

STRATHCONA PARK PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

(June 5, 2023 – In person 1812 Miracle Beach Drive 6PM – 9PM)

SPPAC MEMBERS present: (Chair) Hardolph Wasteneys, Jessie Moore, Ryan Wanner, Jennifer Pass, Bill Phipps, Ryan Stuart, Phil Stone

REGRETS: Catrin Brown, Sandra Borton (resigned June 6th), Darren Saare (resigned June 5th)

Recorder: Ryan Yardley (BC Parks)

Guests

Ryan Yardley (BC Parks)

Public

6 Members of the public attended.

MEETING SUMMARY

Introductions/Agenda

- No formal agenda to leave for open discussions. Topics brought forward by members before the meeting:
 - o Strathcona Area update (Jessie)
 - o Underutilized Trails (Hardolph)
 - o Discussion about IBA between Myra Falls Mine and Wei Wai Kai and Wei Wai Kum First Nations)

STRATHCONA AREA UPDATE:

Status of trails in Strathcona Provincial Park (SPP). Decision if unofficial/unauthorized should be fixed or legitimized. Ten years ago, former BC Parks Area Supervisor proposed additional trail development projects. GENERAL DISCUSSION if SPPAC should recommend authorizing the forementioned trails.

STRATHCONA PARK AREA SUPERVISOR *STRATHCONA UPDATE*, including:

- **Budget** was more-or-less the same as 2022, with some additional funding being available to support priority backcountry projects throughout the region. The work that went into inventory and condition assessments of facilities was helpful in treasury board submissions to increase operational and facility maintenance funding (more on the Asset Management System below). The License Plate funding program and Regional Park Enhancement Fund are also re-confirmed for 2023/24 which has secured the much-needed funds for our partner groups, Strathcona Wilderness Institute (SWI) and the Comox District Mountaineering Club (CDMC).

- **Student Ranger Projects** - Like in past years of the program, in 2023, each Area in the section had the four-person crew for a total of 2 weeks along with project support funding. In Strathcona this season, the Student Rangers will be assisting Rangers with some repairs and maintenance work on the SWI Center, repairing and re-establishing ditches on the Battleship Lake Trail (hopefully with some CDMC volunteers) and replacing safety posts on the Albert Edward Trail. We are also planning on having the Student Rangers out in the park to assess the trails for winter damage and blowdown earlier in the season including upper Myra Falls, Arnica Lake, and Crest Mountain as well as enhancing public relations in busy areas including Forbidden Plateau where they will be reminding visitors on dog on leash, backcountry ethics and safety.
- **Capital Projects**
 - Completed conversion of UD toilets throughout the Plateau and Bedwell. Some signage and small details remain outstanding from the Circlet expansion, which will be completed this fiscal year.
 - Butterwort Bridge on the Elk River Trail has been replaced. Bridge is in service and trail is fully operational.
 - The Della Falls trailhead dock on Great Central Lake has been on the capital list for several years. Replacement with a similar structure is scheduled for the fall when water levels are optimal. Project will also include upgrades and re-design on the trailhead facilities.
- **Croteau Lake Group Site** - The group site will open June 30th to September 30th this year. Last season we had 23 bookings for a total of 59 nights. Most bookings were for 2 nights, with some for 3 nights and a couple of only 1 night. The Croteau Lake Group Site Host Program will be implemented once again this season. We made some minor tweaks to the host camp last season including a new tent based on feedback from past volunteers. We have several returning volunteers on the schedule and some new volunteers, but interest overall this season is lower than the last two seasons. We are still looking to fill 5 – 6 weeks in July and August. Status Quo re-funding: Park Enhancement Funding (PEF) and BC Parks License
- Park Rangers were present on the Paradise Meadows trails most weekends including long weekends this season. We continued to implement a “social conscience” approach to informing dog owners that BC Parks will be considering banning dogs from the area if staff continues to find dog waste and dogs off leash in the park regularly. This approach seemed to be effective this season as the majority of dogs were on leash. Dog waste and bags at the trailhead continues to be an issue that we will work toward developing a strategy for.

- Ranger staff identified priority signs throughout the trail network in this area of the park to be replaced. While the flex post design that was piloted a few years initially seemed promising as a solution, several are broken, bent and/or illegible. Replacement of this signage on the plateau is a big project and will likely be completed by ranger staff in phases.
- Moat Lake area – We have received several reports of illegal camping and fires at this location which has caused conflict with owners at Stuart Wood Island (Jamie Wood). Camping at this location seems to be an emerging trend. The bridge across the Moat Lake outflow on the Castle Crag route has been broken for a couple of years and is no longer operational and hazardous during high water levels. Ranger Staff will be replacing this bridge in the fall along with CDMC members
- BACKCOUNTRY Projects
 - Della Falls – Reports indicate trail is snow free to the falls campsite and a moderate amount of blowdown on the trail. A new food cached has been added new the cable car. No toilets were moved this season but will likely need to be moved next season. Replacement of the aging dock will be complete next spring, prior to the operating season. No further progress in exploring potential work with Hupačasath FN Land Manager since last update. Preparations are in place to replace the failing dock at the trailhead with a new dock structure and toilets at Margaret Creek and Falls campsites.
 - Bedwell Lakes Trail – The UD toilet conversion at Baby Bedwell was completed this summer. The trail and facilities will continue to be monitored for safety issues which will be addressed as needed (temporary or full repair). Annual assessments aren't usually possible until late June after snow has cleared.
 - Arnica Lake – No further enhancements to the trail or camping area this season. Assessments of the trail indicate that short cutting of switchbacks on the trail is an issue. Blocking off as well as clearing windfall from the winter will likely be Park Ranger/Student Ranger project in the spring.
 - Crest Mountain Trail – This trail experienced a large blowdown event in the first km of the trail requiring a small trail re-route and clearing. Monitoring of the Long Term Ecological Monitoring plot (Forest Productivity) occurred in August and September.
 - Kings Peak Trail – A pit for a new Z-best open-air toilet was dug in 2020, Rangers will be flying in to install the new toilet in the coming weeks. Hopefully this should help to alleviate the growing human waste problem that has been a topic of concern over the past few years.

- Marble Meadows – Windfall was cleared from the trail in late August, and the Zeebest toilet at the Wheaton Lake hut that was damaged was replaced last month.
- **Other items:**
- Elk River Bridge Work – upgrade of the Elk River Bridge is currently underway by MoTI contractors with a planned completion of July 2023. MoTI has notified of a planned project for upgrade to the Cervus Creek Bridge which will impact the Lady Falls Trailhead as the access road is contained within the right of way.
- Crest Crags – Volunteer Trail days planned for June 24th and August 12th coordinated by Bill Phipps and volunteers. BC Parks will supply materials and supplies and Park Ranger staff. Bill to provide further update.
- Bridge Inspections/Assessments – All Backcountry bridges in the park (total of 28) were inspected by Stonecroft Engineering in November 2022. This report can be used to develop replacement plan for the next 5 years and hopefully another assessment in 2027.
- Asset Management System – Assessing and documenting all facilities throughout the park is a priority for park ranger staff this season. While there are long term benefits for planning and budgeting and may potentially result in increased maintenance/replacement funding down the road, this has put a significant amount of pressure on staff to complete a lot of this work this season.

GENERAL DISCUSSION of safety of skiing/walking across Penstock (Tennent Lake Trail), discussion of safety concern at mine site. Phil Stone to draft letter.

GENERAL DISCUSSION of the SPPAC's **Raison d'être** and role of public voices, staff, volunteers and importance up upholding the Master Plan.

GENERAL DISCUSSION of **Master Plan** (MP) and if it should be updated as it is 30 years old. Discussion of how and why it could be updated and modernized to reflect new realities (conservation zones and da facto recreation areas etc..). Due to capacity limitations of planning staff, management planning process is not likely in the near future.

GENERAL DISCUSSION of Master Plan re the Nyrstar-Myra Falls Mine and Class B Park designation. Emphasis on that the Master Plan states that the current mining operation site once deactivated will eventually go back into the park.

DISCUSSION of the recent **Impact Benefit Agreement (IBA)** between the Myra Falls Mine and two first nations (We Wi Kum and We Wai Kai Nation). Question to BC Parks: why was SPACC not involved in the negotiations? What are the impacts of the IBA on the closure plans of the mine in the Class B Park?

Discussion: Some members are concerned that the IBA will affect the closure plans. Further discussion identified concerns from some members that the IBA will prolong the mining operations in the park and impacts, this could be a violation of the *Park Act* and the PUP issued to Myra Falls Mine.

BC Parks staff stated there were no amendments or authorization requests made under the permit related to an IBA. The only recent authorization request was the Surface Power Proposal last fall. SPPAC received information in October 2022 meeting from Myra Falls Mine on that request. There are no changes to the terms and conditions of the park use permit. Questions from public related to IBA should be directed to Ministry of Mines.

GENERAL DISCUSSION of SPACC role and purpose. Discussion if SPPAC- like organization should be set up for the north island and include multiple protected areas. Unique opportunity in Strathcona in that there is a public advisory committee. Could the Terms of Reference be expanded or border areas and include more parks? BC Parks' limited capacity at the regional level would limit the effectiveness of a broad public advisory group. Committee members generally agreed that issues across the region are diverse and public advisory for a larger area would not be effective.

Attendance Trends

GENERAL DISCUSSION of managing visitor use in Strathcona. Discussion of installing trail counters at all major trails. This information could be used to support a visitor use management planning in the future. Discussion of funding options for outside organizations like Rotary Club. BC Parks to collect trail use information via counters on all major trails. SPPAC and BC Parks to discuss which trails to put the counters. BC Parks will continue to look for opportunities to further planning for visitor use management in the park. Discussion of the need for data to confirm increased use. Ryan to make list of all trails that could require a trail counter. SPPAC supports implementing a trail counter system.

Kings Peak

Should BC Parks encourage people to use a safer route to access Kings Peak? Should consider moving hikers and campers to the west for safety and to stop erosion and impacts on the natural habitat. Discussion of scouting another route to the summit of Kings Peak. Also, that planned installation of the toilet on the route should go ahead.

Arnica Lake Trail

- Discussion of expanding Arnica Lake Trail and improving the existing campsite.

DISCUSSION of Potential Projects: at next October meeting group to discuss project based off the potential project list developed in 2014.

DISCUSSION of trail Connecting the Heber Rec Site to Crest creek Crag along the old diversion. Discussion of adding hwy signage.

DISCUSSION of Wildfire preparedness. BC Parks confirmed, as discussed last fall, there was a wildfire in 2022 in the Wolf River drainage and extended to the vicinity of the Golden Hinde.

MEETING ADJOURNED 9:15.