



Reference: Knight Inlet Helisports Ltd. Tenure Application (file # 1412758) and Proposed Management Direction for Mt Waddington Range

1.0 Introduction and Background

Knight Inlet Heli Sports (KIHS) applied for Crown Land tenure in the winter of 2007. The application identified four zones including the Waddington Range, the Whitemantle Range and the whole Klinaklini-Silverthroner watershed. Zone Two of KIHS' tenure application, which includes the Mt Waddington massif, has been given a deferred status by ILMB with the hope that the interest groups can come to a "shared use agreement".

The Waddington Range, which includes the highest mountain entirely within BC, Mt Waddington, was first 'discovered' in the early 1920s by Don and Phyllis Munday and is recognized as an extremely important world-class mountaineering, climbing and ski touring area. The Waddington Range has gained international notoriety due to the abundance and variety of climbing and skiing objectives. Equally as important are the rugged approaches, unstable weather, poor and often dangerous climbing conditions, and complete isolation and remoteness, which have all become the hallmarks of the "Waddington" wilderness experience.

FMC has been strongly opposed to heli-ski activity in Zone Two. The introduction of a heli-ski tenure into this area will have damaging and irreversible impacts on the traditional, non-motorized, self-propelled recreational users of the Waddington Range and surrounding area, as well as the iconic reputation of Mt Waddington itself. The FMC is compelled to protect it, from this and any future applications for motorized activity except for motorized access (heli or fixed wing access) for otherwise self-propelled groups. Coming to a shared use agreement for Zone Two has been difficult.

2.0 Synopsis of Present Recreational Use

Most mountaineering and climbing in the Waddington Range occurs in the summer, while the prime ski season is April to June. Some parties do attempt ski trips and climbing ascents in the winter, but this is not the norm. Most ski parties fly in to base-camps (e.g. on Dais Glacier), then spend a week or two climbing or skiing to nearby summits and on adjacent slopes. Popular objectives include the northwest summit of Mt Waddington, Mt Munday and Sockeye Peak to the Southeast, Whitetip Mountain and Bezel Peak to the Southwest, and Fury Gap to the North. In some years Whymper Dome and Fascination Mountain are also popular objectives. As spring gives way to summer the number of base camp locations and nearby objectives increase substantially. Tiedemann Glacier (Rainy Knob), Waddington Combatant Col, Radiant Glacier, Tellot Glacier and the Plummer Hut are all popular base campsites for various climbing and glacier travel objectives.

Some parties access the area by hiking or skiing, either to visit the Waddington area alone or as part of a longer distance and more extensive traverse. For instance, parties may traverse from Middle Lake in the Mosley Creek valley south through the Pantheon, Waddington, and Whitemantle Ranges to exit at the coast; or, may take the Ha-Iltzuk traverse from Bella Coola or Ape Lake across the Monarch Icefields and onward into and across the Silverthrone and Klinaklini glacial systems to exit at Knight Inlet. These traverses can be up to 4 weeks in length and require a tremendous amount of physical exertion and personal commitment. For these parties that last thing they want to encounter is a helicopter buzzing around them constantly servicing heli-ski groups.

As mentioned, Mt. Waddington and the surrounding ranges are internationally popular. This being said the amount of use might appear to be relatively low with an estimated 80—100 recreationists every year, many of these groups being small parties (2-3) with the occasional larger group (20-30). However the FMC would argue that the relatively low usage is part of the area's wilderness appeal. The desirable qualities of mountain or backcountry wilderness areas like Mt Waddington are dependent in large measure on their low population density and low use factor, difficulty of travel, and freedom from pollution of all kinds (physical, chemical, visual, acoustic). The Waddington Range is a remote, rugged region far from civilization and distant from even the most rudimentary roads. As such, access is challenging, somewhat logistically complicated, time-consuming, and expensive. This limits recreation in the area, but at the same time motivates committed wilderness enthusiasts to explore the area.

There are presently three tenured commercial operators in the Waddington area that conduct non-motorized activity: Bracewell Alpine, Canada West Mountain School and Waddington Enterprises.

3.0 Current Management of the Mt Waddington Area

The Mt Waddington area, to all intents and purposes, is an alpine wilderness area. It is an icecap consisting of a network of glaciers and mountain peaks, and with the exception of the lower southwest reaches, is void of any timber value.

The Mt Waddington area was identified as a tourism/recreation opportunity area in the Central Coast Land and Resource Management Plan (CCLRMP), however no official land designation or management recommendation was applied. It was at one time proposed for protected area status. However both the tourism/recreation and conservation sectors agreed that sensitive coastal ecosystems were more appropriate and important candidates for protected area status given the government target at the time of 12%. Indeed at the time no one in the recreation and conservation sectors envisioned the idea of commercial motorized tenures in the Waddington Range. It has been suggested by government that the fate of Mt Waddington and in particular tourism/recreation management was decided in the CCLRMP.

The FMC participated in the CCLRMP process directly and through representation at the table by the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC. In fact tourism/recreation management was not discussed or settled in the CCLRMP negotiations. Nor would it have been in the Government to Government negotiations. The CCLRMP report does provide a strategic level plan, which states throughout, that further detailed planning is required on most issues. It is the position of the FMC that the motorized recreational use of the Mount Waddington area is such an issue.

4.0 Motorized Access vs. Motorized Activity

There are inherent differences between visitors who use air services as an integral part of their activity (e.g. heli skiing, heli hiking and scenic tours) and those backcountry enthusiasts who use air travel primarily as a means of access to climbing, mountaineering, backcountry skiing or glacier travel.

Since the mid-70s, helicopters have provided climbing and skiing groups easier access to the Waddington and surrounding ranges, but for the most part the prevailing activity in these areas is clearly non-motorized – skiing, climbing, hiking, etc. Once the helicopter leaves, groups are completely on their own, immersed in a ‘big mountain’ wilderness setting. Aircraft may access the area once or twice a week during times of peak use. This is considerably different than the consistent use of aircraft for flight seeing or for servicing heli ski or heli-hiking groups.

Backcountry enthusiasts in other popular areas with motorized activity often cite their concern about aircraft noise during the time they are on the ground—often up to three weeks. Backcountry areas lose their remote quality if subjected to mechanized intrusion or noise from airplane or other engines. Proponents of expanding aerial activities and scenic tours have argued that these complaints may not be valid if an airplane or helicopter is being used for access. However, the US National Park Service, for example, has continued planning and management based on the premise that “using airplanes for access does not render invalid the desires of backcountry users to enjoy wilderness values such as solitude and the opportunity to experience the natural soundscape”. These values were important to park visitors early in the history of the former Mount McKinley National Park (now Denali National Park and Preserve); for example, “opportunities to enjoy the natural soundscape” were mentioned as early as the 1920s (Brown 1993).

5.0 Proposed Shared Use Agreement for the Mt Waddington range.

Because of its international significance and public expectations, Mt Waddington should be held to a high standard of care, preserving the wilderness resource values (benefit, use, education, and inspiration) and related recreational opportunities of present and future generations. Public comment on the recent tenure applications widely supported this concept.

It is the position of the FMC that wilderness recreational activities like hiking, climbing and skiing should receive priority (free of impacts to its associated values) over other uses where these opportunities are limited. Such opportunities are indeed limited in the Coast Mountain Range where most of the land base is either under existing or proposed tenure for heli-supported activity. A high priority should therefore be placed on minimizing resource impacts and protecting traditional wilderness recreational activities in the Waddington Range.

The FMC acknowledges the positive contribution to the tenure discussions by Mr. John Dawson and Knight Inlet Heli Sports and their proposal for a “no fly zone” around the Mt Waddington massif. However, a management direction for the Mt Waddington Range should include the provision of continued opportunities, including reasonable motorized access, for mountain climbing, backcountry skiing, and other non-motorized wilderness recreational activities.

5.1 Management Objectives

5.1.1 Proposed “No Fly Zone” for the Mt Waddington Range

A “no fly zone” is proposed where commercial heli skiing, and heli hiking/mountaineering activity by KIHS and any future tenure applicant will be excluded. The proposed no fly zone would incorporate the main height of land of the Mt Waddington massif including the extremity peaks: Martello Mtn. to the Southeast, Finality Mtn. to the West, Mt. Geddes to the Northwest and **Mt. Mercator to the Northeast** (Mt. Mercator is proposed so as to include a buffer around the Claw Peak area and the BCMC Plummer Hut). See map attached.

The Mt Waddington area will be available only for non-motorized public and commercial recreational use. For example, activities such as heli skiing, heli hiking snowmobiling and ATV use are not acceptable. Aerial access for non-motorized activities be allowed. Air access within the Mt Waddington Range should be closely monitored as some areas may have environmental or social sensitivity to aerial landings, where no aerial landings are acceptable. In the future, frequency, timing and location of air access may need to be managed to minimize impact. Over flights should also be discouraged wherever possible. Climbers, skiers and other backcountry enthusiasts are encouraged to consciously choose the least environmentally damaging mode of access that will serve their purpose.

This proposal does not make trade-offs between commercial and public interests. A designation should be considered as opportunities for both commercial and public non-motorized recreation, if consideration is given to potential public / commercial recreation conflicts. It is possible that as recreational use increases in some areas that such trade-offs will have to be made in future revisions to a management plan.

Management Objective Summary:

- Non-motorized recreational uses
- Non-motorized ground transport
- Aerial transport allowed for drop-off/pick up for recreation users.
- Existing non-motorized commercial recreation uses if present.
- New non-motorized commercial recreation uses may be considered.

This proposal also contains a management direction of minimal recreational development (low acceptance of recreational changes to the landscape and low incidence of human contact and managerial presence) and no permanent structures or lodges. There is one existing hut called the Plummer Hut, built and maintained by the British Columbia Mountaineering Club (BCMC), in the Claw Peaks area, which will be allowed to continue to exist in its present location.

Most existing recreation use occurs in the “core area” identified by the proposed no-fly zone”. However, ski and climbing parties often venture into the greater Zone Two area as well as Zones 1, 3 and 4 for skiing and climbing objectives. In addition to the proposed use for the Mt Waddington Range the FMC makes the following two recommendations.

5.1.2 Seasonal Closure for Zone Two

Most ski touring groups come to the Waddington area in the spring (April - May). The ski season lasts until early June and then climbing/mountaineering parties are in the area usually until the end of September. FMC proposes a seasonal closure for commercial heliski activity in all of Zone Two from April 15 until October 31.

5.1.3 Communication Strategy for Zones One, Two, Three and Four

A communication and avoidance strategy for operating in these zones is presently being developed by the proponent KIHS, the FMC and ILMB. Part of this strategy will include a minimum 5km avoidance buffer for ski parties and a communication protocol with known clubs and service providers to determine who and where parties will be. The FMC fully support this strategy and look forward to working with KIHS to implement it.

Note that the above management directions are not based upon Levels of Acceptable Change (LAC) Analysis, but rather a subjective evaluation of acceptable development and use levels. Therefore, indicators for quality of experience are not included in this direction and it does not address social and environmental carrying capacities to a refined degree.

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FMC Recreation and Conservation Committee

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