

Friends of Strathcona Park Newsletter - Fall 2018

Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5

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Bedwell Trip - The visit to CWR - Ken Vandeburgt

This past summer, several of our directors met with Antonella and Bradley, the current Managers of Clayoquot Wilderness Resort (CWR). The purpose of the meeting was as an icebreaker. Antonella and Bradley are aware of the conflict we had regarding horse use in Strathcona Park and wanted to reassure us that they have no future intent to pursue a permit to conduct horse tours or upgrade the Bedwell River trail for horse use within Strathcona Park.

With the new management, there are several significant changes at CWR. The rifle range is closed; the bears are no longer being fed; the atmosphere is no longer that of a dude ranch full of machismo; there is much greater emphasis on providing a quality wilderness experience for the whole family. Heck, I even began to think I'd like to stay a while.

Importantly, CWR is renewing licenses of occupation to use crown land along the foreshore of their property. One of the conditions we asked for was the right of access for hiking. The good news is that guests at the resort find hikers going into or out of the Bedwell valley to be an interesting curiosity. So hikers, as long as there is a record of good behavior, are welcome to use the road to access the



Bedwell Sound with Clayoquot Wilderness Resort in the foreground.

Bedwell Trail.

One issue that is of shared concern is the prospecting activity at the Prosper Mine. The mine has been sold to New Sunro Mines. There is a recent BC Mining Report about the Prosper Mine that describes the mining prospects of the Prosper Mine in glowing terms. (The mining business is full of optimists) One gets the view the company is seeking to attract investment in order to continue exploration work. Little work,

besides clearing brush, is actually being done.

CWR's main concern is that mining operations don't affect CWR operations. Our concerns are: the mineral claims include a large area (some 500 ha) that extends to the Park boundary, where it may affect the integrity of the Park wilderness. Further, it straddles the existing BC Forestry Service Bedwell River Trail Corridor, including the site of the Gail McGee Bridge, which connects the Park to the CWR property and onward to the tidewater.

The private company wants to use the road, which it claims is a public road (!), from the tidewater through CWR property to access the mineral claim area. Plans would include building a bridge across the Bedwell River upstream of the Ursus River to provide road access to the existing mine site. It is helpful to consider the previous owner submitted similar plans to BC Mines in the mid 1990's and the work was never carried out.

Overall, we had a good day visiting with the Managers at CWR. Hopefully, this marks a new era of cooperation over the wilderness in Strathcona Park, between the Resort and Friends of Strathcona Park.

Strathcona Park Update

Information on what has been happening comes from Andy Smith's update given to SPPAC at its recent meeting. Thanks to Andy for sharing this information.

Things have been looking up in the staffing department this year with two backcountry seasonal Rangers employed in the Park. As well there were 6 student Rangers employed from a new government program available for the entire region. They spend one week in Strathcona Park doing various jobs mostly in the Forbidden Plateau Area. It is expected this program will continue next year.

Three capital projects were conducted in the Park this year. Two new pit toilet facilities were constructed in the Plateau area, and planning was completed for replacement and new tent platforms at Kwai and Circlet Lakes as well as new grey water disposal, bear cache and toilets. These areas are experiencing very heavy use so these new facilities should help a lot. New picnic tables and toilets were also installed at Karst Creek. Work at Ralph River campsite was postponed for a year due to its use for a film production.

The film production at the Ralph River campsite is for a new TV series called "See". Filming also used the Lower Myra Falls area. Filming was put off until the fall after the busiest time of the year. A village of 12 - 14 buildings was constructed along the lakeshore at the campsite. After all this was removed there remained a few modest improvements to trails in the area. Production trailers also took over the Karst Creek boat launch area. Some members of the public were upset by being unable to access this part of the Park, however, filming did take use in the shoulder season somewhat minimizing impacts.

B.C. Hydro has paid for some upgrades as part

of their mitigating impacts from their reservoir. The Buttle Lake boat launch saw some repairs, trail improvements at the Buttle Lake campground were done and improvements to the Karst Creek boat launch will be done similar to those at Buttle Lake. They are also doing some test planting in the drawdown zone around the lake to see if some rehabilitation is possible.

Some work is being done on the cable crossing on the Della Falls trail to try to make it easier to use. Some work is planned for next spring on the Elk Falls trail. There will be a new trail sign shelter erected at the start of the Comox Glacier Trail. Work is continuing on trying to establish a campsite just outside the Park boundary at the Heber River to service the Crest Crags climbing area. The Climbers Access Society of B.C. is taking over the management of the climbing area. Work on the new campsite is scheduled to begin in 2019,

SPPAC meeting: Jennifer Pass

At the recent SPPAC meeting on November 16th, the agenda as usual was packed. From the Myra Falls Mine update, to concern about SAR rescues up Albert Edward, and camping at Cream Lake, the issues are diverse and cannot be dealt with speedily. Which means that many issues at the bottom of the agenda did not get aired.

I have only attended as a member of SPPAC for two meetings; so am on a steep learning curve. Our role is to advise (assist, consult with, etc.) B.C. Parks in the management of Strathcona Park, with reference to the Master Plan as guiding document. The 4-fold goals of this assistance by SPPAC include increased public awareness and understanding and support for the Park, increased awareness by BC Parks of public concerns and interests, the oversight of the Master Plan (a public

document) for management issues. The process, if followed, should therefore result in better management of Strathcona Park.

It is important to understand the role of SPPAC in this light. Some issues are not covered by the Master Plan. For example, this summer a film contract was made with BC Parks which resulted in Ralph River Camp ground being unavailable for public use for a period of time from September 2 to the beginning of November. While this issue was discussed after the fact at the SPPAC meeting, film permitting is not covered under the Master Plan, so the issue was decided (based on such issues as zoning criteria, time of use, other public facilities available [ie campground at Buttle Lake], etc.), internally by Parks Management.

In other areas SPPAC and public input are significant. For example, in dealing with the question, ‘what, if anything should Parks do about the number of people being lost up Mt. Albert Edward and requiring SAR assistance’, a discussion ensued, including members of the public who were present (mainly CVMC members) about where the route heads down from the ridge to Cirlet Lake and the difficulty hikers find at that point, in locating the “trail” down. A recommendation was made to provide some helpful signage at the point on the ridge where the route heads down to the Lake.

SPPAC is also helpful in providing input to Parks on how to address the deluge of backcountry users, the overuse of wilderness camping sites and similar issues. After a lively discussion, the take-away was to consider fly-in transportable outhouses at a few of the over-used backcountry camping areas.

Nyrstar at Myra Falls is upgrading their facilities as they gear up towards full

operation and production. They have done upgrades on the Jim Mitchell (shared access) Road, and will be doing night shift hauling. There will be no daytime hauling and there will be traffic controls on the road when hauling is occurring. The closure bond is now \$132,124,500. Nyrstar is in a “community engagement phase” so there will be opportunities for public input. Nicole Personen also stated that “Nyrstar has a desire to work with Parks to inform reclamation”

In summary, a lot happens at a SPPAC meeting and although the meetings are long and are out of town, public attendance not only is allowed, but is often helpful in the advisory process. Do you have issues that you would like SPPAC to consider? Let FOSP or SPPAC know.

Ruth Masters Hero Spoon Award and Legacy

As you know after Ruth's passing a scholarship fund was created in her name at North Island College. It's turned out to be very successful. Currently there is around \$16,600 in the account, much of it raised through FOSP's previous appeal for donations. Donations were matched to \$4700 from other sources topping the fund up even more. This year's recipient was Georgia Watts. The amount available for award in September 2019 will be \$800. Ruth's fund is sustainable and will provide a legacy in her memory that lives on. If you want to donate more to this fund it is best you send a cheque directly to NIC Foundation c/o Erin Petersen, 2300 Ryan Road, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 8N6. Specify it's for the Ruth Masters Hero Spoon Award and you will get a tax deductible receipt.

Permits for Park - Ken Vandeburgt

We're looking for feedback on the question: Is it time for introducing a permit system for Strathcona Park backcountry campsites?

Wild and beautiful places are as important as water itself; and, at one time the wilderness was considered infinite. The illusion of infinity is disappearing fast; there are only so many places like Strathcona Park, and there are ever more humans everyday.

The question of permits is becoming important because there are cases of serious overuse in Strathcona Park. Recently one long weekend there were, anecdotally, hundreds of people camping at Bedwell Lake. Given there are a dozen tent pads at Bedwell and a half dozen at Baby Bedwell, that means a lot of people had to make their own campsite ... to the detriment of the park wilderness experience.

We could blame the problem of overuse on: an ever-increasing population of outdoor enthusiasts seeking wild places, Parks Canada, the BC government, and perhaps some overzealous environmental groups. Alternatively, we could simply just blame Strathcona Park for being irresistible!

There are jurisdictions where a permit is required: Ontario Parks has a permit system in place. Parks Canada requires a reservation and a permit to hike the West Coast Trail. In USA, the Grand Canyon River corridor requires permits. There are lots of other examples where permits and reservations are required as a result of the increasing demand for wilderness access.

In Ontario, you need a permit to use backcountry campsites, and if you are hiking at a busy time you'll need a reservation in order to get a permit. The downside is that you have to plan ahead and of course there is a cost. One advantage, absent in BC, is that the money collected goes back into the Parks. The upside is there isn't a horde of people sharing your wilderness experience and there is a lessening of potential for damage to the wilderness.

The Grand Canyon River corridor has approximately 25 000 people go through the Canyon annually, in rafts or kayaks. The place is still spotless, due to: a very strict permit system; a very clear set of rules regarding cooking and waste disposal (you pack it in, you pack it out); and, a very efficient enforcement by rangers patrolling the river. Money from the permits goes to the law enforcement and maintenance of the infrastructure.

One option would be to expand the recreation resource by building barn-sized backcountry huts as the Department of Conservation administers throughout New Zealand. However there is a lot of resistance to building that sort of intrusive infrastructure in Strathcona Park, never mind that structures have to be built robustly enough to deal with snow loads.

Another option would be to increase the hiking trail system in Strathcona Park so as to spread out the demand over wider areas of the Park. The downside is that the really remote hard-to-get-to places that some of us value wouldn't be remote anymore.

If there is a permit system there will need to be a permit office and that means there needs to be money available to pay for the infrastructure, a

booking system, and staff.

I'm not in favor of fees and permits in order to go for a hike. However, there is a case to be made that permits make a more orderly use of the existing limited recreation resources and may become necessary.

Sometimes it seems as if Strathcona Park is being loved to death.

Feel free to comment on this topic on the form at the end of the newsletter.

Re-introducing youth education programs in the park? - Marlene Smith

One of the reason Strathcona Wilderness Institute was created was to educate people on the safe and respectful way to treat and enter the park and wilderness and to lay a foundation for wilderness and parks stewardship.

Due to a change in parks culture, funding and lack of support for volunteers and school programs, youth involvement in the parks have grind to a hold. The Heathens group, who ran wilderness education and trail building programs for decades in the park actually ended up in the courts and had to defend themselves for camping "illegally in the park" (see our last newsletter).

Having a passion for our parks and seeing the budget for trail maintenance and the building of new trails still well below where it should be; FOSP members are taking another look how (and if) we can and help youth to reconnect with the park again and get some well needed help on the ground in the back

country of the park. If you have some expertise in this field or a strong desire to help out on this project, please drop us a line and help us to reconnect young people with our parks and wilderness again.

Legacies for the Friends

In the last few years we've lost two more of our inspirational elders. They were Ruth

Masters and Hilary Stewart. You know about Ruth's Hero Spoon Award already. In her will Ruth left the bulk of her estate to many environmental groups. Luckily for FOSP we were on the list. Hilary was an author who lived on Quadra Island and was a long time supporter of the Friends as well. She left us another generous legacy in her will. We are honoured to be recognized by these two ladies as worthy of their generosity. Thank you Ruth and Hilary. Your work lives on.

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

Name _____

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e-mail _____

Membership (suggested \$10 per year) _____

Donation (tax receipts for anything over \$25. _____

Comments _____

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