



BC Parks

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# **Strategic Management Planning Policy**

For Ecological Reserves, Parks,  
Conservancies, Protected Areas  
and Recreation Areas

2013

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**This policy replaces all previous policy regarding management planning.**

**Document Approval:**

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. What are the Management Planning Process and a Management Plan?.....	1
3. Management Planning Principles .....	2
4. Management Framework .....	3
5. Strategic Policies .....	5
6. Glossary .....	10



## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to define the strategic policies<sup>1</sup> which govern the form and content of management plans and the process to be followed in the preparation of management plans. Management plans are not required by legislation, but they are essential for providing direction to protected area managers, and represent a commitment to British Columbians regarding the protection and use of protected areas.

Throughout this document, the term “protected area” is used generically to describe “ecological reserves” established under the *Ecological Reserve Act* or *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*, “parks”, “recreation areas”, or “conservancies” established under the *Park Act* or the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act* or “Protected Areas” established under the *Environment and Land Use Act*.

## 2. What are the Management Planning Process and a Management Plan?

Management planning is a process of involvement and engagement with interested communities and individuals and a mechanism used by protected area managers to develop and achieve a shared vision and objectives for protected areas under their stewardship.

A management plan is the result of a management planning process and is developed with First Nations, local governments, the public and other interest groups. It outlines the management direction and desired future condition for a protected area and how to achieve it. Specific purposes of management plans are to:

- Guide the management, conservation and use of protected areas.
- Develop a shared long-term vision for a protected area by identifying its significance within the protected areas network.
- Respond to current and anticipated threats and opportunities by defining a set of clearly articulated and achievable management objectives and strategies.
- Convey a management vision and management direction to the public and management staff, enhancing BC Parks' public accountability.

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<sup>1</sup> Strategic policies are high level policies that support the vision and foundation of BC Parks and guide the management of BC Parks' protected areas system at a province-wide scale. Operational policies provide further detail and guide the day-to-day operations of parks and protected areas.

- Describe the ecological integrity and the primary values for which the protected area was established and define their desired future condition.
- Ensure that the management of protected areas meets legislated requirements and other mandated commitments.
- Ensure that ecological, cultural and recreation management objectives are clearly defined.
- Gain First Nations, public and interest groups' involvement in protected area management.
- Provide a framework for decision-making and to set priorities for implementing those decisions.
- Identify the types, location and threshold of uses and activities appropriate within different parts of a protected area including appropriate levels of visitor use and facility development.
- Guide the appropriate use of limited resources by identifying, describing and prioritizing the management actions required to achieve the objectives for the protected area.
- Serve as a tool to inform the public, governments and BC Parks staff of the vision, management direction and priorities for protected areas.

### **3. Management Planning Principles**

Management planning will be guided by the following set of principles:

- The management planning process will ensure that a management plan is understandable and usable by both staff and the public, and is scope and scale appropriate to the protected area.
- Management planning recognizes the role and value of partners, the public and interest groups, and engages them in a meaningful way.
- Management planning is a flexible process that can be adapted to accommodate: the complexity of each protected area; the degree of First Nations/public/interest group involvement and/or concern; evolving knowledge of ecological processes; and changing trends in recreation and societal values.
- Management planning is inclusive. Everyone involved in the process has a role to play in ensuring that management plans are developed, reviewed, implemented and monitored in a timely and effective manner.
- Management planning is creative, responsive and systematic.
- Management planning involves interagency cooperation and involvement (given that ecosystems, ecosystem services and human uses extend beyond protected area boundaries).

- The development of the management plan follows a defined process with standard stages.
- The management plan is one component of the management planning process. The process continues through the implementation of the management plan, monitoring of its implementation, and review of the management plan to ensure its validity.
- Efforts will be made during the management planning process to resolve any known management issues.
- Management plans will be assessed for relevancy through periodic review. Management plans deemed no longer relevant will be subject to an amendment or a new management plan.
- The management plan is part of a management framework used to manage B.C.'s protected areas; other parts of the framework include legislation, assessments and operational plans.

## 4. Management Framework

Management plans are a component of a larger management framework that consists of legal and strategic direction and other plans or related documents which derive from or support it. Figure 1 shows the management framework for BC Parks.

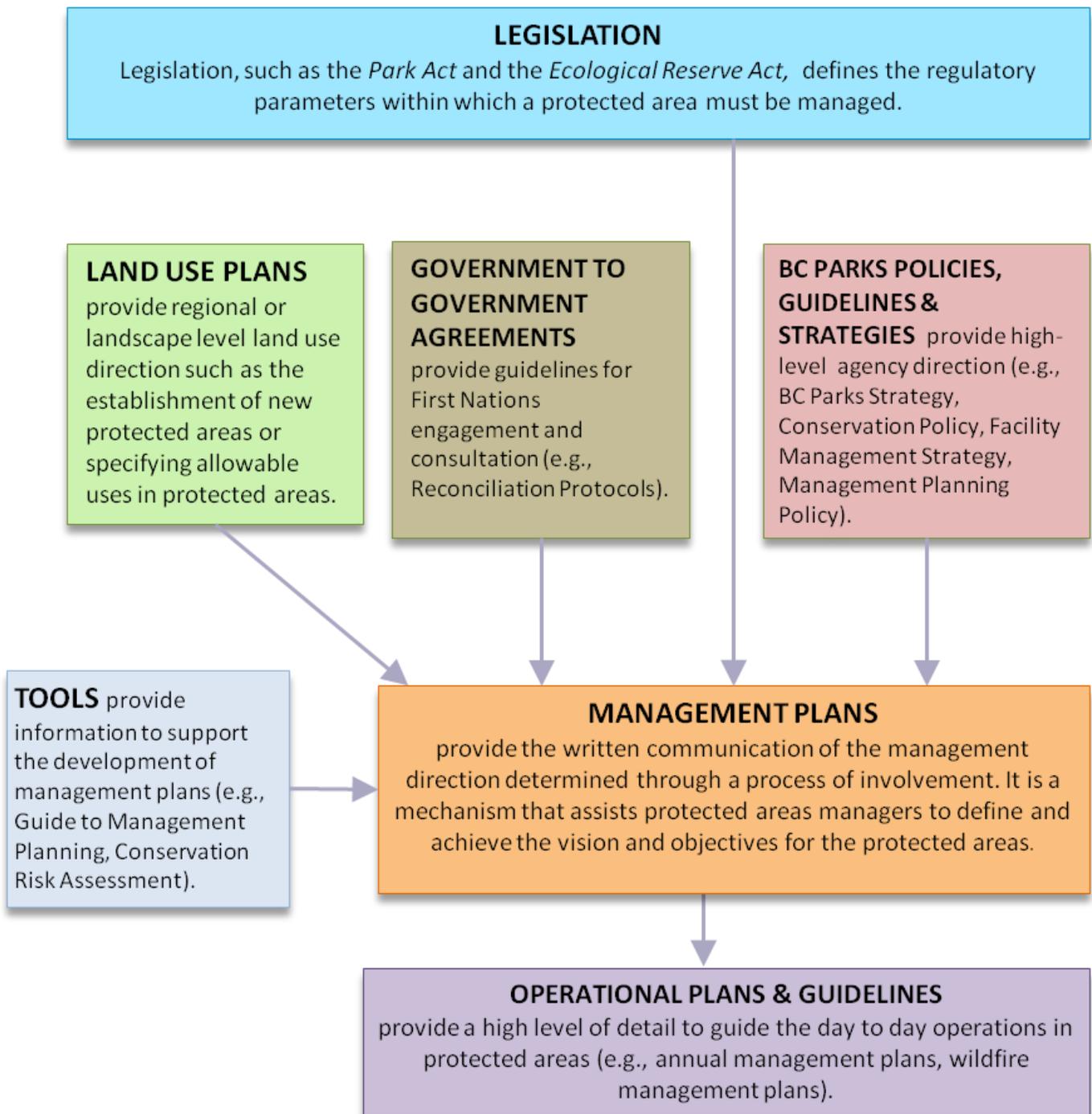
The highest level of direction for managing protected areas is provided by legislation (e.g., the *Park Act*, the *Ecological Reserve Act*), which defines the parameters within which a protected area must be managed.

Land use plans provide direction for landscape/regional level land management including the establishment of new protected areas and, sometimes, appropriate activities within those new protected areas.

Government to government agreements (e.g., Reconciliation Protocols, Collaborative Management Agreements), agency corporate plans (e.g., ministry service and program plans), policies (e.g., Conservation Policy), and strategies (e.g., Facility Management Strategy) are also associated with management plans, providing higher level strategic direction for management planning.

Operational policies/plans, guided by management plans, provide a high level of detail to guide the daily operations of specific protected areas (e.g., annual management plans, fire management plans).

Tools provide guides and information to support the development of management plans (e.g., Guide to Management Planning, Conservation Risk Assessment).



**Figure 1:** Management Framework for BC Parks

## 5. Strategic Policies

To ensure a common form, content, and process, all management plans and management planning processes must adhere to the following set of strategic policies:

### 5.1 **Management plans will be completed for all protected areas.**

A management plan must be prepared and kept current for each protected area. Management plans must be prepared as soon as practicable after the establishment of a new protected area, subject to available resources and the ability of key planning partners to participate.

The BC Parks management planning program will set priorities for completing management plans on an annual basis based on the criteria described in the [BC Parks Management Planning Manual](#).

### 5.2 **No major new uses, new development or major expansion of existing services will be allowed without approved management direction.**

Prior to major new development or the initiation of a new major use in newly established and existing protected areas, an approved management plan must be in place. Existing management plans may require an amendment prior to a major expansion of existing services or a major change to the approved appropriate uses for a protected area (see 5.6 and 5.16).

In general, a major use or expansion is one that may cause significant changes to visitor experiences, cultural values and/or the natural environment conditions that exist in the protected area.

### 5.3 **All management plans require approval.**

Management planning documents must be approved by BC Parks. The management plans may also be approved by other planning partners (e.g., First Nations, non-government agencies). The [BC Parks Management Planning Manual](#) and [Management Plan Review and Approval Guide](#) provide detailed guidance on required approvals.

### 5.4 **Management plan products that were approved prior to the implementation of this policy may still be considered valid.**

Current approved management planning products with names other than 'management plan' (e.g., master plan, management direction statement, purpose statement and zoning plan, interim management statement) may be considered valid; all existing management planning products will be regularly assessed by BC Parks staff to determine their continued validity. All management direction documents completed after the date of approval of

this policy will be approved as 'management plans' (i.e., previous terminology will no longer be used).

**5.5 The BC Parks Zoning Framework will be applied to all protected areas (both land and water) with the exception of ecological reserves.**

Every management plan (for protected areas other than ecological reserves) will include a zoning plan, a map that delineates management zones, and a description of the desired natural and cultural environment and visitor experience for each zone. The zoning plan will also describe the management actions required to attain the desired conditions in each zone. The [BC Parks Zoning Framework](#) provides details about zone attributes (e.g., appropriate activities, types of facilities, etc.).

**5.6 The scale of the management plan must be appropriate to the protected area.**

Management plans will vary based on the complexity of values and management needs of a protected area. BC Parks will consider combining management plans for: geographically-related protected areas with common values and objectives; protected areas that face similar issues, uses, and environmental effects; protected areas that are part of the same collaborative management agreement; and protected areas with the same interest groups and local communities.

**5.7 Management plan direction will be coordinated and integrated with the larger ecosystem, social and cultural landscape.**

Management plans must be prepared and implemented within the context of landscape connectivity, dynamic ecosystems and a changing climate. Management plans should take local development processes and the activities of other agencies and organisations working in the area into consideration, as well as the input of local communities.

**5.8 Management plans will provide direction on appropriate and inappropriate activities and uses.**

Management plans will provide direction on activities and uses that are appropriate within a protected area. Not all activities and uses are appropriate for a particular protected area, a particular location, or a particular temporal period. The management plan will provide guidance on the appropriate level or scale of each activity/use. In some cases, the appropriateness may not be confirmed until further assessments are completed.

The management planning process will also confirm activities and uses that are not appropriate.

**5.9 Management plans will address known and anticipated management issues.**

Objectives and strategies in a management plan will address known current and future management challenges and opportunities that might affect the ability to achieve the vision for the protected area.

**5.10 Management plans will be prepared with the involvement of the public and interest groups.**

The public must have an opportunity and be actively encouraged to review management plans and provide comments to BC Parks through a variety of means.

The level of public engagement and the type of public consultation required will vary according to the specific circumstances of the protected area in question. All management planning processes will provide open and transparent access (as appropriate) to background information, draft management planning documents and the rationale behind planning decisions.

At a minimum, public engagement will include a public announcement and a 30-day web-based public review period for the draft management plan. Other public engagement opportunities (e.g., public forums, meetings) may be provided during individual management planning processes.

**5.11 Management plans will be prepared with the involvement of, and in consultation with, First Nations.**

During the development and review of a management plan, BC Parks will consult with all First Nations whose traditional territories align with the protected area. First Nations communities are intrinsically connected to, and continue to use, protected areas. Often, First Nations have a considerable amount of information about the values and issues in protected areas, and may hold Aboriginal or treaty rights which may be exercised in those areas.

Additionally, BC Parks will seek to work collaboratively with First Nations where a collaborative agreement exists between BC Parks and the First Nation. There are a number of such agreements in place throughout the province that provide a framework for collaborative management plan development. Additionally, there are a large number of other government agreements to assist First Nations in capacity building related to protected areas management, as well as to support and advance treaty negotiations.

**5.12 All management plan processes require an approved project plan.**

Project plans will follow the approved BC Parks [template](#). The project plan must identify the purpose and objectives of a management planning project, structure and roles of the planning team, key management issues/opportunities,

planned First Nations consultation and public engagement activities, a project schedule, and a project budget.

**5.13 Management plans will follow a standard format.**

Management plans will follow the approved [management plan template](#) and be developed according to standards outlined in the [BC Parks Guide to Writing Protected Area Management Plans](#). Although management plans must follow a standard format, the level of detail and complexity will vary between management plans and diversity in management plan content will be encouraged. Alternate management plan formats may be acceptable in some circumstances (e.g., when a management plan is being collaboratively developed) provided that content meets provincial standards. The variation in detail and length of management plans will depend on known current and future management issues, community interest and the complexity of the management issues associated with the protected area.

**5.14 The status of the management planning project will be communicated in a timely manner.**

During the management planning process, appropriate opportunities will be identified to inform interested parties on the status of the process.

Upon approval of a management plan, BC Parks will ensure that those involved in the process, including First Nations, the public and interest groups, are informed of the approval of the management plan.

**5.15 The effectiveness of management direction will be evaluated.**

The effectiveness of management direction will be measured to determine whether the direction was successful in achieving what it was intended to achieve (i.e., was it effective?). The [BC Parks Management Planning Manual](#) describes the criteria and process for effectiveness monitoring.

**5.16 Management plans will be reviewed as necessary to determine whether they continue to be relevant and appropriate.**

An internal management plan validity assessment will be completed for each management plan on a regular basis (i.e., every five years) to determine whether management direction continues to be valid. This internal assessment may be integrated with existing business processes (e.g., annual management planning) and will result in one of the following recommendations:

**No change:** The management plan is deemed to be relevant in its current form.

**Administrative update:** No substantive change to the original management direction is required, but an error or omission is identified that is anticipated to have no First Nations, public or interest group interest or need for involvement

(e.g., spelling or grammatical errors, correcting inaccuracies in descriptive information about the area).

**Amendment:** The management plan requires a change to a specific component of the management plan, but the remainder of the management plan is unaffected and the role of the protected area remains unchanged. An amendment project must involve public review and comment of the proposed changes.

**New Plan Required:** The management plan does not provide relevant direction for existing or anticipated issues and is no longer considered valid. Multiple components of the management plan require revisions or otherwise significant changes are proposed to a management plan. A full management planning process is required.

A new or amendment management planning project can also be triggered by a public request or changing conditions within the protected area including: a natural event that results in significant environmental change (e.g., wildfire); discovery of a significant value that requires new management direction; significant new visitor activities, services or facilities; new information about the effectiveness of management strategies; or an urgent need for ecosystem restoration.

#### **5.17 Management plans will be developed and amended according to established BC Parks management planning guidelines.**

The management planning process will be carried out according to established guidelines outlined in the [BC Parks Management Planning Manual](#). Guidelines specify First Nations and public engagement requirements, management planning project team composition and function, management planning document review and approval requirements, and required steps in the management planning process.

Guidelines also include criteria that will be used to determine management planning priorities at a regional and provincial level. Management planning priorities will be reviewed annually.

## 6. Glossary

**Annual Management Plans (AMPs)** are operational plans that provide direction on the management of individual protected areas by identifying specific tasks for a fiscal year.

**Conservancies** are areas of Crown land established by or under the *Park Act* or the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*. They are established for:

- (a) the protection and maintenance of their biological diversity and natural environments;
- (b) the preservation and maintenance of social, ceremonial and cultural uses of First Nations;
- (c) the protection and maintenance of their recreational values; and
- (d) to ensure that development or use of their natural resources occurs in a sustainable manner consistent with the purposes of (a), (b) and (c) above.

Conservancies provide for a wider range of low impact, compatible economic opportunities than a Class A park, however commercial logging, mining and hydroelectric power generation, other than local run-of-the-river projects, are prohibited.

**Collaborative Management Agreement (CMA)** is a strategic agreement between BC Parks and a First Nation that assists in the development of a collaborative relationship between the First Nation and BC Parks with respect to planning, management and use of protected areas within the traditional territory of the First Nation. A CMA recognizes the First Nation's aboriginal rights and (or) interests in the planning, management and use of those protected areas.

**Conservation Risk Assessment (CRA)** is a process that identifies conservation values and threats to those values in protected areas in order to assist in developing management direction.

**Ecological integrity** occurs when an area or network of areas supports natural ecosystem composition, structure and function, and a capacity for self-renewal.

**Guidelines** are preferred approaches or methods, not directives. They often reflect best practices. Guidelines use words like "should", "may", or "wherever possible".

**Ecological reserves** are established to conserve representative examples of British Columbia; to conserve unique or rare natural phenomena; to protect rare and endangered plants and animals in their natural habitat; and for scientific and educational use. While most ecological reserves are open to the public, they are not established for outdoor recreation and no extractive activities are allowed.

**Management direction statement** is a term for a former type of management plan that is a concise document developed to meet the challenge of providing appropriate

management direction for protected areas within a reasonable time frame. They were shorter, simplified versions of management plans developed using only readily-available information and where there were fewer and/or less complex management issues.

**Management plan** is the approved document which provides strategic guidance for the management of a protected area.

**Policy** is a concise, formal statement of principles which indicate how BC Parks will act in a particular area of its operation and ensures that BC Parks deals with issues in a consistent, accountable and transparent manner. Words like “will” or “must” are used. In BC Parks, there are two levels of policy: strategic and operational.

**Strategic policy** is high level policy that supports the vision and foundation of BC Parks. It guides management planning at a province-wide scale. It is relatively static in that it reflects long-term management direction.

**Operational policy** guides the day-to-day operations of protected areas.

**Principles** are fundamental assumptions or precepts that provide the basis of reasoning or action. They normally reflect ideals that are implemented through objectives, policies, procedures, and guidelines.

**Protected Areas** are established under the *Environment and Land Use Act* and generally have one or more activities that are not usually allowed in a park (e.g., industrial road, pipeline, transmission line, communication site). Allowable activities are determined by specific provisions when the area is established as well as relevant sections of the *Park Act* and regulations.

**Protected area**, for the purposes of this policy manual, refers to any Class A park, Class B park, Class C park, conservancy or recreation area, established under the *Park Act* or the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*, or a Protected Area established under the *Environment and Land Use Act*.

**Parks** are areas of Crown land established or continued as a park under the *Park Act* or the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*. There are three classes of provincial parks:

- **Class A parks** are Crown land dedicated to the preservation of the natural environment for inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public. Activities such as grazing, hay cutting and other uses (except commercial logging, mining or hydro electric development) that existed at the time the park was established may be allowed to continue;
- **Class B parks** differ from Class A parks in that a Class B park may permit a broader range of activities and uses provided that such uses are not detrimental to the recreational values of the park; and
- **Class C parks** differ from Class A parks in that a Class C park must be managed by a local board. They are generally small and often close to urban areas. Commercial logging, mining or hydroelectric development is prohibited.

**Purpose Statement and Zoning Plan** is a term for a former type of management plan that provided a high-level overview of protected area values and their significance, identified key management issues and responses and established a zoning plan. Public input did not occur.

**Recreation areas** are set aside for public recreational use. All current recreation areas are being evaluated to determine if they should become fully protected or returned to integrated resource management lands.

**Zoning framework** is used to assist in the planning and management of a protected area by dividing it into logical units based on consistent management objectives. The zones reflect the intended land use, existing patterns of use, the degree of human use desired, and the level of management and development required. Zoning is a mandatory requirement for all protected areas except ecological reserves.