Skeena Region

MANAGEMENT DIRECTION STATEMENT

March 2003



for Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve and Ningunsaw Provincial Park



Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection Environmental Stewardsh Division

Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve and Ningunsaw Provincial Park Approvals Page

Forward

This management direction statement for Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve and Ningunsaw Provincial Park provides management direction until such time as it is revised. Ongoing consultation between Environmental Stewardship Division and First Nations may result in revisions as appropriate. Aboriginal rights are honoured and respected within the park.

Implementation of strategies identified in the MDS will be dependent on available funding and Environmental Stewardship Division priorities.

Approvals

makid

Regional Manager Skeena Region Environmental Stewardship Division

Assistant Deputy Minister Environmental Stewardship Division

This management direction statement was developed through direction received from the Cassiar Iskut-Stikine Land and Resource Management Plan.

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Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve and Ningunsaw Provincial Park

Management Direction Statement

Introduction

Purpose of the Management Direction Statement

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

Ecological reserves and provincial parks are separate entities governed by different acts of the provincial legislature. Therefore, for easier understanding, this management direction statement treats the Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve and Ningunsaw Provincial Park separately in those areas where separation is required.

Context

The provincial government established Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve by order in council under the *Ecological Reserve Act* on February 6, 1975. Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve is currently named and described in Schedule A of the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*. The ecological reserve covers an area of 2,046 hectares, situated across the Ningunsaw River from Highway 37, 105 kilometres north of Stewart.

The provincial government established Ningunsaw Provincial Park by the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act* on April 11, 2001. The park is currently named and described in Schedule C of that Act. The park extends protection from the ecological reserve to an additional 15,708 hectares to the south. The purpose of the park is to provide valley bottom to alpine representation. Designation followed the recommendations of the Cassiar Iskut-Stikine Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). The park and ecological reserve lie within the asserted traditional territory of the Tahltan First Nation.

The ecological reserveand park protect a complete elevation sequence of ecosystems from the Ningunsaw River valley to alpine. The park includes low elevation forested slopes, riparian areas and lake-headed rivers; the ecological reserve includes a small rounded mountain bordering the Ningunsaw River. Recreational use of the park is currently low.

Several small parks to the west, including Choquette Hot Springs, Great Glacier and Lava Forks, protect special features. About 100 kilometres to the north, a series of large protected areas dominate the landscape. These protected areas include Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Provincial Park, Gladys Lake Ecological Reserve, Mount Edziza Provincial Park and Stikine River Provincial Park. These protected areas conserve entire ecosystems and offer a wide variety of outstanding backcountry outdoor recreation opportunities.

Ecological Reserve Attributes

Conservation

- Both the park and ecological reserve contribute to the representation of the poorly represented Northern Skeena Mountains Ecosection (3.08%). The ecological reserve contributes 4.59% to the representation of the ecosection.
- The park and ecological reserve protect a complete elevation sequence of biogeoclimatic subzones representative of a transition between coastal and interior climates: ICHvc (very wet cold interior cedar hemlock), ICHwc, ESSFwv (wet very cold Engelmann spruce subalpine fir), AT (alpine tundra) biogeoclimatic subzones. The ecological reserve contributes 1.92% to the overall representation of the ESSFwv (4.85%). The ecological reserve and the park are two of only three protected areas contributing to the representation of the ICHvc. Only 0.9% of the ICHvc is protected, and the ecological reserve accounts for 24.98% of the overall representation of this ecosystem. The ecological reserve is one of only two protected areas contributing to the representation of the ICHwc. This ecosystem is poorly represented (0.3%) in the protected areas system and Ningunsaw Ecological Reserve accounts for 97.83% of this representation.
- Provides high value grizzly bear habitat on avalanche chutes.

Commercial Business Opportunities

• Due to the sensitive nature of the ecological reserve, human use activities, except for research and limited education, should be discouraged. There are no opportunities for commercial use.

Cultural Heritage

- Contains a portion of the historic Telegraph Trail (1899 1940s) route.
- Cultural heritage values remain undocumented at this time. Environmental Stewardship Division is seeking Tahltan First Nations' contributions to resolve this lack of knowledge.

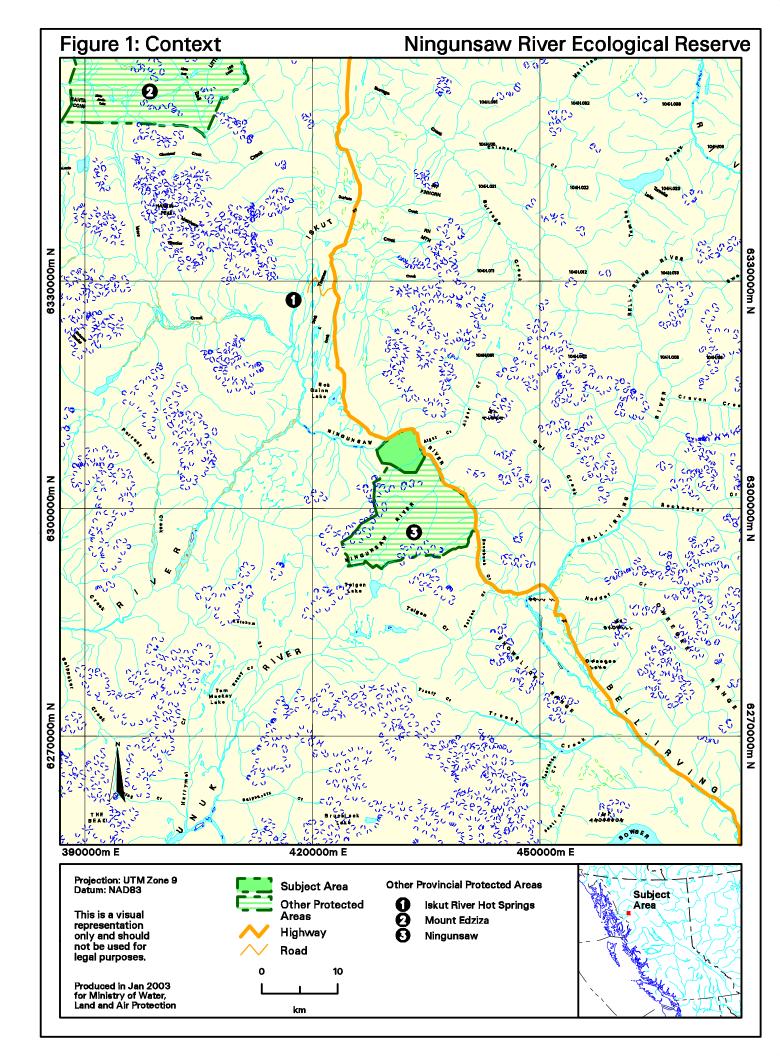
Significance in Protected Areas System

- Only 0.9% of the ICHvc is protected, and the ecological reserve accounts for 24.98% of the overall representation of this ecosystem.
- Ningunsaw Ecological Reserve accounts for 97.83% of the ICHwc ecosystem, an ecosystem poorly represented (0.3%) in the protected areas system.
- Protects high value grizzly bear year round habitat.
- Protects a portion of the historic Collins Telegraph Trail.

Ningunsaw Provincial Park Attributes

Conservation

• Both the park and ecological reserve contribute to the representation of the poorly represented Northern Skeena Mountains Ecosection (3.08%). The park contributes 30.39% of the overall representation of this ecosection in the protected areas system, thus ranking second.



- The park and ecological reserve protect a complete elevation sequence of biogeoclimatic subzones representative of a transition between coastal and interior climates: ICHvc (very wet cold interior cedar hemlock), ICHwc, ESSFwv (wet very cold Engelmann spruce subalpine fir), AT (alpine tundra) biogeoclimatic subzones. The park contributes 8.64% to the overall representation of the ESSFwv (4.85%). The park and ecological reserve are two of only three protected areas contributing to the representation of the ICHvc. Only 0.9% of the ICHvc is protected, and the park accounts for 58.03% of the overall representation of this ecosystem.
- Provides high value grizzly bear habitat on avalanche chutes.

Recreation and Tourism

- Provides heli-skiing and backcountry skiing potential from Highway 37.
- Presents potential for backcountry wilderness outdoor recreation.
- Contains areas with potential for grizzly bear viewing from Highway 37.

Commercial Business Opportunities

- Provides commercial business opportunities for heli-skiing, backcountry skiing and guided hunting activities. (See Appendix 1 for activities allowed in this park).
- Provides low to moderate commercial business opportunities for guided interpretation based tour groups focused on the special features of this park, especially wildlife viewing.

Cultural Heritage

- Cultural heritage values remain undocumented at this time. Environmental Stewardship Division is seeking Tahltan First Nations' contributions to resolve this lack of knowledge.
- Contains a portion of the provincially significant historic Collins Telegraph Trail (1899 1940s).

Significance in Protected Areas System

- Accounts for 58.03% of the overall representation ICHvc (0.9%) ecosystem, an ecosystem poorly represented in the protected areas system.
- Protects high value grizzly bear year round habitat.
- Protects a portion of the provincially significant historic Collins Telegraph Trail.

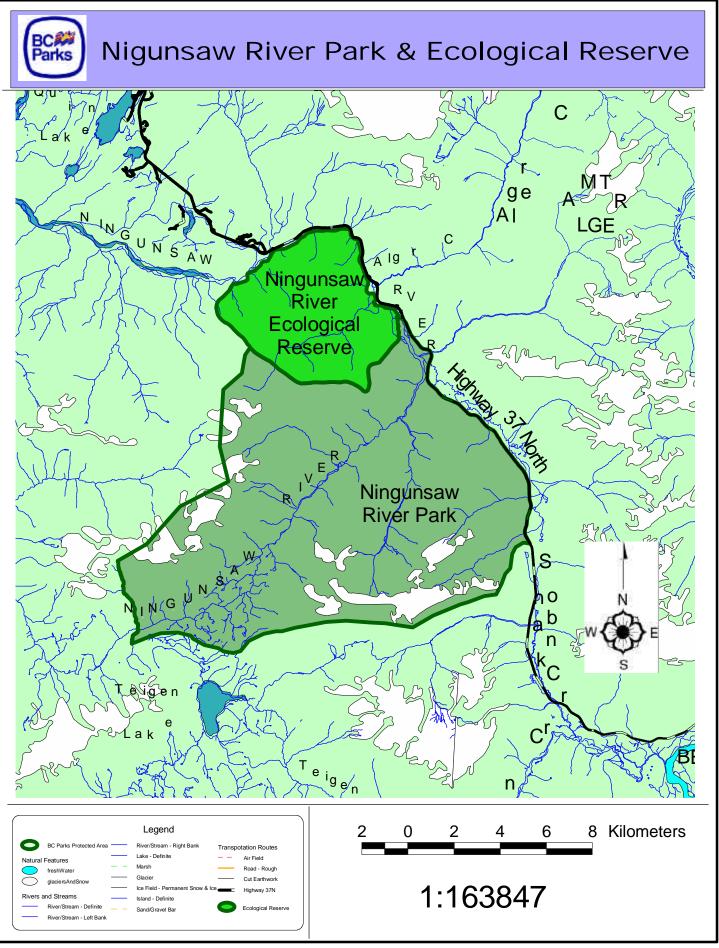
Land Uses, Tenures and Interests

Access

Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve and Ningunsaw Provincial Park are situated immediately west of Highway 37 (Stewart – Cassiar), 120 kilometres north of Meziadin Junction and 215 kilometres south of Dease Lake. The southeast portion of the park directly borders the highway while the ecological reserve lies across the fordable Ningunsaw River.

Existing Tenures

- The provincial park boundary excludes the Highway 37 right of way and gravel sources required for maintenance and upgrading activities.
- Three trapping licenses 621T004, 621T005, 617T015 cover the park. One park use permit issued for trapping SK0210372.



Plot date: February 19, 2001 nil

- Guide-outfitter 617G002 contains the park. No park use permit issued for this business in the park.
- No guided angling or commercial fishery exists in the park.
- Last Frontier heli-skiing tenure includes the park.

Existing Land Use Activities and Facilities

- No facilities exist in the ecological reserve or the park.
- Heli-skiing takes place in the park when bad weather prevents reaching other destinations.
- Backcountry skiing takes place in the park.

Adjacent Patterns of Land Use

- The north and east sides of the park and ecological reserve border the Middle Iskut resource management zone. The direction for the Middle Iskut Resource Management Zone is to maintain the integrity of riparian habitat and recreational values along the Iskut River. The west boundary of the park and ecological reserve borders a general management zone. The southern boundary of the park borders the Kalum Forest District. The Kalum Forest District has no harvesting plans for this area at this time.
- Because of the fairly high elevation of the surrounding landscape, extensive forest harvesting next to the park and ecological reserve is unlikely.
- Highway 37 forms the eastern boundary of the park.

First Nations Interests

- The park and ecological reserve lie within the asserted traditional territory of the Tahltan First Nation.
- Tahltan First Nation has an interest in maintaining their aboriginal traditional uses and activities in the provincial park and the ecological reserve.

Other Agency Interests

- Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Skeena Region Fish and Wildlife Science and Allocation Section, has an interest in the ecological reserve and park wildlife species, particularly maintenance of viable grizzly bear populations.
- The Ministry of Transportation has an interest in providing public safety along Highway 37 and bordering the park.
- The Ministry of Forests has an interest in suppressing fires that might spread from the park or ecological reserve into the neighbouring Iskut valley.
- Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management (British Columbia Conservation Data Centre (CDC)) has an interest in rare species and species at risk in the park and ecological reserve.

Private and Public Stakeholder Interests

- Northern British Columbia Tourism Association is interested in this park because of its value to the touring public using Highway 37.
- Regional residents and communities have an interest in the park as a local outdoor recreation and conservation area
- Research institutions, naturalists and ecologists have an interest in the ecological reserve and the park because the y protect a complete elevation sequence of biogeoclimatic

subzones representative of a transition between coastal and interior climates and the y conserve significant grizzly bear and moose habitat.

- The trapline and guide outfitter owners are interested in the park because the *Park Act* and regulations may place limits on the trapping of fur-bearing animal species and the hunting of wildlife species within Ninguns aw Provincial Park.
- Heli-ski operators (Last Frontier heli-skiing) have an interest in the park for heli-skiing opportunities.

Role of Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve

The primary role for Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve is to protect a complete elevation sequence of biogeoclimatic subzones representative of a transition between coastal and interior climates. Equally important in this role is the ecological reserve's conservation of significant year round grizzly bear and summer moose habitat. The ecological reserve also conserves important cultural heritage values such as the Collins Telegraph Trail.

An important secondary role for Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve is its function as a benchmark for scientific research and education purposes.

Role of Ningunsaw Provincial Park

The primary role for Ningunsaw Provincial Park is to protect a complete elevation sequence of biogeoclimatic subzones representative of a transition between coastal and interior climates. This role also entails the conservation of significant year-round grizzly bear and summer moose habitat. Added to this, the park preserves important cultural heritage values such as the Collins Telegraph Trail.

The park performs a secondary outdoor recreation role by providing backcountry recreation activities. These recreation opportunities are ranked as moderate because of the difficult terrain and dense forest cover. The park presents good wildlife viewing opportunities for moose and grizzly bear.

An important tertiary role for Ningunsaw Provincial Park is its function as an area for scientific research and education purposes, complementing a similar role for the Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve.

Management Commitments and Issues

Direction from Previous Planning

The Cassiar Iskut-Stikine LRMP recommended the Ningunsaw Extension for protection as a provincial park in 2000 and gave the following management direction:

- Allow hunting in the park;
 - co-ordinate the setting of limited entry hunting levels with those outside the protected area;
- Allow Ministry of Transportation to continue activities, such as avalanche control and debris clearing, that provide public safety along Highway 37;
 - Work with Ministry of Transportation to minimise the impacts on protected area values.
- Consider establishing a viewing area for grizzly bears.

Management Issues for Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve

The following management issues require attention in Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve.

Theme	Issue
Protecting ecological values	 Natural values within the ecological reserve may be at risk because an inventory of flora and fauna is incomplete. Ecological values within the ecological reserve may be affected by Ministry of Transportation's safety activities such as avalanche control along Highway 37. Ecological reserve ecosystems may be damaged because the boundaries of the ecological reserve are not located on the ground.
Protecting cultural heritage features and values.	 Cultural heritage values and their significance within the ecological reserve are unknown because no inventory of these values is complete The Tahltan First Nation's association with the ecological reserve is unknown because no research and documentation has occurred. The historic telegraph trail may be at risk because its location is not mapped in the ecological reserve.
Public safety	Ecological reserve visitors may be at risk because of encounters with black and grizzly bear.
Public information about the ecological reserve	 Ecological reserve visitors may enter the ecological reserve unprepared because information about the ecological reserve is inaccurate or unavailable.

Management Issues for Ningunsaw Provincial Park

The following management issues require attention in Ningunsaw Provincial Park.

Theme	Issue	
Protecting the park's ecological values	 Natural values within the provincial park may be at risk because an inventory of flora and fauna is incomplete. 	
	 Ecological values within the park may be affected by Ministry of Transportation's safety activities such as avalanche control along Highway 37. 	
	 Park ecosystems may be damaged because the boundaries of the park are not located on the ground. 	
	• Grizzly bears and moose may be at risk because of hunting pressures and easy access to the park from Highway 37.	
	• The trapline owner(s) and guide-outfitter, if they are operating in the park, are doing so without valid park use permits.	
Protecting cultural heritage features and values.	• The park's cultural features and their significance are unknown because no inventory of these values is complete.	
	 The Tahltan First Nation's association with the provincial park is unknown because no research and documentation has occurred. 	
	• The historic telegraph trail may be at risk because its location is not mapped in the park.	

Theme	Issue	
Providing and protecting outdoor recreation opportunities and features.	 The backcountry visitor experience may be reduced by heli- skiing flights over Ningunsaw Provincial Park. The proposal for wildlife viewing, particularly grizzly bear, may not be viable because of hunting activities. 	
Public safety	 Park visitors may be at risk because of encounters with black and grizzly bears. Park visitors may be placed in unsafe conditions because of the discharge of firearms in the park during hunting season. 	
Public information about the park and ecological reserve	 Park visitors may enter the park unprepared because information about the park is inaccurate or unavailable. 	

Management Direction for Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve

The vision for Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve is to maintain the represented ecosystems intact and free from alteration by humans. Research into the transitional ecosystems of the ecological reserve is encouraged.

Priority Management Objectives and Strategies

The following table describes management strategies to deal with identified issues. In addition, Appendix 1 contains a list of acceptable activities, uses and facilities for the ecological reserve.

Objectives	Strategies		
To protect Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve ecosystems and natural values.	 Undertake an inventory of the ecological reserve's fauna and flora. Focus, in order of priority, on the following ecological reserve values: a) grizzly bear habitat and population; b) mountain goat habitat and population; c) moose summer habitat and population; and, d) rare plants. Implement this inventory for the ecological reserve after the park survey is completed. Work with the Ministry of Transportation to ensure that highway maintenance and safety programs (e.g. avalanche controls) are compatible with ecological reserve management and reduce impacts on the ecological reserve. Monitor heli-skiing use and ensure activities are not occurring or impacting on natural values in the ecological reserve. Work with the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Skeena Region Fish and Wildlife Science and Allocation Section to investigate winter wildlife habitat values with priority on mountain goat habitat. 		
To encourage scientific research in the ecological reserve.	Encourage scientific research into the transitional ecosystems included in the ecological reserve.		
To protect the Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve's cultural heritage values	 Cooperate with the Tahltan First Nation in collecting and documenting existing information on Tahltan First Nations cultural heritage values. Cooperate with local non-aboriginal residents in collecting and documenting existing information on the history of the Ningunsaw River area. Locate and map the historic telegraph trail through the ecological reserve. 		
To provide information to the public about	Ensure ecological reserve boundaries are identified on		

Objectives	Strategies
Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve	the ground.
	• Update the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection web site so accurate, current information is provided to the public about the ecological reserve.

Management Direction for Ningunsaw Provincial Park

The vision for Ningunsaw Provincial Park is to maintain the represented ecosystems with minimal human disturbance while allowing dispersed, low-impact backcountry outdoor recreation activities. Research into the transitional ecosystems of the park is encouraged.

Priority Management Objectives and Strategies

The following table describes management strategies to deal with identified issues. In addition, Appendix 1 contains a list of acceptable activities, uses and facilities for the park.

Objectives	Strategies
To protect Ningunsaw Provincial Park's ecosystems and natural values.	 Undertake an inventory of the park's fauna and flora. Focus, in order of priority, on the following park values: a) grizzly bear habitat and population; b) mountain goat habitat and population; c) moose summer habitat and population; and, d) rare plants. Implement a similar inventory for the ecological reserve when the park survey is complete. Work with the Ministry of Transportation to ensure that highway maintenance and safety programs (e.g. avalanche controls) are compatible with park management and reduce impacts on the park if necessary. Monitor heli-skiing use and investigate potential impacts on mountain goat or other wildlife populations and implement restrictions if necessary. Work with the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Skeena Region Fish and Wildlife Science and Allocation Section to investigate winter wildlife habitat values with priority on mountain goat habitat. Contact the trapline and guide-outfitter licence owners to place these consumptive resource uses under valid park use permit if they are operating in the park. Negotiate with Land and Water BC to convert the heli-
To encourage scientific research in the park.	 skiing tenure affecting the park to a Park Use Permit. Encourage scientific research into the transitional ecosystems included in the park.
To provide good quality backcountry outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences in the park.	 Consult with the heli-skiing company and non-helicopter dependent skiers to reduce potential conflicts. Cooperate with the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Skeena Region Fish and Wildlife Science and Allocation Section to assess the concept of a grizzly bear viewing area within Ningunsaw Provincial Park. Implement the viewing area if appropriate. This evaluation should consider the following: Seek advice from an independent, professional bear biologist who has extensive experience with wildlife viewing programs; Assess the potential risk of increased bear and

Objectives	Strategies		
	 human interactions; Evaluate the safety issues involved with stopping along Highway 37; Assess a proposal to prohibit hunting and the discharge of firearms near the viewing area. 		
To protect Ningunsaw Provincial Park's cultural heritage values	 Cooperate with the Tahltan First Nation in collecting and documenting existing information on Tahltan First Nations cultural heritage values. Cooperate with local non-aboriginal residents in collecting and documenting existing information on the history of the Ningunsaw River area. Locate and map the historic telegraph trail through the park. 		
To provide information to the public about Ningunsaw Provincial Park.	 Design an effective public information package about the bear wildlife viewing area should this concept be realized. Ensure park boundaries are identified on the ground. If bear wildlife viewing area is established, design public information package about bear-human interactions. Update the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection web site so accurate, current information is provided to the public about the park. 		

Consultation and Future Planning

Management of these protected areas should be issue based with minimal monitoring. Environmental Stewardship Division will continue to consult with the Tahltan First Nation through the Tahltan – Environmental Stewardship Division Protected Areas Committee, and will meet with local stakeholders and resource users as issues arise. These protected areas are considered a low priority for the development of a management plan with full public involvement.

Zoning Plan

Management plan zoning does not apply to provincial ecological reserves. The Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve is closed to hunting.

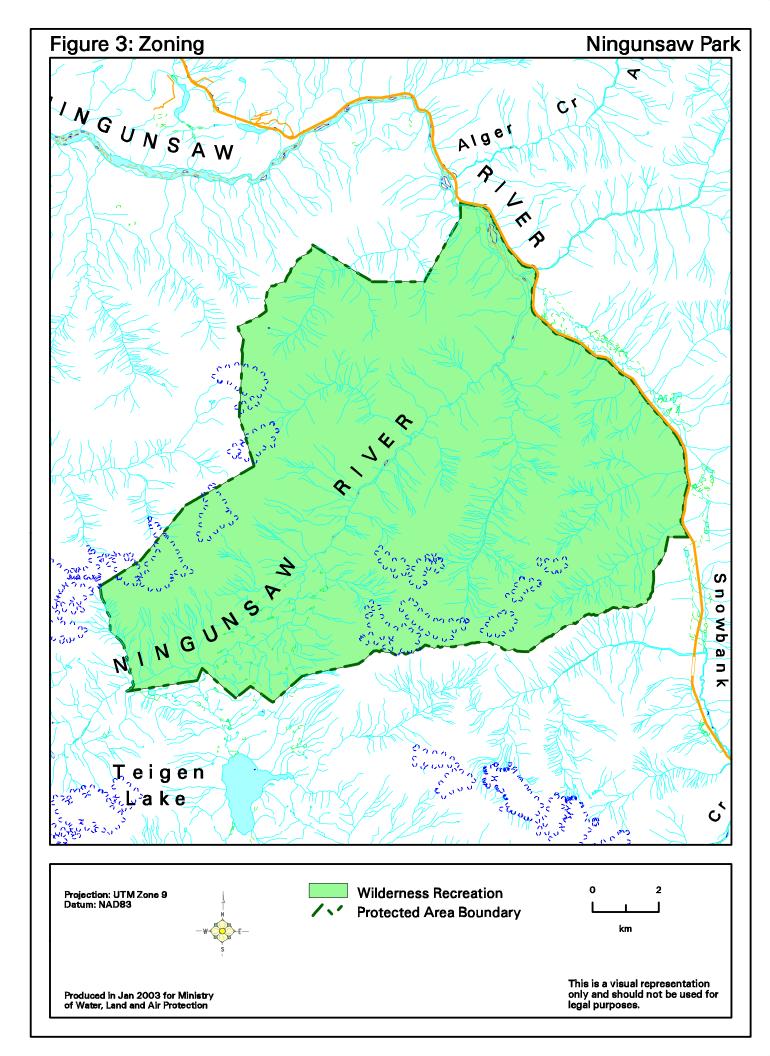
Ningunsaw Provincial Park is zoned as Wilderness Recreation.

Wilderness Recreation Zone

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

Description: Covers 15,708 hectares (100 %) of the provincial park.

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



	Accept	ability
Activity/Use/Facility	Ecological Reserve	Park
Aboriginal traditional uses and activities	Y	Y
Hunting	N	Y
Fishing	N	Y
Trapping	Ν	Y
Grazing (domestic livestock)	N	N
Recreational gold panning/rock hounding	N	N
Utility corridors	Ν	N
Communication sites	N	N
Horse use/pack animals	N	М
Guide outfitting (hunting)	N	Y
Guide outfitting (fishing)	N	N
Guide outfitting (nature tours)	N	Y
Guide outfitting (river rafting)	Ν	N
Cat-assisted skiing	N	N
Ski hills	N	N
Heli-skiing	Ν	Y
Commercial recreation (facility-based)	N	N
Commercial recreation (non-facility-based)	N	Y
Backcountry huts	N	М
Water control structures	N	N
Fish stocking and enhancement	N	N
Road access	N	N
Off-road access (snowmobiling)	N	N
Off-road access (motorised)	N	N
Off-road access (mechanical activities)	N	N
Motorised water access	N	N
Aircraft access	N	Y
Fire management (suppression)	Y subject to initial attack plan	Y subject to initial attack plan
Fire management (prescribed fire management)	N	N
Fire management (prevention)	N	N
Forest insect/disease control	N1	N1
Noxious weed control	N1	N1
Exotic insect/disease control	N1	N1
Commercial filming	N	M
Scientific research (specimen collection)	M	M
Scientific research (manipulative activities)	M	M
Supervised non-consumptive tour groups	M	Y
V = allowed subject to conditions identified in the managem		-

Appendix 1. Ningunsaw River Ecological Reserve and Ningunsaw Provincial Park Table of Acceptable Activities Uses and Facilities

 \overline{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