

STRATHCONA PARK PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

(FINAL) MEETING MINUTES

June 25, 2010 6:00 PM – 10 PM

BC PARKS BOARDROOM, RATHREVOR BEACH PARK, PARKSVILLE

SPPAC MEMBERS: Tawney Lem (Chair), Barb Baker, Philip Stone, Dave Campbell, Nick Page, Warrick Whitehead., Peggy Carswell, Paul Erickson

BC Parks: Andy Smith; Ron Quilter

Regional Manager: Don Cadden

Recorder: John Milne

Public – Peter Rothermel, Ken Rodonents

1. Opening Remarks

Tawney Lem

The past months have been very busy for SPPAC members and others. The new Mount Arrowsmith Park is looking to Strathcona for an example of a Master Plan. SPPAC will look at its agenda to make it more efficient by prioritizing items. Phillip asked if some agenda items were discussed by email, would the public be left out of the process? Items could be discussed by email, then covered at the following SPPAC meeting. There are problems for some with large email attachments due to bandwidth limitations. Agenda items not requiring discussion should be dealt with quickly.

2. Confirm Previous Minutes (March 5, 2010)

All

The previous minutes were accepted as circulated.

Action – These minutes will be put on the Parks website.

3. Regional Manager (Don Cadden)– Meet & Greet/Questions

All

Don wants to find out more about SPPAC. He is not too familiar with Strathcona Park as he has just transferred as Regional Manager in Prince George five months ago. His background is as a fisheries biologist.

Don is responsible for regional staff, overseeing regional programs, acting as the Minister's regional representative, discussing issues with the public and stakeholders, the liaison between the region and Victoria Headquarters, and supporting staff achieve their workplans. He is also responsible for fish, wildlife and ecosystems programs. His wide mandate means he can't always focus on the finer details leaving that up to experienced staff in the various programs. He may not be able to resolve all problems, but will help staff explore and find the solutions.

The West Coast sub-region covers Vancouver Island, Central coast, Haida Gwaii and Tweedsmuir. The region includes over a third of the province's protected areas.

A question was asked about SPPAC's advice going to the Regional Manager, and how it travels up the line to the Minister. Don would like to resolve issues at the regional level. His door is open and he is willing to meet with SPPAC at any time. If issues can't be resolved, then SPPAC can request the Regional Manager take the issue further upward. It will be the Regional Manager's decision if this is necessary.

If the Minister is to make a decision, how can SPPAC get information to him? BC Parks staff record and relay all information to the Regional Manager who in turn provides this to BC Parks Directors and beyond.

SPPAC must always go through the Regional Manager with all issues as per the terms of reference.

SPPAC's concern is, once a decision is made by the Minister if SPPAC is not happy about it, then what are the options? How can SPPAC be more effective? The Minister weighs information from all sources. Don can always ask for clarification for SPPAC as to how a decision was made but sometimes decisions are complex and all the reasons behind a decision may not be fully known. The Minister is the final authority.

SPPAC knows what the outcome of the recent Master Plan amendment was, but doesn't understand the rationale as to how that decision was made.

A comment was made about some of the public's opinions not being regarded, and the feeling that the process was flawed. SPPAC wants to consider looking at the amendment process. Again, BC Parks staff record and relay all information to the Regional Manager who in turn provides this to BC Parks Directors and beyond.

What was the rationale behind the Minister's Master Plan Amendment decision? Don will try to bring the full scope to SPPAC. There is a review of the whole process being done by the Ombudsman's office. The Ombudsman's office is responsible for investigating complaints to ensure proper rules and procedures are being followed. This would include such things as potential political interference.

SPPAC takes its role seriously. Even if only the perception of a flawed process is there, it needs to be dealt with.

Will Parks be looking at the amendment process with the idea of improving it in future? It was a long and expensive exercise.

The Ombudsman's office is requesting additional files from Parks.

Has Clayoquot Wilderness Resort's (CWR) park use permit (PUP) application been set aside until this issue is resolved? Shouldn't the PUP review be postponed in the event that if the Ombudsman's report reveals concerns with the process it could affect the permit decision?

Ron reported on the PUP status. We are currently awaiting an updated permit application from CWR. Things have changed since the original application was submitted, i.e. CWR has learned that mountain bikes are not permitted in this zone, there has been storm events that could have potentially changed the terrain, more information has been gathered about the valley and horses through the completion of the Impact Assessment, etc. Ron and Don will discuss this. CWR has requested a meeting with Parks to discuss the next stages, but this meeting hasn't happened yet. Andy has sent a message to John Caton saying the process is starting and requesting them to update their application.

SPPAC recommends the PUP and its evaluation be put on hold until the Ombudsman's report is complete.

Tawney will check on the Ombudsman's office procedures.

Don will get advice from the Parks' executive regarding this issue.

Peggy expressed SPPAC's appreciation of Don's openness and willingness to meet.

4. Master Plan Amendment Update

Ron

See above

5. Centennial Expedition Update

Phil/Tawney/Barb/Ron

There is one month to go until the expedition. NVI Mining Ltd. (Myra Falls Operations) gave \$20,000 towards the project, so the total raised is now about \$25,000. Strathcona Park Lodge is also being very supportive. There are community events in Campbell River (Tyee Spit) on July 21st, Buttle Narrows (Parks Headquarters) on Aug. 1st, Port Alberni (Alberni Museum) on August 7th, and Victoria (Empress Hotel) on August 9th.

Great participation in this event is happening, and a good film maker is now involved. There should be some money left over to begin the Strathcona Legacy Fund. This fund can be a vehicle for further fundraising for park projects. This will be discussed later.

Details are now being planned – routes, supplies, medical forms, etc.

Ron noted the expedition t-shirts are for sale. Paul will approach MEC in Victoria to see if they will sell some as well.

6. SPPAC Membership Recruitment Update

Andy/Tawney

There was little response to the call for new members, only 5 people. The choices at this time are that SPPAC may stay with the current number of people, or may take 1 or 2 new people. Andy, Ron and Tawney still need to discuss this and if making a selection will then make recommendations to the Regional Manager. Warrick noted his next meeting is his last as his time is up. Nick asked if there was a pool from the previous round of applications still available. Ron still doesn't know his budget for this committee. There can be fewer members if needed. SPPAC's Terms of Reference say SPPAC can have up to 11 people, and 6 is a quorum. Andy and Tawney will review the applications and the previous call for volunteers. Peggy suggested a press release could be issued asking for a volunteer with a specific skill. Phillip suggests looking at age distribution as well.

7. Friends of Strathcona Park – Take Back the Park

Andy

Andy spoke of the FOSP campaign. FOSP held a public meeting, and expressed their dissatisfaction about the lack of funding for parks and its impacts and advised that they want to use an unauthorized action (trail building) to gain media attention. The Friends' first project proposed was the Crest Mountain trail access. Andy spoke at the Courtenay public meeting and corrected FOSP's information regarding closed trails and lack of funds being spent in Strathcona. Andy advised attendees about the work that had been planned last season for implementation this year and what is already in progress, specifically at Della Falls and Upper Myra Falls trails. Contracts have now been awarded for both these trail projects and the trails will be open this season. BC Parks advised FOSP that there was no need for any illegal action as they will support a temporary Crest Mountain bypass route until a decision is reached about replacing the condemned bridge. As a result, a volunteer agreement was signed, and the temporary route put in with BC Parks Ranger assistance. It was a successful project, and the trail is now open.

The two options being considered - replacing the bridge or, making the temporary bypass a permanent trail, are to be assessed by June 30th. If the bridge is the preferred option, then it will be completed by August 30th unless contractual or construction delays occur. If the trail is the preferred option, then an impact assessment will need to be conducted and referrals made to First Nations.

The Bedwell trail route is the second Take Back The Park initiative the FOSP are pursuing. Andy gave some history of the trail and advised FOSP that they could potentially support a short temporary bypass around the "Living Bridge" if one could be found. If a route is found, it will be assessed, and another volunteer agreement signed to allow FOSP to flag the temporary route and establish it through minor clipping with no chainsaw or digging work.. This would allow FOSP to do maintenance on the rest of the trail further up the valley or prior to the "Living Bridge". A reconnaissance trip has been approved.

Port Alberni groups would be interested in volunteer group projects as well.

An important issue for Parks is to ensure safety for volunteers working on these projects.

Parks wants more lead time in future so they can allocate their time and possibly coordinate volunteers with Parks priorities. In dealing with this FOSP issue, Parks have shown that if Volunteer groups are willing to sign a Volunteer Agreement that establishes the conditions of a project, then such work can potentially move ahead. eg. Safety requirements

The safety questions in the Bedwell Valley will be more challenging due to remoteness and accessibility.

There was a wide ranging discussion about the FOSP and BC Parks relationship, their communication, etc.

The issue should be wider than just FOSP and volunteering. Opportunities for all volunteer groups should be available. There are many potential volunteers out there.

Ron said there are limits as to staff time available to supervise volunteers. Parks will do what they can to facilitate these opportunities. Ron acknowledged Kel Kelly's role in making the Crest Mountain agreement happen.

Can SPPAC assist Andy in facilitating the use of volunteers, maybe doing some preliminary work to help save time?

Sometimes Parks' priorities and volunteer's priorities don't match. SPPAC used to look at annual plans and provided suggestions to help Parks set priorities. Maybe this can happen again.

There are other models for utilizing volunteers elsewhere, eg. Habitat for Humanity. Volunteers are a huge untapped resource. They can save money and still get the job done. Parks should come up with policies for utilizing volunteers, maybe like a request for proposals for volunteer groups. This would include criteria to be met.

Andy said there is a volunteer policy already in place. The work load still falls on the local regional staff and this can be the problem when priorities don't match. Even projects supported could require time to be evaluated, agreement conditions worked out and details to be organized. Andy said the Volunteer policy is online on BC Parks' website.

Resources that used to be available in the past from Parks (eg helicopter support) are no longer available unless budgeted for and approved at the beginning of the year.

SPPAC recognizes the benefit of using volunteers. The Crest project fortunately worked out well. SPPAC would like to help parks utilize volunteers in the future.

Public safety projects are always ranked high in the list of priorities. Parks would be willing to have skilled volunteers help. Budgets have just been released, so time to plan is short. Also, the window of time to do work in Strathcona is short.

8. Wolf River Fire (Peter Rothermel Mar 23rd e-mail)

David

This topic concerns the decision around fire fighting in the Park. What is SPPAC's position on fires in park. Do we need a wildfire management plan?

One member stated there are some spectacular old growth trees in the park, and they should be protected from fire. If these trees are low quality, and set on fire by lightening, then let them burn.

But, burned areas do grow up in time. The debate is over the scale of management vs. natural cycles.

Provincial policy is basically to have Forestry officials do a fly over the fire. If it is found to be in the park, then the park fire management plan would be followed. In most cases this involves initial attack. Questions of who to contact, what facilities there are, and where people might be are included in this plan. Parks will meet with fire fighting officials to refine the fire management strategy for the park. Individual fire management plans consider park resources, special features, location, costs, and budgets. The plan is signed off with the land manager (BC Parks). Andy signed off on Wolf River fire. There were many flights to update the situation and keep Victoria informed.

Costs of fire fighting do not come out of Parks budget.

The Wolf River fire was attacked hard at first. A strategy is to set trigger points. If a fire reaches that point, the next step of the attack plan is initiated.

The Wolf River fire was relatively small, but spreading, and it was not possible to put in suppression lines given the terrain. When other fires became priority, resources had to be pulled out. Lighting a back fire was not possible and may have had more impact to the park than the fire itself. There is a stand of yew trees in this area that may be a special feature.

Fire fighters have priorities of public safety and resource values. Strathcona Park does have a draft fire management plan but it is quite complex. This plan needs to be reviewed with the fire center. The Wolf River fire was in the Wilderness Conservation Zone where machines are not allowed so no mechanical fire breaks would typically be allowed.

A new coastal fire plan is out this year. Parks are going to be included in a region wide plan, and approaches will be standardized. The Ministry is moving towards risk management, not putting out as many fires as possible.

Fire is a natural phenomena, and if it constitutes a safety issue then that needs considering.

Peter Rothermel was allowed to present some questions and he was satisfied with the response at this meeting.

The Provincial Fire Center decides how to allocate fire fighting resources, not BC Parks. Impacts of fire on karst formations are more significant. Should there be a plan for them? This is a complex issue.

9. Marmot program update (written update from Don Doyle)

Andy

Timing of this summer's work is uncertain because of deep snow. Last winter's survival rate was poor. There will be a camp on Grieg Ridge going up soon. The first release of marmots depends on the snow. 11-13 groups are to be released. Various sites for release were listed, and there will be multiple releases for the larger sites. 15 – 20 helicopter flights are planned for this season. Phillip went with Don Doyle on a flight to see the operation.

Warrick asked when will this program end. This project has changed since its inception. Nick pointed out money spent on this project takes away from other species at risk. The captive breeding program is very successful, so marmots have to be relocated in the wild at increasing rates. Paul questions the program. The Master Plan supports the project.

10. Heber Decommissioning Update (Andy's email April 28)

Andy

BC Hydro backed away from this because the Water Controller hasn't yet provided official approval. The project is being postponed for 1 year.

11. Della Falls/Drinkwater Cable Car & other Capital Projects Update

Andy

A contract was awarded for replacing the damaged bridge on the Della Falls trail with a cable car crossing, which is now in progress. The old damaged bridge will be removed, and the project should be completed by mid August. The Della Falls Trail will be opened at that time. Blow-downs along the trail were cleared out last year. Unfortunately the 2010 Job Opportunity Program application for trail clearing in this area was not successful.

Barb asked if volunteers could do some brushing out the trail. Andy answered yes.

12. Mine Closure plan (John Wilson email dated Mar31)

Andy

An NVI update was provided. The Mine Closure Plan is now available but Parks have not completed their review yet. A heavy snow pack means good power production.

13. Mine Tour

Tawney/Barb/Paul

Tawney, Barb and Paul had a tour on June 18th. Tawney said it helped her understand the operation. The opportunity is there for other SPPAC members to take this tour. Paul mentioned the visual impact of the mine site. A tour helps one understand how the whole operation works. The waste issue (e.g. tailings) is the mine's legacy, and will be addressed in the Closure Plan.

14. Sid's Cabin (Falling apart)

Andy

Sid's cabin is in disrepair. Should it be restored, replaced, or let go? A cabin at Circllet is a consideration.

Paul thinks Sid's cabin should go. Cabins and huts do not belong in the Park. Building a new one opens up the park to more.

Warrick says dismantle it so it is safe. Don't build a new cabin at Circllet Lake.

Nick says the Circllet Lake cabin is identified in the Master Plan, and has been supported before. Barb says there is potentially money available from a group for a Circllet Lake cabin.

Ron said the Alpine Club could be a group that might be interested in taking this project on.. It is in the Master Plan, and is an allowable use. Sid's cabin is a safety issue, and the stove was removed last year for this reason. It could collapse in winter.

Warrick said cabins all around the world are being closed. Mice are a health hazard.

Andy mentioned safety issues, and historic values (Syd's). These two values cross.

Ron said one option is to restrict access to the cabin, then let it collapse naturally.

Peggy supports this idea, and asked the public members for their opinion.

Peter thinks it is too far gone to repair. Let it die a natural death.

Ken spoke of how the money could be better spent on something else. People use it in the winter and summer. Getting rid of stove was a good idea.

Ron says the Master Plan directs the cabin be maintained, but this can be interpreted as maintain it as a historic site.

Peter suggested an interpretive sign to explain its significance.

SPPAC recommends maintaining Sid’s cabin as a historic site.

15. Strathcona Operations update (SPPWC Hut/Centennial Trail, etc) Andy

Strathcona now has a a new permanent senior ranger, Steve Pratt, who will work with Andy full time. In the past, the Strathcona Senior Ranger was seasonal. Strathcona also has another new ranger this season who has been working at Bowron Lakes for the last two seasons.

At the Paradise Meadows trail head there will be a recognition event on Friday, Aug 20 for the donors. While the public is invited to attend, the focus of the event is for the Donors and Supporters. Key donors will get a framed plaque similar to the sign which is to be put on the building. The only work left is landscaping and installing a picnic table.

Vancouver Island University is paying for an interpretive sign which will provide a detailed view of the plateau mountains along with their names, as well as photos and text about some of the Forbidden Plateau history.

Backcountry camping fees have gone up to \$10 per person per night, for the three core areas of Forbidden Plateau, Elk River and Bedwell Lakes as well as the marine campsites around Buttle Lake. Parks pay approximately \$75,000 annually for our park facility operator (PFO) to provide annual maintenance. The PFO gets to retain the park camping revenue.

16. Round Table – other topics All

Peggy mentioned Gil Parker attended the FOSP AGM. She asked about the Spine Trail. Parks supports it in principal, however not the portion of the proposed Spine Trail that does not conform to the Master Plan. There may be a presentation to SPPAC coming in the future.

17. Public Question Period

Ken Rodonents mentioned snowmobiles in the park, specifically around the Jutland Mountain and Carey Lakes areas. Ron mentioned what Parks has done the last few years. Next year resources may be pooled and enforcement carried out with other Ministries. Ron will suggest this as a priority for the joint enforcement initiative. Tawney mentioned the lack of resources in other ministries for enforcing their own regulations.

There are some new blow-downs on Della Falls trail which need clearing out mostly after the bridge site and on the upper trail near the falls. The new campsite at the falls (2007) doesn’t have much room for tents. Andy is still looking for a solution for campsite problems in this area and hopes to address it this season.

Peter Rothermel spoke of the Prince George volunteers and their working relationship with Parks. They phone up BC Parks and get immediate permission to carry out projects. Ron and Andy explained that other regions may have some local policies/procedures that have been developed. Peter will check what processes are followed in other areas.

Ken mentioned about 8 trees cut down in the park by snowmobilers so they can gain access into park. Andy advised this was done in 2009 and since then erected No Snowmobile signs in the area.

18. Next SPPAC meeting November 19, 2010