



Neḡiḷ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy

Management Plan

March 2013



Gwa'sala-
'Nakwaxda'xw
Nation

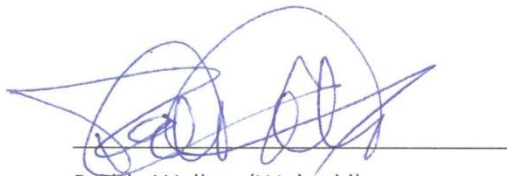


BC Parks

Neġiλ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy

Management Plan

Approved by:



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13/04/13

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Management Plan Purpose

Conservancies are set aside for four main purposes:

- for the protection and maintenance of their biological diversity and natural environments;
- for the preservation and maintenance of social, ceremonial and cultural uses of First Nations;
- for protection and maintenance of their recreational values; and,
- to ensure that development or use of their natural resources occurs in a sustainable manner consistent with the purposes above.

This management plan sets out the long-term direction for Neḡiḷ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy, and provides guidance for how the conservancy will be managed.

In 2006, the provincial government and First Nations across the Province initiated a new relationship. On the central coast, a collaborative approach has been taken with regards to management planning and operation of protected areas. This management plan is the result of a collaborative planning process between the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation and BC Parks.

The management plan identifies the conservancy's important cultural heritage, natural, and recreational values and presents a vision for the future of the conservancy. As well, the management plan:

- addresses current issues affecting the long-term vision for the conservancy;
- guides day-to-day management for the protection of cultural heritage, natural and recreational values;
- identifies appropriate types of recreational activities;
- identifies zones; and,
- provides management direction related to allowable activities and acceptable uses of the conservancy's natural resources.

1.2 Planning Area

Neḡiḷ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy was established on May 31, 2007, pursuant to the *Parks and Protected Areas Statutes Amendment Act, 2007*. The conservancy is named and described in Schedule F of the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act* and is administered under the *Park Act*.

Under the *Park Act*, the Minister may issue a permit for the construction, use or maintenance of a road in a conservancy listed in Schedule F if the road is for the purpose of providing access to natural resources lying beyond the conservancy. At the time of establishment, the Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy was listed in Schedule F to accommodate the potential, future development of a road to access timber on the east side of the estuary.

Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy includes approximately 331 hectares of upland and 150 hectares of foreshore (481 hectares total) at the head of Smith Inlet on the central coast of British Columbia (Figure 1). The conservancy is 78 kilometres northeast of Port Hardy, 200 kilometres northwest of Campbell River and 377 kilometres northwest of Vancouver. Visitors can access the conservancy by float plane, by way of a 50 kilometre boat trip up Smith Inlet from the main shipping route along the coast, or by way of a 120 kilometre boat trip from Port Hardy around Cape Caution.

Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy is an area of origin for members of the Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw First Nation. The conservancy includes a section of the Nekite River, adjacent terrestrial upland, and critical estuary habitat that provides a rich ecological interface between the river system and the ocean. The Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw First Nation is currently involved in comprehensive treaty negotiations with Canada and British Columbia. British Columbia recognizes that protected area status does not prevent a First Nation from identifying these lands as areas of interest in the treaty process.

The conservancy is also within the Mid Coast Timber Supply Area within the North Island Central Coast Forest District. There are previously logged areas at the mouth of the Nekite River, within the conservancy. Future logging is planned on the east side of the conservancy. Forest Service Road 8366 runs adjacent to the southwest border of the conservancy and bisects the northern arm of the conservancy, continuing upstream toward Nekite Indian Reserve (IR No.2).

Lockhart Gordon Conservancy (24,501 hectares) shares the conservancy's western upland border and the Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary West Biodiversity, Tourism and Mining Area (BMTA) (322 hectares) shares the conservancy's southwestern border, upland of the estuary (Figure 1).

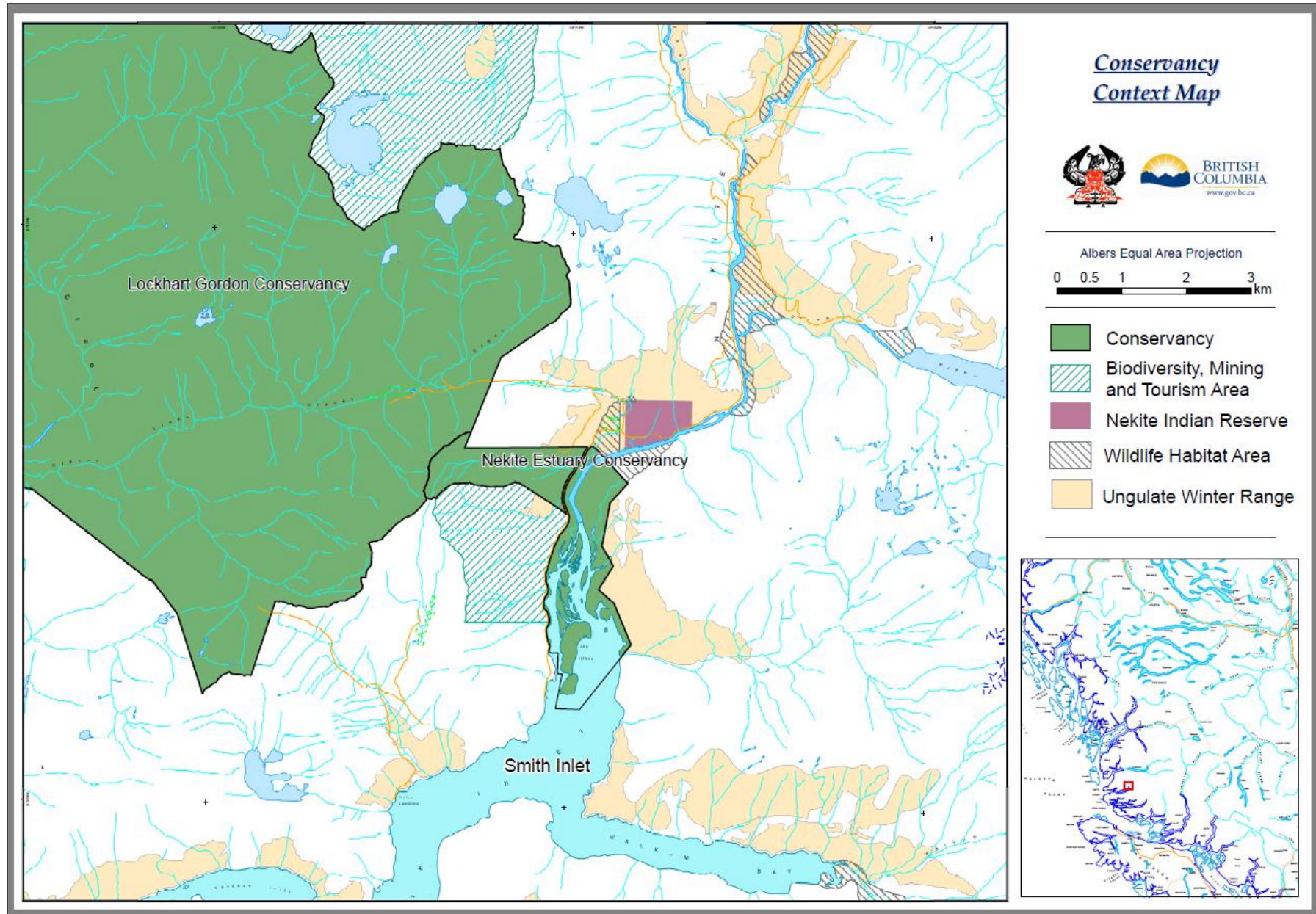


Figure 1: Conservancy Context Map

1.3 Management Commitments

Collaborative Management

A collaborative management agreement (CMA) between the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation and BC Parks outlines the relationship that the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw and the Province have in the planning and management of protected areas within Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw traditional territory.

The CMA commits the parties to plan, manage and use these protected areas in a manner that:

- recognizes and affirms aboriginal rights and provides the First Nation with continued access to land and resources necessary to exercise these rights, subject to measures necessary for conservation and public safety;
- protects natural, cultural and recreational values for future generations;
- provides the First Nation with enhanced access to economic opportunities in the protected areas that are compatible with the protection of natural, cultural and recreational values;
- integrates ecosystem-based science and traditional ecological knowledge;
- builds capacity for the parties and provides opportunities for the First Nation to be involved in the planning, management and use of the protected areas;
- promotes communication between BC Parks and the First Nation; and,
- makes the protected areas available for the use, recreation and enjoyment of all British Columbians.

Land Use Planning

In the land use planning agreement-in-principle (AIP) signed in 2006 between the Province and the First Nations of the southern central coast, the parties agreed on the primary roles for Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy: First Nations cultural heritage use and habitat conservation/protection. The AIP lists ecosystem representation and recreation as secondary roles for the conservancy.

Previously, the Central Coast Land and Resource Management Plan (CCLRMP, 2004) recommended that the principles of adaptive ecosystem based management be applied to land management throughout the central coast, including conservancies. The two overarching goals of EBM are to maintain the ecological integrity of terrestrial, marine and freshwater ecosystems, and to achieve high levels of human well being. The CCLRMP also identified several general management issues to be addressed in estuary conservancies, including: First Nations interests, access to upland developments, and best management of Grizzly Bear – human interactions with respect to recreation.

At the time that the central coast conservancies were announced, the Minister of Environment also made a commitment that existing, tenured uses may continue.

2.0 Roles and Values of the Conservancy



Figure 2: Nekite Estuary Photo

The Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy is significant in the parks and protected areas system for the following reasons:

- (1) The conservancy protects First Nations cultural values and uses. More specifically, the conservancy protects Gwa'sala-'Nakwada'xw culturally significant sites and traditional use areas, including a former Gwa'sala village site that contained numerous salmon fishing stations and smokehouses, as well as an important seasonal resource harvesting area;
- (2) The conservancy protects fish and wildlife habitat. This includes habitat for populations of Chinook, Chum, Coho, Pink and Sockeye salmon, Steelhead, and provincially blue-listed Dolly Varden Char and Cutthroat Trout.¹ The conservancy also protects sensitive habitat for the provincially blue-listed Grizzly Bear, winter

¹ Species and ecological communities are assigned to the red or blue list on the basis of the provincial Conservation Status Rank (SRANK) assigned by the B.C. Conservation Data Centre. The red list includes species/ecological communities that are extirpated, endangered or threatened. The blue list contains species/ecological communities that are considered to be of special concern.

range for Black-tailed Deer, high value habitat for Marbled Murrelet, high quality foraging habitat for Northern Goshawk, and habitat for other coastal bird species;

- (3) The conservancy contributes to ecosystem representation and landscape connectivity. Specifically, the conservancy makes an important contribution to the representation of British Columbia's naturally rare coastal estuaries in the provincial protected areas system. Furthermore, the conservancy is situated adjacent to Lockhart - Gordon Conservancy (24,501 hectares) and to the Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary West Biodiversity, Tourism and Mining Area (BMTA) (322 hectares). Together, these two conservancies and BMTA contribute to ecosystem connectivity in the Central Pacific Ranges Ecosection;
- (4) The conservancy offers visitors a remote, backcountry recreation experience in a scenic and biologically diverse estuarine environment.

2.1 Cultural Heritage

Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy is extremely important to the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation and the families that have utilized this area to harvest and gather the abundance of resources that the Creator provided. At one time, the Gwa'sala and 'Nakwada'xw were two distinct nations. Neġiġ is a place of origin for the Gwa'sala people and a place of many legends.

The place name Neġiġ means "head of the inlet" and refers to a large, former village site in the Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary, which included a number of fishing stations and smokehouses. Neġiġ was an ideal location for a village because of the variety of culturally important plants and animals found in the area, including food plants, cedar trees, medicines, ungulates, bears, wolves, salmon and Eulachon. The Gwa'sala community thrived and flourished in this resource rich location.

Gwa'sala activities at Neġiġ followed a seasonal round. Spring was an important time for the collection of edible plants, medicines, sap, bark and roots, as well as ducks and a variety of marine species easily harvested around the estuary. Summer brought a number of different types of berries that were collected and stored for winter use. Fall saw the return of the salmon and the wildlife species that depend on salmon, such as the Grizzly Bear. Harvesting and processing salmon were important activities at Neġiġ in the fall. In the winter, trapping for fur and hunting ungulates in the valley bottoms provided a source of sustenance and material for clothing and regalia. Winter ceremonies, where the gifts of nature were shared amongst community members, completed this annual cycle.

The Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy is a key location for the transfer of spiritual and traditional ecological knowledge to future generations. As an example, one of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Ninogad (knowledgeable ones) states, "a grove of culturally modified trees in the conservancy represents not only a location that cedar bark was stripped, but also a place that brought family members together to pass on valuable cultural knowledge."

The abundance of natural resources found at Neġiġ allowed for the Gwa’sala to develop their own unique stories, understanding of the world, and cultural practices. This cultural and economic connection to Neġiġ was impacted by the establishment of Indian Reserves by the Government of Canada in the late 1800s. The reserve established for the Gwa’sala at Neġiġ was placed some distance upriver from the traditional village site in the estuary. The Gwa’sala cultural connection to Neġiġ was further affected in 1964, when the Gwa’sala and ‘Nakwada’xw were relocated from Neġiġ and other villages to the current Indian Reserve in Port Hardy. Looking to restore the cultural connection to Neġiġ, a Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw Ninogad (Elder) states:

We have been away from our homelands for so long now and many Elders have passed on the legends and history we still carry. We would like to consider development but need to protect all the cultural sites great and small so that these teachings can be passed on to future generations. It is very important that we be involved in any activity that goes on within this conservancy as we do not want any more of our cultural values destroyed.

The Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw Elders also see a need to re-establish the balance in nature, because the cycles have been “messed up” from past resource development in the Neġiġ watershed. Respect for other species is considered critical. Hereditary Chief Gixsistalasi-Wakas recounts how, at one time, the Grizzly Bears would be on the east side of the river when the fish were running and the people would be on the other side because there was a respect for one another. He states, “We knew when they were busy feeding and they knew when we were busy harvesting salmon or berries.” He recounts that both parties kept their distance and few conflicts arose. The fisheries values in Neġiġ are viewed as extremely important for Grizzly Bears and all other species in the Nekite watershed. When the salmon are once again abundant and an Eulachon run has returned to Neġiġ, the Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw Elders believe balance will have been re-established.

2.2 Biological Diversity and Natural Environment

Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy protects important ecological values associated with a major coastal wetland. The habitat complexes created by the intersection of the Nekite River with the marine environment of Smith Inlet support an area of rich biodiversity. The conservancy also contributes to landscape connectivity in the protected areas network in the south central coast.

The conservancy is important for the protection of:

- Grizzly Bears;
- Pacific salmon;
- Dolly Varden Char and Cutthroat Trout;
- high value Marbled Murrelet habitat;

- high quality Northern Goshawk foraging habitat;
- Black-tailed Deer winter range; and,
- a diverse and productive estuary ecosystem.

Ecosystem Representation

The conservancy protects a major coastal estuary and associated wetlands. Estuaries are among the most productive of all ecosystems, supporting large populations of fish and wildlife in a small area. Offering a diversity of food sources and habitats, estuaries are used by approximately 80% of coastal wildlife species at some point in their life cycles. Estuaries are also naturally rare ecosystems, comprising less than 3% of British Columbia’s coastline. Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy makes an important contribution to the representation of British Columbia’s coastal estuaries in the provincial protected areas system.

The province’s ecoregion classification system divides the province into areas of similar climate, physiography, oceanography, hydrology, vegetation and wildlife potential. Ecosystems are the narrowest in scope of the geographic units within this classification system. The terrestrial portion of the conservancy is within the Central Pacific Ranges (CPR) Ecosystem. The marine component of the conservancy (142 hectares) is within the North Coast Fjords (NCF) Marine Ecosystem. Due to its relatively small size, the conservancy does not make a significant contribution to the representation of these ecosystems in the protected areas system in British Columbia.

However, the conservancy is contiguous with Lockhart Gordon Conservancy (24,501 hectares), which also contributes to the protection of the Central Pacific Ranges Ecosystem. In addition, the conservancy is contiguous with the Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary West Biodiversity, Tourism and Mining Area (BMTA) (322 hectares), which is similarly within the Central Pacific Ranges Ecosystem (Figure 1).² Together, these three areas contribute to ecosystem connectivity in the CPR Ecosystem.

British Columbia’s terrestrial ecosystems are further divided into biogeoclimatic (BEC) zones where specific types of soils, plant and animal communities develop. The conservancy protects three biogeoclimatic variants: Coastal Western Hemlock Submontane Very Wet Maritime (CWHvm1; 253 hectares); Coastal Western Hemlock Montane Very Wet Maritime (CWHvm2; 66 hectares); and Mountain Hemlock Windward Moist Maritime (MHmm1; 28 hectares). Due to its relatively small size, the conservancy does not make a major contribution to representation of these biogeoclimatic zones in the provincial protected areas system.

² Commercial timber harvesting and commercial hydro-electric projects are prohibited within BMTAs.

Salmon/Fish

The Nekite River drainage is a fisheries sensitive watershed with high value fish habitat. Pacific salmon are a keystone species³ in the conservancy, providing an important food source for Grizzly Bears and a critical source of nutrients for the riparian forests of the Nekite River and estuary. The Nekite River provides spawning and rearing habitats for Chinook, Chum, Coho, Pink and Sockeye salmon, as well as Steelhead. Rainbow Trout, Cutthroat Trout and Dolly Varden Char are also present in the Nekite River system. Dolly Varden Char and Cutthroat Trout are provincially blue-listed species.

There is a spawning channel for Chum Salmon in the Nekite River upstream of the conservancy. The Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw First Nation maintains this spawning channel and conducts an annual salmon enumeration project at this site. The west side of the estuary is a spawning site for Pacific Herring. Eulachon, a provincially blue-listed species, is also present in Smith Inlet and has been observed at the Nekite River spawning channel upstream of the conservancy.

Grizzly Bears

The conservancy is important for the protection of Grizzly Bears. Grizzly Bears also play a pivotal role in the productivity of the Nekite estuary. In spring and early summer, Grizzly Bears feed on sedges, grasses and forbs in the estuary. In the fall, the bears carry spawning salmon upland from the estuary, bringing an influx of nutrients into the riparian forests. Grizzly Bears are an indicator species, in that their population status reflects the health and integrity of their habitats. Grizzly Bears are also a provincially blue-listed species.

The lowlands on both sides of the Nekite River and the estuary are considered to be sensitive Grizzly Bear habitat. There are several areas that were formerly designated as Wildlife Habitat Areas (WHAs⁴) for Grizzly Bear in the conservancy, including one on the eastern shore of the estuary (WHA 5-308), one on the east side of the Nekite River (WHA 5-305), and one in the riparian area of a tributary on the west side of the Nekite River (WHA 5-303). WHA 5-308, the majority of WHA 5-305 and a small portion of WHA 5-303 are now included in the conservancy. These portions of WHAs within the conservancy have now been superseded by the conservancy designation. As such, the Grizzly Bear habitat represented in these former WHAs is now protected by the conservancy and is contiguous with the

³ A keystone species is one that is essential to the integrity of an ecosystem due to the key roles it plays in ecosystem structure and function. Pacific salmon have also been identified as a 'cultural keystone species' for First Nations of the northwest coast. A 'cultural keystone species' is described as a cultural icon with a prominent role in the language, ceremony and narratives of a people; without such cultural keystone species, the society would be considerably different. See Garibaldi, A. and N. Turner. 2004. Cultural keystone species: implications for ecological conservation and restoration. *Ecology and Society* 9(3): 1. [online] URL: <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol9/iss3/art1>

⁴ WHAs are mapped areas considered necessary to meet the critical habitat requirements of a species. This WHA designation is superseded by the conservancy designation.

remaining portions of these WHAs on the forest lands adjacent to the conservancy (Figure 1).

Birds

The Neġiġ /Nekite Estuary ranks highly in biological importance for coastal bird species, including overwintering Trumpeter Swans, Canada Geese, goldeneyes, Mallards, Bald Eagles, gulls and mergansers. The Western Grebe, a red-listed species, is also believed to use the estuary. The Pacific Estuary Conservation Program ranked 442 of British Columbia's coastal estuaries for their relative biological importance to waterbirds.⁵ Attributes used to assess biological importance included data on estuary size, habitat rarity, Pacific Herring spawn occurrence, waterbird use, and intertidal species rarity. The Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary received a high score of two on a scale of one to five in this ranking exercise, with one being the highest.

The Neġiġ /Nekite Estuary Conservancy is within an area of high habitat suitability for Marbled Murrelet. There is also moderate to high quality foraging habitat for Northern Goshawk on the west side of the head of estuary. Marbled Murrelet is a blue-listed species and Northern Goshawk is a red-listed species. Both are focal species for ecosystem based management (EBM)⁶ on British Columbia's central coast.

Black-tailed Deer

The conservancy protects critical winter habitat for Black-tailed Deer. There are two patches of former Ungulate Winter Range (UWR u-5-005) for Black-tailed Deer in the conservancy, one on the east side of the Nekite River and estuary, and one on the west side of the Nekite River. This UWR was designated prior to the establishment of the conservancy to protect habitat necessary to meet the winter habitat requirements for Black-tailed Deer. A portion (179 hectares in total) of each patch of this former UWR has now been incorporated into the conservancy, thereby protecting the winter habitat values associated with these patches and maintaining connectivity with the remaining UWR adjacent to the conservancy (Figure 1).

Climate Change

Climate change is expected to result in changes to species composition and ecosystem functioning across the landscape. Other anticipated changes include increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, as well as sea level rise due to melting ice and thermal expansion of warming ocean waters.

⁵ Ryder, J.L., J.K. Kenyon, D. Buffett, K. Moore, M. Ceh, and K. Stipec. 2007. An integrated biophysical assessment of estuarine habitats in British Columbia to assist regional conservation planning. Technical Report Series No. 476. Canadian Wildlife Service, Pacific and Yukon Region, British Columbia.

⁶ Information on the definition and implementation of Ecosystem Based Management is available at http://www.ilmb.gov.bc.ca/slrp/lrmp/nanaimo/central_north_coast/index.html

Protected areas have a role in mitigating the impacts of climate change by naturally storing carbon, and providing refuge for species that migrate when conditions become unfavourable in their existing habitats. In combination with adjacent Lockhart Gordon Conservancy and the Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary West Biodiversity, Mining and Tourism Area, Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy plays a role in climate change adaptation, allowing for species migration and adaptation.

The Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy will likely be impacted by the effects of climate change. Specific impacts are difficult to predict. However, the estuary is expected to be impacted by projected sea level rise. The entire estuary is ranked as having very high or high shoreline sensitivity to sea level rise, due to the susceptibility of the estuarine sediments, and wide sand and gravel flats to erosion. Substantial re-arrangement of intertidal habitats and loss of trees along the shoreline can be expected as high sea levels and storm events coincide. Neġiġ /Nekite Estuary Conservancy may also experience impacts to water quality and availability due to changes in the timing, intensity and duration of precipitation and snowmelt events in the Nekite River watershed. Overall, the effects of climate change may alter ecological dynamics in the estuary and result in impacts to natural, cultural and recreational values in the Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy.

2.3 Recreation

Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy provides opportunities for backcountry recreation activities that are consistent with the protection of First Nations cultural heritage and ecological values. The conservancy protects natural and aesthetic values that support wilderness and nature appreciation in a remote, backcountry setting.

Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy offers visitors the opportunity to experience a scenic and biologically diverse estuarine environment in a remote coastal fjord. Examples of wilderness recreational activities that the conservancy can support include walking/hiking, bird/wildlife viewing, nature photography, fishing, natural/cultural interpretation, camping and boating.

Guided wildlife (Grizzly Bear) viewing occurs in the conservancy. Viewing is conducted by boat in the spring when the Grizzly Bears are feeding on vegetation in the estuary. There is currently one operator offering guided wildlife viewing in the conservancy and surrounding area. There is a floating lodge in the estuary just outside of the conservancy that is associated with this activity. There are also viewing platforms upstream of the conservancy that are used in the fall when the bears are feeding on salmon in the Nekite River.

Sports fishing for Steelhead, Cutthroat Trout and Pacific salmon occurs in the Nekite River. Small numbers of recreational boaters travel to the conservancy. However, boating opportunities are limited by a lack of suitable anchorages in Smith Inlet and the distance of the Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary from the main coastal touring routes.

Given the conservancy's rich cultural heritage and natural values, there is potential for development of a cultural tourism opportunity to provide visitors with a guided cultural and natural interpretation/education experience.

2.4 Resource Use

Natural resource use and development may be permitted in the conservancy, provided that this activity occurs in a sustainable manner and is consistent with the protection and maintenance of biodiversity and natural environments; First Nations social, ceremonial and cultural uses; and recreational values.⁷ There are currently no commercial natural resource uses or developments occurring in the Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy.

The conservancy provides opportunities for First Nations cultural, social and ceremonial uses of traditional marine and terrestrial resources.⁸ The conservancy may also be able to support small scale commercial resource use or development opportunities that are compatible with the conservancy's roles in cultural heritage use, habitat conservation/protection and ecosystem representation. Natural resource use and development opportunities that may be appropriate in this conservancy include commercial aquaculture (not including salmon aquaculture) and commercial harvesting of botanicals (e.g., salal, mushrooms).

⁷ Note: The *Park Act* prohibits commercial logging, mining and hydro-electric power generation, other than local run-of-the-river projects, in conservancies.

⁸ Note: Management of marine fisheries falls under the jurisdiction of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO).

3.0 Management Direction

3.1 Vision

The Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy continues to support the cultural heritage and biodiversity values associated with this rich estuary environment. Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw families are passing on traditional knowledge to the next generation and reconnecting with Neġiġ in a manner that promotes the unique cultural history of the area. Visitors are enjoying the scenic values and wilderness recreation opportunities in the conservancy, and gaining an appreciation of Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw cultural heritage.

The Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation is benefitting from cultural tourism, recreation and sustainable economic development opportunities in the conservancy. The collaborative relationship between the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation and BC Parks is strong and capacity is being built within the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw to diversify participation in all aspects of protection and management. The parties strive to ensure the conservancy is managed into the future for the enjoyment of all visitors.

3.2 Conservancy Zoning

Introduction

This management plan uses zoning to assist in the planning and management of the conservancy. In general terms, zoning divides an area into logical units to apply consistent management objectives for the protection of cultural heritage, conservation, and recreational values. The zones reflect the intended land use, existing patterns of use, the degree of human use desired, and the level of management and development required. There are two zones in the conservancy: Special Feature Zone – Wildlife Habitat Protection and First Nations Cultural Heritage Zone (Figure 3).

Special Feature Zone – Wildlife Habitat Protection

This Special Feature Zone – Wildlife Habitat Protection encompasses land on the east side of the Nekite River from the estuary to the upstream boundary of the conservancy. This zone includes the area previously designated as a Grizzly Bear Wildlife Habitat Area, as well as an area previously designated as Ungulate Winter Range for Black-tailed Deer, and an area of moderate to high quality foraging habitat for Northern Goshawk. This zone protects these wildlife values and provides a riparian travel corridor to the estuary for Grizzly Bears. Recreational uses and commercial resource uses will not be encouraged in this zone to prevent disturbance to Grizzly Bears and protect wildlife values.

This zone also protects Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw cultural heritage values, including the former village site and associated cultural features. Cultural uses in this zone include

seasonal harvesting and processing of traditional resources, with a focus on passing traditional values on to future generations.

For a complete list of appropriate uses in this zone see Appendix A. This zone comprises approximately 91 hectares or 20% of the conservancy.

First Nations Cultural Heritage Zone

The First Nations Cultural Heritage Zone includes the islands within the estuary and the west side of the Nekite River. This zone will also be used for seasonal harvesting and processing of traditional marine and terrestrial resources, as well as intergenerational activities aimed at passing on traditional values to Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw youth. Recreational activities, such as walking/hiking, wildlife viewing, angling, boating, camping, nature photography, and natural/cultural appreciation, are appropriate in this zone. A forest road (excluded from the conservancy) bisects this zone and is important for access to the upper watershed and the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw Indian Reserve.

Small scale buildings to be used for cultural education and interpretation, as well as development of associated trails and interpretive signage, are potential future uses in this zone. Development of backcountry campsites will also be considered as a possible future use in this zone.

For a complete list of appropriate uses in this zone see Appendix A. This zone comprises approximately 390 hectares or 80% of the conservancy.

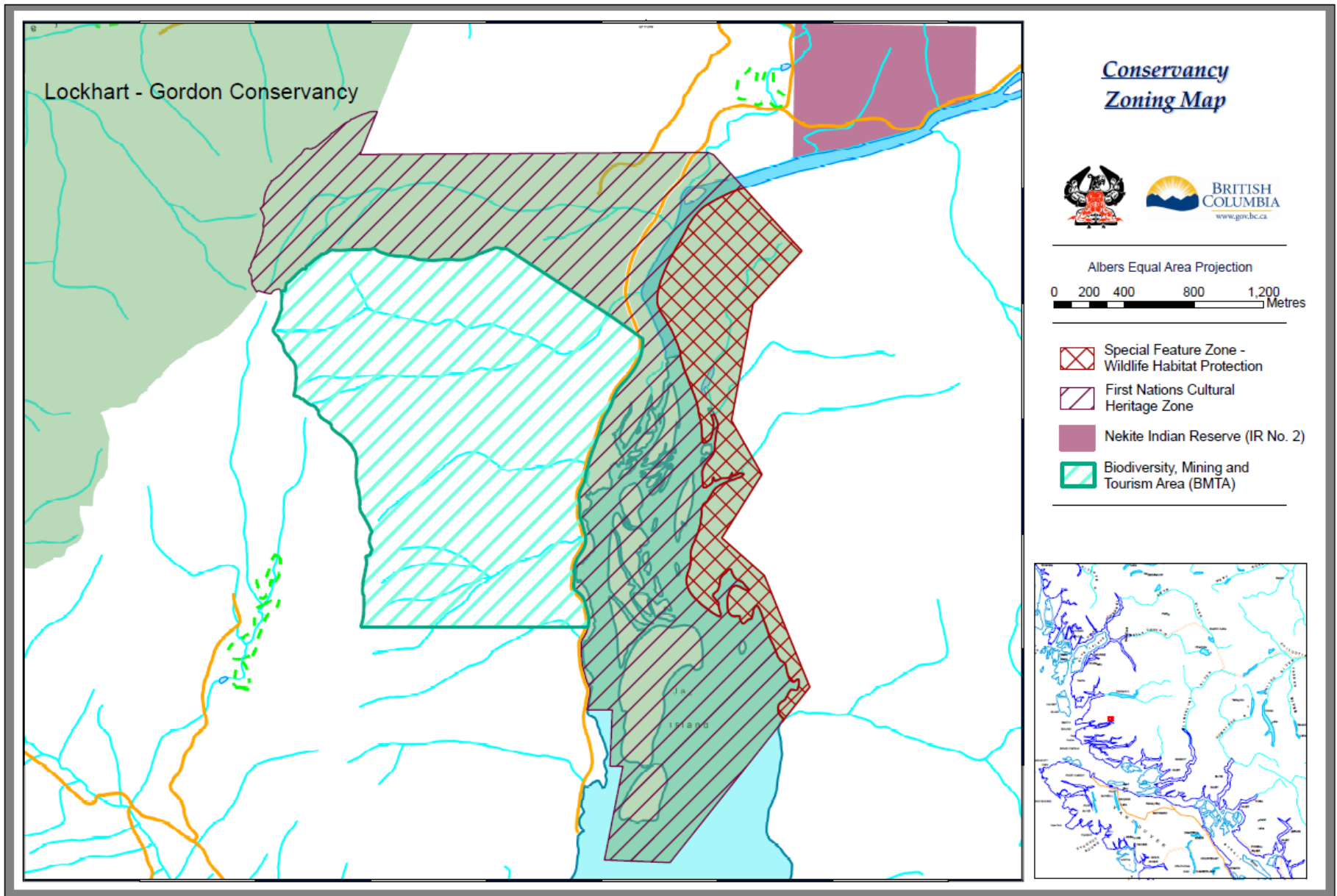


Figure 3. Zoning Map.

3.3 Management Objectives, Issues and Strategies

Five broad management objectives have been identified for Neġiġ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy. The following tables list key issues related to each objective, as well as management strategies to address these issues in the conservancy.

<i>Objective 1: Respect and protect Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw social and cultural heritage values.</i>	
Issues	Strategies
Sacred/cultural heritage sites in the conservancy have been disturbed by visitors.	<p>Develop collaborative procedures for reporting incidents involving disturbance of cultural heritage sites in the conservancy to the appropriate authorities.</p> <p>Support increased Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw role in protecting cultural heritage features in the conservancy.</p> <p>Develop a Guardian Watchman program to involve the Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw First Nation in monitoring, compliance and enforcement activities to protect cultural heritage and ecological features.</p>
Strong desire by the Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw First Nation to reconnect with Neġiġ, participate in traditional activities in the conservancy and pass on knowledge to the next generation.	Support Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw cultural and traditional use activities in the conservancy.
Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw interest in maintaining and enhancing fish populations (particularly salmon) and other key resources in the conservancy.	The Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw will work with BC Parks, relevant federal agencies and partners to rebuild fish populations (particularly salmon) and other species through habitat restoration activities in the conservancy.
Lack of public awareness of the significance of this area to the Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw First Nation may impact protection of cultural heritage values.	<p>Develop signage/communication materials to educate the public about the cultural heritage values in the conservancy.</p> <p>Encourage visitors to contact the Hereditary Chief of the Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw First Nation to learn more about cultural protocol and cultural heritage values in the conservancy. Provide contact information for the Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw First Nation on the BC Parks website.</p>

Objective 2: Protect biological diversity and natural environment values.

Issues	Strategies
The conservancy is vulnerable to the effects of climate change and has very high sensitivity to sea level rise.	<p>The conservancy should be managed to accommodate the potential migration of the estuary upstream.</p> <p>Identify the areas that may be inundated.</p> <p>Avoid construction of facilities or other infrastructure in areas that may be part of the migrating estuary.</p>
Implementation of ecosystem based management in the central coast may require baseline research and ongoing monitoring of focal species and ecological processes in the conservancy.	Encourage research, in partnership with other organizations and agencies, to monitor the ecological processes and focal species within the conservancy.
Lack of information on species at risk may impact protection of biological diversity in the conservancy.	Encourage inventories of species at risk and monitoring of known species at risk in the conservancy (e.g., Grizzly Bears).
Due to its small size, the conservancy is vulnerable to adverse effects from adjacent land uses.	Monitor adjacent land uses and marine activities for potential impacts to conservancy values.

Objective 3. Manage recreation to protect cultural values and maintain or improve the productivity and integrity of habitat in the conservancy, especially for salmon and Grizzly Bear.

Issues	Strategies
Backcountry recreation opportunities that are consistent with the protection of cultural and natural values are appropriate in the conservancy.	<p>Encourage public recreational opportunities that are compatible with protection of cultural/natural estuarine values (e.g., bird/wildlife viewing, nature photography, walking, fishing, natural/cultural appreciation, camping, boating and cultural tourism). For example, small scale buildings to be used for cultural education and interpretation, as well as development of associated trails and interpretive signage, are potential future uses in the First Nations Cultural Heritage Zone. This includes development of backcountry campsites being considered as a possible future use in this zone.</p> <p>Provide information to the public on recreational opportunities in the conservancy (e.g., via the BC Parks website).</p>

Objective 3. Manage recreation to protect cultural values and maintain or improve the productivity and integrity of habitat in the conservancy, especially for salmon and Grizzly Bear.

Limited knowledge of the extent to which this area is used for recreation.	Collaboratively monitor recreational use, using the Backcountry Recreation Impact Monitoring (BRIM) process, and manage accordingly.
Recreational activities, including wildlife viewing and guided angling, should be managed to minimize disturbance to Grizzly Bears.	Recreational activities will be managed in a way which minimizes the risk of potential human-bear conflicts. Recreational uses and commercial resource use opportunities will not be encouraged in the Special Feature – Wildlife Habitat Protection Zone to prevent disturbance to Grizzly Bears, and provide a travel corridor to and from the estuary. Guided wildlife viewing and angling guiding will be managed to ensure a high quality, wilderness experience and the desire to emphasize biodiversity conservation.
Due to the conservancy’s small size, hunting may pose a risk to public safety and conflict with other recreational activities (e.g., bear viewing) or cultural activities.	Recommend regulatory changes to prohibit hunting in the conservancy.

Objective 4. Ensure economic opportunities in the conservancy contribute to broader goals of human wellbeing on the central coast.

Issues	Strategies
The Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw First Nation does not participate in an equitable portion of the opportunities that exist in the protected areas within their traditional territory.	Implement Collaborative Management Agreement commitments to provide the Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw with enhanced access to economic opportunities within their traditional territory.
Recreation and tourism opportunities are important for economic diversification in local communities on northern Vancouver Island and the mainland coast.	Encourage recreational users to use local transportation, tourism and guiding services.

Objective 5. Ensure the use of natural resources is sustainable and consistent with the protection of the conservancy’s values.

Issues	Strategies
Resource use or development activities can occur if they do not impact identified values/roles and/or conflict with other management objectives of the	Consider specific proposals for further evaluation.

Objective 5. Ensure the use of natural resources is sustainable and consistent with the protection of the conservancy's values.

Issues	Strategies
conservancy.	
Potential, future access development and associated infrastructure may pose a threat to natural, cultural or recreational values in the conservancy.	<p>In review of any access development proposals, request that alternatives outside of the conservancy also be considered.</p> <p>Ensure any proposed access/infrastructure development is designed to minimize disturbance to cultural sites, focal species and their habitats, and recreational values.</p> <p>Ensure development proposals follow the BC Parks Impact Assessment process.</p>

4.0 Plan Implementation

An adaptive approach will be applied to the management of this conservancy. Adaptive management involves a five-step process of planning, action, monitoring, evaluation and revision of management strategies to reflect lessons learned. Adaptive management is flexible, collaborative, and responsive to public input.

The effectiveness of the management strategies identified in this management plan at achieving the objectives for Neġiλ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy will be monitored and evaluated by the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation and BC Parks. No specific, future management planning is envisioned for Neġiλ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy. However, BC Parks will work with the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation to coordinate planning and management of the Neġiλ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy, as required.

Management strategies and actions may change to reflect new circumstances and information gained. For example, management strategies may also be revised to respond to the implementation of broader objectives of ecosystem based management in the central coast.

The BC Parks Impact Assessment Policy will also be applied in this conservancy. All reviewable actions will be subject to an assessment of potential impacts, including consideration of the cumulative impacts of proposed actions on conservancy values.

Priority strategies for implementation include:

- Developing a Guardian Watchmen program to involve the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation in monitoring, compliance and enforcement activities to protect cultural heritage features;
- Encouraging visitors to contact the Hereditary Chief of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwada'xw First Nation to learn more about cultural protocol and cultural heritage values in the conservancy. Providing contact information for the Gwa'sala-'Nakwada'xw First Nation on the BC Parks website.

The implementation of the first priority strategy outlined above is dependent on the availability of BC Parks' and Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw financial/staff resources. Approval of this management plan does not constitute approval of funding for implementation.

Appendix A – Appropriate Uses Table

The following table lists existing and potential future uses in NeġiĻ/Nekite Estuary Conservancy. This is not an exhaustive list of uses that may be considered in this protected area.

The table is provided to summarize the uses which the management planning process has confirmed are not appropriate in the conservancy. The table also gives a general indication of the management direction for other uses. The table must be reviewed in conjunction with the other sections of the management plan, including the role descriptions, vision, objectives and strategies.

ACTIVITY	ZONE	
	First Nations Cultural Heritage	Special Feature Zone – Wildlife Habitat Protection
Camping (backcountry)	Y	N
Commercial Wildlife Viewing	Y	N
Cultural Tourism	Y	Y
Fishing	Y	N
Angling Guiding	Y	N
Hunting	N	N
Trapping ⁹	Y	Y
Boating (power)	Y	N/A ¹⁰
Boating (non-power)	Y	N/A
Facilities		
Campsites - backcountry	Y	N
Buildings/Facilities for Cultural Interpretation/Education/Guardian Watchmen Program	Y	N
Interpretive Signage	Y	N
Trails	Y	N

⁹ Note: the trap lines within and adjacent to the Conservancy are currently vacant.

¹⁰ This zone does not include any portion of the Nekite River or estuary.

ACTIVITY	ZONE	
	First Nations Cultural Heritage	Special Feature Zone – Wildlife Habitat Protection
Other Uses		
Aircraft Access (float plane, helicopter)	Y	N/A ¹¹
Scientific Research	Y	Y
Commercial Harvesting of Botanicals (e.g., salal for floral, or mushrooms)	Y	N
Aquaculture (not including salmon aquaculture) ¹²	Y	N
Fisheries Habitat Restoration (e.g., salmon) ¹³	Y	Y
Filming (commercial)	Y	Y
Communication Sites	Y	N

Legend for the Appropriate Uses Table

N	Not an appropriate use in this zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 determined is no longer an appropriate use in this zone. The management plan details strategies for addressing this inappropriate use (e.g., phasing out, closing).
Y	May be an appropriate use in this zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 <u>may be considered</u> 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.
N/A	Not an applicable use in this zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is applied where it is not feasible for the use to take place in this zone (e.g., mooring buoys in a terrestrial zone).

¹¹ This zone does not include any portion of the Nekite River or estuary where float plane access would be feasible, nor does it include and flat, cleared areas suitable for helicopter access. Development of a helicopter landing site is not an appropriate activity in this zone.

¹² Note that Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) is responsible for the management and regulation of aquaculture under the federal *Fisheries Act*.

¹³ Note that Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) is responsible for the management of Pacific salmon species under the federal *Fisheries Act*.