Natural and Cultural Heritage Values Management

Introduction

The management of natural and cultural attributes in Francis Point Provincial Park and Ecological Reserve will be based upon the *Park Act*, *Ecological Reserves Act*, *Park and Recreation Area Regulations,* ministry policies, the land agreements between the property owners (i.e. TNT and NCC) and BC Parks, and the role of the Park and Ecological Reserve in the overall system of provincial parks and protected areas in British Columbia.

BC Parks conservation and recreation management goals will be met by protecting natural, cultural and outdoor recreation values, monitoring conditions and visitor use and working co-operatively with others.

Land Uses, Tenures and Interests

The management of Francis Point Park and Ecological Reserve, which is privately owned land and leased to BC Parks will be influenced and directed by the land agreements that were conditional to the purchase and lease of the properties.

Access Management

Land access to Francis Point Park is currently from three road ends at the Park boundary. The Park is accessed at the north end by following Francis Peninsula Road to its terminus or by turning off Francis Peninsula Road at either Merrill or Rondeview Roads to their road ends along the eastern Park boundary. At present, Merrill Road serves as the primary access point to the Park. Currently the only accommodation for parking is along the road edges near the three road ends. Parking is limited at all three sites and there are no turnaround facilities. As Park visitations increase, the minimal parking available will result in increased congestion and safety concerns.

The first step in establishing the long term primary access point to the Park is establishing the feasibility of developing a parking area. The options for a parking area are located at:

1. Merrill Road
2. Francis Peninsula Road

There is no road access within the Park or Ecological Reserve. The Park and Ecological Reserve can potentially be accessed by small craft at a number of small bays. Signs around the Ecological Reserve at both potential land and water access points note that there is no visitor access without a permit from BC Parks.

Update to Plan – November 19, 2001

Further information has now become available on access into the park and is reflected in the statements below.

Francis Peninsula Road has some opportunities for a parking area and a trail connection to Middle Bay. However prior legal agreements restrict the development of parking or a developed trail access into the park at this location.

Merrill Road has a potential parking location at the end of the road in a highway right of way. Use of this location would require permission from the Ministry of Transportation and Highways, the clearing of about 14 midsize trees, and the import of fill material. The parking area could then accommodate approximately 10 cars.

Objectives	Strategies
• To manage access to the Park with the least disruption to adjacent land owners, the least impact to Park vegetation and the most positive introduction to the Park.	• Work with SCRD, MOTH and adjacent landowners to establish the most appropriate long-term primary access point (parking and trailheads) to the Park. This will be at the Francis Peninsula Road or the Merrill Road entrance.
Objectives continued	**Strategies continued**
	• Maintain the Rondeview Road access as local pedestrian access only.
	• Work with and encourage SCRD, MOTH and adjacent land owners to limit both future road development close to the perimeter of the Park and the creation of additional access points to the Park as the adjacent lands are developed.
• To allow appropriate marine access that minimizes disruption to the foreshore and intertidal area.	• Encourage access to the Park by small craft (e.g. kayaks, canoes and small runabouts) to occur at Middle Bay.
	• Monitor levels of impacts from use via marine access. Take management actions where necessary.
	• No marine access allowed to the Ecological Reserve without a permit from BC Parks.

Existing Tenures, Alienations and Encumbrances Management

There are no existing tenures, alienations or encumbrances within the park and ecological reserve. There are legal agreements between the Province of British Columbia and the landowners (TNT and NCC) which direct and influence the management of the protected areas.

The intent of the covenants and lease agreements between BC Parks and the landowners (TNT and NCC) is that the Park and Ecological Reserve be managed by BC Parks to conserve the biodiversity values of the site and representation of the Very Dry Maritime Subzone of the Coastal Western Hemlock (CWH xm1) ecosystem variant.

Objectives	Strategies
• To allow for recreational, educational and scientific uses appropriate with the wildlife habitat and environmental enhancement purpose of the Park.	• Work with local groups and park visitors to facilitate day use activities in the Park that are compatible with the conservation focus of the Park (i.e. hiking and walking, viewing and nature appreciation)
	• Assess current conditions and monitor levels of recreational use to limit impact to the Park's resources. Take management actions where necessary.
	• Assess, monitor and take management action as necessary to ensure that any future servicing or maintenance of the water line right-of-way through the Park is undertaken in such a manner as to minimize impacts to Park values.

Adjacent Patterns of Land Use

The Park is located in a semi-urban area of Pender Harbour with approximately half of the perimeter bounded by land designated as residential use. With the population of the Egmont/Pender Harbour area expected to double in the next 25 years, there will be challenges to maintain the conservation values of the Park and Ecological Reserve.

Opportunities will be explored with the SCRD and adjacent property owners to encourage appropriate buffers and management direction along the Park boundaries as the adjacent areas develop.

Water

A significant feature of the Park and Ecological Reserve is the four kilometers of undisturbed shoreline along Malaspina Straight. Data on the subtidal flora and fauna around the tip of Moore Point and off the southern tip of Francis Point collected over the past 20 years of SCUBA dives indicates varied substrates with species typical of the marine ecosystems in this area.

Freshwater in the Park infiltrates into the ground, as well as following natural drainage patterns. Most surface water drains toward Malaspina Straight. There is a wetland that straddles the eastern boundary of the Park and drains by a small creek to Middle Bay. Future development of the property adjacent to the Park where most of the wetland is located may affect the wetland and thus the surface water, soil moisture regime and the vegetation downstream in the Park.

Objectives	Strategies
• To identify and maintain the diversity of marine intertidal and subtidal species along the 100m foreshore by protecting sensitive habitats and minimizing impacts of activities on the marine resources.	• Continue to collect marine flora and fauna information along the foreshore and conduct an assessment of their relative sensitivity.
	• In cooperation with other agencies implement a no take policy within the Park and Ecological Reserve foreshore for shellfish.
	• Work with other agencies including Fisheries and Oceans Canada to ensure marine resource values are considered and managed for within the 100m foreshore zone.
• To protect surface and ground water resources to support the vegetation and wildlife communities near the wetlands area.	• Work with SCRD and other agencies to ensure the surface and groundwater regimes are not impacted from future development near the adjacent wetland.

Vegetation

Francis Point Park and Ecological Reserve occurs within the Very Dry Maritime Subzone of the Coastal Western Hemlock biogeoclimatic zone (CWH xm1). This protected area represents a relatively undisturbed example of the CWH xm1 variant, including several rare-listed forest communities and an

unusual and highly sensitive non-forested grass-moss/lichen community. Only 1.9% of the CWH xm1 variant is represented in protected areas. Detailed plant lists and description of the vegetation on the site is contained in the Background Report (Appendix 1) and the Ecological Assessment (Appendix 3) completed in August 2001.

The vegetation cover on the site is primarily an open canopy coniferous-dominated forest and open moss covered rocks. The forest cover mapping indicates that a number of the age classes on the property are over 100 years with a number in the 141 – 250 year range. There is evidence of past logging in the mid and northern sections of the Park. Hand loggers removed some of the large diameter Douglas-fir early in the twentieth century and the stand was again partially disturbed in the 1940's. The forest stands are primarily mature second growth, with some portions approaching old-growth. In the mid section of the Park there is an excellent legacy of old-growth characteristics derived from the original stand of veteran trees present.

The results of several plant surveys indicate an above normal species richness of vascular plants for the size of the Park and Ecological Reserve. There are several plant communities on the site ranging from open areas supporting scattered shrubs, mosses, lichens, grasses and wildflowers on very dry exposed rocky substrates, dry forested sites treed with Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine and arbutus, mesic to moist areas treed with Douglas-fir, western red cedar and western hemlock to a wetland and some riparian vegetation along a small creek draining from the wetland to Middle Bay. The extent of each of these plant communities in the Park and Ecological Reserve has not been mapped.

The Park contains two red-listed (endangered or threatened) and one blue-listed (vulnerable) plant associations.

Red-listed:

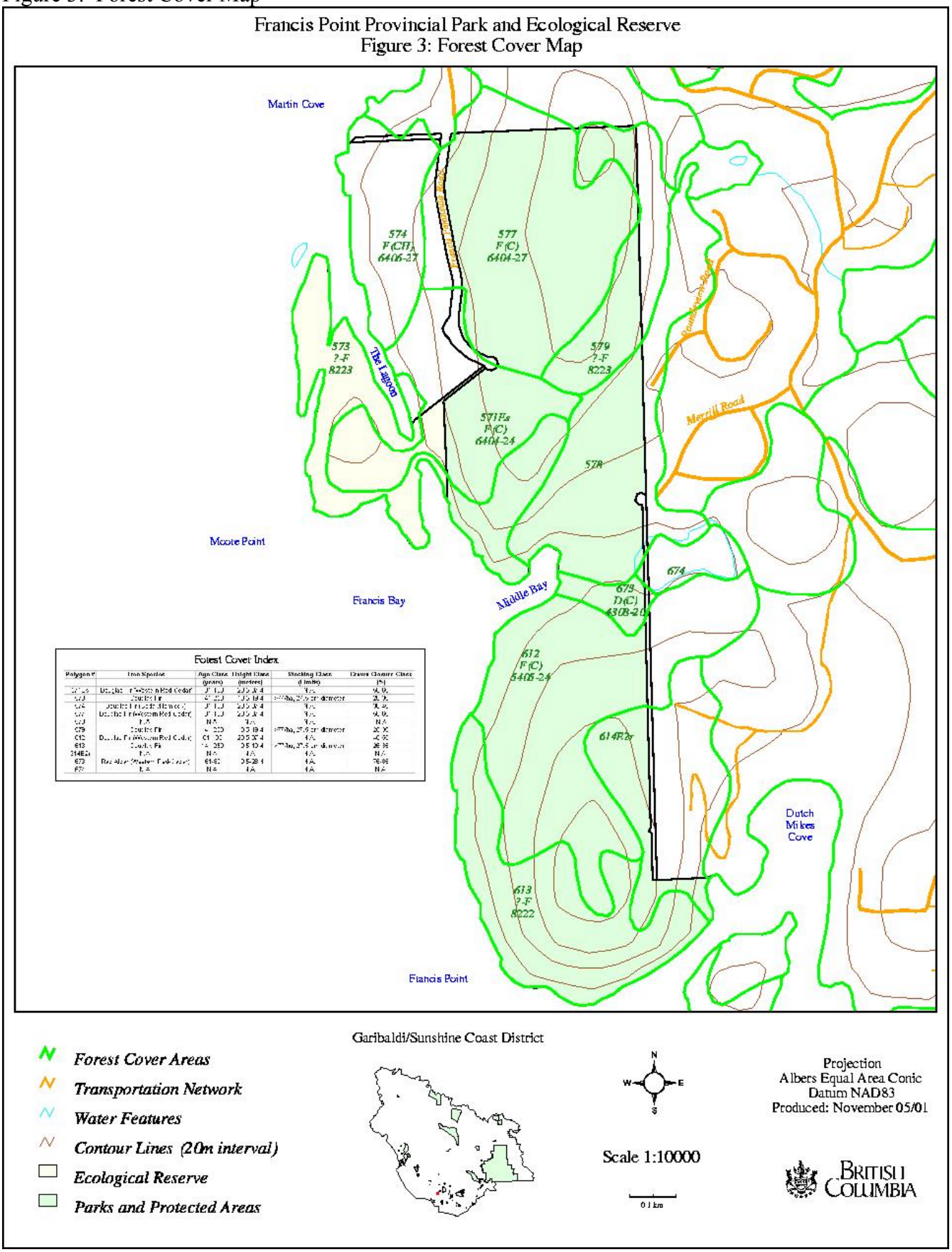
- CWH xm1- 01 Western Hemlock - Douglas-fir - Oregon Beaked Moss; and
- CWH xm1- 02 Douglas-fir - Lodgepole Pine - Rhacomitrium.

Blue-listed:

- CWH xm1- 05 Western Redcedar - Swordfern

The ecological assessment conducted in August 2001 noted the presence of the blue-listed dune bentgrass. Special mention was also made of the grass-moss/lichen component of the CWH xm1- 02 site series, as it contains a combination of uncommon grasses that is not found elsewhere in the site series. These grasses are the blue-listed dune bentgrass and a native rare subspecies of red fescue. Two more co-dominant grasses in this community, poverty oatgrass and western witchgrass are also rather uncommon in such abundance. This unusual grass-moss/lichen community forms the most sensitive part of the rock outcrop vegetation and on the basis of the August 2001 survey, it is recommended that this rare combination be considered a non-forested community.

Figure 3: Forest Cover Map



There is little evidence of non-native vegetation on the property. Aggressive non-native species such as Scotch broom, Himalayan blackberry, orchard grass and sweet vernal grass are very uncommon and Kentucky bluegrass is completely absent. However, it may be only a matter of time until the most aggressive species, broom and blackberry, become more dominant and spread at a greater rate. A challenge will be to manage access and peoples activities to minimize transport of exotic weedy species into the Park and Ecological Reserve.

A number of centuries old but not especially large Douglas fir on the site have burn scars indicating survival of past forest fires. Fire has been a natural component in the evolution of the area's forest types. However, combinations of nearby residential areas, risks and fire interval considerations exclude the use of burning as a vegetation management technique for this protected area.

Objectives	Strategies
• To protect the highly sensitive and rare-listed plants and plant communities.	• Map the extent of highly sensitive and rare-listed plant communities to facilitate location of trails, other Park facilities and to provide a baseline for monitoring.
	• No Park facilities including buildings, picnic and campgrounds, playgrounds or roadways are to be developed in the rare-listed plant communities.
	• New trails that cross the open, moss and lichen covered rock outcrop areas should be kept to a minimum. Existing trails should be relocated away from slanting rock surfaces and away from areas where trail proliferation is likely or already occurring.
	• No trails will be located in the Ecological Reserve.
	• Monitor use of trails through or adjacent to highly sensitive plant communities to determine any degradation and implement corrective measures as appropriate (e.g. fences, seasonal trail closures, and signs).
	• Develop and implement a fire management plan. Chemical retardants should be used as a last resort within the Park and Ecological Reserve.

Objectives continued	Strategies continued
• To prevent and control the establishment of non-native vegetation.	• Provide Park information about the effects of the introduction of non-native vegetation and preventative measures that the public can take (e.g. staying on the trails).
	• Develop and implement a thorough control program for specific aggressive non-native plants (e.g. himalayan blackberry, broom).
	• Avoid the creation of disturbed or exposed mineral soil, from development of trails, parking area and other facilities, and any maintenance activities associated with the water line.
	• Any exposed soil areas should be rehabilitated, possibly by revegetating with native species in a timely manner. A disturbed site should be monitored carefully to ensure natural regeneration has occurred and to prevent any invasive species from becoming established.
	Domestic animals using the Park, including walking dogs or riding horses.
	• Develop opportunities to involve local supporters in regular monitoring and control of invasive species.
• To maintain plant communities for their value and contribution to visual values and recreation attractions	• In the design and construction of facilities limit the amount of vegetation impacted (e.g. trees near a parking area) to protect the visual values of the forest.
	• Avoid scars in the vegetation from trail development that can be seen from other vantage points in the Park or from the water.

Wildlife

The Park and Ecological Reserve's small size and location within a semi-urban area, make it unviable to sustain populations of many wildlife species. However, this protected area does contribute to the habitat requirements of species associated with older second growth and old growth coastal forests. Little is known about the wildlife that utilize the Park, as no site specific wildlife surveys have been conducted on the property.

Objectives	Strategies
• To identify and maintain the diversity of wildlife species within the Park and Ecological Reserve by protecting sensitive or important habitats and minimizing impacts of recreational activities on wildlife populations.	• Conduct surveys for possible occurrences of rare-listed species including bats (e.g. Keen's long-eared myotis) reptiles and amphibians. Depending on the survey results, develop a management strategy to protect any rare or endangered species.
	• Develop opportunities to involve local supporters to conduct regular bird counts or other wildlife inventories.

Landscape Setting and Feature Values

Francis Point Park and Ecological Reserve is a coastal forested landscape ranging from sea level to approximately 100 meters in elevation at two hills on the north and south sections of the Park. The terrain varies from level, to gently/moderately undulating, to steep slopes and abrupt drop-offs. The south and west side of the protected area is a varied shoreline that bounds Malaspina Strait.

Visual

Francis Point Park and Ecological Reserve offers spectacular viewscapes both to the site from the water and from the site across Malaspina Strait, which is a busy navigation channel. From the water, the varied shoreline and upland topography with forested cover and open bluffs provide important coastal viewscapes for the high volume of marine traffic. From the upland, the shoreline of the Park and Ecological Reserve offer west and southwesterly exposure with panoramic views across Malaspina Strait towards Texada and Vancouver Islands. Much of the interior parts of the Park have an open forest canopy with limited understorey vegetation, resulting in an aesthetically pleasing park-like setting.

Objectives	Strategies
• To protect the viewing opportunities from within the Park and Ecological Reserve and the viewscapes to the protected area from Malaspina Strait.	• Work with agencies from adjacent lands (e.g. Ministry of Forests and SCRD) to incorporate visual management considerations in future land developments for protection of visual values from the Park and Ecological Reserve
	• Ensure that any proposed trail development or facilities constructed in the Park are aesthetically pleasing, blend with the natural environment, and protect visual values from the water and other adjacent properties.

Scientific Research

The natural resources of the Park and Ecological Reserve provide an opportunity for scientific research activities related to rare-listed and unique examples of plants and plant communities.

Objectives	Strategies
• To support and encourage scientific research that is compatible with the conservation focus of the Park and Ecological Reserve.	• Support appropriate research activities that minimize disturbance to the site and limit sampling of Park and Ecological Reserve natural and cultural resources.
	• Research activities will be conducted according to the limits on recreation activity within the park and ecological reserve (eg no overnight camping).

Outdoor Recreation Opportunities Management

Introduction

People currently use the undeveloped trails in the Park to access the water at Middle Bay from the Merrill Road entrance. Once at Middle Bay visitors tend to wander along the foreshore of the Bay, paddle, swim or snorkel during warmer weather or sit quietly enjoying the experience of the coastal forest at the waters edge and views across Malaspina Strait. Currently dogs are allowed in the Park as long as they remain on a leash. Most visitors looking for more of a hiking experience, continue from Middle Bay south on undeveloped trails along the bluffs to the navigation light at the southern tip of Francis Point.

There will be no access to the Ecological Reserve without a permit from BC Parks.