapes and alternative backcountry access to the northern portions of the park. It also contributes to the collective tourism values within the Sea-to-Sky Corridor and the communities of Squamish and Whistler. The conservancy is within easy access of the town of Squamish, the Resort Municipality of Whistler, and the heavily populated areas of the Lower Mainland.

The conservancy provides hiking access on the Sigurd Creek Trail through an undeveloped old-growth forested valley. The Sigurd Creek trail provides access to a route up Sigurd Peak, as well as scenic viewpoints of the Squamish River valley, and the impressive Crooked Falls. The Sigurd Creek Trail also connects with a trail leading into the Pelion and Ossa Mountains area within Tantalus Park. This is one of the popular mountaineering areas of the park. The Sigurd Creek Trail is currently a rough trail, offering the opportunity for trail improvements, and potential trail connections to the Pokosha Creek area, and to Sigurd Lake.

There is a commercial recreation licence for heli-hiking, held by Blackcomb Helicopters Limited Partnership (Land file #2407195); the tenure term expires in 2026. The Ministry of Environment and Squamish Nation support the phasing out of this tenure to preserve a remote backcountry experience in the conservancy. The current tenure holder does not have any objections to the phasing out of the tenure, as this area is not well utilised and will therefore not adversely impact their guiding operations.

There is also a licence of occupation held by the Canadian Outback Adventure Company Limited for river rafting (Land file 2407692) on the Squamish River, which flows through the conservancy.

2.5 Development or Use of Natural Resources

There are two trapline licence areas overlapping the conservancy (ID# TR0206T006 and ID# TR0206T007). Other than recreation tenures and the use of the two existing trapline licence areas, there is no development nor use of natural resources within the conservancy.

The conservancy is dedicated to conservation, cultural use, and low intensity backcountry recreation with limited infrastructure development. Low intensity, self-propelled recreational use will be allowed, consistent with maintaining the ecological and cultural values of the conservancy. No development of natural resources is appropriate in the conservancy.

3.0 Management Direction

3.1 Vision

The Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy is managed in a manner that protects and maintains the wilderness qualities of the Sigurd Creek watershed. The conservancy provides a sanctuary for social, ceremonial and cultural uses by the Squamish Nation, as well as for low impact backcountry recreational use and enjoyment of the public. The area is managed to minimize impacts to natural and cultural values, while offering opportunities to enjoy and appreciate those values.

3.2 Management Objectives and Strategies

This section compiles the management issues, objectives, and strategies for the conservancy. See also Appendix A (Appropriate Uses Table).

Issues, Stressors and/or Opportunities	Objective	Strategies	Priority
Squamish Nation has an interest in continuing with their cultural uses and traditional resource harvesting activities in the conservancy.	Protect the natural values and aesthetic qualities that support the cultural use and traditional resource harvesting activities of First Nations.	 Maintain ongoing communications and working relationships with the Squamish Nation consistent with the collaborative management agreement. Promote and enable traditional activities by present and future generations of the Squamish Nation. Work in a co-operative manner with agencies involved in adjacent land use and development to incorporate appropriate management considerations for protection of conservancy values. Ensure any proposed developments or facilities (e.g., Squamish Nation camp or cabin) in the conservancy are aesthetically pleasing, culturally appropriate and blend with the natural environment. BC Parks will advise Squamish Nation if guided hunting is proposed in the conservancy. 	Η

Issues, Stressors and/or Opportunities	Objective	Strategies	Priority
The small size of the conservancy requires the conservancy's ecological processes to be managed in conjunction with other adjacent lands and with the cooperation of other agencies.	Maintain natural ecological processes.	 Ensure any new trails or trail upgrades are sensitive to the critical habitats and requirements of wildlife. Review the Tantalus Park fire management plan and revise as required to include the conservancy. Work in a co-operative manner with other agencies to manage biodiversity values that extend across conservancy boundaries. Encourage agencies to adopt management techniques that will not adversely impact conservancy values (e.g., habitat values for Grizzly Bears). Work in a co-operative manner with agencies, organizations and individuals to identify, research and monitor wildlife, particularly rare or endangered species, wildlife habitats or plant communities. Work in a co-operative manner with other agencies to manage conservation, recreation and cultural values that extend beyond conservancy boundaries. Encourage agencies to adopt appropriate land management techniques that will not adversely impact conservancy values. 	Η
An increased understanding of the cultural importance of the area will enhance the visitor experience and help with the protection of cultural values.	Build support and understanding of the cultural and conservation values of the conservancy.	 Visitor information will identify the conservancy as a component of the larger Esté-tiwilh Kwékwayex Kwelháynexw ta Skwxwú7mesh Temixw (Squamish Nation Wild Spirit Place). The conservancy will be included in standard BC Parks information brochures, maps and website as well as through Squamish Nation communication materials. All signage and communication materials should reflect the collaborative management of the conservancy by the Squamish Nation and BC Parks and have a 'branding' as a Squamish Nation Kwékwayex Kwelháynexw ta Skwxwú7mesh Temixw (Squamish Nation Wild Spirit Place). Where appropriate, Squamish Nation language should be included in communication materials. Interpretive themes will focus on the remote, undisturbed qualities of the Sigurd Creek valley and the importance of the area for First Nation cultural uses as a Squamish Nation Kwékwayex Kwelháynexw ta Skwxwú7mesh Temixw (Squamish Nation Wild Spirit Place) as well as the value of the area for backcountry recreation dependent on a pristine environment. 	Н

Issues, Stressors and/or Opportunities	Objective	Strategies	Priority
Water quality in the conservancy is free from contaminants and pollution.	Maintain freshwater systems in their natural condition free from contaminants or pollution.	 Ensure sanitary facilities (e.g., pit toilets) are properly designed, located and managed within the conservancy. Ensure any conservancy developments are constructed and maintained so as to minimize soil erosion and surface water flow. Provide the public with information on minimizing impacts to water quality in the backcountry. Prohibit fish stocking in alpine or sub-alpine lakes. 	М
Current levels of facilities and use enable a wilderness oriented recreation experience. A significant increase in visitors or infrastructure may impact on these backcountry experiences.	Provide backcountry hiking and skiing opportunities and associated facilities to maintain a wilderness experience.	 Maintain, and, if necessary, improve the existing Sigurd Creek Trail. Consider future development of trail connections to Sigurd Lake and to Pokosha Creek. Monitor recreation use and, where necessary, take steps to manage the type, amount and location of recreation activities where, in the opinion of BC Parks and the Squamish Nation, the aesthetic, cultural and/or ecological values of the conservancy are being negatively impacted. Do not actively promote use and visitation to the conservancy, other than road access signage. Appropriate highway signage will be provided to clarify road access to the conservancy. Signage within the conservancy will be minimized, other than at the trailhead and/or parking lot access. Prohibit the construction of backcountry recreational huts, shelters or cabins. Consider developing wilderness campsites. Cultural infrastructure may be developed, e.g., Squamish Nation camp or marker poles. When the current heli-hiking tenure term comes up for renewal, BC Parks and the Squamish Nation will work with the tenure holder to consider whether the tenure may be extended, amended or excluded based on whether the use is consistent with the management intent for the conservancy. Regulatory changes to prohibit aircraft landings may be recommended. Encourage trail maintenance with local stewardship groups. 	М
Some pre-existing tenures and future tenures may not be consistent with the vision for the conservancy.	Ensure that resource use tenures protect the conservation, cultural and recreational values within the conservancy.	 Retain self-propelled (non-motorized) recreation tenure (i.e., commercial rafting tenure). When the current heli-skiing tenure term is complete, recommend that the tenure not be renewed. No development of natural resources is appropriate in the conservancy. 	М

3.3 Zoning

The entirety of Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy is zoned as a Cultural Zone to protect landscapes that are important for First Nation's cultural values and uses. Low impact, non-mechanized and non-motorised recreation is compatible with this zone type.

4.0 Plan Implementation

4.1 Collaborative Relationship

Squamish Nation and BC Parks will work together to plan, administer and manage the conservancy through application of the laws, policies, and regulations under the *Park Act*, relevant Squamish Nation policies, and consistent with the *Collaborative Agreement for the Management of Protected Areas in Squamish Nation Traditional Territory*.

4.2 Management Strategies

The strategies are listed by priority in section 3.3. Implementation of these actions is dependent upon the availability of BC Parks and Squamish Nation financial and staff resources, and will be affected by the needs of other parks and protected areas in the region. Approval of this management plan does not constitute approval of funding for implementation. In addition, BC Parks and Squamish Nation may seek corporate, community or interagency partnerships to implement many of the actions in this management plan.

4.3 Future Planning

In order to ensure the management of Esté-tiwilh/Sigurd Creek Conservancy remains relevant and effective, an adaptive management approach will be used. Adaptive management involves a five-step process of planning, action, monitoring, evaluation and revision of the management plan to reflect lessons learned, changing circumstances and/or objectives achieved. Adaptive management is flexible, collaborative, and responsive to public input.

The management plan will be reviewed as required by the Squamish Nation and BC Parks. Although no specific future planning is envisioned beyond the term of this management plan, BC Parks and Squamish Nation will coordinate the review of the management plan as required. A review of the management plan should generally be triggered by the complexities of the management issues in the protected area and/or a significant change in circumstances (e.g., a natural disaster, major environmental change or discovery of a major new archaeological site), and not a by a specific time period.

A management plan review looks for any necessary updates to the management plan that: are required to keep management direction current and relevant; correct the intent of a policy statement; address some error or omission; or, address a new proposal. Any updates or changes to the content of the management plan will be addressed through a formal management plan amendment process. The amendment process will include an opportunity for public input.

Currently, Squamish Nation is involved in treaty negotiations with senior levels of government. Squamish Nation's contributions to this management plan are recognized and understood to be without prejudice to future treaty negotiations. Once formal treaty agreements have been reached with the Squamish Nation, this management plan will be reviewed to determine whether it is in compliance with treaty. If it is not in compliance, then this management plan will be revised accordingly. Changes will be made through an open public review process to build understanding of what these changes mean to the conservancy and its use.

Appendix A – Appropriate Uses Table

Activity/Use/Facility	Appropriateness
First Nation Traditional Use ¹	Y
Hunting	Y
Fishing	γ
Trapping	γ
Horse Use/ Pack Animals	Ν
Mountain Biking	Ν
Guide Outfitting (hunting)	γ
Guide Outfitting (fishing)	γ
Guide Outfitting – non mechanised (mountaineering, backpacking)	Y
Cat-Assisted Skiing	Ν
Heli-skiing	Ν
Heli-hiking	Ν
Commercial Recreation (facility-based)	Ν
Backcountry Huts	Ν
Fish Stocking and Enhancement	Ν
Road Access	Ν
Off-road Access (snowmobiling)	Ν
Off-road Access (motorised)	Ν
Motorised Water Use	Ν
Recreational Aircraft Access	Ν
Commercial Aircraft Access	Ν
Commercial Filming	γ

Lege	Legend			
N	Not an appropriate use in this zone	 It has been confirmed during the management planning process that this use is not appropriate in this zone. This may be an existing use which the management planning process has identified as no longer an appropriate use in this zone. The management plan details strategies for addressing this use (e.g., phasing out, closing). 		
Y	May be an appropriate use in this zone	 This indicates that some degree or scale of this use may be appropriate. For existing uses, the management plan will provide guidance on the appropriate level or scale of this use (e.g., direction to reduce, restrict or increase the current level of this activity) and may address specific restrictions or enhancements (e.g., capacity, appropriate sites, designated trails, purposes, party size, time of year, etc.). For new or expanded uses, this does not constitute approval. This indicates that the use may be considered for further evaluation and possible approval (e.g., park use permit adjudication, completion of a review as part of the BC Parks' Impact Assessment Process). In some cases the appropriateness may not be confirmed until further assessments are completed. 		

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Traditional use includes gathering traditional foods; gathering plants used for medicinal and ceremonial purposes; hunting, trapping, and fishing; cutting selected trees for ceremonial or artistic purposes; conducting, teaching or demonstrating ceremonies of traditional, spiritual or religious significance; seeking cultural or spiritual inspiration; and, construction and use of shelters (such as camps and longhouses) essential to the pursuit of the above activities.