



Tahsish-Kwois Park and Tahsish River Ecological Reserve Management Plan

June 2026



BC Parks

*This management plan replaces the
Tahsish-Kwois Provincial Park Purpose
Statement and Zoning Plan, March, 2003
and the Tahsish River Ecological Reserve
Purpose Statement, March 2003*

Acknowledgements

This draft management plan is the result of a collaborative process between BC Parks and the Ka:yu:'k't'h' / Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nations (KCFNs). This collaborative work has proceeded via the Ka:yu:'k't'h' / Che:k'tles7et'h'- Ministry of Environment, Parks and Protected Areas Memorandum of Understanding Implementation Committee (MOU Committee). Of particular note is the participation and significant role of the Tyee Ha'wiih (Hereditary Head Chiefs) of the KCFNs, Tyee Ha'wilth Christina Cox, Tyee Ha'wilth Francis Gillette and Ha'wilth Samantha Christiansen in the development of the management plan. This contribution underscores the critical importance and role of Tahsish-Kwois Park and the Tahsish River Ecological Reserve to both KCFNs and the BC Parks Protected Area system.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Table of Contents	ii
1.0 Introduction	4
1.1 Management Plan Purpose	4
1.2 Location, Access and Key Features	4
2.0 Management Direction	9
2.1 Vision Statement.....	9
2.2 Significance in the Protected Areas System.....	9
2.3 Significance for Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nations.....	10
2.4 Management Issues, Objectives and Strategies.....	10
2.5 Zoning Plan and Compatible Uses	16
3.0 Plan Implementation	21
3.1 Implementation Plan	21
3.2 High Priority Strategies	21
3.3 Plan Assessment.....	22
APPENDIX 1: Management Plan Context	24
1. Protected Areas History and Legislative Framework.....	24
2. Existing Management Commitments and Agreements.....	25
3. Authorizations and Permits	25
4. Marine and Landscape Context	26
5. External Pressures and Climate Change.....	26
6. Values	27
6.1 Biodiversity and Natural Heritage Values.....	27

6.2	Cultural Heritage Values	29
6.3	Recreation Values	30
APPENDIX 2: Maa-nulth Treaty and MOU Management Commitments		.33

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Context Map	6
Figure 2: Tahsish-Kwois Park	7
Figure 3: Tahsish River Ecological Reserve.....	8
Figure 4: Zoning Map.....	18

1.0 Introduction

This management plan has been developed through the collaborative work of the Ka:yu:'k't'h' / Che:k'tles7et'h'- Ministry of Environment, Parks and Protected Areas Memorandum of Understanding Implementation Committee (MOU Committee). This ongoing collaboration is an important factor in contributing to the ability of the Ka:yu:'k't'h' First Nation to survive and prosper within their traditional territory. This management plan represents a significant collaborative success between BC Parks and the Ka:yu:'k't'h' / Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nations (KCFNs) to protect an exemplary and important area of the Ka:yu:'k't'h' Tyee Hawilth territory for all time.

This management plan provides an understanding of the cultural, spiritual, archaeological, historic, and current importance of the protected areas to KCFNs. In developing management objectives, the management plan looks to the changing use of the landscape overall: from times of indigenous only use through modern resource harvesting, followed by the establishment of Tahsish-Kwois Park and Tahsish River Ecological Reserve as protected areas.

1.1 Management Plan Purpose

The purpose of this management plan is to guide the management of Tahsish-Kwois Park and Tahsish River Ecological Reserve.

This management plan:

- articulates the key features and significance of Tahsish-Kwois Park and Tahsish River Ecological Reserve;
- provides information and clarity on the importance of Tahsish-Kwois Park and Tahsish River Ecological Reserve to KCFNs;
- identifies appropriate types and levels of management activities and protection;
- determines appropriate levels of use and development;
- establishes a long-term vision and management objectives for Tahsish-Kwois Park and Tahsish River Ecological Reserve; and
- responds to current and predicted threats and opportunities by defining a set of management strategies to achieve the management vision and objectives.

1.2 Location, Access and Key Features

Tahsish-Kwois Provincial Park is a Class 'A' Park and is contiguous with the Tahsish River Ecological Reserve. These two provincial protected areas are located on the

northwest coast of Vancouver Island, at the head of Tahsish Inlet in the territory (Nisma) of the Ka:'yu:'k't'h' First Nation. The two protected areas are adjacent to KCFNs Treaty Lands and are located approximately 25 kilometers southeast of Port Alice, 15 kilometres northeast of Kyuquot and 10 kilometers north of Fair Harbour (Figure 1).

The primary access to Tahsish Inlet is by boat from either Kyuquot or Fair Harbour. Vehicles can also reach the shore of Kyuquot Sound/Tahsish Inlet by way of forestry roads from the Artlish River Valley, and by way of forestry roads via Zeballos or Atluck Lake. Most typically, access into the park is by boat via the Tahsish River through the ecological reserve¹. This access route is limited by shallow waters and tidal patterns. It is possible to enter the park from private logging roads branching from the Artlish River Valley and then by foot over rugged terrain, but this access is not encouraged to protect visitor safety and park values. Air access (helicopter landings on gravel beds and float plane on Silburn Lake) occurs, with commercial operators requiring a Park Use Permit (PUP).

Tahsish-Kwois Park (Figure 2) protects Kwois Creek and Silburn Creek, two largely undisturbed secondary coastal watersheds, as well as the lower portion of the Tahsish River Watershed, and special natural features including significant fish, wildlife, and rare plant habitat. The park is 10,987 hectares in total, including 10,971 hectares of upland and 16 hectares of foreshore extending 100 metres in Tahsish Inlet at the southeast area of the park. Park features include: a Sitka spruce old growth stand, alpine and sub-alpine areas extending to 1,200 metres in elevation, a high elevation (unnamed) lake, a significant low-elevation lake (Silburn Lake), Silburn Creek and Kwois Creek, and other seasonal streams within the Silburn and Kwois Creek watersheds, a scenic river canyon, and u-shaped glaciated river valleys.

Tahsish River Ecological Reserve (Figure 3) preserves a significant, intact estuary. The ecological reserve is 87 hectares in total (56 hectares upland and 31 hectares foreshore). It protects the estuary of the Tahsish River, including a 12 hectare island in the middle of the river's mouth, as well as intertidal and subtidal areas.

¹ British Columbia's *Ecological Reserve Act* and Regulations prohibit motorized use. However, as a "navigable water" under the *Canadian Navigable Waters Act*, vessel access *through* the ecological reserve is likely permitted under federal authorities.

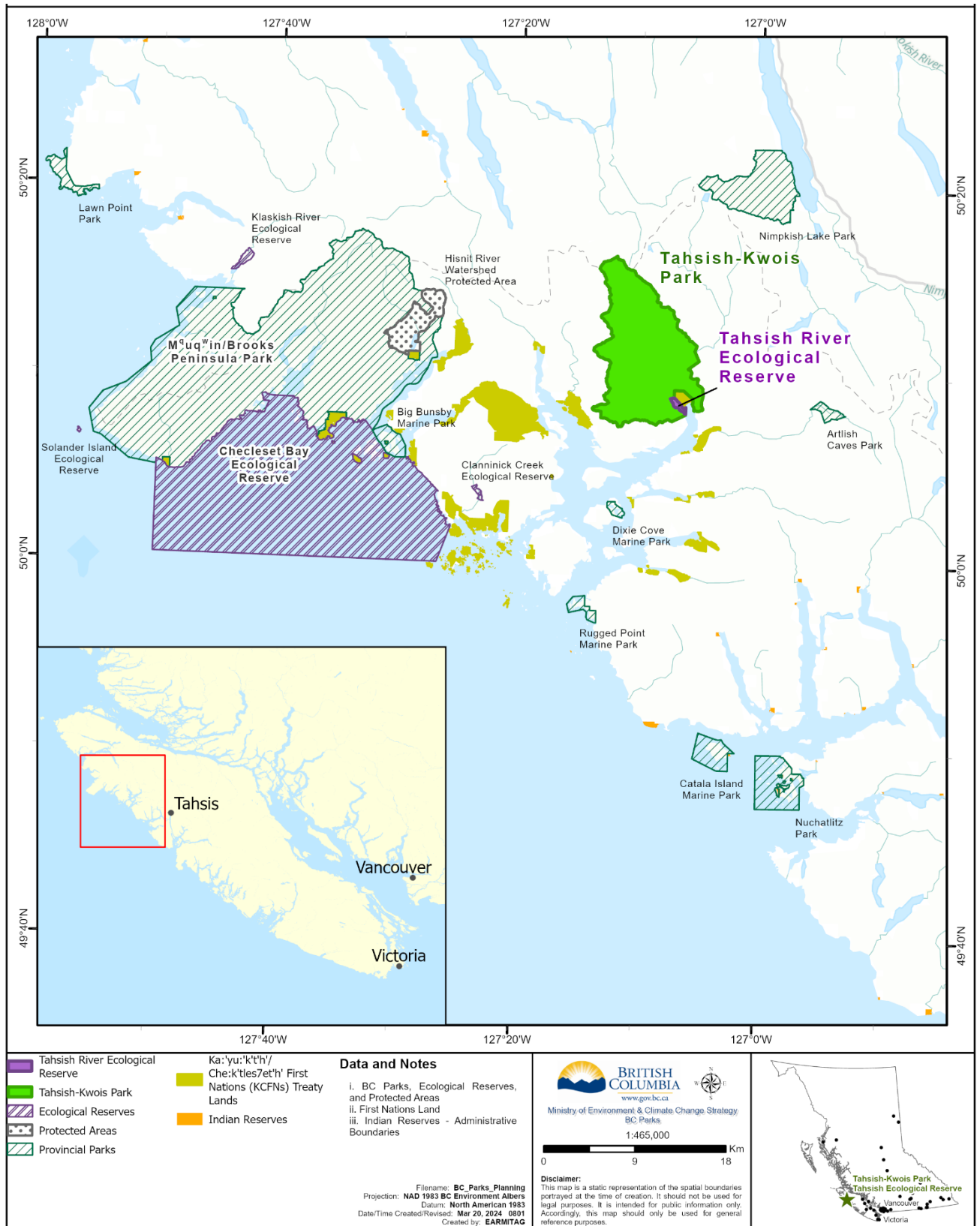


Figure 1: Context Map

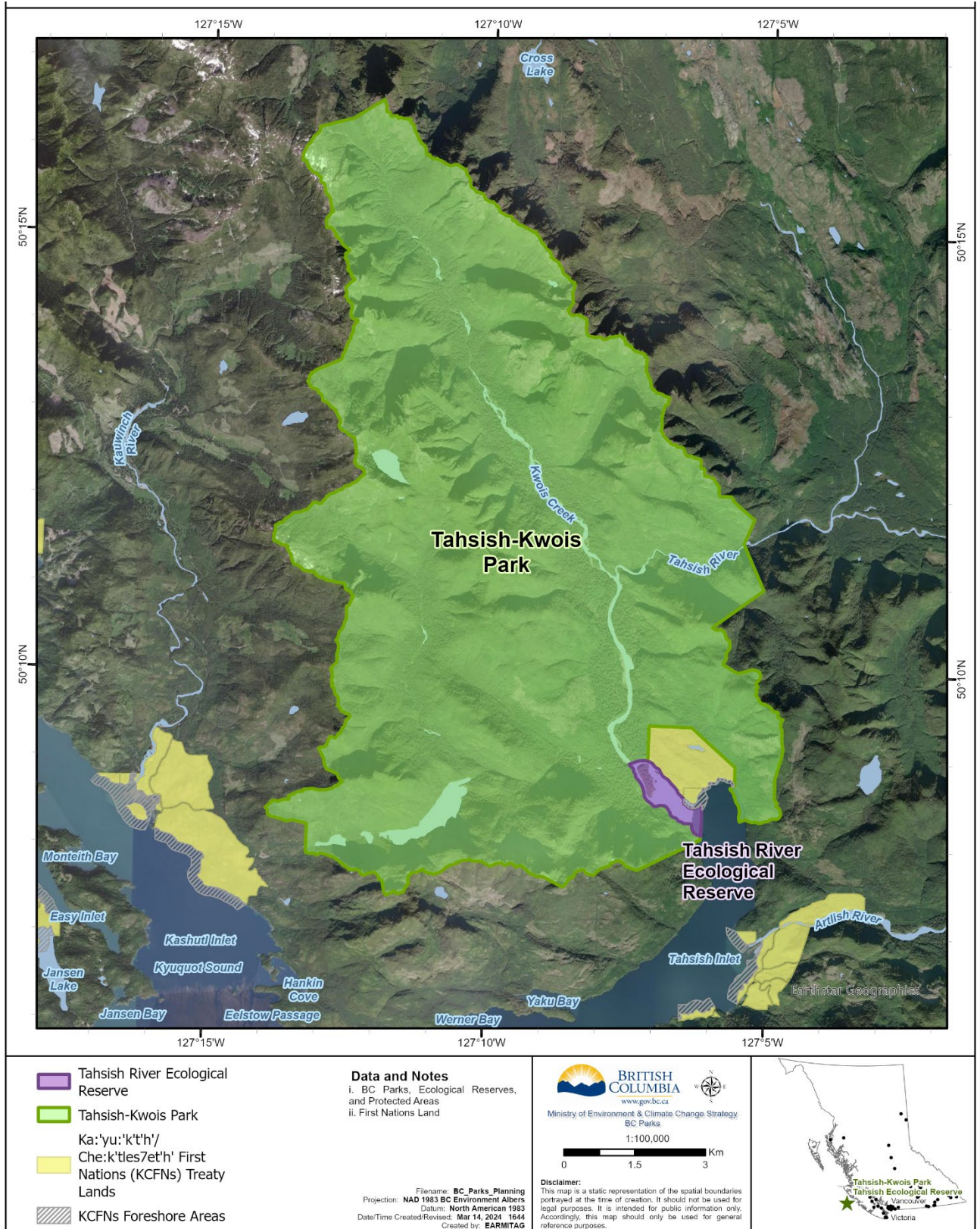


Figure 2: Tahsish-Kwois Park

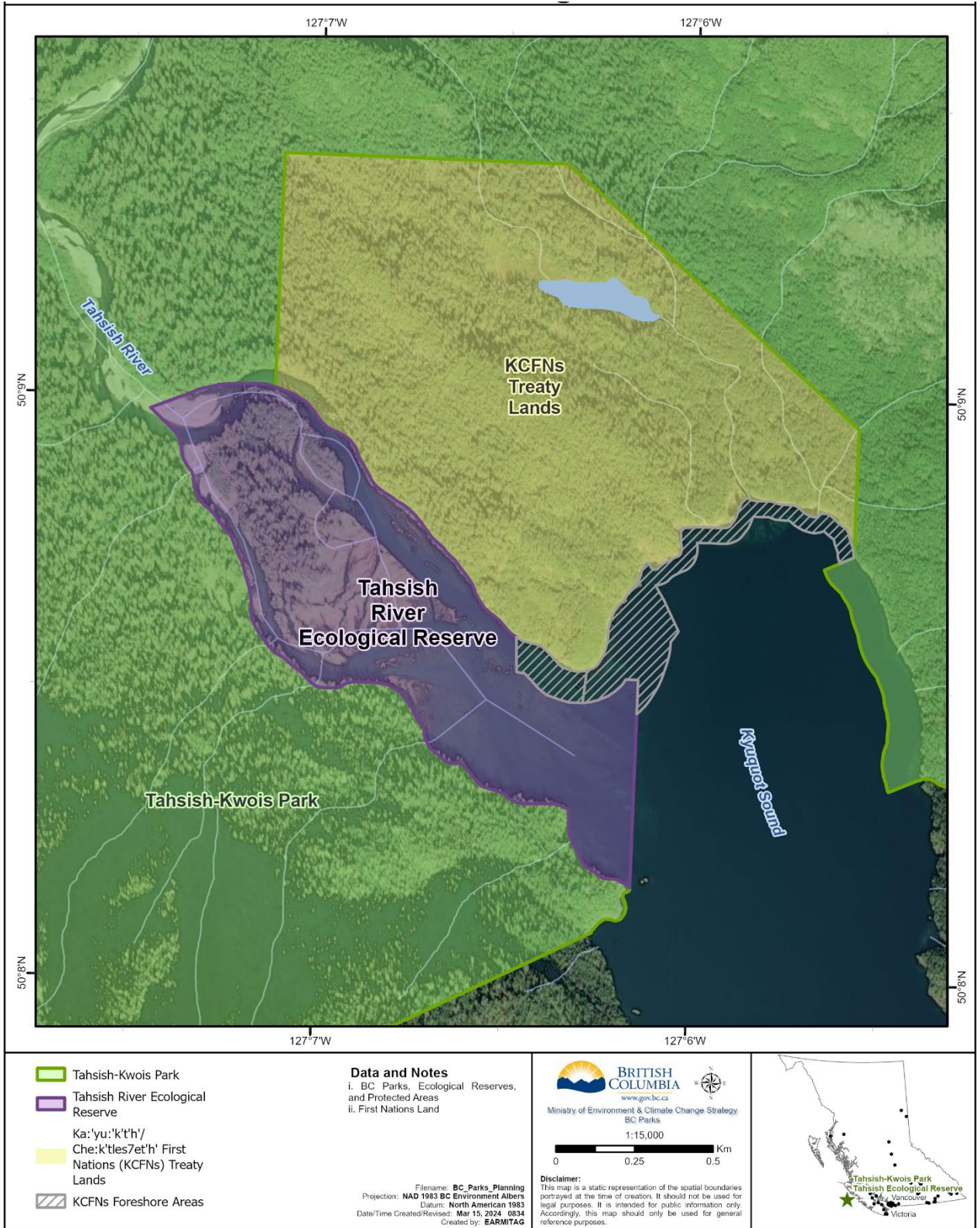


Figure 3: Tahsish River Ecological Reserve

2.0 Management Direction

BC Parks and KCFNs understand the importance of the following principles in providing guidance for the management direction within this plan.

There are three key enduring principles that are common to all Nuu-Chah-Nulth Peoples of which the Ka:'yu:'k't'h' People have always been a part, which are:

- Hishuk-is-tsawalk (everything is inter-connected - everything is one);
- Uu-athluk (taking care of); and
- Issak (respect for all things living and non-breathing).

2.1 Vision Statement

Tahsish-Kwois Park and the Tahsish River Ecological Reserve continue to protect the remote forested wilderness of these coastal watersheds and special natural features, including significant fish, wildlife and rare plant habitat.

Where past disturbance of the environment has occurred, the park and ecological reserve will be viewed for habitat restoration to provide resilience in the context of a changing climate, in keeping with the values of Hishuk-is-tsawalk, meaning 'everything is inter-connected – everything is one'.

Cultural heritage values are protected. Ka:yu:'k't'h' / Che:k'tles7et'h' treaty rights are respected, and the stewardship presence by the Ka:yu:'k't'h' people within the territory provides enhanced protection for the park and ecological reserve values.

Visitors are enjoying low-impact backcountry recreation experiences, while gaining an appreciation of the Indigenous history, culture and current-day presence in the area.

2.2 Significance in the Protected Areas System

The contribution of all the provincial protected areas within the KCFNs' Nisma (territory) is significant to the provincial protected areas system. Tahsish -Kwois Park and the Tahsish River Ecological Reserve make a significant contribution to the provincial protected areas system within this larger assemblage of protected areas.

- Together, they form one of the largest protected area complexes on Vancouver Island, preserving coastal watersheds and a largely undisturbed forested wilderness.
- The park preserves substantial tracts of old growth forest in an area of the province where they are rare due to forest harvesting practices outside the protected area boundaries.
- The ecological reserve protects a productive tidal estuary and small forested area containing diverse vegetation and plant communities and also supports important fish and wildlife habitat.

2.3 Significance for Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nations

Together with the adjacent KCFNs Treaty Lands, the park and ecological reserve play a vital role in the continuation of KCFNs culture. These lands secure the Nations' link to the past and provide guidance for the future. These two protected areas are significant in importance as the lands are within the Hahoulth (area of governance) of the Tye Ha'wiih (Head Chief) of the Ka:'yu:'k't'h' people. The Tahsish serves as the starting point of the traditional trade corridor. The Tahsish provides for cultural use and the ongoing sustainable food supply for the Ka:'yu:'k't'h' people. Additional details on the important cultural heritage values are contained within Section 6.2 of this management plan.

2.4 Management Issues, Objectives and Strategies

The management objectives and strategies to address key management issues in the park and ecological reserve are outlined in the tables below. Implementation of these strategies is dependent on available resources. The Plan Implementation section (Section 3.0) prioritizes these strategies and provides important context regarding their implementation.

Objective 1. Protect Cultural Heritage

<p>Management Context and Issues: The Tahsish River and Kwois Creek watersheds are culturally significant areas, and formal archaeological inventories are incomplete. There are sites of cultural and spiritual sensitivity within the protected areas, and opportunities for BC Park and KCFNs to continue research and learning into the future. Recreational use of these areas may impact cultural sites, uses, values and treaty rights. In addition, impacts associated with a changing climate such as altered hydrology, species composition and distribution, and wildfire will continue to impact culturally important sites, features, resources and practices.</p>
<p>Strategies:</p>

- Current and future cultural use of the protected areas will maintain and strengthen the cultural expression by KCFNs.
- BC Parks and Ka:yu:'k't'h' First Nation continue to work collaboratively to learn about and protect cultural values within the park and ecological reserve. As new cultural sites and values are identified, ensure proposed direction provides adequate protection.
- As recreational use patterns and impacts from external pressures evolve, an adaptive approach is required to continually assess impacts and set management direction to protect cultural values.
- Explore opportunities to participate in watershed-scale / territory-wide management approaches to support ecosystem resilience and persistence of culturally important species.

Objective 2. Protect Natural Values: Fish productivity and diversity

Management Context and Issues: The Tahsish-Kwois system supports all anadromous and resident salmonid species native to Vancouver Island, but fish escapement records show a decrease in productivity from earlier levels.

The significant decline over decades in the Tahsish River fish stocks is a concern from a conservation and cultural/recreational use perspective.

The Tahsish and Kwois systems have experienced sediment and gravel accruals moving downstream, which have impacted fish habitat.

Disturbances on the landscape outside the protected areas from forest harvesting activities (historic and ongoing), combined with wildfires and increasingly heavy rainfall events, appear to be a strong factor in the degradation of fish habitat.

Recreational angling use appears to be low but does occur in the park and includes commercial recreational fishing opportunities (helicopter accessed fishing and boat guided fisheries).

Strategies:

- Given the unstable nature of gravel transport through the river system, and anticipated impacts of climate change, management actions that resist these system-wide changes may not be feasible. Take a cautious, climate informed approach to habitat restoration for recovery in this dynamic system.
- Explore opportunities to review localized impact areas in Tahsish-Kwois Park within previously logged areas to consider priorities for habitat restoration.
- Encourage partnership opportunities to protect and enhance fish habitat. This may include research and monitoring, suitable restoration and recovery

measures and collaborating with federal and provincial fisheries agencies. KCFN, stewardship groups, commercial and recreational fisheries, visitors and non-government organizations also can play a role in the protection of fish habitat.

- Given land use outside the protected areas is beyond the immediate influence and role of BC Parks, continue to raise awareness of impacts originating outside protected area boundaries and explore solutions with partners and other agencies. This may include working through multi-government/agency venues, exploring research, and partnering with educational and stewardship organizations, etc.
- If fish harvesting increases, work with regulatory agencies to ensure adequate conservation measures are maintained.

Objective 3. Protect Natural Values: Wildlife productivity and diversity

Management Context and Issues: The Tahsish River and Kwois Creek watersheds provide important habitat for Roosevelt elk (Tl'unim'), as well as black-tailed deer and other species.

Current recreational and commercial hunting levels are understood to be low. Hunting levels for elk are managed under allocations to allow for sustainability of the populations in the Tahsish and Kwois valleys.

As historical climates disappear and new climates emerge in the protected areas, ecosystems are expected to shift and change, resulting in uncertain changes to wildlife species, their habitats and migration.

Strategies:

- Evaluate the watersheds in the protected areas for their potential to support/enhance wildlife productivity and use.
- Encourage research studies to better understand key wildlife habitat and the implications of climate change and wildfire impacts on ecosystems.
- Determine whether there is potential for restoring indigenous habitat management practices to increase wildlife productivity and forage habitat.
- Continue monitoring and collaborating with the provincial government branch responsible for managing wildlife and regulating recreational hunting to ensure Roosevelt elk and other wildlife values are protected.

Objective 4. Protect Natural Values: Sensitive ecosystems, plant communities and species

Management Context and Issues: The old growth forests, estuary and associated ecological communities are sensitive to disturbance and climate change, including changing species composition and distribution. The old growth Sitka spruce forest in the lower river valley of the park is of particular note. Estuary values are anticipated to shift inland as sea levels rise and the resulting impacts need to be better understood. These natural values are important to KCFNs for botanicals and medicinal use. The flora and fauna are significant beyond food sustenance.

Strategies:

- Protect native ecological communities, including those associated with old growth forests and estuaries, by monitoring and maintaining relatively low levels of recreational use.
- Use the protected areas as an opportunity for joint learning about Hishuk-is-tsawalk ('everything is inter-connected – everything is one') in practice.
- Encourage inventory and research on species and ecological communities to gain a better understanding of changes to these values over time².
- Explore ways to educate and alert visitors that the ecological reserve is an environmentally sensitive area.
- Promote no-trace camping and responsible recreation by visitors within the park and communicate that camping is not permitted in the ecological reserve.
- Manage the lower reaches of the park to anticipate marine inundation and shifting estuary values from the ecological reserve inland into the park.

Objective 5. Protect Natural Values and Wilderness Recreation Experience

Management Context and Issues: Recreation use and pressures may increase with visitation shifting from other areas of BC given emerging recreation trends.

Concerns have been raised regarding impacts on fish and fish habitat, arising from motorized boat access into Tahsish-Kwois Park via the Tahsish River, particularly by use of jet boats.

Helicopter use for commercially guided angling access is anticipated to be occasional, but impact to the wilderness experience has been raised as a

² Baseline information compiled in 2003 may be valuable for evaluating the impact of climate change and other disturbances on sensitive ecosystems. See Tahsish-Kwois Park and Tahsish River Ecological Reserve Management Plan Background Report.

concern. A Park Use Permit is required for commercial operators to access the park by helicopter.

Recreational values and experiences are at risk from climate change impacts such as flooding and wildfire risks, changes in fish and wildlife habitat and populations, for example.

Strategies:

- Consider increasing education to the public regarding sensitive values within the park and ecological reserve.
- Monitor levels of wilderness camping. If higher levels of use and impacts are observed, a small rustic tent campsite close to the lower reaches of the Tahsish River may be provided within the park.
- Ensure visitors travelling by motorized vessels through the Ecological Reserve are not stopping to access land within the ecological reserve. Continue monitoring boat use traversing through the ecological reserve and impacts on protected area values. If use levels and impacts continue to be of concern, work with federal authorities to consider whether horsepower restrictions or other controls on motorized boat use are needed.
- Continue monitoring the frequency and timing of recreational use in the park. Consider limits on park use permits if necessary to protect values and maintain low use levels.
- Using park use permit conditions, restrict commercial aircraft landing locations to only: (1) helicopter landings on gravel beds adjacent to the river and (2) floatplane landings on Silburn Lake.
- Consider public information requirements and opportunities for BC Parks and KCFNs to collaborate on visitor safety messaging, emergency planning, response and recovery as it relates to visitor experience in protected areas throughout KCFNs territory.

Objective 6. Ensure Compatible Land and Marine Use Planning and Management

Management Context and Issues: There is a mosaic of land use at the head of Tahsish Inlet that includes the park, ecological reserve, KCFNs Treaty Lands (including lands formerly within Tahsish-Kwois Park) and KCFNs foreshore.

Since these land and marine areas are directly adjacent to each other, management decisions by either party may impact the interests or activities of the other party.

Strategies:

- Ensure visitor information informs the public of the land designations and respectful use of the lands when visiting.
- If a recreation focus (accommodation, park tours, etc.) is envisioned for KCFNs Treaty Lands in the future, implement a coordinated approach to consider implications and appropriate direction for managing access and use in the protected areas.
- Implement a coordinated approach with KCFNs for any wilderness style camping facilities.
- Apply a climate change lens on decision-making across the landscape.

Objective 7. Implement Maa-nulth First Nations Treaty and Protected Area MOU

Management Context and Issues: Implementation of the Maa-nulth Treaty on April 1, 2011 established a number of Treaty Rights and other provisions for KCFNs members in the park and ecological reserve (Appendix 2). Treaty also established a number of requirements regarding former Provincial Park Lands (Appendix 2).

The effective management of protected areas in KCFNs Territory is strengthened through ongoing collaboration between BC Parks and KCFNs.

Strategies

- BC Parks and KCFNs work together and with other relevant agencies to understand and guide implementation of Treaty Rights and other applicable provisions related to the park and ecological reserve.
- Implement Treaty commitments regarding the management of First Nations' Public Lands that are former Provincial Park Lands.
- Continue to strengthen relationships and improve collaborative management of protected areas through the Parks and Protected Areas Memorandum of Understanding Implementation Committee. Improve understanding of parties' interests and capacity in management as they evolve, identify strategic priorities, support interagency coordination and integrate knowledge systems.
- Strengthen operational coordination between BC Parks Rangers and KCFNs Witwaak Stewards to enhance monitoring, and identify/implement joint priorities.

2.5 Zoning Plan and Compatible Uses

Zoning assists in the planning and management of protected areas. In general terms, zoning divides an area into logical units within which certain activities/uses are permitted and a particular set of management objectives apply. The zones reflect the existing patterns of use, intended land use, the degree of human use desired, and the acceptable level of management and development.

Ecological Reserve

A zoning framework and compatible use matrix are not provided for Tahsish River Ecological Reserve as ecological reserves are areas protected for ecological purposes, emphasizing scientific research and educational uses. The Ecological Reserve is open to the public for observational uses such as nature appreciation, wildlife viewing, bird watching and photography. Other outdoor recreation activities are not permitted, including camping, motorized access to land areas, recreational fires etc.

2.5.1 Tahsish-Kwois Park Wilderness Zone³

Description

The Wilderness Zone has been applied to all areas of Tahsish-Kwois Park. The zone encompasses all the terrestrial area (10,971 ha) and all marine foreshore (16 ha) within the park (figure 4).

Objective and Management Intent

The objective of the Wilderness Zone is to protect a remote, undisturbed natural landscape and to allow for unassisted backcountry recreation opportunities dependent on a relatively pristine environment. A key objective of the Wilderness Zone is to protect cultural values and sensitive ecological communities and species. The low recreational use will assist in minimizing interference with KCFNs cultural activities, plant harvesting, hunting and fishing, etc., in keeping with the protected area values. The marine foreshore fronting Tahsish-Kwois Park provides management authority and control over use of the foreshore.

Examples of recreational activities that are appropriate in this zone include unassisted backpacking, fishing, hunting as per provincial regulations and natural/cultural heritage appreciation. Development of recreational facilities is minimal, for user convenience and safety, and protection of the environment (e.g.,

³ “Wilderness Zone in this plan corresponds to the BC Parks Wilderness Recreation Zone

trails, basic campsite, basic shelter). It is anticipated that no marine structures, such as wharfs, docks or boat facilities will be developed in this zone.

Means of overland recreational access is non-mechanized and non-motorized. The lower reaches of the Tahsish River are very shallow, so visitors are only able to access the lowest reaches of the river within the park by motorized vessel. Low-frequency air access may be permitted to designated sites (i.e. Silburn Lake and gravel banks along river). A more detailed list of compatible facilities and activities are provided in Table 1.

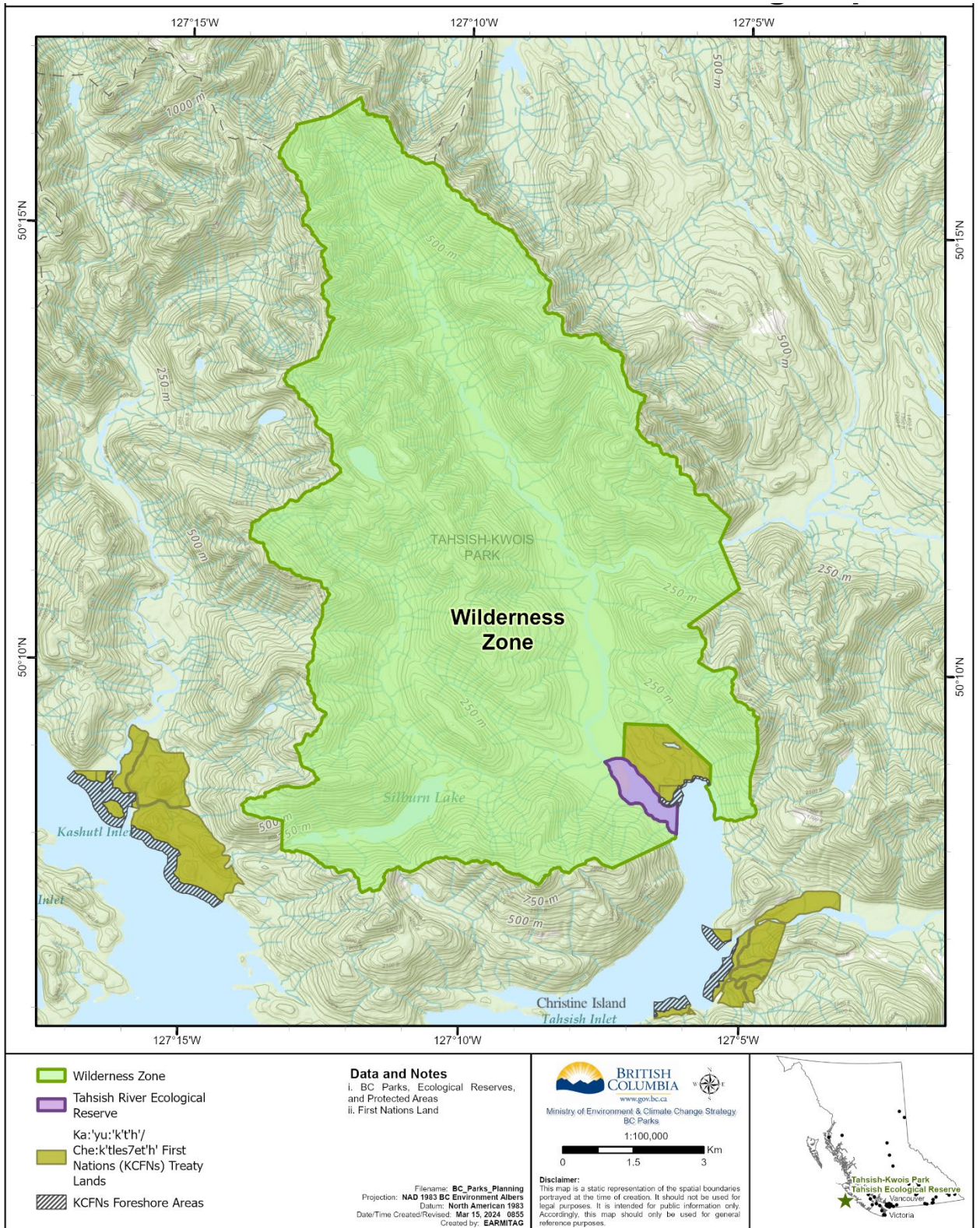


Figure 4: Zoning Map

2.5.3 Compatible Use

The following table summarizes existing and potential future uses in Tahsish-Kwois Park that are, and are not, appropriate in each zone. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all uses that may be considered in the park in the future.

Please note that appropriate uses may be geographically restricted (i.e., only allowed in certain areas of the park or only appropriate at certain times of the year). Park users must be well informed of any use restrictions. It is also important to review relevant sections of the management plan when interpreting the table.

Table 1: Compatible Use Table for Tahsish-Kwois Park

Activity/Facility	Wilderness Recreation Zone (Upland & Marine)	Comments
ACTIVITY		
Aircraft Landing/Takeoff (e.g., helicopter)	Y	Park Use Permit required for commercial use. Commercial users will be restricted to helicopter landings on gravel beds adjacent to the river and floatplane landings on Silburn Lake.
Boating (human powered and electrical)	Y	
Boating (combustion engine)	Y	Limited by natural features to lowest reaches of Tahsish River in park. Restriction of boat use, horsepower limits and access may be considered.
Camping (designated sites)	Y	A small rustic tent campsite may be developed if impacts are observed from wilderness style camping
Camping (wilderness style - undesignated sites)	Y	
Commercial Filming	Y	By park use permit for commercial use. Follow leave no trace principles.
Commercial Fishing and guided sport fishing (Saltwater)	N/A	Saltwater fishing is managed by DFO
Fisheries Enhancement and Management	Y	
Fishing	Y	Freshwater fishing is managed by WLRS

Activity/Facility	Wilderness Recreation Zone (Upland & Marine)	Comments
Hiking	Y	
Hunting	Y	Hunting is managed by WLRS
Land-based Mechanized Activity (e.g., mountain biking)	N	
Land-based Motorized Activity (e.g., 4x4, motorcycles, ATV, snowmobiles)	N	Exception - Limited use if required for management purposes (e.g., KCFNs fisheries and stewardship workers, accessibility to cultural sites/practices).
Trapping	Y	Trapping is managed by WLRS
FACILITY		
Boat Launches, Wharves and Docks	N	
Cabins, Huts and Shelters	Y	Potential small structures for cultural and/or management purposes (e.g. 'Hahoulth' cabin for KCFNs domestic harvesting, emergency shelter for fisheries & stewardship workers).
Lodges (as defined in the Fixed Roof Accommodation Policy)	N	
Designated Camping Sites (not vehicle accessed)	Y	Consider identifying designated camping sites if needed to manage visitor use/impacts. Limited, rustic facilities.
Mooring Buoys	N	
Trails	Y	Backcountry style
Visitor Information Buildings	N	
Small scale improvements (info shelter, signage, etc.)	Y	Compatible with hiking and wilderness camping.

Appropriate Use Table Legend		
N	Not an appropriate use	The use is not appropriate in the indicated zone. If the use currently exists but the management planning process has determined that the use is no longer appropriate in all or part of

Appropriate Use Table Legend		
		the protected area, the management plan will include strategies for ending the activity (e.g., phasing out, closing).
Y	May be an appropriate use	Some level or extent of this use may be appropriate in the zone indicated. The management plan may provide guidance on the appropriate level of use and may address specific restrictions or planned enhancements (e.g. capacity, designated areas for a particular activity, party size, time of year, etc.). For new or expanded uses, this symbol indicates that the use <u>may be considered</u> for further evaluation. The appropriateness of some activities may not be confirmed until a further assessment (e.g., BC Parks Impact Assessment Process) or evaluation process (e.g., park use permit adjudication) is completed.
N/A	Not an applicable use in this zone	It is not feasible for the use to take place in this zone (e.g., mooring buoys in a terrestrial zone).

3.0 Plan Implementation

3.1 Implementation Plan

Issues and strategies presented in this management plan will inform prioritization discussions between BC Parks and KCFNs through the MOU Committee. Items to be included in BC Parks' annual management plan include a description of the resources available during a given year, including staff and any additional operating or project funds that may support identified strategies.

BC Parks and KCFNs will seek project-specific funding and/or partners to implement high priority strategies. Specific projects will be evaluated for their priority in relation to the overall protected areas system. Some of the initiatives contemplated are not funded as part of core BC Parks activities so jointly seeking funds with outside partners will be a key aspect of the implementation.

3.2 High Priority Strategies

The following strategies have been identified as high priorities for implementation:

1. Explore opportunities to participate in watershed-scale / territory-wide management approaches to support ecosystem resilience and persistence of culturally important species.

2. Explore opportunities to review localized impact areas in Tahsish-Kwois Park within previously logged areas to consider priorities for habitat restoration.
3. Determine whether there is potential for restoring indigenous habitat management practices to increase wildlife productivity and forage habitat.
4. Protect native ecological communities, including those associated with old growth forests and estuaries, by monitoring and maintaining relatively low levels of recreational use.
5. Promote no-trace camping and responsible recreation by visitors within the park and communicate that camping is not permitted in the ecological reserve.
6. Consider public information requirements and opportunities for BC Parks and KCFNs to collaborate on visitor safety messaging, emergency planning, response and recovery as it relates to visitor experience in protected areas throughout KCFNs territory.
7. Ensure visitor information informs the public of the land designations and respectful use of the lands when visiting.
8. BC Parks and KCFNs work together and with other relevant agencies to understand and guide implementation of Treaty Rights and other applicable provisions related to the park and ecological reserve.
9. Strengthen operational coordination between BC Parks Rangers and KCFNs Witwaak Stewards to enhance monitoring and identify/implement joint priorities.

3.3 Plan Assessment

The direction provided in this plan is based on the best available information at the time of writing. Management guidance may evolve over time as new information becomes available.

To ensure that the management direction for Tahsish-Kwois Park and Tahsish River Ecological Reserve remains relevant and effective, the management plan will be assessed by BC Parks staff and KCFNs on a regular basis (i.e., at least every 5 years). Minor administrative updates may be identified and completed at any time (e.g., correct spelling errors, update protected area details where needed), and will be documented according to BC Parks' guidelines.

If an internal assessment reveals that the management plan requires more significant updating or substantial new management direction is needed, a formal review by BC Parks and KCFNs may be initiated to determine whether the management plan requires an amendment or if a new management plan is required.

The management plan amendment process or development of a new management plan includes an opportunity for public input.

APPENDIX 1: Management Plan Context

Information in this appendix provides important management context and protected area values summaries which inform management direction for Tahsish-Kwois Park and Tahsish River Ecological Reserve.

1. Protected Areas History and Legislative Framework

The Tahsish River area has been of vital importance to Ka:'yu:'k't'h' First Nation for centuries as an area of sustenance, culture and community. Previous historic designation under forest tenures provided rights to harvest this area to forestry companies. Provincial interest in protecting lands in the watersheds began in 1979 when the public raised concerns regarding forest harvest plans in the area. The Tahsish River Ecological Reserve was established under an Order-in-Council in 1988. Tahsish-Kwois Park was recommended for protection by the Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE) and as part of the Vancouver Island Land Use Plan in 1994.

Park

Tahsish-Kwois Park was established as a Class A park in 1995 as a result of the Vancouver Island Land Use Plan and is named and described in Schedule C of the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*. In January 2001, the province acquired an additional 193 hectares of land adjacent to the estuary (DL 568) which was subsequently added to the park. The park is approximately 10,987 hectares (10,971 hectares of upland and 16 hectares of foreshore).

Class A parks are Crown lands dedicated to the preservation of the natural environment for the inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public. Development in Class A parks is limited to that which is necessary to maintain the park's recreational values.

Ecological Reserve

Tahsish River Ecological Reserve was established in 1988 and is described in Schedule A of the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*. Initially, the Ecological Reserve was established by Order-in-Council No. 900/1988 in the *Ecological Reserve Act*. Subsequently, the ecological reserve was formally designated on May 17, 2004 in Schedule A of the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*. The ecological reserve contains approximately 87 hectares (56 hectares of upland and 31 hectares of foreshore).

Ecological reserves are areas protected for ecological purposes including areas that: provide representative examples of natural ecosystems; protect rare or

endangered flora and fauna; are suitable for research and education; contain unique examples of botanical, zoological, genetic or geological phenomena; or provide opportunities for recovery after human modification. While most ecological reserves are open to the public, they are not established for outdoor recreation purposes and no extractive activities (e.g., logging, mining, or hydroelectric development) are allowed.

Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' Treaty Lands

The park and the ecological reserve are included under the statute of the *Maa-nulth First Nations Final Agreement Act* in 2011. The *Act* was negotiated between Canada, British Columbia and the Huu-ay-aht, Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h', Toquaht, Uchucklesaht and Yuułu?ił?ath First Nations under the BC treaty process. An area of Tahsish-Kwois Park, in addition to former IR# 11, was transferred to KCFNs through the treaty process and forms part of the Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' Treaty Lands adjacent to the two provincial protected areas.

2. Existing Management Commitments and Agreements

Tahsish-Kwois Park was identified for protection under the Vancouver Island Land Use Plan (1994). That process identified ecological conservation and recreation roles for the park as follows: i) primary role is ecosystem representation, ii) secondary role to protect forested wilderness and intact coastal watersheds with special natural features, iii) tertiary role to provide remote recreation opportunities.

Through the Management of Provincial Protected Areas Memorandum of Understanding (2006), KCFNs and BC Parks aim to work together on the planning and management of provincial protected areas in their territory in a manner that respects Section 35 Rights, is consistent with provincial and federal legislations, respects, protects, presents and preserves the culture, history and traditions of KCFNs and integrates traditional and scientific knowledge.

More recently, the BC Government has passed legislation to bring the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) into provincial law. This new legislation – the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* – serves as the legislative framework for reconciliation, recognizing the constitutional and human rights of Indigenous peoples and aligning B.C.'s laws with the internationally recognized standards of the U.N. Declaration, as well as the legal rights of Indigenous peoples.

3. Authorizations and Permits

There are no facilities or land tenures within Tahsish-Kwois Park or Tahsish River Ecological Reserve. There are some traplines within and adjacent to the park. Traplines are administered under the ministry responsible for wildlife management

(hunting and trapping). BC Parks has issued Park Use Permits (PUPs) in the park for research purposes, as well as commercial recreation purposes such as guide outfitting (hunting), hiking/non motorized guided activity, wildlife viewing, nature discovery, guided angling and air accessed recreation activities. In the ecological reserve, PUPs are limited to non-recreational and non-commercially based activities for research and education. BC Parks has continued engagement with KCFNs on the review of PUP applications and renewals.

4. Marine and Landscape Context

The two protected areas are within the Ka:'yu:'k't'h' Nisma (territory) and are adjacent to Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nations Treaty Lands, established through Treaty (the Maa-nulth Final Agreement). The marine foreshore areas of the park and ecological reserve are also adjacent to a marine area under the administration of the Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nations Government under a Foreshore Agreement with the Province.

The park and ecological reserve are within the vicinity of several other provincial protected areas, including M^auq̓in /Brooks Peninsula Park, Hisnit/Power River Watershed Protected Area, Nimpkish Lake Park, Artlish Caves Park, Rugged Point Park and Dixie Cove Marine Park. Land use outside the protected areas' boundaries is dominated by forest harvesting, including within the upper Tahsish River watershed.

5. External Pressures and Climate Change

Although the landscapes within the park and ecological reserve are largely undisturbed, past and present forestry activities in the upper watershed of the Tahsish River outside the park boundaries have altered stream morphology, hydrology and biological productivity in the park. Sediment load is significant within the river systems, and this leads to dynamic flow and channel morphology regimes which then affect fish habitat quality and distribution.

In addition, the effects of climate change are already evident in the park and ecological reserve and will continue to impact stream morphology and other key values. Climatic projections for this area include⁴:

- Higher mean annual temperature and significant increased precipitation

⁴ Climate Projection information derived from: The Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium **Plan2Adapt** tool that provides information on future climate conditions, using regional district boundaries at <https://www.pacificclimate.org/analysis-tools/plan2adapt> and Wright, P. 2021. Interpreting Climate Metrics for Park Planners and Managers: Vancouver Island Region Case Study. Ecosystem Science and Management Program, UNBC (which used data sourced from ClimateBC/ClimateNA data (<http://climatebc.ca/RasterFiles>)).

- Changes in seasonal precipitation patterns with significantly more rain in winter and spring, and dramatic decrease in summer precipitation leading to more drought conditions
- More extreme rainfall/storms and extreme heat events
- Shifting ecosystems, emerging novel and disappearing climates⁵
- Changes in marine composition and sea level rise (though somewhat tempered by isostatic rebound at this location)

These changes are expected to threaten old growth forests, increase forest fire occurrence, impact species composition and behaviour, alter river flows and characteristics, erode streambanks, change estuary shorelines and alter/reduce important habitats. In addition to the ecological implications, these changes threaten culturally important species, practices and sites, and may impact recreational access, visitor safety and enjoyment.

6. Values

6.1 Biodiversity and Natural Heritage Values

Ecosystem Representation

The British Columbia Biogeoclimatic Ecosystem Classification System divides the province into 16 biogeoclimatic zones based primarily on climate, vegetation and soil data and areas under the influence of similar regional climate. Biogeoclimatic zones can be further classified into subzones, which themselves can be further classified into variants. Biogeoclimatic subzones consist of unique sequences of geographically related ecosystems where climatic climax ecosystems are members of the same zonal plant association. Variants reflect differences in regional climate.

The Biogeoclimatic Subzone Variants represented in the Tahsish-Kwois Park and Tahsish River Ecological Reserve are:

- Coastal Western Hemlock Submontane Very Wet Maritime (CWHvm1) variant (51.1% of the park)
- Coastal Western Hemlock Montane Very Wet Maritime (CWHvm2) variant (28.3% of the park)
- Coastal Western Hemlock Southern Very Wet Hypermaritime (CWHvh1) variant (8.0% of the park and 17.3% of the ecological reserve),

⁵ Mahony, C (2019). Shifting Climates of Tashish-Kwois Provincial Park. BC Parks Living Lab Program

- Mountain Hemlock Windward Moist Maritime (MHmm1) variant (10.4% of the park), and
- Vancouver Island Shelf (VIS) Marine Ecoregion (marine portions of the Tahsish River Ecological Reserve and foreshore area of Tahsish-Kwois Park)

These climates are broadly representative of the rainforest climates of the windward side of Vancouver Island. Tahsish-Kwois Park makes a notable contribution (1.7%) of the CWHvm1 that is currently underrepresented in the protected area system (15.8% total).

Natural Features and Biodiversity

Tahsish-Kwois Park protects two undeveloped secondary watersheds: Kwois Creek and Silburn Creek, as well as the lower portion of the Tahsish River, while the Tahsish River Ecological Reserve protects the Tahsish River estuary.

Vegetation Types and Rare Plant Species

The park is covered with mature forests, with much of the forested area being more than 150 years old. However, forestry activities have historically taken place within some areas of the landscape, so the forest is a mosaic of old growth and second growth forests. The park contains large areas of Sitka spruce old-growth forests and their associated ecological communities, which are extremely rare due to intensive logging pressures in areas surrounding the park. The Sitka spruce old-growth forest is located along the Tahsish River, and covers approximately 650 hectares (6%) of the park.

In the ecological reserve, the Tahsish River estuary has very diverse vegetation with ten identified plant communities and rare plant species. Plant communities vary from Sitka spruce forest-dominated to tidal meadows and intertidal algal and plant communities. Many of the old-growth Sitka spruce ecological communities are likely at risk, although this requires further investigation. Old flood channels in the treed area support slough sedge, water-parsley and Mexican hedge nettle. Scattered individuals of western red cedar, western hemlock, amabilis fir, broadleaf maple and pacific crab apple also occur. At the interface between high tide and upland habitats, several graminoid (herbaceous plants with a grass-like morphology) species occur, as well as saltmarsh species and algae.

Fish

The protected area supports all anadromous and resident salmonid species native to Vancouver Island. A selective barrier in the canyon of the Lower Tahsish divides the system into two zones of utilization: Lower Tahsish, Kwois and Silburn (within the boundary of Tahsish-Kwois Park) and Upper Tahsish and tributaries (mostly beyond the park boundary). Conservation of the summer run stock of steelhead is

considered a high priority. In 2003, this population was identified as one of 36 such populations in the Vancouver Island Region. As well, cutthroat trout *clarkii subspecies* (blue listed), dolly varden char, coastrange sculpin and threespine stickleback occur in this system. Tahsish River estuary has a network of channels with various depths, flow characteristics and substrates that occur in the estuary, which provide migrating, spawning and important rearing habitat for fish.

Wildlife

Tahsish-Kwois Park and Tahsish River Ecological Reserve protect habitat for ungulate species, such as Roosevelt elk (blue listed) and black-tailed deer. In particular, the lower Tahsish River valley is important Roosevelt elk winter range habitat and old-growth on south-facing mid-slope elevations provide important black-tailed deer winter range. Predator species, including grey wolf, cougar and American black bear are also found in the protected areas, as well as other species such as American mink, raccoon and North American river otter. The estuary, intertidal and marine areas of the protected area support sea otter (blue listed), harbour seals, steller sealion (blue listed) and Olympia oyster (blue listed). The protected areas also provide critical habitat for northern myotis and little brown myotis bats, both which are blue-listed and federally endangered. There have been reports of the endangered Vancouver Island wolverine inhabiting remote sections of the watershed, although there hasn't been a confirmed sighting on Vancouver Island since 1993.

Both the emergent and the water-covered parts of the Tahsish River Ecological Reserve and Tahsish-Kwois Provincial Park are extensively used during migration and in the winter by shorebirds, waders, dabbling and diving ducks, Canada geese and trumpeter swans. Bald eagles are present year-round and are particularly abundant during salmon runs. The old growth forests and aquatic ecosystems within the protected areas support a diversity of bird species and other wildlife habitat. Importantly, critical habitat for marbled murrelet (blue-listed) occurs within the protected areas.

6.2 Cultural Heritage Values

Tahsish-Kwois Park, the Tahsish River Ecological Reserve and areas contained within the Ka:yu:'k't'h' people's lands have always been important to the Ka:yu:'k't'h' people over the centuries and continue in importance to the present day. The importance is underscored as this area is the Hahoulth (area of governance) of the Tyee Ha'wiih (Head Chief) of the Ka:'yu:'k't'h' people. The park and ecological reserve abut and surround the Ka:yu:'k't'h' Treaty Settlement Lands and territories and have been traditionally used by the Ka:yu:'k't'h' people.

The name Tahsish means 'a path', the starting point of the trading 'Grease' trail to Nimpkish on the east coast of Vancouver Island. This was a major overland trade route

for people between Tahsish Inlet and the mouth of the Nimpkish River via the Tahsish River valley, Atluck Lake and Nimpkish Lake. The trade with others included food stuffs common to the respective home areas such as the Eulachon grease from the east coast of Vancouver Island. Trade with others was also cultural in nature. Hutsa (Robert Peters), a Ka:yu:'k't'h' elder, noted that songs were also gifted between groups for people to use. This is reflective of the rich cultural heritage of the area.

Seasonal settlement areas in the Tahsish and Kwois valleys are located within these Ka:yu:'k't'h' lands. Dwellings were present in the area to provide shelter for people. The habitation was broad in duration; salmon fishing season has been described by Elders as occurring from mid-April until October or November. Ka:yu:'k't'h' people also overwintered at Tahsish while hunting, fishing, and trapping, and these lands and waters sustained them.

The Tahsish River is a main salmon river for the Ka:yu:'k't'h' people. Elder accounts note that steelhead, chum (dog) salmon, pink salmon, chinook salmon, sockeye salmon and coho salmon were all present at Tahsish at different times of the year. There was an experience described by Elder Hilda Hanson, of a recollection by her grandmother, of coho salmon being caught in the Tahsish as late as December. The mouth of the Tahsish River within the ecological reserve, has also been a place for seafood gathering and hunting (for seal/sealion, geese, ducks, deer, bear and elk).

There are traditional locations for processing food, such as smoking and drying fish. Gathering of materials also occurred, such as wood for fires and building, grass and stripping cedar bark for baskets and clothing. Plants and berries were also gathered for both food and all things needed to live, including medicinal preparation.

The park area, ecological reserve and KCFNs Treaty Lands within the broader territory has been a significant place for activities of cultural expression such as the exercise of responsibilities to the land, creation of dances, songs, drumming, canoe building and community activities. There are also sites of cultural and spiritual significance to the Ka:yu:'k't'h' people along the Tahsish River. This cultural heritage and ongoing importance of the area speaks to the special nature of the Tahsish and Kwois watersheds and adjacent KCFNs Treaty Settlement Lands.

6.3 Recreation Values

The park offers a variety of outdoor recreational activities which are best experienced in the summer. In winter, heavy coastal rainfall with low temperatures combined with river wading and hiking through wet, dense forest makes visits to this area particularly hazardous.

Wilderness outdoor recreation opportunities at Tahsish-Kwois Park include old growth forest viewing and associated wilderness hiking, wildlife viewing and nature study opportunities. Wilderness camping opportunities are also available, and

visitors are encouraged to follow responsible recreation guidelines⁶. The terrain and dense forest understory make hiking in many areas of the park a very rugged activity. Hunting and angling opportunities are available but are self-limiting due to the remote location. Angling typically occurs in the lower reaches of Silburn Creek, Kwois Creek and Tahsish River. Focused recreation within the ecologically sensitive ecological reserve is not encouraged.

The lower reaches of the Tahsish River provides for travel by canoe or kayak on the accessible, low gradient river. The river flows around and over gravel bars which may require the visitor to wade in the river and pull the canoe or kayak. The action of the river may cause trees to fall into it, and so travelling upstream may also be complicated in this situation. The old growth forest has a dense understory of salal. Wilderness camping is easiest on the riverbank gravel bars. Campers and those who tie up their boats need to be aware of how far the tide influences the water level of the river, and the possibility of inundation from heavy rain events.

The park has no developed trails. Hikers typically utilize game trails. Away from the valley bottoms, visitors wishing to hike to mountain peaks must contend with steep, forested slopes and elevation gains of more than 1000 metres. For these reasons, recreation opportunities are generally focused in the lower Tahsish River Valley. Day use in the lowest reaches of the Tahsish River is possible, but hiking to Silburn Lake, Kwois Creek and the canyon of the Tahsish River requires overnight camping. Air access for recreation in the park is restricted to helicopter landing on gravel banks along the river, and float plane access to Silburn Lake.

Recreation Trends

Recreation activities on northern Vancouver Island have been increasing in recent years. Recent trends are seeing more people seeking remote sites to recreate in the backcountry. The Covid-19 Pandemic caused an increase in outdoor recreation activities and it is projected outdoor recreation will remain high into the future. As people migrate to Vancouver Island in search for outdoor recreation, there is a forecasted pressure on the recreational capacity, opportunities, and values in the northern parts of the island. As climate change induced wildfires become more common and intense in the Interior of B.C., more people are in search of recreation opportunities on Vancouver Island which currently experiences less frequent and intense fires.

In particular, motorized boat accessed recreation requires continued monitoring. It may be necessary to control the speed, mode and timing of such boat traffic for

⁶ BC Parks, Responsible Recreation Guidelines: <https://bcparks.ca/plan-your-trip/visit-responsibly/responsible-recreation/>

safety and to protect fish habitat, cultural and recreational experiences in the park, as well as the values of the ecological reserve.

APPENDIX 2: Maa-nulth Treaty and MOU Management Commitments

The establishment of the Ka:yu:'k't'h' / Che:k'tles7et'h'- Ministry of Environment, Parks and Protected Areas Memorandum of Understanding Implementation Committee (MOU Committee) has been an enduring part of working together to fulfill Maa-nulth treaty and MOU management commitments.

The following table summarizes items from the Maa-nulth First Nations treaty and the *Management of Protected Areas Memorandum of Understanding* between the Maa-nulth First Nations and the Ministry of Environment in 2006 that are referenced within this management plan. This list is included for information purposes only.

Topic	Commitment
Gathering Rights in Provincial Protected Areas	The treaty (24.6.0) ensures Ka:yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' members' Rights to Gather and to Trade and Barter Plants and the boughs, burls and roots of Timber for Domestic Purposes in Provincial Protected Areas within the First Nation's Area, subject to measures necessary for conservation, public health or public safety.
Hunting, Fishing and Migratory Bird Harvest Rights	The treaty ensures members' Rights such as Fishing, Wildlife Harvest, and Migratory Bird Harvest in the Domestic Fishing Area, Wildlife Harvest Area, and Migratory Bird Harvest Area, respectively are within each of these defined Areas.
Depiction of Cultural Information	The treaty (24.5.6) commits the Province to consult on a) the depiction of Nuu-chah-nulth culture or heritage in the Protected Area; and, b) the importance of Nuu-chah-nulth culture and heritage to the purpose of the Protected Area. The MOU (p.4) commits the Province to receive the First Nations' approval prior to depiction of language, use of place names, and interpretation of the First Nations' history.
Access to Water for Community Water Supply	The treaty states that if other means of water access are not possible, and on request of the Ka:yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nations, the First Nations and the Province will negotiate and attempt to reach agreement on amendments to the boundaries of Tahsish-Kwois Park to enable the First Nations to reasonably access water from the Tahsish River and Tsauk Creek.

Topic	Commitment
<p>Encourage Economic Opportunities</p>	<p>The MOU defines as one of its objectives (p.3): To encourage economic opportunities and to provide enhanced access for the Maa-nulth First Nations and other residents of the area, in a manner that is consistent with applicable provincial and federal legislation, this Understanding, the Treaty after effective date and any subsequent management plans.</p>
<p>Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nations Private and Public Lands</p>	<p>Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nation Private Lands described in this management plan are lands that were formerly Indian Reserves. The treaty (5.2.0) describes how the First Nation may designate portions of its public lands as private lands.</p> <p>Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' First Nations Public Lands described in this management plan refer to the Ka:'yu:'k't'h'/Che:k'tles7et'h' lands where reasonable public access is to be maintained for temporary recreational uses and temporary non-commercial purposes. Details regarding public access to these lands are described in the Final Agreement (5.4.0).</p> <p>Implement treaty commitments regarding the management of First Nations' Public Lands that are former Provincial Park Lands by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring the public continues to be able to access for recreational purposes, the KCFNs Public Lands. • Ensuring consultation between the KCFNs and British Columbia before any portion of the Public Lands are designated as Maa-nulth First Nation Private Lands or vice versa. • Protecting and maintaining biological diversity and natural environments. • Prohibiting commercial logging, mineral activities, hydro power generation other than local run-of-the-river projects, or any other activity that is inconsistent with the recreational values of the area.