

Friends of Strathcona Park

Newsletter - Spring 2016

Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5

www.friendsofstrathcona.org

Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge Withdraws Horse Application

Lets start with the good news. CWR recently notified B.C. Parks they wanted to withdraw their application to take horses into the Bedwell Valley and that their Park Use Permit be cancelled. B.C. Parks obliged and the proposal is now dead. FOSP has been fighting this proposal since 2004. The public was overwhelmingly opposed to this application which they made clear numerous times over the years at various public processes. B.C. Parks approved the application anyway and the Friends went to court for a judicial review of the permit. Unfortunately, the review failed and the permit stood.

FOSP does not know exactly why CWR gave up on the idea, but suspect it had something to do with John Caton leaving CWR and a new manager being appointed. Mr. Caton was the driving force behind the idea from the beginning. FOSP had many reasons for opposing the application which have been stated at length in the past. The proposal involved upgrading trails and building substantial bridges and horse associated facilities which would have been very expensive. This too was most likely a reason for the application's demise.

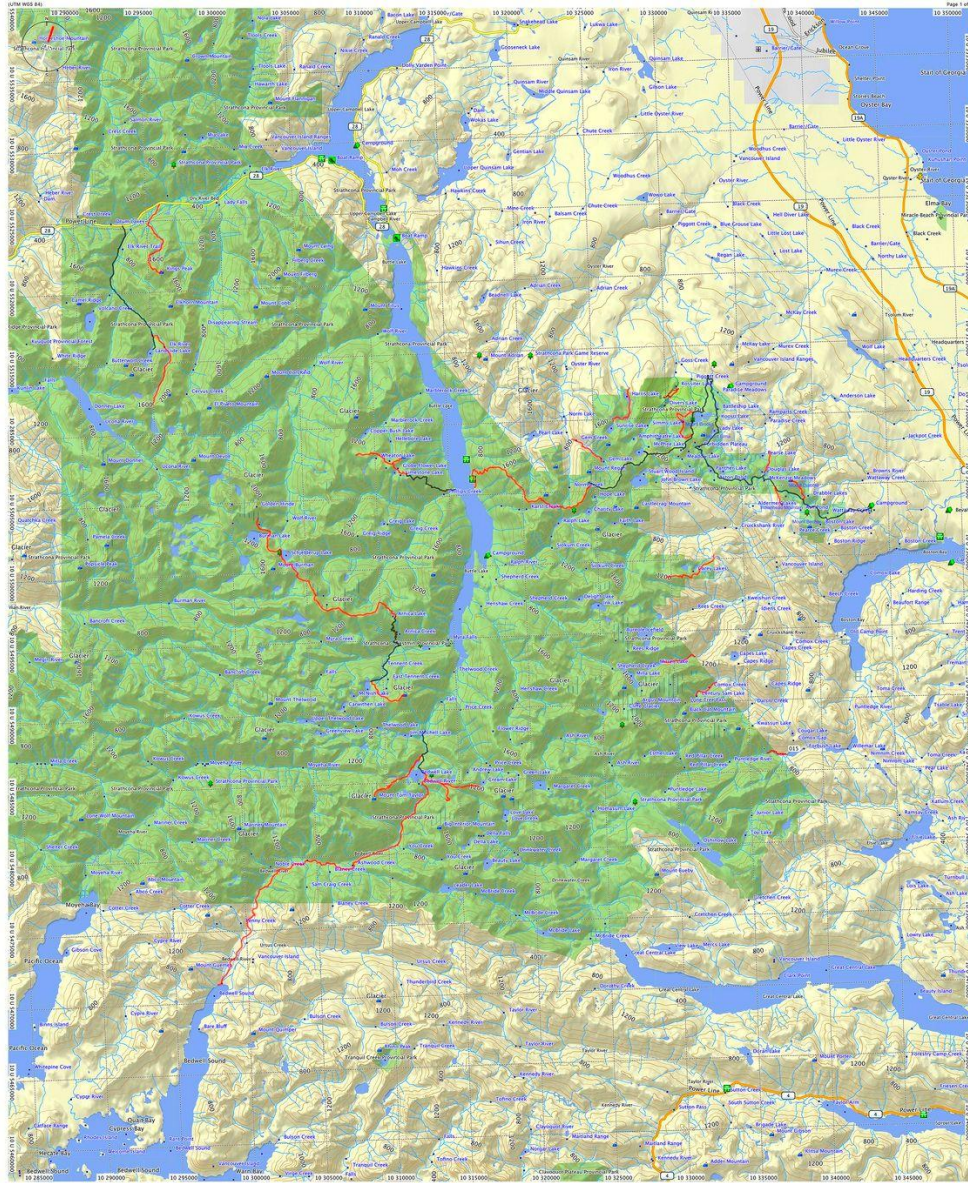
A work plan for the horse project was given to Parks last year, Parks' staff walked the route and asked for some changes which we

believe were made. Park staff promised FOSP and SPPAC they would get a copy of the work plan, but this never happened.

Part of the long arduous battle involved a Master Plan Amendment in 2010 which allowed horses on old road beds in various places in the Park. FOSP always felt this was spin designed to allow CWR to get their permit. Horse groups checked out these new opportunities, but to our knowledge, have never found any of the new routes useful for riding and have not used them. They were hard to access with horse trailers, had no place to turn trailers around and for the most part were not long enough to be worth the effort of getting there.

To prevent future reoccurrences of this conflict which is a waste of everyone's time and resources, FOSP would like to propose this Master Plan amendment be rescinded.

B.C. Park staff are still interested in someone taking over the trail in the future. They are considering offering it to the Ahousaht nation to adopt and take hikers into the Park. We've been assured there would be no horses in any future plan. This move brings up some serious questions about unfettered and free public access. CWR has reluctantly allowed hikers to cross their property and access the trail and Park. In any event the FOSP believe public access exists on road allowances dating back to very early in the 20th century. It is extremely important there be permanent unfettered access through the Bedwell Valley to Strathcona Park.



A Good Trail System For Strathcona Park? by Karl Stevenson

This map is not 100% accurate, and it's not intended as a trail guide. Its purpose is to show the large number of trails created by park users in Strathcona Park. BC Parks has seldom had funds to create trails in Strathcona (other than a few short trails to points of

interest close to roads), so the bulk of trails in the park have been created by hikers themselves. To see a colour version of this map go to the FOSP webpage at www.friendsofstrathcona.org/ or Tim Penney's page at www.public.fotki.com/TimPenney/maps/map-small-2.html For those who are unable to access the colour map here's the list of trails built by volunteer

labour: 1) Trail to Elk Pass, 2) Kings Peak Trail, 3) Mt. Albert Edward-Mt. Augerpoint-Buttle Lake Trail, 4) Mirren Lake Trail, 5) Drabble Lakes to Mt. Drabble Trail, 6) Mt. Indianhead Trail, 7) Pearce Lake to McKenzie Lake Trail, 8) Harris Lake to Sunrise Lake Trail, 9) Trail over Marble Plateau, 10) Trail from Arnica Lake to tarn below Golden Hinde, 11) Carey Ridge Trail, 12) Baby Bedwell Lake to Mt. Tom Taylor Trail, 13) Alpine to Ocean Bedwell River Trail, 14) Bedwell Lake to Cream Lake Trail, 15) Bedwell Lake to Big Interior Bowl Trail, 16) Mt. Allen Brooks Trail, 17) Mt. Myra Trail, 18) Upper Puntledge River Trail, 19) Gem Lake Trail, 20) Rossiter Lake Trail

It's not always clear why BC Parks chooses whether or not to officially recognize a trail. On this map, most of the trails outlined in black are hiker-created, and all are officially recognized. All of the trails outlined in red are hiker-created and not officially recognized by Parks, but it's sometimes unclear which ones are officially recognized and which aren't.

Some hiker-created trails are well marked and easy to follow, others aren't. Some are sporadically marked with ribbons and cairns, some aren't. BC Parks maps show some hiker-created trails but not others. Some trails are good, some are bad, and some are downright ugly. Governments have never done anything to create a trail system for the park, and the "system" on the map is the inevitable result. If it weren't for trails created by park users, Strathcona would have almost no trails at all.

The purpose of this article is to see if people are interested in creating a coherent, practical, low-impact system of trails in Strathcona Park. I believe a good, easy to follow trail system is urgently needed to allow people to enjoy and appreciate the park with minimal human impact. There could be a system of grading

trails to recognize routes, easy trails and more difficult trails as is done in many hiking guide books as well as education into how to choose an appropriate hiking experience for one's capabilities.

Trails do this by confining human impact to the smallest area possible. If people can see a trail they follow it, especially if they know it'll take them where they want to go. By following the trail, they automatically confine their own impact to the specific area of the trail. This happens with no supervision and no enforcement, as long as the trail is easy to follow. If it's hard to follow, people lose it, and blunder around trying to find it again. They then impact large areas, create false trails, and totally defeat the purpose of the original trail.

This is currently happening in Strathcona Park. If there's no trail, people take the easiest route they can find. As more people follow the same route, a definable path appears. If the path isn't easy to follow, people lose it and blunder around, impacting large areas, creating false trails, and the cycle continues. Park officials call the trails "routes" and tear down ribbons and other markings, but this isn't a solution. It actually makes things worse. With the markings removed, more people lose the trail, blunder around, impact more areas, create more false trails, and on and on.

The real solution is to provide Strathcona Park with a good trail system. Governments have had more than a century to do this in Strathcona, but as the map shows, they haven't done much. Will the next century be any different? It certainly doesn't look like it at this point.

But there might be another way -- low cost, low impact, and very practical. Park users -- mainly hiking and mountaineering clubs -- have built good trails in the park in the past. These trails are almost all of the best trails in the park. They're still in use **today**, quietly and efficiently limiting and containing human impact, exactly as they're supposed to, exactly as they've always done.

These trails have worked so well for one main reason: they were planned and sited by people who had years of experience in the park. In practical matters, experience is often better than money, as these trails clearly show. They're wisely sited and they're only wide enough for one person, which allowed them to be built with minimal ground disturbance and consequently minimal erosion. Their width also made them quick and easy to build at very low cost.

Designing a comprehensive, practical low cost trail system could be achieved with the cooperation of user groups like the FMCBC and their various clubs, SPPAC and B.C. Parks.

Good trails lessen and contain human impact, in accordance with the main theme of the Strathcona Park Master Plan. Unplanned trails of all types are now springing up all over Strathcona Park because there is a need for them and B.C. Parks does not recognize nor respond to that need. A planned system of trails is obviously needed, and the likelihood of a government-created system is basically nil. Experienced and knowledgeable park users can create such a system if government will allow it -- a big question.

Trail work is fun. If well organized and well managed there's always a place for everyone,

and it's a chance to give something to the park. However, bureaucratic red tape and attitudes have killed the pleasure of trail building for many of us.

If you're interested, please send an e-mail to me, Karl Stevenson at karlrobinstevenson@gmail.com

I may not always reply to e-mails immediately -- sometimes I'm away for several weeks -- but I will reply.

A huge thank you to Tim Penney for the map.

B.C. Parks Perspective

Andy Smith was contacted regarding parks' policy on the use of flagging tape and cairns in the Park. The hope was there was a written policy statement or guideline available which could shed some light on the topic. None seems to be available so Andy contacted some of his peers in the Ministry and sent the FOSP an email with their thoughts on the matter. The Friends appreciate the effort Andy put into this. We've paraphrased Andy's response to capture its main points.

Basically B.C. Parks is opposed to any flagging in the Park. They consider it an illegal activity and any old flagging should be reported and removed. Any flagging should be approved by B.C. Parks before being put up. It is considered garbage, waste or litter. Andy referred to Sections 9, 12, 14 and 29 of the Park Act. and Regulations 32, 33 and 34. Andy also referenced the Principles of Leave No Trace use in parks for minimizing impacts.

Andy included Aaron Miller, B.C. Parks Section Head, Philip Stone, Chair of SPPAC,

Erica McClaren, B.C. Parks Conservation Specialist (who added a concern about wildlife ingesting flagging tape), and Kirby Villeneuve, Recreation Section Head in his correspondence and they all supported what Andy said.

Andy also pointed out that there are some situations where temporary flagging is appropriate which should be removed afterwards. He also noted that cairn building is out of control in the Park and also presents a problem.

Parks position on trail building is where a group wishes to build a trail, a proposal should be made, then discussed and evaluated. Impacts, safety and need must be considered and First Nations consulted.

The FOSP thinks what confuses the public is that flagging is in place in many areas of the Park and remains there for a long time while in other cases Parks staff are more determined to remove flagging. There is some inconsistency apparent there. As noted in Karl's article above, there are many trails and routes created by individuals or groups, some officially recognized and some not, some flagged in various ways and some not. Perhaps this is a function of Parks limited resources where they do not have the ability to manage all these trails and routes. Perhaps it is a case of out of sight out of mind.

There are definitely two distinct points of view on this topic and perhaps no resolution coming anytime soon.

Closure Plans – the Mine at Myra Falls

The Myra Falls mine has recently ceased mining operations due to low market values of zinc. At some point in the future the tailings disposal facility at the mine will be full and the mine will close permanently. Nyrstar (the

Swiss company who owns the mine) estimates approximately ten more years of active mining. This estimate is based on the room left in the tailings disposal facility. When those years will occur seems to be dependent on Nyrstar's decision as to when to be actively mining. How many years are allotted? Could those ten years be spread out over the next 50 years, the next 100? While these are concerns, on the positive side, as environmental requirements are increasing, a later closure should mean more stringent closure requirements.

But what about closure? A closure plan (2004) was provided to government by prior mine owner Boliden and there is apparently a 2009 closure plan but I have not been able to find it. I understand the 2014 closure plan is still in the works. The response of government to the 2004 plan should give us not only comfort, but also enliven a public resolve to continue to re-iterate the concerns expressed by both R.H. Heath, Regional Environmental Stewardship Manager, and parks staff. The following is a list of the main government expressed concerns in response to the 2004 Closure Plan:

- The closure plan contemplates retention of the hydro-electric facilities. This is unacceptable and the closure plan must provide for and cost out deactivation and restoration of both the Tennent Lake and Thelwood /Jim Mitchell Lakes hydro-electric facilities.
- One of the key goals of closure is to return all areas affected by mining to Class A Park land; parks staff expressed concern that the closure plan involved ongoing power needs

and site treatment “in perpetuity” and asked if the reclamation and restoration is completed to a high standard, couldn’t there be an end date to the need for power infrastructure and production at the site.

- It is important that the plan address the importance of maintaining the quality of water in the receiving environment as tailings drainage ends up in Buttle Lake, which is part of the watershed for Campbell River drinking water (my note: 2014 testing at the end of Buttle Lake at the Gold River Bridge noted higher than acceptable levels of cadmium – no required testing any further away from the mine)
- It is also important that the closure plan address sensitive species in the vicinity of the mine and in areas affected by the mine.
- There needs to be a fuller inventory in the closure plan of potential acid generating rock (to include areas omitted in this closure plan).
- It is anticipated in the closure plan that demolished buildings would be disposed of in tailings dams. Rather there should be serious efforts to reduce the amount of this type of waste through a full recycling and restoration program.
- The mine area is in the asserted territory of the Mowachaht/Muchalat, Comox and Cape Mudge First Nations. As such, if pollution abatement infrastructure and monitoring are required in perpetuity, a full analysis of the scope of this monitoring needs to be set out and provisions made for a permanent “legitimate operator”.
- Following the Master Plan, special attention must be given to areas of particular beauty and/or of special

wildlife habitat. These areas should be set out and addressed separately in the closure plan. (eg. Thelwood Valley)

- Mine area should be returned to as natural a state as possible (not leaving concrete foundations, stakes etc. in place as set out in the closure plan)
- Clean fill should be obtained without (if possible) new disturbances in the park.
- Importance of using a forester to meet desired objective of restoring site to pre-mining condition (ie not just using single species revegetation, like alder) (It seems that Nyrstar has addressed this request).

There are several other points in the park staff analysis of the 2004 Closure Plan but these points above show the conscientious tenor of the report and should re-invigorate us all, as stewards of the park, to push for a new closure plan, one that incorporates the fundamental park values and indicates that the mine owner takes responsibility to do a thorough and environmentally appropriate job in returning this desecrated land to Class A parkland.

Jennifer Pass

Special Ceremony in the Park.

Recently Marlene was invited to attend and assist in a ceremony in the park conducted by two Peruvian Shamans. The purpose was to help people to re-connect with the land; heal the insults we humans have created and help the Earth recover and honour the planet to continue to provide all life opportunities for



One of the Peruvian shamans at the ceremony.

all who live on this planet. We travelled to Buttle Lake and stopped at what was once Parks headquarters, now the Facility operators' domain. We looked at the beautiful vista of Buttle Lake and I briefly explained the history of the park and its multitude of abuses from logging, damming, flooding and mining. We then continued to the end of Buttle Lake to head for the Price Creek Wilderness Festival site. The Shamen did not feel it was the right energy and we searched around and finally the perfect spot was found. To my surprise it was right on top of the rock next to the entrance of the mining road where we had the blockade 28 years ago to the day! It was a beautiful ceremony and I felt it was very fitting now we are thinking of how we can help safeguard the place where the mine is right now once it closes and



Site of the 1988 blockade.

continue to protect Buttle Lake, the Bedwell corridor and the entire park. For me it felt like renewing my vows to the park to keep it safe from human caused destruction! (by Marlene Smith)

Park Update

There is quite a bit happening in the Park right now. The CWR withdrawing their permit and the Myra Falls mine are important issues and have been covered above. The only information to add about the mine is that it is part of Nyrstar trying to sell all their mines in various parts of the world. The staff there have received many expressions of interest and say they expect the mine to be sold by the end of the year. There are about 50 people working there right now trying to get it ready for sale. There have been some water quality problems during the last year which they are working on so it doesn't happen again. The final Closure Plan is to be completed by Dec. 31, 2016. We have not seen it and hope it will be made available for the public to see.

There are plans to build a group campsite at Croteau Lake to take the pressure off other campsites in the area. There has been talk about including yurts there for people to rent. We have some concerns with this as it represents much more infrastructure than the Master Plan speaks to. Also, the Park Facility Operator would manage it and collect the fees. We're not quite sure what the public thinks about this, so feel free to make a comment on the membership form at the end of the newsletter and return it to us. We'll compile the results and report back in the next newsletter.

There has been quite a bit of work done in the Forbidden Plateau area including board

walks and improvements to accessibility for the handicapped. Future work entails signage and a dock at Battleship Lake for swimming and fishing. Three composting toilets have been installed at Battleship Lake, Bedwell Lake and Croteau Lake.

SPPAC is looking for two more volunteers to join the committee. There is a need for more female members, so they will be given priority. To find out more about what is required you can check out their terms of reference at www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/strath/strathwk.html and if you would like to apply please contact Andy Smith at 250-337-2405 or email Andy.Smith@gov.bc.ca

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. _____)	
Are you in favour of yurts at Croteau Lake? Yes ____ No ____	
Comments _____	

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