

2.0 PROTECTED AREA VISION AND ROLES

2.1 Significance

The 36,747 hectare Churn Creek Protected Area contains grassland conservation values and cultural heritage values of both provincial and national significance.

The narrow band of valley-bottom grasslands that occur along the Fraser, Thompson and Chilcotin Rivers and in the Southern Okanagan are actually the continuation of a system of deserts and grasslands that occur on the dry east sides of mountain ranges all the way from California to British Columbia. The bunchgrass grasslands occurring at Churn Creek exist at the most northern extent of this large arid and semiarid area, making it one of a kind in Canada. The Protected Area encompasses a great diversity of near natural grasslands, and contains large areas of low, mid and high elevation grasslands with a variety of aspects as well as wetlands and forests. This is combined with an exemplary variety of landforms created by glacial and fluvial processes, erosion and mass movement.

The resulting open landscape of terraces, kettle lakes, hoodoos and gullies, together with the massive Fraser River Canyon is among the most scenic in the Province. This diversity is distinctive in the Province's protected area system, making Churn Creek the most significant grassland protected area west of the Rockies.

In addition to its grassland values, Churn Creek contains regionally significant wildlife populations. A mule deer herd of 2000-3000 uses a majority of the Protected Area and three distinct herds of California bighorn sheep (2 migratory and one resident herd) use the grasslands. Numerous red and blue listed species are also associated with the grasslands.

Culturally, Churn Creek is regionally significant as it has been occupied and used by groups of Secwepemc and Ts'ilqot'in Nations, who have developed a distinct riverine and grasslands adaptation to the land.

Recreationally, Churn Creek is regionally significant for its hunting, horseback riding, wildlife viewing and mountain biking opportunities. Its relatively close access to Williams Lake, 100 Mile House and Clinton make it a popular destination for hunters and horseback riders from the Lower Mainland, Okanagan and the Cariboo.

2.2 Context

Churn Creek represents 28,112 hectares of the Fraser Basin (FRB) ecosection, 8,251 hectares of the Chilcotin Plateau (CHP) ecosection and 384 hectares of the Central Chilcotin Range ecosection. Other protected areas in the FRB ecosection include the Big Creek Ecological

Reserve and Junction Sheep Range Park. Together these three areas protect 14% of this relatively small ecosection. Other protected areas in the CHP ecosection include Nazko Lake Park, Big Creek Park, Bull Canyon Park, Nunsti Park and Stum Lake/White Pelican Park. Together with Churn Creek, these areas protect 4.0% of the CHP ecosection.

Across British Columbia, Churn Creek is one of five large Protected Areas that focus specifically on the conservation of grasslands. Lac du Bois Park, located in the Thompson River Basin ecosection near Kamloops, protects 1,779 hectares of Lower and 5,019 hectares of Middle Grasslands; Junction Sheep Range Park in the Fraser Basin ecosection protects 1,312 hectares of Lower and 3,238 hectares of Middle Grasslands, Tunkwa Park in the Southern Thompson Uplands protects 4,845 hectares of Middle and Upper grasslands, and Edge Hills Park, located in the Pavillion Ranges ecosection represents another 1,468 hectares of Lower Grasslands. Churn Creek is the only area with significant areas of Upper, Middle and Lower Grasslands.

A number of smaller parks and ecological reserves also protect modest grassland areas. They include Kikomun, Elephant Hill, and Cornwall Provincial Parks, and Soap Lake, Hayne's Lease, Trout Creek, Tranquille and Big Creek Ecological Reserves. Small grassland areas are also captured residually in larger areas like Okanagan Lake Provincial Park and in smaller recreational focused areas in the southern Interior such as Sun-Oka, Juniper Beach, Steelhead, and Savona Provincial Parks.

Map Two:
***Regional Context of the
Churn Creek Protected Area***
Located in Appendix M: Map Folio

2.3 Vision Statement

The vision statement outlined below is intended to provide direction for the long term management of the Churn Creek Protected Area. The vision statement describes the condition of the Protected Area 50 years from now if the intent of the Management Plan is followed. *It is not meant to describe the current condition of the area.* The vision statement is used to provide context and guidance for managers to make decisions about stewardship, recreation and other activities in the Protected Area.

The prime role of the Churn Creek Protected Area is to conserve and restore nationally significant grasslands and wildlife populations while maintaining a viable, year-round working ranch. The fragile nature of the grasslands and wetlands and their importance for wildlife habitat are recognized in management. Protected Area management also reflects the historic importance of Churn Creek for First Nations, ranchers, hunters, miners, and recreational users. Traditional use of the area by First Nations continues.

The grasslands continue to recover in condition since management regimes changed in the early 1990s. Wetlands and riparian areas are healthy and function as they should. Forest encroachment into the grasslands has been controlled and natural processes such as fire have been reintroduced. The spread of noxious weeds has also been controlled and their populations are declining. Areas that were logged prior to the Protected Area being created are now young forest and old roads are growing over. Research and monitoring has increased our understanding and knowledge of grassland ecosystems and the wildlife that live in them.

Private land holders and placer miners are continuing to use their property as they desire and have rights to access and develop these lands subject to any relevant regulations. An Industrial Corridor passes through the middle of the Protected Area and provides access for mining, logging and other industrial users. The area continues to be managed consistent with the plan developed in 1999 unless that plan was changed through another public process.

Low impact recreation that does not detract from values of the Protected Area is allowed, but visitor numbers are managed to protect the natural ecological integrity of the area. Trails for horseback riders, hikers and mountain bikers have been established in less sensitive areas to limit the impact of people on grasslands and wildlife. Corridors for snowmobiles and a network of roads separate motorized from non-motorized recreation. The less-structured, day use nature of Churn Creek is still the focus of recreation, but a staging area or campsite is established to provide basic services for visitors. Commercial tourism facilities are located outside the Protected Area boundary.

Opportunities are provided for visitors to learn about First Nations culture; how ranching coexists with protected spaces; about the sensitivity and uniqueness of grassland ecosystems; and the history and culture of the area. First Nations, local

residents and organizations develop partnerships with BC Parks to help in the stewardship and management of the Protected Area.

2.4 Protected Area Strategy Roles

The vision statement (see 2.3 above) is based, in part, on the conservation and recreation contributions the Churn Creek Protected Area makes to the Province's *Protected Areas Strategy*. The roles for Churn Creek are described below and provide the general purpose of the Protected Area. Together with the vision statement, these roles help guide the management strategies and user activities in the Protected Area.

Roles of Churn Creek Protected Area

Conservation Role

- ◆ Churn Creek is representative of the dry vegetation found in the Bunchgrass grassland and Interior Douglas-fir environments of the Fraser Basin and Chilcotin Plateau Ecosections. It contains eight biogeoclimatic subzones and variants, including:

Biogeoclimatic Subzone or Variant	Total Amount in Province (ha)	Total Amount Protected in Province (ha)¹	Amount Protected in Churn Creek (hectares)	% of Provincial Total Protected in Churn Creek
BGxh3 variant,	26,859	7,514	4,475	60%
BGxh2 variant	75,068	2,956	8	<1%
BGxw2 variant	57,343	10,416	7,189	69%
Total Bunchgrass	291,781²	27,586³	11,672	42%
IDFxm subzone	245,568	16,677	16,275	98%
IDFdk3 variant	908,417	11,571	1,042	9%
IDFdk4 variant	393,778	8,662	5,535	64%
Total Interior Douglas-fir	4,245,415	175,346	22,852	13%
SBPSxc subzone,	1,024,581	33,776	1,643	5%
Total Sub Boreal Pine Spruce	2,136,093	200,462	1,643	<1%
MSxv subzone	824,597	60,755	480	<1%

¹ As of March 1, 2000

² Totals in this column include all of the BG, IDF, MS and SBPS subzones and variants, some of which are not present in Churn Creek.

³ Totals in this column include all of the BG, IDF, MS and SBPS subzones and variants, some of which are not present in Churn Creek.

Total Montane Spruce	2,641,176	188,638	480	<1%
Lake	2,111,175	279,086	99	<1%

- ◆ Numerous kettle lakes, wetlands, creeks, slump areas and other large riparian areas representative of grassland and the Interior Douglas-fir forest/grassland transition environment can be found in the Protected Area.
- ◆ Includes an elevational sequence of biogeoclimatic zones from Bunchgrass to Interior Douglas-Fir, to Sub-Boreal Pine Spruce and to Montane Spruce.
- ◆ Protects regionally significant habitat and populations of mule deer (spring, summer and winter habitat) and three distinct herds and lambing areas of California bighorn sheep (migratory and resident).
- ◆ Includes spectacular hoodoos and erosional features in the Churn Creek gorge and along the Fraser River that are representative of the Fraser River corridor.
- ◆ Contains numerous red and blue listed species (see Appendix A or Section 4.4 Fish and Wildlife for details).

Recreation Role

- ◆ The recreation role (public and commercial) of the Churn Creek Protected Area is focused on limited, low-impact opportunities in a grassland and forested setting, including hunting, wildlife viewing, horseback riding, hiking and mountain biking. A network of open roads provide motorized access for hunting and for people with limited abilities, while large non-motorized areas provide settings for hiking, horseback riding and backcountry camping in a natural setting. Condition of roads and lack of potable water limit backcountry opportunities.
- ◆ Agro-tourism (including cultural tourism) at the Empire Valley Ranch furnishes an opportunity for ranch-based tourism that is unique across the Protected Area system.

Cultural Heritage Role

- ◆ First Nations use includes past settlement of the area as well as a number of significant archaeological sites. First Nations continue to use the area to practice aboriginal rights such as hunting.
- ◆ The Churn Creek area provides the opportunity to appreciate several themes important to the history of British Columbia. Activities of Chinese miners, while not well understood, left a large impact on the area and provided infrastructure to the ranchers that followed. As well, the Empire Valley Ranch provides an excellent example of the settlement and development of a historic and still operating interior cattle ranching operation.