

Friends of Strathcona Park Newsletter - Spring 2018

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

Annual General Meeting

This year's Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday, June 23rd from 3 to 5 p.m. followed by our usual potluck barbeque. FOSP will supply the wild salmon. The location is the same as last year's, Jennifer Pass and Jack Welsh's house at 3164 Hellicar Road. To get there follow Headquarters Road out of Courtenay to the north. Turn left onto Hellicar Road which is the next one past Tsolum River Road, about 5 km north of Courtenay. If coming from the north turn up Merville Road at the Merville Store and turn left onto Headquarters Road about 3 km from the store. It's about another 3 km to Hellicar Road. Jennifer and Jack's is on the right almost at the end of the road. Park on the road as there is limited parking by the house.

To be voted on is our new constitution as required under the new Society's Act. The work has been done so it's a matter of ratifying it. Updates to the articles in this newsletter will be presented and discussion about where we go from here will take place.

We welcome new directors to join us as some of us have been at it for a long time and we need to get more people involved. We also will need an accountant to help next spring with our tax return. We have been lucky to have had Pam Monroe for many years doing this job, but she's unable to carry on in the future. Pam has prepared

a list of directions for the new person and is willing to be available to answer any questions. This is not a difficult job for someone with accounting skills and would be a welcome contribution to the Friends.

We are incredibly grateful to Pam for taking this on for us for such a long time. Thanks Pam. You are appreciated.

We hope you can join us. The meetings go smoothly and the chance to socialize afterwards is a lot of fun.

Meetings with MLA's and Ministers

After the change of government in the last provincial election the feeling was that we had a chance for a new direction for our provincial park system. The Friends decided to lobby our new

AGM

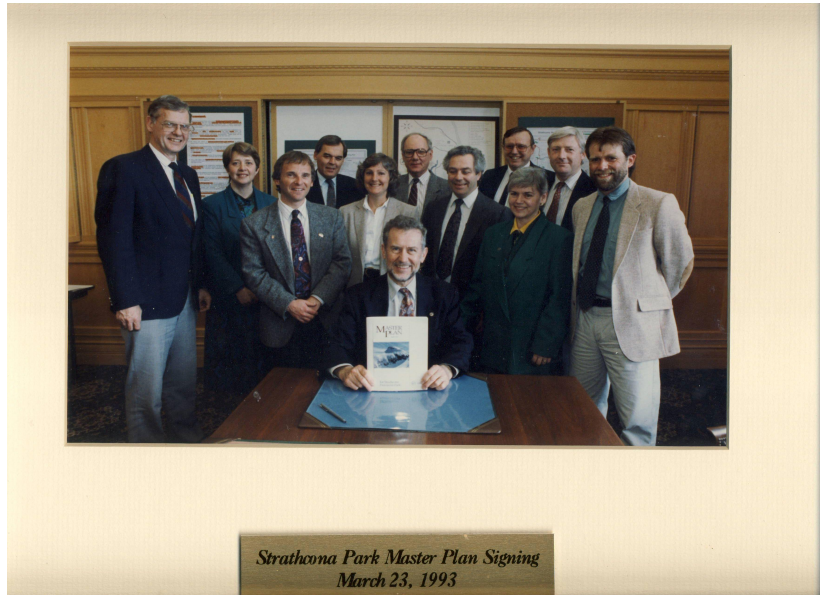
**June 23rd, 3- 5 p.m.
followed by potluck barbeque
with salmon provided.**

**Location:
3164 Hellicar Rd.
Courtenay.**

Directions in newsletter article.

representatives to try to make a case for rebuilding the park system that has suffered over the last decade or two. We hoped to lobby for an increase in funding, for a change in the culture of park administration so the bottom line is not the defining goal of park management, for an improvement in the volunteer situation in the system and for better public access to our public parks through private lands. We also wanted to bring up some concerns about the mine operating in the Park and about its closure plan and bond. This last item is better discussed with the Minister of Mines, a meeting we've attempted to have over a long period of time with no success to date. The Friends have some concerns with the closure plan and the bond which would only apply to any damage occurring within the mine site, i.e., Strathcona Westmin Park, and would not apply to any damage in Strathcona Park proper or the Campbell River watershed.

Our first meeting took place last August 11th at Ronna-Rae Leonard's office in Courtenay. Ronna-Rae, her staff and Lynne Stone from Claire Trevena's office attended. We felt our message was heard. Our next meeting was on January 12th in Port Alberni with Scott Fraser and his constituency associate. We met with Scott as an MLA, not as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs which meant he was freer to speak and fewer staff had to attend. Again, we were heard and had a very productive



*Strathcona Park Master Plan Signing
March 23, 1993*

Front, John Cashore (Min of Parks) Left to right front row; Derek Thompson (BC Parks), Peggy Carswell (public committee member), Bryan Price BC Parks), Ann Fiddick (public member) Back row; Jake Masselink (ADM) Margaret Lord (MLA), Colin Gabelmann (MLA) George Trachuk (BC Parks), Ron Lampard (BC Parks) Jim Rutter (public committee member), Ron Quiltor (BC Parks)

discussion. On January 31st we travelled to Victoria and met with George Heyman, Minister of Environment, his Deputy Minister, Mark Zacharias and Assistant Deputy Minister, Jim Standen. We covered the same topics as before as well as giving the Minister a copy of a letter showing a public road access through the Bedwell Valley to the Park. The Minister gave this to Mr. Standen who passed it on to Don Cadden. We received a response to this letter which was not what we had hoped for. We've also passed this letter on to the Ministry of Highways. This topic will be on the agenda for the AGM.

Since then there has been some improvements to funding for the provincial park system and

some other developments which will be mentioned under the SPPAC report in this newsletter.

25 Years Celebration of Strathcona Master Plan

It has been 30 years since law-obeying citizens were willing to risk their freedom and get arrested, ending up in jail for protecting BC's oldest Provincial Park.

In early 1987, a decision was made at the senior government level to remove a large area of land from Strathcona Park. The decision also reclassified certain lands within the Park from Class "B" to a Recreation Area – thereby relaxing conditions that had to be met before permits authorizing exploration and development within the Park would be granted.

The changes were made by an Order In Council signed by then Minister of Environment and Parks, Stephen Rogers, which was passed without any consultation in the legislature or with the public. The OIC created a "multiple use" perspective, where industrial mining and logging industry would "recreate" side by side in the remote wilderness areas of Strathcona Park.

It resulted in a great alienation between the Ministry of Environment and Parks and the public, leading eventually to the now well-known blockade and arrests in Strathcona in 1988.

At this time the new NDP government had more heart for the wilderness, environment and parks. Under leadership of the ADM for Parks, Jake Masselink, the Strathcona Steering Committee was given the responsibility of producing a Master Plan for the park. The committee included three public advisory members, Peggy Carswell (Area C Director, Comox-Strathcona Regional District), Anne Fiddick (Mayor of Gold River) and Jim Rutter (Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC) and a

team of BC Parks staff from the South Coast Region, the Strathcona District and Victoria Headquarters.

The Committee's task was to undertake an in-depth consultation process in order to restore public confidence in BC Parks, and create a Master Plan for Strathcona Park that took into account the vision and wishes of the public and various interest groups.

This time, the government/Parks wanted to get it right by listening to the people and creating a document that represented the people's perspectives and wishes and respected the pristine wilderness aspect of the park.

After several years of conducting intensive and long meetings with many interested people and groups, and reviewing hundreds of written submissions, a Master Plan was finally developed

The government/parks members on the committee and authors of the Master Plan, ADM Jake Masselink, Mel Turner, Bryan Price, Derek Thompson, Ron Lampart and Ron Quilter, managed indeed to regain the public trust and confidence. The public members, Peggy Carswell, Ann Fiddick and Jim Rutter, did a stellar job to help and to reunite public and parks officials.

Even though the Master Plan has some weaknesses in its wording (for example, it has become clear that Strathcona Park is not suitable for horse use); it was the biggest collaborative effort in Park history to create this document between public and government.

Opening this document up for review as suggested at the last SPPAC meeting would be a massive undertaking in order to ensure the same level of commitment to collaboration between the public and government and so

that those who have given hundreds of hours to this plan are being interpreted and acted upon appropriately.

Stay alert and in tune and connect to the SPPAC Facebook page (Search for Friends of Strathcona Park on Vancouver Island) and make sure that the plan does not get gutted and destroyed.



Management plan as seen by the “multiple use” perspective based on the recommendations of the “Wilderness Mosaic” (cartoon by Ryo Murraygreen 1988)

SPPAC

The last Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee meeting was held on April 13th at Miracle Beach Park. There were quite a few topics discussed which are highlighted below. The complete minutes will be posted on B.C. Parks website when approved.

Two rangers are being hired for the summer as well as a new community liaison officer named Craig Medding who will lead a student ranger program of 5 people. His area will cover the entire west coast including Haida Gwaii and he is based out of

Rathrevor Beach Park in Parksville.

The Myra Falls Mine has a new manager and the mine is slowly being brought back into production after a lengthy closure. The mine is no longer for sale as Nyrstar achieved their goal of raising capital by selling other mines elsewhere in the world. Reopening is going to involve upgrading the Jim Mitchell Lake road, hauling ore along it, and stockpiling ore for the concentrator. A staffed gate is proposed for the mine site. This was unsuccessfully tried a few years ago and will be tweaked to try to make it work better than it did.

Work at the Ralph River campsite that began last year will continue. A new group campsite near the Karst Creek boat launch has been created as well as the new backcountry group campground at Croteau Lake complete with tent platforms and a yurt. It is now open for

booking.

A discussion took place about the Della Falls trail, how to maintain it due to its isolation and how to pay for its maintenance. A high priority is the heavy use being experienced at the Circlet and Kwai Lake areas and how to improve the facilities there. Work is being planned for the Elk River trail where there was a washout a few years ago. The heavily eroded Bedwell Lake trail has been identified as a priority for some time in the future. The Comox District Mountaineering Club is going to continue its

volunteer work on the Forbidden Plateau trail this summer and TimberWest is going to build a shelter and install some signs at the Comox Glacier trail.

Creating a campsite near the Crest Creek climbing area was discussed with some reservations expressed about location and how attractive it would be for the climbing community. A SPPAC subcommittee is being created to work on this.

B.C. Parks is reviewing their fee structure and part of this will be to consider an annual pass for backcountry use.

Discussion about the ongoing problems of snowmobiles trespassing in the Park took place and suggestions were made about how to deal with this issue. One suggestion was to hire winter rangers.

The issue of attracting new members to SPPAC and of how to generate more public interest in SPPAC was discussed. Jennifer Pass is a new appointee to SPPAC and there is currently room for more members. Holding a SPPAC open house in the fall in Courtenay is planned.

Another topic for future SPPAC meetings is to talk about reviewing the Park Master Plan. This topic is the subject of another article in this newsletter and must be approached with care as the last Master Plan review opened things up for snowmobile operators and float plane operators to look for opportunities to take their equipment into the Park.

Volunteering in the Park

Many trails and structures in Strathcona and other parks have been created and often maintained by volunteers. Volunteering brings people together, creates good relationships

between parks and “special interest” user groups and gets work done for free or very cheaply. It also creates an understanding that not all work needs to be paid for in order to feel you have done something good. Many outdoor clubs have contributed to the many trails and signs in Strathcona Park; one just needs to mention the name Ruth Masters and the CDMC and FOSP to illustrate this point. Volunteering was encouraged and appreciated by BC Parks and supported in the form of youth trail building crews (supervised by BC Parks employees), volunteer warden programs and free helicopter time where needed and if available.

Unfortunately for the parks and society, the need for volunteer agreements, farming the actual on the ground parks work out to facility operators (for profit private interest), fear of law suits and government cut backs has led to dropping many volunteer programs and to alienation and the reluctance of several volunteer groups to actually getting involved with the parks administration over the last decades. This is a real loss to the old park culture. In the court case and charges against the Heathens group last year, the judge’s perspectives were very well expressed in his final statement (see Jack’s article in the last newsletter).

In meeting with Minister George Heymen, there was a spark of hope that maybe this NDP government is more willing to open up and support parks volunteerism; especially for youth and outdoor groups. The government recently announced money has been made available for this. This is a good first step, although only available for university students and people over 18 years of age.

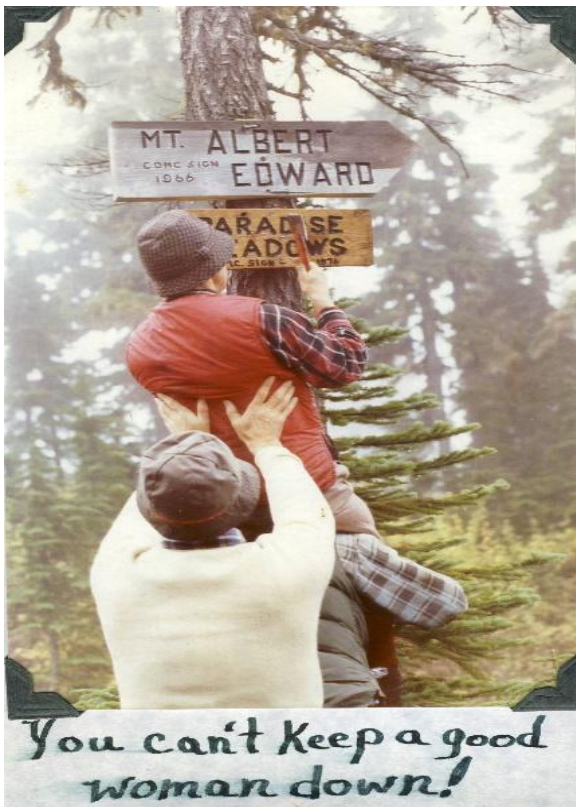
Teachers involved in school outdoor programs are keen to revive the old youth parks

volunteer program. Parks facility operator Shawn, in a personal conversation, is on board also. The work is there; tons of it! Especially in the more remote areas like Della Falls, where BC Parks have problems making things happen due to lack of funding and staff. Many ex parks employees remember having taking part in one of these youth volunteer programs in the past and are very supportive. Many of the “elders” in past volunteer programs like some of the members of the Heathens and some of the members of FOSP are willing and keen to share their knowledge and experience (most of them are too burned out to actually help on the ground). Admitting that it will take some politicking

and getting around some ingrained resistance; and for the sake of the future of the long-term protection of our treasured Strathcona Park and for the sake of so many youth who have lost their connection with nature and the park; it is worth every effort to restore the youth volunteer programs again. And maybe out of that will flow a better relationship between outdoors groups, volunteering and BC Parks!

Are you interested in taking on this challenge as a volunteer coordinator to get this off the ground! Do we need some seed money? Would FOSP be willing to create a special fund maybe in the name of Ruth Masters to get this off the ground? Sounds good, interesting? Come and join us at the FOSP AGM on June 24th and join the Board with this task in mind!

Friends of Strathcona funded and constructed a suspension bridge over the Bedwell River and created a trail between Bedwell Sound and Buttle Lake, creating the first Ocean to Alpine and across the island trail. Part of the Buttle Lake to Bedwell Lake section was later rebuilt by BC Parks.



Ruth Masters and CDMC provided most of the signs in Strathcona Park and Forbidden Plateau area. These signs are attractive, natural and have survived for decades.



Working on the approach to the Gayle McGee Bridge. Stan and George Doran are front and center working on some stairs.

Reflections on the Strathcona Blockade of 1988

by Karl Stevenson

Most visitors to Strathcona Park today have probably never heard of the Strathcona Blockade, and don't realize the danger Strathcona Park was in when the government opened Strathcona Park to exploratory drilling by mining companies in 1987.

When FOSP tried to persuade the government to reverse their decision, they repeatedly told us they couldn't stop mining companies from carrying out drilling operations in the park. They said that if they did, the mining companies would take them to court, and the government would have to pay out millions of dollars in compensation. This turned out to be untrue. Despite what the government said, a case had already been tried (in 1986) which proved the opposite. A mining company (Cream Silver Mines Ltd.) had taken the government to court for stopping them from operating in Strathcona Park. They lost. The government paid no compensation.

In 1987, there were 226 valid mineral claims and five mineral leases in Strathcona Park, the result of years of mismanagement by various governments over many years. In 1988, Cream Silver was the first mining company to take advantage of the new laws passed by the government in 1987 which allowed exploratory drilling in the park. With so many claims in the park, other companies were undoubtedly watching. If Cream Silver was successful, others would follow. It didn't happen. Cream Silver was first stopped for a week by a blockade on the road leading to the drill sites. When the

blockade was removed, people continued to obstruct the drilling in a peaceful manner. Ultimately, 64 people were arrested, but the plans of Cream Silver and the government were brought to a halt.

The blockade was a trying time for all who took part. It went on for two extremely stressful months. Finally, the resulting media storm forced the government to back down. The government stopped Cream Silver, although they'd said it was impossible. And, contrary to what they'd told us, it didn't cost millions. In fact it cost nothing. After the blockade, Cream Silver took the government to court, exactly as they had before, in 1986. The result was exactly the same as it was in 1986. They lost. They received no compensation. The blockade shouldn't have been necessary. Contrary to what they told us, the government could have stopped Cream Silver at any time with no monetary risk.

But apparently the government had learned that people care about their parks. Shortly after the blockade, they called a halt to all claim staking and mining activity in all BC provincial parks (except for a mine in Strathcona Park). They also started the process of extinguishing all mining claims in all provincial parks. (Incidentally, this process is almost certainly completed by now, but as we've seen, nothing is certain when dealing with governments; people would be wise to check the status of any mining claims in any park they care about.)

Today there are no mining claims in Strathcona Park except for the claims of the mine noted above, which unfortunately still operates on Myra Creek at the top end of Buttle Lake. The government built a paved road along the shore of Buttle Lake to service this mine in the early

1960s, which is when the mine began serious operations. (Most people probably don't know this road in the park was built to service the mine, but it was. Now it also serves the park, although signs along the road still identify it as "Western Mines Road".)

At the time of the blockade, this large operating mine was just too big a nut for us to crack, and we were mainly focussed on stopping the government from putting even more mines into the park. So the mine continues to operate — and pollute — in our oldest provincial park, ironically called "the flagship of the provincial park system" by past governments. The mine was fined \$80,000.00 in the 1980s, and was recently

fined \$165,000.00 for pollution offences.

The pollution and other damage — the huge open pit scar, logged and dammed lakes, ruined watersheds, pipelines, settling ponds, industrial roads, noise, etc., serve as an ugly warning to us all of what could have happened to other areas of Strathcona Park and other parks in our provincial park system if the Strathcona Blockade hadn't taken place.

Let's not forget what the blockade accomplished. As the years go by, it's important to remember the hard work and bravery of all those people who stood against the government in the winter of 1988 to protect our oldest provincial park. And importantly, they somehow managed to do it peacefully, against great odds.

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