

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to Churn Creek Protected Area

Churn Creek Protected Area was established in July 1995 as a result of the protected area recommendations contained in the Cariboo-Chilcotin Land Use Plan (CCLUP), and was among 16 other park and protected area designations in the Cariboo-Chilcotin. Although the Churn Creek Protected Area was established to protect its ecological values, a commitment was made that activities such as recreation, cattle grazing, hunting, trapping and backcountry tourism should continue to take place.

The *Environment and Land Use Act* and the *Park Act* and *Park Act and Recreation Area Regulations* provide the legal framework for the management of the Protected Area. The *Environment and Land Use Act*, by which this protected area was established, was created to accommodate the range of activities that were committed to in the CCLUP (specifically the Empire Valley Ranch and the Industrial Corridor), but not permitted under the *Park Act*.

1.2 The Management Planning Process

This management plan is prepared by BC Parks as a document to guide Protected Area management over a ten year term. Under the direction provided by the *Environment and Land Use Act* and the *Park and Recreation Area Regulations*, the management plan sets out objectives and strategies for conservation, development, interpretation and operation of the Protected Area. The management plan relies on information relating to such things as natural resources, cultural activities, and recreation uses in addition to activities occurring on surrounding lands. The process for preparing the plan involved analysis of the overall goals of the Protected Area, patterns of use, management objectives, and possible sources of conflict among Protected Area policies.

The management plan not only establishes long-term management direction for the Protected Area, but also deals with immediate issues. This means that the plan contains numerous statements describing management actions to be undertaken. Since BC Parks cannot carry out every task at the same time, the plan also sets out a schedule for implementation.

Map One:
Churn Creek Protected Area
Place Names
Located in Appendix M: Map Folio

BC Parks endeavors to prepare management plans with a high degree of public involvement. In the case of the Churn Creek Protected Area, two main groups provided direction on the creation of the plan - the Steering Committee and the Local Advisory Group. In addition, the Pitt Report, which is discussed below, also provided direction on long term management of the Protected Area and the design of the management planning process.

1.2.1 The Pitt Report

Following its purchase of the Empire Valley Ranch in the spring of 1998, government appointed Dr. Michael Pitt as an advisor on range resource management. Dr. Pitt, a professional agrologist and professor of range management/grassland ecology at the University of British Columbia, was asked to prepare a report with recommendations on range management in the Churn Creek Protected Area. Specifically, Dr. Pitt was asked to make recommendations on:

- 1) grazing regime options that balance grasslands conservation with long-term utilization of the grazing resources;
- 2) an allocation process for range opportunities in the Churn Creek Protected Area; and,
- 3) an interim range resources management strategy.

Dr. Pitt was also asked to consult with provincial and regional stakeholders and identify range related issues/concerns and suggestions on how they could be incorporated into the management plan for the CCPA.

The report contains several recommendations on how the planning process should be structured. Dr. Pitt says:

“I recommend that a Management Team consisting of a Steering Committee and a Local Advisory Group should develop the Management Plan for the CCPA ... The Steering Committee would include the District Manager of BC Parks (or delegate), the Ministry of Forests (to assess and administer grazing management) and a representative of the Esketemc First Nation and Canoe Creek Band, respectively.” (page 30, Pitt Report)

“Within this structure, the Steering Committee assumes primary responsibility for ensuring development of the Management Plan. The Local Advisory Group must be engaged and involved in this process in a meaningful way.” (p 31)

“The Steering Committee should submit its recommended Management Plan for final approval to BC Parks, which retains ultimate responsibility because of the statutory responsibility for Provincial heritage and conservation values at the CCPA. Any required changes proposed by BC Parks to the recommended Management Plan should be reviewed and justified with the Steering Committee and the Local Advisory Group.” (p 31)

A full copy of the Pitt Report is available from BC Parks.

1.2.2 Steering Committee

Following recommendations of the Pitt Report, the Steering Committee was formed in the fall of 1998 and had its first meeting in September. The Steering Committee consisted of Steve Mazur, the District Manager from BC Parks; Larry Camille, Chief of the Canoe Creek Band; Bill Chelsea, Chief from the Esketmec First Nation; and Ross Fredell, Range Resource Officer from the Ministry of Forests in Williams Lake. The Steering Committee met monthly to organize the planning process and provide planning staff with overall direction. In addition to assuming primary responsibility for the development of the Management Plan, the Steering Committee also assessed the criteria for long-term commercial opportunities and adjudicated proposals, addressed operational issues that arose at Churn Creek, and reviewed information provided to the Local Advisory Group.

1.2.3 Local Advisory Group

In the fall of 1998 approximately 100 people were sent a letter asking them to participate in a Local Advisory Group (LAG) to help in the development of a management plan for the Churn Creek Protected Area. These 100 people represented a broad cross section of interests and perspectives. As the process continued, an additional 80 people requested to be placed on the mailing list and to attend the LAG meetings.

The LAG met for the first time in December 1998 to discuss the planning process. At this December meeting, the LAG identified a number of key issues to be addressed in the plan. The issues included:

1. Ranch and Water Management
2. Grasslands Restoration and Wildlife
3. Recreation and Access
4. Cultural Heritage

The LAG agreed to meet again in January, March, May, July and September to discuss options to resolve these specific issues.

The main tool used by the LAG was an “options package.” In the months prior to a LAG meeting, BC Parks planning staff met with stakeholders, First Nations and technical resource people to determine the range of possible options that would “solve” an issue. For example, prior to the January meeting on Ranch and Water Management, staff met with ranchers, water managers, engineers, agricultural experts and First Nations. Together, eight options for ranch management and five options for water systems were identified.

Background information, maps and the pros and cons of each management option were put together in an “options package” and sent to members of the LAG two weeks prior to the LAG meetings.

At the LAG meetings (attended by an average of 35-65 people), background information was presented and each “option” was reviewed and discussed. Some options were discarded and others were substituted based on local knowledge and input from the group. At the end of the meeting, each option was placed on flipchart paper and posted on the wall. LAG members were given stickies and asked to place their stickie on their preferred option. The meetings ended with a discussion of the preferred options of the group. This formed the recommendations of the Local Advisory Group to the Steering Committee.

Definite choices of various options were tabulated for Ranch and Water Management and Recreation and Access, but this approach was considered inappropriate for Grasslands Management, Wildlife, Vegetation Management and Cultural Heritage. For these more technical issues, the LAG was given background presentations and then provided with suggested objectives and strategies, which were in turn discussed at the meetings.

Based on recommendations from the LAG, a first draft of the plan was written over the summer of 1999. BC Parks planning staff continued to meet with groups to clarify interests and fine tune the draft plan. The draft was distributed to the LAG by mail during the summer and discussed at a LAG meeting in September. At the September meeting the LAG decided a final meeting scheduled for later in the fall was not required – a final draft sent to them by mail was all that was necessary.

1.3 Relationship With Other Land Use Planning

1.3.1 Cariboo Chilcotin Land Use Plan

In 1995, the Cariboo-Chilcotin Land-Use Plan created 17 new parks and protected areas. The *CCLUP 90 Day Implementation Report* contains a significant amount of direction on the management of these new areas. Direction included:

- ◆ Dominant ecological values should be protected, and that uses such as recreation, cattle grazing (except Junction Sheep Range), hunting, trapping and backcountry tourism, will be allowed.
- ◆ Mining tenures fully within the boundaries will be extinguished. Fair compensation will be established through negotiation between the Provincial government and the affected tenure holders.
- ◆ Hunting and trapping will continue to be allowed.
- ◆ The park will be available, in principle and where appropriate, for commercial tourism and recreation. Development opportunities will be identified during area-specific management planning which will recognize the protection of the special natural values of each area and

the provision for public non-commercial recreation. In some circumstances, development opportunities may include “fixed roof” accommodation.

- ◆ Existing approved levels of cattle grazing will continue. The maximum level of animal unit months (AUMs) will be set at the existing level of authorized AUMs as of October 24, 1994.
- ◆ Existing approved levels of cattle grazing will continue in all protected areas. Opportunities for enhancing grazing for expressed management purposes may be addressed in subsequent management plans, which would be developed in consultation with affected operators.
- ◆ No private land will be included within protected areas unless the government negotiates a mutually-agreed purchase. Existing landowner use, development and access rights will be unaffected by protected areas.

In addition to this general direction, the *CCLUP 90 Day Implementation Report* contains specific direction on the Churn Creek Protected Area. This includes:

“There will be a continuance of access and provision for utility corridor(s) (infrastructure necessary for mine development) along the existing roads, including any future upgrading as may be required for resource development, through the Churn Creek Protected Area ... for all resource and non-resource users. It is necessary that any subsequent Order-In-Council establishing this protected area and any subsequent protected area management plan must reflect this commitment.”

(90 Day Implementation Report, page 36)

“All existing uses will continue in the Churn Creek Protected Area. This includes placer tenures on Churn Creek, but not other mineral tenures that may occur **within** the revised boundaries.” *(90 Day Implementation Report, page 36)*

“Access to both ranching lands and the Churn Creek placer tenures within this protected area will continue.” *(90 Day Implementation Report, page 36)*

“If a federal park is proposed, the Province will insist that it would not extend north of Churn Creek.” *(90 Day Implementation Report, page 37)*

“Churn Creek Protected Area contains a number of pre-existing placer tenures along Churn Creek which, as part of the cross-sectoral accord in the development of the Land-Use Plan, will retain present rights of access, use and development.”

(90 Day Implementation Report, page 34)

“For Churn Creek and Homathko River-Tatlayoko Protected Areas, the Land Use Plan specifies provision for access and utility corridors for resource and non-resource users. The maintenance of existing access corridors is not without precedent, although it does challenge traditional management under the two statutes noted above [*BC Park Act* and the *Ecological Reserves Act*]. The commitment for future

development of access corridors, which is guaranteed by the Plan, would be a management challenge under those statutes.”

(90 Day Implementation Report, page 34)

1.3.2 South Chilcotin Subregional Plan

In addition to the CCLUP, the other significant planning process that may affect the Churn Creek Protected Area is the South Chilcotin Subregional Plan (SCSRP). The SCSRП was initiated in 1996 to implement the CCLUP targets for the South Chilcotin Special Resource Development Zone, located adjacent to the Protected Area. The SCSRП process replaced the Churn Creek and Hungry Valley Local Resource Use Plans, which had been underway since the early 1990s.

The SCSRП, which was completed in the spring of 1999, contains a significant amount of direction on timber harvesting, access management, and recreation management. The Churn Creek Protected Area Management Plan is consistent with the SCSRП.

1.4 Relationship with First Nations

Portions of the Churn Creek Protected Area have been identified in the asserted Traditional Territories of five First Nation bands: Canoe Creek, Alkali Lake, Whispering Pines, Stone and Toosey.

BC Parks has recognized the historic importance of the Churn Creek/Empire Valley area to First Nations by including First Nation representation on the Churn Creek Protected Area Steering Committee. The involvement of First Nations at the Steering Committee level is consistent with the “government to government” relationship between the Province and First Nations.

The role of the Steering Committee, as outlined in section 1.2.2, is to provide overall guidance and direction in the preparation of this Protected Area Management Plan. Upon completion and approval of this Management Plan, the Steering Committee will shift its role from providing direction on *developing* the Plan to providing direction on *implementing* the Plan.

First Nations will continue to participate in quarterly Steering Committee meetings to discuss implementation of the Management Plan where it relates to any aboriginal rights that First Nations may assert in the area as well as other interests of mutual concern.

This Protected Area Management Plan will not prejudice any Treaty Negotiations.

1.5 Relationship with Ministry of Forests

In order to manage cattle, the Ministry of Forests works closely with BC Parks. The following are a number of key points that define the relationship between BC Parks and the Ministry of Forests. They come from the *Protocol Agreement between Ministry of Forests and the Ministry of Environment, Lands, and Parks - BC Parks (September 1997)*.

- 1) Range Act agreements will continue to be administered and managed by the Ministry of Forests in accordance with the *Range Act* and the *Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act*.
- 2) Apart from *Range Act* Agreements, BC Parks has jurisdiction over all matters concerning the Protected Area.
- 3) Range Practices (seeding, grazing schedules, structures and other developments) must be approved in the Range Use Plan.
- 4) The Range Use Plan must be consistent with the Protected Area Management Plan.
- 5) Range Use Plans will be created by the Ministry of Forests or the Agreement holder and will be referred to BC Parks.
- 6) Ministry of Forests will carry out the required enforcement actions on *Range Act* Agreement Holders according to the *Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act* and associated legislation, policy and procedures.

BC Parks and the Ministry of Forests have agreed to an enhanced referral process for the Churn Creek Protected Area. This enhanced process includes:

- a) Ministry of Forests Range staff will include BC Parks staff in the development of the Range Use Plan and will work cooperatively determining any new range related infrastructure or developments in the Churn Creek Protected Area. BC Parks will consult with Wildlife Branch for technical information on wildlife habitat needs.
- b) Infrastructure developments will be discussed by the Steering Committee on a biannual basis.
- c) Ministry of Forests will provide BC Parks with a flow chart showing proposed annual AUM usage rotational goals with sufficient short-term flexibility to address contingencies.
- d) BC Parks will discuss any actions or developments that are likely to impact range quality with the Ministry of Forests.