

Park Zoning

Introduction

Zoning is a procedure used to assist in the management of parks by dividing each park into logical land and water units based upon uniform and consistent management objectives and/or intended land uses. Appendix B provides a detailed description of BC Parks planning zones, which include intensive recreation, natural environment, special feature, wilderness recreation and wilderness conservation. The natural environment and intensive recreation zones are appropriate to Koksilah River Provincial Park.

Natural Environment Zone

*The objective of a **Natural Environment Zone** is to protect scenic values and to provide for backcountry recreation opportunities in a largely undisturbed natural environment. Oriented to maintaining a natural environment and a high quality recreation experience, facilities are usually limited to relatively small areas and are visually compatible with the natural setting.*

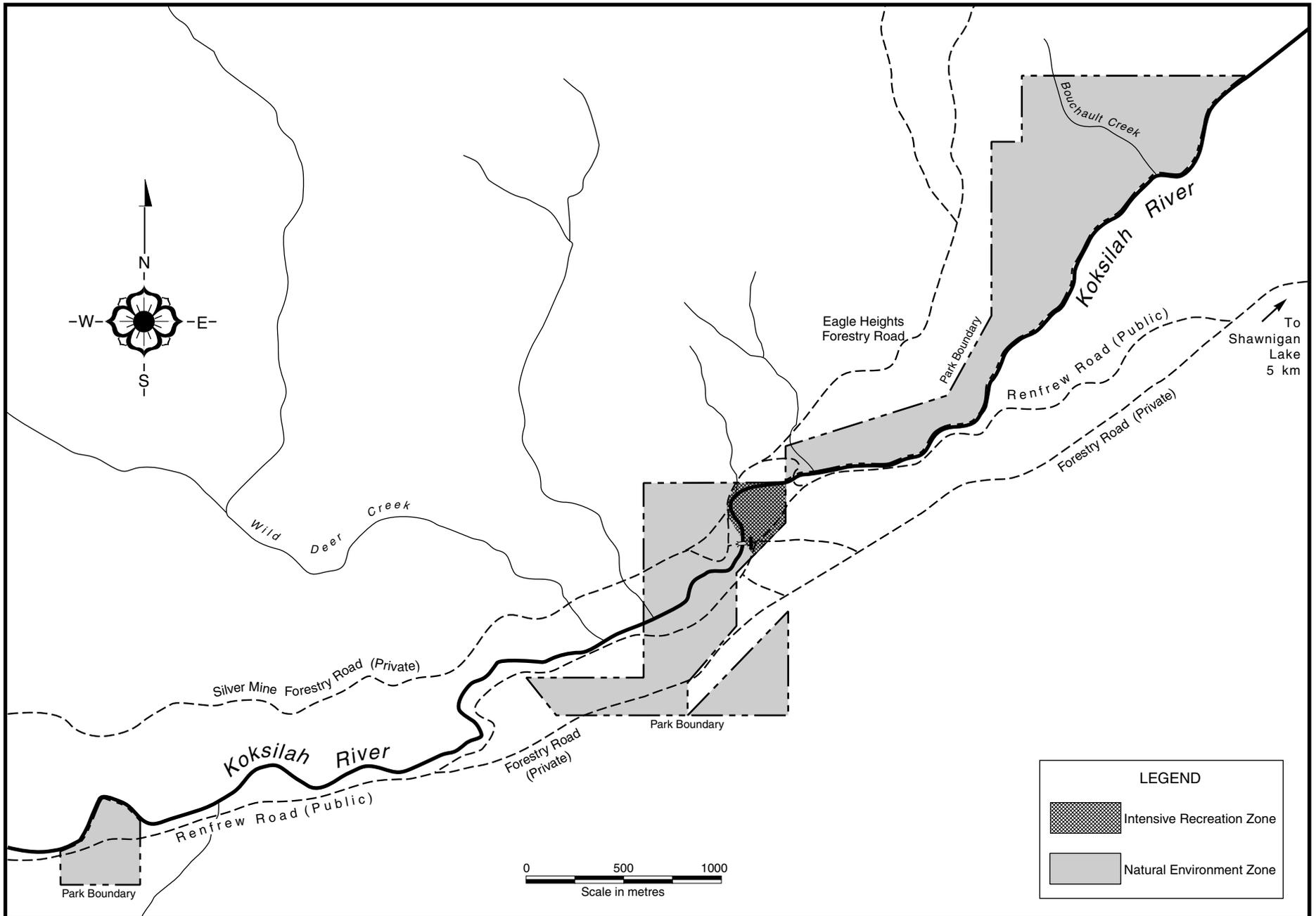
The natural environment zone, containing approximately 202 hectares, encompasses the majority of the park, including all portions on the north side of Koksilah River; all of the eastern section of the park; Lot 191 to the west; and most of the middle portion (Figure 3). These natural environment zones are to be maintained in their natural condition, while allowing a minimal amount of appropriate recreational activities such as camping, picnicking, nature appreciation, bird / wildlife viewing, swimming, kayaking, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding and angling.

Intensive Recreation Zone

*The objective of an **Intensive Recreation Zone** is to provide for a variety of readily accessible, facility-oriented outdoor recreation opportunities. Oriented toward maintaining a high quality recreation experience, facilities may be intensely developed for user convenience.*

The small intensive recreation zone, containing approximately 8 hectares and located immediately adjacent to Burnt Bridge, has been developed for intensive recreation purposes, and includes 10 walk-in tent sites, a 15 space parking lot, two pit toilets, picnic tables and an information kiosk (Figure 4).

Koksilah River Provincial Park - Zoning



Natural and Cultural Values Management

Introduction

Park management will provide for the protection of natural features, ecosystems, and cultural heritage, along with opportunities for compatible recreational activities. This section outlines objectives and strategies compatible with the Vision Statement and Conservation and Cultural Heritage Role.



Plate 2: Viewscape from the Park to Eagle Heights

Land and Boundaries

The rationalization of park boundaries and acquisition of adjacent land are of importance to the future role of the park. An expansion of park boundaries would provide increased opportunities for the retention of ecological integrity in this area and provide additional recreation opportunities for park users. At the same time, existing areas within the park that may not meet park objectives will be reviewed and may be potentially available for exchange with ecologically valuable lands adjacent to the park.

Land adjacent to the park is primarily used by:

- Forestry companies for timber harvesting, including Weyerhaeuser Canada Ltd., TimberWest, and Marguerite Logging.
- Ministry of Forests who manages Crown provincial forest within Vancouver Island Plantation Provincial Forest through the Small Business Forest Enterprise Program (SBFEP).
- BC Hydro, which has a right-of-way in the vicinity of the park.
- All-terrain vehicles, mountain biking, horseback riding and hiking, particularly on Weyerhaeuser Canada Ltd. and TimberWest lands, as both companies allow recreational usage at this time on their lands.
- Private landowners, including some with on-site residences.
- Adjacent mineral claim holder.
- Other recreation sites, including a rustic 15 site campground that is being developed by TimberWest five km upstream of the park at Kapoor Hill. Also, the Ministry of Forests has two undeveloped recreation reserves (UREPs) approximately two km down river of the park, at Kinsol Trestle and at Marble Canyon.
- Two private campgrounds, one on the north side and one on the south side of Koksilah River.

There is a significant ‘pocket’ grassland meadow located just to the north of the park at Eagle Heights (see Figure 2 for location; Plate 3 for photograph). Seventeen hectares of this thirty-five hectare site is provincial Crown Forest Reserve, while the remainder is the property of Weyerhaeuser Canada Ltd. This site is open grassland, with Garry oak trees, arbutus trees, wildflowers, and has small caves and sinkholes in the surrounding forest. The Koksilah Park Society, a number of other conservation groups and the CVRD have been active in promoting to have this land (including adjacent land for a buffer zone, a total size of eighty hectare) designated as an ecological reserve or added to the park. The site is considered outstanding by specialists because of its size, natural condition without introduced species, and because it provides habitat for rare and uncommon plant species and communities such as:

- Blue-listed (endangered or threatened) - Common Bluecup (*Githopsis specularioides*), Dune bentgrass (*Agrostis pallens*) found close to seepage sites on open slopes.
- Blue-listed (endangered or threatened) – Western Pearl Flower (*Heterocodon rariflorum*) found on seepage sites within ‘pocket’ grasslands.

- other uncommon species such as:
 Foliose Willowherb (*Epilobium foliosum*) found on dry, sparsely vegetated patches within grasslands.
 Clustered broom-rape (*Orobanche fasciculata*).
 Venus Looking Glass (*Triodanis perfoliata*)
 Blue Toadflax (*Linaria canadensis* var. *texana*).
 Lemmon's Needlegrass (*Achnatheron lemmonii* var. *lemmonii*).
 Harford's melic (*Melica harfordii*)
 Small-leafed Bentgrass (*Agrostis microphylla*).

Although not yet mapped by the CDC (2000), this site contains four provincially red-listed plant communities:

- *Festuca idahoensis* – *Koeleria macrantha* (Idaho fescue-junegrass – S1)
- *Quercus garryana*/*Holodiscus discolor* (Garry oak-ocean spray – S1)
- *Pseudotsuga menziesii* – *Arbutus menziesii* (Douglas-fir – arbutus – S2)
- *Arbutus menziesii*/*Arctostaphylos columbiana* (Arbutus/hairy manzanita – S2)

From a conservation perspective, the presence of intact, rare plant communities can be considered more significant than the presence of individual rare plant species. Some of these elements are also likely to occur within the park boundaries.

Protection of the Eagle Heights grassland, either as part of the park or as an ecological reserve, would result in a protected area with very high conservation significance. Local government, professional botanists, ecologists and other local and provincial conservation groups such as the Sierra Club and Federation of B.C. Naturalists support the Koksilah Park Society's desire to conserve the meadow.

Objectives: *To further explore the opportunity of securing protection for the rare and environmentally sensitive pocket grasslands located adjacent to the park.*

To review existing park boundaries and identify any contiguous lands worthy of conserving for rare or endangered plant and wildlife species, and/or that will provide expanded recreational opportunities and improved park access for park users.

To consider a long-term land acquisition plan that would look at establishing a linear greenway corridor along both sides of the river to link the Lot 191 portion of the park with the rest of the park.

Strategies:

- Continue negotiations with Weyerhaeuser Canada, Cowichan Tribes, Ministry of Forests, and other government agencies to provide protection for the rare grassland meadow located adjacent to the park.
- Identify appropriate contiguous lands to acquire by enlisting the assistance of interest groups and agencies to more fully identify, categorize and map adjacent locations with sensitive habitats and scenic or otherwise special features.
- Develop a land acquisition and disposition program based upon the results of the above noted land evaluation process. This would include reviewing existing park lands that may be deemed surplus (e.g. south portion of Lot 191 and triangular portion of Bear Creek Forestry Road) and identifying potential lands with higher ecological and cultural values.
- Undertake the initiation of park boundary adjustments along the river corridor that consider additions and deletions to the park.
- Explore potential opportunities for corporate/other land donations.
- Inform the Vancouver Island Interagency Management Committee (IAMC) about proposed park boundary adjustments and land acquisition initiative.



Plate 3: Pocket Grassland Meadow at Eagle Heights

Water

Water is an important physical characteristic of the park as the river provides a desirable, peaceful quality to the natural environment (Plate 4). Apart from the river, there are no other notable large aquatic features such as lakes. The river and its tributary streams are seasonally fast flowing and dramatic in some areas and are more quiet and reflective at other locations. The majority of the riverbank is rocky and steep, although fairly level areas with a gravel shoreline are common.

Objective: *To protect and preserve the natural quality of the water in the park for conservation, fish habitat, aesthetic and recreational purposes.*

Strategies:

- Situate visitor facilities in locations that do not jeopardize water quality.
- Based on recommendations from the *Recreation and Trail Plan* determine the role that the park can play in providing opportunities for fishing in the Koksilah River.



Plate 4: Reflections in a Koksilah River Pool

Forest and Vegetation

Vegetation is one of the most prevalent values of the park, particularly the scenic stands of tall trees in certain locations, such as at Lot 191 (Plate 5). The park is mainly forested with Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*). Both old-growth and second-growth stands of Douglas-fir are common. District lot 191 holds particularly fine, near record-size Grand fir (*Abies grandis*). Western yew (*Taxus brevifolia*) grows in several locations along the riverside. Since many of the trees are large, they create an atmosphere of solitude and serenity. Undergrowth is generally fairly dense, although it is possible to traverse most of the park on foot without much difficulty. As previously noted, several rare vascular plant species also occur within the park.

In the main portion of the park in the vicinity of Burnt Bridge, as well as in some parts of Lot 191, historic over use has led to areas of denuded ground where the lower vegetation has been worn away. These natural areas are now being rehabilitated through a revegetation program.

Objectives: *To protect threatened, rare and endangered plant species and habitats.*

To continue to preserve the important natural environment features along the Koksilah River.

- Strategies:**
- Conduct a comprehensive plant inventory and determine the distribution of old growth forest within the park; encourage research studies of plant communities / species found within the park.
 - Continue to prevent vehicular access to Lot 191 to assist in preserving its natural values. In conjunction, provide a day-use parking lot to encourage foot traffic and increased low impact usage of the site, such as nature appreciation and picnicking.
 - Encourage preservation of significant natural and cultural sites in the vicinity of Koksilah River, including a rare pocket grassland.
 - Continue with revegetation initiatives and keep park visitors away from newly planted areas until the vegetation regrows by erecting fencing and signage. Install signage, increase park monitoring, and erect fencing immediately adjacent to Burnt Bridge to discourage continued damage by mountain bikers.
 - Update a *Fire Management Plan*, in consultation with the Ministry of Forests, as per the inter-ministerial protocol agreement.
 - Investigate working with Ministry of Forests and MELP on spatially locating old growth management areas (OGMAS) in the South Island Forest District and within Koksilah River Provincial Park.



Plate 5: Moss Covered Douglas-fir on Lot 191

Wildlife

According to a 1995 provincial government working paper entitled “*Wildlife Diversity in British Columbia: Distribution and Habitat Use of Amphibians, Reptiles, Birds, and Mammals in Biogeoclimatic Zones*”, the Very Dry Maritime subzone of the Coastal Western Hemlock (CWHxm) zone that encompasses most of leeward Vancouver Island, provides habitat for 451 wildlife species. These species include 327 birds, 105 mammals, 13 amphibians and 6 reptiles.

Members of the Cowichan Valley Natural History Society and the Cowichan Valley Naturalists have observed approximately 90 species of birds that occur in the vicinity of the park on a seasonal or year round basis (Appendix C). Wildlife species known to exist within the park include: black tailed deer, black bear, cougar, timber wolf, raccoon, mink, marten, Douglas squirrel, garter snake, western red-backed salamander, rough-skinned newt, Pacific tree frog, red-legged frog, western screech owl, and several species of bat. The Koksilah River hosts a “wild run” of late winter / early spring steelhead. In addition, hatchery bred and released trout descend to the park via a creek from Wild Deer Lake.

Objectives: *To protect rare and endangered species.*

To protect and maintain the park's natural wildlife habitats.

To encourage scientific research within the park.

- Strategies:**
- Ensure sensitive wildlife habitats and rare and endangered species are protected when developing recreation facilities, e.g. trails and visitor management strategies.
 - Encourage inventory research of terrestrial and aquatic species to provide information on the presence of both rare and endangered species.

Cultural Heritage Values

Koksilah River Provincial Park and adjacent areas are part of the traditional territory of the Cowichan Tribes. Other local cultural history within the park has been minimal. Cowichan Tribes have in the past and will continue to use Koksilah River Provincial Park for their traditional purposes such as historical/spiritual use, gathering of medicinal plants and seasonal hunting.

Objectives: *To protect and preserve archaeological, cultural and historic values from disruptive development and inappropriate land uses and recreational activities.*

To increase knowledge, understanding and awareness of Koksilah River Provincial Park's cultural heritage values.

To provide information and education opportunities on First Nations culture and the history of the area.

- Strategies:**
- Ensure that First Nations cultural and spiritual values associated with the park are protected.
 - Continue meetings with representatives of the Cowichan Tribes to develop an understanding of common values with BC Parks and discuss possible opportunities for First Nation's involvement in aspects of the park's management.
 - Cooperate with the Cowichan Tribes in developing an information package that outlines traditional aboriginal land uses and culture. BC Parks will seek cooperation from the Cowichan Tribes and assist their representatives in gathering archaeological, heritage and cultural information that may be important for conservation purposes.
 - Investigate the history of this area (e.g. logging, railroad development mining and early settlement).

Visual/Aesthetic

Koksilah River has a picturesque setting that is characterized by towering first and second growth trees, moss-covered rock outcrops, and a river with interesting bends, deep pools, shallow rapids and distinctive blends of water color. There is considerable variety in the landscape of the park, both within and between adjacent land parcels, which creates interest and encourages exploration. The view from the park includes a forested mountain slope that provides habitat for a rare pocket grassland meadow (Plate 2) that is not within the park.

Objectives: *To minimize human changes to the views both within and outside of the park so that the visual qualities and natural atmosphere of the park are not compromised.*

To ensure that recreational experiences are provided for in a manner which complements and ensures ecological integrity of the park's natural setting.

Strategies:

- Continue to work with owners of adjacent land, including the Ministry of Forests, forest companies and private landowners, to promote and maintain the visual integrity of lands surrounding the park.
- Design and situate park facilities in a manner that preserves the park's visual attractiveness.

Scientific Research and Education

The park's proximity to Malaspina College's Duncan and Nanaimo campuses, and relative closeness to Victoria's post-secondary institutions and government agencies provides numerous scientific research and education opportunities.

Objectives: *To encourage scientific research that contributes to an understanding of the natural ecosystems and cultural features of the park.*

To promote conservation through increased environmental and cultural awareness and education.

To encourage scientific research projects in the park.

Strategies:

- Liaise with post-secondary institutions, government agencies, interest groups, First Nations, funding agencies and corporate sponsors to unite researchers with funding for projects.
- Encourage inventory research of terrestrial and aquatic species to provide information on the presence of both rare and endangered species.
- Publicize research findings that are of interest to the general public in website information and on informational signage within the park.