



**Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC**  
Accessing the backcountry one step at a time

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## **TO: The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services**

### ***re: Increased Funding for BC Provincial Parks and for Recreation Sites and Trails***

The Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC (FMCBC) promotes self-propelled activities, such as hiking, mountaineering, trail running, snowshoeing, and backcountry skiing through leadership, advocacy and education. We are a federation of 44 outdoor clubs with a membership of over 5,100 people from across the province. We engage with outdoor recreation organizations, government agencies and others to protect and maintain access for quality non-motorized recreation in BC's mountains and wilderness.

We are writing to request additional funding for both BC Parks and the Recreations Sites and Trails, a division of FLRNRO, to address the increasing demands for public recreation opportunities in our provincial parks and protected areas and on Crown Land outside of our provincial park system.

#### **A. Additional Funding for BC Parks**

Our 2016 budget submissions sought increased funding for BC Parks (doubling of BC Parks' budget from \$31M, excluding the amount allocated to park operators to \$60M, with "new" money). While there have been some increases in BC Parks' budget over the past several years, BC Parks remains seriously underfunded and understaffed. We renew our request for an increase in BC Parks' budget from the current \$40.5M to \$60M, with "new" money. We ask for this 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 park system. 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.

- ***Under-funding of BC Parks' operating and capital budgets***

BC Parks' budget increased from approximately \$31M in 2016 to \$40.5M in 2018/2019. After the government's 2018 funding announcements, which included \$5M over three years to expand BC Parks campsites, we sought clarification about BC Parks' budget. We learned that BC Parks' operating budget had in fact decreased by \$8.8M from 2017/18, primarily due to the one-time grant given to the Parks Foundation in 2017/18. This decrease was offset by the previous government's announced increases for park rangers, campsite expansion and wages under collective agreements. The BC Parks Estimate Budget Changes from 2017/18 to 2018/19<sup>1</sup> is attached for reference. The summary shows the three main categories of funding for BC Parks: operational (the main funding pot that funds our staffing and day to day operations), the Park Enhancement Fund (which is non-operational and functions with revenue and expenditure targets), and capital funding (for our facilities projects, equipment and vessels).

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<sup>1</sup> Provided to FMCBC by David Ranson, Executive Director, BC Parks – Provincial Services Branch Victoria

Despite the importance of our provincial park system to the government’s tourism strategy<sup>2</sup> and the research which shows that every \$1 invested in the protected areas system generates \$8.42 in visitor spending on food, entertainment, transportation and other goods and services, government continues to under-fund BC Parks. BC Parks’ current budget is simply not commensurate with the needs of our provincial park system, which is the third largest park system by area in North America, after the US National Parks Service and Parks Canada, and the second largest in Canada. Contrast, for example, BC Parks’ 2018 budget (operating and capital) of approximately \$40.5M for 1032 Parks or Protected Areas<sup>3</sup> to Metro Vancouver Regional Parks 2018 Operating Budget of \$41.3M for 24 Regional Parks, 5 Greenways and a handful of park reserves.

Further, contrast BC Parks’ 2018/2019 budget of \$40.5M to the Destination BC 2018/2019 budget of \$51.5M. It makes little sense to under-fund BC Parks, when our provincial park system plays such a key role in attracting tourists and in providing wilderness recreation opportunities for our citizens.

- **Insufficient Full-time Rangers**

The number of rangers has increased from six full-time rangers in the entire province in 2016 to 31 full-time rangers, plus roughly 55 seasonal (auxiliary) rangers. Over the past summer, BC Parks hired student work crews to carry out work on trails and facilities throughout the province. However, with current ranger staffing and approximately 1032 Parks or Protected Areas in BC, there is still only 1 ranger per 13 Parks or Protected areas. FMCBC member clubs and other clubs and organizations continue to put in many days clearing or restoring trails or helping in other ways to maintain park infrastructure. BC Parks simply cannot manage and maintain the parks, facilities and trails throughout the province, without the contributions made by volunteers.

With the increase in park visitors and with some parks reaching capacity, BC Parks would benefit from additional full-time rangers. The presence of park rangers is essential to enforce BC Parks policies, to protect the natural environment from inappropriate use, campfires, tent sites and waste disposal; to supervise restoration of park ecosystems, trails and other infrastructure; to promote “leave no trace” practices; and, to provide safety advice to inexperienced hikers and campers.

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<sup>2</sup> 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 of the largest and most significant in the world and a key attraction for both citizens and tourists.**” (emphasis added).

<sup>3</sup> Parks and Protected Areas System Administered by BC Parks (as of June 13, 2016):

Designation	Number	Area (ha)
Class A Parks	628	10,515,996
Class B Parks	2	3,778
Class C Parks	13	484
Recreation Areas	2	5,929
Conservancies	156	2,998,504
Designation under the <i>Environment and Land Use Act</i>	83	384,371
Ecological Reserves	148	160,456
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,032</b>	<b>14,069,881</b>

- ***Insufficient Planning and Management Resources***

With the ever-increasing population growth over the last decade, the number of visitors in parks close to urban centres has increased rapidly as more and more citizens and tourists recreate in our provincial parks. Joffre Lakes Provincial Park, for example, saw more than 170,000 visitors in 2017 alone. Unfortunately, BC Parks does not have the capacity to proactively respond, if at all, to this increased demand.

As an example, in early 2018, the FMCBC proposed that the parking lot and access road to Rubble Creek be plowed to facilitate winter access to Garibaldi Provincial Park. Currently, in winter, only a very small area is plowed, providing very minimal parking off Highway 99. Plowing the 2 km of road to the summer parking lot and trailhead would reduce the trip distance by 4 km and provide ample parking for winter users. In response to our request, BC Parks advised that the park facility operator does not provide any off-season services for Rubble Creek between December 1 and April 30. This is simply not good enough when additional access points are desperately needed for parks close to urban centres.

To maintain the ecological integrity of our parks, increasing or improving access points and recreational opportunities in our provincial parks must be properly planned and developed. In our 2016 submissions, we advocated for more planning and management resources, pointing out that many park management plans are currently non-existent or out of date. Callaghan and Pinecone Burke Provincial Parks were provided as two examples of parks without management plans. This remains the status in 2018. While the planning process for Pinecone Burke was initiated in 2014, a draft management plan is still not available for public review and comment. Both parks were created in 1997, are in close proximity to the large population centers of the Lower Mainland and remain vastly underutilized. Mount Seymour Provincial Park, created in 1936, is an example of a provincial park with a management plan which is badly out of date and not even available to the public. The planning process for Mount Seymour was supposed to start in 2015 but we are still waiting for it to be initiated.

## **B. Additional Funding for Recreation Sites and Trails**

While the primary focus of our submissions is funding for BC Parks, we don't want to overlook the funding needs of the Recreation Sites and Trails (RST). RST's mandate includes working with communities and recreation organizations to develop, manage and promote a network of designated recreation sites, trails and facilities; and, authorizing construction of recreation facilities and trails on Crown land outside of BC's provincial park system.

As with BC Parks, the regional RST staff are inadequate to maintain and manage the trails and recreation sites (i.e., campgrounds, day shelters, cabins and fire lookouts) in their respective districts. In the Squamish Forest District for example, RST manages 453 Recreation Sites, 269 trails, 1 Area-Based Trail Network, and 2 Interpretive Forests. RST's 2017/18 regional budget was \$1.9M, with \$466,500 dedicated to the Sea to Sky Corridor. RST's operations budget for the Sea to Sky Corridor is only \$115,000, basically covering one full-time Recreation Technician. The Chilliwack District has two full-time Recreation Technicians. Similarly, the McKenzie and Prince George Forest District has two full-time staff. This is simply insufficient to manage all the recreational assets in the various districts across the province. The forest fires of the past 2 years have put further strain on many of the regional RST staff and resources.

Many of our member clubs have Volunteer Working Agreements with RST, which relies heavily on volunteers to carry out maintenance on trails and recreation sites. While RST reimburses some expenses incurred by volunteers, other maintenance costs and expenses (e.g., trail markers are one example) are covered by monies from clubs or donations solicited from other sources. In our view, RST requires more staff across the province and more funding to manage recreation and to look after the hundreds of trails and other facilities on Crown land outside of our provincial park system.

In July 2018, FMCBC and club representatives met with RST and other government representatives to discuss options to resolve the access and parking related issues for the Singing Pass trail to Garibaldi Provincial Park. At the meeting, RST reported:

- greater than 10% annual growth in public demand and expectations for recreation facilities and opportunities;
- more than 60 requests per year for s. 57 / 56 designations under the *Forest Act*, of which RST can only process about 10 each year;
- managing established sites and trails occupies 95% of RST's budget and time; and,
- lack of pro-active recreation access management planning to address public demand.

Budget constraints and available resources limit RST's ability to respond to the extraordinary public demand for new facilities, upgraded facilities and increased maintenance requirements on Crown land.

In conclusion, we ask that there be a substantial increase to BC Parks' budget to enable BC Parks to carry out its mandate and to respond to the pressures faced by our provincial park system.

Increased funding for RST to permit RST to respond proactively to the increased demands for recreational opportunities and to manage current recreational sites and trails on Crown land outside of our provincial park system would be most welcome, especially funding for road maintenance - the Nesakwatch FSR which provides access to both the Slesse Memorial and Mt Rexford trails as an example. This road is once again washed out; meaning that access to these trails is only available to those with high clearance 4x4's (if at all..). It would be most helpful if RSTBC had a budget for clearing roads that lead to important hiking trails.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

Sincerely,

Barry J Janyk  
Executive Director  
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**15 October 2018**