

STRATHCONA PARK PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING AGENDA

June 1, 2007 6 PM – 10 PM

**BC PARKS BOARDROOM – RATHREVOR BEACH PARK
PARKSVILLE**

CURRENT MEMBERS: Ron Quilter (BC Parks), Andy Smith (BC Parks), Gary Schaan (Chair), John Wilson, Paul Erickson, Warrick Whitehead, Dave Vincent, Barb Baker, Rick Rollins, Sandy Briggs

Present – Andy Smith (BC Parks), Gary Schaan (chair), John Wilson, Warrick Whitehead, Barb Baker, Paul Erickson, Dave Vincent, Max McDonald (BC Parks seasonal back country ranger)

Absent – Ron Quilter (BC Parks), Sandy Briggs
John Milne (recorder)

Presenters - Frank Ullmann, Ministry of Tourism,
- Marlene Smith (FOSP)

Public – Evan Loveless (FMC), Peter Rothermel (FMC),

1. Opening RemarksGary Schaan (Chair)

Gary reviewed the mandate of committee. It is to provide advice to parks staff re management plans, specific issues, permit applications, public issues and concerns. This is related to tonight's issues. Gary is concerned about park staff being reactive due to budget constraints, and issues that have arisen. The park's 100th anniversary coming up, so would be nice if there were some positive developments to celebrate.

This agenda provides for early information on CWR proposal to be discussed at end of meeting. SPPAC may develop some recommendations at that time.

2. Confirm/Review Previous Minutes (Feb 16, 2007) –

Barb has questions about these minutes. Will there be delays in accessing the Bedwell Lake trail when the road is being upgraded? Andy will provide more information later, but there will be a light system implemented to control traffic.

The previous minutes were accepted as accurate.

3. Additions/Deletions to Agenda

4. New Business

- 1) **CWR – Min. Sport/Tourism & the Arts - Frank Ullman, Recreation**
Officer reported to the committee on behalf of Diane Tetarenko.

Gary asked for a description of the head of Bedwell Sound, its tenures and applications up to the park boundary.

Frank can't answer all of these questions. Frank's department manages forest service recreation. Diane manages commercial interests and adventure tourism operators. The Bedwell Trail outside the park is managed by Frank's department. Current tenures that exist are the Oinmitis Indian Reserve (Ahousesht First Nation) on the east side of the bay across from the CWR land; Crown Land including the tidal flats and swampy area at mouth of river; and on the west side of the Bedwell River is CWR private land. The road passing through the CWR private land is included in CWR's land title.. Some maps indicate there may be a gap between the river and the CWR private property, but this has not been mapped, so it is hard to tell. In the mid 1980's there was a change in map datum planes, so some map information was shifted, and some was not. This gap may be part of this error. One would have to go back to original survey to find out where the property line really is. This gap if it exists may be up to 20 m. Information on this is contradictory. It looks like more information would be required to confirm this one way or the other, however, due to the terrain and location trail building and maintenance in this potential gap would be difficult.

From CWR's private property to the park boundary the road, which becomes trail just prior to the suspension bridge traverses crown land. The suspension bridge across the river has not being taken over by any party. No formal agreement covering the Gayle McGee bridge exists. If this application is approved, the Min. of Tourism would grant CWR the responsibility for maintaining the bridge. The trail would remain a public trail, and its use would not be exclusive.

Gary asked about application for two water lots for kayak landing. There could or could not be exclusive rights to these lots. Andy said that the CWR proposal indicates that they would allow the public to disembark at the dock as well as pull canoes and kayaks up onto the shore, but that the public would not be allowed to tie up and leave boats at either dock.. CWR is also applying for another small piece of fee simple property nearby. There would be a condition added to allow public access across their property, and the public would have access to their dock, but not moorage there, for loading/unloading only. This would be a 30 year lease. Frank is not sure about the legality of public access, but it is in the proposal. None of these new applications have anything to do with the road/trail.

Gary said this issue has most to do with public access. What opportunities and restrictions will there be for public access? Warrick asked if parks have a bargaining tool regarding access. Andy said parks can't do that. It can be discussed, but can't be a condition of a PUP. Dave said British Common Law which did allow public access along roads/trails if public has used them was repealed in 1958.

Andy asked about the other side of valley. Frank said they like to avoid Indian Reserves, and there is a big tidal flat there. The valley bottom is very difficult to build a trail due to brush growth - on the west coast this results in high maintenance. Using the road is most practical route. Building on the other side would require permission, and only if a practical route could be found. This is a long term issue. Barb pointed out CWR's negotiations with the band to reroute trail. Land claims settlements can result in people being charged for access. This is always a possibility, but Andy added that CWR had already indicated that they would be willing to enter into an agreement that would allow the public to cross there land , as they do currently, should the First Nations ever started charging

Andy clarified that while these new permits might provide an opportunity to discuss unfettered access to the park, it is unlikely to be given. Frank said that maintenance of trail can be made a condition of the permit.. Gary mentioned the deadline for public input on these tenures outside the park is June 6th. SPPAC will make a recommendation to Dick Heath with copies to Frank and Diane. (This has been done since the meeting)

Warrick pointed out CWR wants all or nothing. CWR will only do trail work if they get all that they want. The applications outside the park should be separate from the PUP within the park.

Marlene said she recalls seeing something from the Min. of Forests guaranteeing public access back in 1986 or 1987. Marlene will try to remember where she saw this. It would be nice to find the document. Andy added that it would only be relevant if such an agreement was in a legal format.

Frank said either party can back out of this type of agreement in 60 days.

The suspension bridge should be inspected every two years, and repaired if necessary.

2) Land access to Della Falls –

Barb noted the area adjacent to the park is to be logged affecting potential future access to Della Falls. Can something be worked out with Western Forest Products on crown land to protect the area mentioned in the Master Plan

Amendment as an alternate access to the Della Falls trail? It might be better to have access to Della Falls through park land. A condition of logging on public land is to maintain recreational access. If TimberWest owns the land it is harder to cross because of their attitude towards access.

SPPAC endorses pursuing an alternate land access to Della Falls trail. Barb will pursue this issue and do some research.

3) FOS - 15 min Presentation regarding CWR by Marlene Smith

SPPAC was created because of conflict over park use, and to provide advice to parks so they do not make the same mistakes as before.

Regarding the open house sessions, many found more questions were created than answered. Different answers to the same questions were given to different people. There was no opportunity to hear what the questions were, what the answers were, and to record the answers so people's memories are not relied on. Marlene asked for a proper public process, not an open house. Also, people in other communities did not have the opportunity to take part as in the past.

What is this proposal about? Is it about repairing the trail, or to provide private interest access to the park? Is this an exclusive use? Can someone else also get a permit to do the same thing as in the CWR proposal?

Marlene spoke about the condition of the trail. There are washouts which have taken away parts of trails as she described. CWR gave contradictory information about the proposal. CWR wants permission to proceed, and will work out the details later.

Re the issue of horses, food, etc. and wildlife. High end clients will want good food which will attract wildlife.

There isn't good information about elk in the Bedwell Valley. Note the master plan calls for rerouting the trail to avoid elk habitat.

The map in the proposal is deceptive. It doesn't show the park boundary, and shows trail going all the way to the Ralph River campsite thus making its impact seem lessened.

Re unfettered access – this is an issue in many other places as well. Charges for access make it unavailable to many who can not afford it, eg. the Nootka Trail. There needs to be a change government policy regarding access to public parks.

FOSP urges SPPAC to hold proper public hearings before any more discussion is entertained. There needs to be a public record of what is said.

FOSP suggests holding a round table in order to reach common ground before such public hearings. Marlene suggests Brian Gunn of the Wilderness Tourism Assoc., and the BC Wildlife Federation be included along with John Caton of CWR, representatives from FOSP and FMC, and that parks facilitate the meeting, or hire a neutral facilitator.

Note that the FMC proposal to do trail work was turned down before due to the “living bridge” being too dangerous. This needs replacing as soon as possible. This crossing is ideal for a suspension bridge. Such a bridge stands up to the snow load, looks good, and goes up quickly.

Marlene said it is not politically correct to turn one proposal down, and choose another. FMC is again willing to work on the trail and bridge. They can do the necessary fund raising for a public trail. This proposal is realistic, practical, and provides an alternative to CWR’s proposal.

This issue sets a precedent for other parks. Strathcona Park has always been the first for many things.

John mentioned WTA policy on lodges in parks which is to support cabins up to 400 square feet each, and yurts in parks. The expectation is that if this proposal goes ahead, there will follow a request to build such facilities at You Creek.

4) NVI Gate/Info Kiosk

Andy gave an update about NVI installing a gate at the mine site in order to control access. It will be located at the first aid building just before a fork in the road as one enters the main mine site. There will be an intercom at side of road for people to gain access. Visitors will have to check in orally to tell where they are going. Visitors who are knowledgeable about the area will be granted access, those who don’t will go into the office to obtain information. The office will be open 24/7 and manned by first aid attendants. If the first aid attendants are busy, someone else will be available.

Warrick noted that some visitors may turn away when they see the gate. There should be a sign to alleviate potential problems.

John Wilson noted if the road is public, it must be accessible. If the road is private, the mine manger has the right to restrict visitors. This has not been an issue before. John asked if could be reconsidered. Andy advised that this is the prerogative of the mine manager I order to minimize liabilities.. Andy

will check out the legal status of the road. Paul agreed with John Wilson's assessment. There could be a problem if access is not available.

5) Marmot Re-introduction update

Gary met with Don Doyle who couldn't understand SPPAC's difficulty with the marmot proposal. His point of view is that his mandate is marmot recovery, and the marmot team would be sensitive about their activities in order to accommodate SPPAC's concerns.

Andy flew with Don Doyle and a specialist over the area to check snow levels and see what areas are clear of snow. They also looked for a location for a base camp with consideration about environmental sensitivity and separation from hikers. They wish to be close to Buttle Lake to keep helicopter access away from hiking trails. Andy advised that Don was willing to try hiking out to see how feasible it is as a way to reduce flights.

They will fly over the area again in July to check sites again when the snow is gone. Tent pads and toilet will be constructed off site, and flown in. 4 people have been hired. There will be two groups of marmots released 1 ½ km from each other. A family group is to be released in August. 4 others (2 male, 2 female) are to be released in mid July. A letter of approval has been issued from parks, A PUP is not needed. Warrick asked for a copy of the letter (has since been sent to SPPAC). Gary asked for periodic updates. Warrick wants to be recorded as feeling this has been pushed through without SPPAC support.

5) Forbidden Ski Hill Degradation and potential impact on Strathcona.

Gary was up to Mount Becher a few weeks ago, and was asked by the local residents association for an update on the status of the old ski hill. It is a dangerous place for the public. Trucks go in there, as do snowmobiles. Concrete block walls in one building are ready to collapse, diesel tanks seem to be empty, and the rope tow landing is collapsing. This is a liability problem, it looks bad, and there is no way to keep people out. There is concern that illegal activities will spill over into Strathcona Park.

Who owns the buildings? It is a class C park. People are concerned about access to Strathcona Park. If it is "deparked", it would be turned over to another ministry. Other ministries don't want it because of the clean up costs. Private interests are not interested until it is fee simple in status. It is not in litigation. Parks are waiting for the Minister or BC Parks Executive team to provide direction. Andy and Ron at one point suggested they and Regional Manager be appointed as a temporary class C park board so decisions could be made. Gary asked that his photos be passed on to the Minister to show the danger, contamination, possible damage and liability. SPPAC is asking this be resolved as an access issue re the park.

The cost estimate a while ago was \$450-000. Dave suggested this might be \$500,000 - \$700,000 judging from the Mount Arrowsmith cleanup. Some mountain bike groups are interested in doing something there. Gary noticed people have been taking materials for salvage. Andy might ask for request for proposal to clean up the site.(have since been in discussions with Regional Manager and BC Parks Executive Director who requested a new Minister's decision note be prepared

Peter Rothermel said he had inspected the Mount Arrowsmith cleanup, and for \$120,000 was well done.

6) New Membership

SPPAC needs new members. A call is to be put out and ads run in newspapers. There are 5 vacancies. Rick Rollins attendance was questioned again. Rick will be asked to resign as he hasn't attended a meeting since Oct 05. The quorum is 6, and SPPAC can have up to 12 members. Gary and Andy will send out notice to the SPPAC mailing list, and put ads in local papers.

8) Park Update

NVI – The Park Use Permit is being changed to reflect the mine's new name, and new footprint size.

Tennant Lake Trail – NVI is committed to finishing the trail project to Tennant Lake this year. The upper section needs finishing.

Bedwell Trail access – The road is dressed close to trail head, but the last 200 m. is gone. No cars can get to the trail head. Experts say more material could come down. NVI is assessing the situation and developing a construction plan. While it was hoped to have the road open by by June 15th, it will probably won't be open until mid July.. The Jim Mitchell Lake Road will be temporarily closed while repairs are taking place. Andy advised that NVI agreed to improving foot access should there be a long gap between start of peak hiking season and the road construction.

The bridge at the south end of Buttle Lake over the Thelwood River is to be replaced. The footings were damaged in the winter storms, and a bailey bridge has been erected over top.

Thelwood hauling plans are to be finalized. This is behind due to the landslide on the road. NVI will probably start to haul in the fall. Traffic control is being discussed and will be reviewed by parks when presented.

The closure plan for the mine is to be worked on in the fall. The new plan will have more detail on closing the tailings facility as they will be closed earlier than previously thought. Input from SPPAC and the public is desired. The company believes it is important that the closure plan reflects something positive for the community after the mine has been closed. A public survey is to be conducted. A deadline for the plan is the end of 2008.

Paradise trailhead – It is still covered in snow. Snow stored in the parking lot is high and deep. The pile of snow has exceeded the “push line”, so it will have to be pulled back before the gravel melts down on top of the trail and park facilities.. The new toilet was damaged during the winter. Landscaping is yet to be done. The new granite portal sign is at Miracle Beach Park waiting to be installed.

More capital investment is planned for Strathcona Backcountry and will include trail upgrades on the Plateau. The first focus will be on the Helen McKenzie/Battleship trail and damaged boardwalks. There is a three year time frame. This year is for the planning process, and construction will come later. A Recreation Superintendent position has been created to manage capital and Project Managers will be hired to oversee individual projects.

Outdoor Center – Campbell River Rotary has again applied to Coast Sustainability Trust for \$250,000 for this year’s work. VIMSS has applied to North Island Communities Economic Development Trust for more money, (about \$750,000), of which approximately \$350,000 would be dedicated for outdoor center. Both have gone through first screening and been supported.

Alexander Creek culvert along Buttle Lake has been successfully installed.

November storms – Now that snow is melting Parks are finding damage. The Karst Creek trail and Upper Myra Falls trails are closed due to windfall (Myra has since been re-opened but Karst is still closed). The Elk River trail is a mess, and some creeks have relocated. Oshinow Lake access is cut off, but Island Timberland will be responsible for opening it up (discussions are currently taking place and a plan is being developed to deactivate their permitted road as well as open up the Oshinow Lake access road). There may be more damage further into park which will be found as the snow melts.

Backcountry permit – Osprey applied to re-assign their permit to Windy Park Operations. All other conditions will remain the same. The reason is that Osprey may be pursuing legal action against the Province..

Staffing – 3 seasonal backcountry rangers have been hired. They will cover both the backcountry and front country.

No update on Glacier Trail access. The same restrictions will apply as last year.

9) CWR PUP – 9:00 p.m.

Evan Loveless's letter went to all SPPAC members today indicating that FMCBC is developing a proposal to work on the Bedwell Trail. Evan will be making a formal proposal for working on the trail and to build a suspension bridge at a \$50,000 cost to replace the "Living Bridge". The Master Plan recommends re-routing the trail in some areas. FMC would work with Parks and SPPAC to plan this. This could be as a partnership with CWR and Strathcona Park Lodge. Paul asked about the relationship between this proposal and the CWR proposal. This follows up on last year's FMC trail work proposal which was first accepted, then cancelled due to Park's liability issues after learning about the condition of the bridges

Andy advised that while there could be potential for CWR and FMC to work together, there may be some conflict between the two proposals. Andy said CWR could still help the community, while assisting FMC to achieve their goals. It would be great if this acted as a catalyst to help this issue. Peter added if horse permission is not given, then the FMC proposal would still be possible. He pointed out that CWR indicated that if they do not get permission for horse use, then they would not do the trail work. The FMC would allow this trail work to happen.

Strathcona Park Lodge wants to take hikers through the Bedwell. They would also benefit from this proposal. Dave talked to Jim deHart about such a partnership between the two lodges. He said interaction between guests paying \$150 a night and those paying \$1500 a night is not desirable. This might not be realistic.

Andy said if CWR proposal was approved he would want to hold them to their commitments, however, this could possibly include both groups if it was worded properly.

Gary asked about horse and mountain bikes. This is the ultimate issue. There is no way to control mountain bikes. John Caton has admitted this. The ecological integrity of the park and the impact of horses must be looked at.

Warrick pointed out that if horses are used, they need large bridges, very different from those needed for hikers. He wants a proper public process, using a consultant, with all details researched, presented at a proper public meeting before a decision is made.

Warrick could not figure out what the plan was about from the information given at the open house.

Dave pointed out horses don't like suspension bridges. Also, a solid bridge would have a significant snow load. A trained horse can cross a narrow bridge, only 12" wide. Suspension bridges are cheap and fast to build.

Dave said the Tofino open house response was one of confusion. Andy said it wasn't well attended in Tofino. More people in Tofino were opposed to the project than in support, but this was not a surprise as historically, the majority of attendees are usually only those opposed to an issue.

John Wilson said the CWR proposal was an opportunity to provide a trail, and that horses and bikes may be the price to pay for this even if it is against the master plan. The FMC proposal is totally consistent with the master plan with no strings attached. Why not support FMC proposal instead? Dave V sees the benefit of the CWR proposal as providing access through private land, and Gary added so is stewardship. Dave said parks would be giving exclusive use to CWR to run horses into park. Dave hasn't seen a business plan, or a plan for repairs for sections not there (few hundred Meter), or where cracks in the road bed indicate more sections will go at some time.

Barb pointed out a trail doesn't work if it is on native property. Andy said there would be something in or linked to PUP to guarantee free access if natives were to charge for access over their land. Paul agreed with the comment about the lack of a business plan. If the proposal is not viable, then the trail would not be kept up. To create a business plan would not be difficult. What would projections be about how many clients it would take to generate the necessary funds. This proposal should be rejected if it is not viable. Do they have the resources to do this? Why give them a permit if there is no likelihood of success?

Paul is not against a private interest using a park as long as they follow the same guidelines as the public. He wants a detailed financial plan before accepting this proposal. If it is not profitable, the project will not be completed.

Andy says there is no business plan because it is irrelevant as they don't get any more money from this extension of their operation due to the fact they are already full and it is his understanding that there are no extra charges to the clients. The plan calls for 10 guests and 2 wranglers. Andy says this is about horses in the park, not a trail. Paul disagrees and says it is both. Andy says a bond to cover what they said they would do is a part of most PUPs. Andy doesn't want to tie the horse issue to the trail. This is about horses. He doesn't want it said that permission was given based on the trail work that CWR is proposing, rather than careful assessment of appropriateness and potential impacts.

Dave says upgrading the trail is tied to this. He says the costs in the plan are seriously underrepresented. He expects it will cost 2 – 3 times what they say it will. Andy indicated that if the work is more than what CWR is willing to pay, then they won't be doing it and therefore would be contravention of their permit. The result would be cancellation and this issue wouldn't exist.

Andy likes the potential of combining the CWR and FMC proposals. Paul pointed out two types of bridges are very different.

Gary asked without horses and mountain bikes what are the chances of them still working on the trail. That is the question. CWR have stated they would not work on the trail if they didn't get the permission asked for. They could allow Strathcona Park Lodge access through their property, but not others.

Warrick likes the FMC proposal. Public support is for this option. The park will have the benefit of the trail upgrades. He expects government will soon deal with these kind of access issues because it is a problem in many other places as well. If CWR closes access because they don't get their way, then parks need to look at alternatives. If there is no access, then government should deal with it, if not then it is too bad, there would be no access. Andy indicated that he only learned of the FMC proposal today and that it is only being developed. The FMC proposal would require review as well.

Gary wants to make recommendation to Dick Heath regarding the section between the ocean and the park boundary expressing that public interest is to allow public access to the park. This is connected to Frank Ullman's information at the beginning of the meeting.(this has since been done).

What is the time line for this PUP? Andy advised that a decision will be made once BC Parks feels comfortable that they have enough information to make a defensible decision.. No dates for decision have been made yet.

Barb wants to discuss horse implications more. Andy is disappointed in responses to the proposal. There was little new information received.. Andy was hoping they would receive more pertinent questions about the proposal or sharing of information rather than just opinions for and against. People at the open houses objected to the proposal. Andy advised that he had to correct many people due to misinformation put out by FOSP.

Gary sees two issues on horses and bikes. Does the master plan allow this? There are questions of environmental assessment and integrity. These need answering before SPPAC can consider supporting this application. John Wilson agrees. SPPAC hasn't addressed these topics, neither has the proponent.

John W. mentioned other critical components: the process, the website, and the open houses. All are deficient. This needs looking at during the next meeting. John wants to see another round of public meetings as recommended at the previous SPPAC meeting. Andy clarified that normally BC Parks makes permit decisions internally, without public input at all. However, in this case BC Parks wanted to make sure they had all the information they needed to make a decision, so instructed CWR to provide an opportunity for the public to give input and ask questions. This is the reason the web site and questionnaire was created and why the Open Houses were arranged.

Warrick said CWR had their chance to do their process, and met with little support. They failed, and don't have support. Andy indicated that this wasn't a vote, it was a search for information and input.

Gary said SPPAC has little power over this. He felt at the meetings there was curiosity and critical concern. He doesn't think the process can be criticized. There is a public responsibility to consider something not in the master plan. If we open the master plan to changes, what other changes will be applied for?

Andy feels this zone allows horses. He advised that the Wilderness Recreation zone, which was created through the Maser Plan process, allows horse access if appropriate and after considering potential impacts. Gary asked about the member's interpretation of the master plan? Mountain bikes are not allowed in this zone. The intent of the plan author's is not to allow horses. Because they are not specifically disallowed, some are considering they could be.

John W. read some excerpts from master plan supporting documents showing horses should be excluded. Andy disagreed, and explained how provincial zoning allows this. Paul deferred to Andy's expertise. His opinion is not to favour the mix of horses and hikers in this area. Horse trails and hiking trails are not compatible.

Barb thinks hikers and horses can coexist in some places. In some areas there has been a lot of damage. This meeting has not addressed the horse issue. SPPAC shouldn't make a decision yet. Barb has some information about the quantity of manure produced by this proposal.

Andy wants reasons not to allow horses before turning the proposal down. Andy says he did not receive much new information by open house participants. Warrick disagreed.

Gary suggested SPPAC express scepticism about horses, bikes and the viability of the proposal in general. Also, SPPAC should consider the FMC proposal.

Dave suggested the round table take place with some experts for advice. How far up do salmon go? SPPAC needs a lot more detail and information.

Andy will compile questions from open houses to give to SPPAC to react to. An Environmental Impact Study costs a lot, so one is often not done until later.

Dave asked if the "showstoppers" could be outlined? Is this proposal viable or not? What needs doing? How much will it cost? Are there salmon up there?

Andy says we will make a decision when he has enough information.

6. Public Question Period

There were no public questions due to the lack of time. The meeting ended at 10:25 p.m.

7. Confirm Next Meeting - Sept. 14