



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

### **re: Funding for BC Provincial Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails – 2020 Budget**

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 43 clubs with a membership of more than 5,000 people from across the province. Many of our clubs build and maintain trails, which are used by the public. The FMCBC and clubs 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 once again request additional funding for BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC), a division of the Ministry of Forestry, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRORD) to address the increasing demands for public recreation opportunities in our provincial parks and protected areas and on Crown lands outside our provincial parks system.

#### **A. Status of Funding for BC Parks and RSTBC**

In the past several years, the FMCBC has made submissions to the Select Standing Committee to increase funding for BC Parks and for RSTBC. Over those years, there has been slight increase in funding for BC Parks. The funding increase, however, has been nominal in the context of the severe underfunding of BC Parks for almost 20 years:

- In 2001 BC Parks operating budget was approximately \$41 million
  - With CPI correction<sup>1</sup>, \$41 million would be \$56.8 million in 2019
  - BC's population increased by 22% since 2001, so a budget of \$41 million in 2001, would be equivalent to \$70 million in 2019, on a per capita basis with CPI correction
- In 2016, BC Parks operating budget was \$31.16 million
- In 2017, it was \$40.7 million
- In early 2017, the province committed an additional \$35 million over three years towards hiring 25 additional enforcement officers and building 1,900 new campsites
  - BC Parks estimated budget 2017/2018: \$49.27 million
  - BC Parks estimated budget 2018/2019: \$40.48 million<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bank of Canada Inflation Calculator used for CPI corrections

This to manage 1,033 parks and protected areas within BC, covering 14 million hectares, representing 14% of provincial lands. There are over 6,000 kilometres of hiking trails and 2,000 walk-in or backcountry campgrounds in the provincial parks system.

The economic value of BC's parks in terms of the tourism industry and spending by BC residents is substantial: Every dollar invested in BC Parks generates \$8.42 in additional spending by park users (Canadian Parks Council, 2009). Further, according to BC Parks 2016 Annual Report, approximately one quarter of park users are non-residents, showing not only the significant tourism impacts, but also the high value of the provincial parks system to BC residents.

The operating budget for RSTBC is significantly smaller than BC Parks at \$7 million in 2017. Yet, there is an estimate of 30,000 kilometres of trails in BC, with 12,000 kilometres under the responsibility of RSTBC (compared to the 6,000 kilometres in BC Parks).<sup>3</sup>

Despite the importance of our provincial parks to the government's tourism strategy<sup>4</sup>, government continues to under-fund our provincial parks system and RSTBC. BC Parks budget is not commensurate with our provincial parks system being the third largest parks 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 of approximately \$40.5M for 1033 parks and protected areas to Metro Vancouver Regional Parks 2018 budget of \$41.3M for 24 Regional Parks, 5 Greenways and a handful of park reserves.

Further, contrast Destination BC's funding to that of BC Parks and RSTBC. The base operating funding in 2016/2017 for Destination BC was \$51.5 million. In 2017, the tourism industry generated \$18.4 billion in revenue, contributing \$9 billion to the provincial GDP. Destination BC, which relies heavily on parks and protected areas to promote tourism abroad, recognizes that outdoor adventure and recreation are key strengths to support and develop, including trail development and management. Destination BC also recognizes that key challenges are the lack of staff and funding for land-based management and aging infrastructure.

It makes little sense to under-fund BC Parks and RSTBC, when our provincial parks system and the trails on Crown lands outside of our parks play such a fundamental role in attracting tourists and in providing wilderness recreation opportunities for BC residents. Instead of more Destination BC funding, the focus needs to shift to funding the development of trails, infrastructure and access and management of our wilderness recreation resource.

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<sup>2</sup> [BC Parks Estimate Budget Changes \(2017/18 to 2018/19\)](#) provided by David Ranson, Executive Director, BC Parks – Provincial Services Branch Victoria, is attached for reference. The summary of budget changes 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).

<sup>3</sup> Neufeldt, Clayton, *The Beaten Track: Visitor Management in BC Parks and Protected Areas*, SFU, Spring 2019.

<sup>4</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).

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

We request an increase in BC Parks budget from the current \$40.48 million to \$100 million. This increase would permit BC Parks to carry out its mandate to conserve properly the ecological integrity of our parks and to respond to and proactively manage the pressures and increased demands on our provincial parks system. Such a substantive increase will allow BC Parks to increase its management, planning and ranger resources, replace or repair aging and hazardous park infrastructure, increase park facilities, such as campsites, outhouses and trails, and allow BC Parks to encourage and support its volunteer partnership programs.

- ***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 1,033 parks and protected areas in BC, there is still only 1 ranger per 13 parks or protected areas. FMCBC member clubs and other clubs and organizations put in many, 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, let alone expand the inventory of trails within our parks.

With the increase in park visitors and with some parks reaching or exceeding 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.

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

With the ever-increasing population growth over the last decade, overall visitors have steadily increased. In 2016/17, there was a total of 21.8 million day-use visits to provincial parks, a 28% increase from 17 million visits in 2008/09. This increase has been even greater in southwest BC, with its large urban centers.<sup>5</sup> Joffre Lakes Provincial Park, for example, saw more than 170,000 visitors in 2017, compared to about 58,000 in 2008/09. Garibaldi Provincial Park saw 89,184 visitors in 2015/16, compared to about 48,000 in 2008/09.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, BC Parks does not have the capacity to pro-actively respond - if at all - to this increased demand.

When park facility operator contracted services were adopted by government as an alternate service delivery model for BC Parks, the intent was to free up park staff to do park management, including education/interpretation, youth crew, ranger patrols and resource management. Instead, those services have declined and pay for use and restrictions by reservation have been proposed, rather than expanding

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<sup>5</sup> Lower Mainland population grew by 16% between 2006 and 2016 (Metro Vancouver, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Neufeldt, SFU, Spring 2019.

the capacity of our provincial park system with new trails, access, parking and backcountry campsites. While there is funding to increase campsites, there is not funding for plowing the access roads and parking lots. Some examples:

- 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 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 the FMCBC's request, BC Parks advised that the park facility operator did not provide off-season services for Rubble Creek between December 1 and April 30.
- The popular Paul Ridge (Elfin Lake) access, also in Garibaldi Provincial Park, is another example. In winter, the park facility operator has just one snowplow and has a hard time keeping the road clear, particularly after a snowfall. It is very frustrating for the public when the access road is closed after a snowfall. This is simply not good enough when additional access points are desperately needed for parks close to urban centres.
- Kokanee Creek Provincial Park in Kootenay, BC, used to be plowed in winter but no longer. As a result, people park on the highway, creating a dangerous situation when the highway plows go by. Further, the lack of plowing prevents people accessing the various trails that originate in the park, cross-country skiing in the campground, snowshoeing, dog walking, bird walking or wildlife viewing.

To maintain the ecological integrity of our parks, increasing or improving access points and recreational opportunities 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.

- In 2016, Callaghan and Pinecone Burke Provincial Parks were provided as examples of parks without management plans. This remains the status in 2019. Both parks were established in 1997, are in close proximity to the large population centers in the Lower Mainland and remain vastly underutilized. The planning process for Pinecone Burke Provincial Park was initiated in 2014. Five years later, a draft management plan is still not available for public comment.
- 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. Its planning process was supposed to start in 2015. It has still not started.
- Both Cypress and Seymour Provincial Parks are underutilized in summer months. With some planning, additional trails could be development to provide much needed outdoor recreation opportunities to ease the over-capacity experienced in many parks and recreation areas in the Lower Mainland and Sea-to-Sky Corridor.

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

In our 2018 submissions, we sought increased funding for RSTBC. Its 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 provincial parks. We were extremely disappointed that there was no mention of RSTBC in the 2018 Standing Committee Report and their need for more staff and resources.

As with BC Parks, the regional RSTBC 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 and are totally dependent on volunteers to carry out maintenance of trails, even historic trails.

- In the Squamish Forest District for example, RSTBC manages 453 Recreation Sites, 269 trails, 1 Area-Based Trail Network, and 2 Interpretive Forests. RSTBC's 2017/18 regional budget was \$1.9M, with \$466,500 dedicated to the Sea to Sky Corridor. RSTBC's operations budget for the Sea to Sky Corridor was only \$115,000, basically covering 1 full-time Recreation Technician.
- The Chilliwack Forest District has 2 Recreation Technicians.
- The Mackenzie and Prince George Forest District has 2 Recreation Technicians.<sup>7</sup>
- The South Coast Recreation District has not had a Recreation Officer since mid-April, after she was transferred to the Ministry of Tourism to assist with Adventure Tourism until mid-September. As a result, the South Coast Recreation District has 1 Recreation Technician.

RSTBC staffing is inadequate to maintain and manage the recreational resources within those and other districts throughout BC. RSTBC would like to legally designate many other trails and recreation sites but they simply do not have the resources to manage them. This is a province wide issue.

Many of our member clubs have Volunteer Working Agreements with RSTBC, which rely heavily on volunteers to carry out maintenance on trails and recreation sites. Besides volunteer labour, member clubs and other organizations provide funding for trail work, equipment and trail markers. The forest fires of the past 2 years have put further strain on many of the regional RSTBC staff and resources. In our view, RSTBC across the province needs more staff and more funding to manage recreation and to look after the hundreds of trails and other facilities on Crown lands outside provincial parks.

In July 2018, FMCBC and club representatives met with RSTBC and other government representatives in the Sea to Sky Corridor to discuss options to resolve the access and parking issues for the Singing Pass trail to Garibaldi Provincial Park (which remains unresolved). At the meeting RSTBC reported,

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

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<sup>7</sup> D. King from the Prince George Backcountry Recreation Society and Caledonia Ramblers Hiking Club detailed the situation with respect to BC Parks and RSTBC in the Mackenzie and Prince George Forest District to the Select Standing Committee in Prince George on June 18, 2019.

Budget constraints and available resources limit RSTBC's ability to respond to the extraordinary public demand for new facilities, upgraded facilities and increased maintenance needs. In addition, RSTBC has no funding to address road maintenance, resulting in loss of access to popular trails or restricting access to those with high clearance 4WD vehicles. Some examples:

- The Nesakwatch Forest Service Road, which provides access to both the Slesse Memorial and Mt. Rexford trails, has washed out, limiting access to those with high clearance 4WD vehicles, if at all. It would be extremely beneficial if RSTBC had a budget for clearing roads that lead to important trails.
- On Vancouver Island, the Marion Creek Forest Service Road, which provides access to many popular mountain peaks and to the new 5040 Peak Hut constructed by the Alpine Club of Canada Vancouver Island Section, is now impassable to vehicles other than 4WD or high clearance vehicles. The Club was unable to get help maintaining the 9-kilometer access road.

#### **D. Summary**

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 parks system.

We also request a substantial increase in funding for RSTBC commensurate with its mandate which will permit RSTBC to respond pro-actively to the increased demands for recreational opportunities, to manage current recreational sites and trails on Crown land outside provincial parks and to maintain roads which provide much needed access to important trail networks and recreation areas.

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

Sincerely,

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