

# Friends of Strathcona Park Newsletter - Fall 2010

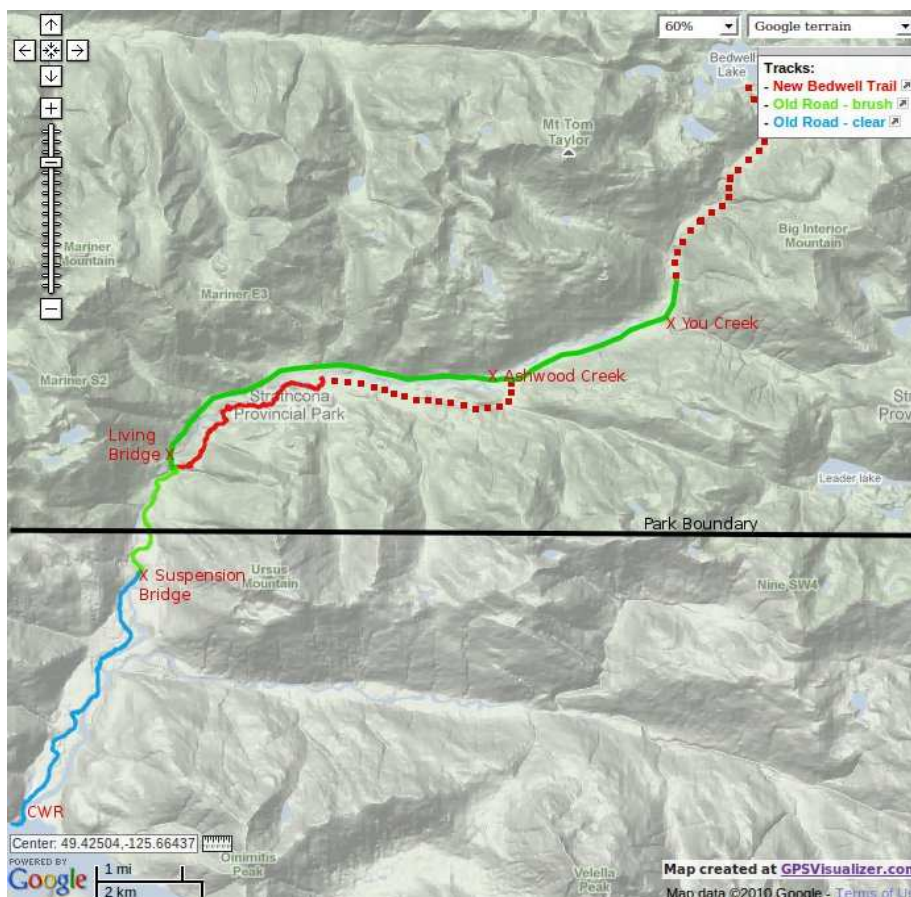
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## CWR Application Amendment

Clayoquot Wilderness Resort submitted an amended application for a Park Use Permit (PUP) on October 7<sup>th</sup>. It refines the original application by adding more detail and changing some parts entirely.

To simplify the topic the list reads:

- expect Parks to waive the PUP fee
- If approved, the PUP will contain approval stages built into the schedule
- detailed design work would take place after approval
- as stages are approved, construction and maintenance schedules will be developed.
- completion will take two seasons.
- the mountain biking component is removed. (This was added after the initial proposal was made. Probably a throw away idea)
- Horses will be taken about 1.75 km past the Ashwood crossing of the Bedwell. This is short of the original destination of You creek.



**Bedwell Valley showing the old damaged trail, the trail constructed last year and the proposed trail construction for next year.**

- Other conditions remain the same as the original application – no grazing (unenforceable), stay on trails, sterilized feed, maximum group of 12, remove horse manure from park, proper behaviour of guests. (See FOSEP critique elsewhere in this newsletter)
- The Gayle McGee bridge outside the Park will remain.
- Horse trail will be constructed to BC Parks Type II horse standard, hiking trail beyond to Bedwell

Lake will be constructed to Type IV hiking standard. If Parks approves FOSP's alternate route on the other side of the valley, the horse trail may be for horses only, no hikers.

-3-4 bridges to be constructed wide enough for one horse, no vehicle access.

-Cable crossing for hikers to be built across the Bedwell near Ashwood Creek, horses are to ford the river. Where the road bed is washed out, detours will be constructed to Type IV hiking trail standard.

-Boulder fields created by a recent 100 year flood event will have a trail cleared through them.

-Old wood box culverts will be either repaired or replaced with swales.

-If the PUP is approved more detailed plans and costs will be produced. Ahousaht First Nations people will be employed to build trail using only hand tools, no heavy machinery.

-New campsite is to be constructed on an old spur road off the main route. Up to 8 tent pads are to be built with 2 available for the public (the original application had 3 for the public).

Public platforms are to be separate from those used by CWR guests. CWR tent platforms are available to the public when not used by the resort. A composting toilet and hitching post will also be constructed (the original proposal for a corral has been dropped).

-Man made waste with no historical significance is to be removed from the park.

-Some infrastructure will be prefabricated and flown into the Park by helicopter.

-Horses will be used to support the trail building crew.

So why are the Friends still opposed to this proposal?

For the following reasons:

-Thin edge of the wedge – If PUP is granted, and CWR satisfies BC Parks, then they may apply for further developments. 400 sq. ft. cabins in BC Parks is a policy of the Wilderness Tourism Association (WTA). A roofed dining hall in a rain forest may appeal to CWR guests.

-Sets precedent for other applications – Recent Master Plan Amendment has opened other areas of the Park to possible horse use. Would there be pressure to extend the scope of horse use in the future?

-Difficulty in monitoring the permit conditions – Parks has very limited resources to do so. WTA policy is for self reporting by proponents.

-Possible conflicts between hikers and horse riders, wildlife and horses.

-Limited public benefit. With new FOSP trail the need for the old trail to be upgraded is gone. Anyone other than CWR can not take horses into the Bedwell is too expensive to be practical, so this becomes a de facto exclusive use. Only benefit is to CWR.

-Lack of term for the PUP. Is this to be a 10, 20 or 30 year term? Is the PUP transferable if CWR fails, or is it extinguished?

### **100 Years Strathcona Park, how are we going to celebrate this?**

The SPPAC committee under the leadership of Phillip Stone celebrated the 100 years of Strathcona Park by re-enacting the Price Ellison expedition which took place in 1910. This original expedition led to recommendations calling for the creation of a park, which we now know as Strathcona Park.

Your directors have discussed how we as friends of Strathcona Park can celebrate the parks' 100th birthday. Your suggestions, input and actions are welcome! Please help us and the park celebrate the fact Strathcona Park is 100 years old, and its creation actually led to the formation of our provincial park system!

Your directors would like to, leave a lasting legacy for the park, something that can be used, seen and experienced in the next 100 years. Our ideas are:

### **1. Centennial trail building**

The Price Creek trail follows the footsteps of the Price Ellison expedition. The Price Creek trail was originally constructed by the CDMC following a series of Elk trails. It was later improved upon by the Friends of Strathcona Park. It is in a bad state and needs mostly dead fall cutting out. These are big trees that have fallen over the trail and block it in places. From the crossing to Cream Lake there is a bear/elk trail which follows Price Creek up to Green Lake. From there one needs to cross a little pass and get to Margaret Lake. Then following Margaret Creek it connects with Drinkwater Creek leading out to Great Central Lake and Port Alberni. This would make a great project having groups work together from the north end of the Park and from Port Alberni creating another wonderful and interesting hike through the park!

Of course the friends will be completing the Bedwell Trail where we left it last year from Sam Craig Creek all the way to Bedwell Lake. We need LOTS of volunteers to help out on that one! It will create an ocean to alpine trail, from Bedwell inlet all the way to Buttle Lake! Please contact us via our website if you want to help out!

### **2. How to protect our park(s) for the next 100 years.**

We are looking for workable ideas about how we can protect this (and other) parks for the next 100 years and keep them free, accessible and wild for all of the future human and animal generations!

Any idea is welcome, especially political ones as the government's will to protect and fund our parks is not particularly in line with a 100 year celebration!

### **Take Back the Park Campaign**

The Friends' "Take Back the Park" campaign has three main goals:

- 1) To halt privatization in Strathcona Park – to keep the park entirely under public control
- 2) To publicize the cutbacks to funding and staffing levels in Strathcona Park
- 3) To get many new people involved in protecting Strathcona Park

We decided early on that the best way to accomplish all three goals was to provide "hands-on" activities that would get people out into the park to do something real, and to listen to what the land has to say. We decided that trail building projects would be the best way to do that.

### **The Crest Trail**

The Crest Trail had been closed for two complete seasons, and was heading for a third, due to a bridge crossing that had been deemed unsafe by BC Parks. The Friends sent out an intrepid reconnaissance team that found a much easier access route requiring no water crossings other than over a few small streams.

This new access route left from near the Crest Crags climbing area and joined the old trail about a kilometre up a very beautiful, gently sloping route.

We brought this route, and our intention to clear it, to BC Parks in May. After some interesting and positive negotiation we were granted a permit to clear the route as a temporary access to the old trail.

To our amazement and surprise, more than 50 volunteers signed up to help! On a sunny Saturday in June, we carpooled up to the site, and by the end of a day filled with good humour, hard work and delicious food, had the project completed.

Highlights included working side by side with two BC Parks rangers, volunteers from as far away as Victoria, and a number of young people, including a wonderful family from Gold River. By all measures, the day was a great success.

BC Parks subsequently found funds to rebuild the damaged bridge and the Crest Trail is now re-opened at the old trailhead. It is unlikely this would have happened without the work of the Friends and all of our new “friends”. Thanks to all who helped.

### **The Bedwell Trail**

As reported in the last newsletter, there is still a permit application before BC Parks to approve the building of a major trail for exclusive



**Bob St. John on the new FOSP Bedwell trail with Mariner Mountain in the background.**

private horse use in the Bedwell Valley. The trail, which would include at least five major bridge projects, would provide easy horse access for the guests of an exclusive resort outside the park into the heart of the park.

The amended application has just been released to the Friends and we are studying it carefully. Despite a few small changes, it remains essentially the same as before.

The main argument made for granting the permit has been that the private horse trail would open up the Bedwell Trail to the public at no cost to the taxpayers. In response to that argument, the Friends organized another trail-building project to open up the Bedwell Trail ourselves, at no cost to the taxpayers.

To our surprise and pleasure, we once again negotiated a successful agreement with BC Parks and went into the project with a signed volunteer agreement.



**View from the new Bedwell trail looking towards Bedwell Sound. Much nicer views are evident from the FOSP option on the south side of the valley.**

To our delight, we had a stellar crew of 20 trail builders show up for the 5 day effort and each and every one worked hard. We were a veritable trail-building machine, clearing almost three times as far up the valley as we had hoped – all the way to Sam Craig Creek. The trail is narrow and gentle and runs very comfortably with the land. It will weather the heaviest rains without washing away. It is a truly beautiful thing.

Our amazing route finders, Karl Stevenson, Bob St. John and Lorne Lanyon headed out in June and working in the hottest days of the summer to find a new route up the Bedwell Valley that not only eliminates the need for any significant river crossings, but is remarkably beautiful as well.

The trail follows the up-and-down contours of the park to high rock outcroppings with sensational views of the ocean, Mt. Tom Taylor and Big Interior Mountain, and then plunges down through remnants of huge ancient forests. It takes hikers along old elk trails and beside beautiful tarns and ponds, some full of water lilies. It touches at the shores of the river in three places, all of them wonderful sites for camping.

Some of us have spent quite a bit of time in the Bedwell Valley, but we have never seen the beauty of the place in the way that our new trail reveals it.

And now that it is there, we are pointing out to BC Parks and to the government, that there is absolutely no argument for them to approve a private horse trail for exclusive use on the other side of the river. There is nothing in the public interest that can be served by granting the permit.

We remain convinced that the permit is not, and never was, intended to serve the public interest but is simply based on the government's ideology that privatizing public assets is always the best thing to do, even in British Columbia's parks.

We had a wonderful time doing these projects and thank all who helped. See you next year when we finish the Bedwell Trail!

## **Website, Facebook Group**

Our website, <http://friendsofstrathcona.org>, has been in existence for over a year now, and has served as a convenient way to see our upcoming activities and to review our past accomplishments. The Letters Help page offers a list of email addresses of local and regional media and political entities which can be copied into your email program. Our most popular pages dealt with our Take Back the Park program of trail building this last summer

We recently started a Facebook group, an informal gathering which anyone can join. Members can post comments, photos, links to interesting articles... just about anything they feel is relevant. We have a Discussion thread whereby you can post trails or facilities needing some TLC in Strathcona Park. You can view our group from links on our website Home page, or google 'Friends of Strathcona Park on Facebook'.

## **Directors' Activities**

Since the last Newsletter, our Directors have been busy...

- May 20: a public meeting at Zocalo Cafe in Courtenay kicked off our Take Back the Park program of trail building on Crest Mountain and in the Bedwell Valley.

- Jun 11-13: 2010 AGM at Driftwood Group Campground on Buttle Lake. Besides official business, we had a lot of fun around the campfire, celebrated Marlene's 60th, took a tour of the Crest Mountain bridge bypass trail, and capped it off with a hike to Myra Falls.

- Jun 19: Over 50 volunteers established a wonderful trail to circumvent the defunct bridge at the Crest Mountain trail-head, as well as some maintenance of the original trail higher

up the hill. In the end, Parks replaced the bridge this fall at considerable tax-payer expense.

- Jul 6-10: Reconnaissance field trip into the Bedwell Valley to prepare for the main work party in August.

- Jul 17: BC Parks Day was celebrated at the newly completed Visitors' Center on Mt Washington. We showed slides of our Take Back the Park program, showed Rick Searle's film '100 years of Strathcona Park', and conducted a rousing sing-along.

- Aug 14-18: Twenty volunteers established 5 km of trail in the Bedwell Valley using only snippers and hand-saws. This new route on the south side of the river bypassed 2 Bedwell River crossings, 2 difficult stream crossings (Noble and Buccaneer Creeks), and several washouts. The new route is a joy to walk with magnificent views of Mts Mariner, Tom Taylor, and Big Interior; and travels through old growth and by idyllic ponds. This was phase II of our Bedwell Inlet to Bedwell Lake trail project. (Phase III coming this summer.)

- Sep 24: attended an Outdoor Recreation Council of BC meeting with BC Parks' bureaucrat, Scott Benton... see article elsewhere in this newsletter.

- Oct 24: presented a slide show of our summer trail building to the Island Mountain Ramblers AGM in Nanaimo.

- Nov 14: surveyed the Price Creek trail as a potential maintenance project for next summer.

- Nov 19: presented our case against

Clayoquot Wilderness Resorts' application to establish a commercial horse operation in the Bedwell Valley to SPPAC (Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee).

- Nov 20: presented a slide show of our summer trail building to the FMCBC (Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC) in Parksville.

- Other activities: numerous Directors' meetings were held, usually every 3 weeks; many letters to the media and blog posts were written; radio interviews were given; the website was kept current, and the Facebook group monitored.

### **Issues surrounding volunteers in BC Parks**

On September 24, directors Karl Stevenson and Bob St. John attended an Outdoor Recreation Council of BC meeting with Scott Benton, Executive Director of BC Parks, in Vancouver. Participants included various NGO groups who do volunteer work in BC Parks. They are finding that in recent years regulatory hurdles are hampering their efforts; that their concerns and suggestions are being ignored; and that volunteers don't seem to be appreciated by Parks anymore.

Scott stated that BC Parks former volunteer policy is set out in a large binder to give guidance to BC Parks managers (a copy was passed around). It was last updated in 1997 and in fact the volunteer policy was effectively done away with in 2002. One important fact is that WorkSafe BC regards volunteers as employees and the same standards applied to both.

Scott mentioned that volunteer management is not high on the BC Parks priority list. Staffing levels are a political issue and the

BC Parks budget will be reduced again in the next fiscal year. Scott acknowledged that the province is not taking advantage of volunteer resources.

Scott concluded by admitting that the decision to discontinue the volunteer support program in 2002 had been a mistake and that BC Parks needs to fix the situation. (The Friends website has the complete meeting notes on its Reference page.)

### **Strathcona Park Public Advisory Committee Meeting**

SPPAC's last regular meeting was held on November 19<sup>th</sup> in Parksville. There are a number of items of interest to FOSP members.

SPPAC welcomed a new member, Erik Holbek, a forestry consultant from the Comox Valley to its ranks, and said goodbye to a long time member, Warrick Whitehead, from Duncan. Warrick has been an outspoken advocate for the park for many years and will be missed. Thanks, Warrick, for standing up for what you believe in.

NVI Mine presented their plan for raising the level of Jim Mitchell Lake by 3 m to aid in power generation. This would be done with pneumatic bladders raising the level of a spillway several times a year to capture water during peak flow periods. There are too many details to report here, but SPPAC is considering the proposal and asking for more information about engineering and legal issues.

SPPAC kindly gave the Friends some time to present more information on the CWR amended application. Jennifer Pass spoke about some legal issues to do with decision making and transparency. Bob St. John presented some slides and maps of the Bedwell Valley and last summer's trail

building projects. Karl Stevenson closed by asking SPPAC to recommend denying the permit for CWR, restoring the Master Plan to its original form and to write the Minister asking him to do the same. The complete text of Karl's presentation can be found on FOSP's website.

SPPAC discussed the issues at length, and in the end expressed a long list of concerns, many of which have been documented in previous newsletters, and voted unanimously to not support the approval of this permit, and to write a letter saying so. FOSP is very appreciative of SPPAC's strong stand in trying to protect the park.

Last summer's Centennial Expedition was a huge success. Phillip Stone deserves many thanks for organizing this event. Watch out for a film of this expedition. As well, BC Parks have nominated this project for an award.

SPPAC membership is becoming an issue. Parks have not been satisfied with the applicants volunteering to be part of SPPAC, so have been recruiting from areas they want representatives from, specifically engineering and students from Vancouver Island University. While these sources may have merit, FOSP questions why those who love

the park and have a long history with it are being rejected. This seems to represent a change in the procedure for choosing members.

BC Parks have had some capital money to spend in the park this year. The list includes Drinkwater Cable Car - \$107,000, Crest Mountain Bridge replacement - \$37,000, Paradise Meadows Trail work - \$64,000 and some others.

The Visitors Center at Mount Washington has been completed and officially opened this summer. FOSP has had a hand in its creation as we have donated some of your money over the years as well as volunteered on some committees helping this happen. Congratulations to Steve Smith of SWI and Andy Smith of Parks for spearheading this project. Steve has been involved in this for about 14 years.

There were 10 members of the public attending this SPPAC meeting which shows a large concern by the public over what is happening in the park. Some of what is happening is very positive, and some not. The next SPPAC meeting is scheduled for February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Put it on your new calendar if you'd like to attend. The times are 6 – 10 p.m. at Rath Trevor Beach Park in Parksville, maintenance yard at the bottom of the hill on the left behind the sewage dump station.

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**FOSP Membership Form**  
**Thank you for renewing.**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Phone** \_\_\_\_\_ **Fax** \_\_\_\_\_

**e-mail** \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership (suggested \$10 per year)**

**Comments** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**send to: Friends of Strathcona Park, P.O. Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5**