



October 14, 2016

By Email (premier@gov.bc.ca)

The Honourable Christy Clark
Premier of British Columbia
PO Box 9041
Station Provincial Government
Victoria, BC
V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Clark,

Re: BC Parks Budget

The Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC (FMCBC) is a province-wide umbrella organization of 37 outdoor recreation clubs with more than 5000 individual members. For over four decades, the FMCBC has represented non-motorized backcountry recreation interests and advocated for the preservation of and access to the wilderness experience for non-motorized backcountry enthusiasts.

We are writing today about preserving the ecological integrity of our highly valued provincial parks. We believe the ecological integrity of our parks is being compromised by years of BC Parks' budget cutbacks, which has resulted in the deterioration of park infrastructure, nearly non-existent park rangers and insufficient management and planning resources to respond to the increasing demands on our provincial parks.

This province is blessed with an amazing natural environment and past governments realized its importance by establishing provincial parks and the provincial park system. The 1990's Parks Legacy Project demonstrated how much the BC public values our parks. Unfortunately, continuous budget cuts have seriously eroded BC Parks' ability to properly manage and monitor the ecological integrity of our parks and to adequately plan for and respond to the growing pressures faced by our park system.

In 2010, the BC Auditor General found that the ecological integrity of our provincial parks was not being conserved and that many aspects of park management and planning could be improved. In our view, the Auditor General's findings are as valid today as they were in 2010. While the initiative to remove parking fees has made provincial parks more affordable for families, inadequate resources allocated to BC Parks is destroying the very reason why BC citizens and tourists visit our parks. Protecting the ecological integrity of our parks is essential if people are to access, enjoy and benefit from our beautiful parks today, tomorrow and in the future.

According to the BC Government Tourism strategy, "*Visitors often travel to BC to experience nature in a way unavailable to them in their home country. BC parks system, for example, is one the largest and most significant in the world and a key attraction for both citizens and tourists.*" Yet, even though tourism contributed \$7.1 billion in GDP in 2014 to the BC economy and BC Parks' research shows that every dollar invested in the protected areas system generates \$8.42 in visitor



spending on food, entertainment, transportation and other goods and services, your government refuses to invest in our provincial park system. Under-funding BC Parks is simply shortsighted. The lack of funds and resources for BC Parks is resulting in the degradation of our parks and the tarnishing of BC's "Super Natural" image and needs to be addressed.

- **Deteriorating Park Infrastructure**

At current funding levels, significant amounts of maintenance are being deferred in BC parks. Facilities and trails that could be fixed with small repairs today will require comprehensive rebuilding at much greater cost in the near future. The FMCBC members' collection of photographs from across the province (#fundbc parks Facebook album) provides examples of deteriorating park infrastructure that are turning into major rehabilitation projects (e.g., rotted out bridges, boardwalks, stairs and outhouses; badly eroded trails; missing, broken or illegible signs). Cost cutting on infrastructure maintenance, trail repairs and signage can actually result in increased costs through medical care and time off work for injured BC citizens and tourists and increased search and rescue efforts and costs.

With the ever-increasing population growth over the last decade, particularly in southwestern BC, there has been a considerable increase in visitors to our parks. Unfortunately, BC Parks has not had the capacity to respond adequately, if at all, to this increased demand. Visitors are turned away because the supply of parking, campsites and trails has not kept up with demand, as evidenced this year with the many disappointed families unable to reserve a campsite through BC Parks' reservation system or unable to access campsites available on a first come, first serve basis.

- **Nearly Non-existent Park Rangers**

With the increase in park visitors and with some parks reaching capacity, increased ranger presence is required to monitor the environment, reduce human-wildlife interactions and enforce rules. As a result of inadequate BC Parks' funding, it is very rare to see a ranger enforcing BC Parks' policies, protecting the natural environment from inappropriate use, campfires, tent sites and waste disposal; supervising restoration of park ecosystems, trails and other infrastructure; promoting "leave no trace" practices; and, providing safety advice to inexperienced hikers and campers.

- **Insufficient Planning and Management Resources**

Due to extreme staffing constraints, many park management plans are currently non-existent or out of date. As an example, both Callaghan and Pinecone Burke Provincial Parks were founded 20 years ago and yet have no management plans in place. As a result, they are vastly underutilized and are not delivering economic benefits to the province.

As visitor numbers increase, new facilities such as outhouses, trails, campsites and alpine meadow boardwalks must be added. However, to maintain the ecological integrity of our parks, such additions must be properly planned and developed. As parks reach capacity, thought must also be given to providing protected area or official recreation site status to other environmentally sensitive areas that are receiving the overflow crowds (Semaphore Lakes and Watersprite Lake being examples).



Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC

Accessing the backcountry one step at a time

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In conclusion, we ask that there be a substantial increase to BC Parks' budget to enable BC Parks to carry out its mandate, to properly conserve the ecological integrity of our parks, and to respond to the pressures faced by our provincial parks system. We request that your government double BC Parks' current budget of \$31M (excluding the amount allocated to park operators) to \$60M with "new" money. Such a substantive increase will allow BC Parks to increase its management, planning and ranger resources, to replace or repair aging and hazardous park infrastructure and to increase park facilities, such as campsites, outhouses and trails. These actions will go some way to improve the current state of our provincial parks, increase visitor satisfaction, and enhance the economic and health benefits derived from our provincial park system.

We look forward to your reply and welcome a discussion on how to address the serious issues faced by our provincial parks system.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jodi Appleton', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Jodi Appleton, Executive Director
Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC

- Cc The Honourable Mary Polak, Minister of Environment (ENV.minister@gov.bc.ca)
- Cc The Honourable Michael de Jong, Minister of Finance (FIN.Minister@gov.bc.ca)
- Cc Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
(FinanceCommittee@leg.bc.ca)
- Cc John Horgan, Leader of the Official Opposition
(john.horgan.MLA@leg.bc.ca)
- Cc Vicki Huntington, Independent
(Vicki.huntington.MLA@leg.bc.ca)
- Cc Dr. Andrew Weaver, Independent
(andrew.weaver.MLA@leg.bc.ca)
- Cc Members of the Treasury Board:
 - Shirley Bond (Vice-Chair) (shirley.bond.MLA@leg.bc.ca)
 - Rich Coleman (rich.coleman.MLA@leg.bc.ca)
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