

November 8, 2011

## **South Chilcotin Mountains and Big Creek Parks**

### **Values:**

- The parks contain a diversity of land forms and climatic influences, contributing to a rich biological diversity.
- A large remote area dedicated to conservation.
- Conservation of grasslands, whitebark pine stands, wetland areas and lakeshores, flower meadows, shale scree slopes and fossil sites.
- Extensive history of interest in South Chilcotin Mountains and Big Creek Parks by the naturalist groups, forming the Southern Chilcotin Mountains Wilderness Society in 1979.
- Southern-most extent of some species.

### **Concerns:**

- The management plan needs to have integrity.
- Easy travel requires careful management of uses and users to maintain natural values.
- Concern with the rapid increase in float plane landings.
- Damage from trail users and off-trail use.
- Parks in danger of being loved to death. Do not want to encourage increased use until more knowledge is obtained – create a “slow” park, i.e. develop only as more knowledge is obtained.
- Spruce Lake shoreline is heavily impacted, especially at the north and east sides.
- Concern that, in the short term, users will generate their own use patterns to the detriment of the values; a circle of practice will be set up that will become the status quo that will be hard to reverse. Don't let the management plan be seconded by new users moving in. The management plan should be justified by natural value protection, such as grasslands.

### **Management Recommendations:**

#### **Knowledge:**

- More inventory and ground-truthing of natural values is needed, with more emphasis on the less visible species. Edith's Checkerspot, a red listed species was specifically mentioned as being relatively abundant on the grasslands areas and subject to disturbance or mortality due to their

habit of clustering around puddles on trails. South Chilcotin Mountains is a provincial hotspot for these butterflies. Access restrictions should be considered to prevent disturbance.

- A precautionary approach is needed due to the lack of inventory, where recreation that could disturb wildlife or plants would not be encouraged until studies have been conducted to allow proper assessment.
- Site specific data is available from Breeding Bird Atlas data, and from Nature Vancouver camps in Cinnabar Basin on bird, plant and butterfly lists. The information should be evaluated for species that could be impacted by recreational use or contribute to the rationale for designating a location for a wilderness conservation core area.

## Conservation:

- Conservation should be the priority for South Chilcotin Mountains and Big Creek Parks, noting the high ecological values. Conservation should be more important than recreation in a large core wilderness area.
- Grasslands should be a focus (altai fescue grasslands on Clukata Ridge, widespread alpine tundra on the Dil Dil Plateau, mid-elevation grasslands on valley floors and south-facing slopes of Tyaughton and Gun Creeks). Maintain the healthy nature of the grasslands; work to manage mountain bike and horse impacts, erosion control on main trails.
- Priority should be to maintain the integrity of natural areas and their values.
- The parks are possibly the southernmost location for arctic/alpine butterfly populations, but more data is needed.
- Recommend a Wilderness Conservation zone for the area north of Warner Lake to Tyaughton Creek to Deer Pass as fewer people go there.
- Core wilderness areas should be designated over a large extent of the two parks, including the grasslands. This will balance the three Mining and Tourism Areas adjacent to the park. Adjacent Crown lands should be evaluated for recreation opportunities. Adjacent opportunities should be recognized in the management plan. Direct higher impact recreation to the Mining and Tourism Areas and other Crown lands, keeping the focus on high quality natural habitats within the parks.
- Smaller, fragile areas should be given conservation priority as well (Cinnabar Basin, western half of Eldorado Basin), which should have restrictions to protect the lush and extensive flower meadows, and attention to individual alpine plants on scree slopes (plants are very vulnerable to damage).
- Park management should be strongly co-ordinated with the management of the Mining and Tourism Areas, as activities there can easily impact the parks, e.g. Taylor Basin, eastern half of Eldorado Basin and Paradise Creek/Cardtable Mountain.
- Cattle grazing should be limited to existing levels and not be extended into new areas. In existing tenure areas, grazing should be kept away from sensitive wetlands.
- Provide priority statements for protection: central core, grasslands.
- The plan may have to come down on one side or the other – conservation or recreation.

## Wildlife:

- Wildlife: top priority is for grizzly bear management around Spruce Lake, especially the west side, the Gun Creek, Tyax and Upper Relay grasslands. Manage people and allow the bears to thrive. Need for garbage management; need for metal storage containers.
- Grizzly bear are frequently in high human use areas around Spruce Lake, with a need to educate people as to safe behaviour. These parks should be closed to grizzly bear hunting.
- Impacts on goats should be carefully monitored. There is a need to correlate use with movement of goats.

## Access:

- Access should not be unduly restricted except for reasons of protection of sensitive value: access without compromising values.
- Road access to the park boundary should not be considered until the experience of the park has been realized for a period of time. Existing roads, especially Taylor and Paradise Creeks, should not be improved.
- Too much disturbance, with lakes being a draw. Perhaps sacrifice Spruce Lake in the interests of Warner and Lorna Lakes.
- Road access should not be a high priority since BC Parks does not have the capability to manage increased use of the parks. Access management will be a critical tool for park management.

## Aircraft:

- Noise of floatplane access is too frequent, which is seen to have increased dramatically on Spruce, Lorna and Warner Lakes over the years. Although people should be able to access South Chilcotin Mountains Park, the remote setting and the quiet solitude sought by many people in going to such a remote setting needs to be considered. Restrictions on frequency of flights, locations and days should be implemented. There should be down days for flights to individual lakes.
- Air carriers should have to report the numbers of guests taken into parks, with controls to protect values.
- Helicopters should especially be restricted.

## Recreation:

- Maintain backcountry values.
- Minimal development is suggested: if you get in, then you have to get out on your own.
- Priority should be to manage as a "wilderness." Maintain by having primitive trails, limited roads and minimizing bridges.
- It is known that the floatplane access is largely due to demand for mountain biking. There is a feeling that if bikers want to cycle out of the park, then they should be able to cycle in.
- Heli-skiing landings and runs should be at least 1500 m. from mountain goat and bighorn sheep ranges.
- Damage to trails when wet, especially from Taylor to Cinnabar Basin. This park is remote, and a method to maintain trails is needed to repair damage before allowing increasing traffic.

- Creation of the park may draw extra traffic and use.
- Mountain biking: Bikers should be there to experience the park, not for the thrill of biking; that can be done elsewhere, possibly in adjacent areas. Short, fast trips are becoming more common, and likely the cause of most damage. Longer trippers seem to be more prepared and cause less damage.
- Mountain biking and associated float plane flights to the center of the park needs to be addressed. Mountain bikes should be directed to the Mining and Tourism Areas and other nearby Crown lands. Concern is on the direct impact on plants and wildlife, as well as the potential to spread invasive plants.
- Concern on bikes going off trail or spread out where trails are less defined, and little enforcement presence to correct this. Damage occurs from rutting and subsequent water damage. Some concerns that the focus is less on enjoying the park setting and more on technical aspects of biking, which is different than horse users and hikers.
- Evaluation of trails is needed to determine if any should be closed, rehabilitated or rerouted due to mud and wet habitat, and which trails to clear of wind-fall pine, or just left as is.
- General access and no-trace camping works well in most of the parks, but high attraction destinations (Spruce Lake, Cinnabar Basin) should have designated camping.
- Use should not be dispersed; use a sacrifice-the-perimeter strategy rather than overuse the core.
- Need a monitoring program on the amount and types of use. Consider requiring users to register, obtaining a free permit, as a first step in monitoring so that usage can be determined. A web-based, self-registration form could be used to encourage park visitors to self-register through the BC Parks website; the encouragement to register would be to help with conservation and improve management.

### Commercial Uses:

- Outfitter permits should not be expanded without public review. Permits should not be expanded in key recreation areas such as lakeshores. Keep a respectful distance from public attraction areas. Consider an advisory committee to review such proposals.
- New tenures or expanded facilities should not be in key areas; keep development away from the lakeshores, which are a high priority for protection. Cabins should not be allowed on Warner Lake or in Taylor Basin.

### Education:

- Use knowledge from different sources; breeding bird atlas, naturalist, e.g. Mountain bluebirds are common in the park.
  - Invite people to become educated.
  - Address the need to involve people.

- Advise people of the footprint their activities create.
- Need statements on the website, such as to tread lightly in a park.
- Spread information in concert with a free permit system/self-registration.
- Interactive methods.
- The park is globally significant.
- Use a “Help Us” strategy whereby visitors watch for and record information, getting people to think about the natural values and impacts.
- Have a park contact to where information can be sent.
- How to minimize impacts on the very special natural grasslands.
- Advise people of the special features of the parks on the BC Parks website, covering fragile grasslands, no trace camping, leave no garbage, safe storage of food, bear aware, no camp fires in alpine, reduce spread of invasive species, requirements for mountain bikes to stay on trails. Also make available through guide outfitters, trailheads or combined with self-registration.

### **General:**

- Boundary: the Gun Creek boundary should be adjusted to the creek. This is where the boundary was meant to be, but implemented by following a straight line on a smaller scale map.
- Establish a permanent Advisory Committee to serve as a forum to review and make recommendations to resolve management issues or seek outside funding for wildlife and plant inventories.

### **Skihyst Park:**

- Finish the trail to Goat Bluff. The existing trail only has a beginning and an end, with no middle.
- Need for another washroom at the other end of the park.
- Protect the hot, dry grassland slopes to protect habitat for the Sheridan’s Hairstreak butterfly.
- Bird and plant lists are available from the Alouette Field Naturalists.
- LRMP management intent is good: to maintain the natural environment and provide trails. Should keep this park as it is.

### **Yalakom and Fred Antoine Parks:**

- Essentially follow the management direction statements from the LRMP.
- These parks should not be publicized nor promoted.
- Mountain biking was not a traditional use, but it is now starting to be advertised. Should stop it before it becomes entrenched, at least on an interim basis until an inventory of natural values can be completed. Websites are starting to promote these areas, so it is urgent that immediate steps be taken to prohibit this activity. This could be reviewed in the future when more staff and inventory are available.

- Should not encourage use in most of these new parks (Yalakom, Fred Antoine).

### **Other parks:**

- LRMP management intent is well worded with focus to maintain the natural environment for French Bar Creek, Bridge River Delta, and the enlarged Marble Canyon.