



**Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection  
Environmental Stewardship Division**

**Parks and Protected Areas Branch**

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**Maintaining Conservation Values**

**In**

**Operating Areas**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

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The Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Environmental Stewardship Division (ESD) has initiated a new recreation model for the maintenance of recreation facilities and delivery of recreation opportunities in campsites located in parks in the province. This new recreation model has established Operating Areas in provincial parks which will be maintained by park facility operators (PFO's). While Operating Areas will commonly be associated with established recreational facilities and established recreational activities, they may in some cases extend to less developed park areas. Also, PFO's may propose new facilities or recreational activities in the Operating Areas.

In order to ensure conservation values are maintained in both established Operating Areas and in the greater park areas, guidelines for maintaining conservation values in Operating Areas are required. This paper identifies a set of general guidelines for the maintenance of conservation values in Operating Areas which can be applied to all parks, however, park specific issues will require more detailed analysis.

## **II. GENERAL CONSERVATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR OPERATING AREAS**

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### **1. Conservation Values – Systems Context**

Prior to the establishment of Operating Areas, an assessment of the relative conservation values of areas proposed for Operating Areas from a systems context was considered. This process identified that some Operating Areas are located in red listed plant communities; located in under represented ecosystems (i.e.: rare grasslands); or, contain critical habitats or significant cultural values. PFO operational duties and recreation activities undertaken within the Operating Area must not detrimentally affect these values.

The following is a general list of the natural and cultural values that have been identified by regional staff as existing within the boundaries of Operating Areas within the province:

- 68 - archaeological sites: some Operating Area's may contain numerous sites; some may include whole village sites and/or middens
- 10 - First Nations traditional uses: spiritual uses or traditional gathering
- 29 - blue listed plant occurrences
- 42 - red listed plant occurrences
- 38 - blue listed animal occurrences: includes birds, wildlife, amphibians, insects, etc.

- 28 - red listed animal occurrences: includes birds, wildlife, amphibians, insects, etc.
- 15 - significant habitats: spawning channels, Grizzly bear habitat, red and blue listed plant communities
- 5 - areas with identified wildlife management issues (bear habitat)
- 2 - internationally significant fossil beds

Note: These numbers are conservative because many of the parks have not been accurately inventoried. Park specific identified values are included in Section K of the Operating Areas Information.

## **2. Conservation Values – Higher Level Planning**

Some parks may have been designated as a result of Land and Resource Management Planning Process or other planning processes. These higher level plans may have directed specific criteria for the management of conservation values in specific parks. It will be important to ensure that the PFO operational duties and recreational activities undertaken in an Operating Area do not conflict with the higher level plan directions.

Also, the management of parks and protected areas will be directed by Management Plans, Management Direction Statements or Park Purpose Statements. These management documents set appropriate conservation goals and define park zoning to ensure conservation values are maintained and appropriate recreation opportunities are offered. They may also supply specific direction for the maintenance of conservation values in the park or protected area. All activities in a park or protected area including Operating Areas must comply with the zoning and management direction given in these documents.

## **3. Conservation Values – BC Parks Principles**

British Columbia Parks is a world leader in conservation management, therefore, protection of outstanding conservation and wilderness values in provincial parks is paramount. The BC Parks reputation is an extremely important symbol to the international community and it is important that the PFO operational duties and recreational activities undertaken in Operating Areas preserve this brand.

If undertaken appropriately, PFO operational duties and recreational activities in Operating Areas may increase park conservation values rather than decrease them. Also, BC Parks conservation oriented wilderness and “green” image may well serve as a major attraction to Operating Area Users.

It is important that PFO’s understand and are supportive of the value of conservation to their particular operations so that the outdoor experience that park visitors are specifically seeking is not lost due to inappropriate operational duties or recreation activities. Also, the maintenance and recreation goal of the

Operation Area must conform to the park or protected area purpose. For example if a park was established for the protection of a particular natural feature or quality, PFO operational duties and recreational activities should be undertaken in the Operating Area so that the feature is not compromised and can be sustained over the long term.

#### **4. Conservation Values – Park Context**

In the maintenance of conservation values within parks, it is important to recognize that some impacts may occur both within the Operating Area and also within other areas of the park. For example, a large campsite where campfires are burning may significantly impact surrounding air quality beyond the campsite. In another example, a new recreational activity in an Operating Area which brings large numbers of people to new areas of the park or changes recreational use patterns in a park may adversely affect how wildlife use the area.

In addition, the cumulative impacts of all park activities and all park users must be considered along with PFO operational duties and recreational activities undertaken in the Operating Area. It is possible that a specific value in a park may not be able to withstand both public and Operating Area User impacts. An example may be a rare plant community subject to disturbance due to public recreational use and further subject to disturbance due to new Operating Area recreational activities.

Prior to changes to PFO operational duties and recreational activities undertaken in Operating Areas, it is important to establish science based park specific monitoring criteria and indicators for ecological, and in some cases social and economic affects which may result from changes. The establishment of park specific monitoring criteria and indicators will allow for the tracking of conservation values in the Operating Area and provide an opportunity to correct problems and acknowledge successes.

### **III. LEGAL STANDARDS AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES**

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#### **1. Acts and Codes**

PFO's operating in Provincial Parks will be bound by the same legal standards applicable to other crown lands in addition to the *Park Act*, the *Protected Areas of British Columbia Act*, the *Environmental Land Use Act* and the *Park and Recreation Area Regulations*. Numerous other Federal and Provincial Acts also apply in Operating Areas, such as the *Wildlife Act*, *Heritage Conservation Act*, *Federal Fisheries Act*, *Fish Protection Act*, *Waste Management Act*, etc. and components of the *Species at Risk Act*.

As identified previously, many operating areas may contain red and blue listed species or species identified under the *Species at Risk Act*. These species will require special consideration to ensure they are not affected by PFO operational duties and recreational activities undertaken in Operating Areas.

It is also possible that new species may become red or blue listed over time and will require future special management considerations. Actions to ensure red and blue listed species, species at risk, and critical habitats are not affected by PFO operational duties and recreational activities undertaken in Operating Areas will be cooperatively developed by ESD, Parks and Protected Areas Section and PFO's and noted in the Annual Operating Plan.

## **2. Government Conservation Initiatives**

The government of British Columbia is currently developing strategies and associated actions to address the conservation of biological diversity and rare or endangered species or ecosystems in the province. The Biodiversity Strategy is currently being developed along with a Species at Risk Strategy, an Alien Species Strategy, an Ecosystems at Risk Strategy, a Wildlife/Human Conflict Reduction Strategy and, a Living Rivers Strategy.

These strategies will identify species and habitats requiring specific management actions to ensure recovery or long-term viability. Actions to ensure species at risk and/or habitats at risk are not affected by PFO operational duties and recreational activities undertaken in Operating Areas will be cooperatively developed by ESD, Parks and Protected Areas Section and PFO's and noted in the Annual Operating Plan.

Associated with the various strategies, specific conservation values in parks and in Operating Areas may be formally or informally inventoried or monitored by agencies such as COSEWIC (Council on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada), CDC (Conservation Data Center), Provincial Archaeological Branch, Species at Risk Recovery Teams, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, First Nations Bands etc to ensure values are not affected by PFO operational duties and recreational activities undertaken in Operating Areas.

## **3. BC Parks Policies**

PFO's are responsible to be aware of and comply with BC Parks and Protected Areas management plans and conservation policies. General policies which are applicable to retention of conservation in parks and protected areas include;

- BC Parks Conservation Program Policies;
  - BC Parks Impact Assessment Process;
  - Bear Human Conflict Prevention Plan for Parks and Protected Areas;
- and,

➤ **Wildlife/Danger Tree Assessment Process.**

These policies can be accessed on line at:

[http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/operations/rec\\_serv\\_policies\\_procedures.htm](http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/operations/rec_serv_policies_procedures.htm)

Alternatively, copies of these policies and plans can be viewed at regional Environmental Stewardship offices.

**NOTE:** In addition to the above mentioned general policies, there also may be park specific natural value management direction given in other plans such as park weed management plans, park wildlife conflict prevention plans, park fire prevention plans, etc. The management practices identified in these plans for the maintenance of conservation values in Operating Areas must be included in the development of Annual Operating Plans for Operating Areas.

#### **4. Natural Disturbances and Wildlife Conflicts**

The ownership of all natural resources in parks and protected areas remains with the province. The management of natural disturbances within Operating Areas remains with Environmental Stewardship Division with the exception of:

- PFO actions to protect staff and public health and safety; or,
- PFO actions to protect staff, public and facilities in the event of fire, flood, windstorm or, bear-human or other wildlife conflicts.

➤ ***Bear Human Conflict Prevention***

PFO's will be required to fulfill specific duties as noted in the Bear Human Conflict Prevention Plan for Parks and Protected Areas to ensure bear human conflicts are minimized.

➤ ***Wildlife/Danger Trees***

PFO's will be required to complete wildlife/danger tree assessments, however, any tree removal or modification actions must be approved by ESD Parks and Protected Areas Section.

#### **5. Archaeological and Cultural Impacts and First Nations Considerations**

Many Parks and some Operating Areas contain significant archaeological and cultural values including archaeological sites, culturally modified trees, spiritual sites and First Nations traditional use areas. The management of archaeological resources and culturally modified trees is governed by *Heritage Conservation Act* and an archaeological impact assessment must be completed prior to any potential disturbance of an archaeological site.

First Nations traditional uses, spiritual practices and culturally significant sites must be respected and PFO's must plan accordingly. First Nations traditional uses and cultural values in Operating Areas which must be respected can be discussed with ESD during the development of the Annual Operating Plan. Some proposed recreational activities or facility development in parks may also require First Nations consultation if impacts to First Nations aboriginal rights are anticipated.

#### **IV. IDENTIFICATION, MONITORING, AND MITIGATION OF OPERATING AREA IMPACTS ON PARK CONSERVATION VALUES**

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##### **1. Identified Values**

Known natural and cultural values have been identified in Section K of Operating Area Information, however, specific information regarding archaeological sites; First Nations traditional activities and cultural values; and, red and blue listed species has been suppressed to ensure protection of sites and values. PFO's will be informed by ESD of specific information regarding these values and the appropriate operational duties to ensure values are not affected before park operations commence. Actions to ensure these values are maintained must be included in the Annual Operating Plan.

##### **2. Identification of Impacts to Conservation Values**

Proposed changes to PFO operational duties, new recreational activities, or new facilities development may result in potential disturbance or associated impact to the Operating Area or greater park area. The potential disturbance may be neutral or minor for minimal changes to current operations or major for new facility development or new recreational activities in Operating Areas or surrounding parklands.

The potential impact may also be neutral if conservation values are maintained, negative if conservation values are lost or positive if conservation values are improved. To ensure impacts to park and Operation Area conservation values are either neutral or positive it will be important to be fully aware of what conservation values are affected and the total impact to the values. The main tool for identifying the potential impacts of changes to Operating Area facilities or activities is the impact assessment.

##### **3. Impact Assessment Process**

Environmental Stewardship Division, Parks and Protected Areas Section has an establish process for determining potential impacts to conservation values in parks and protected areas through the impact assessment process. The Impact

Assessment is a well-defined science based process for identification of: environmental issues and impacts; significance of impacts; cumulative effects; and, mitigation procedures for identified impacts. It could also be used to develop monitoring criteria and indicators for positive or negative levels of change to park conservation values.

The impact assessment process is important because for some parks, inventories of natural and cultural values and assessment of potential impacts of management activities may be lacking. Without an impact assessment, changes to PFO operational duties and recreational activities undertaken in Operating Areas may result in unanticipated and/or unacceptable conservation impacts to the park.

➤ ***Level 1 Preliminary Screen Impact Assessment***

In Operating Areas where there are no or little changes to PFO operational duties and recreational activities undertaken in Operating Areas, an impact assessment may not be required. When there are proposed changes to facilities, recreational activities or operational duties, however, a minimum *Level 1 Preliminary Screen Impact Assessment* is required.

The preliminary screen assessment will be conducted by the ESD Parks and Protected Areas Section staff with input from the Fish and Wildlife and Ecosystem Sections and it will identify any potential impacts to conservation values. It will also identify if further assessment through a *Level 2 Detailed Screen Impact Assessment* is required. The preliminary screen must be done well in advance of any proposed changes to park facilities or recreation opportunities to allow time for a Level 2 Detailed Screen Impact Assessment if required.

➤ ***Level 2 Detailed Screen Impact Assessment or a Full Impact Assessment Report***

For Operating Areas where significant changes to PFO operational duties, new facilities or new Operating Area recreational activities are proposed, a *Level 2 Detailed Screen Impact Assessment* or a *Full Impact Assessment Report* may be required. The proposed level of change and associated potential impact as identified by the Level 1 Preliminary Screen Assessment will determine the required level of advanced impact assessment.

For a Level 2 Detailed Screen Impact Assessment or a Full Impact Assessment Report, the PFO will be required to retain the appropriate ecologists or biologists to conduct the assessment according to the well-defined standards of the BC Parks impact assessment process. The assessment will then be reviewed by ESD and the activity will be approved; denied; approved with mitigation actions; or, denied pending major amendments.

#### **4. Mitigation**

When an impact assessment identifies a proposed recreational or operational activity or facility development in an Operating Area that is anticipated to have unacceptable impacts to conservation values, it is the responsibility of the PFO to propose an appropriate mitigation process to ensure conservation values are maintained. If an appropriate mitigation process cannot be achieved, the PFO will be required to amend the proposed activity or facility so that unacceptable conservation impacts no longer result from the activity or are appropriately mitigated to the satisfaction of the Parks and Protected Areas Section. In some cases an appropriate mitigation process will not be possible and the proposal will be denied.

#### **5. Monitoring and Assessment**

Through the impact assessment process, appropriate monitoring criteria and indicators can be established for new facilities, changes to recreation activities undertaken in Operating Areas, or PFO operational duties to ensure conservation values in Operating Areas are acceptably maintained. In most cases, Parks and Protected Areas staff with input from Fish and Wildlife and Ecosystem Section staff through the impact assessment process will determine if monitoring is required and the level, criteria and indicators to be monitored. The PFO will be required to undertake the monitoring and submit appropriate monitoring reports for review by the Parks and Protected Areas staff.

As identified in the Request for Proposal, to ensure that conservation values are maintained, ESD will conduct independent third party assessments to ensure natural and cultural values are being maintained.

### **V. PFO ETHICS, STEWARDSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES, OPERATING AREA REVIEW AND CONSERVATION INTERPRETATION**

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The following section outlines some potential PFO initiated park ethics, stewardship and review opportunities for Operating Areas.

#### **1. Ethics and Stewardship**

PFO's may wish to form their own ethic and review association to ensure that high conservation values are maintained in Operating Areas and the parks where their operations take place. Through an ethic and review association PFO's may be able to achieve a higher stewardship of conservation values in Operating Areas than currently exists. Also, through innovation or their own personal conservation ethics, PFO's may become leaders of conservation stewardship and recognized through public acknowledgement of their achievements.

## **2. Park Stewardship Responsibilities**

Since Operating Area Users will be attracted to conservation features in parks where the Operating Areas occur but beyond the actual Operating Area, it is in the best interests of the PFO to ensure park values are not impacted by Operating Area User activities.

For example, Operating Area Users may be attracted to rare alpine flowers which occur near the Operating Area on a short trail to the alpine. The PFO may wish to highlight the rare alpine flowers as an attraction to Operating Area Users, thereby increasing use of the trail. Increased use, however, may have a detrimental affect on the trail or the preservation of the flowers and conservation maintenance actions may be required.

In cases where park areas outside of Operating Areas are impacted by Operating Area Users, PFO's, as part of their stewardship ethic may work cooperatively with ESD to maintain park conservation values which are affected. For the above example, rather than close the trail to protect the rare flowers, the PFO and ESD may cooperatively seek solutions to the problem which will accommodate increased use and ensure the flowers are viewed appropriately and their habitat maintained. In this fashion, not only are social and economic opportunities increased, conservation values are also maintained or enhanced.

## **3. Independent Review**

In addition to the independent third party assessments undertaken by ESD to ensure natural and cultural values are being maintained, the PFO's may wish to independently invite national or international conservation related organizations to conduct their own reviews or audits. Some PFO's may even seek ISO (International Organization for Standardization) certification to certify the environmentally acceptable standards of their operations.

The conservation, social and economic benefits of a positive international review would be extremely valuable to a PFO and could potentially greatly increase Park User interest in the Operating Area and the associated economic value of the operation. A visit to the park and Operating Area could be advertised as a "green" vacation as an attraction to park visitors.

## **4. Conservation Interpretation**

In some Operating Areas, PFO's may wish to offer conservation information or interpretation for the enjoyment of Park Users. PFO's may wish to consult with ESD staff about the development of appropriate conservation information for the Operating Area or park in general.