



November 15, 2021

Mr. Keith Baric
Planning Section Head
Okanagan Region, BC Parks

Dear Mr. Baric:

Re: Initial Stage of the Management Plan for Cathedral Park

The Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC (FMCBC) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the development of the Cathedral Park Management Plan. The Federation promotes non-motorized activities, such as hiking, mountaineering, trail running, snowshoeing and backcountry skiing through leadership, collaboration, advocacy and education. We are a federation of 45 outdoor clubs from across the province. We engage with outdoor recreation organizations, Indigenous Peoples, government agencies, and commercial operators to protect and maintain access for quality non-motorized recreation in BC's mountains and wilderness.

Cathedral Park has been a popular destination for many of our members. Members of the Alpine Club of Canada made a first ascent of Grimface Mt. in 1932. The British Columbia Mountaineering Club has done first ascents of main routes on a number of the peaks in the park. Many members have done extended trips in the parks as well as doing family base camps in the core area to introduce the next generations to outdoor activities.

The last management plan was produced in 1989 and many of the key issues then are still relevant today even though strategies to deal with these issues were implemented. The following issues are important in developing the new management plan.

1. Visitor Management Even in the 1980s the park was heavily used in the summer and fall months with campsites overflowing. The numbers visiting the area continue to grow and implementing strategies to cap visitor numbers during peak periods is needed. This could be achieved by:
 - Establishing a booking system so that the popular camping areas are not overflowing and visitors are directed to less well-known campgrounds.
 - The booking system needs to discourage "no shows". On a recent multi-day visit over the August long weekend, one member reported that despite the high demand for campsites in the park, the Quinescoe campsite was only filled one of the nights and Lake of the Woods had several empty sites because of no-shows. The busyness of the campsites, however, did not extend to the hiking trails. The member hiked several longer trails in the park (i.e., Scout and Longview) and did not encounter any other visitors.

- The booking system should allow for multi-day through hikes. Weather and other circumstances would make it difficult to plan and undertake these trips, if all campsites in the core area had to be pre-booked.
 - Encouraging visits outside peak periods as was done in the previous plan.
 - Encouraging visitors to camp along the Ashnola River or other campsites in the area. There are a number of day hikes on both sides of the Ashnola River valley, as well multi-day backpacking opportunities into the Snowy Protected Area.
 - In the previous plan there were objectives to promote the park. It is clear particularly in this age of social media that the park doesn't need a lot of promotional effort but rather that efforts should be more focused on visitor management.
2. Protecting the Wilderness Zones The Wilderness Zones should be managed as they have to date with limited interventions such as trail maintenance and protection of wetland sections with boardwalks. There is a lot of trail erosion and braiding occurring and the multiple "trails" are causing vegetation damage. See further comments about the current state of the trails under Section 5. Campsites should remain primitive and not be expanded within the Wilderness Zones.
 3. Protection of Wildlife and Ecosystems Cathedral Park has a great diversity of ecosystems and a number of endangered species. The opportunity to see wildlife and the beauty of the alpine area are two reasons visitors are attracted to the park. With climate change, alpine areas and species that live there are threatened even more and need greater protection. Visitors are already being educated about behaviours to avoid mountain goats being drawn into campsites. Other strategies may need to be considered and implemented to further protect the wildlife and ecosystems.

With respect to hunting, we would appreciate information on the population history of various large mammal species, such as mountain goats, big-horn sheep, bears and deer, to determine whether hunting should be phased out in the park. There are other areas near the park where hunting can occur.

4. Recreational Activities: Backcountry skiing and snowshoeing should be added as recognized recreational activities in the park. There are couloirs and glades above the lodge area which are skiable. The lodge and cabins could be made available to expand winter recreation opportunities. The lodge has a tracked vehicle that could be made available in winter for transportation to the lodge.

Some climbing opportunities (Grimface, the Matriarch and Macabre Tower) are available in the park and climbing should remain a recognized activity within the park. New climbing routes should be allowed in accordance with the new routing guidelines adopted by BC Parks in Stawamus Chief Provincial Park.

Camping and hiking are very popular activities in Cathedral Park. We received many comments from members about camping and campsites in the park. The comments are summarized below:

- Campfires at Quinescoe are often very large and frequent, despite warm weather. While campfires are part of the camping experience for many, the smoke that often hangs over the campground is testimony to too much of a good thing.
 - The water quality of Quinescoe Lake has deteriorated over the years. Several factors may be contributing to the deterioration (i.e., erosion and contaminants from the Lodge and campground) and this requires further study.
 - Re-open Pyramid campsite by removing the blowdown and thereby increase the camping opportunities in the park. It may be possible to slightly increase available campsites by acquiring the land around the park headquarters in the park.
 - The food caches are inadequate.
 - Many visitors arrive with too much “stuff”, including huge coolers. This often results in food being left in the fire pits. At Lake O’Hara, which also has vehicle transport to the campsite, there are limits on what can be brought into the park, which appears to be helping the situation.
5. Trails and trail infrastructure: Like many other provincial parks where not enough trail maintenance have been undertaken for many, many years (some describe it as severe neglect), Cathedral Park’s trail system is in poor condition. Eroded and braided trails, deteriorating footbridges and trail signage need repairs and upgrades. See the attached report dated September 17, 2020 from Dr. Tom Perry describing the poor state of the trail system and campsites within the park.

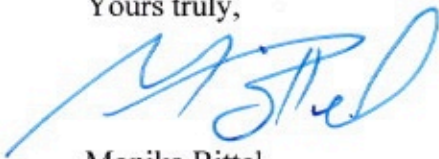
There are several opportunities to develop and expand the current trail system:

- The Cathedral Forks trail could be re-established to provide hiking access to The Deacon and Orthodox Mountain. It leaves Wall Creek Trail beyond the junction with the route to the core area.
- The Centennial Trail (follows Wall Creek part way and down Ewart Creek) should be upgraded and maintained (moderate difficulty, gravel surfacing in wet areas, up to 15% grade) as it connects to Manning Park and Snowy Protected Area. Better signage is also needed. It is a long-distance trail worthy of a higher standard.
- Although this planning process is for Cathedral, a management plan for the Snowy Protected Area, adjacent to Cathedral, is also needed to expand the hiking and backpacking opportunities and help disperse visitors. Since the Ewart Creek trailhead provides access to both Cathedral and Snowy, there should be information about both areas at the Ewart Creek trailhead.
- The bridge across Ewart Creek is broken and needs replacing. Further, a new footbridge is required across Juniper Creek where it enters Ewart Creek about 5 km from the Ewart Creek trailhead to restore access to the Snowy Protected Area.
- Improve access to the Ewart Creek trailhead, as the current access road is extremely narrow for long distances. If two vehicles meet, one has to back up pressed between canyon walls and creek drop off.

- A pedestrian and horse only footbridge across Ashnola River adjacent to the Ewart Creek trailhead would be desirable, with sufficient parking off Ashnola road.
 - The background report states that the park use permit for the lodge has expired and that the province now controls the lodge and the contract for paid access to Quiniscoe Lake. The draft management plan should include options for the lodge that include options for continued operation or removal.
6. Fire Management The impact of fires unfortunately will continue to increase. The park has been impacted by two major fires in 2018 and 2021. Closing the park and having effective evacuation strategies will continue to be needed when fires threaten the area. Prescribed burns to reduce blowdown areas and to renew grazing habitat should be conducted using best scientific practices.
7. Education and Interpretation For many visitors the opportunity to learn about many aspects of the park, such as geology, wildlife and First Nations history enhances their experience of the park and in spite of social media, ranger presentations continue to be important and memorable for visitors. Education will continue to be even more important in protecting the park values.

Please add the FMCBC to the mailing list for the management planning process. We will follow the management plan process for Cathedral Park with interest and will continue to provide input. Should you need any additional input or information from FMCBC, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Yours truly,



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