

**STRATHCONA PARK PUBLIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING NOTES - DRAFT**

85900-20/SPPAC

DATE: MARCH 31, 2006

TIME: 6:00 PM – 10:00 PM

LOCATION: BOARDROOM, PROTECTED AREAS HQ
RATHREVOR BEACH PARK, PARKSVILLE

ATTENDANCE: **Committee members** - Anne Fiddick, Ron Quilter, Gary Schaan, John Wilson, Barb Baker, Sandy Briggs, Frank Hovenden

Secretary – John Milne

Public/Guests – Jim Fiddick, Peter Rothermel (Federation of Mountain Clubs), Evan Loveless (Federation of Mountain Clubs), Ken Rodonets (Comox District Mountaineering Club), group from Clayoquot Wilderness Resort (Louis Joseph, Hereditary Chief from Ahousaht, Jim Dehart, John Caton), Trudy Chatwin (MOE biologist representing Marmot Recovery Project)

Absent – Warrick Whitehead, Rick Rollins, Paul Erickson, Dave Vincent

CHAIR: Anne Fiddick

SECRETARY: John Milne

1. **Opening Remarks - Anne Fiddick**
Welcomed new SPPAC member, Barbara Baker, from Port Alberni to committee.
2. **Additions/Deletions to Agenda**
Changes in order to accommodate delegations.
3. **Review Previous Minutes**
Minutes will be put on website after being approved.

3.1 Paradise Meadows Trailhead Relocation and Visitor Center

Trail about ½ built. Construction recommencing when snow gone. Goal is to open around midsummer. Try to get people to use new trail head when completed. SWI and visitor's center was driver to get this going. Agreements being worked on with Mount Washington Resort snow removal and storage is current issue. Upper parking lot is to be expanded, lower parking lot is to be divided in two to change grades. Will help separate parks section from resort section. More funding needed and is being worked on. Current discussions about where to locate visitors center to accommodate snow removal – either closer to lodge or further away than on original diagram. Group met at Raven Lodge recently to explore alternatives.

Need a SPPAC rep to liaise with the group. Gary Schaan willing to be representative.

3.2. Marmots

Trudy Chatwin, MOE

A rare and endangered species and plant biologist from Nanaimo who works with Don Doyle, gave a Power Point presentation on Vancouver Island Marmot.

History of V.I. marmot population change and recovery efforts. Various theories about reasons for population decline. Most of marmot deaths due to predation from wolves, cougars and eagles. Theory is that increased predator population due to alternate sources of food becoming available. Have resulted in increased mortality of marmots.

Marmot Recovery team made up of about 20 different groups. Various sources of fundraising, both public and private, as well as children and school groups. Recovery plans have evolved over the years as more knowledge available. Current emphasis is on captive breeding program, especially in larger groups. Goal is to have 400 - 600 free marmots. Three areas identified for reintroduction – Haley Lake, Green Mountain, Strathcona Park. The goal is to release 20 – 25 into wild annually. Genetic diversity is maintained by keeping track of genealogy.

Mount Washington facility built to acclimatize marmots. Also used to quarantine animals arriving from zoo programs.

Also working on non-lethal management of predators – chase with dogs, play recorded barking, radio collars, human scent, electric fences.

Listed off various sites for reintroduction – one is Strathcona Park on Greig Ridge formerly occupied by marmots. It is a quiet area for park visitors, is a dead end trail, large amount of habitat, no elk in area so less risk from predator. Would require a base camp for shepherds, helicopter access early July to end September. Remove camp in winter.

Goal is to release one group of marmots in 2007, 1 or 2 more groups in 2008, then evaluate the program in 2009.

Questions and comments from SPPAC members:

Would project use electric fence or dogs in park. Answer - no.

Could there be impact on ptarmigan in area?

Frank: Statistics are questionable, against using park, should preserve habitat, not manage predators.

Trudy: There will no predator control.

Frank: Marmots should be outside park, focus on preserving habitat. Suggests that this is against management plan.

Ron: Previous meetings discussed this. Ministry has stated its support of program; impacts to park need to be mitigated. Helicopter access has always been the key issue, not the program in the park. Management plan supports research in park, and is allowable.

Frank: There are more issues than that. This is not research, is a reintroduction project, research has previously been done outside park.

Anne referred to master plan, read section on allowing facilities in Wilderness Conservation zone. She suggested SPPAC would like to review a specific proposal outlining the specific details of the reintroduction project in the park. How many helicopter trips, shepherds, etc?

Trudy will take suggestions back to her group. Anne suggests Marmot group read the zoning description in Master Plan.

Gary and John W: use caution; don't want to be surprised some where down the road.

3.2 Survivor Canada Update

Anne circulated a newspaper article reporting Survivor Canada organizer had 17 know aliases, was arrested and convicted for fraud and other fraud related crimes. Ron gave review of history of park scam. Government lawyers laid charge and culprit was convicted and fined \$1000 for using park without a permit.

3.3 Tlools Creek Update – (time 9:22)

Ron distributed government news release on new additions to Strathcona Park. It is an area that has been added to the park but is still part of the overall Timberwest land exchange deal.

Timberwest deal is still not complete. First Nations consultation is incomplete. Also, land had to come out of park before it can be traded (Mount Flannigan). Buttle Narrows portion of land deal was purchased for cash, not a trade. Final balance adds 40 ha to park. A good news result, a fair trade supported by all.

3.4 Wood Mountain Update

Trying to resolve cleanup issues. Still not deleted from park system so can't be sold or leased.

Ski hill needs to be cleaned up before being sold, a catch 22. Apparently there are investors that are interested in buying and reopening as a ski development but not while in park status. Access to Strathcona Park will be allowed in whatever sale or lease arrangement is made.

4. New Business

4.1 Bedwell Trail/Clayoquot Wilderness Resort (Jim DeHart, John Caton, Louie Joseph represented resort) (time 7:30)

Package was distributed to members of committee.

John Caton gave a short history of resort

1999 purchased 500 acres at mouth of Bedwell River. Stretches 1¼ miles up stream. Have 30 horses. Now ride up to park boundary. Philosophy of resort is low impact and high quality, international guests, eco tourism. Have friendly relationship with Ahousaht people, more so than people in Tofino. Working with Ahousaht to put a tourism proposal together. Have salmon spawning project going. Seven km of side channel rehabilitation. Funded various environmental research projects, spending \$3 million on salmon.

Ahousaht Holistic Center

An aboriginal healing center for families to be built on reserve land across sound along with a tourist center. Summer is for tourists, rest of year is for first nation use. Tourist attraction would be teaching first nation culture to tourists. Proposal is to relocate trail to cross the river to far side and through reserve land. Would funnel hikers through their facilities. Looking at putting canopy walkway through trees on reserve. Concern raised about what would happen to unfettered access?

Existing trail conditions

Are poor. CWR claims that Ministry of Forests want to turn over Gayle Magee Memorial Bridge and trail maintenance on lower trail outside park to Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge. There is a suggestion that MOF may pull the suspension bridge out due to safety issues. Parks have no resources to maintain or upgrade trail within the park.

Proposed partnership

Clayoquot Wilderness Resort, First Nations, Parks, MOF, Strathcona Park Lodge. Strathcona Park Lodge provided a letter of support to CWR.

Proposed activities

Hiking, camping, mountain biking and horses to You Creek giving access to hike from the end of the road further into park.

Proposed access facilities and trail improvements

Trail upgrade and maintenance, corral, composting toilets, tent pads, three bridge replacements. The replacement of FOSP bridge as well as two others. A note from a package of information distributed at the meeting - all bridges to be built to be horse accessible, i.e. the Friends bridge would be replaced to allow horses to pass.

Proposed operations

Exceed BC Parks standards for PUP. Hiking and camping, mountain biking, horseback tours, limited to 12 guests at a time. Sterilized feeds 3 days before trip. No trace camping,

Public Access

Clayoquot Wilderness Resort would welcome the public as through traffic. No dock space is available other than drop off and pick up. Will continue to provide assistance but no services, future access considerations. Have allowed people to store kayaks, etc. while hiking. This would change when trail relocated through Indian Reserve. The public would then be separated from the resort.

Chief Louie spoke

He grew up in Bedwell and roamed the valley and adjacent area, hunted and fished the area. Worked in lower mainland 26 years, took administration courses, was a fisherman and boat builder. Sees Clayoquot Wilderness Resort as conservationist, generous, trusts them, spoke of sharing and helping each other. This is opportunity for native culture to coexist with Canadian culture.

Questions

Anne pointed out recreation zone covers the valley, covers facilities but not necessarily horses. Ron mentioned the current management plan allows for horses in Oshinow Lake and Kunlin Lake now. An amendment to the master plan may be required to allow this activity. We would expect that CWR would have to hold public involvement processes. Wilderness Recreation Zoning does allow horse use. A permit could alleviate the need for a master plan change.

John Wilson suggested a geotechnical person needs to look at impacts and erosion of trail.

John Caton stated little impact up to suspension bridge. Trail past there road base covered with alder and berry bushes. 95% of old road bed is flat. Suggest building a 3 foot wide trail on old road grade, moving around trees. Only 400 m elevation gain from ocean to You Creek, most in canyon area. Could get a wheel chair to You Creek when complete.

Ron asked about some washouts. There are some between Noble Creek and You Creek.

Peter Rothermel spoke about his work party. Goal is to clear trail up to Noble Creek. Ron asked if Peter supported this proposal. Ron mentioned hazard of crossings. Peter wants access to Mariner Mountain.

John Caton stated wood needs replacing on FOSP bridge. Cabling would not be replaced, is not up to current standards. Peter supports working on trail, but not horses in park.

Sandy mentioned if building a trail without a road already in place, it would be located away from canyons.

John Milne asked about what the problem is with the Friends bridge – the pins in the rock are not sufficient any more. Bridges hang from the cables, not sit on them.

Ron said upgrading the trail is consistent with the master plan. The horses and mountain bikes are the issue.

Anne mentioned old mining claims have been extinguished, but area not cleaned up. John Caton said there is currently some mining activity in old Walter Guppy claim (outside the park). A small 3 man operation. Clayoquot Wilderness Resort has given them permission to cross their property. They are building some small cabins and Clayoquot Wilderness Resort will take tours through historic type mine cabins.

Peter R. said Federation of Mountain Clubs is not supporting this, just the trail.

Sandy Briggs is opposed to mountain bikes in park, doesn't care about trail at all. Public support is for funding parks out of taxes, not these kinds of proposals. This is shown over and over in various hearings.

Ron wants feedback. Support is heard for trail. Tradeoff is trail for horses and bikes.

Gary worried about mountain bikes. They are allowed on roads in some areas. John Caton says he can control horses because of the difficulty and isolation of access and can control mountain bikes guided by his staff but can't control others unless he had exclusive control of valley. Is conceivable someone could transport a bike in. Would cost \$3,000 to barge horses into trail, so public horse access is unrealistic.

John Wilson points out conundrum of one party having exclusive access to park. Mentioned resulting pressure on other parts of park from horse users if this is allowed. John asked how would part of washed out trail be rebuilt. Answer is only part washed out is in around canyon. They would hire engineers to design it properly.

Chief Joseph says no problem with horse erosion. Elk have been in the area with no problem. He thinks if elk don't cause erosion, then neither should horses.

John C mentioned they ride into Ursus Creek old growth on a trail. The trail is worn 2 feet deep due to horse use by miners a long time ago. Area has been industrialized by mining and logging. He is willing to put resources into this. Mentioned Friends position as supporting trail work and hiking only. His guests want to ride into park. He wants to keep pursuing this proposal.

Break – Clayoquot Wilderness Resort delegates left at this point.

Discussion continued

Ron: BC Parks needs to respond to this proposal. Ron asked for Friends position. Directors are 100% opposed. Survey results from Friends polling their members reviewed. 96% want trail kept open, 59% opposed to allowing horses in park. Was no mention of mountain bikes prior to this meeting.

Need to check master plan re horses – is it vague on this area? Look for direction. Same for mountain bikes. Mountain bikes and horses go together in similar areas.

John Wilson opposed to horses and mountain bikes on trail.

Barb asked would they stop at You Creek? Answer – could be restricted by park use permit. - Diverting trail to first nation's side could result in user fees. Gary sees benefit to first nations band.

John Wilson does not support. Concerned about destruction of trail by meandering river and asked how to rebuild to standards to support horses. How would this happen?

Frank asks how much money do they have to do this work? It is enormously expensive, but they are a high end resort and are interested in taking on the work (www.wildretreat.com)

Anne says PUP would specify what was needed. Parks would set standards and a performance guarantee.

Ron says unsafe bridges need to be dealt with due to liability concerns. Reality is this may be the only option to keep the trail open.

Anne is tending to go along with it. She thinks it would be a net benefit. Is an alienated area already?

Gary is cautiously supportive depending on details.

Sandy is opposed.

Barb says Port Alberni people not too knowledgeable, but has heard that people would like to have access.

Peter Rothermel said some support from his group, but they are not too sure.

Ron said FRBC did some work on what is needed a few years ago and he would look into reports.

Evan Loveless said park improvements should come from taxes.

Action

SPPAC to discuss further by e-mail

Ron Q to follow up with CWR

4.2 Snowmobile Activity and Enforcement

Another annual struggle with snowmobiles near Jutland, etc. Boundaries have been marked. Joint heli and snowmobile patrols with RCMP have taken place. One charge to an illegal snowmobile would set an example.

4.3 Bill 50 Park Additions(time 9:26)

Buttle Bluffs area deleted from park for TimberWest Road in 1998. Lots were traded for this around Buttle Narrows before. Seven trespasses around deletions resulted in more lots being added to park. See map, green areas are around Buttle Campground – 3 pond loop, Rainbow Island and others. This was passed last year and maps are now out.

Divers Rossitor addition maps also given out. John Wilson noted this ties up a lot of loose ends. Acquisition people in Victoria are doing an excellent job. Cause for celebration.

Ron brought up question of prioritizing acquisitions in Strathcona against the rest of the parks system. May only be \$5 million next year for acquisition projects for whole province.

4.4 Comox Glacier Trail Land Trade Discussions – 9:03 Ken Rodonets presented

Ron Q said TimberWest approached parks previously and parks were not interested at that time. Since then Ken R wrote letter and was in local media. This increased profile of the issue. Ken spoke about TimberWest access problems last year. He read his parts of his letter to the government then presented their map. Presented their arguments. He would like to know SPPAC's position.

Ron Q reiterated that Parks not interested swapping land out of park. The management plan goal is to include Capes Idiens area including Comox Glacier Area so parks support protecting the trail. It is on the acquisition list but not at the expense of Datsio Creek. Ron stated other ministries don't want to give up land either. Maybe a cash deal is possible. This publicity puts this issue on the table now. SPPAC supports protecting trail, but not this trade. TimberWest will helilog the area probably in 2007. Evan said they will spray paint stumps so can find trail after logging. Logging this area would cause erosion.

Ron asked would it be worthwhile purchasing a buffer around the trail so many meters on either side. Note – on Arrowsmith buffer is 80 meters on either side, put there by logging company with no remuneration.

Discussion with SPPAC members about TimberWest's certification and how it might apply to community involvement.

Action

Evan suggested SPPAC may make a recommendation about protecting trail. SPPAC supported this. Letter to be written supporting protection of all or part of this area. Letter goes to Dick Heath. Ask for a buffer. TimberWest already knows parks are interested.

e.) Membership –Barb Baker from Port Alberni has joined the SPPAC committee filling the vacancy.

f.) BC Parks/Strathcona 100th Anniversary – Ron will have PowerPoint presentation for next meeting.

BC Parks is starting to think about planning for celebration. Start now for 2011. Will be province wide with Strathcona as the focus. Several suggestions for activities including a reprise of the 1920 Price Ellison Expedition. Would take place in 2010 to publicize the 2011 anniversary. Is SPPAC interested in taking part in the planning of this event? New Visitor Center may be up and running by 2011.

4.5 Crest Creek Climbing Area

Sandy spoke on Heathen's report. It is a sound report, covers trails and facilities. Need to look at plant communities around there. Is heavily impacted as is corridor for many services. Camping in the area is needed especially group camping for climbers. Need good communication between Parks and Heathens. Draft Climbing Strategy from the Heathens was given out for information only at this point. The area is used all seasons.

4.6 Mount Washington Winter Parking

Ongoing issue. People can park overnight but need to check in at lodge so resort can clear snow at night. Parking on the road results in being towed.

4.7 Expenses

Ron passed out expense form. Return tonight to get paid.

5. Park Update - Ron Q

Covered above

6. Public Question Period

Public appreciated being allowed to comment at times during the meeting.

7. Follow-up

Members need to e-mail reaction to John Caton's presentation to Ron Quilter.

Minutes from Strathcona Westmin meeting coming out soon.

Meeting Adjourned

NEXT MEETING: Friday, June 9, 2006; 6:00 PM;
Rathrevor Beach Park