

Friends of Strathcona Park

Newsletter - Spring 2021

Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5
www.friendsofstrathconapark.org

Trail over use and Access to Strathcona Provincial Park.

During the summer of 2020 with all the travel bans and restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, BC residents and Canadians in general were encouraged to visit local wilderness and parks.

Although overuse of certain, more accessible, parts of Strathcona Park has been a growing problem for a few years, in the pandemic, it was noted that overuse was becoming a significant issue.

In the summer of 2020 many of the trails in Strathcona Park were over used with long lines of cars parked along the road near the trail, creating significant road safety concerns. The Forbidden Plateau and Paradise Meadows also suffered from too many people on and off the trails. SWI (Strathcona Wilderness Institute) and Friends of Strathcona received multiple reports and pictures of this overuse in the park. This situation has prompted our board to consider a response. So we consulted the “Larkin Report”.

The “Larkin report” was published in June 1988. This report is, officially, entitled “Strathcona

Park, Restoring the Balance”. It was a thorough analysis of issues affecting the park at that time – the work was done by the first Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee, which later became SPPAC (Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee). The committee was chaired by Dr Peter Larkin, hence the name “Larkin Report”. Out of this report also came “The Master Plan, a guiding document for the management of Strathcona Provincial Park.” This report is available through a link on our website at [bib19708.pdf \(gov.bc.ca\)](http://bib19708.pdf.gov.bc.ca) if you'd like to have a closer look.

In section 4 of the Larkin Report, there is a list of access points into the park that are “problematic”, because they cross private land or forest land. Friends of Strathcona is planning to do a feasibility study over the next 2 years to take another look at what happened to these areas and their recommendations. This year we plan to gather information about these areas and what the problems are outside and inside the park.

We are soliciting help from park users, hiking and Search and Rescue groups to describe the problems with access to these areas, preferably with pictures and your personal experiences. An example might

be: Century Sam Lake (near the glacier trail head at Comox Lake); “found road in poor condition and a locked gate”. We are interested in photos with dates etc. on the underuse, use, overuse of the trails (example long line up of cars near the Landslide Lake trailhead on long weekend’s summer 2020). We are also interested in under use of areas, and your experiences where there are no issues of overuse. You can email us at

info@friendsofstrathconapark.org

We are interested in details for the following areas:

Norm, Pearl and Gem Lake at the upper reaches of the Oyster River Watershed.

Wood Mountain/ Becher trail access to the Park located at the old Forbidden Plateau Ski area.

**Alderman Lakes and Beech Creek
Carey Lakes**

Oshinow Lake and Ramsey Creek area on the southern boundaries of the park.

Drinkwater Creek and Della Falls trail via land and road (currently most people access this area via boat from Port Alberni, there is an existing network of old logging roads leading very close to the trailhead. We would love to get more information!

Bedwell River traverse from tidewater to Bedwell Lake. The access to this trail goes through private land (CWR) with a pre-existing “public right of way” to the start of the trail. FOSP built a bridge (the Gail Magee Bridge) in the early 1990 which enables the public to safely cross the Bedwell River. A little further upstream the trail used to cross the river again, but the old log bridge has become very dangerous so FOSP surveyed and found a better alternative route, staying on the rivers left. This also prevents hikers having to cross the river again higher up near Ashwood Creek. BC Parks have not been very supportive of this route even though it is much safer than the old route, which crosses several creeks and also is partly washed out near a steep rock bluff.

Sunrise Lake and Jutland Mountain at the upper reaches of the Oyster River.

Gold Lake (Campbell River and Gold River access).

Rossiter and Divers Lakes (Upper Oyster River, Mt. Washington access).

We are also interested in the state of some of the back country trails and problems such as “braiding” etc.

Any reports, pictures and descriptions are welcome for this first phase. In the next phase we are planning to compile

all this information and look at the environmental impact opening up these areas might create. Which would then lead to a report with recommendations to the government to look at reopening these areas for public use and how best to go about that.

Any other suggestions of access points not covered here with pictures and connections in existing trails in the park are welcome.

The Access Project this summer – FOSP plans

Friends of Strathcona Park will conduct this access survey this summer and next (2021 – 2022) with the goals of identifying problems around access, use and overuse at the margins and within the Park and also making suggestions for improving public access (and thereby protecting fragile ecosystems and also improving users' experience).

We hope the results of the study will help plans for the development of the park. We also hope that the findings will result in plans to deal with overuse issues and help to minimize impacts to those areas being damaged by overuse.

We have applied for grants in aid from various local governments. As a result we have received an offer from the Comox Valley Regional District of three days of work from their two summer students. They will also have

transportation. We are also hoping for a letter of support from CVRD and are applying to ICET (Island Coastal Trust) for financial support.

This summer, with the summer student work time provided (and hopefully with volunteer help – PLEASE CALL AND VOLUNTEER. You can phone John Milne at 250-941-8203 or Jennifer Pass at 250-334-2321). We will be focussing on the Mt. Washington entry point to the park: counting vehicles on long weekends (and one other weekend) in the parking lot and asking hikers a few questions on their departures and returns.

Our hope is that the information we glean this summer from the Mt. Washington entry point, will provide a platform to launch the more detailed part of the project.

When we started this project in January, we initially made contact with all the First Nations with lands around Strathcona Park. We are in continuing conversation with some of these groups and are desirous of their input and engagement.

We've also sent out letters to local outdoor and environmental groups for input and hope some of them will get engaged. So far we've concentrated on the Comox Valley area, but hope to expand into the Campbell River, Port

Alberni, Tofino and Gold River areas. A few of us are working hard on this and would greatly appreciate anyone who would like to become involved especially in these other geographic areas.

On May 25 Jennifer Pass and John Milne appeared via Zoom before the Comox Valley Regional District to present information on this access survey. We were asked quite a few questions after the presentation and the CVRD is going to follow up with a letter of support at a subsequent meeting. As mentioned before, they have already donated several student work days to help us with our project. We have been in conversations with the Strathcona Regional District and are optimistic that they will add some support to our project.

We feel improving access to the Park will benefit the Park, the experience of those of us who love to spend time in it, and the communities surrounding it by spreading use out and minimizing impacts as well as contributing to local economies outside the Park.

How You Can Help with the Access Project

We also hope to receive information from hikers who we are not able to approach with our time and limited point-of-entry process. Whether you are using the Mt. Washington entry to the park, or any

other access point, if you are planning to hike in Strathcona Park this summer please fill out the attached questionnaire, add photos if appropriate, and return it to us (by email to info@friendsofstrathconapark.ca) or by mail to Friends of Strathcona Park, Box 3404, Courtenay, BC, V9N 5N5). We'd love to hear from you!

AGM

We are hoping to hold our Annual General Meeting in fall, most likely during September. We hope that Covid restrictions will have eased by then and we can hold an in person AGM with whatever conditions we must adhere to. We'll send out more information at that time.

New Website

Renee Poisson has been working hard on a new website for the FOSP. You can find it at

<http://www.friendsofstrathconapark.org>

Renee has cleaned up the old website and eliminated dead links and out of date material. There are still much useful information available through the archives section as well as a blog where we hope to have more up to date information. This is still a work in progress so we hope to improve it even more as time goes on.

Here are some Strathcona updates for this

early time in the season courtesy of Andy Smith of B.C. Parks:

- Covid Protocols still in place following any PHO orders. However, campgrounds are/ will be open to all BC Residents (within own health region) and if nothing changes, this will expand to include all of BC and then other Canadians
- New BC Parks Welcome sign has been developed for installation in all parks - "Welcome to BC Parks. You Belong Here - BC Parks are inclusive, diverse and respectful places where everyone is welcome."
- The water level at Upper Campbell Reservoir/Butte Lake is currently at about 216 metres and slowly rising. The summer recreation target from mid-June to early September is 217 m to 220.5 m. BC Hydro forecasts the reservoir level to be near the low end of that range over the summer period
- A milestone of 250K licence plates has been sold in BC Parks Licence Plate Program (LPP) bringing in a total of \$16M to BC Parks.
- It was announced in April by Minister Heyman and Parliamentary Secretary Kelly Greene that BC Parks would receive a budget lift of \$36 million for operating and \$47 million for capital over the next 3 years
- Strathcona Senior Ranger, Jamie Godfrey and Backcountry Ranger, Harry Reddin have both returned this season and will be working until October and November accordingly.
- A 4 person Student Ranger crew has been hired again for this season and based out of Black Creek. The crew will be assigned to each Area for two weeks. It is hoped the crew will assist with such projects as; addressing short-cut trails on steep trails; set up of Croteau

Lake group site and re-staining yurt; Staining of Paradise Meadows Information Hut; PR patrols on Forbidden Plateau and elsewhere

- Warning of potential dog ban will continue again this season on plateau trails. It is hoped that there will be more compliance of dogs on leash but if not, BC Parks may consider implementing a ban as the dog issue has been growing steadily. Enforcement/ ticketing may occur sporadically this season
- CDMC has been recognized as the Provincial BC Volunteer Group of the Year for their outstanding and continuous volunteer efforts extending over decades.
- Butte Lake and Gold River Corridors will benefit from an interpretive sign upgrade project. There is committed funding to produce a theme plan and fabricate new signs over the next couple of seasons
- Nyrstar has had a name change to Myra Falls Mine Ltd. A new General Manager, Floyd Varley started with the mine in March. The mine is developing a new 5 Year closure plan for this year. A strike started at the mine on [April 3rd](#). BC Parks approved a temporary strike information station located adjacent to the Thelwood Bridge at the south end of Butte Lake – there should be no impacts to the public visiting park locations.
- Backcountry locations are still under snow at higher elevations, including much of the plateau. A trail report was started in May and will be updated as BC Parks staff assess trails
- Arnica Lake campground project will be finished early this summer and includes new tent pads, signage and bridge crossings

- Mowachaht/Muchalaht completed an initial camping feasibility study of the Kunlin/Donner Lake area as identified in the Strathcona Park Master Plan. There are no plans to develop anything at this time. Information is being gathered to help guide planning and decision making in the future.
- New open format ZBest pit toilets are expected to be installed at Meadows below Kings Peak; Della Falls; Wheaton Hut
- Kwai Lake campground upgrade will start this year with a design plan. Construction may start in the Fall or in 2022.
- Croteau Lake Group site has already

been booked for most of this season starting **June 16th**. The host program for Croteau Lake is resuming this year and most weeks now have scheduled hosts.

- BC Hydro is continuing with their experimental rehabilitation vegetation plots around Buttle Lake. The 3 year study will determine the most effective techniques and what native species to use where around the impacted shoreline.

FOSP Membership Form
Thank you for renewing.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **Postal Code** _____

Phone _____ **alternate phone (cell)** _____

e-mail _____

Membership (suggested \$10 per year) _____

Donation (tax receipts for anything over \$25. _____

Comments _____

send to: Friends of Strathcona Park, P.O. Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5

Strathcona Park Access Study 2021 - 2022

General Questionnaire for park users

In order to better understand access issues around the perimeter of Strathcona Park, we request that if you are enjoying the park this summer (Summer 2021), please help us with this study by filling out this form after your time in the park and returning it to us by either of the following methods:

Email: info@strathconapark.org
mail: Friends of Strathcona Park, Box 3404, Courtenay B.C. V9N 5N5

If you need more space to fully answer the following questions, please feel free to add another sheet.

1. I was (we were) in Strathcona Park from: (date to date)

2. I (we) entered the Park at: (please describe the entry point as accurately as possible) (eg. Mt. Washington parking lot, etc.)

We arrived at the access point to the park (ie entry point):

- before 9:00 am
- between 9:00 am and noon
- between noon and 3:00 pm

- between 3:00 pm and 6:00 pm
- after 6:00 pm

4. During my (our) stay in the park I/we camped in a backcountry campsite:

- yes
- no

- 5. I was
 - alone
 - in a party of 2-4
 - in a party larger than 4

6. At the point I (we) entered the park, there was

- a) a parking lot for 5 or more vehicles
- b) a parking lot for fewer than 5 vehicles
- c) roadside parking only

7. If you ticked a) or b) for number 5, please answer this question. The parking lot at the entry point to the park was

- a) not full and there was room for me to park
- b) full and I/we was/were not able to park in it

Continued over

8. During my/our stay in the park (even if only for a day, please answer this question) I/we, found the park to be (please choose the one most accurate answer (this is a subjective question, based on your perceptions)

a.) uncrowded – I/we saw very few other park users

b) well used but not over used – I/we felt comfortable with the level of use

c) crowded – I/we felt uncomfortable with the level of use.

9. If you chose (c) in Question 8, could you elaborate, please.

10. Do you have any comments based on your observations in relation to the condition of campsites, trails, outhouses, or other park amenities?

11. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

12. If you have any photos that would help us see the level of use of access points, trails, campgrounds, could you please attach (up to 4 photos please).

13. Thank you so much for filling out this questionnaire. We are offering a free membership for three years in Friends of Strathcona Park for those park users who send in filled out questionnaires. Please include contact information so that we can include you in this offer and follow up on your observations and comments. (ie. email address, mailing address, or if you prefer a phone number). Even if you do not want a free membership, we would appreciate contact information, so that we might be able to follow up with you on your comments.

Contact information

Name _____

Address _____

email _____

Please send to FOSP, address on first page of this newsletter. Thank you for helping.