

**BC Forest Service**

**Information Package**

**A Partnership Approach for  
BC Forest Service Recreation Sites and Trails**

August 2002



## **INTRODUCTION**

To support the government's goal to restore sound fiscal management, the Ministry of Forests announced earlier this year that it would focus on its core stewardship and forest management duties and gradually withdraw from managing over 1,300 forest service recreation sites and nearly 500 trails.

At a cost of \$5 million annually to taxpayers, the Ministry of Forests can no longer afford to fully maintain recreation sites and trails. However, the ministry's goal is to keep open as many sites and trails as possible – and for those sites and trails to continue to provide rustic, public recreation opportunities.

To accomplish this, the ministry is seeking partners to share in maintaining recreation sites and trails, where there's a high level of interest. This presents an opportunity for local organizations to take advantage of the infrastructure the Forest Service has built up and manage recreation sites and trails. Often community groups are the most knowledgeable about how to manage local resources. A benefit of local management is responsiveness to local needs.

This information package has been developed to:

- help potential partners assess the opportunities for managing B.C. Forest Service (BCFS) recreation sites and trails, and assist them in developing management proposals, which will be solicited by the Forest Service this fall; and
- initiate dialogue with potential partners related to terms, conditions and scope of managing BCFS recreation sites and trails.

### **Linkages with Recreation Stewardship Panel**

The Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection recently appointed a Recreation Stewardship Panel to recommend improved management models and funding sources for British Columbia's fish and wildlife services, recreation services within provincial parks, and opportunities for greater public involvement in the decision-making process. The panel will submit its final report no later than November 29, 2002. Although BCFS recreation sites and trails do not fall under the panel's mandate, their recommendations may provide mechanisms or processes that will provide consistency to management of the province's recreational resources and assist the BCFS in managing recreation sites and trails through public-private partnership agreements.

### **Background**

The BCFS is responsible for managing recreation resources and public recreation use in provincial forests. Land and Water BC (a Crown corporation under the auspices of the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management) manages commercial recreation use on Crown lands. BC Parks (a division of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection) manages resources and recreational use in provincial parks.

The BCFS recreation site and trail program was established in 1971 to develop and manage areas where public overnight use was concentrated, and where safety, sanitation and environmental issues required attention. Currently, there are more than 1,300 recreation sites and nearly 500 trails.

There are two types of BCFS recreation sites: *regular* and *enhanced*. Both types are generally located kilometres from major highways, primarily on forest roads. The recreation sites are rustic, with amenities limited to pit toilets, picnic tables and fire pits.

- *Regular recreation sites* are often small, with most having under 15 distinct camping units per campground. Some sites have garbage bins, but most do not (users are expected to pack out their garbage).
- *Enhanced recreation sites* (approximately 44) are often located closer to urban areas and are generally larger, averaging over 30 distinct camping units per campground. The higher level of use at these sites requires increased levels of maintenance and supervision.

Approximately 500 recreation trails provide opportunities for hiking, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. Some trails provide enhanced services such as track-setting or grooming.

Public use of BCFS recreation sites and trails was free until 1999. However, in that year, recreation fees were introduced at all BCFS recreation sites and some trails to help finance operating costs.

Camping fees generated approximately \$800,000 in revenue per year, which covered just over one-third of the total operating costs. The BCFS provided an additional \$2 million annually in base funding support and about \$3 million in salary costs. Enhanced trail fees generated approximately \$300,000 last year, which was used to offset the costs of track setting and grooming services at cross-country ski and snowmobile trails. There has been no BCFS base funding support for other trails since 1997.

### **Current Status**

Following discussions with key recreation stakeholders, the BCFS announced that, for 2002-03, it would continue regular maintenance to approximately 600 recreation sites and 170 trails to help ensure the orderly transfer of these facilities to new managers. The other sites and trails remain open to the public, but are maintained by users.

For this year, use of the majority of recreation sites and trails is free, though a \$10 per night fee (camping permit) continues to be charged at enhanced recreation sites (with discounts provided to seniors and persons with disabilities). These fees were set during the camping fee program implemented in 1999; fees for regular recreation sites (i.e. camping pass) were discontinued earlier in 2002. As well, there are locally set fees for use of enhanced recreation trails.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

The BCFS is seeking partners to take over the management and maintenance of recreation sites and trails under agreements with the ministry. These agreements will outline maintenance responsibilities for agreement holders. In limited circumstances where forest roads exist only to provide access to recreation sites, responsibilities may also include road maintenance.

The ministry has already entered into some agreements with community organizations and forest companies, and many other interested groups are stepping forward. However, all recreation sites and trails will remain public facilities on Crown land.

Based on the ministry's service plan and discussions with stakeholders, the ministry has identified a number of objectives for recreation sites and trails in British Columbia:

- Retain all recreation sites and trails in public ownership.
- Keep open as many recreation sites and trails as possible.
- Continue to provide safe, sanitary and rustic public recreation opportunities.
- Encourage volunteerism and local community involvement to help benefit local economies.
- Build partnerships with non-government organizations, like the forest industry, local governments, First Nations and community groups to manage recreation sites and trails.
- Use agreements to formalize partnerships.
- Continue to honour effective agreements for managing recreation sites and trails (e.g., cross-country ski trails and snowmobile trails).
- Maintain the BCFS identity (logo) at recreation sites and trails, while also promoting the identity of the partner organization.

Agreements will clarify the commitment of partner organizations and the BCFS, including obligations that may affect liability. While several outdoor recreation organizations have access to comprehensive liability coverage that may be available to potential partners, some have expressed a reluctance to enter into agreements if they are required to purchase liability insurance. The Ministry of Forests is seeking effective ways to indemnify agreement holders.

### **Options for Enhanced Recreation Sites and Trails**

The BCFS anticipates that the management of enhanced recreation sites and trails have a high likelihood of being transferred to other parties. At this time, the BCFS is interested in having these sites and trails managed on a non-commercial basis.

Under the existing *Forest Recreation Regulation*, any proposals which include user fees as a means of generating revenue, would be restricted to enhanced recreation sites and trails where additional services are provided.

Surveys indicate the public is willing to pay a reasonable fee to ensure the continued availability of these camping and trail opportunities, and this was generally proven to be true during the three years recreation fees were implemented. A number of options exist for managing enhanced recreation sites and trails.

- a) Increase the number of enhanced recreation sites and trails*  
Some existing regular recreation sites and trails have the potential to be upgraded to enhanced sites and trails. Upgrading some sites and trails with higher levels of service and use, coupled with fees that are collected and retained by the operator, may be a cost-effective way to maintain sites and trails.
- b) Set enhanced camping fees on a local basis*  
Enhanced trail fees can be set locally, depending on the types of services provided. This same approach could potentially be applied to enhanced recreation sites.
- c) Increase the number of camping units at enhanced recreation sites*  
At some sites, it may be possible to increase the number of camping units, which would generate more revenue to offset maintenance costs.
- d) Increase use at enhanced recreation sites and trails*  
Increasing awareness of the attractions at these sites and trails could increase use, generate higher revenues, and provide additional recreational opportunities.
- e) Manage regular recreation sites and trails in the vicinity of enhanced sites and trails*  
Some operators managing enhanced recreation sites and trails may generate sufficient revenue to enable them to also manage nearby regular sites and trails.

### **Options for Regular Recreation Sites and Trails**

Potential partners may be interested in managing regular recreation sites and trails because of social and economic benefits to the local area.

In addition to the possible cost-recovery mechanism listed for enhanced sites and trails, there may be other ways to recover or reduce maintenance costs.

### **Options for Enhanced and Regular Recreation Sites and Trails**

- a) Reduce overall maintenance (operating) costs*  
Innovative measures, such as the use of volunteers, may help reduce operating costs while maintaining or increasing recreational opportunities at all types of sites and trails. This has been the experience at some enhanced recreation trails, where volunteer efforts significantly reduce the costs of maintaining the trails.
- b) Reduce administration costs*  
In a typical year, the BCFS has managed over 120 contracts to address the maintenance of recreation sites and trails. The BCFS would like to replace this with

a smaller number of long-term partnership agreements. This would reduce administration costs, provide more security to interested parties, and offer potential economies of scale in recreation site and trail management.

c) *Your ideas*

There are likely other ideas that would enable recreation sites and trails to be managed more effectively under partnership agreements. When the BCFS solicits proposals this fall, we would like to hear your ideas.

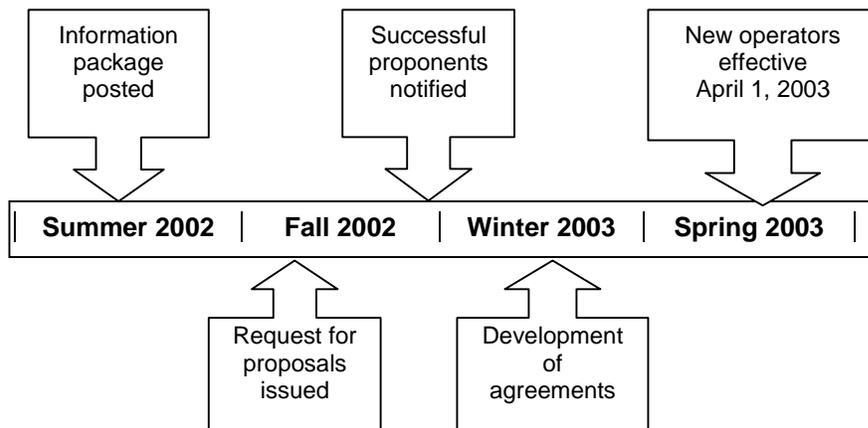
### Other Management Options

Where no appropriate expression of interest is received to manage and maintain a recreation site or trail on a non-commercial basis, the BCFS will explore other options. The Forest Service may:

- work with Land and Water BC to advertise the opportunity to manage the site or trail as a commercial facility. The site or trail would remain Crown property;
- leave the area open to the public, if there are no safety or management issues requiring costly upgrades or regularly scheduled maintenance; however, the site or trail will not be maintained; or
- fully or partially decommission the area where there are safety or management issues that require costly upgrades or regularly scheduled maintenance. The public may continue to use the site or trail, but it would not be maintained.

### NEXT STEPS

In Fall 2002, the BCFS will formally invite proposals from non-government organizations and local governments to manage and maintain existing recreation sites and trails beginning April 1, 2003. Proposals will be evaluated and agreements developed with the successful proponents over winter.



## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

The following principles and general criteria are intended to guide the development of proposals, and will also be used to assist in evaluating submitted proposals and awarding agreements to manage recreation sites and trails:

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #1**

Retain all BCFS recreation sites and trails in public ownership on a non-commercial basis.

#### **Criteria:**

- Does the proposal retain the recreation sites and trails in public ownership (i.e., Crown owned, not sold or privatised)?
- How does the proposal contribute to maximizing the number of sites and trails kept open?
- Is the proposal based on a non-commercial operation?

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #2**

Continue to provide safe, sanitary, environmentally sound, and socially acceptable rustic, public recreation opportunities.

#### **Criteria:**

- How does the proposal retain the rustic recreation opportunity at the sites and trails?
- How does the proposal respond to increasing public demand for recreation? Does the proponent have the capability (staff/resources) to develop or enhance facilities?
- How does the proposal promote protection of forest resources such as fire prevention and safe fire use?

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #3**

Ensure public access to sites and trails.

#### **Criteria:**

- Does the proposal recognize who has responsibility and cost of maintaining forest road access to the sites or trails where roads exist only to provide access to recreation?

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #4**

Reduce the Province's costs of managing and maintaining recreation sites and trails.

#### **Criteria:**

- Does the proposal include clusters or groups of sites and trails to reduce the number of management agreements and administration costs?
- How are the costs to operate the facility going to be recovered? User fees? Volunteers? Partnerships? Other?
- Is the proposal self-sufficient or does it require additional funding from third parties?
- Does the proponent have a proven track record of managing recreation sites and trails?

- Can the proponent be expected to manage the sites and trails for the long term with a low risk of default?

#### **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #5**

Honour existing management agreements with groups and organizations currently managing and maintaining recreation sites and trails that are in good standing with the BCFS. In addition, recognize groups/organizations that have made significant donations and/or volunteer contributions towards the development and/or maintenance of sites and trails.

##### **Criteria:**

- Is the proposal from a group or organization currently under an existing agreement to maintain recreation sites or trails?
- Is the proposal from a group or organization that has made significant volunteer contributions towards the development and/or maintenance of the site or trail?
- Is the group in good standing with the BCFS?
- Is the group registered as a not-for-profit society?
- Can the BCFS still deliver its end of the agreement? Or do changes need to be made?

#### **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #6**

Work with local community-based organizations to ensure recreation sites and trails contribute to local communities in both economic and social terms.

##### **Criteria:**

- Is the proposal supported by the local community?
- Does the proposal provide local employment opportunities?

#### **GUIDING PRINCIPLE #7**

Work directly with First Nations to develop partnerships in managing recreation sites and trails.

##### **Criteria:**

- Does the proposal involve First Nations interests/values?
- Is the proposal linked to an economic measures agreement between government and First Nations?

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

A list of existing recreation sites and trails and their locations is available on the Ministry of Forests recreation website at: <http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfp/rec/rec.htm>. Choose the Adobe Acrobat document “[List of Campgrounds, Trails and Interpretive Sites.](#)”

Additional information on specific recreation sites or trails can be obtained from local forest district offices.

If you or your organization has additional questions, please contact one of the following Forest Service staff nearest you:

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