

**STRATHCONA PARK PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE
(November 19, 2010 – Rath Trevor Beach Park, Parksville)**

Those present:

SPPAC MEMBERS: Tawney Lem (Chair), Barb Baker, Philip Stone, Dave Campbell, Warrick Whitehead (last meeting), Peggy Carswell, Paul Erickson, Erik Holbek (first meeting)

Absent: Nick Page

BC Parks: Andy Smith; Ron Quilter

Recorder: John Milne

NVI mines – Robert Behrendt, Ivor McWilliams, Steve Wuschke for first part of meeting.

Public – 10 members

1. **Opening Remarks** Tawney
Lem

Everyone present at the table and in the public audience introduced themselves.

2. **Welcome new Committee Member – Erik Holbek**
Andy/Tawney – All

Tawney introduced Erik and asked him to give some of his background. He is a Forest Consultant from Econ Consulting, Comox Valley. He is a registered Professional Forester who works with woodlot licensees. Erik has experience working with First Nations as well as technical expertise. His experience working with multiple interest stakeholders makes him valuable to the committee.

3. **Confirm Previous Minutes (June 25 2010)** All

Last meeting's minutes were accepted as circulated.

Action: Andy will arrange to have them posted to BC Parks website.

4. **Group Discussion and Planning Items**

- a. **NVI Power Options** (15 min Presentation/15 min Discussion) NVI
Representatives

This information follows information previously presented and discussed.

Robert Behrendt showed a power-point presentation. There was a review of some of the economic benefits of the NVI mine. A map was shown delineating the mine site and its deposits. NVI's business plan includes safety, environmental excellence, a financially healthy mine, ore grade improvements, and ore recovery improvement. The NVI mine is currently in good financial shape.

A Power Management Strategy was developed in 2009 and has saved 3 million litres of diesel fuel, reduced green house gas emissions, and reduced noise from generators.

Diesel consumption is down by more than half to date. Producing 500,000-600,000 tons of ore per year is the mines "sweetpot".

Expanding the mine will call for more power for ventilation, pumping and paste handling.

Potential power saving strategies were presented to SPACC at previous meetings. SPPAC made a number of recommendations at that time.

In April 2010 a discussion occurred about raising the Jim Mitchell Dam, raising the level of Thelwood Lake, a grid connection, installing a new penstock and generator, and some other possibilities.

Raising the Jim Mitchell spillway to generate more power at low environmental and financial cost is the option being presented here. NVI proposes to raise the current spillway with a 3.3 metre extension which can be manipulated up and down with the use of multiple rubber air bladders. Raising the level of Thelwood Lake is not being considered at this time. NVI believes this work would remain in the parameters of their existing Park Use Permit.

The spillway extension would capture water at the end of high flow events. More engineering still needs to be done to confirm technical details. Under current production rates and based on average annual weather patterns, up to 100% of electric power could be generated by hydro thus eliminating or severely reducing the need for diesel power.

A slide showing a sample spill gate extension on Ashlu Creek was presented. Low pressure pneumatic bladders control the level of steel gates. The control system is computer based and tied into the main mine office.

This proposal may require some tree clearing along the lakeshore. How much clearing would be known after a more detailed survey is done.

Has there been a water balance analysis done? The mine runs out of water for power production at the end of September and in March. Raising the spillway would be done 2 – 3 times per year, before spring runoff, and when the autumn rains start. Water elevation data has been supplied to Parks. Each event would extend hydro production by about 10 days. The gate has to be down in winter so as to not impede natural flows.

The adjacent earthen dam may have to be modified depending on engineering studies to ensure adequate "freeboard"(difference between water level and top of dam) is maintained. This dam is critical and must be sound.

The current PUP allows water to go 3.3m higher than the current level. This provision of the permit hasn't been pursued to date, therefore Parks needs to ensure that the plan meets the existing permit conditions (all indications at this time appear to support this claim) The Ministry of Mines and the dam safety people will also be involved. Federal fisheries will also be part of this because of effects on fish downstream from the lake. This proposal will only require a permit amendment if the proposed work was outside the existing permit conditions. Parks will do a legal review of the current permit to see if it fits. NVI proposes to complete an impact assessment along with an engineering assessment/plan prior to getting final approval.

NVI is waiting for the green light from Parks and other regulatory agencies before proceeding.

A question about mine closure was asked. What part of the system will be kept to run the tailings pumps at that time?

It was suggested NVI should work on the part of the system to be kept for closure. NVI advised that water must be treated for 100 years. NVI wants to keep both dams so one at a time can be taken down for maintenance. After they are no longer needed, both would be removed.

A question was asked about pumping water back uphill to produce more power. This is not practical as there is no reservoir at the bottom and no power to pump it back uphill. These facilities are not tied to the grid.

This proposal would bring diesel use close to zero while the mine operates, at which time the power would be used for treatment after closure.

How does SPPAC feel about this? A comment was made about the work done by NVI since the first presentation and how it is a tradeoff. No glaring problems have been identified. There is more concern about the closure plan. This is a reasonable plan and the trade offs are worth it.

What happens if studies show the earthen dam must be raised by 2 m? Does this change the situation? This much change may prove too much for this project. Raising the earthen dam would not require too much fill. The work required to raise this dam would be captured under the existing permit.

Are there any potential showstoppers? This proposal appears to be fairly easy to implement. Impacts of construction would have to be acceptable and able to be mitigated. This looks fairly straightforward.

Parks would do a Level 1 Assessment, and if required, NVI would be responsible for a Level 2 Assessment.

Dam safety regulations must be confirmed prior to BC Parks considering it any further..

There is no sensitive habitat around Jim Mitchell Lake. It is steep sided and boulder strewn, with a steep flowing creek the opposite end.

SPPAC wants to hear back about potential engineering challenges and confirmation of Parks' legal review.

If the permit has to be amended because it is outside current conditions, SPPAC will still support acceptance.

SPPAC wants to keep dialogue ongoing between NVI and the committee. Updates on the legal review and dam assessment will be provided at the mine meeting in the new year.

b. CWR Permit
Andy/Ron

Friends of Strathcona Park (CWR Permit) – 15 minutes
Representatives

FOSP

Jennifer Pass spoke about legal considerations, and SPPAC's role. FOSP asked SPPAC to continue its role in advising Parks. Transparency, intelligibility and justification are issues to be considered in determining whether the statutory decision maker's decision (to grant a PUP) is reasonable. What is the public benefit from CWR's proposal? Only Two tent platforms are reserved for the public at all times (Six other platforms are open to the public 5 days per week). The lack of public horse access (logistics makes it difficult) makes this an exclusive use. Granting the PUP is unintelligible for the reasons given.

Bob St. John presented some slides showing the Bedwell area and its trails (failed bridges that would be replaced; existing road corridor showing rock and gravel debris). He spoke about the area and CWR's operation, and also reviewed last summer's trail project.

Karl Stevenson read a statement asking for the CWR permit to be denied and the Master Plan to be reinstated. He reviewed some of the park's history from a FOSP point of view. He also shared some of the FOI disclosures. Karl asked SPPAC to write the Minister and ask him to deny the CWR permit for a number of reasons including the building of a new hiking trail which negates the need for CWR's option. FOSP believe this PUP is only the first step and CWR will want more then other commercial ventures may want in as well once the precedent it set.

CWR application - Ron and Andy.

BC Parks' first ensure the permit proposal meets the Master Plan Amendment and Park Act, asking the proponent questions to clarify issues and then making a recommendation as to why or why not the proposal should be accepted/declined. Any necessary conditions would be added during the drafting of the permit.

Acting on a public request by the FOSP, the Ombudsman's Office is still reviewing this permit process . The last SPPAC meeting recommended the PUP be put on hold until the Ombudsman's report is complete. Andy said no direction has been given to stop the adjudication of the PUP as directed by Don Cadden. The Ombudsman's report will not comment on any decision but rather only on any procedural issues. The report is not holding up the process.

Does SPPAC have any further questions? Is there any information that BC Parks is not aware of?

SPPAC was curious about manure management - as to how many people and what techniques will be used to remove manure? This part of the permit application seems unrealistic. Who's going to monitor manure removal seriously? Would a soil sample be needed?

Asked what procedures BC Parks has for monitoring this permit if approved? As with all permits, BC Parks relies on random & scheduled inspections, reports as per permit, public feedback/reports and annual self reports from the proponent .

What happens if the proponent breaches this condition? What is the benchmark? How much manure is OK?

As with all permits, should a proponent breach a condition, they jeopardize their permit. What may be reasonable and realistic would need to be agreed to. Manure was never an issue in the past for other Master Plan identified areas.

Monitoring depends on trust and how can we trust this? What resources are available for random checks? It is not possible to have people there 24/7 for any issue. There is no talk yet about how often checks would be done. The majority of PUP's now depend on self policing. Most operators adhere to their permits. It is true that staff is not available to be there very often, but like other permit areas, priority of time is relative to the complexity and need.

SPPAC recommends a manure removal strategy due to the possibility of introducing non invasive species. Andy advised that forms of mitigation have been proposed such as sterilized feed, dedicated horses, etc. Over a 30 year period there may be a significant amount of manure deposited there.

There was discussion about the approach SPPAC has taken towards this permit.

Parks should take into account the logistical exclusivity of this PUP, high demands placed on Parks staff to monitor this PUP, high demands to monitor ongoing conflicts this will cause, CWR's suggestion to waive a PUP fee, the benefits of a proposed hiking trail on the south side of the river, frequent flood and wind events due to climate change, high maintenance of CWR built facilities as a result of this climate change, and hiker/horse conflicts. BC Parks is considering all these points.

Warrick recommends supporting the FOSP hiking trail option (no discussions, planning, assessments, First Nation consultation has been done yet). CWR should be responsible for paying everything including existing trail upgrades facility replacement, maintenance and BC Parks inspections.

The feeling is that the Minister has made a political decision under the influence of others. However, "Firebrand" letters are not always productive. The Minister finalized the Master Plan decision and is not going to change this. If FOSP believe they have grounds for any legal action then it is up to them to pursue a legal avenue. SPPAC should not be involved other than advising and commenting on the details of the PUP application.

SPPAC as an advisory committee can at best, reiterate its opposition to having horses in park. SPPAC must work within its procedures and rules, and should focus on details, not philosophy.

There is no mention of a term in this application. This should be included, or stated by Parks. There should be penalties for non compliance. There needs to be a dispute resolution procedure. How would complaints from the public be handled?

Paul thinks the permit should not be granted, but if it is, these issues should be dealt with.

If a second trail was to be approved then the major benefit of the existing trail would be lost.

The term asked for is 20 years. It will be reviewed periodically depending on how the permit is structured. It was suggested a visit by Park staff paid for by CWR should occur every second year, or what ever other term is decided.

A performance bond should be a condition. Is CWR still going to be responsible for the trail all the way to Bedwell Lake?

The infrastructure required (bridges and cable car) is being designed for CWR horse use, not the public. Costs must not become a BC Parks problem.

More detail will be required about any proposed trail rerouting, and how it meets the Master Plan criteria. Is there any criteria? How feasible are some of the crossings, and how long will they last?

Consideration should be given to trail standards - can a hiker and a horse use a trail 2 foot wide trail?

SPPAC should capture these issues in a letter as to why they are opposed to the permit. This is not a case of stating what conditions need to be met.

Camping where horses are is not a desirable option. Hikers would not want to camp there. Hikers' campsites should be well away from horses. The issue of no dock space at CWR limits public access. There is the expectation of CWR making it more difficult in the future for hikers.

There may be a legal challenge to this PUP.

An appreciation was given to Park staff for doing their job in light of such a tough situation.

What should SPPAC do? The **recommendation is to talk to Don Cadden and perhaps Minister Coell.**

The Regional Manager makes the decision on this PUP based on the Master Plan and whether or not concerns can be mitigated. Ron said most things talked about can be mitigated to some extent.

Some believe there is zero public benefit from this application.

The new trail on the south side of the valley is not approved yet. No discussion has taken place, no impact assessment has been done, and no further permits have been granted. It is unclear whether this is an option or not.

What about wildlife conflicts? Guns won't be allowed. If there are conflicts with wildlife inside the park, parks investigates, and sees what action needs taking. If a problem animal is habituated, it has to be dealt with. Assumptions and statements can't just be made without them being substantiated. There must be background data to support accusations.

What is the time frame for this? Based on the date the PUP proposal amendment was submitted (Oct 7th), 120 days, takes it to approximately Feb 7, (4 months) when a decision should be made. (note – actual time for permit adjudication is typically 140 days)

Economic factors for CWR may make this too prohibitive if there are too many expensive conditions imposed. Parks can't impose conditions on some permit holders that aren't reasonable or not imposed on others. The term of the permit to be fair, needs to be relative to connected to costs imposed. If conditions are met and there are no non-compliance issues, permits usually get renewed. This may not be an economic decision.

Warrick suggested SPPAC work on a document collaboratively over the next few weeks, which is to be forwarded to Don Cadden.

The Bedwell Valley is regenerating, so it can't be written off as a damaged valley. It can return to wilderness if left alone and no impacts are imposed.

PUPs can be transferable with the permission of the Minister. A new Permittee would need to meet all the same conditions as the original Permittee. This could be problematic considering the issue of wanting public access to the park. Access across private land cannot be written as a condition of the PUP as this is outside the park. The lack of unfettered public access is a negative, as it could be retracted at some time in the future. However, it could also be potentially used to leverage an agreement.

Recommendation – SPPAC will request a meeting between Don Cadden and a subcommittee of SPPAC to discuss this.

SPPAC could use the current political condition of the government to ask for reconsideration. Also, SPPAC could add former members of SPPAC to those signing on to a letter.

Recommendation – SPPAC shall write a letter stating it is not in support of the PUP for the reasons discussed here.

This is to be done as soon as possible.

c. Renaming Marble Meadows trail to “Cowlin Trail”

Ron

There has been a request to rename Marble Meadows trail to Cowlin's Crest subject to the geographic name branch with government's approval. Another option would be to erect a sign. Parks has to consider the zone before a sign could be approved. Not sure if this is appropriate or not as there are so many people who have done so much for the Park. Many feel there are too many plaques and monuments already in the Park. Maybe there are some other ways to recognize John's name. Such a sign could set a precedent.

Action: Refer to next meeting.

d. Centennial Expedition

Phil/Tawney/Barb/Ron

Tawney reported on the success of the event. Tawney also gave out Ruth Masters bookmarks to SPPAC members.

Phillip said the goals of the project were achieved. The expedition was an excellent team building experience. Details to be presented to at the BC Parks provincial conference in Victoria next week. All surplus funds will go directly into the park legacy fund. A 55 minute film of the expedition is being produced scheduled for release at the end of January. Phillip was asked to give a more complete report at the next SPPAC meeting. The Centennial Expedition was nominated and won the BC Parks,

Partnership award.

5. Updates

a. SPPAC Membership Recruitment Update

Andy/Tawney

Erik Holbek has been appointed as a new member to SPPAC. A number of other applications were submitted. Based on the Terms of Reference, certain skills were targeted in choosing successful applicants. Tawney and Andy wanted an engineer to replace David Vincent, but have been unsuccessful to date. Andy solicited applicants from various groups in the categories listed under the Terms of Reference.

As per ToR, the Landscape architecture field was also targeted. (Note – Nick Page has a degree in Landscape Architecture). Also representation from younger people was wanted, so Vancouver Island University was targeted. There was one respondent who was qualified, but as they had been a parks facility operator there was question about potential conflict of interest. More discussion via e-mail is required to gather input about creating a student seat on the committee. It was noted that it could be hard for a student to make the normal long term commitment. SPPAC may have to request a change to the terms of reference in order to make this official and consistent. This would be made as a recommendation from SPPAC to the Regional Manager.

Andy and Tawney will continue working on obtaining new members.

b. Capital Projects Update

Andy

The Visitors Center at the Paradise Meadows has been completed. Landscaping has been done. \$12,000 from BC Parks Capital budget was accessed to cover this final component of the project..

Drinkwater Creek cable car – This has been completed, and the trail is open. The total cost was \$107,000, which was less costly than building a replacement bridge.

Upper Myra Falls boardwalk – Bridge/walkway was replaced at a cost of \$13,000. Trail has now been re-opened.

Crest Mountain Bridge Replacement – A wonderful new cedar log bridge as well as some trail upgrades were completed at a cost of \$37,000. The trail is now reopened.

Paradise Meadows Loop Trail – Upgrades to this trail which is accessed off the main Centennial Trail was completed at a cost of \$64,000

Buttle Lake Hand Pumps – All but one hand pump along with cement pads, were replaced at Buttle Lake and Ralph River campgrounds at a cost of \$65,000.

c. Miscellaneous Updates:

Vancouver Island University (VIU) Signage (Paradise Meadows) – A new interpretive sign, depicting many of the mountains within Strathcona, including insets providing some history of the plateau area, is currently being developed. The 60 inch x 18 inch sign will be complete by the end of February and be installed on the back deck of the new Wilderness Center for the 2011 season. The cost of the sign and mounting hardware is approximately \$2000 and being covered by a donation from VIU.

Strathcona Park Wilderness Centre (SPWC) and Centennial Trail - A recognition ceremony was held at the new building on August 20, 2010 where donors and supported were recognized and thanked. A large recognition sign detailing supporters along with a history of the project was unveiled and installed on one of the outside walls of the SPWC.

BC Hydro Heber Penstock Removal Project – Since the April 2010 postponement, no word has been received as to when this may move ahead..

VI Marmot Program - update was sent out to members by email. There has been some mortalities over the last winter but the program is still successfully growing the population. More releases are expected for 2011.

Friends of Strathcona Park – Crest Mtn. & Bedwell Trails Work Unauthorized Activities planned in park. This issue needs further discussion.

Gerry Roberts, SWI Volunteer of the Year – Gerry Roberts, of Strathcona Wilderness Institute, who volunteers countless hours at the Buttle Lake Information Hut was nominated and won the prestigious Province wide, BC Parks Volunteer of the Year award.

6. Distributed Items

Auditor General Report An update will be provided at the next meeting.

7. Farewell to Warrick – last meeting All

Acknowledgement was given of Warrick's work on SPPAC. Ron & Andy spoke highly of him for his support and contribution over the years.

Warrick provided some farewell comments - spoke of his approval of SPPAC's work over his term.

In his opinion SPPAC needs to be more than an advisory committee. Although supported by the Master Plan, Warrick reiterated his concerns about the marmot program. Warrick feels that commemorative plaques and monuments must be removed from the Park. Although there already is a few SPPAC members who are also FOSP members, Warrick believes it may be beneficial to continue to have a FOSP representative on the committee. SPPAC should write a letter to Don Cadden and the Minister and ask that the Ursus valley be added to the park. This would help take pressure off the Bedwell valley. Warrick was sorry he missed the Centennial Expedition, but he was in Iceland on a wonderful trip

8. Round Table – other topics All

None were brought up.

9. Public Question Period

Jesse Hopps from VIU – As a student, Jesse is supportive of having a student on the committee.

Karl Stevenson – While elk sign is evident throughout the valley, Karl confirmed elk were present on the side of the river where a horse trail may be. He also asked if hikers are mitigable.

Jennifer Pass – Jennifer suggested that SPPAC can be fundamentally against the CWR application, as well as against it for specific reasons. They are independent of each other.

Ken Vanderburg - Ken was disappointed the Master plan was changed. It should include a clause regarding the amendment process. Maybe parks could be taken out of government hands and made a crown corporation administered by a non profit group. There could be things worse than horses in the park. SPPAC should become more than an advisory committee. Andy noted Class C parks are run by boards, and raise money themselves. Getting money is the challenge.

When did we allow bridge building in parks?

Next Meeting: 1) NVI/SPPAC – February – to be confirmed by email 2) Regular – February 25