

**Crest Creek Crag/ Strathcona Park:**  
**Rock Climbing Strategy**  
**A Framework for Future Development**  
**At Crest Creek**

**Draft**

*Submitted to:*

**BC Parks**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The objective of the following document is to bring forward a working plan for the future of the “Crest Creek Crag”, a popular rock-climbing area within Strathcona Park. The Heathens Mountaineering Club which has been involved with the development of the area for many years is most qualified to be representative of this. This document and its related information will be submitted to BC Parks with the intent to “formalize” the contents within this draft in accordance with the guidelines as set out in the amended Master Plan.

### **The Geography of Crest Creek within Strathcona Park and rock-climbing recreational opportunities**

Located along Hwy 28, roughly 74 kilometers west of the town of Campbell River and 15 kilometers east of the community of Gold River, the Crest Creek Crag lies just within the western boundary of Strathcona Provincial Park. Nestled in the valley confines of the “Elk River Corridor” within the Central Vancouver Island Mountain Range, Crest Creek and a small chain of lakes are situated at an apex of Vancouver Island’s watershed. Its landforms, forests, and waterways are the result of a unique process involving the historical geography of Vancouver Island. Historical water flows from Crest Lake, ran westward to the Muchalat Inlet, whereas now flow eastward into the Campbell Lakes hydro generation system and from there to the Georgia Strait. Logging interests and the construction of the BC Hydro water diversion project in 1958 altered much of the natural landscape in the immediate area of Crest Creek. The surrounding natural endowment offers opportunities to travel into the mountains, from day hikes to demanding technical alpine ventures.

The geology of Vancouver Island is extremely complicated. It is continuously being shaped by the active continental margin on which it sits. The Karmustzen formation that forms the majority of the Central Vancouver Island Range was formed during the Mesozoic period, layered as pillow lava, this basaltic igneous rock can be loose and unstable by nature. The Crest Creek area may possess its solid, crystalline rock qualities by having been subjected to different cooling and compressive forces. East of the Crest Creek area the quality of the rock deteriorates rapidly, as evidenced by obsidians, columns and volcanic welded tuffs. Furthermore, glaciation that occurred upto 11,000 years ago would have shaped and scoured the valley, along with the presence of water forces, exposing the solid climbing rocks as they are today.

Crest Creek Crag is increasingly gaining recognition by people from outside the region as a recreation destination most notably for its solid, high quality rock climbing experience - but also for its quality of other recreational opportunities within the area.

Self-described and unofficially trademarked as Vancouver Island’s largest and most aesthetic rock climbing area, the Heathens Mountaineering Club is now actively taking steps to enhance its growing reputation and to give shape to its future direction in a way that builds on and leverages its “natural capital” as a rock climbing destination; to promote an awareness of recreational values, respect for the environment and recognition of Park values.



## **The Crest Creek Crag: A History of climbing and development**

The Strathcona Park Master Plan identifies climbing as the key recreational activity within the Crest Creek highway corridor area. Climbers have been walking through and exploring what is known as the Crest Creek Crag for over twenty years. The first climbing routes were established prior to 1980 on a series of bluffs just west of today's Crest Creek's main climbing area. Over the following years local climbers continued to develop climbing routes in and around Crest Creek itself (Ref. ACC Van Is. Sec. Issue 13:2 Island Bushwhacker.) In Jan 1987, proposed park boundary changes would have placed an area of Crest Creek outside of the park boundaries. This decision was reversed by the Public Review Committee report "Restoring the Balance".

As the climbing area became more heavily visited, especially by outside groups, there emerged a growing concern that visible impact and user conflict was becoming an issue. The Heathens Mountaineering Club in conjunction with various individuals, recognized the need for a more formal alliance with BC Parks. At a meeting with BC Parks staff in 1993 a "Planning Group" was established represented by the Heathens Mountaineering Club, local climbers, SPPAC members and other stakeholders. This group was to meet yearly to review the ongoing development of rock-climbing at Crest Creek (Ref: Appendix 1 ref: 2). The Heathens forwarded rock-climbing development plans to BC Parks, which has been reviewed by Parks staff on an ongoing basis.

The first official recognition of Crest Creek as a recreational rock-climbing destination within Strathcona Park occurred in 1995 when BC Hydro required remedial maintenance to the Crest Creek diversion berm. This provided BC Parks with an opportunity to have BC Hydro build a "climbers" parking area. In 1999 a full day-use picnic site was constructed at Crest Lake's north shore to serve the needs of non-climbing visitors. In 2002, TimberWest completed their logging operations and as required in their "Permit" obligations with BC Parks, deactivated the ERT logging road. Various individuals from the climbing community, working with Park's staff, managed to retain a section of the timber span bridge at the Mud Lake location and with the assistance of the Heathens club, a footbridge was constructed along with the completion of a new parking area. Members of the Heathens club along with the support of BC Parks built many trails, short bridges and boardwalks accessing the many popular climbing routes. Today an amended Strathcona Park Master Plan provides the framework for a more formal direction for the ongoing future of the area and the need to address specific issues.

The Heathens Mountaineering Club has held its annual Summer Camp at Crest Creek for the past ten years in the alder forest along the outflow of Crest Creek at Crest Lake. Over the duration of a two-week period, this camp can see 300 plus climber visitations. From obscurity in the mid 1980s, the Crest Creek climbing area has grown in popularity and is used extensively by Island climbers, commercial groups under permit, and visiting climbers from abroad. It is becoming the busiest; most enjoyed climbing area on Vancouver Island. Locally, the Campbell River climbing gym "On The Rocks" may bring a further influx of climbers to the area. The approximately 200 climbing routes at Crest Creek Crag can see an estimated 3000 to 4000 climber days per year and continues to grow in popularity. Today, Crest Creek Crag provides recreational opportunities for an increasing number of other user groups as well, with an expanding trail system that can be enjoyed by climbers and hikers alike.



## **2. A FRAMEWORK FOR A WORKING PLAN**

### **Our Vision for the "Crest Creek Crags" climbing area**

*Crest Creek is intended to be a cornerstone of Strathcona Park as a rock-climbing destination. Other recreational interests, such as hiking and fishing, can be enjoyed within the area. In conjunction with BC Parks, and cared for by the user groups of this region, and shared with its many visitors, its natural assets and recreational opportunities will be managed by the principals as guided in the Master Plan. Highly visible and easily accessed, Crest Creek will be an attraction to the western corridor of Strathcona Park, offering a testament to a co-operative management, where recreational values and industrial interests coincide in a natural setting. Crest Creek represents many things to many people: a social place in a natural setting, a place of uncommon beauty and sanctuary; a rock-climbing playground; an essential element of local lifestyle. Over time Crest Creek and other surrounding recreational assets, will be connected unilaterally within Strathcona Park's western corridor as a destination location within the park. .*

### **Goals for Crest Creek within Strathcona Park**

The ultimate purpose of the Crest Creek Crags "Rock Climbing Strategy Development Plan" is to:

1. Enable and enhance enjoyment of this area and its natural resources in a way that does not diminish its unique qualities and character; by planning climbing development, trail systems and the installation of appropriate facilities.
2. Provide for rock climbing recreation activities within the area, primarily by relying on climbers for "self-management" of their activities and interactions.
3. Incorporate the crags in this definable area under an appropriate management regime that enhances the Crest Creek area for climbing use while minimizing the impact to the natural environment.
4. Establish the Crest Creek area as a cornerstone within Strathcona Park as a rock climbing destination within an Intensive Recreation Zone shared with the industrial interests of BC Hydro and to encourage a strong sense of connectivity to the surrounding environment.

### **The Boundaries of planned route development**

The Crest Creek Crags climbing area currently consists of an approximate 20 hectare area that borders the western most edge of Strathcona Park's boundary. The area includes the water bodies of Crest Creek, Crest Lake and Mud Lake. This parcel encompasses a major component of the natural assets used for rock climbing recreation. The set boundaries of planned rock climbing development are limited to the eastern portion of Crest Lake, including the area referred to as "Skid Row", and westward from this point (within the confines of the Hydro grid) to the area referred to as the "WestWall."

The following maps and table provide an overview of the present recreational area, its natural features and character, and its local trail system that links each climbing crag with other recreation areas and visitor amenities in the surrounding area. (Ref: Appendix 1 fig. 1)

**Table 1: Inventory:** Current and Proposed Rock Climbing / Trail development

Location of climbing cliff /trail	Map Location by No.	Name of Crag	No. of routes	Comments/ development/ maintenance
NW location Heavily brushed in spur-road travelling north off Hwy 28	(1) (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Crag X</li> <li>▪ Black Crag</li> </ul>	9 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Distant location in an area previously logged; sees low visitor numbers</li> <li>▪ <u>No planned new development</u></li> <li>▪ Anchors on some routes and trails need to be upgraded to re-establish this area</li> <li>▪ Routes need to be re-cleaned</li> </ul>
Western most cliff located next to north side of Hwy 28	(3) (4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Projects</li> <li>▪ Pet Projects</li> </ul>	13 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Projects are used extensively by large groups for teaching</li> <li>▪ <u>No further development potential</u></li> <li>▪ Some routes require occasional re-cleaning</li> <li>▪ Seasonal brushing and trail maintenance as required</li> </ul>
Located adjacent to the north side of the Hwy 28 bridge alongside Crest Creek	(5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Crest Crag</li> </ul>	19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extremely popular with all groups and visiting observers</li> <li>▪ Highly visible from the highway</li> <li>▪ <u>No planned new development.</u></li> <li>▪ Some routes require occasional re-cleaning</li> <li>▪ Seasonal brushing and trail maintenance as required</li> </ul>
North side of Hwy 28 in first growth forest	(6) (7) (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Crag in the Woods</li> <li>▪ Cougar Rock</li> <li>▪ Two Tree Edge</li> </ul>	13 6 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ First crags to be developed within the forest</li> <li>▪ Has limited new route potential</li> <li>▪ Requires regular route re-cleaning due to vigorous moss growth</li> <li>▪ Trails to be upgraded as required i.e. step repair, removal of inconsistent or failing trail structures</li> </ul>
North side of Hwy directly across the Crest Lake day use site	(9) (10) (11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Crows Nest</li> <li>▪ The Dune</li> <li>▪ The Attic</li> </ul>	13 3 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The highly visible Crows Nest is an extremely popular cliff with long one pitch routes, having both difficult free and technical aid routes</li> <li>▪ <u>Has new route potential</u></li> <li>▪ Trails to be upgraded where needed, brushing and maintenance as required</li> <li>▪ Some routes require regular re-cleaning due to vigorous moss growth</li> </ul>

West of Crest Lake on north slope of Hydro grid	(24)  (23) (22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The Emerald Wall</li> <li>▪ The West Wall</li> <li>▪ Sunset Roof</li> <li>▪ The Oz Wall</li> </ul>	10  3 7 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Predominately technical aid routes with a limited number of difficult free climbs</li> <li>▪ Used by aid climbers rather than the main stream group</li> <li>▪ The steep cliffs limit support to any plant growth on the rock faces</li> <li>▪ Developed trails limited to lower Sunset with rough access to Emerald and above</li> <li>▪ <u>Has new route potential</u></li> <li>▪ Ongoing route development</li> <li>▪ Brushing and maintenance of trails as needed</li> <li>▪ <u>Development west of this area leaves the Park boundary</u></li> </ul>
Located on the SW shore of Crest Lake above the outflow of Crest Creek and beneath the Hydro grid	(16)  (17)  (18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lakeside Bluffs</li> <li>▪ The Joint Wall</li> <li>▪ The Sluice Wall</li> </ul>	3 10 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Some of the longer one pitch free routes in area</li> <li>▪ Considered as one of the more aesthetic areas</li> <li>▪ Sluice Wall and Joint Wall have extensive route development</li> <li>▪ <u>Has potential for further development</u></li> <li>▪ Plans to create a number of new climbing routes on the Lakeside Bluff</li> <li>▪ Ongoing re-cleaning of routes</li> <li>▪ Access routes at the top of the cliffs require no maintenance</li> </ul>
Located above the SW corner of Crest Lake, on the north slope of the Hydro grid	(19)  (20)  (21)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gateway Rock</li> <li>▪ Another World</li> <li>▪ The Top of The World</li> </ul>	14 3 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gateway has been extensively developed</li> <li>▪ <u>No plans for continued route creation</u></li> <li>▪ Plans to rebuild the staircase at Gateway to standard</li> <li>▪ Main trail to be kept to standard</li> <li>▪ Some routes need to be re-cleaned</li> <li>▪ Access trails from main trail to climbing crags being upgraded</li> <li>▪ Planned route development on Another World and The Top of The World</li> </ul>
Located above the E end of Crest Lake as the upper most line of bluffs on the north slope of the Hydro grid. Accessed from the Mud Lake Parking area or the “loop” trail from the west.	(14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sunrise Rocks</li> <li>▪ Lower Sunrise</li> <li>▪ Ahrens Rock</li> <li>▪ The Small Walls</li> </ul>	12 4 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extensively used by large groups and one of the most popular crags in the area.</li> <li>▪ One of the more recently developed areas</li> <li>▪ Upgrading of existing trails to continue</li> <li>▪ Structures planned for sections of trail</li> <li>▪ <u>Planned and ongoing route development</u></li> </ul>

<p>Located at the SE corner of Crest Lake in the bluffs directly above the lake. This area is accessed from the new parking area at Mud Lake</p>	<p>(15)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hidden Walls First Tier</li> <li>▪ Hidden Wall Second Tier</li> <li>▪ Hidden Wall Third Tier</li> </ul>	<p>6 11 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A beautiful climbing area amongst the trees and above the lake</li> <li>▪ Superb rock quality</li> <li>▪ Presently the most used area at Crest Creek</li> <li>▪ Extensive work done to trails as this is a portion of the envisioned “loop” trail</li> <li>▪ Trail maintenance and construction ongoing</li> <li>▪ Trail re-route planned at east end of second tier</li> <li>▪ Significant development has taken place</li> <li>▪ <u>Planned and ongoing route development</u></li> </ul>
<p>Located on the edge of the second growth SE of Crest Lake on the north slope of the Hydro grid. Accessed from the new Mud Lake parking area</p>	<p>(12) (13)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Skid Row</li> <li>▪ The Tombstone</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Has significant high quality route potential</li> <li>▪ Presently undeveloped</li> <li>▪ No established trails into the area</li> <li>▪ May require an Environmental Impact Assessment</li> <li>▪ <u>This area defines the eastern boundary to which climbing development at Crest Creek would take place</u></li> </ul>
		<p><b>Total developed routes 206</b></p>		

### Crest Creek Rock Climbing Strategy Development Plan

The Heathens Mountaineering Club have been working under volunteer adoption agreements with BC Parks since 1993. As part of the work initiated under this agreement, they submitted a rock-climbing development plan in 1994. A formal Crest Creek rock-climbing strategy development plan for the climbing area, will be carried out by the Crest Creek Planning Group and the Heathens club and will be consistent with the amended Parks Master Plan. This strategy will follow the methods used at other BC Parks (Ref: Stawamus Chief, Shannon Falls and Murrin Provincial Park ‘Rock Climbing Strategy’ Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks)

The Crest Creek Planning Group and the Heathens Mountaineering Club are committed to work with BC Parks in building on these initial efforts and to formally link the development and management of the Crest Creek climbing area with the vision and goals of the Master Plan. The Crest Creek Rock Climbing Strategy Plan will address resource inventory and analysis components, establish clear objectives and realistic timelines, and propose strategies as needed to address existing and potential concerns, constraints, and opportunities. It would describe protocols; including possible mechanisms for funding, shared responsibility and decision-making.

### **3. STRATEGY TOPICS:**

#### **Historical and cultural values**

##### ***Background:***

The Crest Creek area has no known or recognized historical and cultural value to the First Nation people. Since the 1950's when industrial interests (hydro project and logging) extensively modified the landscape of the immediate and surrounding area there has been no cultural or historic concern expressed by First Nations. A recent initiative by First Nations to re-divert Crest Creek back to its original westward flow was not approved by the Province because it would have caused a major environmental disturbance to the area. The project as proposed, reflected the First Nation cultural concern associated with fish habitat in the Heber River drainage. As new information associated with First Nation's interests in the climbing area becomes available it will be incorporated into an updated Rock-Climbing Strategy Development Plan.

##### ***Management Direction:***

The identification of historical and cultural data is the primary responsibility of BC Parks

##### ***Action:***

BC Parks will make available any future information so that it can be utilized into this development plan.

#### **Trails**

##### ***Background:***

There are basically two types of trails in the Crest Creek area: The main trails to the climbing sites are used by both hikers and climbers. These trails are used regularly, generally constructed to a higher standard, incorporating bridges, boardwalks, staircases and retaining walls. The second type is climber access routes and can be steep and not so visible. Many of these secondary trails are in a continual state of upgrade to address any erosion concerns. (Ref: Appendix 1 Fig. 1).

##### ***Management Direction:***

Formalizing the system of trails and incorporating proper signage will be consistent with the rationale of the amended Master Plan.

Primarily climbers will maintain existing climbers' trails with assistance by BC Parks where feasible. Any trail work to existing trails, which would involve significant work or changes (e.g. re-routing), would be planned in conjunction with BC Parks, The Heathens Club and the Crest Creek Planning Group. The Heathens Club and individual members of the climbing community have extensive experience at trail construction. Work involving the use of more specialized equipment (e.g. chainsaws and other gas powered tools) would be reserved to those that hold a BC Parks validation to operate such equipment.

As new crags and faces are developed within the defined climbing area, they will be accessed where feasible by choosing existing trails. A written set of trail planning and construction guidelines is

rigorously followed; These guidelines are continually being reprinted in the Heathens Club seasonal newsletter (Ref: Appendix 1 ref. 3 & 4) Many of the climbing crags have already had trails developed over the past years to access them. If warranted by future environmental concerns the closure of certain sections of trails will be carried out, but with cooperative planning this possibility is expected to be minute.

The use of the main trails by non-climbers, namely hikers and onlookers are increasing and are encouraged. The main trails are of a higher standard of construction and tend to avoid imminent hazardous locations

***Actions:***

1. Develop inventory of existing trails. Monitor development of new trails and changes in existing trails.
2. Develop a plan for required new trails (most of this planning is in place)
3. Perform maintenance on existing trails, develop a timeline that is realistic and can be worked with.
4. Ensure trail upgrades and new trail construction meet the required parks standards
5. Any structures to be built to have a design plan in place according to set standards and be approved by BC Parks
6. BC Parks to help with possible material requirements as in the past.
7. Install updated trail and crag location maps at each information shelter (west and east parking lots)

**Cleaning of Climbing Routes**

***Background:***

Due to the West Coast climate, vegetation growth can be fairly vigorous on the rocks in and around the Crest Creek area. In order to develop new climbs and maintain existing ones, vegetation and loose rock is cleaned and removed by climbers. The majority of routes are being developed within the confines of the power line corridor. This area has been subject to extensive and continual vegetation removal as part of the hydro line maintenance work. The likelihood that climbing and route development will be the cause of a negative impact on rare plant species is extremely low. Seepage areas that may support certain plant species are not conducive to the climbing experience and will tend to be avoided all together. The amount of cliff area impacted by cleaning is difficult to measure but can be considered negligible, restricted to little more than the width of the climb itself. Guidelines are established and followed. (Ref. Appendix 1 ref.3). Bottom staging areas have adopted the same criteria as in building trails where cribbing and ground material may be used to protect the ground from user disturbance. Addressing concerns with route development would be consistent with the contents of the amended Master Plan.

***Management Direction:***

1. Minimize the impact of cleaning of climbing routes at all times.
2. Refrain from any new crag development in the mature timber on the north side of Crest Lake. Keep within the existing developed crags for new routes and maintenance.

3. Limit development of the cliffs visible from the highway, located immediately above the lake and well below the power line grid.
4. Remove only the minimum amount of material from the climb, to ensure that it is safe and offers an appropriate climbing experience.
5. Remove no trees unless approved by BC Parks.
6. Think carefully about the importance and quality of the route. Will the route continue to be used and does it justify the amount of cleaning proposed? How significant will it be to climbers for its length and grade of difficulty?
7. During any cleaning activities the climbers must ensure the safety of any other users in the area.

### ***Action***

1. BC Parks to monitor cleaning activities as in the past.
2. The Heathens Club and the Crest Creek Planning Group to monitor cleaning activities.
3. Formalize the written guidelines for route cleaning as published by the Heathens Club
4. Identify the vegetation to be removed, supplying samples as requested to BC Parks.
5. Climbers to execute a personal sense of responsibility

### **Fixed Protection**

#### ***Background:***

Fixed protection has been used at the Crest Creek climbing area since the early 80's. Although a general consensus has evolved over time within the climbing fraternity on the use of bolts, contention over the appropriateness of bolting can arise as new situations develop. When bolts are required at Crest Creek, it is accepted that when they are well placed they add to both the safety and enjoyment of the climb. Bolts have only been placed by a small group of experienced climbers. This is closely evaluated and monitored by well-trained members of the Heathens club. Bolting standards are based on the latest technical information available on the bolts and methods in use and by the years of experience gained from being an active climber in the area. In general, the climbing community has been and will continue to be self-regulating in the use of bolts.

The Crest Creek area of Strathcona Park is located next to a highway, a water diversion channel and a power line corridor that have created extensive land alterations in the past. These activities are shared within an intensive recreational zone. For these two reasons, the use of fixed protection should not be compared to their use in other parks.

#### ***Management Direction:***

The use of fixed protection, rappel stations, and fixed belay stations will continue to be primarily determined by the rock climbing community. BC Parks will monitor trends or changes in the use of fixed protection.

#### ***Action:***

1. Continue present situation. BC Parks and climbers to monitor trends.
2. Use non-obtrusive colored bolt hangers for rappel or belay stations where practical.
3. Use careful planning and discretion when determining a bolt placement.
4. Replace bolts that may be out dated or have been badly placed.
5. Older routes with badly spaced bolts may need to be retro-bolted.
6. Continue to evaluate and monitor the bolts on climbing routes to ensure their integrity.

### **Safety**

#### ***Background***

Climbers at Crest Creek have relied on themselves and other climbers to establish safety practices. The Heathens Mountaineering Club is a strong advocate of promoting safety in the wilderness and on the rocks through self-administered programs and educational literature. It must be recognized

that relative to the high level of climbing activity, there is an extremely low occurrence of safety related incidents. Due to the fact that almost all climbs at Crest Creek are one climbing pitch long by nature, retreat and retrieval of an injured climber would be considered fairly basic and would not require the assistance of a search and rescue organization. Proper signage will direct visitors other than climbers to remain on the main trails reducing the likelihood of straying into hazardous terrain.

***Management Direction***

Primary responsibility for safety will continue to rest with the climbers. As required BC Parks will assist a SAR team in rescue related situations. BC Parks will monitor safety-related issues.

***Action:***

Continue present practice of self regulated climber's safety

**Sensitive Areas and Inventories**

***Background:***

Little is known about the composition or the ecology of the plant and animal communities found in the cliff areas. Wildlife in the area may include rodents, bird species; cougar, bear and migrant resident elk. Years of observation suggest that no animal habitats have been disturbed in the past. Routes in the power line corridor, having been previously stripped of its natural forest cover and then burned, do not appear to offer any unusual plants. The already fully developed climbing cliffs reveal little as to the natural ecology of the area. Climbing existing routes and developing new routes often will result in modification of the park environment. This could include creating access trails, cleaning vegetation off climbing routes and placing fixed protection (e.g. bolts) along routes. With the areas past length of history most of this modification has already taken place. The development of climbing routes at Crest Creek has followed the guidelines as set out by the Heathens Club (Ref: Appendix 1 ref 3 & 4). To ensure protection of both conservation values and climbing opportunities, more information may need to be gathered on the sensitivity and ecology of the natural communities; this would be consistent with the requirements of the amended Master Plan.

***Management Direction:***

Inventory of plant species may be required in "identified" sensitive areas if and when new climbing crags are proposed there. As well, an inventory of existing areas where future expansion of climbing is planned to occur may need to be completed. Vegetation inventory for areas already developed with trails and climbing cliffs and under the agreement of BC Parks should not be the sole responsibility of the climbing community.

***Action:***

1. As is feasible, inventories and analysis may be required in areas of new development; these areas would be focused primarily at areas outside of the power line corridor.
2. Trails should not normally be included in the inventory as they are self-mitigating by defining a clear pathway, limiting their impact. Trail development will not take place in "identified" or "suspect" sensitive areas.

3. Environmental assessments are the primary responsibility of BC Parks. The climbing community may assist in environmental data collection that may include plant sample gathering (photo log or physical) for identification.
4. Climbing cliffs or routes may be subject to closure (temporary or as determined) should there be an identified issue with any resident wildlife habitat. The Heathens Club has been diligent in the past as to an awareness of this responsibility.
5. Conflicting interests such as establishing wildlife habitat within areas of high recreational use should be carefully evaluated before implementing such programs. Local ecology and wildlife will take precedence over recreational users other than in locations already well established with facilities.
6. The climbing community and BC Parks will endeavor to work closely to meet these requirements.

## **Bivouacs and Camping**

### ***Background:***

With only short climbing routes at Crest Creek the issue of bivouacs is of no concern. Presently there are no camping facilities near or in the area to cater to visitors. Camping in the gravel based alder forest at the outflow of Crest Creek into Crest Lake has been done by permission from BC Parks for the last ten years during the Heathens Mountaineering Club's annual "Summer Camp". This area located between the western parking area and the Crest Lake day-use site has had very limited development other than some clearing and establishment of access trails and remains virtually in its "original" state. As the Crest Creek area has no formal camping location to serve visiting climbers this area remains as an ideal site location. The climbing community would like this area to remain as a walk-in only campsite to avoid user conflict with the regular profile of tourist camping.

### ***Management Direction:***

As this topic was identified in the amended Master Plan, BC Parks will work with the Crest Creek Planning Committee and the Heathens Club to work on a plan for possible development for this site. As this was formally a heavily disturbed site when creating the Crest Creek diversion for hydro purposes and now harbors an alder forest, environmental issues would be minimal.

### ***Action:***

1. Work with the climbing community to establish a plan of action for the development of a climber's walk-in campsite.
2. Set a deadline for a development plan to be in place by late 2005.
3. Look at the possibility for implementing a final development date in early 2006.

## **Facilities and Signage**

### ***Background:***

Recognition of Crest Creek as a climbers destination and the need for formal development of facilities were established in 1994, when BC Hydro required significant remedial maintenance to the Crest Creek diversion berm and outflow channel located on the western side of Crest Lake. As a

result BC Parks (in consultation with the climbing community) implemented the construction of a parking area, with the installation of an information shelter, a pit toilet, picnic tables, trails and signage to the area. In 1999 a day-use picnic site was constructed on the north shore of Crest Lake to serve visitors to the area other than climbers. The decommissioning of the “ERT” road that ran through the park, removed a span over Crest Creek close to the Hwy 28 bridge and one at Mud Lake, resulting in the division the climbing area and effectively relocated the normal access to the day-use picnic site. Signage identifying the present locations of area facilities and trails are now obsolete due to the decommissioning process. Working with BC Parks, Heathens club members assisted in the construction of a footbridge and furthermore funded the construction of a parking area at the Mud Lake location. With the increased popularity of the Hidden Wall climbing area, the distance from existing toilet amenities and the inclusion of a “loop” trail interconnecting all of the climbing crags, there is a justified need for such infrastructures as; a toilet, garbage receptacle and signage at the Mud Lake parking area. This will bring this location to the same standard as the western parking area and protect the surrounding environment from human impact.

**Management Direction:**

BC Parks recognizes the Crest Creek area as a popular rock climbing destination and an important component of recreational opportunities within Strathcona Park. This recognition is well documented and as a result a formal draft plan to direct future development within Crest Creek is to be formulated by the climbing community with the assistance of BC Parks. The installation of amenities and signage would be consistent within the contents of the Master Plan but needs to be evaluated on the basis of a development plan for Crest Creek.

**Action:**

1. In consultation with BC Parks the Crest Creek Planning Group will develop a plan for Crest Creek and identify facility and signage requirements.
2. The Heathens Club to secure grants to fund the construction and installation of a pit toilet at the Mud Creek parking location (This is an important requirement to protect water quality and impact from the increasing number of climbers to this location).
3. BC Parks to authorize the installation of a toilet facility to be constructed and installed by the Heathens Club at no immediate expense to BC Parks.
4. Formulate a directive addressing the Mud Creek toilet facility proposed methods of maintenance
5. Consider the need for an environmental impact assessment

## **4. GOVERNANCE**

### **Shared Responsibility for Park Stewardship at Crest Creek**

BC Parks is ultimately responsible for the administration of BC Provincial Park lands. However, there is an initiative within the Ministry to encourage community stewardship and to share responsibility.

BC Parks maintains the current infrastructure at Crest Creek i.e. lakeside day-use site and western parking lot, toilet facility and signage. Future amenities may require that different methods are available to transfer specific roles, responsibilities and tasks to the climbing community. To date, the Heathens Mountaineering Club, and various individuals have taken different degrees of initiative and responsibility for stewardship of the Crest Creek area, and both its natural and constructed (e.g. trails) assets. The current Crest Creek Planning Group, which includes representation from these groups, embodies that notion of shared responsibility.

The Crest Creek Planning Group has explored the extent of possible mechanisms for management of rock climbing routes, and believes that the climbing community is best suited through experience to manage this, and will formalize its review of the options and implications through future dialogue with BC Parks.

### **Joint Management**

One possible method of joint management would entail the creation of a stakeholders representation group. The “Crest Creek Crag Planning Committee” would be established, entering into a working partnership with the Heathens Mountaineering Club and BC Parks in developing and managing the Crest Creek Crag. A Management Agreement with BC Parks would guide the appropriate development and stewardship of clearly defined areas and features of the Crest Creek Crag and area.

Stakeholders that are representative of rock-climbing activities within the Crest Creek area, may include the following:

- Crest Creek Planning Committee
- Heathens Mountaineering Club
- Climbers’ Access Society of BC
- Strathcona Park Advisory Committee Member

### **Decision-Making Authority**

Based on established principles, BC Parks is ultimately responsible for decision-making within the Park boundaries. However, the Heathens Mountaineering Club and the Crest Creek Planning Committee could play a decision-making role as appropriate within its defined areas of responsibility, with decisions being made either through consensus within the planning group or by direct consultation with BC Parks.

Decision-making would be directed by the contents within the approved Rock Climbing Strategy Development Plan and subsequently by an approved Park Management Plan as outlined in the BC Parks 2003 Master Plan Amendment. The input of the Crest Creek Planning Committee and the Heathens Mountaineering Club into the creation of these documents ensures the intent of future decision-making. The vision, goals and supporting objectives contained in these plans would provide clear directives to guide park management decisions. This would include the definition of appropriate vs. inappropriate facilities and uses within the park; suitable means of implementation in terms of materials, methods and landscape treatment; determination of suitable park activities; and management recommendations.

### **Responsibility and Authority**

The responsibility for the management of all activities, including rock-climbing activities at the Crest Creek Crags ultimately remains with BC Parks. Although the Heathens Club has already entered into previous adoption agreements with BC Parks, a more formalized Letter of Understanding or Management Agreement could be drafted to define the areas of responsibility of the climbing community.

Other examples of a joint responsibility with BC Parks may include, terms of reference for management for existing and future area infrastructure to serve the needs for both area visitors and climbers.

Under an arrangement of shared responsibility, BC Parks will retain responsibility for the following:

- Administrative support and approvals;
- Any future land acquisition;
- Environmental Impact Assessments
- Historical Values and their significance
- Contribution of resources and financial assistance as appropriate;
- Directly involving the Crest Creek Crags Planning Committee and the Heathens Mountaineering Club as to any planned landscape alterations as a direct result of 'Land User Permits' e.g.: BC Hydro and Power, Ministry of Transport
- Park maintenance relating to clearly defined public use sites and their associated facilities;

Through co-operation with BC Parks, the following points will be addressed:

- Possible project planning in association with BC Parks staff;
- Establishing priorities for the ongoing planning and site development of the Crest Creek Crags, soliciting resources from BC parks and/or outside resources for project costs as necessary;

- Organizing fund-raising efforts for priority projects may include; pursuing grants and other funding opportunities, soliciting goods and services and potential sponsorships;
- Obtaining approval from BC Parks to proceed with facilities development projects;
- Development of a rock-climbing strategy, similar in nature and intent to that developed by climbers and BC Parks in relation to master plans for provincial parks in the region.
- Assisting BC Parks staff as necessary with risk analysis, annual inspections and implementation of safety improvements.

## 5. BUDGETARY NEEDS AND POSSIBLE FUNDING SOURCES

The Crest Creek Planning Team has identified several key actions for the years 2005-2006. Consistent with the goal of enabling and enhancing public enjoyment of the Crest Creek climbing area. These actions are aimed squarely at expanding and refining this rock-climbing strategy into an immediate plan, addressing issues relating to park access, amenities, and management, in anticipation of the 2005-2006 climbing season. Appropriately developed and managed, Crest Creek will make a strong impression on visitors to Strathcona Park and will reinforce our claim to being the most attractive and well-managed rock climbing area on Vancouver Island. While any number of projects such as trail enhancements and park amenities might be anticipated in the future, this proposal focuses on key initiatives and improvements for public safety and enjoyment of Crest Creek that can be achieved in 2005-2006.

*The following Table 2 lists a summary of development directions that can be acted on immediately and represents a realistic number of short term goals to enhance the area and address specific concerns:*

**Table 2: Summary of 2005 Priority action and Budget Allocations**

Budget Item	Description	Funding Requirements and Sources (plus in-kind contributions)
<b>Planning</b>	Development Plan (2005)	Plus: volunteer support & input
<b>Eastern Parking Lot (Mud Lake)</b>	Add -on improvements to existing parking area and entrance addressing minor deficiencies: 1) Additional gravel capping and landscaping needed to improve the visitor's first impression/experience at the footbridge/ parking lot entrance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Heathens Club to secure limited funds</li> <li>● Parks to help with costs</li> <li>● Parks support needed</li> <li>● Volunteer efforts</li> <li>● Solicit material donations</li> </ul>

<b>Toilet and Garbage Service (Mud Lake)</b>	1) Construction and installation of a Parks Standard, contained pit toilet facility at the Mud Lake parking area. 2) Installation of (1) Parks standard garbage receptacle at the east Mud Lake parking area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Heathens Club to fund construction and installation of Pit Toilet (funding secured to be utilized by April 1, 2005)</li> <li>● BC Parks to fund garbage receptacle</li> <li>● Add to BC Parks maintenance budget</li> <li>● Parks and operations maintenance support needed</li> <li>● Volunteer efforts</li> </ul>
<b>Trail building and Safety</b>	1) Trail repairs to address current safety issues, such as trail fill material, removal of small rock or root hazards, step construction and placement of drainage culverts (Entrance to hidden Wall trail). 2) Staircase to be constructed on the Hidden Wall trail to Sunrise (2 meter obstacle) 3) On going brushing of trails as required 4) Re-route on Hidden Wall trail to redirect climbers away from steep rooted section in trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Heathens Club to solicit available funding for selected projects</li> <li>● Parks to supply additional materials as required</li> <li>● Parks support needed (generators etc.)</li> <li>● Volunteer work parties.</li> </ul>
<b>Key Viewpoint Site and Access Enhancements</b>	1) Improve trail access from the Crest Lake day-use site along the deactivated road section west to Crest Creek where the former trail connects with the bridge at Hwy 28; add signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Parks to supply sources and materials as needed</li> <li>● Volunteer work parties</li> <li>● Parks support needed</li> </ul>
<b>Park Signage</b>	1) Install a information shelter at Mud Lake parking lot, with a map, notice board, code of conduct 2) Construct and install a new Type ‘A’ Parks Entry sign for the Crest Lake day-use area at relocated Hwy 28 turnoff point 3) Install directional signage to the Mud Lake Parking lot immediately visible from the Hwy 28 turnoff point 4) Parks to supply trail directional signage at (7) key locations due to decommissioning alterations: signs needed at Hwy 28 bridge locating new trail access points (1) sign for the ‘Hidden Wall’ trail (1) sign for west parking lot indicating direction of trail to climbs under power grid (2) trail signs needed at day-use site location indicating trail to Crest Lake/Creek outflow beach and trail at decommissioned road location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Volunteer efforts.</li> <li>● Parks to fund and source</li> <li>● Parks and operations support needed</li> </ul>
<b>TOTAL PRIORITY ACTIONS and BUDGET ALLOCATIONS (2005):</b>		

## **Appendix 1: Figures and References**

*Figure 1: Maps of existing Crest Creek Trails and Climbing Crags*

*Reference 2: Terms of Reference to Guide the Crest Creek Planning Group*

*Reference 3: Guidelines to Trail and Route development*

*Reference 4: Excerpts – Heathens Newsletter Fall and Winter 2004*