

Recreation and Conservation Committee Report

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Parks and Wilderness Areas

The FMC responded to the Roofed Accommodation Policy for BC Parks released this past summer with a letter criticizing the size and scale of developments the policy allows, and the lack of public process involved in developing the policy. Attached to the letter was the FMC Guiding Principles for Roofed Accommodation document, which allows for modest, public oriented huts in limited areas in parks. Please see the article on roofed accommodation for more information. The FMC also sent a letter to the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Finance making a strong case for increased funding for parks. A submission on this issue was also provided to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services at their public hearings.

Backcountry Commercial Recreation Tenures

The FMC Recreation and Conservation Committee continues to respond to the many tenure and resort proposals in popular backcountry recreation areas across the Province. In many areas these tenures have the potential to pose significant threats to recreational access and impact backcountry experiences due to motorized activity, and the FMC are being vigilant in defending such areas and traditional use. This process is complicated due to the poor communication offered by government in regards to tenure proposals. In response the FMC has been working with government to improve proposal information on the website and improve the tenure referral process to include interest groups such as the FMC, Outdoor Recreation Council, Federation of BC Naturalists and others. In many cases this will include FMC clubs that are local to an area such as the KMC in the Kootenays.

The FMC has also been working with Government and tourism industry stakeholders to manage access, opportunities and experiences on Crown land. This work has included participation in the development of a new Adventure Tourism Tenuring Policy and an integrated Commercial Tourism and Recreation policy framework.

Motorized Use Conflicts

Pressures from and conflicts with motorized users in the backcountry continue to be a significant issue for FMC members and the non-motorized public. So we were encouraged by the recommendations for Off Road Vehicle (ORV) licensing and registration legislation put forward by the ORV Coalition. The FMC and Outdoor Recreation Council approved the final report put forward to government even though there were a few issues of concern with some recommendations. This legislation was important enough that we didn't want it derailed because of a few technical items in the recommendations. This was one of those rare processes where motorized groups, non –motorized groups, conservationists and other interest groups could all agree. Government had started to draft policy and legislation based on the recommendations, however we have now learned that Cabinet will not proceed with implementing any of the recommendations until 2008 if at all. Our MLAs need to hear loud and clear that this is important legislation for British Columbia and that it has been widely endorsed by most interest groups.

Resort Developments

The Juliet Creek Resort proposal intended for Juliet Creek and Coldwater Creek valleys near the Coquihalla Summit is moving to the next stage where it goes to the Environmental Assessment Office for review and approval. Cascade Environmental Resource Group has been retained by the Resort proponent, Westscapes Development Inc., to conduct existing use and impact studies including existing recreational use. The FMC have made a submission to this process describing non-motorized recreational use of the area. Included with this submission was an account of recreational user days by FMC members and estimates of other public use in the adjacent and surrounding areas. If this resort proposal goes ahead there will certainly be impacts to traditional backcountry skiing, climbing and hiking activities in the area since several key locations will be assumed by the Resort's Controlled Recreation Area (CRA) or on the border of the CRA. The proposed Juliet Creek resort will potentially have far reaching impacts for the environment, the economy and certainly the non-motorized recreational public. However the project seems to be receiving very little attention. The FMC have sent letters to both the Resort Development Branch of the Ministry of Tourism Sport and the Arts (MTSA) and the Environmental Assessment Office (EAO) raising our issues and concerns with the proposal. We will also work to raise the profile of this mega resort proposal.

In the north the ACC – Smither's Section has been able to resolve some of its issues with Ski Ride Smithers proposal to expand its area. This proposal would have restricting access to backcountry skiing and an important ice climbing area on Hudson Bay Mountain. The ice climbing area will not be included in the Controlled Recreation Zone (CRA) and reasonable access will be granted to the public for backcountry skiing. Meanwhile a large heli ski tenure for the Cambria Icefield is expected to be granted to Last Frontier Heli Skiing. This is despite the significant concerns raised by the FMC and local members.

Comox Glacier Trail and Access

The FMC continue to work to protect the Comox Glacier Trail from logging and restricted access. We have been working with West Coast Environmental Law and an independent lawyer to obtain a legal opinion on the official status of the trail and public rights to access it via private timber lands. We hope to have this opinion completed before the end of the year. In addition to the legal work the FMC are also submitting a formal complaint to the forest industry certification body that TimberWest subscribes to, the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, citing non-compliance to an objective that requires the company to protect and manage lands that are ecologically, geologically, historically, or culturally important in a manner that recognizes their special qualities. We are also conducting ongoing work communicating the importance of the trail to key politicians and economic groups. This is an important issue for the Vancouver Island clubs as the Comox Glacier Trail is one of the main access points to Strathcona Park. At a minimum we want a significant land/logging buffer for the trail. The legal work will also have bearing on other access issues on the Island and beyond.

Sea-to-Sky Land and Resource Management Plan Update

The Sea-to-Sky LRMP is still in the government-to-government process with local First Nations. In the meantime the Backcountry Forum signs have been approved and are expected to be put in this fall. Volunteers will be needed to help with this work so if you are interested contact Pat Harrison. Funding has also been provided by the province to print brochures and improve the

website.

Write Letters

We encourage members to write letters to government to keep the pressure on these issues and other issues. Following are e-mail addresses for key Ministers: Premier Gordon Campbell: Premier@gov.bc.ca, Pat Bell (Minister of Agriculture and Lands): Pat.Bell@gov.bc.ca, Stan Hagan (Minister of Tourism Sport and the Arts): Stan.Hagan@gov.bc.ca, Barry Penner (Minister of the Environment): Barry.Penner@gov.bc.ca, and Rich Coleman (Minister of Forests): Rich.Coleman@gov.bc.ca. You can also cc your email to your MLA. Faxes are also recommended.