

Skeena Region

**MANAGEMENT DIRECTION
STATEMENT**

November 2003



**for Morice River
Ecological Reserve**



Ministry of Water, Land and
Air Protection
Environmental Stewardship
Division

Morice River Ecological Reserve


Approvals Page

Forward

This management direction statement for Morice River Ecological Reserve 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 ecological reserve.

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

Approvals



Regional Manager
Skeena Region
Environmental Stewardship Division



Assistant Deputy Minister
Environmental Stewardship Division

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Morice River Ecological Reserve

Management Direction Statement

Introduction

Purpose of the Management Direction Statement

Management direction statements (MDS) provide strategic management direction for all protected areas that do not have an approved management plan. Management direction statements also describe protected area values, management issues and concerns; management strategy focused on immediate priority objectives and strategies; and, direction statements from other planning processes. While strategies may be identified in the MDS, the completion of all these strategies is subject to funding and funding procedures. In addition, all development associated with these strategies within the protected area is subject to the Parks and Protected Areas Branch Impact Assessment Policy.

Context

The objective of the ecological reserve program in British Columbia is the conservation of representative and special natural ecosystems, plants and animal species, features and phenomena. Ecological reserves contribute to the maintenance of biological diversity and the protection of genetic materials. They also offer opportunities for scientific research and educational activities. In many ecological reserves, the Environmental Stewardship Division does permit non-consumptive low-intensity uses such as nature appreciation, wildlife viewing, bird watching and photography.

The provincial government established Morice River Ecological Reserve (E.R. #81) on December 15th, 1977 by Order-in-Council 3775/77 under the *Ecological Reserve Act*. The *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act* provided legislated status to the ecological reserve boundaries on June 12th, 2000. Morice River Ecological Reserve covers 357.5 hectares and is the only protected area in the Morice Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) planning area that has as its purpose ecological protection. The ecological reserve is located on the west side of the Morice River 24 kilometres southwest of Houston, across the river from the Morice River Road. This area lies within the asserted traditional territory of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation and the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council.

The purpose of the Morice River Ecological Reserve is to preserve for research purposes, a forest ecosystem representative of the western edge of the Sub-boreal Spruce Zone. The ecological reserve is also near the western edge of the Nechako Plateau. In May 1983 a forest fire almost completely burned the ecological reserve. Since the fire, forest regeneration has resulted in a dense stand of young lodgepole pine among the standing and fallen burned trees. Prior to the fire the flatter uplands of the reserve contained dense stands of lodgepole pine or spruce, while the southeast facing slopes above the river had more open stands containing aspen. The riverbanks supported some spruce and cottonwood.

Local naturalists and ecologists use the ecological reserve. Morice River Ecological Reserve provides a setting to monitor forest succession after disturbance, as is being done by the Ministry of Forests Research Branch. As well as the research and conservation roles, the ecological reserve serves an educational role for those interested in forest succession after fire.

Tyhee Lake Provincial Park near Telkwa offers the public full-service camping, boating, swimming and picnicking outdoor recreation opportunities, while Babine Mountains Provincial Park to the northwest and Tweedsmuir Provincial Park to the south provide outstanding backcountry outdoor recreation activities.

Ecological Reserve Attributes

Conservation

This ecological reserve:

- Protects a small area of the poorly represented Bulkley Basin Ecosection. Morice River Ecological Reserve is one of 17 protected areas in this ecosection. Currently 3% of this ecosection is included in the protected areas system. Morice River Ecological Reserve contributes minimally (1%) to the overall protected areas system representation of this ecosection;
- Conserves 358 hectares of the SBSdk (Sub-boreal Spruce dry cool subzone, Babine variant) Biogeoclimatic Zone. This variant is under-represented in the protected areas system (5 %). Morice River Ecological Reserve contributes only less than 1% to the overall representation of the SBSdk. The major contributors are Entiako Provincial Park and Protected Area, Sutherland River Provincial Park and Protected Area and Tweedsmuir Provincial Park;
- Is located near the south-western limit of the Sub-Boreal Spruce Biogeoclimatic Zone;
- Provides an opportunity to monitor forest succession following fire in a relatively natural environment;
- Protects important habitat for mule deer and moose; and
- Contains the rare plant species *Carex backii* (Back's sedge); also known as *Carex saximontana* (Rocky Mountain sedge), that is listed with the British Columbia Conservation Data Centre (Blue list, G4, S1S3)

Research and Education

Morice Ecological Reserve

- Provides opportunities for scientists to undertake research into forest succession after fire; and
- Offers opportunities for education about forest succession after fire without the occurrence of further forest harvesting disturbance.

Other Values of Interest

- The ecological reserve contains no known cultural heritage values.

Significance in the Protected Areas System

- It protects an example lowland forest in the of Sub-Boreal Spruce biogeoclimatic zone at the south-western limit of its range; and
- It is the only significant protected area in the Morice Forest District.

Land Uses, Tenures and Interests

Access

Morice River Ecological Reserve is located 24 kilometres south of Houston on the west side of the Morice River. The Morice River Road is across the river from the ecological reserve. Boat access is required to reach the ecological reserve from this location. The Forest Service deactivated roads that previously provided access to the ecological reserve on the west side of the river. Most of these roads are overgrown with trees and brush. No trails exist within the ecological reserve and travel is difficult because of extensive windfall and dense forest regeneration.

Existing Tenures, Alienations and Encumbrances

- The Ministry of Forests Research Branch has established 10 permanent transects to monitor succession after wildfire.

Adjacent Patterns of Land Use

- Ministry of Forests manages the surrounding forests. The wildfire that burned the ecological reserve in 1983 also burned much of the surrounding forested area. Salvage logging cleared most of the burned and standing dead trees outside the ecological reserve and the area was subsequently reforested.

First Nations Interests

The Morice River Ecological Reserve lies within the asserted traditional territory of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation and the Wet'suwet'en Band, who are affiliated with the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council.

Other Agency Interests

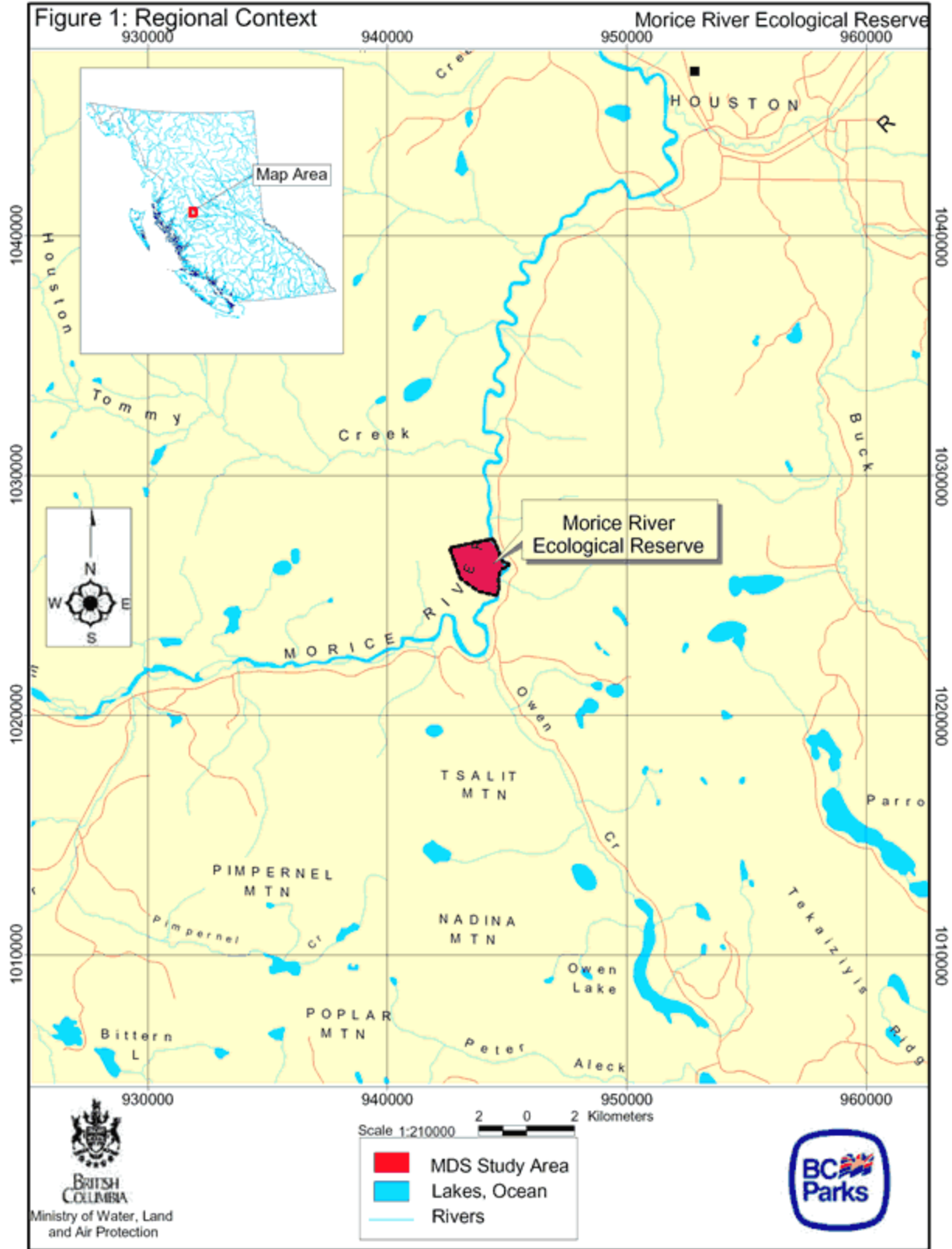
- Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management (British Columbia Conservation Data Centre (CDC)) has an interest in rare species and species at risk in the ecological reserve.
- Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Skeena Region Fish & Wildlife Sciences and Allocation Section has an interest in high value deer and moose habitat protected in the ecological reserve.
- Ministry of Forests Research Branch is interested in the ecological reserve because of their research transects set up to monitor forest succession after 1983 wild fire in the ecological reserve. The Research Branch is interested in continuing this research.

Private and Public Stakeholder Interests

- Residents of Houston have an interest in this ecological reserve because of its education opportunities and protection of important deer and moose habitat.

- Research and educational institutions (e.g., North West Community College, University of Northern British Columbia) have an interest in the ecological reserve because of its forest succession attributes.
- Friends of Ecological Reserves, Bulkley Valley Naturalists, local ecologists and naturalists have an interest in the ecological reserve for its protection of rare plant species and species at risk.

Figure 1: Regional Context



Morice River Ecological Reserve Role Statement

The primary role of Morice River Ecological Reserve is to conserve a representative example of the Sub-boreal Spruce Biogeoclimatic Zone at its southwestern limits and to protect a rare plant species. The Morice River Ecological Reserve provides an important benchmark for forest succession following a significant wild fire event. In addition, the ecological reserve serves secondary research and education roles by providing opportunities to study and learn about forest succession after fire in the Sub-boreal Spruce Biogeoclimatic Zone.

Management Commitments and Issues

Management Direction from Previous Planning

The Morice Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) process began in 2000 with the production of a background report. In May 2002, the Morice LRMP planning phase began and continues in 2003. Thus, the Morice LRMP provided no direction relating to the Morice River Ecological Reserve because of recent commencement of planning.

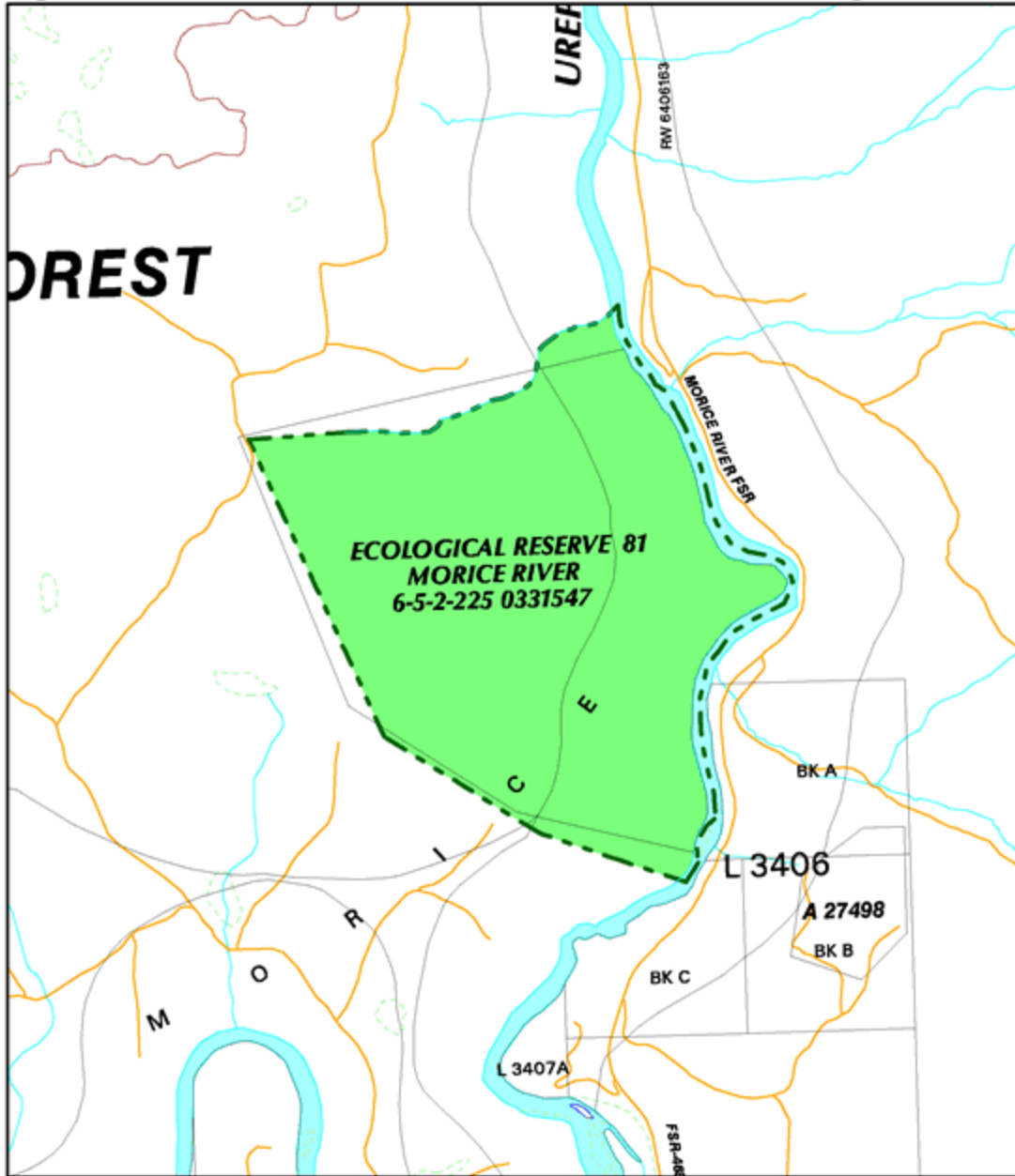
Management Issues

Environmental Stewardship Division identified the following management issues for resolution.

Theme	Issue
Protecting ecological values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed inventory of the locations of <i>Carex backii</i> have not been completed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Considerable information exists about the ecological reserves's other flora and fauna because of established research plots in the ecological reserve. • The rare plant species <i>Carex backii</i> may not persist in the ecological reserve because it is occurring in a seral stage associated with the recent fire in the ecological reserve • Adjacent forest harvesting may create new access or result in changes to some ecological attributes of the reserve. • Present research activities contravene the <i>Ecological Reserve Act</i> and its regulations because Environmental Stewardship Division has not authorized such activities by valid park use permits.
Protecting cultural values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significance of cultural values in unknown because of the lack of cultural heritage inventories
Ecological reserve boundary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The integrity of the ecological reserve may be at risk because the new proposed boundary remains unapproved by government. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Historical problems regarding the boundary of the ecological reserve and forest harvesting have now been resolved, however the new boundary agreed upon by the Ministry of Forests and Environmental Stewardship Division has yet to be given legislated status.
Providing ecological reserve information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitors to the area may be unaware of the area's ecological reserve status because no signs identify the ecological reserve's boundary.



Figure 2: Tenure

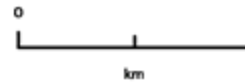
Morice River Ecological Reserve



Projection: UTM Zone 9
Datum: NAD83



 Subject Area
 Cadastral Boundary
(from CDMS)



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.

Management Direction

Priority Management Objectives and Strategies

Objective	Strategy
To protect the ecological reserve's natural values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete an inventory of the rare plant <i>Carex backii</i> • Do not take measures to maintain <i>Carex backii</i> within the ecological reserve as succession proceeds to the next seral stage. • Ensure signage is in place to notify adjacent land users of ecological reserve status. • Work with other agencies such as Water, Land and Air Protection – Wildlife and Habitat sections –, Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management and Ministry of Forests to ensure co-ordination between management agencies and to ensure management activities do not affect the ecological integrity of the ecological reserve. • Ensure research activities are under park use permit and are consistent with the <i>Ecological Reserve Act</i> and its regulations.
To protect the ecological reserve's cultural values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate and collect information on cultural heritage values in conjunction with the Wet'suwet'en First Nation.
To legislate the ecological reserve's boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake interagency review of the revised ecological reserve boundary and forward to the Minister of Water, Land and Air Protection for a decision on placing the revised boundary in legislation.
To protect First Nations values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with the Wet'suwet'en Office of Hereditary Chiefs, Wet'suwet'en Band and the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council as issues require.
To provide information to the public and ecological reserve visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection official web site with accurate and current information about Morice River Ecological Reserve. • Ensure that boundary signs are in place to notify visitors of the ecological reserve's existence.

Consultation and Future Planning

Environmental Stewardship Division will consult with the Wet'suwet'en Office of Hereditary Chiefs, Wet'suwet'en Band and the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council, local stakeholders and adjacent resource users as necessary. This ecological reserve has a low priority for the preparation of a full management plan. Environmental Stewardship Division will review and revise, if necessary, this management direction statement in five to seven years.

**Appendix 1. Morice River Ecological Reserve
Table of Acceptable Activities, Uses and Facilities.**

Activity/Use/Facility	Acceptability
Aboriginal traditional uses and activities	Y
Hunting	N
Fishing	N
Trapping	N
Grazing (domestic livestock)	N
Recreational Gold Panning/Rock Hounding	N
Utility Corridors	N
Communication Sites	N
Horse Use/ Pack Animals	N
Guide Outfitting (hunting)	N
Guide Outfitting (fishing)	N
Guide Outfitting (nature tours)	N
Guide Outfitting (river rafting)	N
Cat-Assisted Skiing	N
Ski Hills	N
Commercial Recreation (facility-based)	N
Commercial recreation (non-facility based)	N
Backcountry Huts	N
Water Control Structures	N
Fish Stocking and Enhancement	N
Road Access	N
Off-road Access (snowmobiling)	N
Off-road Access (motorised)	N
Off-road Access (mechanical activities)	N
Motorised Water Access	N
Aircraft Access	N
Fire Management (suppression)	N1
Fire Management (prescribed fire management)	N1
Fire Management (prevention)	N
Forest Insect/Disease Control	N1
Noxious Weed Control	Y
Exotic Insect/Disease Control	N1
Scientific Research (specimen collection) by permit only	Y
Scientific Research (manipulative activities) by permit only	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