



Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC

Accessing the backcountry one step at a time

PO Box 19673 Vancouver, BC V5T 4E7
fmcbc@mountainclubs.org
www.mountainclubs.org
Tel: 604.873.6096

Vicki Haberl
Planning Section Head
B.C. Parks,
South Coast Region
Ministry of the Environment

25 February 2015

Via Email: Vicki.Haberl@gov.bc.ca

Re: North Shore Ski Area Parking and Access - Final Discussion Paper

Dear Ms. Haberl,

As you know, the FMCBC represents the interests of 33 non-motorized outdoor recreation clubs which have a combined membership of approximately 5000 individual members. For over 40 years we have been promoting non-motorized backcountry recreation, particularly to improve trails and access to the backcountry, and our members have been participating in many land use decision-making processes.

Your above noted Paper reviews complex problems in our North Shore ski areas which are aggravated by unpredictable and highly variable weather and snow conditions. Your report provides a wide selection of possible solutions to these problems which arise for only 20-30 peak days per ski season. This "peak day" aspect is also part of the problem, as it is short term and thus reduces the perceived importance of the problem, but we are told that these relatively few peak days are essential for viable operation of the ski areas. In our opinion, most year-round operating facilities have a limited carrying capacity for their visitors, and it is probably rarely justified economically to have permanently installed capacity to handle the relatively few maximum visitor days. In other words, the seasonal parking capacity problems of the two ski areas are probably typical of other year-round operating facilities. These occasional over-capacity problems, which frustrate the public and operators alike, can probably only be mitigated and not entirely eliminated.

There are many opinions among our members with respect to solutions, and this letter will address only a few. As the budget for BC Parks has been severely reduced for decades and most of the proposed solutions would incur a cost, our members feel that the responsibility to cover these costs should be mainly placed on the operator and not on the government. Reason being that these solutions are to mitigate problems that result directly from a private company operating in a public park where there are many operational restrictions that are not found in Crown Land tenures. However, some solutions are in line with the BC Parks' mandate of providing facilities to access areas of the park, and thus we feel at least a portion of the cost for these types of solutions could be paid for by the government.

We realize that without the privately-operated ski areas it would be difficult to justify the expense of keeping the access roads and parking area cleared for the general public to access during the winter. It is to the advantage of both the general public and the two ski hill operators that the ski areas remain viable, as they provide access to the local high country and snow for the large population base of Metro-Vancouver. Therefore, if possible there should be a balance between the ski operators' profits and the public's right to access public parks at a reasonable cost.



The following discussion refers specifically to problems found at Mt Seymour as the parking capacity at Cypress far exceeds that of Mt. Seymour. One of the suggested solutions for Mt Seymour is to increase the visitor parking capacity. This solution is unpopular amongst our members because increasing parking areas adjacent to the ski lifts and/or the upper Lots 2, 3 and 4 would result in the loss of additional upper elevation public park area. If Mt Seymour's skiing and snowboarding clients prefer to park their cars within a short walk of the ski lifts, we feel that these clients should pay an additional premium to park near the lifts as is the recent practice at Cypress. This parking premium cost would be quite small compared with the relatively high cost of lift tickets and ski gear, and might encourage carpooling which would reduce the overall number of cars. The parking premium might also discourage lower budget non-client park visitors who would be willing to walk the extra distance to save on the parking premium.

Non-paying visitors using the backcountry presently use Lot P5 which requires parking their cars generally perpendicularly to the main road on a relatively narrow strip of plowed packed snow or mud parallel to the main roadway. This can be hazardous because the cars can get stuck on the parking strip due to poor traction and there are often cars passing close by the ends of the parked cars which sometimes project into the roadway itself. Poor visibility due to fog or rain further increases the danger of collision. We feel that even widening the parking strip to provide more room for cars to be clear of the roadway would not necessarily make things safer because when entering the strip the cars have to slow down to park, and when leaving have to accelerate from a standstill to join the passing cars which can be travelling at relatively high speed. Lot P5 has upper and lower sections which extend for hundreds of meters along the highway and almost reach the specific conventional lower parking area Lot P1. Parking in these lower areas necessitates walking some considerable distance to the ski area; therefore, Lot P1 and at least Lower Lot P5 are not good options for families with young children.

As discussed in Option 8, one proposal is that BC Parks could provide properly engineered hiking trails between the ski area and existing more remote parking areas, i.e., Lower Lots P5 and P1. This proposal would avoid the present dangerous and unpleasant walk along the packed snow verges of the busy main road. Lot P1 is often occupied by users of the group site and can have limited parking capacity; however, Lot P1 is at a relatively low elevation with a gravel surface which could be enlarged at a reasonable expense without detracting much from park's natural assets. It should be noted that we have some safety concerns regarding Lot P1 as it connects to the main road adjacent a tight switch back where approaching cars cannot easily see the cars entering or leaving the lot. Another suggestion for an alternative foot access between the ski area and these lower parking areas is to build a trail on the opposite side of the road from the parking lots keeping in mind that crossing the road can be hazardous. Thus a safe option for the road crossing would need to be considered such as providing an overpass or underpass or installing clearly visible pedestrian controlled crossing lights. Providing more trails which are properly engineered is clearly within the mandate of BC Parks, and thus it would be reasonable for some of the cost and expertise for building these trails could be borne by BC Parks. These would also provide summer trails for those wanting a longer, less crowded and more aesthetic walk than by starting at the lift area which most summer visitors do now. Some of our club members would be prepared to assist BC Parks in selecting a suitable route for these proposed trails.

These complicated parking arrangements are only necessary on peak days, and this aspect should be clearly explained on the websites of the ski area operators and BC Parks so that visitors know what to expect in advance of arriving. On these few peak days, adequate signage should be displayed well down the hill to ensure understanding and compliance which is simpler and safer than towing illegally parked cars. In the



Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC

Accessing the backcountry one step at a time

PO Box 19673 Vancouver, BC V5T 4E7
fmcbc@mountainclubs.org
www.mountainclubs.org
Tel: 604.873.6096

opposite weather situation, when the ski lifts are not operating due to poor snow/weather conditions, we strongly believe that the newly imposed parking and access restrictions for backcountry users should be not be in effect and that backcountry users should be able to enjoy unrestricted parking and unrestricted access to backcountry areas of the parks. In this latter situation, for clarity the parking signage should indicate removal of the restrictions.

We realize the above discussion addresses only a few of the options outlined in the Discussion Paper. If necessary, some of the other options proposed in the Discussion Paper can best be reviewed at a meeting.

We hope that our limited views expressed above will aid BC Parks and the ski area operators in finding a low cost and relatively simple solution to this long standing and vexatious problem.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Wood,

Co-Chair, Recreation and Conservation Committee,
Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC