

**Friends of Strathcona Park**  
**Newsletter - Spring 2019**  
Box 3404, Courtenay, B.C. V9N 5N5  
[www.friendsofstrathcona.org](http://www.friendsofstrathcona.org)

**THE MINE IN THE PARK**

It seems incongruous to have a mine in a park, but then perhaps mines that are not in parks get even less public scrutiny. On the 22nd of May, our FOSP “mine subcommittee” – John Wilson, Peggy Carswell and I, picked up Leona Adams, (Campbell River Environmental Committee) in Campbell River and drove up to Nyrstar Myra Falls for a meeting with Nicole Pesonen, their Senior Environmental Specialist, and Jacques Leclerc, the head of Health, Safety, Environment and Communities.

Nicole and Jacques were generous with their time, comprehensive in their presentations and answered our questions. So where are we now? There is a plan (more like a hope) to put all tailings underground eventually, but maybe they will only reach the 80% mark. They are trying to put all “acid producing” waste underground. The berm around the Lynx Tailing Disposal Facility grows and in 7-10 years the reservoir like structure will likely be full. What then? Nyrstar will likely apply for a permit for another (above-ground) tailings disposal facility within their

**Annual General Meeting**

The Friends of Strathcona Park's Annual General Meeting is being held on Saturday, June 22nd. The meeting will be from 3 to 5 p.m. followed by a barbeque at 6 p.m.. This format is similar to the last few years' meetings and has proved to be really successful. The FOSP will supply barbequed sockeye salmon and people are asked to bring something to share. The AGM will be held at Jennifer Pass and Jack Welsh's place as it has been in the past. They are at 3164 Hellicar Road which is off Headquarters Road north of Courtenay. To get there from Courtenay proceed out Headquarters Road past Smith Road and Tsolum River Road to the next left which is Hellicar. The AGM is near the end of the road on the right, look for a sign. Coming from the north turn right at the Merville Store onto Merville Road. Carry on for a few kilometres and turn left onto Headquarters Road, Hellicar is a few km along on the right. Follow directions as above and we'll see you at the meeting.

footprint.

Nyrstar has been doing studies on the life in Myra Creek (affected by mineral contaminants to some extent from leaching of minerals into the Creek above the mine, but also contributed to by ground water from mine area getting into the creek), in order to determine safe levels for fish and other life. This “ability

to be healthy” of stream occupants sets the level for the allowable concentration of contaminants in the creek.

When asked about landslide risks in the Myra Valley, they have looked at risks of debris flows and other landslide types and have worked on dealing with some potential debris flow events but more questions have emerged on this general topic.

The scar area for “harvesting” clean rock for berm building, road building etc., seems to grow like a crab on the valley.

The closure bond is now at 130 million and a bit of good news: any new company interested in acquisition of this mine would have to prove financial wherewithal to fund this (ie. good financial track record) before BC government would approve a sale.

For those of us who have hoped for a final closure of the mine in the foreseeable future, that hope seems to constantly recede on the horizon, but are we in some ways better off with an operating company that is working on closure issues on an ongoing basis? As climate change occurs, and as errors elsewhere lead to better practices, the art of “doing closure” improves.

But as members of the public living in this area and caring about the Park and the environment in general we do need

to take on the stakeholder role that is ours. Should every permit be granted automatically? How can we contribute to the decision making process? How can we work with Nyrstar to not only help solve the environmental challenges they face, but also to raise our concerns, share our expertise and improve the quality and level of endorsement for important decisions? Clearly, the community who will be living with this minesite in their watershed and those living further afield who have an interest in the subject should be part of an ongoing, formal collaboration with mine managers and government personnel. There is a need to be informed, identify concerns, and have confidence that the wider community has influence on operations during the mining phase and conditions during temporary shut downs, as well as on the the nature of the area and perpetual environmental management after final closure

Two things prevent this from being just another “Pollyanna” statement. Development at Myra Falls is largely “permit controlled”. As FOSP we need to push to receive notification of permit applications or changes that are significant. It is not enough that they are in the Gazette. Also, we need to help provide a regular informative liaison

between Nyrstar and the public. There is a new organization –BC Mining Law Reform, headed by the University of Victoria Environmental Law Centre (see article at

<https://reformbcmining.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/BCMLR-Closure-Reclamation-Abandoned-Mines.pdf>

which is addressing directly concerns about the risks of badly executed mine closures). How can we contribute to their work? In our group Peggy Carswell, who was instrumental in the development of the Strathcona Park Master Plan, the “bible” for management of the park, brings skills of collaboration and facilitation; John Wilson brings a lifelong professional knowledge of geology; Leona, through her work for CREC brings clear critiques of berm stability and water quality issues. With their help and the involvement of YOU our members (just email me [passj@telus.net](mailto:passj@telus.net)) lets get this going!

Submitted by Jennifer Pass

### **Park Updates**

Thanks to Andy Smith of B.C. Parks for sharing news of what's been happening in the Park lately and what will be happening.

Two seasonal rangers are returning to Strathcona Park and will have started by the time you read this. A student ranger program begun last year is continuing this season

although the numbers were cut from 6 to 4. They will be working on some projects repairing winter damage, installing signs and restoring a trail near Circlet Lake.

Some new capital projects are in the works as well. The heavily used Circlet Lake area is having old tent platforms replaced and new ones added to increase capacity. Use will be monitored and reservations considered if the demand continues to grow to an unacceptable level. Two of the new toilet designs will be installed.

Further years will see upgrades to the Kwai Lake campsite and the replacement of all old toilet designs with the new composting type. This will reduce the need for flying sewage out of the Park. Additional future plans include upgrades to the new Karst Creek group campground and to the Ralph River campground.

Parks hope to see further increase in the booking of the Yurt and group campground at Croteau Lake. Last year was the first season with 8 weekend bookings. A brochure has been produced and groups can book through B.C. Parks website. A site host program is being implemented and volunteers are being sought for one week commitments. It should be noted the Yurt is for gathering and cooking in, not for sleeping in. There are tent platforms for that.

Work has been completed at the Buttle Lake campground to improve the boat launch ramp as well as the ramp at the Karst Creek ramp. A new wheelchair accessible trail was constructed at the Buttle Lake campground

which leads to the point on the north shore of the bay and has a view down the lake. Unfortunately low water levels in Buttle Lake have limited access to the water. Boat launches and trails can only go so far.

Work should now be underway to upgrade the Elk Lake trail. The Comox District Mountaineering Club has been working on trails in the Forbidden Plateau area and this is expected to continue. CDMC is also going to install a new sign at the Comox Glacier trail head. Two new yellow chairs will be located at the far end of Croteau Lake and the two at Battleship Lake will be placed again this year. A new campsite is being developed outside the Park along the road to Gold River. This will not be a B.C. Parks trail, but one under the Ministry of FLNRO and will provide camping for those using the Crest Creek rock climbing area, a short walk away.

### **SPPAC**

The Strathcona Public Advisory Committee met on May 10th which is where the park update came from.

Topics discussed included the idea of locating a sign on the ridge to Mount Albert Edward where hikers sometimes get lost on their way back down from the peak. Search and Rescue has had several calls to locate people who have missed the turn down off the ridge. Topics included installing a toilet at Cream Lake, as well as one on the north ridge camp on Mt. Burman and the way to King's Peak. The problems with these toilets are zoning. This infrastructure is allowed in Wilderness Recreation Zones, but not

Wilderness Conservation Zones.

Dogs off leash is a perennial problem in the Forbidden Plateau area. Consideration is being given to erecting signs about this. Vandalism to cars parked at trail heads in the Buttle Lake area has been a problem lately.

Philip Stone has been SPPAC chair for a while and is stepping down, but will continue to serve on the committee. Many thanks to Philip for a job well done. In the past SPPAC meetings have been regularly scheduled. Regional Director Don Cadden wants SPPAC only to meet when necessary. Most years there are only 2 or 3 meetings. This may or may not change as issues to discuss frequently arise and one meeting a year always includes a mine update where staff from whoever is operating the mine presents an update to SPPAC. The next SPPAC meeting will likely be in November.

### **Clayoquot Wilderness Lodge**

If you've hiked the Bedwell, you've been through the Outpost. Twenty years ago Richard Genovese began creating this dream child: a wilderness resort French Riviera style. Subsequent to his death, Richard's Outpost has passed into new hands. The owners are now KSL Capital Partners.

### **Access from Bedwell Sound to Strathcona Park**

The situation is that Clayoquot Wilderness Resort owns 4 crown grants at the head of Bedwell Sound. These lots are located on the

only deepwater access to the Bedwell Valley. There is an old mining road that starts at the dock owned by Clayoquot Wilderness Resort. The road goes through all four lots and passes through crown land, designated as a Recreation Corridor, before entering Strathcona Park. The road ends at the base of Big Interior Mountain, about 12 km inside the Park boundary.

The original crown grants were purchased in the early 1900's. The gold rush in the Yukon was attracting thousands of gold seekers north and merchants in Victoria wanted a piece of the action. Rumors were circulated about the possibility of finding gold in the Bedwell River, then called the Bear River. The grants were obtained by people interested in profiting from the prospectors through the provision of goods and services.

The Friends of Strathcona Park obtained copies of the original crown grants. Two of the grants show a public road going through the properties. The other two show an exception that reserved one chain width (66 feet) from the high tide line. The existing road is almost entirely within the boundaries of this exception. The problem with the exception is the original grants reverted to the crown due to unpaid taxes. The reverted grants were later sold again but without the exception stated. It is unclear if the newer grants are to the natural boundary of the high tide line. The BC Survey General's opinion says the intent was the resold grants include land to the natural boundary.

The history of mining in the Bedwell Valley is relevant. There was sporadic mining activity in the Bedwell Valley from 1898 to 1988 when the BC government was forced by public outrage to purchase all mineral rights in Strathcona Park except for the Myra Falls

Mine. The BC mining reports for that period provide a litany of road building activity with government money assistance, some mining activity, then the road and bridges being washed out.

The case rests on the fact of the Bedwell River Road being a public highway because crown money was used to build it.

In 1940, Walter Guppy built the Prosper Mine, located between Clayoquot Wilderness Resort and Strathcona Park. In 2016, New Sunro Mines purchased the rights to the Prosper Mineral Claim. They wanted to use the Bedwell road for access to the mine.

So there is a conundrum; if the road is declared a public highway then we get guaranteed access for hikers to Strathcona Park but we also get guaranteed access for miners at Prosper Mine and loggers for access to the unlogged Ursus Creek, both of which are not seen as desirable.

At the moment recreational hikers do have permission from Clayoquot Wilderness Resort to cross their property. The access is reinforced by BC Government making the hiker access a requirement for Clayoquot Wilderness Resort to use crown land fronting their private property under license of occupation. The problem is with the access being subject to the continued goodwill of the owners of Clayoquot Wilderness Resort.

There the matter rests.

The Bedwell Trail extends from Buttle Lake to Bedwell Sound. Its the only trail I am aware of that passes from the Mountains to the Sea. Its a rugged four day hike in one direction. The main problem is logistics of getting to and from the trail and getting back to your car or boat.

Committee that meets to discuss Strathcona Park issues with BC Parks staff. If you love Strathcona Park, any or all of these organizations need your participation.

### October fundraiser

I'm going to close this with an appeal to volunteers. There are three groups that you might be interested in. There is Friends of Strathcona Park, which advocates for the protection of the Park and its wilderness values, Strathcona Wilderness Institute, which operates the information kiosks at Mnt Washington and Buttle Lake, and lastly there is Strathcona Park Public Advisory

Mark the date! Oct 25. Fundraiser for FOSP. A celebration of 30 plus yers of FOSP. Tin Town Café, Tin Town, Courtenay. 6.00pm to 10pm.

There will be rare movies about the Strathcona Park and the Bedwell river.

Food and beverages on the premises.

Live entertainment. Door prizes.

More details as the year goes by. See you then.

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### FOSP Membership Form Thank you for renewing.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ alternate phone (cell) \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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