

**STRATHCONA PARK PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE
FINAL MINUTES for Feb. 27 2013 – QF Meeting Room, Courtenay**

SPPAC MEMBERS: Tawney Lem (Chair), Philip Stone, David Campbell, Hardolph Wasteneys, Allison Mewett, Nick Page, Darren Saare

Regrets: Mick Taylor, Peggy Carswell, Erik Holbek

BC Parks: Andy Smith

Recorder: John Milne

Public - Jan Neuspiel, Christine Fordham, Ken Vandeburgt, Bob Bock, David Stapley, Kevin McPhedran, one other unknown.

- 1. Introductions** - Darren Saare from Port Alberni is SPPAC's new member. He is a Social Worker, has served on the Alberni Valley Rescue Squad for nearly ten (10) years, and is an avid hiker, white water kayaker, canoeist and climber.
- 2. Approve agenda** - The last SPPAC meeting's minutes were adopted by email and are posted on BC Parks' website. Suggestion was made to add the FOSP court case to the agenda for an update.
- 3. ACC - VI Hut Proposal** - The Alpine Club of Canada, Vancouver Island Chapter, has made a proposal to BC Parks to manage the Ranger's Cabin near Hairtrigger Lake. Christine Fordham representing the ACC, spoke to the proposal which had been circulated to SPPAC members prior to meeting. This is not a formal proposal yet as the ACC had been requested by BC Parks to present it to SPPAC first in order to identify any major concerns or need for additional information. This proposal involves the ACC upgrading and managing the existing Ranger Cabin for use by the public. If supported, the ACC would receive authorization through a Park Use Permit. As this is a BC Parks facility, currently used in the summer months by the Strathcona Backcountry Park Facility Operator, any proposal would require their input and discussion on impacts to their service, use and maintenance. Other outdoor groups would be involved in this including back country facility operator. There are lots of volunteers available to help with this. This could be used to take pressure off the Circlet Lake area, and the ACC would make the cabin available for winter use too. The ACC already has infrastructure in place to manage huts, as they oversee 25 other huts. They also have a research group available for consultation on mitigating environmental impacts. Managing the outhouse there would also be their responsibility. User fees would be set by the government, as is the case for other huts located in Provincial Parks. The ACC is a non profit society. They are willing to spend between \$20,000 and \$30,000 on rehabilitating the hut. Operation costs are projected to break even and will be covered by user fees.

Questions - Hardolph asked about winter access through Mt. Washington Resort's property. Jan has spoken to Peter Gibson about such access. Search and Rescue could

benefit by avoiding the use of helicopters by using the Ranger cabin to provide ground access. There was a discussion on whether there should be winter groomed trails to the cabin to facilitate maintenance. Currently no snowmobiles are allowed in this area (snowmobiles are only authorized for Mount Washington under a park use permit to maintain the approved groomed trail network). David noted illegal snowmobiles if/when trespassing; avoid this area due to heavy use by the public. Additional groomed trails may encourage illegal snowmobile use which is not allowed in the park. Increased impacts from heavier use may become an issue if the cabin was open in the winter. If snowmobiles were authorized to stock the cabin it may result in unintended negative consequences. Enhancing winter use of this area may encourage more visitations which may lead to more incidents.

Nick asked about fees and how they would work. Since the cabin is in the Park the fees are established by the Minister (currently fees for cabin use around the Province range from \$5/person/night up to \$35/person/night and \$50/family/night), which is the same for everyone. The ACC has a reservation system available to all members of the public. It charges \$25 per adult and \$15 for children.

Andy clarified that as there is no current backcountry roofed accommodation fees in Strathcona Park, Provincial approvals would be required to charge any more than the current backcountry fees. If day use fees are proposed, they would also require approval from BC Parks. As this type of use has been granted in other BC Parks, consistency in how and what fees would be supported, would be the goal.

Andy clarified exclusive use of the cabin. While the use is intended for all public, the permit granting the maintenance and operation would be an “exclusive use” to only one Permittee (no others could receive a permit for the same use at the same time). Before awarding any permit, if the proposal was supported, this opportunity would either need to be advertised to confirm if there are any other interested parties, or, develop a Request for Proposals process, inviting any other interested people/groups to submit similar proposals.

Philip asked about the identified need for opening the hut for public use, since the hut is not as remotely located as some of the other ACC cabins. Christine said this proposal would be aimed at the beginner/intermediate level of user. The cabin would have about a dozen beds. While the hut could reduce some of the impacts at Cirplet Lake, it could be a trade off for high impacts around the cabin? Andy commented that this proposal should only be considered as an exploration of an option for an identified under-utilized cabin. While a cabin was identified in the Master Plan for Cirplet Lake, the Ranger cabin already exists and would therefore not have new “building” impacts (user impacts must however be considered).

The hut would provide another recreational option in the winter other than what is provided by Mt. Washington Resort's operation. The public would have a day-use destination which they could ski to on a marked trail at no cost

If this proposal had a day use charge, it would be less attractive to SPPAC. There could be a donation box available as is done in some other places. If there is a custodian on site, it adds to cost. If the cabin was free, it would be more attractive to the public. However, someone has to take responsibility for the cabin's maintenance.

The Varsity Outdoor Club at UBC has a number of huts with donation boxes.

Andy likes having a custodian who has a fire going to make it attractive and ensures the cabin is maintained properly.

Nick and Philip want to see issues such as costs, impacts, etc. identified. Information about the numbers of users in this area would also be helpful but BC Parks only collects trail use data in the summer from trail counters located at the trailhead. Mount Washington also supplies BC Parks with their Nordic Skier numbers.

The cabin's current fuel sources are now propane and wood. A helicopter flies this in and takes sewage out. Hardolph is concerned about the cost of using helicopters. Andy advised that this would be the responsibility of the Permittee, but agreed that any increased costs would impact user fees. Christine noted that maintenance flights would be limited to the Fall and Spring.

The trail along Helen McKenzie in this area needs improvement.

SPPAC was asked if this proposal is supported in general. SPPAC's opinion is to follow this up by refining comments and to create criteria for this proposal.

Would this encourage other non profit societies or commercial enterprises to look for other similar opportunities?

What drives this is the need for a PUP, and that PUP process has to be fair. Does this have to be put out for proposals, or should Parks look at this proposal, request public input and ask for other ideas? Parks must ensure this doesn't encourage other non-acceptable proposals. SPPAC is not interested in a commercial hut operation.

The only other public hut in Strathcona is the Wheaton Hut which is maintained by the Shawnigan Lake School that built it. There is no legal agreement for this hut. The Wheaton Hut has no user fees as it is not in the Park's core area.

SPPAC will follow up on developing criteria and will communicating them to the ACC as soon as possible. In the meantime this proposal can be shared with other groups to solicit their comments. SPPAC's will be completed within a month.

Ken Vandeburgt asked about Mt. Washington grooming trails to the hut. They don't have a PUP to do so and the terrain is too steep to operate their machines. Andy said this wouldn't be entertained by BC Parks unless the public really wanted it and then it would

have to be assessed for pros/cons and impacts. Some public may want to use the cabin's cooking facilities and camp elsewhere nearby.

Ken gave Tawney the FMCBC policy document on huts in parks.

Tawney mentioned the SPPAC Facebook page may be a good place to get public feedback on this issue.

If this hut opened in the winter, could there be a winter ranger? Andy commented that Parks' resources are limited, however staff would somehow have to monitor the operation. ACC is not interested in providing safety patrols due to potential liability concerns, however a marked trail could be part of the proposal.

4. Adjacency Issues - activities outside the park that impact it.

a. Access through Mt. Washington's Resort - Public access to the backcountry through the resort is free if the member of the public is not using Mt. Washington's track-set trails. They can cross the track-set trails but not travel on them. It was suggested some signs be put up explaining this. There are currently signs on groomed trails indicating the Park boundary. These could include additional information regarding the use of trails. Andy advised that there is a sign on the two groomed access trails where they cross into the park.

A suggestion was made from the public about using the SWI hut to provide information as well, and information could be posted inside Raven Lodge. Parks already talks to Mt. Washington Resort each year about informing new staff about these rules.

Parking is provided for backcountry users with certain conditions as to where to park. This has been discussed before and processes are being followed.

Tawney spoke about agenda items **b. Views of Logged lands from the Park**, **c. Public Access through TimberWest's lands** and **d. Comox Lake Sustainable Use Recreation Area Proposal**. Should SPPAC make a recommendation to the Regional Manager about communicating with TimberWest (e.g. notification of harvest plans, visual quality assessments, and access to the park)? TimberWest's SFI certification includes objectives for providing recreational access and maintaining visual objectives.

Philip thinks a letter wouldn't hurt, but is not optimistic about its success. Adjacency issues are a far bigger topic. Nick noted that Mt. Washington Resort has immediate impacts on the Park, but there hasn't been much success getting concerns about these impacts addressed. Andy advised that while BC Parks has no authority outside park lands, that peers in the Ministry of Environment are discussing park impacts with both Mount Washington and Ministry of Transportation.

Philip suggested including FMCBC and the Climbers Access Society of BC. They need to be encouraged to involve themselves in this issue. Andy thinks this is beyond SPPAC's

scope. SPPAC is limited to making recommendations to the Regional Director. SPPAC could ask the Regional Director to take it to a higher level in government.

This is very political which is not supposed to be SPPAC's role.

Jan (public attendee) was optimistic about the change in ownership of TW and how their social license is more important now. There may be an opportunity to address the access issue at the Board level (vs. the operational level).

b. Viewing Logged lands from the Park – to be addressed in any discussions with TW.

c. Public access through TimberWest lands – to be addressed in any discussions with TW, and forwarded to other groups.

d. Comox Lake Sustainable Use Recreation Area Proposal - David Stapley spoke briefly and outlined this proposal and what processes had been followed.

David asked if SPPAC could write a letter of support for the proposal. SPPAC will write a letter to the Regional Director recommending that the proposal be supported. A copy of the letter will be provided to David. This letter would include the access issue. Nick will draft this letter.

David suggested inviting TimberWest to a SPPAC meeting to discuss adjacency issues and certification.

5. Campfires in the Park - Philip spoke about there being more fire pits than ever before, and some people are now cutting live trees in the Park. The Schelderup Lake area is especially bad for this. There needs to be more public education. Philip suggested signage at problem spots. The aim should be to make having campfires socially unacceptable. Removing existing fire rings would also help. There could be 20 - 25 places where this is a problem. Andy said BC Parks staff keep cleaning up fire rings and erecting signs whenever they can. Putting up signs could be a good project for volunteers. Maybe outdoor groups would be willing to help do this.

Andy suggested there are other things to do. Philip will contact the Hiking Trails book publishers to add educational information on this to their guidebooks. Andy said BC Parks can add information to PUP's, and use local media to publicize this problem. Also it may be possible to use some money from the Strathcona Centennial Expedition fund to hire someone to put a media campaign together. Some information can be added to SPPAC's Facebook page. This must be a long term and consistent campaign.

Jan is willing to share his contact list with SPPAC.

Philip is to follow up on this issue.

6. Nyrstar Mine

a. Danger Trees along Powerhouse Rd. - Philip found a tree located well off the road marked as a danger tree to be removed. He thinks there are too many so called danger trees coming down. Andy said WorkSafe determines this. BC Parks' first choice is to modify the tree to make it safer if possible. There are many conditions used to determine what needs to be done. Two tree assessors gave opinions on the safety of these trees. NVI paid for the assessments. Andy says NVI is reluctant to take trees down as it is a cost to them and a bother. Philip says these are very special trees and need to be saved. There are liability issues with unsafe trees.

These issues arise at times, but hazard trees are not actively looked for.

Phillip thinks these trees should be given special designation.

b. Mine Cover Systems - There was an email discussion between SPPAC members about this. The suggestion was to use clean wood waste generated outside the Park to help regeneration at the mine site. Hardolph spoke of the relationship between trees and mushrooms, and how this can aid the reclamation process. TimberWest could be used as a source to provide woody debris. Bringing such material into Park is against policy due to potential introduction of invasive species and conflict with Park Act. Perhaps using material from adjacent areas would be more acceptable.

Currently replanting plans involve planting alder and shrubs.

BC Parks and SPPAC submitted comments on Nyrstar's Reclamation Plan and is waiting to hear back.

There should be a performance standard used to measure the success of reclamation.

c. Nyrstar's update from Ivor - See Attached document from Nyrstar.

Philip asked about the status of the suggested trail access along the south shore of Jim Mitchell Lake leading to Thelwood Lake. Does the potential use of the area justify the effort? Another option could be to enhance canoe access, especially at the far end of Jim Mitchell Lake. This may be a more practical use of resources. The opportunity to do this will be when the dam project is under way and lake levels are very low.

7. Strathcona Update - See attached document from Andy Smith.

8. Methods of Public Engagement - This was not discussed.

9. Open Discussion and Public Questions -

Bob Bock said the Ranger Cabin should be kept for park stewardship and custodial purposes as it was intended. There is a need to get Park Rangers back to help provide

protection for the Park. However, school groups using the Ranger Cabin and paying fees could help finance hiring Rangers. A question was asked about the possible use of the cabin by one group taking a large share of use and dominating the time available.

Bob has a concern about winter access and expressed the need to mark the route from the end of Lake Helen McKenzie to Cirplet Lake so people don't get lost.

Ken Vandeburgt spoke about the Friends of Strathcona Park court case. If it is successful he noted the Master Plan would need to be amended back. Andy advised it is his understanding that the court case is not challenging the Master Plan Amendment, but rather the issuing of the CWR permit.

The Master Plan calls for hut at Cirplet Lake, so would it have to change to accommodate the proposed new use of the Ranger's Cabin? Andy says this is not a new facility, so the Master Plan doesn't need to change. BC Parks would just issue a permit to accommodate the proposed use. Tawney asked Ken for FOSP's opinion on huts. The FOSP have discussed the topic, but don't yet have a consensus.

It was suggested that money from timber sales in the Park at the mine be used for educational purposes.

Ken said another use of the funds could be replacing the K2 creek crossing below Bedwell Lake towards the ocean. If FOSP loses its legal challenge the creek crossing would be CWR's responsibility.

Ken asked if the mine would be closed due to lack of clean fill, or will it extend past this time. There will be pressure to keep the mine open and operating as long as possible. Hardolph says shutting down means having to deal with tailings in the long term. The mine doesn't have to deal with these the same way if it is still operating.

Can they bring clean fill into the Park instead of getting it on site? Bringing in extensive amounts of clean fill may be in conflict with the Park Act and could introduce invasive species.

Next meeting - May 22, 2013 at the Filberg Centre located in Courtenay.