

# **RAFT COVE PROVINCIAL PARK**

## **MASTER PLAN**

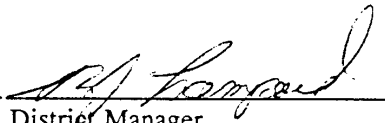
**March, 1993**



**South Coast Region**

# RAFT COVE PROVINCIAL PARK MASTER PLAN

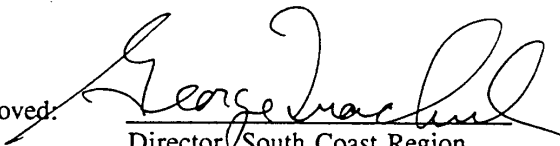
Recommended:



District Manager  
Strathcona District

Date: 95-08-27

Approved:



Director, South Coast Region

Date: 93-06-29

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## **PLAN HIGHLIGHTS**

Raft Cove Provincial Park is characterized by upland wooded areas, expansive sandy beach and spit, estuary, boggy areas and rugged rocky headlands. These characteristics contribute to the representation of the Nahwitti Lowland Landscape.

- \* Raft Cove Provincial Park protects a beautiful sandy beach, river estuary, rocky headlands and a wild coastal environment. Its remote location, rich physical resources and potential for vehicle access make it an excellent addition to the provincial parks system of northern Vancouver Island. The park's recreation and conservation values and access to Vancouver Island's west coast make Raft Cove provincially significant.
  
- \* The park will offer vehicle accessible destination camping which is lacking in the northern area of Vancouver Island.
  
- \* Development, including road access, camping and day-use facilities, will be restricted to a small section of the park in order to maintain its natural character.

# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose of the Plan

This draft master plan for Raft Cove Provincial Park defines the role of the park and establishes the objectives and desired actions to guide the management and development of park facilities. The completed Master Plan will also provide direction for a number of key park issues, including park access, ecological sensitivity of the spit, commercial activities and boundary adjustments.

## Background Summary

Raft Cove Provincial Park was established in 1990 and is situated along the remote northwest coast of Vancouver Island. Raft Cove is characterized by scenic sandy beaches, rugged coastline and Pacific Ocean surf. It is approximately 25 kilometres west of Holberg and 65 kilometres southwest of Port Hardy (Figure 1). The park's 670 hectares are comprised of 405 hectares of upland area and 265 hectares of foreshore.

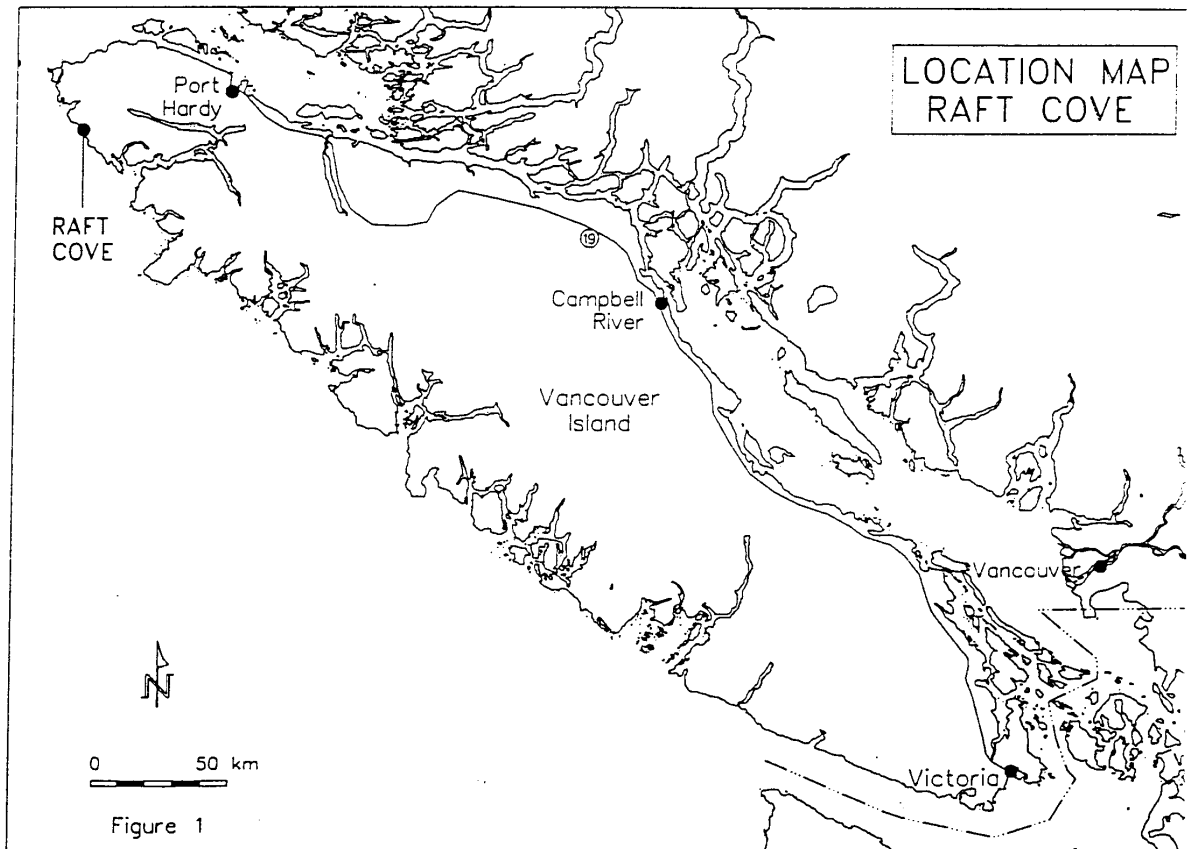


Figure 1

The park offers a variety of recreational opportunities. The core of the park is dominated by a long sandy spit which was built up by the actions of the west coast surf at the confluence of the Macjack River. This pristine beach extends along the shoreline for over 2 kilometres and is an ideal setting for picnics, beach activities and hiking. The rugged shoreline also provides good opportunities for tidal pool exploration.

Raft Cove Park was established with the idea of providing vehicle access to the northwest coast, which would complement existing backcountry facilities associated with Cape Scott Provincial Park. The low forested bench behind the beach at Raft Cove lends itself to the development of ocean-side camping and day-use without affecting the overall integrity of the coastal wilderness experience.

## **Planning Issues**

### **Resource Management**

The spit formed at the mouth of the Macjack River is sensitive to the effects of recreational facilities and use. The trees and understorey characteristic of the spit protect it from erosion. Management objectives and actions will be developed to protect this natural resource.

Tidal pools and intertidal beach flats contain many species of marine life that are sensitive to human use. An assessment of these resources will consider management methods for protecting this area from any negative impacts of recreational use or commercial harvesting.

Commercial use of natural resources in the park, such as the harvesting of geoduck clams will be reviewed, and management strategies will be outlined.

### **Visitor Services**

Road accessible, ocean-side camping opportunities are currently unavailable in provincial parks on northern Vancouver Island. Raft Cove is well suited to campground development, which would enable local residents and tourists to directly access the Pacific Ocean environment. This plan will highlight this opportunity and recommend suitable types of visitor facilities which enhance the park's features while protecting them from unnecessary impact.

Two road access routes to the park have been proposed: Port Hardy - Holberg - Raft Cove; and Port Hardy - Coal Harbour - Holberg - Raft Cove. Both of these alternatives will be considered.

From outside the park, the Macjack River is used by canoeists to access Raft Cove and its extensive beach front. Consideration will be given to this type of access and use, suggesting cooperative efforts to promote river recreation.

# THE ROLE OF THE PARK

## Regional and Provincial Context

Raft Cove Provincial Park protects a beautiful sandy beach, river estuary, rocky headlands and a wild coastal environment. Its remote location, rich physical resources and potential for vehicle access make it an excellent addition to the provincial parks system of northern Vancouver Island. Raft Cove was established in order to complement the wilderness camping and day-use opportunities of Cape Scott Provincial Park. The park's recreation and conservation values and access to Vancouver Island's west coast make Raft Cove provincially significant.

## Conservation Role

Raft Cove provincial Park plays an important role in conservation on northwest Vancouver Island.

- The park protects part of the Cape Scott Corridor identified in *Special Features for BC Parks*. The corridor is recognized for its beaches, marine shore, marine life, and historic features.
- Raft Cove contributes to the representation of the Nahwitti Lowland which was described in *Landscapes for BC Parks* as: a low elevation part of the outer coast, with hilly relief and a very wet temperate climate; rounded hills to flat, poorly-drained areas near sea; meandering tea-coloured streams from cedarsphagnum bogs; extensive sandy beaches and rugged headlands; cougars, wolves, deer, black bears, migratory and resident birds at estuaries, sea-run cutthroat trout in streams.

## Recreation Role

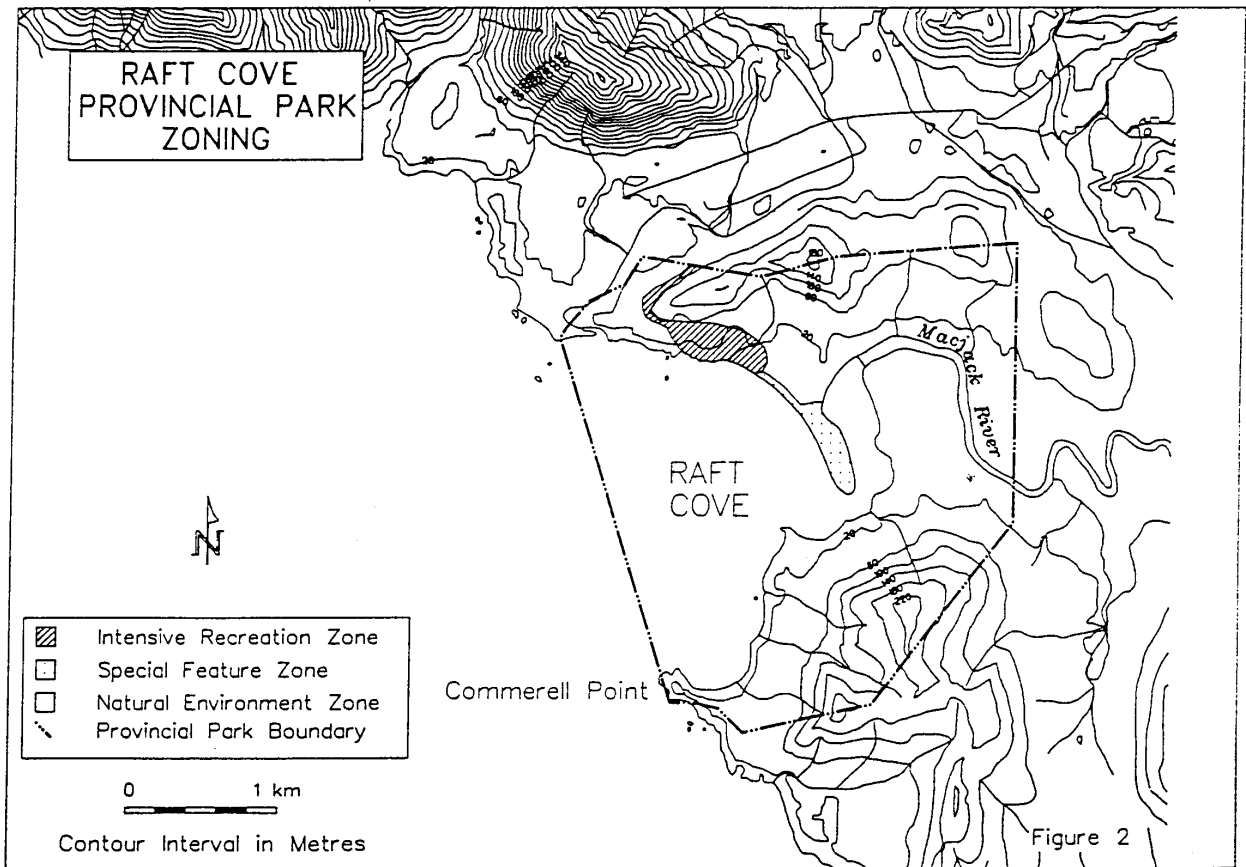
Raft Cove offers a wide variety of recreation opportunities to park users and has potential to contribute to all of BC Parks recreation goals.

- This park provides outstanding local and regional day-use opportunities such as wildlife viewing, nature appreciation, kayaking and canoeing, beach walking and hiking in a beautiful west coast beach environment.
- While northern Vancouver Island is not identified as a outdoor recreation holiday destination in *Recreation Goals for BC Parks*, the Port Hardy area attracts many visitors. Raft Cove will contribute to the area's overall tourism strategy by providing an easily accessible area for people interested in spending extra time in the Port Hardy area.
- Raft Cove will provide the travelling public with vehicle access to overnight camping and day-use opportunities on the Pacific coast.



## PARK ZONING

Zoning is a concept used in the planning and management of provincial parks and recreation areas to divide park land and water based areas into zones with consistent management objectives. These zones reflect the intended land use, facility development, and levels of management and human activity. Raft Cove Park Provincial Park has been divided into three zones; Intensive Recreation Zone, Special Feature Zone and Natural Environment Zone (Figure 2). General management guidelines for all park zones are outlined in Appendix 1.



### **Intensive Recreation Zone**

The objective of this zone is to provide a variety of readily accessible facility-oriented outdoor recreation opportunities. In Raft Cove this zone includes areas of facility development such as a campground, picnic area, access road and parking lot. The management intent is to restrict the high levels of development to this specific zone, thereby limiting the disturbance of the overall natural setting.

### **Special Feature Zone**

The objective of the Special Feature Zone is to protect and present significant natural or cultural resources, features or processes because of their special character, fragility and heritage value. The sandy spit and extensive beach along the park shoreline and archaeological sites (when documented) are the significant features of Raft Cove Park. Development in this zone will be minimal, while providing opportunities for beach walking, nature appreciation, walk-in camping and interpretation.

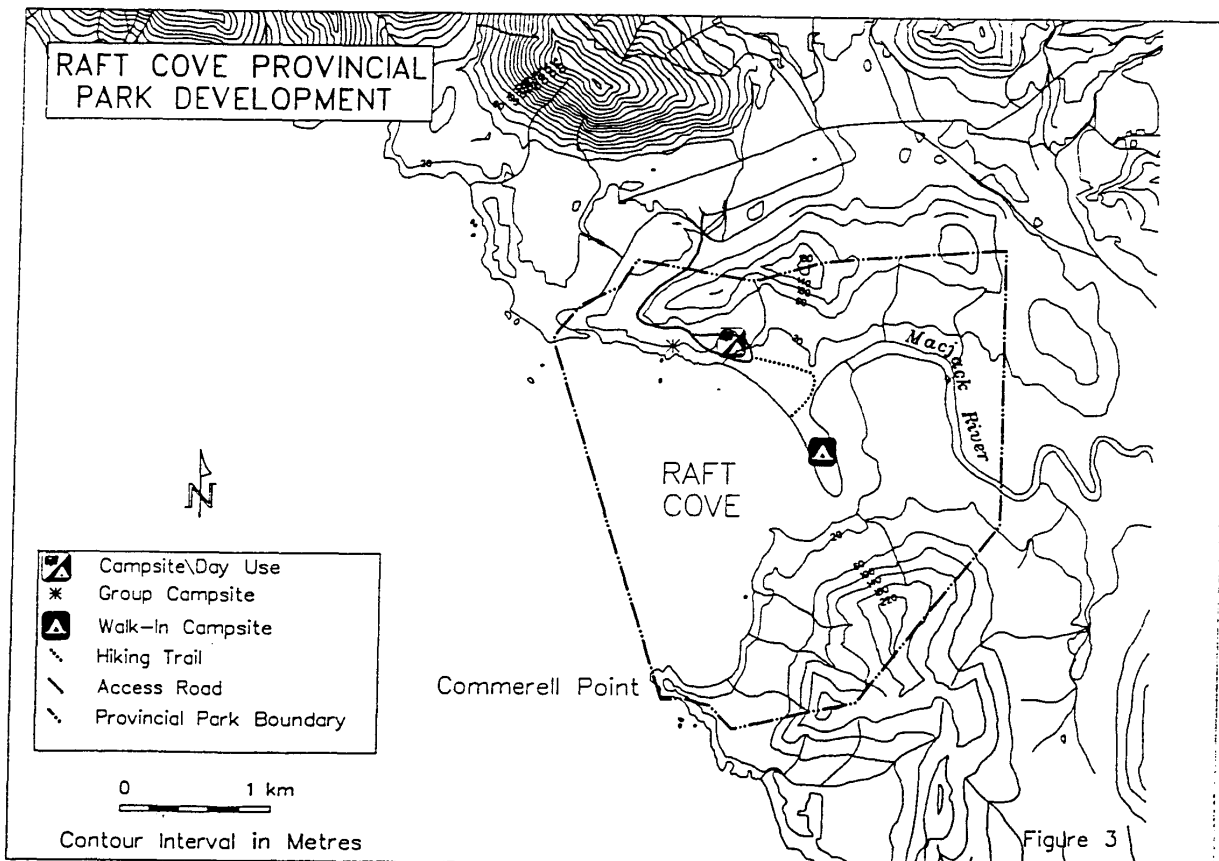
### **Natural Environment Zone**

The objective of this zone is to protect scenic values and to provide for recreation opportunities in a largely undisturbed natural environment. Recreation opportunities include hiking, backpacking, historic and nature appreciation, and fishing. Facilities such as trails may be developed for the convenience of park users. This zone includes the remainder of the park outside the Intensive Recreation and Special Feature Zones.

## DEVELOPMENT PLAN

BC Parks is proposing the development of Raft Cove Park to include: road access, road accessible camping and day-use areas, hiking trails, parking and sanitary facilities. To provide opportunities for local residents and visitors to the area a number of facilities will be developed (Figure 3). Detailed site plans and impact assessments will be undertaken before facility development takes place.

- Vehicle access into the park.
- A day-use/picnic facility and day-use parking.
- A 40 unit vehicle campground with associated facilities, (pit toilets, water system)
- A small group camping area with associated facilities for local scouts, guides and service organizations.
- Day-use hiking trails in the upland area.
- Six to eight walk-in campsites in the forested upland along the spit.
- Park maintenance yard



# NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

## Introduction

Resource management will be oriented to protecting the natural characteristics of the park so that the quality of the environment is maintained for public enjoyment and recreation. As described above, park zoning will influence levels and types of resource management.

## Land

Objective:

- During the Cape Scott Master Planning process and the Parks and Wilderness for the 90's initiative, suggestions were made to study the lands and water between Cape Scott and Raft Cove parks.

Action:

- During the next few years, the area will be studied to determine whether this area is appropriate for park status. It is situated in the Quatsino Provincial Forest and consists of steep forested slopes and a coast with pebble beaches, rocky headlands and tidal pools. This area has potential to provide backcountry recreation opportunities and to protect views from Cape Scott Park.

## Water

Raft Cove Park encompasses 265 ha of foreshore and the lower portion and estuary of the Macjack River.

Objective:

- To maintain marine and freshwater fish and wildlife habitat and to maintain the natural quality of water in the park.

Actions:

- BC Parks intends to work co-operatively with other agencies to maintain marine and fresh water fish and wildlife habitat;
- Ensure that proper sanitary facilities and a fresh water hand pump are installed;
- Periodically monitor the water quality of the Macjack River;
- Develop a strategy for dealing with any oil spill which may affect Raft Cove Park.

## Soils and Vegetation

Development must take place in a sensitive manner to ensure that the soils and vegetation in the park will withstand recreational facility development and use. Detailed site plans and impact assessments will be undertaken before facility development takes place. Some areas such as the sandy spit and eastern side of the Macjack estuary are not appropriate for facility

development.

Objectives:

- Consider soil and vegetation conditions in the planning and development of the park;
- Allow natural processes to occur in the park wherever possible, i.e. spit formation;
- Maintain wildlife diversity and habitat;
- Protect representative marine and terrestrial species occurring in the park that contribute the landscape goal and visual and recreational values;
- Protect marine and terrestrial rare and endangered species.

Actions:

- Conduct biophysical mapping to inventory the natural resources and wildlife habitat in the park to develop a management strategy;
- Monitor forest health and work co-operatively with the Ministry of Forests and other agencies to protect commercial forests and other interests adjacent to the park;
- Place facilities and trails in areas that can withstand recreational use;
- Remove hazardous trees and branches along trails and around campsites and other park facilities.

## **Fish**

Raft Cove Park provides habitat for a variety of marine and freshwater fish and supports a recreational sports fishery.

Objective:

- To protect the fish species and habitat within the park.

Actions:

- Work co-operatively with the Ministry of Environment and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to manage fish species and habitat within the park;
- Maintain current fishing regulations.

## **Wildlife**

Objective:

- To maintain the natural diversity of wildlife species in the park.

Actions:

- Ensure facility developments have a minimal impact on wildlife and habitat;
- Continue to prohibit hunting and the discharge of firearms in the park;
- Prohibit the removal or disturbance of marine and terrestrial wildlife except as authorized by valid park use permit.
- Monitor the impact of the limited amount of commercial resource extraction, such as

goeduck clam harvesting, to assess whether more restrictive management strategies are required.

## **Cultural Resources**

There is evidence that Raft Cove and Macjack estuary were used by Native people. Archaeological sites have not been formally catalogued, therefore, the Heritage Conservation Branch has recommended that a preliminary heritage survey be undertaken prior to any park development. The Quatsino Band of the Kwakiutl District Tribal Council claims Raft Cove as part of their traditional territory.

Objective:

- To protect archaeological resources in the park.

Actions:

- Establish contact with the Quatsino Band to determine the significance of the area to their culture;
- Inventory and catalogue archaeological resources in the park;
- Protect such resources from facility development and any negative impacts from recreation.

## **Visual Resources**

Objective:

- To protect the visual resources of the park.

Actions:

- Discuss the potential of an addition linking Raft Cove and Cape Scott parks with appropriate agencies and companies;
- Situate and design park facilities so that visual resources in the park are not diminished;
- In the legal description for Raft Cove the northeast corner of the park boundary was inadvertently extended beyond the height of land. The boundary will be amended to remove this area (approx 4 ha) from the park.

## **VISITOR SERVICES**

### **General Concept**

In providing services to the park visitor BC Parks has four recreation goals: tourism travel routes; outdoor recreation holiday destination; backcountry recreation; and local recreation. In its' undeveloped state, Raft Cove Park provides local and regional recreation opportunities. If the park was developed to make it road accessible, Raft Cove would contribute to additional recreation goals.

The Island Highway is identified as a tourism travel route and many visitors travel to Port Hardy to visit the area and to catch the ferry to Prince Rupert. Raft Cove is situated near the terminus of the highway (65 km from Port Hardy) and would provide the travelling public with an opportunity to experience the west coast environment.

The objective of the outdoor recreation holiday destination goal is to provide park attractions which serve as or improve key destinations for outdoor recreation. Due to a lack of holiday destination provincial parks north of Campbell River, Raft Cove Park was established to fill this void and serve to complement the wilderness experience of Cape Scott Provincial Park.

Raft Cove has potential to provide opportunities for backcountry recreation if the park was expanded north along the coast to San Josef Bay.

### **Access Strategy**

Raft Cove Park is presently accessed by road and then by 45 minutes of hiking. BC Parks development plans include road accessible camping and day-use opportunities. The Macjack River is also used to access Raft Cove Park by canoe and kayak. BC Parks will work with the appropriate agencies to recognize and accommodate this recreational activity.

BC Parks will promote the access route from Port Hardy - Holberg - Raft Cove through park literature and directional signs.

### **Information Strategy**

- Within the park, visitor programs and information should highlight:
- The natural history of the park, i.e. spit formation, ocean and land interface;
- Native history;
- Visitor safety and assistance in keeping the park clean and well managed.

## **Marketing and Promotion Strategy**

Upon the completion of Phase 1 of the development program, Raft Cove Provincial Park will be included in public awareness programs. Park maps, brochures, and programs should stress:

- Raft Cove's role in the park system;
- The natural and cultural resource values of the park;
- The recreational opportunities in the park; and
- Visitor safety.

Raft Cove will be promoted through Travel Info Centres and BC Park offices. BC Parks will work with Mount Waddington Regional District to promote tourism in the Cape Scott and Raft Cove areas.

## **Management Services**

Raft Cove is managed by the Miracle Zone of the Strathcona Park District. The zone office is situated at Miracle Beach Park. Management of the park will be carried out according to the guidelines of the Master Plan and Ministry policies and procedures.

Management activities include:

- Ensure safe and appropriate public use of the park by providing information and enforcing park regulations;
- Monitor environmental conditions and conduct work to minimize visitor impacts on park resources;
- Maintain park facilities;
- Conduct visitor safety programs, such as the hazard tree removal program;
- Collect park use statistics;
- Oversee any Park Use Permits issued within the park;
- Provide information, public relations, and visitor programs.



## **OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES**

Raft Cove offers a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities ranging from camping, fishing, day hiking, picnicking and beach activities. The master plan establishes suitable locations for facilities development and acceptable levels of use.

### **Camping**

Raft Cove will offer road accessible camping in a 40 unit campground, and group camping opportunities. Walk-in campsites will be developed in the forested upland along the spit for those seeking a more remote experience. There are also opportunities to develop walk-in campsites in the potential addition between Raft Cove and Cape Scott to service backcountry hikers.

### **Hiking**

Raft Cove Park has potential to offer a variety of hiking experiences ranging from beach strolling to overnight backcountry hiking. Hiking opportunities exist along the beach and rocky headlands, however, trails will be developed in the upland due to the heavy underbrush. Cut-off trails should be developed in the upland in areas where there are risks of hikers getting stranded by high tides.

Opportunities for trail development exist in the upland area between the camping area and the spit, along the northern shore of Macjack River, and between Cape Scott and Raft Cove parks. There are also hiking opportunities to Commerell Point, however BC Parks will not develop trails or provide a method for crossing the Macjack River.

### **Beach Activities**

The sandy beach, rocky headlands, and tidal pools provide recreational opportunities for nature study, hiking and beach activities.

### **Picnicking**

A picnic area will be developed adjacent to the campground to provide day-use opportunities in the park.

### **Canoeing/Kayaking**

Canoeing and kayaking occur along the Macjack River. Consideration will be given to the needs of these park users and BC Parks will work with other agencies to accommodate continued recreational use of this type.

### **Angling**

The Macjack River provides opportunities for recreational fishing of steelhead, coho, and sea-run cutthroat. Existing fishing regulations will remain in place.

## **PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Phase 1**

- Biophysical mapping
- Highway signs and entrance portal
- Access road and bridge
- Sanitary facilities and hand pumps for water
- 40 unit campground
- 25 vehicle parking lot
- Picnic area
- Interpretive trails
- Park maintenance yard

### **Phase 2**

- Walk-in campsites
- 50 person group campground
- Study potential addition to park

## APPENDIX 1

### ZONING IN BC PARKS

	<b>Intensive Recreation</b>	<b>Natural Environment</b>
OBJECTIVE	To provide for a variety of readily accessible, facility-oriented outdoor recreation opportunities.	To protect scenic values and to provide for backcountry recreation opportunities in a largely undisturbed natural environment.
USE LEVEL	Relatively high density and long duration types of use.	Relatively low use but higher levels in association with nodes of activity or access.
MEANS OF ACCESS	All-weather public roads or other types of access where use levels are high (see "Impacts" below).	Mechanized (power-boats, snowmobiles, all terrain vehicles), non-mechanized (foot, horse, canoe, bicycle). Aircraft and motorboat access to drop-off and pickup points will be permitted.
LOCATION	Continuous with all-weather roads and covering immediate areas, modified landscapes or other high-use areas.	Removed from all-weather roads but easily accessible on a day-use basis. Accessible for mechanized means such as boat or p lane.
SIZE OF ZONE	Small; usually less than 2,000 ha.	Can range from small to large.
BOUNDARY DEFINITION	Includes areas of high facility development in concentrated areas.	Boundaries should consider limits of activity/facility areas relative to ecosystem characteristics and features.
RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES	Vehicle camping, picnicking, beach activities, power-boating, canoeing, kayaking, strolling, historic and natural appreciation, fishing, snowplay, downhill and cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, specialized activities.	Walk-in/boat-in camping, power-boating, hunting, canoeing, kayaking, backpacking, historic and nature appreciation, fishing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, river rafting, horseback riding, heli-skiing, heli-hiking, and specialized activities.

Special Feature	Wilderness Recreation	Wilderness Conservation
Interpretive facilities only, resources are to be protected.	Minimal facility development. Limited development for user conveniences and safety, and protection of the environment eg. trails, primitive campsites, etc. Some basic facilities at access nodes, eg. dock, primitive shelter, etc.	None.
None; resources to be maintained unimpaired.	Natural area generally free of evidence of modern human beings. Evidence of human presence is confined to specific facility sites. Facilities are visually compatible with natural setting.	Natural area generally free of evidence of modern human beings.
High level of management protection with ongoing monitoring. Oriented to maintaining resources, and, where appropriate, a high quality of recreational and interpretive experience. Action or passive management depending on size, location, and nature of the resource. Visitor access may be restricted to preserve the recreation experience and to limit impact on the area.	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.	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.
Tidepools in Botanical Beach Park; Sunshine Meadow in Mount Assiniboine Park.	Quanchus Mountains Wilderness in Tweedsmuir Park; Wilderness Zone in Spatsizi Park.	Central Valhallas Wilderness in Valhalla Provincial Park; Garibaldi Park Nature Conservancy area.

	<b>Intensive Recreation</b>	<b>Natural Environment</b>
FACILITIES	<p>May be intensely developed for user convenience. Campgrounds, landscaped picnic/play areas, trail, accommodation or interpretive buildings, boat launches; administrative buildings, service campgrounds, gravel pits, disposal sites, wood lots, parking lots, etc.</p>	<p>Moderately developed to user convenience. Trails, walk in/boat-in campsites, shelters; accommodation buildings may be permitted; facilities for motorized access eg. docks, land strips, fuel storage, etc. Lodge developments in facilities subzone.</p>
IMPACTS ON NATURAL ENVIRONMENT	<p>Includes natural resource features and phenomena in a primarily natural state but where human presence may be readily visible both through the existence of recreation facilities and of people using the zone. Includes areas of high facility development with significant impact on concentrated areas.</p>	<p>Areas where human presence on the land is not normally visible, facilities development limited to relatively small areas. Facilities are visually compatible with natural setting.</p>
MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES	<p>Oriented toward maintaining a high quality recreation experience. Intensive management of resource and/or control of visitor activities. Operational facilities designed for efficient operation while remaining unobtrusive to the park visitor.</p>	<p>Oriented to maintaining a natural environment and to providing a high quality recreation experience. Visitor access may be restricted to preserve the recreation experience to limit impact on the areas. Separation of less compatible recreational activities and transportation Designation of transportation may be necessary to avoid potential conflicts (eg. horse trails, cycle paths, hiking trails).</p>
EXAMPLES OF ZONING	<p>Campground in Rath Trevor Beach Park; Gibson Pass ski areas in EC Manning Park.</p>	<p>Core area in Cathedral Provincial Park; North beach in Naikoon Park.</p>

<b>Special Feature</b>	<b>Wilderness Recreation</b>	<b>Wilderness Conservation</b>
To protect and present significant natural or cultural resources, features or processes because of their special character, facility and heritage values.	To protect a remote, undisturbed natural landscape and to provide backcountry recreation opportunities dependent on a pristine environment where air access may be permitted to designed sites.	To protect a remote, undisturbed natural landscape and to provide unassessed backcountry recreation opportunities dependent on a pristine environment where no motorized activities will be allowed.
Generally low.	Very low use, to provide solitary experiences and a wilderness atmosphere. Use may be controlled to protect the environment.	Very low use, to provide solitary experiences and a wilderness atmosphere. Use may be controlled to protect the environment.
Various; may require special access permit.	Non-mechanized; except may permit low frequency air access to designated sites; foot, canoe (horses may be permitted).	Non-mechanized (no air access); foot, canoe (horses may be permitted).
Determined by location of special resources; may be surrounded by or next to any of the other zones.	Remote; generally not visited on a day-use basis.	Remote; not easily visited on a day-use basis.
Small; usually less to 2000 hectares.	Large; greater than 5,000 ha.	Large; greater than 5,000 ha.
Area required by biophysical characteristics or the natural and extent of cultural resources (adequate to afford protection).	Defined by ecosystem limits and geographic features. Boundaries will encompass areas of visitor interest for specific activities supported by air access. Will be designated under the Park Act.	Defined by ecosystem limits and geographic features. Will be designated under the Park Act.
Sight-seeing, historic and nature appreciation. May be subject to temporary closures or permanently restricted access.	Backpacking, canoeing, kayaking, river rafting, nature and historic appreciation, hunting, fishing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, horseback riding, specialized activities (eg. caving, climbing).	Backpacking, canoeing, kayaking, river rafting, nature and historic appreciation, fishing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, horseback riding, specialized activities (eg. caving, climbing).

## **APPENDIX 2 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

In November 1992, two open houses were held at Port Hardy and Holberg to review a draft Master Plan and background report for Raft Cove. A wide variety of comments was received by BC Parks.

### **Summary of Comments**

Twenty-four responses were received by BC Park's Strathcona District office regarding Raft Cove in the form of comment sheets and letters. A petition with 240 signatures was also received.

Ten submissions supported development of the park as outlined in the draft Master Plan. A desire for easy access and camping opportunities on the west coast of the island, increased tourism, encouraging tourists to stay longer and local job creation were reasons expressed for supporting recreational facility development in the park. The suggestion was made on one of these comment sheets that a campground smaller than the 40 sites suggested in the draft Master Plan be established. Support for a vehicle accessible campground and day-use area was received from Mount Waddington Regional District Directors, the Economic Development Commission and Parks Commission.

Fourteen comments sheets and the petition did not support the development of a vehicle accessible campground and day-use area at Raft Cove. Concern was expressed about the potential impacts of vehicle access degrading the Raft Cove's features and wilderness character. Some individuals like the challenge of the trail as it exists now. On four comment sheets San Josef Bay in Cape Scott Park was compared with Raft Cove. The commenters stated that since the trail into San Josef Bay has been improved to be wheel-chair accessible there has been all terrain vehicle use on the beach and increased amounts littering by park users. Due to concerns about this occurring at Raft Cove, as well as concerns regarding pollution on the beach and erosion of the sandy spit, these individuals did not support facility development at Raft Cove. On four comment sheets it was suggested that San Josef Bay should be developed with vehicle accessible campground and day use facilities instead of Raft Cove, because it is already wheel-chair accessible. Safe access to the park was mentioned on two comment sheets. Facility development would encourage an increased number of park visitors, and concern was expressed about many of them having an inadequate knowledge of travelling safely on logging roads.

### **Issues Analysis:**

#### **Park Facility Development**

Many people supported campground and day-use facility development at Raft Cove while others rejected the idea due to concerns about jeopardizing park values.

The proposed facilities at Raft Cove will be situated in appropriate locations based on a biophysical inventory of the park and detailed site plans. Facilities will be designed to prevent vehicle access on to the beach. Consultation with the Quatsino Indian Band will take place to

ensure that any developments do not affect cultural resources or traditional activities.

Some individuals preferred the development of a vehicle accessible campground and day-use area at San Josef Bay in Cape Scott Park rather than at Raft Cove. Public input during the 1985 Cape Scott Master Planning process reinforced that the role of Cape Scott Park is to provide a wilderness experience and that the park's main attraction is its appeal as a relatively natural park with historical areas undisturbed by development. The public input suggested that a variety of levels of difficulty should be retained for wilderness hiking opportunities and the easy hike to San Josef Bay should remain as such. The potential to provide vehicle access to other recreationally significant north coast beaches, such as Raft Cove where encroaching logging roads would facilitate vehicle access, was identified. It was recommended that Raft Cove be the subject of a new park study proposal in which vehicle accessible camping would be acceptable. Raft Cove was established as a Provincial Park in 1990 with the intention of developing vehicle accessible camping and day use facilities. In addition, Raft Cove Park has significant visual values that make it an attractive location for facility development. BC Parks has determined that Raft Cove is preferable for campground and day-use facilities while San Josef Bay will maintain hike-in access only.

### **Safety**

Information regarding safe logging road travel and the risks of being trapped along the beach by changing tidal conditions can be accommodated by park promotional material and information programs.

### **Park Operations**

Removal of sea life and other resources from the park, littering, and all terrain vehicle use on the beach were potential impacts of park development noted in submissions from the public. These matters are addressed by existing Park regulations.



# **RAFT COVE PROVINCIAL PARK**

## **MASTER PLAN**

### **BACKGROUND REPORT**

**March, 1993**



**South Coast Region**

# BACKGROUND REPORT

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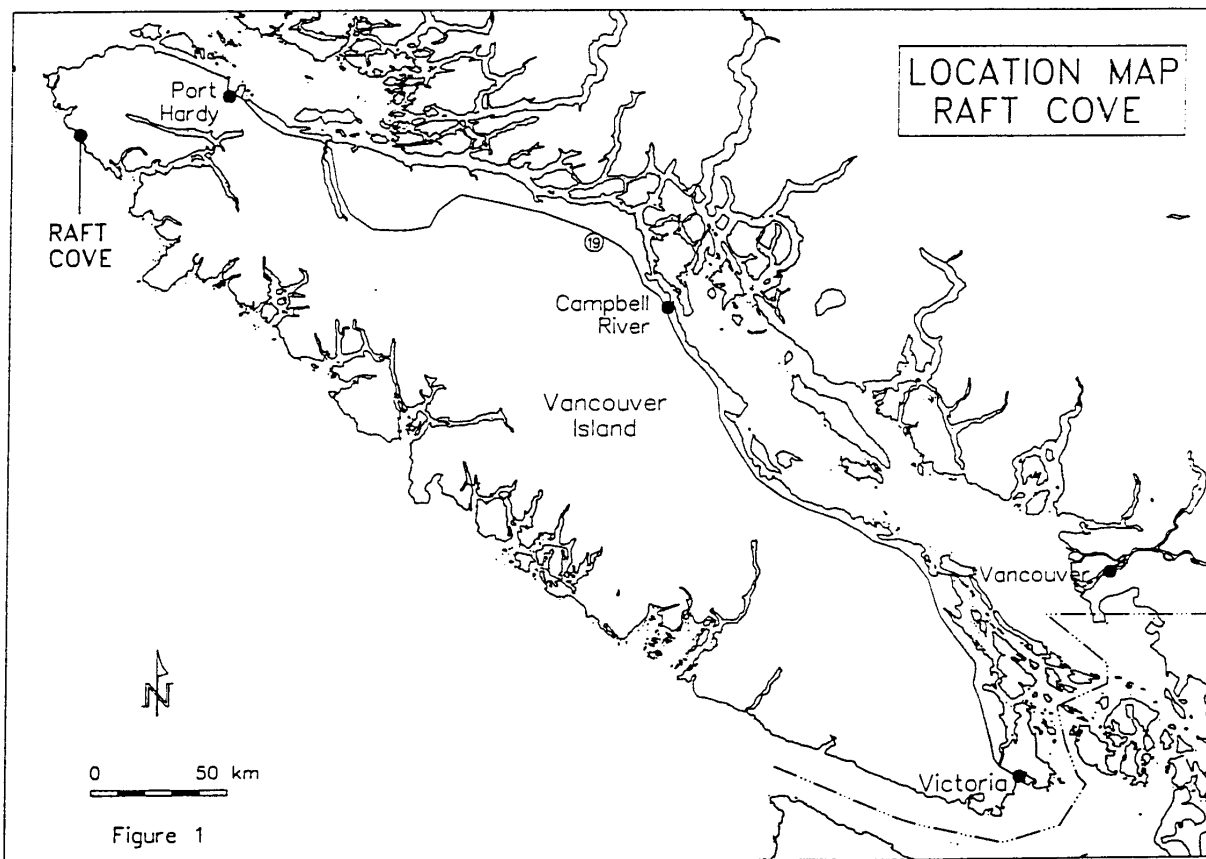
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## INTRODUCTION

Raft Cove Provincial Park (Figure 1) is located on the northwest coast of Vancouver Island, 65 kilometres south west of Port Hardy. The park protects and preserves a beautiful sandy beach, river estuary, rocky headlands and a wild coastal environment. It's remote location, rich physical resources and potential for vehicle access make it an excellent addition to the provincial parks system of northern Vancouver Island. Raft Cove was established in order to provide an alternative to the wilderness camping opportunities of Cape Scott Provincial Park.

Raft Cove was established as a Class A Provincial Park in 1990. The park contains 670 hectares of upland area and 265 hectares of foreshore and includes features characteristic of the Nahwitti Lowland Landscape such as rounded hills, poorly drained areas, rugged coastline and western hemlock, and western redcedar forests.



## **NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Raft Cove has three main features: a long spit and crescent shaped sandy beach; forested upland area; and a rugged coastline. The long sandy beach resulting from the continual pounding of the headlands by the Pacific breakers serves as the dominant feature of the park. The north and south extensions of the bay are characterized by eroded rock formations and rocky headlands. The upland area is a mixture of redcedar, western hemlock, sitka spruce with a dense shrubby understorey dominated by salal.

### **Climate**

The Pacific Ocean and the northwest-southeast orientation of British Columbia's mountain chains play significant roles in the climate of the province. The ocean is a reservoir of heat and moisture. As weather systems reach coastal BC, moist air is forced over mountain chains causing precipitation to occur. The wettest climates in BC occur on the windward slopes of coastal BC. Precipitation usually falls as rain, or at higher elevations, as snow (Meidinger, and Pojar, 1991).

In the winter, prevailing winds move northeast over the Pacific Ocean toward the Gulf of Alaska. These prevailing westerly winds weaken in the summer. The frequency and intensity of precipitation and storms diminishes as a Pacific high pressure centre expands northward (Valentine, 1978). By middle to late summer, the high pressure system is usually well established and warm clear weather prevails in the province.

Northern Vancouver Island is characterized by cool wet winters and warm, dry summers. Mean monthly temperatures in the Cape Scott area range from 4.1°C in January to 13.9°C in August. Total mean monthly precipitation ranges from a maximum of 344 mm in December (332 mm rainfall, and 12 mm as snowfall) to a minimum in July of 83 mm. Annual average precipitation is 2628 mm and on average, precipitation occurs on 241 days per year. (Based on climate normals from 1951-1980).

Exposed to the Pacific Ocean, the park is pounded by high winds and surf associated with Pacific storms. Prevailing winds from the southeast can reach speeds of 100 km/hr during the winter. During the summer prevailing winds from the northwest and south can exceed 60 km/hr (Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, 1991).

### **Physiography**

Northern Vancouver Island is part of the Coastal Trough physiographic unit. The trough is a topographically low belt extending from Puget Sound in Washington State, between Vancouver Island and the mainland, to Dixon Entrance, north of the Queen Charlotte Islands. Northern Vancouver Island is situated in the northern section of the Coastal Trough, the Hecate Depression. Most of the Hecate Depression is below sea-level, however, the Nahwitti Lowland on Vancouver Island is situated above sealevel (Holland, 1976).

Glaciation during the Pleistocene Epoch shaped the landforms of the area as glacial ice moved from the mainland across northern Vancouver Island (Holland, 1976). Glacial ice appears to have moved in a northwesterly direction across the Nahwitti Lowland (Howes, 1991).

The Nahwitti Lowland is characterized by low relief and, except for a few summits, the rounded hills are under 2000 ft in elevation. The area between Raft Cove and Holberg is characterized by broad lowlands with a northwest to southeast oriented axis situated between rounded hills. Thin layers of colluvium and morainal till overlies the bedrock in the hills, while deep fluvial and fluvio-glacial sediments and till occupy the lowlands (Howes, 1991).

The ridges in Raft Cove Park are covered by surficial materials of colluvial and morainal gravelly sandy loam and gravelly loam. The upper elevations of ridges closest to the coast have thin veneers of soil overlying volcanic bedrock, with minor amounts of rock outcrops. Further inland and at lower elevations the soils are deeper.

Along the Macjack River fluvial sediments are common. Soil textures are gravelly loamy sand to sandy loam, with minor amounts of silty loam. The east side of the Macjack River estuary consists of very poorly drained silty to sandy loam overlying gravel. The spit consists of rapidly drained sandy to sandy loam sediments (Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, 1980).

## **Geology**

Northern Vancouver Island is underlain by Mesozoic volcanic and sedimentary bedrock (230-65 million years before present) with granitic pluton intrusives of Jurassic time (195-140 million years before present). The bedrock in the Raft Cove area is known as the Bonanza Group (Howes, 1991).

The volcanics of the Bonanza Group include fine grained basaltic andesite and rhyodacite (fine grained volcanic rock consisting of quartz, potassium and sodium feldspar with ferro magnesium minerals). They are interbedded with maroon and green tuffs (consolidated volcanic ash), clastic sedimentary units and breccias (sedimentary rock with angular fragments or clasts) (Howes, 1991). There are minor amounts of argillite and greywacke (angular sands suspended in finer materials) (Muller, 1977).

## Soils

The glaciation, weathering, local topography, moist, cool climate and abundant rainfall have resulted in Ferro-Humic Podzol soil throughout the majority of the park. The main soil processes are the accumulation of organic matter, high iron and aluminum content, and very strong podzol B horizons. This soil type occurs in humid west coast coniferous forests.

Characteristics of this Ferro-Humic Podzol landscape include:

- The soil is subject to continuous seepage;
- Excessive moisture is not apparent in the soil in the usual form of gleying and mottling but rather is shown by higher organic matter. (Organic content may reach or exceed 30%);
- Soil is acidic with pH values of less than 5.0 common (Valentine, 1978);

## Vegetation

The vegetation of the park is described as the very wet hypermaritime subzone of the Coastal Western Hemlock Biogeoclimatic Zone (Demarchi, 1989). This subzone is characterized by stands of western redcedar (*Thuja plicata*), western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) and sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*). Yellow cedar (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis*) also occurs in wetter areas. Small pockets of old growth spruce can be found close to the shoreline in the park and along the river in areas affected by tidal brackish water. Dominating the understorey throughout the park is tall, dense salal (*Gaultheria shallon*). Also common in the understorey is deer fern (*Blechnum spicant*), lanky moss (*Rhytidiadelphus loreus*) and step moss (*Hylocomium splendens*).

## Wildlife

Wildlife diversity within the park is likely to be high. There is a significant population of black bears on the north coast and during the summer months they forage along the creek beds and in the open, logged areas on the northeast boundary of the park. Elk, wolves and cougars are also common in the north end of the Island, and it is expected that they use the park.

Based on a report for Cape Scott Provincial Park, it is likely that the following species inhabit or use Raft Cove Park: Red Squirrel; White-footed Mouse; Black-tailed deer; racoon; American Beaver; River Otter; and mink. Bird life is likely to include the Rufous Hummingbird, Pileated Woodpecker, Stellar's Jay and Winter Wren (Cannings, 1975).

Aquatic life is rich in the area. The intertidal areas support various lichens, green and red algae, limpets, barnacles and clams. The marine portion of the park supports harbour seals, sea lions, and sea otter (Demarchi, 1989). The Macjack River provides opportunities for recreational fishing of steelhead, coho, and sea-run cutthroat, while the estuary is an important feeding area for a variety of birds (Davage, 1992).

## **Outdoor Recreation Features and Visual Resources**

Raft Cove on the northwestern coast of Vancouver Island is an area of low rolling topography, rocky headlands and a sandy beach. Due to the location, access and natural resources, the park has an abundance of outdoor recreational features. The principal attraction of the area is its west coast wilderness atmosphere with its rolling surf, rocky headlands, beach, and rugged coastline. The park offers excellent opportunities for camping, picnicking, hiking, and wildlife viewing.

The scenic resources of Raft Cove Park are a significant attraction for visitors. Visually the park is breathtaking with its long crescent sandy beach, wild rugged coastline and pounding west coast surf.

## **Cultural Resources**

There is evidence that Raft Cove and Macjack estuary were used by Native people. Archaeological sites have not been formally catalogued, therefore, the Heritage Conservation Branch has recommended that a preliminary heritage survey be undertaken prior to any park development. The Quatsino Band of the Kwakiutl District Tribal Council claims Raft Cove as part of their traditional territory.

## **Resource Analysis**

The resources of the park contribute to the conservation and recreation goals of the provincial park system. The park contributes to the representation of the Nahwitti Lowland Landscape. Access to the west coast, beaches, tidal pools and other features of the park provide excellent opportunities for recreation. The Island Highway is identified as a tourism travel route and many visitors travel to Port Hardy visit the area and to catch the ferry to Prince Rupert. Raft Cove has potential to provide a camping destination for visitors to the area and continue to provide day-use opportunities for local residents. If the park was expanded to the north along the coast, the park would also provide opportunities for backcountry recreation.

## **RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES**

The primary activities are hiking, picnicking, beach walking, fishing and canoeing on the Macjack River. Viewing nature is also an attraction. The park has tidal pools and watching grey whales during early spring migration periods is possible from shore. With park development, there are opportunities for camping and group camping.

The only existing facility in the park is a narrow access trail. A day-use area, sanitation facilities, improved access and campsite development will enhance the recreation opportunities in the park.

## **TENURES. OCCUPANCY RIGHTS. AND JURISDICTION**

LEASES AND USE PERMITS	None
RIGHT OF WAY	None
FEE SIMPLE LAND HOLDINGS	None
FOREST TENURES	None
MINERAL TENURES	None
WATER RIGHTS	None
TRESPASSES	None
STATUTORY JURISDICTIONS	None
SPECIAL REGULATIONS	None

## **MARKET ANALYSIS**

### **Existing Use**

Raft Cove has been used for recreation for many years. The level of use in past years is unknown, however the number of visitors since Raft Cove was established as a park are listed below.

Numbers of visitors to Raft Cove were traditionally low. Only local residents were willing to hike for two hours or canoe down the Macjack River to gain access to Raft Cove. Roads in the vicinity of the park boundary have been constructed to support recent logging activity. This has significantly reduced the hiking time to the core of the park (approx 45 minutes). Improved access has increased the use of the park by both local and regional day hikers and backpackers.



In 1992 the number of visitors to the park was estimated to be:  
June 38; August 310;  
July 269; September 248.

Methods for recording use of the park will be improved over time and will produce more accurate records.

### **Promotion and Information**

Raft Cove's Pacific coast atmosphere and outstanding sandy beach will attract those who enjoy the wilderness of our west coast but are not hikers. Promotions will be directed at those using the park as a holiday destination for vehicle camping. The park will also be promoted for its day-use/picnic opportunities and day hiking.

To promote the park and local area, B. C. Parks will use the services of the local and regional tourism centres. The park will also be identified and promoted in all provincial and regional park maps and park specific brochures.

### **Park Product**

The shoreline of the Raft Cove Park offers scenery and coastal features of provincial significance. Access to the open Pacific Ocean, tidal pools, the sandy spit and opportunities for wildlife viewing and coastal hiking are major attractions of the park.

## **MASTER PLAN ISSUES**

### **Planning Process**

A public involvement process involving interest groups, residents and the Quatsino Band will be conducted by BC Parks to gain valuable input regarding the Master Plan.

In addition, the Regional District of Mount Waddington distributed a questionnaire regarding development of Raft Cove. Forty-two questionnaires were completed and returned. Questions included whether the respondent has been to Raft Cove Park, what sort of development is desired, whether the respondent would like to see road access closer to the beach in the park, and whether road access closer to the beach would affect the number of times the respondent would visit the park. A summary of the results is included in Appendix 1.

### **Park Development**

Raft Cove Park was established with the intention to develop vehicle accessible camping and day-use areas to complement the backcountry facilities found in Cape Scott Park. The Master Planning process for Cape Scott Park determined that the natural character of Cape Scott including San Josef Bay should be maintained. The wheel-chair accessible trail into San Josef Bay and will be maintained in its present form.

Road accessible, ocean-side camping opportunities are currently unavailable in provincial parks on northern Vancouver Island. Raft Cove offers an excellent opportunity to provide vehicle access to this coastal wilderness. The Master Plan for Raft Cove will address the type and level of development which will take place.

### **Park Access**

Access routes to the park by road will be considered. The Macjack River is also used to access Raft Cove Park and its extensive beach front. Consideration will be given to accommodating access by canoe.

### **Park Expansion**

During the Cape Scott Master Planning process and the Parks and Wilderness for the 90's initiative, suggestions were made to study the lands and water between Cape Scott and Raft Cove parks. This area is situated in the Quatsino Provincial Forest and consists of steep forested slopes and a coast with pebble beaches, rocky headlands and tidal pools. This area has potential to provide backcountry recreation opportunities and to protect views from Cape Scott Park. During the next few years, the area will be studied to determine whether it is appropriate for park status.

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## APPENDIX 1

### RAFT COVE PROVINCIAL PARK SURVEY OF AREA 'B' CONSTITUENTS - SUMMARY OF 42 QUESTIONNAIRES -

1. Have you been to Raft Cove Provincial Park?

YES - 34

NO - 8

2. What sort of development would you like to see in the park:

23 further trail development

17 campground development

6 no development

13 day use area

6 group camping area

*13 other - removal/control of garbage; canoeing access (up-river access / expand to include estuary with canoe ramp/ boat launch) like San Jo); large parking area to avoid congestion; road access; R. V. facilities; full development*

3. Would you like to see road access closer to the beach at Raft Cove Park?

YES - 24

NO - 18

4a. If so, what sort of road access would you like to see? - *proper lot with turnabout room; beach access at San Jo not Raft Cove, with campsite and parking lot near ocean; beach access at Raft Cove, with campsite and parking lot at / near ocean; access within 20 m.; close to beach footpath only to beach, gravel road; within 100 yd. of beach; paved road linking up with trail but half the length of existing trail; access for people "46 and older"; within 15 min. hike; 15 min. hike that is wheelchair accessible; for campers; road to N. end of park; anything to give easier access to one beach; all weather road to NW end of beach.*

4b. If not, what sort of access do you recommend to the beach? *trail (hiking) only, maintained (existing) trail ("as is"); better and/or alternate trails; good gravel road; challenging trail; canoes and trail; improved trail, like San Jo; at least wheelchair accessible; boardwalk; trails with drainrock or pavement.*

5. If there were road access closer to the beach:

a. Would it increase the number of times you would visit the park:

i. more 26

ii. less 9

iii. no different 4

b. Would it have a positive or negative affect on your visit.

*POSITIVE-22 NEGATIVE-12*

**6. General Comments:** *concerns for safe drinking water and outhouses; no ATV's or trail bikes; need summer caretaker/ park wardens; no generators; use guest book for survey input; garbage removal/ pollution (eg. San Jo's increased access = increased garbage, decreased respect); need signs (water, camping ethics, emergencies); emergency shelter; keep area pristine /little hard to reach; build road to San Jo (as development has already begun there) and leave Raft to hikers; Raft more private, more challenging hike than San Jo, but requires less time than Cape Scott; if you do develop, please be responsible and keep it clean; against any development in the park; pave road from Port Hardy to Cape Scott and Raft Cove (or build Viking Highway), limit campsite development until use and growth can be gaged; make Raft Cove = Long Beach, San Jo for day hikers and Cape Scott for the intrepids; road, but not at river end of beach; road, to make year round use of park easier; want road access to Nissen Bight; keep it rustic / "as is"; trail too tough / couldn't find the trail / health and age restricts access to San Jo, Raft Cove and Cape Scott/ share the beauty of our province to all/ need road to one of the beaches - want the road; need more parks; would like to visit beach; road would be positive for winter visits but negative for summer visits*

7. Are you:

3 15 - 30 years old

25 31- 45 yearsold

14 46 and older