

BC Parks – Planning

Where are we with the plan?

The last Kakwa newsletter, a short update to let everyone know what was happening during the period of government change, was sent out in 2002. Since that time, staff have continued to be affected by other work priorities, and the previous Kakwa Planner, Mike Murtha, left Prince George in July 2002 to work for Parks Canada. These factors impacted work on the draft Kakwa plan that had been targeted for distribution in the late summer of 2002. Despite these set backs, work has proceeded on the draft plan and it is now scheduled for release on the internet prior to the end of May 2004. Following that, there will be a review period for public comment, after which the plan will be finalized. This newsletter provides a summary of the draft plan.

Provincial parks are now managed as part of the Environmental Stewardship Division of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection (MWLAP), with Kakwa Park falling under the Omineca Region of the new Division. Gail Ross is now responsible for all parks and protected areas planning.

The Draft Management Plan and an electronic version of the Comment Sheet are available at:
<http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/planning/mgmtplns/kakwa/kakwa.htm>

Vision and plan highlights

Kakwa is seen as part of an important heritage of Canadian mountain parks, which together form the largest protected area in southern Canada with ecosystems and natural processes remaining intact. The park will be managed to protect endangered or threatened species, and MWLAP staff will work cooperatively with government agencies in both BC and Alberta to achieve shared objectives for this trans-border parkland. Ecological integrity and wilderness preservation will be the highest priorities

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in Kakwa Park, and these will be reflected in its predominant Wilderness Zoning.

Continuance of the current level of low impact backcountry recreation will be permitted, and this will be managed using precautionary principles so that risks to conservation values may be minimized. New or improved access will be avoided.

The planning process

The strategic management plan will guide park management over the next ten years, and at the same time it will look fifty years ahead. Under direction provided by the Park Act and ensuing Regulations, the plan sets out objectives and strategies for conservation, development, recreation, interpretation and operation of the park. The strategic plan provides both long-term direction and deals with immediate issues.

Much of the information on natural values, cultural activities and recreation uses used to prepare this plan can be found in the Background Report that was prepared in October 2001. This is available on

the management plan website listed on the last page, along with other pertinent information including past newsletters and a summary of public input. As well, MWLAP consulted with First Nations, other government agencies, public interest groups and the general public. It drew on guidelines and recommendations of the Prince George and Dawson Creek Land and Resource Management Plans (LRMPs) with regard to both the park and surrounding lands, and the Robson Valley LRMP with regard to adjacent lands.

Public input was an important factor in creating the draft plan following completion of the background report, and was achieved through:

- ⌘ a mail out of information to 170 recipients;
- ⌘ open houses in Grande Prairie, Prince George, and McBride with 60, 150 and 5 people attending respectively;
- ⌘ a web page cited above containing links to the background report and newsletters which received over 800 hits, and
- ⌘ feedback received both in person and by 140 written questionnaires and submissions.

An overwhelming majority of people providing input to this process indicated that they wished to see Kakwa continue to be managed for its wilderness qualities. The top priority for the plan, therefore, will be to ensure its ecological integrity and to manage it in the context of surrounding lands in both BC and Alberta.

Relationship with other land use planning

The Prince George LRMP recommended that:

- ⌘ the Wishaw quartzite quarry and associated access should continue and be recognized in the zoning of the park, and that if the tenure should expire, opportunities for re-staking and new tenure(s) should continue in the current tenure area;
- ⌘ trapping and commercial guiding should continue as selected permitted uses, and
- ⌘ other recreational uses should be deferred to the park planning process.

The Dawson Creek LRMP recommended that:

- ⌘ the plan be coordinated with Alberta Parks;
- ⌘ snowmobiling should be allowed within designated areas; and
- ⌘ trapping should be considered an acceptable use.

Management issues

Of several management issues discussed in the draft plan, two stand out.

1. Protecting ecological values with respect to the area's international significance and at-risk species found in the park requires collaboration with other resource agencies in BC and Alberta. This will mean ensuring appropriate types, levels and areas of recreational use that will not compromise the area's ecological integrity.
2. Ensuring that the outstanding opportunities for backcountry recreation in a spectacular wilderness setting are maintained. In particular, this will require careful planning and monitoring of motorized and mechanized recreation.

Kakwa as a protected area

The big picture

Kakwa is the most northerly of the protected areas that make up a continuous chain of parks stretching 600 kilometers to the south along the Rocky Mountains. In Alberta, Kakwa Wildland Provincial Park and Willmore Wilderness Provincial Park connect with BC's Kakwa Provincial Park. In BC, Wapiti and Monkman Parks lie a short distance to the northwest, and Wells Gray, Cariboo Mountains, Bowron Lakes, and West Twin Parks lie southwest across the Rocky Mountain Trench.

Significance and conservation role

There are a number of factors contributing to Kakwa's significance in the protected area system:

- ∥ the only park in BC that includes the Front Ranges ecosection. Fully 43% of the Front Ranges ecosection lies within the park, and 52% of Kakwa Park is made up of this ecosection. The remainder of the park contains the highest elevation and relief and the greatest vegetation diversity in the Southern Hart Ranges ecosection.
- ∥ significant fossil fish sites.
- ∥ habitat and migration paths for several endangered, at risk, and vulnerable species, including mountain and northern caribou, grizzly bears and the northernmost population of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep.
- ∥ key contiguity with other large wilderness parks in BC and Alberta – part of the largest protected and unroaded wilderness in southern Canada.
- ∥ spectacular and contrasting scenery straddling both sides of the Continental Divide.
- ∥ open ridges and meadows of the Front Ranges providing an outstanding mix of backcountry hiking possibilities similar to Jasper and Banff National Parks.
- ∥ the terrain and climate of the Front Ranges combined with a seasonal absence of large mammals, except for mountain goats and California bighorn sheep, make Kakwa attractive for snowmobiling.

Park zoning

A range of zones is recognized in the planning and management of parks and protected areas, from an Intensive Recreation Zone at one end of the spectrum to a Wilderness Conservation Zone at the other. Because of the emphasis on wilderness conservation in Kakwa, the most protective category of zones appropriate to each part of the park has been used. The zones proposed for Kakwa are laid out in the draft management plan.

When the province wide (with extensive public input) Wilderness Advisory Committee recommended the establishment of Kakwa Recreation Area, they also made some zoning recommendations which have been incorporated into the present day plan.

Zoning must be harmonized with contiguous parks in Alberta, and zones adjacent to other boundaries of the park will reflect and convey the park's significance to managers of adjacent resource lands both in BC and Alberta. The Prince George, Dawson Creek and Robson Valley LRMPs all speak to this need.

Because of the seasonal variations in the movement of wildlife referred to above and the park's ability to absorb human visitors, temporal as well as spatial zoning has been used. For the summer season from the beginning of May until the end of October, the vast majority of the park is zoned as either 'Wilderness Conservation' or 'Wilderness Recreation' with the main objective of promoting a remote, undisturbed natural landscape that provides a refuge for wildlife and a benchmark for natural processes. A 'Wilderness Recreation' zone is used in areas where hunting and aircraft access are allowed. 'Natural Environment' zoning is used for the immediate vicinity of the Kakwa and Jarvis Lake cabins.

From the beginning of November to the end of April, the 'Natural Environment.' Zone identifies areas where snowmobiling is a well-established and will be permitted to continue. The rest of the park will remain 'Wilderness Conservation' or "Wilderness Recreation' during the winter months.

The fossil sites will not receive a 'Special Feature' zone at this time, since that would make its location known.

While the Wishaw quarry and its access road are 'nonconforming' with the above zoning, that zoning will not impede the legal right of the owner to continue with quarry operations.

Land uses, tenures & interests

Access management

Surface access to Kakwa Park has traditionally been difficult, and even today access close to the park boundary requires driving long distances over rough roads. Yet it is precisely because of its remote setting, rugged terrain, and difficulty of access that the wilderness qualities and ecology of Kakwa are intact today.

Surface access has also been the source of many of the issues faced by interim managers of Kakwa. The area was closed to off-road vehicles in the early 1990's after efforts to confine their use to designated trails met with only limited success. In BC, a gate was placed at Bastille Creek on the Walker Creek Forest Service Road in the late 1990's to prevent unauthorized vehicle access along the Wishaw Quarry Road. The gate was later moved to the park boundary at Buchanan Creek after an extensive public debate and inquiry, which itself highlighted the level of local interest in Kakwa. Later, the section of road between Bastille and Buchanan Creeks suffered washouts during the heavy rains of July 2001, making access more difficult. Today, it is a long, but scenic 29-kilometer walk from Bastille Creek to Buchanan Creek over McGregor Pass to Kakwa Lake, with random camping opportunities along the way. In order to maintain the wilderness character of Kakwa, road access will continue to be prohibited into the park, except for quarry access by the tenure holder, and access for park management to Kakwa Lake only.

There is a long tradition of accessing Kakwa by air, and this will continue with restrictions. Floatplane access will be permitted at Kakwa and Jarvis Lakes. Private floatplane access will be monitored, and if the level of use becomes a concern, access limits may be considered. A Park Use Permit is required for commercial floatplanes operating into Kakwa and Jarvis Lakes, as well as for all helicopter landings in the park. Low levels of helicopter use will continue for park management purposes including wildlife surveys, park research, ferrying

equipment and supplies, and of course, for rescue purposes.

Tenures and encumbrances

Commercial tenures in Kakwa Park are authorized by Park Use Permits and include outfitting and guiding hunters, llama-assisted hiking, guiding mountaineering, commercial air access, trapping, and quartzite quarrying. In light of public input provided to the planning process and the emphasis on ecological integrity, LRMP recommendations concerning quarrying and trapping tenures may be reconsidered when the LRMPs are reviewed.

There are several strategies proposed in the draft plan concerning tenures that aim to ensure that the wilderness character and ecological integrity of the park is maintained.

- ⚡ existing tenures for guided hunting, llama-assisted hiking and horse-packing trips will continue to be recognized with the proviso that appropriate limits will be placed on the operations, and public access will not be impeded to areas used by these operations. Llama-assisted guided hiking will be limited to the current area used around Kakwa Lake, La Glace Lake and Mount Ruth in order to ensure that there is no overlap with Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep ranges and minimize the possibility of disease transmittal to the sheep.
- ⚡ new commercial applications will be accepted for aircraft drop-off and pickup at Kakwa Lake, for guided mountaineering, and for guided hiking/backpacking. One tenure will be available for each activity.
- ⚡ commercial guiding tenures will not be allowed for other activities, especially those introducing more motorized uses such as snowmobiling, jet boating, and helicopter use.
- ⚡ existing publicly owned cabins will remain available for public use, but there will be no new tenures authorized for permanent structures for use by commercial businesses,

clubs or other organizations. This strategy prohibits mountaineering, hunting, skiing and snowmobiling huts or cabins from being built inside the park.

Commitments to the two non-conforming uses of the park, namely trapping and the Wishaw Quarry, will be honoured.

- ⌘ Park Use Permits will continue to be issued for the three registered traplines that partly overlap the park, although efforts will be made to acquire traplines where an owner is willing to sell. The first priority will be to acquire traplines in the “No Hunting Area” so that the integrity of the wildlife sanctuary can be achieved. Since snowmobiles will continue to be permitted for trapping purposes, the next priority will be in the northern part of the park that is closed to recreational snowmobiling so that the zone can be managed as a completely wild area.
- ⌘ while honouring commitments to the owner of the quartzite claims, a long-term park objective is to eliminate all quarrying activities within the park. To that end, efforts will be made to acquire the claims when they become available and, as the seller is willing.

Adjacent patterns of land use

The primary objectives for Kakwa Park are ecological integrity and wilderness conservation. These are partly dependent on the management of adjoining lands and parks in BC and Alberta, and the reverse is also true as developments within Kakwa Park will affect neighbouring lands. An important piece of the management plan is therefore to work cooperatively with agencies that manage these adjacent lands.

First Nations

Kakwa Park lies within the traditional territories of both the L’heidli T’enneh and Treaty 8 First Nations. As well, members of the Cree and Metis communities from the south Peace area have a history of association with the park. An objective of the plan is to respect treaty and aboriginal rights by honouring legal obligations and participating in negotiations and discussions regarding shared interests and possible working relationships within the park.

Natural heritage values

Geology, soils and landforms

These and the other natural values covered below are discussed at length in the background report.

The draft management plan sets out objectives and strategies to ensure that all park activities contribute to maintaining the integrity of the geological, soil and landform features that are important to the regional ecosystem.

- ⌘ the fish fossil sites will be protected. Their location will not be publicized either by special zoning or other means, and only accredited scientists will be permitted to undertake research. The public will be kept informed through published information and displays at suitable locations such as visitor centres, museums and park offices.
- ⌘ non-destructive research will be permitted within the park by geologists to increase local and regional knowledge.
- ⌘ recreational trails and other facilities will be managed in consideration of sensitive soils, especially in wet locations such as valley bottoms. Restoration work will be undertaken where damage has already occurred.
- ⌘ decommissioning, deactivation, and restoration of the Wishaw quartzite quarry and access road are long term objectives following a possible future acquisition of all claims.

Water

Five large, pristine subalpine lakes, Kakwa, Jarvis, Cecilia, Dimsdale, and Babette are prominent features of Kakwa Park. As well, Kakwa's many creeks and rivers drain north to the Arctic and West to the Pacific from the Continental Divide that passes through the park.

The objective of the management plan is to protect the purity of all waters originating in the park. In particular, water quality will be monitored in the vicinity of horse corrals, the llama base camp, the Wishaw quarry, and areas where snowmobiles park and refuel. These activities, as well as the location of designated campsites, will be located in order to avoid contamination of creeks and lakes. Periodic monitoring will be a permit condition for commercial activities using horses and llamas.

Ecosystem values

Ensuring the maintenance of localized ecosystem values in context with both the regional ecosystem as well as the park's unique contributions to the provincial protected area system will guide all levels of park management.

- ⚡ the standard BC Parks Impact Assessment Process will be applied to all actions to ensure that potential impacts on the park's ecological integrity and regional ecosystems are primary considerations.
- ⚡ trans-boundary movement of rivers, wildlife and human visitors as well as shared resources such as wildlife habitat will be planned and managed for.
- ⚡ work with the province of Alberta to develop an inter-provincial park agreement between Kakwa Provincial Park, Kakwa Wildlands and Wilmore Wilderness.
- ⚡ Kakwa Park will be nominated as an addition to the Rocky Mountains World heritage Site.

Research

An important plan objective is to initiate and support appropriate research to improve knowledge of Kakwa Park, especially through wildlife and other environmental inventories, and conservation research.

Vegetation

As with soils and geology, key objectives of the plan are to minimize impacts by all human activities to the park's special vegetation features, and to take action to repair damage already done.

- ⚡ park staff will work with the snowmobile community to find alternative fuel sources for winter heating at the cabins at Kakwa and Jarvis Lakes, as firewood or fuel will no longer be available inside the park. Options include use of propane for heating and firewood brought in from outside the park.
- ⚡ the snowmobile community will be invited to help monitor vegetation plots in heavily used snowmobile areas, and will participate in prescribing corrective action if adverse effects are found.
- ⚡ re-growth of vegetation along the old tote road beside Kakwa Lake will be allowed. If winter users want to continue snowmobile trail grooming, they will have to participate in the brushing of the tote road to BC Parks standards.
- ⚡ horse trails will be located to minimize impacts on vegetation, and a horse grazing assessment will be undertaken to protect meadows and avoid introduced species. Electric fences and/or tethering will not be permitted.
- ⚡ other strategies outlined in the plan are to work with managers of surrounding lands with regard to fire and insect populations and re-establishment of native species. Restoring native vegetation in the Wishaw quarry is a long term objective.

Wildlife

Conservation of natural numbers and diversity of fish and wildlife is a main goal of the management plan. Wildlife surveys together with updates to maps and inventories will be carried out as resources allow. Emphasis will be on monitoring, protecting and if necessary restoring critical habitats. In the long term, a desirable park strategy is to phase out trapping, as it is a commercial, non-recreational removal of park resources.

Another key objective of the plan is to ensure that recreational and commercial use of the park does not negatively impact fish, wildlife, and their habitats. To that end, an important plan strategy relates to minimizing conflicts between people and grizzly bears. The grizzly habitat assessment work done around Kakwa Lake will be used to locate recreational facilities in order to minimize conflict. An adaptive management approach will be used by periodically monitoring the effectiveness of the plan and making changes as necessary. In addition, since the McGregor valley is an important movement corridor for bears and other wildlife, the only development allowed there is the access road/trail. Also, part of the rationale behind not allowing any new cabins or huts to be constructed is to lessen concentration of park use and resulting bear conflicts.

Areas north of Jarvis Creek and Kakwa River will be managed as an undeveloped wild area with undisturbed wildlife habitat. Snowmobiling is excluded from this area because of its importance as winter habitat, especially for sheep, goats and moose. In other parts of the park that are currently open to snowmobiling, goat populations will be monitored cooperatively with the snowmobiling community to determine whether there are any impacts from the sport and to take corrective action as needed.

Resident and guided hunting will continue to be permitted in the park, except in the "No Hunting Area". Regulations may be adjusted to sustain populations, and will be coordinated with hunting regulations outside the park in both BC and Alberta

to take account of larger regional ecosystems. The "No Hunting" area will be managed as a wildlife sanctuary. The management of Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep on a Limited Entry Hunt basis will be investigated as way of stabilizing and conservatively managing harvest levels of this most northerly population.

Summer recreational fishing of lakes and streams will continue in accordance with provincial regulations, while ice fishing will remain closed and no more fish stocking will be allowed.

Cultural heritage values

To date, no archeological work has been done in Kakwa Park. A plan objective is to acquire cultural information in order to help protect existing cultural resources. Strategies that may be followed are to work with First Nations to obtain traditional knowledge, undertake archeological investigations, and to collect historical information of the area.

Recreation opportunities

The management of recreation opportunities is largely what the Kakwa Park management plan is all about. This park is one of the few areas remaining that offers a truly primitive, multi-day wilderness experience in a reasonably compact area. A primary plan objective is to allow for the current level of visitor access to the park while avoiding the development of new or improved access.

Snowmobiling

Snowmobiling will be permitted within areas zoned for this activity as detailed on the next page of this Newsletter. The snowmobiling season will be six months long from the beginning of November to the end of April (middle of April in Sheep Pass area) each year. Outside of this timeframe, wildlife concerns will take precedence as animals move back into the snowmobiling areas. During the snowmobiling season, there will be ongoing and

cooperative monitoring for impacts. Areas north of Jarvis Creek and Kakwa River, areas west of Edgegrain valley, and Intersection Mountain and areas along the Alberta boundary are closed to protect wildlife and habitat. Snowmobile campers will be restricted to the cabins at Kakwa and Jarvis Lakes, and the standard 14-day limit will apply.

Hunting

Kakwa and Cecilia watersheds are closed to hunting, as they are the main areas used for general recreation. Beyond that, hunting is a traditional use of the area, especially for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep in the northeast. Recreational use of Jarvis Lakes and Sheep Pass will be monitored to assess the implications of hunting to other users.

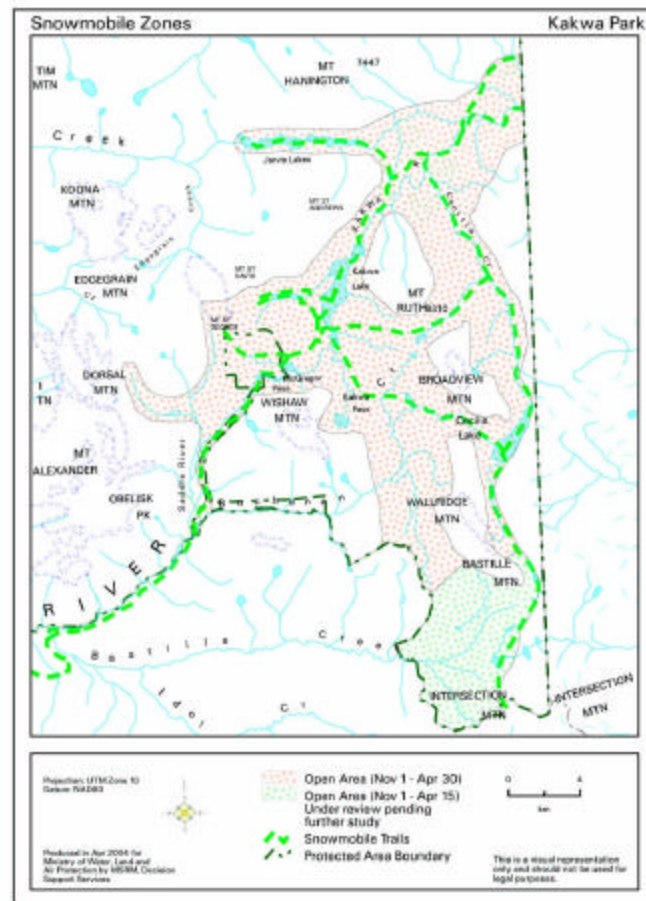
Horse use

The park provides good opportunities for horseback riding and packing trips, and many of the trails in the area were originally developed for that purpose. A grazing assessment will be completed to determine carrying capacity and any limits will be applied first to commercial operators and then to the public. No electric fencing or tethering will be permitted in the park.

Hiking, camping, caving, skiing, fishing, mountain biking

Trails will remain rustic throughout the park, and will be maintained or repaired only when it is necessary to prevent erosion and protect the park environment. The area north of Jarvis Creek and Kakwa River will emphasize undisturbed wildlife habitat.

Llama assisted hiking will be permitted in current use areas only. Mountain bikes will be allowed on the quarry road and old tote road from Buchanan Creek via Kakwa Lake. Some facilities may be allowed on the periphery of the park, but permanent structures will be discouraged in the McGregor Valley between Bastille and Buchanan Creeks because of the valley's importance as a wildlife movement corridor.



Other

ATV's will not be permitted in the park at any time, except for park management purposes along designated roads. Motorized boats will not be permitted in the park, except for the boat kept at Kakwa Lake, again for management purposes. Heliskiing and helihiking will not be authorized in the park.

The public cabins at Kakwa and Jarvis Lakes will be available for public use when not required for park management purposes. Commercial use of these cabins will not be permitted. There will be no commercial recreation services permitted in the northern part of the park apart from registered hunting guides.

An overnight user fee will be examined.

Tourism

Kakwa has a large potential for a wide range of high quality commercial wilderness recreation opportunities. That being said, the focus of the management plan will be on low key commercial recreation that enhances visitor enjoyment of the park without compromising the area's wilderness values or the use and enjoyment by the public.

- ⚡ one commercial opportunity will be available for each activity that is compatible with the park's wilderness nature such as hiking, climbing, horse and llama packing; and mountaineering.
- ⚡ commercial use will be similar to that of the public, with no private cabins or season-long base camps.

Management services

The *Park Act* and the *Park and Recreation Area Regulations* together with MWLAP policies and procedures and overall government policy and regulations guide the management of Kakwa Provincial Park. The main management objective is to maintain the park as a wilderness area, and to that end coordination with managers of surrounding lands both in BC and Alberta will be important.

- ⚡ management activities will parallel as far as possible public use of the park;
- ⚡ use of wheeled and motorized vehicles will be limited in the park as discussed earlier in the newsletter;
- ⚡ park headquarters cabins at Kakwa Lake will be retained, and while no new building will be added, appropriate replacements of existing buildings in cooperation with user groups is acceptable;

- ⚡ a World Heritage Site nomination will be developed;
- ⚡ an Inter-provincial Park will be proposed between Alberta and B.C.;
- ⚡ a name change to Kakwa Wilderness Provincial Park will be proposed; and
- ⚡ the precautionary principle and adaptive management will be used.

Visitor information

Visitor communication is an important piece of park management, and in the case of Kakwa the main thrust will be to communicate the park's wilderness character and the need for self-sufficiency. Maps and other information will be displayed at the Kakwa and Jarvis Lake cabins. Off-site information will be available at visitor centres, park offices and BC Park's website.

Looking ahead

The major task now is to complete the draft of the management plan for public review. Each name on our mailing list will receive this Newsletter Summary which will also include the BC Parks website where the full draft plan will be posted. Comments will be welcomed for six weeks (by email and mail) after the plan is posted on the website. Final revisions will then be made, and the plan will be forwarded to Victoria for Ministerial approval.

Implementation of most of the strategies in the plan will be operational in nature. Some strategies may require more detailed planning, and MWLAP will ensure that other government agencies, the public and other stakeholders will be consulted where appropriate to do so. Actual implementation of the plan will depend on availability of staff and resources, and other regional priorities within MWLAP.

We thank you for your interest in Kakwa Park and look forward to your continued involvement as we finalize the plan. You can contact us at any time as indicated below.

Please complete the comment sheet and send by mail or fax (an electronic version is also available on the site listed below) by **AUGUST 31st, 2004** to:

By fax or email

Email: OminecaPlanning@gems4.gov.bc.ca

Fax: (250) 565-6940

By mail

Kakwa Management Plan
Planning Section Head,
Environmental Stewardship Division
4051 – 18th Avenue
Prince George, BC, V2N 1B3

***Management Plan and Comment Sheet
website address***

<http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/planning/mgmtplns/kakwa/kakwa.htm>

A further update will be provided in the Spring of 2005

