

NECHAKO CANYON PROTECTED AREA

PURPOSE STATEMENT AND ZONING PLAN

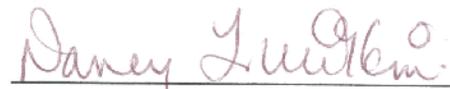
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Approved by:



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Date: March 18/03



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Date: Mar. 31/03

Nechako Canyon Protected Area Purpose Statement and Zoning Plan

The Nechako Canyon Protected Area (1,246 hectares) is located 80 km southwest of Vanderhoof, and encompasses the 7 km long Grand Canyon of the Nechako. The protected area is situated below Kenney Dam and Knewstubb Lake, extending to a point 3 km north of Cheslatta Falls.

The Nechako River was once a raging torrent which cut through a 300 m volcanic ridge, forming the Nechako Canyon. When the Kenney Dam was constructed the natural water flow was interrupted leaving a dry river bed with a small creek and deep rock-bound pools. Erosional features left behind include towering pinnacles, caves, overhanging cliffs and colossal boulders, stone bridges and grottos, sinkholes and water-filled potholes. Downstream, where the canyon widens into the Cheslatta outwash fan, the “Devil’s Punchbowl” forms a steep-walled lake with a rock island marking the entrance to the canyon mouth. Jasper agate and large gypsum crystals are found in the canyon wall near the mouth. The canyon is a ‘special feature’ in the provincial protected areas system as it offers a rare opportunity to witness and study the impressive erosional features and unique historical development of the area. However, should the water release facility be built, this feature will be lost.

Chinook salmon spawn downstream of Cheslatta Falls, and several species of freshwater fish, including rainbow trout, are found in the river. Angling is presently restricted for the 5 km stretch on the Nechako River downstream from Cheslatta Falls.

The Upper Nechako, below Cheslatta Falls, provides opportunities for fishing, rafting, and canoeing, and there is limited use for commercial recreation for guided hiking, canoeing and rafting.

Cheslatta Falls and the Kenney Dam are popular recreation destinations adjacent to the protected area. A small campsite, previously managed by the Ministry of Forests, is located on Cheslatta River, and is a staging area for hiking access to Cheslatta Falls.

Numerous Carrier encampments and resource utilization sites in the canyon are evidence of prehistoric aboriginal fishing grounds along the canyon. To date, 118 archaeological sites have been recorded, and include numerous house pits, encampments, cache pits, culturally modified trees and resource utilization sites. The Nechako Canyon lies within the traditional territory of the Saik’us and Cheslatta’ten, and the people still maintain a strong interest in the area.

European pioneers have explored this region for over 150 years. A surveyor named F. C. Swanell traveled through the canyon at the turn of the century, and documented the “Grand Canyon of the Nechako” in his journals and maps.

The dry river bed of the Nechako Canyon is a cultural legacy of the Kenney Dam mega-project of the 1950’s, once the largest rock-filled clay-core dam in the world.

The area was established as a protected area under the *Environment and Land Use Act* to allow for the future construction of a road through the protected area for the purpose of providing access to flow management facilities for the Nechako River.

Primary Role

The primary role of the park is to protect the Nechako Canyon as a special natural feature with a combination of natural and cultural values including:

- dramatic water erosion features (will become inaccessible after water release facility construction).
- significant fish spawning habitat
- representation of a portion of the provincially significant ramifications of the Kenny Dam mega project of the 1950’s.

Secondary Role

The secondary role is protection of the First Nations cultural values represented by a high concentration of archeological sites.

Tertiary Role

The tertiary role is to provide backcountry recreation opportunities associated with appreciation of the special natural and cultural values of this protected area. No facilities are currently available within the protected area.

Known Management Issues	Response
Forest Health	The amount of mountain pine beetle in this park has resulted in the abandonment strategy for any further management action.
Public Safety	A site inspection of the existing trail network for public safety needs to be conducted and any upgrades or improvements implemented. Future trail construction will require archaeological assessment and consultation with local First Nations.
Protection of Archaeological sites/cultural Values	Research, inventory and manage heritage values. In conjunction with First Nations, develop a management plan for the interpretation and protection of archaeological sites in the area. Consider walk-in interpretive trails which take visitors to the general area of archaeological finds, but not onto the sites themselves. Support a river corridor management process in conjunction with the public, industry, government agencies and First Nations to mitigate impacts on archaeological sites.
Recreation Opportunities	Maintain and enhance recreational trails (e.g. to the canyon) to provide for better use of the area.
Management Coordination	Relationships will be developed with local First Nations through consultation. A working relationship will be established with other

	agencies for coordinated management of the area.
Commercial recreation	Existing tourism operator activity will need to be authorized under park use permit.
Fisheries Management	Environmental Stewardship will participate in development of future plans relating to cold-water release from the Kenney Dam and fisheries conservation strategies in the upper Nechako River.
Access Management	Limit motorized access to preserve or enhance cultural/heritage, recreation and water quality values Construct no new roads into the area; limit motorized access to existing roads only unless it is associated with construction works for approved Nechako River flow management facilities (e.g. cold water release facility, Kenney Dam.)
Kenney Dam	Potential cold water release through Kenney Dam will modify river flow and water levels.

Zoning

The entirety of Nechako Canyon Protected Area (1,246 ha) will be zoned Natural Environment (protection of scenic values and provision of backcountry recreation opportunities in a largely undisturbed natural environment).

CONSERVATION

Representation

- Ecosection

- biogeoclimatic subzone/variant

Situated in the poorly represented Bulkley Basin Ecosection. Only 2.7% of this ecosection is protected; Nechako canyon contributes only 3% of overall protected areas system representation to this ecosection. SBSdk – 5.32% protected. Nechako Canyon contributes 2% towards overall representation.

Special Feature

- X The Nechako Canyon is a ‘special feature’ with high heritage values, interesting rock formations in the canyon, and valuable fish habitat.

Rare/Endangered Values

Unknown at this time

Scientific/Research Opportunities

- X Water erosion

RECREATION

Representation:

- backcountry

- destination
- travel corridor
- local recreation

- X Opportunities for exploring the canyon through hiking, canoeing and rafting.
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- X Fishing. Cheslatta Falls and Kenney Dam are significant destinations for local/regional recreation. Improvement of access to the Nechako Canyon and enhancement of opportunities for natural and cultural appreciation would significantly increase potential for local/regional recreation.

Special Opportunities

- X Unique and dramatic natural setting for recreation in an area rich in cultural heritage

Education/Interpretation Opportunities

- X First Nations fisheries and other resource utilization; occupation; transportation and history. The mega project of the Kenny Dam; ramifications of hydrological shift. Salmon migration and spawning; fisheries management.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Representation

- X First Nations cultural heritage

Special Feature

- X 118 known archaeological sites, part of an aboriginal trail from Fort McLeod to Fort St. James

OTHER MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Other Designations

X Chinook salmon spawning beds protected by federal *Fisheries Act*.

Relationship to Other Pas

Large nearby parks include Finger-Tatuk and Entiako. Nechako Canyon complements Stuart River in protecting special features associated with a significant river corridor, and providing local/regional recreation opportunities in the Vanderhoof area.

Co-operative Management Arrangements

Partnerships

X Potential partnership with Cheslatta people for trail construction, interpretation

Vulnerability

The Conservation Risk Assessment Process identified 2 risk factors (the shape and the size of the park) for the park and rated them as moderately significant. Two stressors/threats were identified for the park: Forest harvesting activity and grazing/feeding which were both rated as low significance.

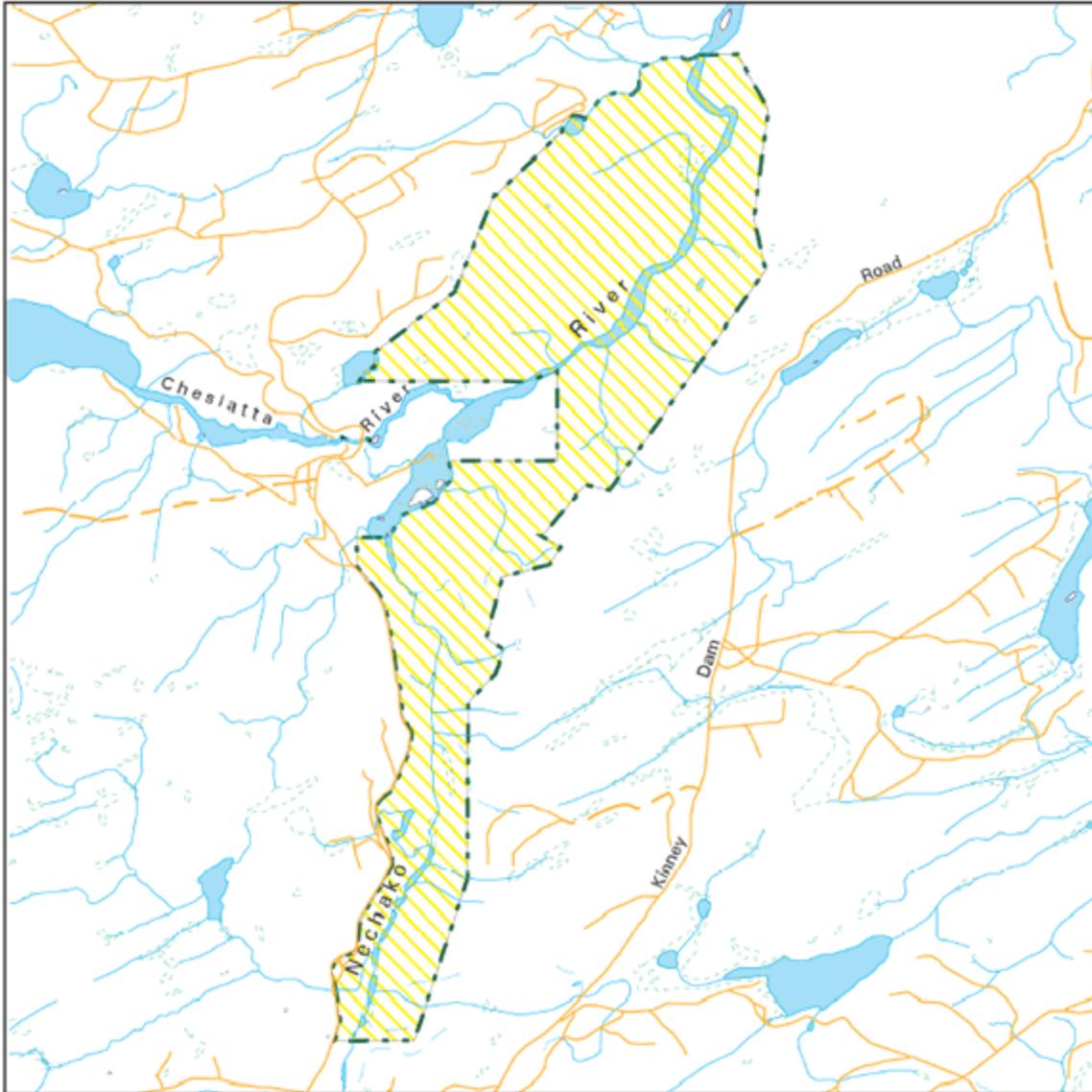
Relationship to Other Strategies

Nechako Canyon was recommended for protection by the Vanderhoof LRMP, which was approved in February, 1997.

Area: 1,246 hectares

Date of establishment: July 6, 2000.

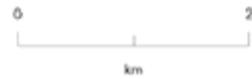
Zoning Map - Nechako Canyon Protected Area



Projection: Albers Equal Areas
Datum: NAD83



 Natural Environment
 Protected Area Boundary



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