

HAMBER PROVINCIAL PARK

MASTER PLAN

DECEMBER, 1986



Province of
British Columbia

Ministry of
Environment
and Parks
PARKS AND OUTDOOR
RECREATION DIVISION

MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. M.V. Collins
Assistant Deputy Minister
Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Southern Interior Region

Date: 86.12.11.

File: 2-3-3-80

The attached Master Plan for Hamber Provincial Park is
submitted for your review and approval.

M.E. Goddard
Regional Director
Southern Interior Region

APPROVED:

M.V. Collins
Assistant Deputy Minister

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A.	Plan Highlights	1.
B.	Introduction	3.
	1. Plan Purpose	3.
	2. Background Summary	5.
C.	The Role of Hamber Park	7.
	1. Regional and Provincial Context	7.
	2. Conservation Role	9.
	3. Recreation Role	9.
D.	Zoning	11.
E.	Natural and Cultural Resources Management	13.
	1. Land	13.
	2. Water	14.
	3. Vegetation	14.
	4. Wildlife and Fish	15.
	5. Cultural	18.
	6. Visual Resources	18.
F.	Visitor Services	18.
	1. Introduction	18.
	Access Strategy	19.
	Marketing Strategy	21.
	2. Visitor Opportunities	22.
	Camping	22.
	Fishing	22.
	Boating	24.

Backpacking, hiking, mountaineering	24.
Winter Recreation	26.
Wilderness Resort Camp	26.
3. User Capacities	28.
4. Management Services	31.
G. Plan Implementation	33.

MAPS

Location	4.
Boundaries - Past and Present	6.
Zoning	12.
Hamber Park Access Trail	20.
Hamber Park Development	23.

HAMBER PROVINCIAL PARK MASTER PLAN

A. Plan Highlights

- 1) Hamber Park is primarily a feature focus park centering on the spectacular wilderness setting of Fortress Lake. The Park ranks high in provincial significance for scenic and natural qualities, and offers outstanding potential for backcountry recreation with opportunities relating to fishing, viewing, boating, backpacking, hiking, and mountaineering.

- 2) In the past, the Park's remote location and difficult access kept it relatively isolated, and of general low profile. In recognizing these circumstances the Parks Division has reviewed its roles and objectives for the Park under the general precept that public access and recreation use can be developed and promoted while retaining the Park's inherent wilderness character. The resulting management actions include:
 - a) Sanctioning of traditional use of public aircraft for access into the Park. Administrative policies will set criteria for numbers of flights, landing zones and authorization to ensure control over disruptions to other park users.

 - b) If environmentally and economically viable, establishing a permanent commercial fly-in recreation camp in the Park, operated on a concessionaire basis.

- c) Provision of chartered aircraft services as an alternative means of public access, administered under concessionaire basis.
 - d) Establishing a bridge crossing over the Chaba River and trail link from Sunwapta Falls in Jasper to open the Park to safe foot access.
 - e) Development of trails, campsites and shelters to allow people to take advantage of extensive day hiking and backpacking excursions in the park.
 - f) Development of management plans for vegetation and wildlife.
 - g) Establishment of a summer staffing presence in the Park for maintenance, public information and safety, and to monitor and regulate commercial and public activities in the Park.
 - h) Implementation of plan actions will be dependent upon the allocation of supporting funds.
- 3) The extension of park boundaries to include the major natural features of the Clemenceau Icefield and the Cummins Lakes would significantly expand the variety and scope of recreation opportunities in the Park. The Master Plan will be expanded to cover the extended area should it be added to the Park.

B. Introduction

1. Plan Purpose

In 1975 under policies set out in a Interim Policy Statement the Parks Division undertook a deliberate strategy to manage Hamber Park as a Nature Conservancy. The intention, by prohibiting commercial activities and use of aircraft, was to create wilderness under the strict definition of Nature Conservancy.

Over recent years, there has been serious questioning of the validity of these management policies as they apply to the Park. Foremost is the evolving sense that the Park has much more to offer for public benefit than what is intended under the confined purposes of Nature Conservancy status. It is felt that better use of the Park could be made without necessarily jeopardizing the ideals of preservation. From practical perspectives, management of the Park as a Nature Conservancy has proven to be inefficient and administratively difficult, primarily because of continued unsupervised aircraft recreation.

The incongruities of attempting to apply the Nature Conservancy Concept and policies in Hamber Park suggest a need to shift toward a more flexible, recreation use orientation. On this basis, it is the Division's intention that Hamber Park be developed, managed and marketed to encourage public use and recreation. In this context this Master Plan sets forth guidelines and strategies for development and management which will realize the overall recreational potential of the Park while ensuring protection of natural wildland qualities. The various relevant background factors and overview of the Park's biophysical features are presented in the Master Plan Background Report.

LOCATION MAP



2. Background Summary

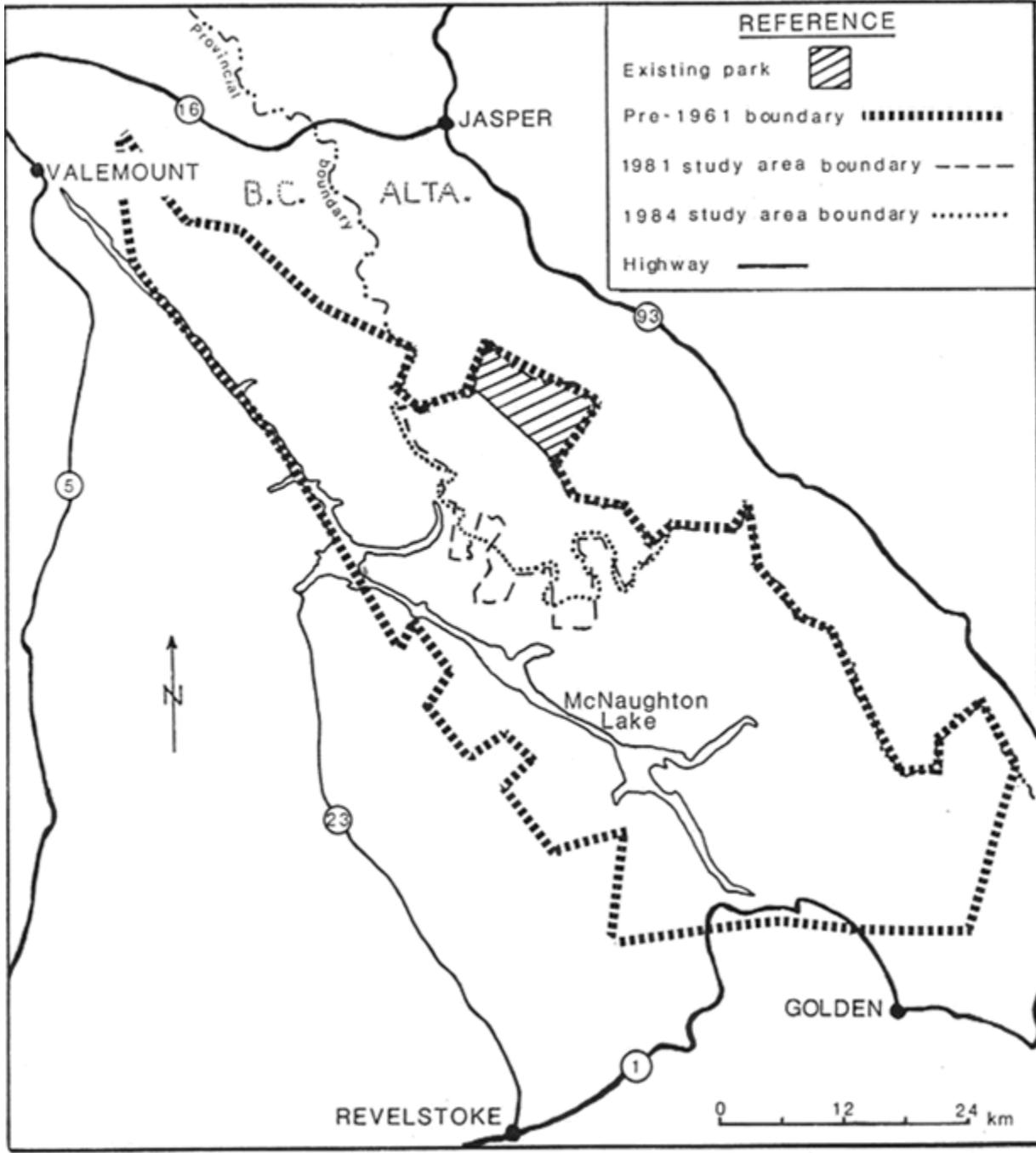
The original Hamber Park in 1941 contained 1,009,112 hectares and included significant features like Mt. Sir Sandford, the Cummins Lakes and the Clemenceau Icefield. In consideration of the large tracts of commercial forest land in the Columbia River Valley and the pending Columbia River hydro electric developments, the boundaries were radically modified in 1961, with minor revisions in 1962, to form the configuration of the present Class "A" Park. The boundaries follow the natural height-of-land watershed limits surrounding Fortress Lake and include the upper Wood River Valley to comprise 24, 518 hectares.

As part of the Park Ranges of the Rocky Mountains, the Park is situated northeast of Mica Creek, contiguous on the west side of the Continental divide to Jasper National Park. The Park exhibits rugged and heavily glaciated mountain landscapes, vegetation patterns dominated by alpine meadowlands and subalpine forests of old growth spruce, and wildlife species which are typically associated with the Rocky Mountains.

Dangerous river crossings have kept the park isolated and use has been essentially confined to fly-in visitors. Fishing for large brook trout has been the primary purpose for visiting the park. Until recently, the Park was visited by fewer than 100 people a year.

Fortress Lake is considered one of the more outstanding scenic attractions in the provincial park system. With planned completion of a safe trail link from

BOUNDARIES – PAST & PRESENT



Sunwapta Falls in Jasper Park, Fortress Lake will be easily accessible to backpackers. It is felt based on the experience of Parks Canada with the existing heavy use pressures in similar attractive areas, that Hamber Park will rapidly become a major backcountry destination once the trail link is completed (see market analysis in background report). The Parks Canada commitment to construct the trail link into Hamber Park from Jasper Park will justify concurrent development by the Parks Division of campsite facilities and trail systems along Fortress Lake and into the main side drainages. The resulting management obligations will require park staffing on a seasonal basis.

C. The Role of Hamber Park

1. Regional and Provincial Context

Hamber Park forms part of a massive complex of National and Provincial Parks which stretches north in unbroken continuity over the Canadian Rockies from Elk Lakes Provincial Park in British Columbia to the far reaches of the Willmore Wilderness Provincial Park in Alberta. Hamber's 24,518 hectares appear insignificant in scale with this massive area of parkland, however, the comparative relevance and value of the Park lies in the recognition that it focuses on Fortress Lake as one of the largest and most spectacularly impressive lake settings in the Rockies.

On a Regional basis, Fortress Lake is the only mountain lake in the provincial parks within the Southern Interior Region Rocky Mountains which offers opportunities for float plane access. There is also no other provincial park in the Region which has a trophy brook trout fishery. These circumstances create one of the best situations in southern interior provincial parks for a fly-in wilderness recreation camp.

The Park has potential with development of access and provision of visitor facilities and management services, to become as popular a backcountry destination as other well known attractions in the Rocky Mountains. The combined factors of fly-in access, brook trout fishing, and hiking in a spectacular wilderness setting provides one of the better opportunities in the Southern Interior Region for wilderness recreation.

Hamber Park satisfies the criteria established for World Heritage sites. Proposals have been made to nominate Hamber, Mount Assiniboine and Mt. Robson Parks as part of the Canadian Rocky Mountains World Heritage Site.

Park boundary extensions have been proposed that would centre upon the spectacular array of peaks, glacial features and alpine basins of the Clemenceau Icefield and the historic Athabasca trail in the Pacific Creek drainage. Restoration of these outstanding recreation and heritage features to Hamber Park would provide recognition of their provincial significance and would substantially raise the profile and stature of the Park.

2. Conservation Role

- a) The park provides outstanding representation of the biophysical characteristics of the Continental Ranges of the Rocky Mountains, in particular the engelmann spruce subalpine fir and alpine biogeoclimatic conditions.
- b) The park protects the provincially significant brook trout fishery in Fortress Lake, and important grizzly bear and mountain goat habitats which overlap with Jasper National Park.
- c) The park preserves as "wilderness" the special natural features and visual qualities of Fortress Lake and its surrounding mountain landscapes.

3. Recreation Role

Through provision of alternative means of access to Fortress Lake including use of chartered and private aircraft, and establishment of park trails, facilities and support services, Hamber Park will become a popular recreation destination within the Rocky Mountains offering opportunities for:

- a) Scenic Viewing and photography - The spectacular beauty of Fortress Lake is a major reason for visiting the park.
- b) Fishing - The large brook trout have been the traditional attraction for park visitation. The quality of the fishing experience will continue to be a major drawing card.

c) Boating - Boats, whether powered or self propelled, will allow visitors to travel on Fortress Lake and will form a primary means of access for viewing and fishing.

d) Backpacking, day hiking - Conditions along Fortress Lake and into some of the the more easily reached alpine basins will be suited to visitors with limited hiking experience. There will be a number of loop trips as well as difficult routes for more skilled hikers.

e) Mountaineering - The peaks, glaciers, and rugged remote areas and exploration of the Park will attract and challenge climbers and wilderness enthusiasts.

f) Hunting - The park offers opportunities for quality wilderness hunts for mountain goat, moose and bear.

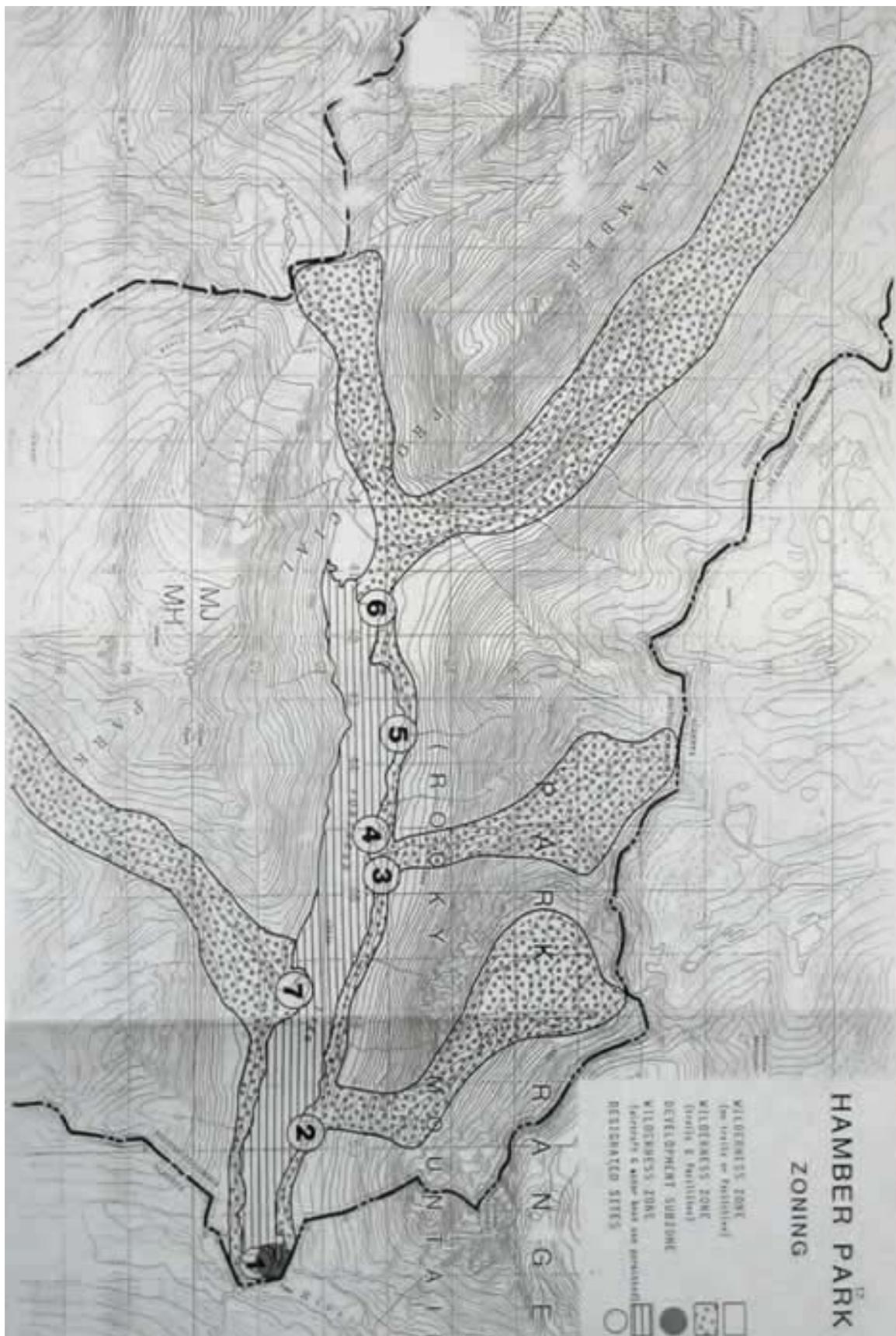
These opportunities will relate to a variety of types and levels of backcountry use, ranging from a resort camp for those visitors who require and appreciate convenience and security to primitive campsites and trails suitable for families and moderately experienced backpackers. Trails and facilities will be aligned to Fortress Lake as the Park's focal feature, and to some of the more scenic of the Lake's tributary valleys. Large portions of the park will remain as pure wilderness. The nature and scale of park development and use will be maintained at levels which are compatible with the backcountry experience and ensure the protection of the park's natural resources.

D. Zoning

With the exception of the special circumstances relating to aircraft and motor boat use on Fortress Lake, the guidelines and criteria as set out under the terms and definitions of the Provincial Park zoning system for wilderness meet the development and management objectives for the Park.

The immediate upland along the north shore and south east shore of Fortress Lake, the upper portions of the Wood River and the drainages of Alnus Creek, Wash Out Creek, Fortress Creek and Chisel Creek are defined within the Wilderness zone as areas where trails, accommodation and management facilities will be established. Use levels, recreation activities and design of facilities including resort buildings will be compatible with the wilderness setting. Boundaries will be designated to confine intensive facility developments - the resort camp, the east end campground, and staff accommodation - to specific locations within the wilderness zone.

The Provincial Park zoning policy lists non-mechanized access as a criterion for wilderness zoning. In the case of Hamber Park exception must be made to this policy to permit motor boat use on Fortress Lake for safety purposes because of the frequent and unpredictable hazardous wind conditions that occur throughout the summer. Fortress Lake will be designated as a separate wilderness zone allowing for aircraft landings and motor boat use.



The majority of the Park, excluding Fortress Lake and the areas outlined for trail and facility development, will remain as wilderness with no trails, facilities, or visible evidence of human intrusion.

With all of the Park zoned as wilderness, resource management will be oriented toward maintaining high visual and natural qualities. Manipulation of the environment, such as the use of prescribed burns for maintenance of wildlife habitat or visual qualities, may be warranted and will be permitted under wilderness zone designation.

E. Natural and Cultural Resources Management

1. Land

In 1981 a park study area consisting of the upper portions of the Wood and Cummins Rivers, the Clemenceau River, the Clemenceau Icefield and the headwater basins of the Kinbasket and Sullivan Rivers was excluded from the Kinbasket Provincial Forest by an agreement under the Deferred Planning Area process. The Park Proposal study completed in 1985 recommends establishment of a 12,000 ha Recreation Area covering the impressive waterfalls and lakes at the head of the Cummins River and the provincially significant glaciers and peaks of the Clemenceau Icefield. Addition of these features would significantly enhance the values of Hamber Park.

The proposed addition will be considered in context with the provincial park system plan.

2. Water

For aesthetic, ecological and health considerations, it is important that the high natural quality of waters within the park be maintained.

- a) Appropriate sanitary facilities at all designated use sites will minimize possible chance of contaminating drinking water sources.
- b) Lake levels will continue to be monitored at a permanent reference point.

3. Vegetation

Visual and recreation values, including the presence and movement patterns of wildlife, are very much dependent upon the distribution, composition and condition of plant communities in the park.

- a) Responsibility for fire control lies with the District Manager, who will co-ordinate with the Forest Service and Parks Canada in planning and carrying out of fire fighting measures. Fire suppression will only be undertaken by ground crews and water bombers. No heavy ground mechanization will be permitted. Detailed organization and action plans will be prepared for fire control in the park.

b) There is no shortage of firewood at designated use areas along Fortress Lake, however, the Division will have to supply firewood for the east end campground. In the alpine areas, campfires will be discouraged in favour of backpack stoves.

c) There is very limited grazing potential in the Park and, as a consequence, recreational horse use will not be permitted. This policy complements the Parks Canada policy which bans overnight horse use in the Chaba and Athabasca drainages in Jasper National Park.

d) Snags and trees presenting a hazard in all designated campsite areas and cabin sites will be removed.

e) Studies and management plans will be undertaken to determine what role naturally caused fires and/or prescribed burns will have in maintaining and enhancing visual values and wildlife habitats.

4. Wildlife and Fish

a) Hunting is an appropriate activity in the Park. Hunting regulations will be set in accordance with Ministry policy. Harvest levels and seasons will be managed on the basis of park populations and set at conservative levels. This will require close monitoring of populations.

b) Trapping and hunting guiding rights will not be permitted in the Park. (see section 4, wildlife, in background report)

c) Conflict between park visitors, park facilities and park wildlife will be minimized. The locations of facilities such as trails and campsites will be based upon consideration of wildlife habitats and behavior and will minimize conflicts whenever possible.

Bear/human conflict is recognized as a serious potential problem in Hamber Park.

Management activities to minimize the danger to park visitors from bears will:

- i) emphasize visitor awareness of potential bear/human encounters.
- ii) direct visitor use away from areas frequented by bears.
- iii) encourage visitor behavior and activities appropriate in bear country.
- iv) provide special facilities and maintenance procedures, which will minimize the opportunity for bear/human incidents. Individual bears which exhibit uncharacteristic, aggressive behaviour dangerous to human life, may be removed from the park if no other alternatives are available.

d) A resource management plan for the parks faunal resources will contain goals and implementation strategies consistent with objectives outlined in this master plan. Wildlife management will emphasize minimizing the opportunities for bear human conflict.

Inventories and management studies will be conducted, and plans will be developed as visitor use and park development requires.

e) The resource in both lakes and streams will be managed to ensure the preservation of its quality in terms of the wilderness experience, fish size and angler success. A primary focus will be Fortress Lake's wild stocks of Brook trout. Regulation and habitat protection will emphasize the recreational experience rather than consumptive use. Creel census records and enforcement of fishing regulations will be essential to successful fishery management. These duties will be priority functions for park rangers.

f) The objectives of other agencies with responsibility for adjoining lands, such as Parks Canada (Jasper Park), Fisheries and the Wildlife Branch will be integrated into resource planning and facility development whenever compatible with park objectives.

g) Management of stream fisheries and small lakes in the park will be consistent with the Fish and Wildlife Branch Regional fisheries plan.

5. Cultural Resources

Research and inventory will be undertaken to determine the cultural resources of the Park. Management of these resources will be implemented through a Resource Management Plan and will be consistent with Parks Division Resource Management Policies.

6. Visual Resources

Protection of aesthetic values will form a key element of resource management responsibilities in the Park.

a) All facilities in the Park will be situated and designed to be visually unobtrusive from the lake and from the air.

b) Visual protection and enhancement will be taken into account as objectives of any vegetation management plans for the park.

F. Visitor Services

1. Introduction

Recreational use of Hamber Park is predicated upon the establishment of facilities to allow safe visitor access to the Park, and mobility within. Scale, type and design of support facilities will be in keeping with the backcountry experience. Support

facilities and management services will provide for reasonable levels of public security and convenience and will be directed toward minimizing user impacts and avoiding conflicts between the various user types.

Effective levels of staffing are essential to ensure successful implementation of the visitor services plans.

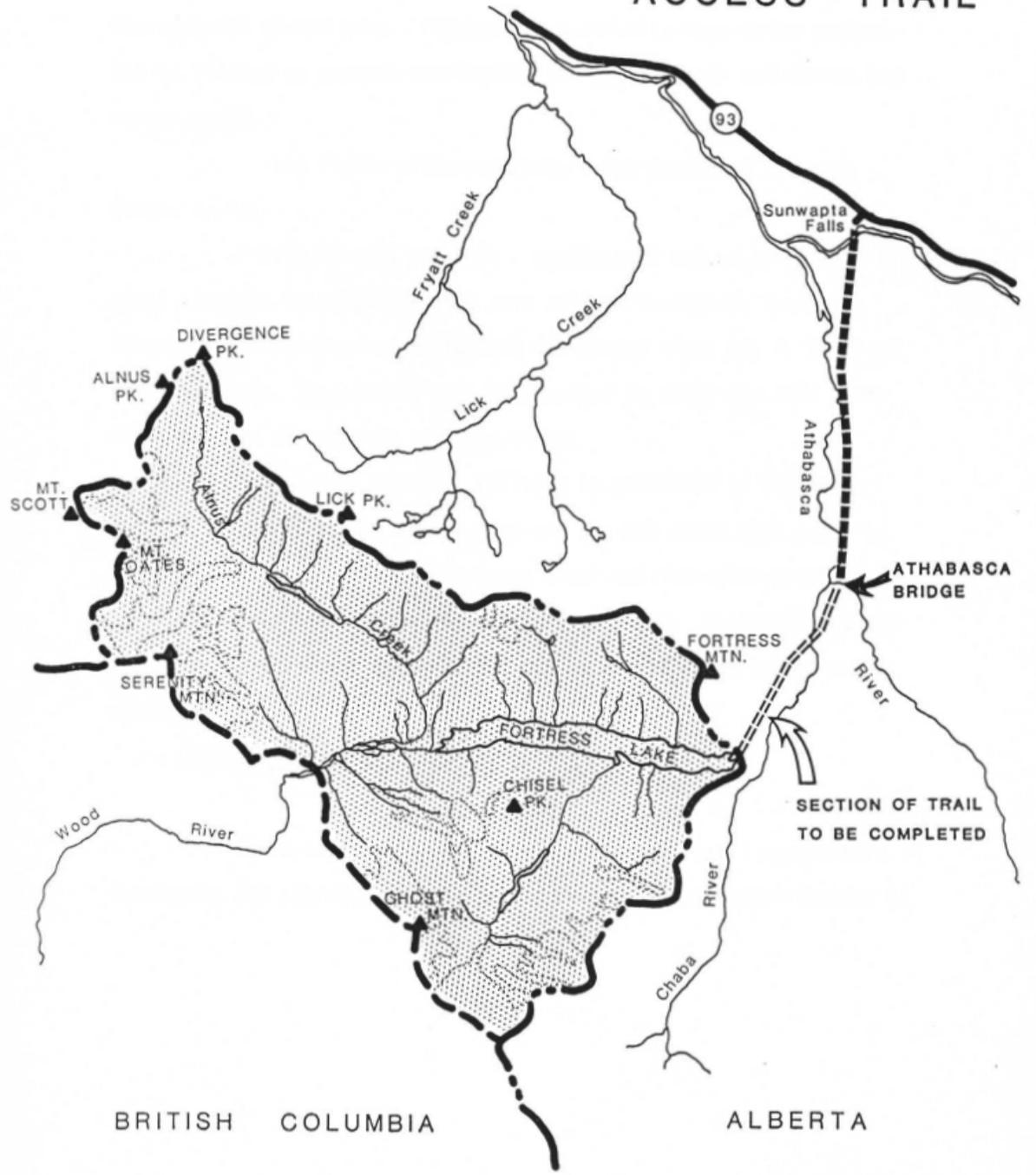
Access Strategy

a) Trail access - completion of the trail link from Sunwapta in Jasper National Park, with a bridge crossing over the Chaba River will ensure a safe and convenient walking route into the Park. The 22 kilometre trail stays almost on a level gradient to Fortress Lake, allowing for an easy long day trip or for a very pleasant two day trip for families or those who prefer a leisurely approach. It is expected that backpackers will rapidly become the major users of the park once the trail is completed.

b) Air Access

i) Charter fly-in service - on a concessionaire contract basis to allow the public to charter aircraft flight to the Park. This will be especially appealing to groups. The aircraft will land at designated sites 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 (refer to zoning map

HAMBER PARK ACCESS TRAIL



BRITISH COLUMBIA

ALBERTA



page 12) and flight paths will be directed to minimize intrusion onto the east end of the Lake. Flights may eventually have to be controlled or limited to prevent overloading on long weekends and during key summer weeks.

ii) Fly-in wilderness camp - for guests of the camp (sites 7, 4).

iii) Private aircraft - traditional use of privately owned aircraft for access to the park will be permitted, however, aircraft will be required to land at designated sites (3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) on the lake. Facilities will be provided to allow for safe overnight moorage of aircraft at these sites.

iv) Heli hiking - will not be permitted in the park. Most of the park is extremely rugged and the few areas that could be used for heli-hiking such as Fortress Creek and the upper sections of the Chaba River are planned for trail development. Heli-hiking would not be compatible with the intended use of the Park for hiking and wilderness travel.

Marketing Strategy

Park visitation will not be encouraged until requisite facilities and staffing are in place. Preparation and distribution of park specific information will coincide with

implementation of access and facility development plans. Promotional material for backpackers will be developed in co-ordination with Jasper National Park.

It is expected that the concessionaire operations, both resort and chartered air services, will wish to promote the park and their services. A condition of the Park Use Permit(s) will allow Parks Division control over all promotional material, particularly relating to the "image" and use of the park.

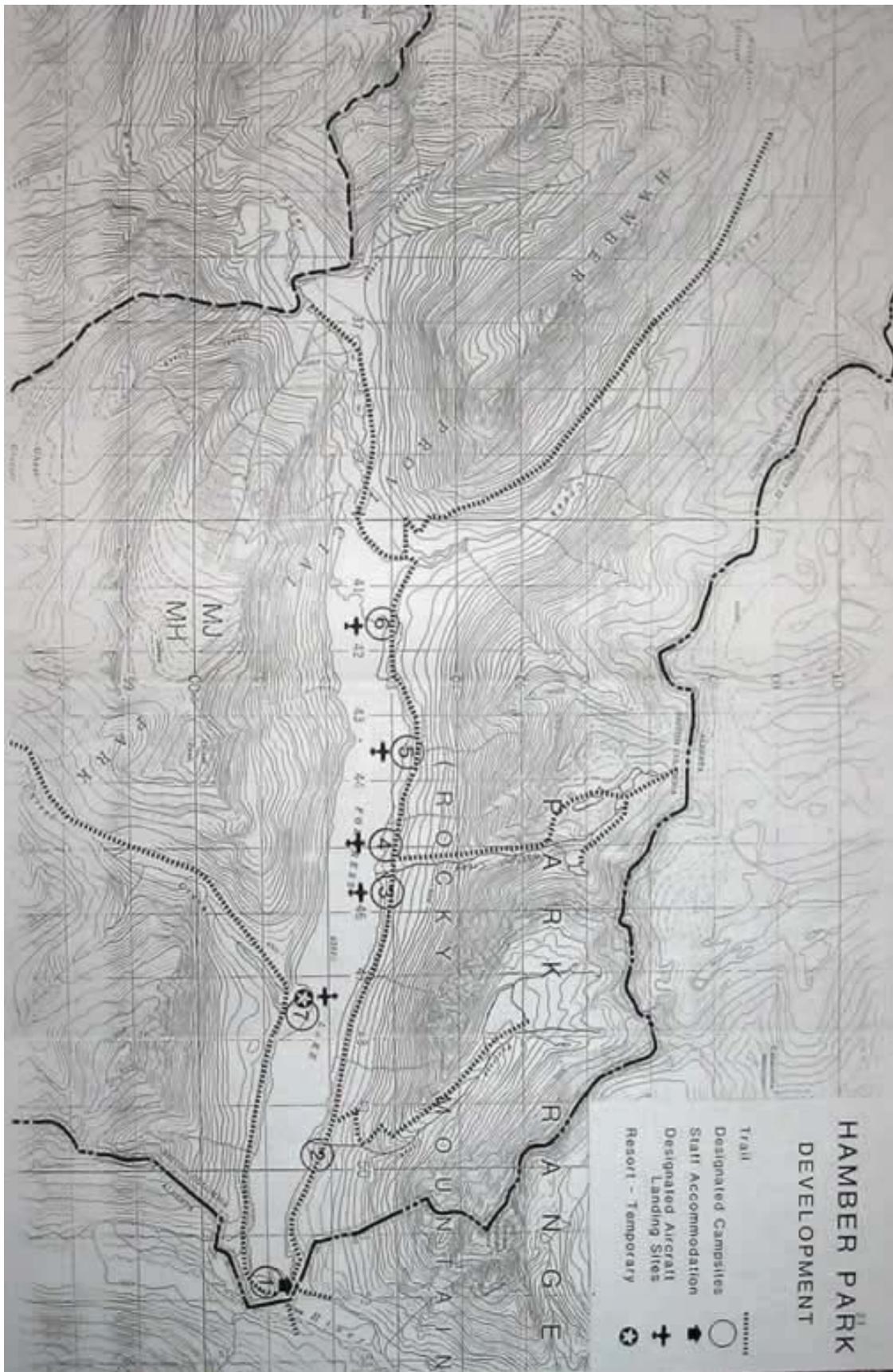
2. Visitor Opportunities

a) Camping - with few exceptions all activities in the Park will be based on overnight use. Facilities will be provided in the park to ensure relative comfort and security for visitors.

Designated campsites will be located on Fortress Lake at sites 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7. Shelters, hardened camp pads, firecircles, cache poles, and toilets will be provided at each site.

Sites 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 will be available for air access camping, with provision of any necessary aircraft docking facilities.

b) Fishing - park visitors will have the opportunity to enjoy fishing for large brook trout in Fortress Lake.



Managers have a critical responsibility to ensure maintenance of the quality of the fishery. Park brochures and public information should seek the understanding and co-operation of fishermen to change past attitudes which measured success more on the quantity of fish taken than on the appreciative aspects of the overall experience.

Backpackers will be able to use the north shore trail to fish the shoreline of the Lake. Backpackers and fly-in fishermen may also have access to boat rentals from the concessionaire.

c) Boating - provides an effective and convenient means of sight-seeing, fishing and travelling in the Park. The concessionaire camp operator, in addition to providing boats for his guests, will be encouraged to provide boat rentals to public fly-in or walk-in visitors. The concessionaire should also be encouraged to provide canoe rentals.

In keeping with the scale of Fortress Lake and the nature of use, motor boats will be restricted to 10 horsepower or less. For the same reason, aircraft users will be discouraged from taxiing on the lake, particularly on the east end.

d) Hiking, mountaineering -

Objective – To allow all visitors in the Park the opportunity to walk the shoreline of Fortress Lake, and to visit the highly scenic back drainages and alpine basins of the Park.

Many of the walk-in visitors will use the east end campsite (#1) of the Park as a base for day trips along the lakeshore and into the side drainages of Fortress Creek and Washout Creek. Others will backpack to other campsites along the lake and make extended trips to the Wood River, Serenity Glacier, Alnus Creek, Chisel Creek and loop trips through into Jasper via Alnus Creek, Washout Creek and Fortress Creek.

Hiking will be a major focus for the concessionaire camp operator, with emphasis likely on the easier day trips to the Wood River, Fortress Creek and Washout Creek, and possibly Chisel Creek.

It is expected that many fly-in visitors, utilizing charter services, will be interested in backpacking through the Park and climbing the more challenging peaks. Park trails will provide good access to the major peaks – Chisel, Fortress, Serenity and Ghost Mountains.

Initial priority for trail construction will be the north side trail down to the Wood River-Alnus Creek junction followed by trails up Fortress Creek, Washout Creek, Alnus Creek, Serenity Creek and Chisel Creek. Alnus Creek will require a bridge crossing to allow people to walk the alluvial flats along the Wood River.

Eventually trails may be extended down the Wood River to connect to the Clemenceau area and the Athabasca trail.

e) Winter Recreation

The hike-in route from Sunwapta, with bridges over the Athabasca and Chaba Rivers, will be assessed for safety and suitability for winter ski access into the Park. Winter potential for ski touring in the Park will also be assessed and, if proven suitable and economic, the resort operator will be encouraged to provide winter accommodation and fly-in services into the Park.

f) Wilderness Resort Camp

Objective - to allow use and enjoyment of the park by those people who require or prefer the comforts, security and services offered by a wilderness vacation camp and not otherwise provided by the Parks Division.

It is felt that Fortress Lake offers opportunity to establish a commercially viable fishing and wilderness recreation camp catering to Canadians and the international tourism market. The camp will be operated on a concessionaire basis under terms and conditions of a Park Use Permit. The Resort will provide for a wider variety of interests than strictly fishing. Hiking, photography, wildlife viewing, boating and perhaps

winter recreation are other opportunities which will be emphasized. The resort will also be encouraged to cater to walk-in and other fly-in visitors. It is expected the concessionaire will:

- i) provide services and camp environment which relate to appreciation of wilderness values,
- ii) make conscientious effort to ensure minimum conflict with other park users,
- iii) promote and practice conservation to ensure maintenance of a quality fishery,
- iv) conduct a safe, clean and efficient operation.

The present location of the concessionaire camp has proven unsuitable for permanent use. The site is subject to flooding and contains some of the best black bear habitat in the Park. The camp is also visibly obtrusive from the north shore of the lake where the main focus of visitor use will be taking place.

After the initial trial period (1985-1989) and if during which time the operation has proven viable, the concessionaire will be required to relocate to a more suitable site. Factors for assessing site suitability will include:

- i) impacts of noise and visual disruptions.
- ii) potential problems with bears.
- iii) foot access connections from lake shore trail to the Wood River, Washout Creek and Fortress Creeks trails.
- iv) potential to serve hike-in visitors.
- v) protection for mooring boats and aircraft.
- vi) availability of potable water, drainage, and site hazards.
- vii) construction costs.

3. User capacities

Setting of carrying capacities is essential to guide scale of development. In keeping with the objectives of the park and as reflected by the zoning plans, carrying capacities must be kept at levels which ensure the "wilderness experience" for all visitors. Carrying capacities must take into account the scale and use dispersion capabilities of the park and environmental factors such as bear/visitor sensitivity thresholds and the fishery capacity. There must also be intuitive assessments of social factors, particularly relating to potential conflicts between the different user types. Because of the inexact nature of this process, carrying capacity figures proposed for the park at this initial stage of development will likely require some adjustments as visitation evolves.

Hike-in and chartered aircraft users - The majority of visitors will orient their activities to the lake which, because of its linear configuration and steeply sloping shorelines, has limited capacity to absorb use. If the 10 campsites at the east end of the lake were fully occupied the site would be overcrowded in terms of the individual's sense of personal space and solitude. Dispersal at other potential campsites on the lake and in the alpine areas would also allow for similar low carrying capacities. The overall park capacity for visitors hiking-in and those using chartered aircraft should be considered around 50 to 60 people at one time.

Private aircraft - Aircraft noise reverberating within the Fortress Lake basin is very loud, particularly as aircraft land, take off or taxi on the lake. Float plane noise levels are very much higher than helicopters or motor boats, and there is no question that there is disruptive impact to other visitors. Along with the private aircraft, there will also be the chartered aircraft flights and transport flights of the camp operator, which altogether could potentially create conflicts, particularly during long weekends in summer.

The 5 aircraft landing sites identified in the development plans should be more than sufficient when relating to the size of the lake. Relegating the extreme east end of the lake, east from Chisel Creek and Washout Creeks, to no aircraft landings or taxiing will help reduce conflicts with the hikers who will be primarily concentrated at this end of the lake.

It is not anticipated that aircraft related conflicts will arise in June and early autumn periods. However there may eventually be periods in the summer during which limits will have to be instituted on numbers of aircraft in the Park at one time.

Wilderness Camp - It is expected that the commercial wilderness camp guests will tolerate higher user densities than hike-in and fly-in visitors.

It is uncertain what number of guests will be required to ensure the financial viability of the camp. While this will be a determining factor in setting the scale of operation, it is paramount that the presence and activities of the camp not impinge on the enjoyment of the park by other visitors. In large measure, potential problems can be minimized by careful location and design of facilities.

In the initial trial period, the camp has established facilities to accommodate less than 10 guests. It would be reasonable to expect a doubling of this capacity, but much beyond that number there could be conflicts, particularly if the activities were primarily focussed on fishing and boating activities. Management staff will monitor the situation closely to establish realistic levels which ensure fair financial return to the concessionaire while minimizing conflict to other park users.

4. Management Services

Staffing for the Park will ensure that various management responsibilities will be carried out according to the guidelines of the Master Plan and the established policies and procedures of the Division.

Management and operation functions will include:

a) Regulating public use to ensure safe and proper use of the Park.
Enforcement of air flight regulations.

b) Maintenance of trails, cabins and other facilities.

c) Application of tree hazard removal programs and other park user safety measures.

d) Conducting necessary work to prevent user impacts and protection of park resources.

e) Collection of user data and monitoring of environmental conditions, particularly the fishery.

f) Providing information and public relations role.

Ranger staff will be headquartered in the Park at the east end of Fortress Lake. Patrols will be conducted on the lake by power boat. Lodge operations and chartered aircraft use will receive periodic inspections.

Proper accommodation facilities will be provided for park staff. Radio communications within the Park and to the outside will be established in the interests of public safety and efficient park management.

Concessions and Use Permits

The Resort and Chartered air services will be operated as park concessions under Park Use Permit authority.

Special Regulations under the Park Act will have to be established to ensure authority to control private use of aircraft on Fortress Lake. The regulation should provide Parks authority to designate flight paths and landing sites and to allow control over the number of aircraft in the Park at one time.

G. Plan Implementation

Development

Priority 1 items

- co-ordinate with Parks Canada to establish a safe hike-in trail into the Park
- improve east end campground
- north shore trail
- establish staff accommodation
- establish facilities at designated sites 2, 3, 5 and 6
- Washout and Fortress Creek trails
- Signing

Priority 2 items

- move concessionaire camp to more suitable site
- Alnus Creek trail
- Chisel Creek trail

Planning and Technical Services

- cabin/lodge site assessment
- pursue park expansion
- conduct winter assessment
- vegetation management plan
- wildlife management plans

Management

- establish staffing presence in the park
- accommodation and radio communication
- establish air flight controls

Visitor Services

- co-ordinate with Parks Canada for information and signing from Jasper National Park
- establish and advertise charter aircraft services
- develop park brochure

BACKGROUND REPORT

FOR

HAMBER PROVINCIAL PARK MASTER PLAN

HAMBER PROVINCIAL PARK MASTER PLAN

BACKGROUND REPORT

A. Introduction

Hamber Provincial Park has undergone considerable change since its initial establishment in 1941. In spirit with the intent of the National Parks, the Park was envisaged as complimenting and providing continuity to the vast land tract of preserved wilderness extending and straddling both sides of the Continental Divide from Mt. Robson to Yoho and Glacier National Parks. At 1,009,112 hectares, the original Hamber Park represents the largest park entity ever established in the provincial park system.

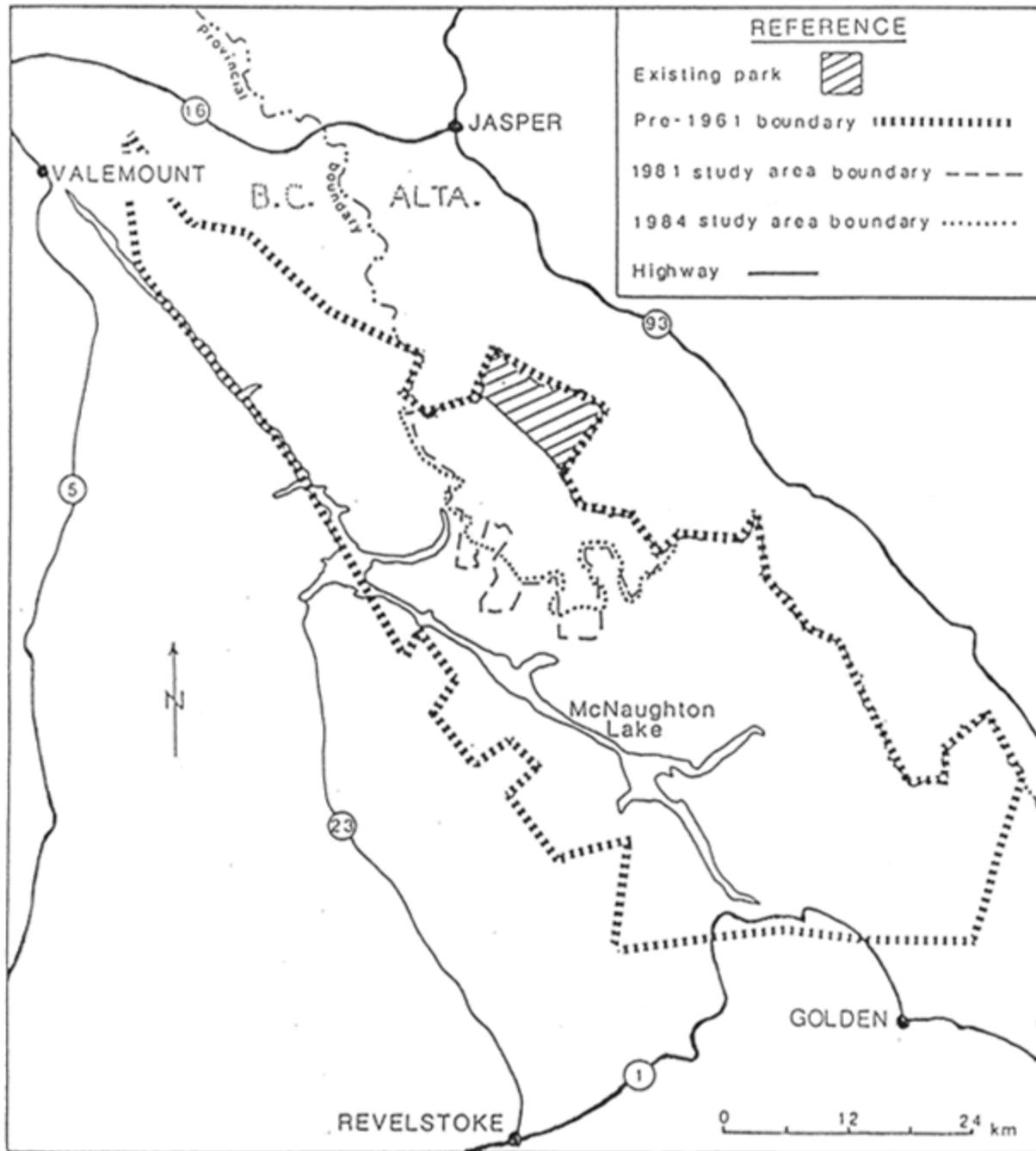
Today, with boundaries containing 24,514 hectares, the Park remains as only a fraction of its original size. Realization of the commercial value of the timber in the Park forced boundary reductions to 22,500 hectares in June, 1961, and reclassification to Class B. A further change in boundaries in November, 1962, increased the Park to its present size (24,518 hectares) as well as reinstating the Class A status.

As the focal attraction, Fortress Lake is one of the most spectacular features in the Rocky Mountains, rivaling in scenic beauty many of the other famous park settings in North America. The Park's landscapes and associated plant and animal communities provide nearly complete representation of the biophysical features and conditions of the Park Ranges of the Rocky Mountains.

LOCATION MAP



BOUNDARIES - PAST & PRESENT



In the past, Park use was restricted by difficult access to hardy individuals willing to risk the hazards involved in fording the Athabasca River, or to those who had use of horses or could afford to own or charter a floatplane. Historically, hunting and fishing were the dominant attractions.

In 1985 major initiatives were taken to encourage and facilitate park visitation. Completion of a major foot bridge by Parks Canada over the Athabasca River in Jasper National Park will lead to significant influx of hike-in visitors. In coordination with Parks Canada, the Parks Division has constructed campsites and will establish a trail link connection to Jasper Park to accommodate the anticipated use from Alberta. The Parks Division has also established a concessionaire fly-in visitor camp for fishermen and general sightseeing tourists.

B. Resources

1. Physiography

The Park comprises the watershed of Fortress Lake. Lying at an elevation of 1336 metres, the lake is surrounded by peaks reaching over 3000 metres. Created through processes of thrust faulting, the mountains display monumental and castellated peak formations. Fortress and Chisel Peaks are the dominant peaks on

the north and south sides of the lake. Mt. Quincy in nearby Jasper Park, provides a dramatic backdrop of turreted peaks and hanging glaciers.

Fortress and Chisel Creeks are the main drainages leading into the lake. Alnus Creek is the major valley running south to join the Wood River below the outlet of the lake. Glaciers are dominant features above the west slopes of Alnus Creek and at the head of Chisel Creek. There are high alpine basins at the top ends of most of the major creeks.

2. Water

Fortress Lake is approximately 10.8 kilometres long and its width is almost uniformly 1 to 1.5 kilometres over the whole length, with 27.7 square kilometres of surface area. There are three main streams feeding the lake, and 12 minor ones.

Lake levels rise from .5 to 1 metre through early summer and gradually drop to low levels by August. Extreme high water levels have apparently risen in recent times, as evidenced by flooding into forested areas and old cabin sites along the shoreline. Blockage of the outlet by landslide could lead to reverse outflow of the lake to the east side. Less than 7 metres separate the lake from the top of the divide.

3. Climate and Vegetation

The Park lies in the largest and most actively glaciated region of the Canadian Rocky Mountains. At the higher elevations to the south are the massive Clemenceau and Columbia Icefields.

Fortress Lake is deeply snowbound through the winter months; snow lingers along the shore until early June and by October, begins to fall and accumulate. Weather patterns during the summer season are typical of heavy precipitation zones within the Interior Wet Belt. Situated on the windward side, the Park captures the brunt of Pacific storms surging across the Rockies. As a consequence, conditions can be highly variable. High pressure ridges can produce warm sunny periods, however, the high frequency of summer storms makes the situation unpredictable.

The visibly dominant vegetative features of the Park are the dense Engelmann spruce climax forests covering the north side of Fortress Lake and south along the Wood River, the burned slopes along the northeast sides of the lake and the alpine meadowlands. The numerous avalanche chutes and the extensive alluvial fans along the Wood River are other major identifiable vegetative patterns.

The dense forests are composed of Engelmann Spruce, Mountain Hemlock and Alpine Fir. Tree heights reach 50 metres and diameters at breast height range to 100 centimetres. Heavy windfall and thick false azalea characterizes the understory.

The large burn covering the northeast side of the lake from the shore to timberline dates back to 1960. Only a few isolated pockets of timber were left unscathed. Pine and spruce saplings and pioneer deciduous tree and shrub species have taken firm hold in regenerating the area.

The alpine tundra stretches from timberline at 6,000 to 7,000 feet to bare rock and ice slopes of the peaks. The large open basins have extensive meadow areas. Krummholz on the ridgelines and Willow-Alder thickets along seepage areas form a common vegetation pattern on the lower alpine fringe.

Slide paths are prevalent along the slopes of the lake and tributary valleys. Ranging from 100 metres to a mile in width and in many instances, reaching to the lake edge and valley bottoms; the slide areas have dense thickets of alder and willow at lower elevations, giving way to forbs and grasses on the higher slopes.

Broad willow flats have developed over the wide gravel and sand deposits bordering Chisel and Alnus Creeks and the Wood River. Open areas along the exposed gravel sites are densely matted with *Dryas*. There are marshy areas extending down the Wood River from the outlet of the lake past the junction with Alnus Creek.

4. Wildlife

Much important wildlife data was obtained in a 1985 Black Bear and Grizzly habitat study. It was learned that although the park has a relatively low population of bears, the potential for bear/human conflict is high. Information and recommendations contained in this study will provide the basic tools to develop a program for reducing bear/human conflicts. The ability to plan park development and visitor use before conflicts develop will greatly assist park managers in providing effective visitor safety programs within a wilderness environment.

Additional specific information on wildlife values has yet to be gathered. Observations of Ranger staff during two summers and records of game harvested by guides provides a basic knowledge of species occurrence and habitat.

Mountain goats, moose, Grizzly and Black bears are the common larger animals. The marshes, burns and brushy creek margins are typical moose habitats. Grizzlies frequent the slide paths and open mountain slopes. Black bears appear to stay closer to the lake and valley bottoms.

There has been no guiding in the Park since the early 1970's and it is likely that little if any hunting activity has occurred since then. Circumstances since the 1970's do not favour reactivating guided hunting activities in the park. The Fish and Wildlife Branch will not allow establishment of a guiding territory in vicinity of the Park. The Park is too small in itself and the operating season too short to support a viable guiding enterprise. Parks Canada would not permit horse grazing in the Chaba and Athabasca River Valleys and there is no available graze in Hamber Park. There are no useable horse trails in the Park and planned hiking trails will not be durable enough to support horse use.

Eastern Brook trout is the only recorded fish species in the Park. A fishery study conducted by the Division at Fortress Lake in 1983, revealed that available spawning habitat along the 1/2 km. section of the Wood River below the lake outlet is adequate in relation to the fishery capability of the lake. While the study also revealed a surplus of harvestable fish, the sample of trout taken indicated a decline in average fish size from the historical records of large (2+ kg) fish. It is suspected that the study results relating to fish size were inaccurate. The large trout (1+ kg) that are still being caught suggest that the sampling techniques failed to pick up the average and larger size fish. The fishery will be closely monitored and there will be follow up inventories conducted in coordination with the Provincial Fisheries Branch.

5. Cultural Resources

a) Archaeological

There are no known archaeological sites in the Park. Indians may have travelled along Fortress Lake and down the Wood River but there is no evidence of their passing.

b) Historical

Athabasca Pass, which lies north of the park, was the main brigade route for the Hudson Bay Company for many years during the 1800's. Furs were brought up the Columbia River to Boat Encampment, then transferred to horses for the trip over the pass. The route followed the Wood River and ascended Jeffrey and Pacific Creeks to the famous Committee Punch Bowl at the pass summit. The Whirlpool River was then followed to Jasper. It is thought that a later route across the Continental Divide continued up the Wood River to Fortress Lake and skirted along the north and south shores to Fortress Pass and down to Sunwapta Falls in Jasper National Park, but there is little documentation or physical evidence of this trail route.

6. Visual Resources

Fortress Lake qualifies as one of the more outstanding scenic attractions of the Provincial park system. Dominant visual features are Fortress Peak, Chisel Peak, Mt. Quincy

and the Serenity Glacier. The composition of contrasting forms, textures and tones of ice and rock, emerald green alpine slopes, dark spruce forests and turquoise blue lake waters epitomizes the beauty and visual harmony of the Canadian Rocky Mountains.

7. Analysis

This section considers the significance of the park's resources relative to the recreation and conservation purposes of the provincial park system.

a) Conservation Significance

(i) Landscape Representation

The Park provides near-adequate representation of the Park Ranges of the Rocky Mountains. Subalpine Engelmann Spruce - Subalpine Fir and the Alpine Tundra biogeoclimactic zones are well represented. The other major biogeoclimactic zone of the Park Ranges, the Boreal White and Black Spruce, is lacking; however, these conditions are adequately represented in Mt. Robson Provincial Park to the north and Kootenay National Park to the south.

(ii) Heritage

The Athabasca trail is not situated within the boundaries of Hamber Park. The trail is considered of national significance and is a critical element in the park boundary review. Because of conflicts with forest interests, it may only be reasonable to include the identifiable upper section in the extended Park.

b) Recreation Significance

With appropriate levels of development and management, the park resources and environment could accommodate relatively high levels of wildland recreation use without jeopardizing conservation ideals.

Specific opportunities include:

- i) angling - opportunities to catch two kilogram brook trout are comparatively rare in Western Canada.
- ii) sight-seeing photography - whether flying or walking in, a major incentive for visiting the park will be to view and photograph the startling scenery of Fortress Lake.

- iii) backpacking hiking - Fortress Lake will form a major destination for backpackers out of Jasper. Parks Canada staff feel that Fortress Lake will vie with any of the popular backpack destinations in the National Parks for attracting use.
 - there is long term potential to establish trail systems along the Lake, the side drainages, the Wood river and the alpine basins to provide interconnections back to Jasper Park, to the Athabasca trail and to the Clemenceau Icefield area.

- iv) boating canoeing - it is expected that the concessionaire will provide boat rental services to park visitors; boating is the most effective means of moving along the lake; frequent high wind conditions create a hazard.

- v) mountaineering exploring - the high peaks of the Park, particularly Fortress Mountain, Chisel Peak and Ghost peak, and glaciers offer challenging climbing prospects.

- vi) skiing - the Chaba River valley in Jasper Park with proper development could provide a good safe ski route into Fortress Lake. Day trips and extended excursions could be made from a base camp at the Lake.

- vii) hunting - there is good hunting for moose, black bear, and goat but the remoteness and expensive access pose major limitations.

The recreational potential of Hamber Park could be considerably enhanced with the addition of the Athabasca fur brigade trail, the series of impressive waterfalls and lakes at the head of the Cummins River and the extensive glaciers and peaks of the Clemenceau Icefield.

C. Tenures, Occupancy Rights, and Jurisdictions

1. leases and use permits

PUP 1520 - Fortress Lake Lodge; authorized operation of a fishing wilderness recreation camp, and fly-in services; issued June 1, 1985; renewal date December 31, 1989.

2. fee simple lands

none

3. other tenures

none

4. trespasses

none

5. mineral claims and developments

none

6. statutory jurisdictions

none

D. Existing Facilities

Ten campsites have been developed at the east end of Fortress Lake to accommodate visitors from Jasper Park.

There is an overgrown trail on the north shore of the lake which could be easily opened to allow access along the lake from the east end to Alnus Creek near the outlet on the west.

E. Market Analysis

During the summers of 1973 and 1974, Ranger staff were stationed in the Park to carry out a number of management functions as well as basic inventory of park resources and monitoring of visitor use. Use figures were recorded in both years during July and August; 53 visitors entered the Park in 1973 and 33 in 1974.

By far the majority of visitors flew into the Park for the primary purpose of fishing. Slightly more of the visitors originated from British Columbia (46%) than from Alberta (40%), with 14% coming from the United States.

While these are the only formal recordings of use figures, it is felt that they provide general indication of how the Park was used until recently. From their observations and discussions with the fishermen that flew in, the Rangers had the impression that people were tending to keep the place to themselves. In relation to its scale and attractiveness, the Park has been one of the most poorly publicized in the provincial park system.

It is expected that use patterns in the Park will significantly change over the next few years. Based upon first hand perceptions of visitor interests in the Sunwapta area, Parks Canada staff feel that the foot bridge over the Athabasca River will lead to dramatic and sudden influx of backpackers into Fortress Lake. Their assumptions are based upon existing heavy demands within Jasper National Park for backcountry visitation where quotas have been set to restrict use to social and carrying capacities. Parks Canada staff compare the use and attraction

potential of Fortress Lake to the Tonquin Valley in Jasper which receives upwards of 4,000 party nights a year.

As demonstrated at Mt. Assiniboine Provincial Park, there is good demand for commercially operated wilderness lodges. Fortress Lake may offer a viable situation for a fly-in fishing and wilderness vacation resort with the setting and attractions to draw international tourist appeal. Economic assessments conducted by the concessionaire indicate a potential tourism based market of Fortress Lake.

F. Key Issues

In 1975, an Interim Policy Statement was drawn up to formulate guidelines and policies for managing the Park as a Nature Conservancy. It was intended that use of the Park would adhere to the concept of wilderness in its truest sense. Accordingly, all forms of commercial activities and use of combustion engines were deemed illegal. After nine years of trial, management of the Parks as a Nature Conservancy proved impractical and the benefits accrued to society in terms of public use and enjoyment of park values has been questioned.

The problems and incongruities of attempting to apply the Nature Conservancy Concept and policies in Hamber Park suggest a need to shift toward a more flexible, recreation use orientation. In this context, the Park Master Plan will outline strategies to balance Park development and use with the maintenance of the park's resource values and wilderness atmosphere. There are six major issues to be addressed in the Master Plan.

1. Provision of foot access is crucial to opening of the Park to recreation use. The Chaba and Athabasca valleys in Jasper National Park provide opportunity to develop an easy low gradient hike-in route into Hamber Park. With the bridge crossing of the Athabasca River completed in 1985, this trail route is now eighty percent completed, but until a bridge is provided over the Chaba River, Hamber Park can only be safely reached on foot during low water periods, from early August through autumn. The Parks Division will have to coordinate with Parks Canada to have this route opened as early as possible, and to provide for marking of the easiest and safest route in the interim.

2. The Division recognizes the use of private aircraft and chartered aircraft services as traditional and legitimate means of access to the park. Sanctioning of aircraft uses, however, imposes problems for administration. There is obvious potential for conflict between aircraft users and hike-in visitors. There is no existing legislation to control aircraft use at Fortress Lake, and enforcement of any control measures will be difficult.

3. Fortress Lake provides opportunity for a concessionaire operated fly-in camp providing services and facilities that the Division would not otherwise be involved with. The economic uncertainties and logistic problems will require that such an operation be established on a trial basis to determine its suitability.

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4. The large Brook trout at Fortress Lake form a major attraction. The fishery, however, is sensitive to overfishing and will have to be carefully managed to ensure maintenance of its present quality.

5. Initiatives to develop and promote use of the park can only be undertaken if there is concurrent commitment to establish appropriate levels of staffing in the park. The complexities of managing public activities, administering aircraft use, supervising lodge operations and charter services, and protecting sensitive park resources will present considerable challenge to park managers.

6. There is potential to significantly enhance the recreation and conservation values of the Park by addition of the spectacular features associated with the Clemenceau Icefield, the Cummins Lakes, and the upper sections of the Athabasca trail. Conflicts with mineral and forest interests will force compromise on status and boundaries for park expansion.