

MANAGEMENT PLAN

May 2001

for Koksilah River
Provincial Park



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Ministry of Water, Land
and Air Protection
Parks Division

Koksilah River
Provincial Park

MANAGEMENT
PLAN

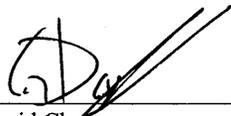
Prepared by
British Columbia Parks
South Vancouver Island District
Victoria, BC



Koksilah River
Provincial Park

MANAGEMENT
PLAN

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Don Webb, President, Koksilah Park Society
David Aldcroft, Cowichan Valley Natural History Society

Plan Highlights

Park Role Highlights

- Koksilah River Provincial Park will continue to provide a range of outdoor recreational experiences for visitors, while protecting the natural attributes of the river and its scenic surroundings.
- Where feasible, the park's boundaries will be extended to protect important natural and cultural values and to provide additional recreation opportunities. A rare pocket grassland meadow adjacent to the park will receive high priority for acquisition, either as an addition to the park or a separate ecological reserve. Existing areas within the park which do not meet park objectives will be reviewed and may be potentially available to exchange for ecologically significant lands adjacent to the park.
- It is proposed that vehicular access to the park should be modified so that through traffic will utilize Bear Creek Road, which is an existing privately owned bypass road. Renfrew Road, which runs through the park, could become gated at each end of the main section of the park to conserve the park's natural environment, and create a higher standard of safety and solitude for park visitors. If implemented, park visitors will enter and exit the park via an existing connector road between Renfrew Road and Bear Creek Road.

Natural and Cultural Values Highlights

- Work closely with Cowichan Tribes to ensure that First Nations cultural and spiritual values associated with Koksilah River Provincial Park are protected. BC Parks will encourage Cowichan Tribes to participate in the stewardship of the park.
- The park provides habitat for several endangered and vulnerable plant species and plant communities.
- The park has an attractive physical setting with high aesthetic values deserving of protection. Future management strategies will ensure that the park's sensitive ecosystem habitat and natural ambience will not be compromised.
- Park monitoring and public awareness initiatives will receive a high priority to discourage activities that degrade the natural environment. A park stewardship agreement with the Koksilah Park Society will be formalized.

Visitor Recreation Highlights

- Recreational experiences to be encouraged include nature appreciation, camping, hiking, picnicking, swimming and kayaking. Further facility development will be dependent upon the outcome of a *Recreation and Trail Plan* that will take into consideration visitor needs, environmental impact and the Vision Statement for the park. Cycling, horseback riding and fishing will continue to be permitted where appropriate. However, off-road vehicles and hunting are not appropriate activities in this park and are prohibited within the park boundaries.
- Proposed facility additions and upgrading are modest and include information signage, multi-use trails and picnic tables. Additional walk-in campsites may be added if the *Recreation and Trail Plan* supports this initiative.
- Scientific research and public education will be encouraged as they contribute to an understanding of the natural ecosystem and cultural features of the park.

Communications Highlights

- Communications will be used as a tool to instill a sense of stewardship toward the park and to strengthen partnerships with parties that have interests and goals that are compatible with those of BC Parks.
- Cooperation, collaboration and partnerships will play an increasingly important role in the cost-effective management of the park in the future. Interest groups, First Nations, other government agencies, owners of adjacent land and other stakeholders will be invited to involve themselves in the ongoing day-to-day operation of the park.



Plate 1: View of Koksilah River from Burnt Bridge

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Introduction

The Management Planning Process

A park *management plan* guides the management of a park for a five to ten year term. It sets out specific objectives and strategies for conservation, recreation, interpretation and operation of the park. A *management plan* relies on a diversity of information, including park values, recreation uses, and activities occurring on surrounding lands. This information is available from park managers, discussions with representatives of other government agencies, previously prepared reports, interest groups, study teams and the general public.

The process for preparing a *management plan* involves a rigorous discussion and analysis regarding the overall goals of the park, its patterns and intensity of use, management objectives and possible sources of conflict among park policies. In choosing the most appropriate management options, the intent is to reach an optimal balance between encouraging recreational uses and ensuring conservation of natural habitat, with conservation of ecosystems and special features being of primary importance.

Management plans deal with immediate issues, outline ongoing strategies and establish long-term direction for a park. Consequently, plans generally contain numerous statements describing management strategies that need varying degrees of attention. Since BC Parks cannot carry out every task at the same time, the plan must also determine priorities for management strategies. Approval of the *management plan* is not an indication that funding is available to implement management strategies. Standard funding procedures will apply during implementation of the plan.

BC Parks prepares *management plans* with a high degree of public involvement. The general public and interest groups have opportunities to provide comments through a variety of means, including public meetings, questionnaires and local study teams.

Each section of this *management plan* for Koksilah River Provincial Park provides a brief summary of relevant background information. The report is organized into six sections:

- 1) The purpose of the plan, highlighting key planning issues and providing a summary of background information on the park;
- 2) The role of the park and its Vision Statement, describing the importance of the park and critical goals and principles that establish a long-term foundation for managing the park, including protection of park values;
- 3) Park zoning, defining how different areas of the park will be managed;
- 4) Objectives and associated strategies for protecting and managing the park's natural and cultural values;
- 5) Strategies for providing the general public with points of access to the park, information about the park, outdoor recreation opportunities, and management services; and
- 6) Priorities for implementing the *management plan*.

Background Summary

Koksilah River Provincial Park is situated on four individual parcels of land along the Koksilah River. Lands were set aside as a protected area in 1945 and 1958, and provincial park designation was granted in 1959. The 210 hectare (518 acre) park is located in the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) several kilometres northwest of the West Arm of Shawnigan Lake, and about 20 kilometres south of the city of Duncan (Figure 1). Several small settlements, including Shawnigan Lake, Cobble Hill and Mill Bay, are situated to the east. The park attracts local and regional users who mainly reside in the CVRD and throughout southern Vancouver Island.

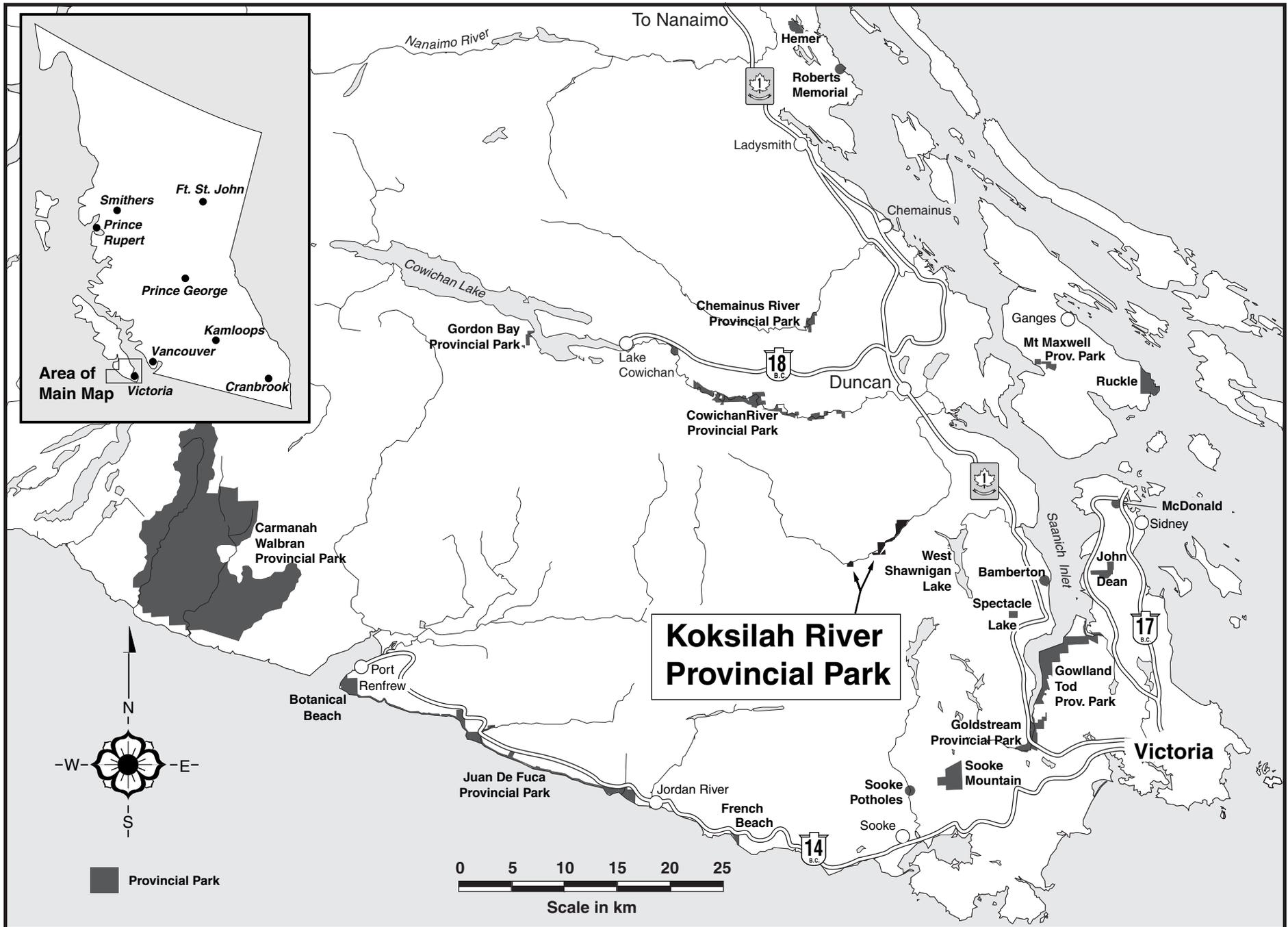
Koksilah River Provincial Park lies within Electoral Area B (Shawnigan Lake) of the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD). Centred around Shawnigan Lake, this Electoral Area has 24 community parks totaling approximately 77 hectares. The 1999 estimated population of Area B was 7,200 and is expected to increase by two percent annually. The CVRD is a major participant in the Trans Canada Trail initiative program and support the preservation of a significant amount of Crown lands within their district for both conservation and recreation purposes.

This Class “A” park is situated within the rainshadow of the Insular Mountain Range in the transition of the Nanaimo Lowland Ecosection and the Leeward Island Mountains Ecosection. To the north lie the mountainous uplands of the Koksilah Ridge, and to the south, east and northeast are Shawnigan Lake and the lowlands of the Cowichan Valley. Vancouver Island’s Insular Mountain Range lies to the west, and provides the water source for the river. The climate is characterized by warm, dry summers and mild, wet winters.

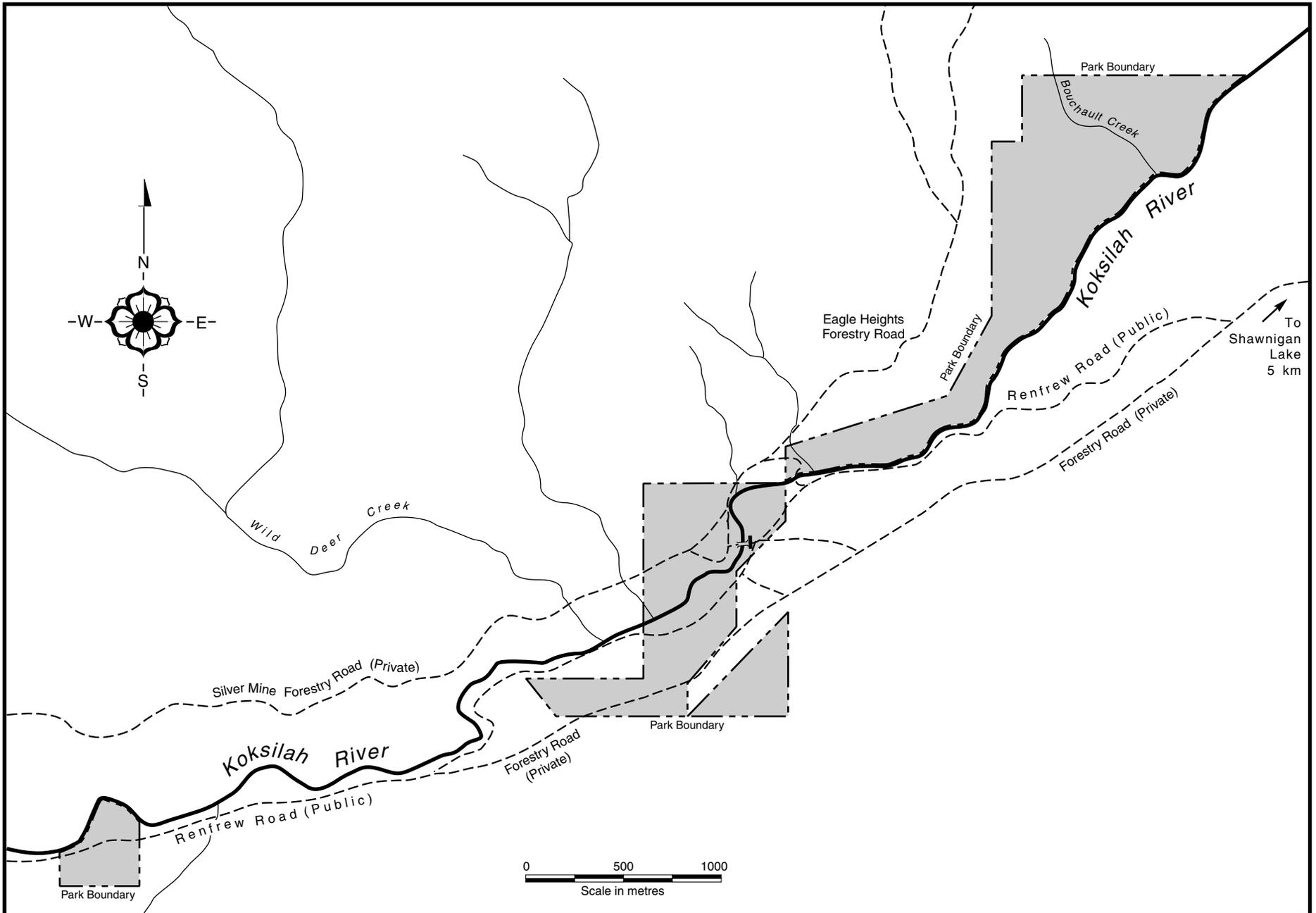
The park features include a scenic river with moderately steep banks, alternating with areas of easy access to a shoreline that is mainly rocky. There are several swimming holes, a seasonal steelhead trout fishery, small white water sections that are used by kayak enthusiasts, and limited trails. Most recreational activity occurs in and emanates from the vicinity of “Burnt Bridge” (Figure 2). The current bridge is the third bridge at this location, and was constructed in 1948. In 1997, BC Parks with FRBC Recreation Program funding, restored and revegetated the campground area located immediately northeast of the bridge, which now includes 10 walk-in tent sites, a 15 space gravel parking lot, two pit toilets and an information kiosk.

The Koksilah River area has historically been a popular site for camping, motor biking, cycling and a variety of outdoor recreational activities, including fishing and hunting although the park is closed to hunting.

Koksilah River Provincial Park - Regional Context - BC Parks



Koksilah River Provincial Park - Park Map



BC Parks has improved the park facilities and overall conditions in Koksilah River Provincial Park over the past five years. With the introduction of a Park Facility Operator (PFO) in recent years there has been a reduction in rowdy behaviour, vandalism, tree cutting (for firewood), mushroom harvesting, dumping of refuse, illegal use of firearms, lighting fires and camping in undesignated areas. However, with limited park staffing and funding resources, the current levels of service compromise the park's integrity as it cannot meet the increased demands and year round pressures from park users.

BC Parks has the support of the local government, adjacent private land owners and interest groups in following through with these initiatives, which have resulted in positive changes to the usage of Koksilah River Provincial Park and adjacent lands.

More recently BC Parks has made the following changes:

- Installed directional signs to increase awareness of this provincial park.
- Added signage to more clearly define park boundaries and facilities.
- Installed a gate at Burnt Bridge in conjunction with the adjacent landowners.
- Supported establishment of the Koksilah Park Society, a "Friends of the Park" organization.
- Allowed construction by the Koksilah Park Society of a hiking / nature trail.
- Supported park clean-ups using local volunteers.
- Closed off various sections of the park to mountain biking and motorized vehicles.
- Implemented a modest facility development program that included tenting sites, a small parking lot, two toilets, and provision of visitor information.
- Placed commercial recreational activities under Park Use Permits.

Recreational opportunities presently available include:

- Walk-in camping;
- Nature appreciation and bird / wildlife viewing;
- Picnicking;
- Seasonal angling;
- Swimming;
- Hiking;
- Kayaking; and
- Mountain biking on designated trails.

Relationship to Other Land Use Planning

BC Parks recognizes that Koksilah River Provincial Park is one of several recreational providers within a regional recreation area. In order to accommodate an expanding population base and tourism growth, there will be a need for a collaborative approach to decision-making in the near term, so that long-term goals and initiatives are consistent and mutually supportive between BC Parks, the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) and other government agencies.

Recreation within the CVRD is about to enter a more intensive stage of planning, which will involve and impact upon all types of recreation facilities and protected areas. BC Parks will collaborate in and support CVRD planning initiatives, including a *Regional Recreation Plan*, a *Greenways Study* and /or a *Trails Master Plan*, since these studies provide useful information to assist in provincial park decision-making and management.

At the time of preparing this *management plan*, opportunities for trail expansion exist. The Trans Canada Trail will run through or near the park, and connect with the Galloping Goose Trail to the south of Shawnigan Lake. This trail will have a major impact on Koksilah River Park and its future management decisions.

The *Vancouver Island Land-Use Plan (February 2000)* identified many areas in the vicinity of the park as General Management Zone 34, which are watershed regions with substantial forests suitable for timber harvesting and silviculture.

Management Issues

The planning issues involve surrounding lands. Management strategies therefore need to take into consideration the need to retain ecological integrity and the mandates and interests of other agencies, the values of groups interested in conservation and recreation, and the views of adjacent landowners and other stakeholders and the need to retain ecological integrity within the park.

Access and Roads

Unacceptable levels of inappropriate and unregulated activities in the past have resulted from easy and unlimited access to the park. Positive changes have taken place in recent years (e.g. installation of Burnt Bridge gate), but there is potential to greatly improve the situation by modifying access and roads.

Park Boundaries

Significant outdoor recreation features and natural values, such as adjacent grasslands and the gorge, lie outside the park. Modifications to park boundaries will be considered to conserve rare or endangered plant and wildlife species and plant communities. Some existing areas within the park do not meet park objectives and could be considered surplus and potentially available to exchange for those contiguous ecologically important lands.

Regional Recreation Planning

BC Parks' management and development of Koksilah River Provincial Park will be affected by the regional planning initiatives of the CVRD and by development of the Trans Canada Trail and the expansion of other local trail networks.

Recreation Opportunities

Further evaluation is required to determine the types of outdoor recreation opportunities that are compatible with the conservation objectives of the park.

The Role of the Park

Provincial and Regional Context

Koksilah River Provincial Park is situated in southwestern BC near the east coast of southern Vancouver Island (Figures 1 and 2). The park is located within the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), which has a population of approximately 75,000. Duncan and North Cowichan are the closest major urban centres with over 30,000 residents living within the municipal boundary.

The moderate climate of eastern Vancouver Island, which is in the rainshadow of the Insular Mountain Range, permits a variety of year round recreation activities. A survey of CVRD residents conducted in 1992 for the *Cowichan River Recreation Management Plan* identified the most common recreational activities of residents. In descending order, these were: day hiking, nature study, swimming, picnicking, fishing, inner tubing, camping, cycling, rafting, canoeing, horseback riding, hunting, overnight hiking and kayaking.

Many of the above noted activities are available in Koksilah River Provincial Park, which attests to its popularity. The park is mainly used by local and regional users as its location is well away from the Trans-Canada Highway. Until recently, the park has not been identified on highway signage. Increased awareness of the park among tourists is only recently being encouraged, as park facilities have recently been developed to accommodate growing numbers of overnight and day use visitors.

Nearby provincial parks include Cowichan River Provincial Park to the north (Class “A”), West Shawnigan Lake Provincial Park (Class “A”), Spectacle Lake Provincial Park (Class “A”) and Bamberton Provincial Park (Class “A”) to the south, and Bright Angel Provincial Park (Class “C”) to the east (Figure 1). The CVRD has Crown land reserved for a regional park in the Marble Canyon area, approximately two km downstream on the Koksilah River.

Significance in the Protected Areas System

Koksilah River Park lies within the Leeward Island Mountains Ecoregion of which only 4.60% is protected provincially and the Nanaimo Lowland Ecoregion of which only 1.31% is protected provincially.

The park and adjacent area provides habitat for rare vascular plant species, as identified by the British Columbia Conservation Data Centre (CDC), which monitors the locations of rare vascular plants, plant communities and wildlife species in the province. CDC records show 2 endangered or threatened (“red listed”) and 2 vulnerable (“blue listed”) vascular plant species located in this area:

- Pine broomrape (*Orobanche pinorum*) S1, red listed;
- Prairie lupine (*Lupinus lepidus* var. *lepidus*) S1, red listed;
- Woodland penstemon (*Notochelone nemorosa*) S2S3, blue listed
- Macoun’s groundsel (*Senecio macounii*) S3, blue listed

Although not yet mapped by the CDC (2000), the following three S2 red-listed plant communities are represented within the park:

- *Pseudotsuga menziesii/Symphoricarpos albus-Holodiscus discolor* (Douglas-fir/snowberry-ocean spray);
- *Pseudotsuga menziesii-Arbutus menziesii* (Douglas-fir-arbutus);
- *Pseudotsuga menziesii/Gaultheria shallon* (Douglas-fir/salal).

Remnants of old growth Douglas-fir forest and tall grand fir (*Abies grandis*) in the southwestern parcel or in the vicinity of the park (D.L. 191) are also of conservation significance within the surrounding landscape of clearcuts and younger forests.

- Pine Broomrape (*Orobanche pinorum*) Located within the park boundary. This is the only known occurrence of this very rare species found in British Columbia.
- Prairie Lupine (*Lupinus lepidus var. lepidus*) A “historical” record exists for this species in this area, but this red listed (endangered or threatened) plant has not been reconfirmed recently and may now be extirpated from the park, and possibly from the province.
- Woodland Penstemon (*Notochelone nemorosa*). The park contains one of the largest populations of this blue listed (vulnerable) species known in British Columbia.
- Macoun's Groundsel (*Senecio macounii*). This uncommon plant has not been confirmed in the park in recent years and its exact location within the park is uncertain. There are a few other protected areas in the region from which the species has been recorded.

Endangered or vulnerable wildlife, including Roosevelt elk and the western screech owl are believed to use the park for their habitat. Apart from bird counts (Appendix C), no comprehensive wildlife inventories have been conducted within the park.

Park Roles

Conservation

As outlined in the *Protected Areas Strategy*, BC Parks has two conservation goals; *ecosystem representation* (“Goal 1”) and *special features conservation* (“Goal 2”). Koksilah River Provincial Park contributes to the both of these goals, and park management will emphasize both goals. The park provides protection for representative ecosystems and associated habitats within the Very Dry Maritime subzone of the Coastal Western Hemlock biogeoclimatic zone, which is vastly underrepresented and restricted in British Columbia to the eastern part of Vancouver Island. A special feature of the park is its picturesque riverfront setting with scenic stands of moss covered old growth Douglas-fir and associated plant species. Koksilah River Provincial Park conserves the habitat of a number of threatened (rare and endangered) species and plant communities, which are under pressure throughout this region.

Tourism and Outdoor Recreation

BC Parks has four recreation goals (Appendix A): outdoor recreation holiday destination, tourism travel route, regional recreation and backcountry recreation opportunities. Koksilah River Provincial Park provides mainly regional recreation opportunities. Its geographic location and present size are not generally conducive to providing holiday destination, tourism, or backcountry recreation opportunities. Consequently, awareness and use of the park has been mainly limited to local and regional clientele.

Koksilah River Provincial Park does, however, offer a variety of river-oriented recreational opportunities. These include bird and wildlife viewing, camping, picnicking, hiking, swimming, kayaking, limited mountain biking, nature appreciation and fishing.

Historically, recreational activities have generally not been monitored or managed in Koksilah River Provincial Park. Visitors with a diversity of interests use the park for a range of purposes. Most recreation occurs in the vicinity of Burnt Bridge, located near the park's geographic centre. Some activities within the park have had negative impacts, particularly the use of off-road vehicles and mountain bikes. These activities have been largely controlled in recent years with the requirement to apply for a Park Use Permit to host in-park events, and the installation of signage, gating of Burnt Bridge to limit park access, and recent facility development.

Several proposals are currently underway to expand the network of trails both within and adjacent to the park. There are collaborative efforts among BC Parks, Ministry of Forests, Koksilah Park Society, Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD), Shawnigan Lake Trails Society, and the Trans Canada Trail Foundation to develop an extensive regional trail system. The Trans Canada Trail Foundation is contemplating various trail options, including one route that would be located within a portion of the park

Cultural

There are no known archaeological sites known within the park. However, this area is within the Cowichan Tribes traditional territory that is still in the treaty process and is subject to negotiation.

Burnt Bridge, which was rebuilt and named after the previous bridge burned, is a notable local landmark. The first bridge was built around 1865 and linked a wagon road to the Robertson Silver Mine (now abandoned) upstream of the park.

Vision for the Park

The primary roles (or goals) for the park are to

1. *Provide a river oriented recreational experience, while at the same time preserving the natural values and features of the river environment and adjacent sensitive sites.*
2. *Preserve and interpret a significant length of free flowing river.*

This park vision will guide the management of the park and park issues will be addressed in the context of this vision.

Koksilah River Provincial Park Vision Statement

Koksilah River Provincial Park continues to provide a river-oriented recreational experience for visitors and will protect the natural values and features of the river and adjacent sensitive sites.

The park is a focal point for recreational activities along the Koksilah River. It will continue to provide informal walk-in camping and compatible day use activities.

In recognition of the conservation and recreation values of the Koksilah River, the park boundaries will be reviewed and:

- *Where possible, a continuous linear greenway corridor of parkland along the river will be created, and exemplary sites adjacent to the park will be protected and interpreted.*
- *Collaborations and partnerships with interest groups, land owners and agencies will be facilitated wherever appropriate to achieve mutual conservation and recreation objectives within the park and adjacent to its boundaries.*

Relationship with First Nations

The traditional territory of the Cowichan Tribes includes the Koksilah River Provincial Park and its adjacent areas. This First Nation is aligned with the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, which negotiates on its behalf and all Crown land within Cowichan Tribes traditional territory is still in the treaty process and is subject to negotiation. To date, the Cowichan Tribes has expressed the following comments regarding Koksilah River Provincial Park and surrounding lands:

- Several sites of importance for spiritual purposes are located within the proposed new boundaries for the park.
- Culturally modified trees exist throughout the park.
- Seasonal hunting is traditionally practiced in areas adjacent to the Koksilah River.
- Medicinal plants are present throughout and adjacent to the park. Protection of the right to gather these plants is important to the Cowichan Tribes.
- Eagle Heights, which would be within the proposed expanded park boundary, is an area where traditional use activities take place.
- Several sites that are of traditional historical spiritual use and of legendary significance to the Cowichan Tribes are located in and adjacent to the park.
- A portion of the area contained within the proposed new boundary is Crown land. All Crown land in Cowichan Tribes' traditional territory is subject to treaty discussions.

Objective: *To improve communication and working relationships with First Nations whose traditional territories include the park.*

- Strategies:**
- Work closely with the Cowichan Tribes to review those identified areas of special spiritual and cultural interest within the park and discuss how BC Parks can protect these values.
 - Encourage the Cowichan Tribes to participate in the stewardship of the park.

Relationship with Interest Groups

Introduction

Based upon the regional nature of some of the park's major issues, ongoing liaison will continue with government agencies, interest groups, owners of adjacent land and the general public. The major stakeholders and their interests include:

- Koksilah Park Society has a desire to expand the trail system in the park, extend the park boundary to preserve an adjacent pocket grassland meadow in its natural state, and conserve the riparian zone.

- Cowichan Tribes is interested in playing a stewardship role in the management of this park.
- Sierra Club of BC (Victoria chapter) and Federation of B.C. Naturalists supports the acquisition of the rare pocket grassland meadow located adjacent to the park.
- Cowichan Community Land Trust Society would also like to preserve the rare pocket grassland meadow, as well as a large buffer zone to be created through the use of conservation covenants.
- Cowichan Valley Naturalists and the Cowichan Valley Natural History Society are interested in preserving local natural heritage.
- Owners of adjacent land, including logging companies, the Ministry of Forests, individual land owners, and other parties that may be involved in possible land exchanges, conservation covenants or acquisitions with BC Parks.
- Cowichan Valley Regional District who is planning for future conservation and recreation needs on a regional scale through the Shawnigan Parks and Recreation Commission.
- Proponents of trail expansion, including the Trans Canada Trail Foundation and the Shawnigan Lake Trails Committee.
- Mountain bike and various other recreational user and conservation groups representing specific interests and park uses.

Collaboration and partnership initiatives provide an opportunity to plan at the regional scale, rather than on a less efficient/effective park-by-park basis. BC Parks will provide information and support for CVRD and Trans Canada Trail Foundation planning initiatives such as a *Regional Recreation Plan*, a *Greenways Study* and / or a *Trails Master Plan*. Results from these initiatives could potentially have planning management implications for various provincial parks, including Koksilah River, Cowichan River, West Shawnigan Lake, Memory Island, Spectacle Lake, Bamberton and Goldstream.

Objective: *To fulfil park objectives by utilizing collaborative arrangements where possible with interested agencies, user and interest groups and other stakeholders.*

- Strategies:**
- Collaborate with the CVRD, other agencies and interest groups in preparing a Regional Recreation Plan that supports and fulfills the vision for the park.
 - Collaborate with and provide assistance to agencies such as the CVRD and interest groups in developing a Greenways Study and/or Trail Master Plan for the Koksilah River.
 - Encourage and support the Trans Canada Trail Foundation in establishing a trail system within and in the vicinity of the park.
 - Encourage non-profit organizations to apply for funds from corporate and / or government program sources. As opportunities arise, jointly complete projects that fulfil mutual mandates.
 - Encourage volunteers to participate in a variety of park projects under the direction of BC Parks staff.

Government Agencies

BC Parks and the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) have mutual interests in providing parks and other protected areas for conservation and recreation purposes.

Objective: *To encourage appropriate collaboration and partnerships with government agencies with similar mandates to BC Parks.*

Strategies:

- Continue to build upon the working relationship that has been established with CVRD and LUCO (Trans Canada Trail) staff.
- Assist, collaborate or partnership with the CVRD on park planning projects that are mutually beneficial.

Interest Groups and Individuals

There is a diversity of conservation and recreation-minded groups that provide assistance and support for BC Parks initiatives. Some of these are local based groups while others are local branches of national and international organizations.

Objectives: *To encourage interest groups to assist with projects that can achieve mutually compatible recreation and conservation goals.*

To continue community stewardship of the park, and solicit community support to assist with park monitoring, and to provide guidance on planned park activities and projects.

Strategies:

- Enlist the participation of interest groups and individuals in the inventory and ongoing monitoring of natural and cultural values.
- Continue the volunteer Stewardship agreement with the Koksilah Park Society, to assist in protecting the park's conservation and recreation values. Various components of the BC Parks Volunteer Program may also be appropriate to interested individuals, including the Park Watch and Conservation Steward Programs.
- Maintain liaison with owners of adjacent private land regarding the effects of public recreation on their property.