

Skwaha Grazing Tenure Terminated

by Hans Roemer, Victoria
and Bob Scheer, Thompson River District

A decision important for the long-term conservation of an ecological reserve was reached at the Inter-agency Management Committee's (IAMC) meeting on December 1, 1998. Following Thompson River District Manager, Monty Downs' presentation, the IAMC agreed to discontinue the grazing tenure on the 850 ha Skwaha Lake Ecological Reserve near Lytton.

Grazing had been permitted by a proviso in the Order-in-Council creating the reserve in 1978, "subject to maintenance of good range condition as determined by the British Columbia Forest Service Range Division, and a representative of the Ecological Reserves Committee who will have control over stocking rates...". This proviso was later found to be "ultra vires", i.e. not legally admissible in the Order-in-Council. More importantly for the ecology of the reserve, decades of cattle grazing, even at a low intensity, had started to leave undeniable signs in the form of soil damage and introduced plants. On this basis BC Parks and before it, the Ecological Reserves Program staff had pleaded for the termination of grazing since the 1980s.

Skwaha Lake Ecological Reserve has been set aside mainly to protect an extremely rich flora. Spectacular mass displays of balsamroot, glacier lily, lupines, and other colourful



Skwaha Lake Ecological Reserve protects an extremely rich flora.

wildflowers are combined with high species and community diversity and with rare species and plant communities. The reserve also supports black bears and mule deer, and a large band of the re-introduced California bighorn sheep has made it their home.

The plant life in this reserve has special ethnobotanical significance as well. Traditionally, the native peoples of the region had annual summer camps in the adjacent Botanie Valley to gather plants for food and medicinal purposes. However, overgrazing and other disturbance has led to a decline in these native plant resources and to accelerated invasion of alien species in Botanie Valley and elsewhere. In contrast, and most

fortunately, all these plants important to First Nations are still present in abundance inside the reserve.

Twenty years after its creation Skwaha Lake Ecological Reserve will now fully assume the ecological and ethnobotanical benchmark function it was created to serve. □

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Articles from readers are welcome. Deadline for material in the next issue is March 1, 1999.

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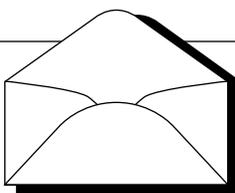
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Letters

*Erv Newcombe
Senior Park Ranger
South Vancouver Island District*

Dear Erv:

Re: November 26, 1998 Cowichan River Rescue

I would like to thank you personally and on behalf of BC Parks for the professional and proactive role you took in potentially saving the lives of three people in a November 26, 1998 rafting incident on the Cowichan River.

I understand, in speaking with staff and reading the newspaper accounts, that without your determination to assist these people (and despite their failure to heed to your repeated warnings) there would have been no doubt that one or two of them would have died in the river.

It is with these kind of actions displayed by you that day, while on duty, that prove the value of park rangers being available and equipped with the skills and experience (as you obviously are) to provide emergency services to park visitors, when necessary.

Thank you again on behalf of all of your colleagues at BC Parks. Your efforts reflect well on both you and the public service. Keep up the good work.

*Sincerely,
Denis O'Gorman
Assistant Deputy Minister*

A Sign of the Times

*by G. David Chater,
South Vancouver Island District*

Working cooperatively with various organizations, First Nations and government agencies is becoming more and more a "sign of the times" in BC Parks to further the management of protected areas.

Provincially, BC Parks is working in close cooperation with a number of organizations towards mutual goals in protected area management. These organizations include: a variety of land use planning tables (LRMPs); First Nations in "cooperative agreements"; the federal government in the Pacific Marine Heritage Legacy Program (PMHL) and Marine Protected Area Pilot Projects; and, provincial organizations such as the BC Museums Association.

Within the south Vancouver Island area, BC Parks is working closely with the regional districts in the Capital Region and Cowichan Valley on a

number of projects and in ongoing management in several parks.

With the Capital Regional District Parks Department (CRD) the focus has been on joint signage (*see photo page 3*), park management planning initiatives and publications such as "in park" brochures and the annual Parks Guide for Vancouver Island. The CRD has also been the recipient of a number of former provincial parks that have been transferred over the years to be included within the regional park system.

BC Parks and the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) have, in the past year, teamed up on a joint funding program within Cowichan River Provincial Park (which also includes the adjacent Sandy Pool Regional Park). The CVRD significantly

(continued on page 3) ►

("A Sign ..." continued from page 2)

contributes financially on an annual basis to the operation of the provincial park and BC Parks provides support to the operation of the small regional park. The local residents and political representatives of the area are extremely supportive of this cooperative arrangement and are now proposing a similar arrangement for West Shawnigan Lake and Memory Island Provincial Parks. These agreements between BC Parks and the CVRD are a "win-win" for agencies, taxpayers and park visitors.

Other collaborative projects upcoming in the CVRD area include the potential transfer of a Class "C" provincial park to the regional park system and joint participation with BC Parks on a section of the Trans Canada Trail.

BC Parks, in the south island, is not only working cooperatively with regional districts, but also with local First Nations. For example, BC Parks has made a proposal to the Cowichan Tribes to enter into a joint agreement on two reserves that are surrounded by Cowichan River Provincial Park.

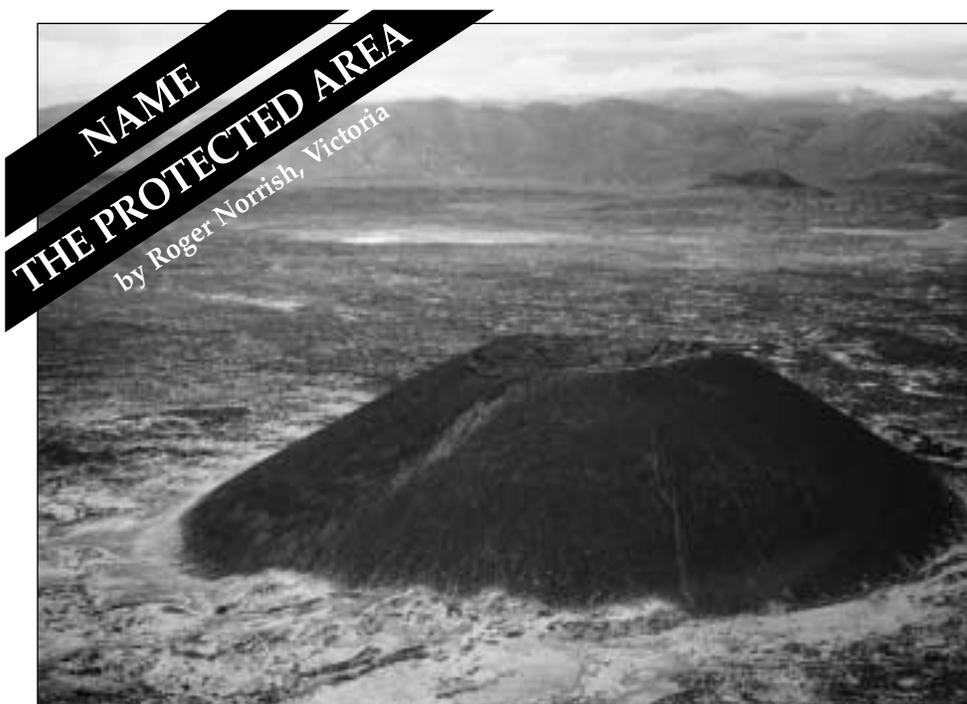
The proposal involves BC Parks "leasing" these two parcels of land and providing recreational facilities and services that are complementary to the adjacent provincial park but also provide some protection for the land (which is currently being damaged by unregulated use) and potential employment and training opportunities for Tribes' members. The Cowichan Tribes have a long-term goal to get into the "parks business", but need to develop some capacity within their organization to further this objective to eventually manage some park areas and also tourism-related infrastructure and services such as campgrounds and fishing cabins on their lands.

If this proposal comes to fruition, benefits will be achieved by both BC Parks (in further protection or enhancement of the provincial park) and Cowichan Tribes (in interim protection of their lands and employment and training opportunities for their people).

Cooperative arrangements are the new way of doing business and are a "sign of the times". □



BC Parks and the Capital Regional District Parks Department working together.



Volcanic cinder cones, wilderness expanses and spectacular wildlife highlight this special provincial park.

Wonderful names like Eve Cone, Cocoa Crater and Raspberry Pass provide an air of mystery about this park. Located west of Highway 37 in northwestern BC, this park is one of the most magnificent protected areas in Canada. Established in 1972, the park is dominated by a vast mountain created by the violent forces of volcanic eruptions that occurred thousands of years ago. The southern portion of the park contains volcanic rock so colourful that the mountains are called the "Spectrum Range". Should you visit this park, you will experience solitude and an unfettered wild landscape. If you are fortunate, you may even see stone sheep, timber wolves, moose and Ptarmigan. What is the name of this protected area? And can you explain what the geological term "shield volcano" means? (Answer on page 7). □

Kootenay District – 1998 Highlights

by Ida Cale, Kootenay District

At an end-of-the season meeting, the Kootenay District staff expressed the desire to share some of the highlights of 1998. Visions is focusing on conservation so some projects of that nature are featured. Many other works were suggested by the Kootenay staff including a solar hydro-electric installation in Bugaboo Park, cable-car installation in the Purcells and projects undertaken by volunteers and the E-team. If you are curious for more details, contact Ida Cale at (250) 422-4210.



▲ Jikke Stegeman, an E-team intern, plants pine grass plugs at Wasa Lake Provincial Park, part of the Grassland Ecosystem Restoration Project.



▲ Zoology Workshop. One of seven programs of the Biologists and Biodiversity Conference "Bringing Youth and Scientists Together" held September 1998. Organized by BC Parks and East Kootenay Environmental Society. Financial support provided by BC Information, Science and Technology Agency and Mountain Equipment Co-op.



▲ The Backcountry Horsemen of BC from Cranbrook and Creston volunteered their time and equipment to pack-up and pack-out garbage from the Height of the Rockies Provincial Park. Warren Smith loads up his horse.



▲ Fly fishing demonstration at Norbury Lake Provincial Park's Flying Fish Festival, put on by the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, interpretive contractor and volunteers and sponsored by Mountain Man Outdoors store.



▲ Kikomun Creek Provincial Park – A trial project for harvesting a non-native plant species (St. John's Wort) for medicinal purposes.



▲ Grassland Ecosystem Restoration prescribed burn in Kikomun Creek Provincial Park – BC Parks, BC Forest Service and BC Environment.

Composting Toilets – A Room with a View

by Michael Kerfoot, Sunergy Systems Ltd.

I knew it was going to be a good project from the outset. Robin Draper, Recreation Officer from Prince George, phoned to see if we could meet while he was in the Banff area on holiday. A bureaucrat that dedicates some holiday time to talk about toilets suggests auspicious beginnings. I have yet to hear his wife's interpretation of such omens!

I was asked to provide Phoenix composting toilet facilities at three high-use campgrounds in Mt. Robson Provincial Park – Whitehorn, Berg lake and Robson Pass. My intent in designing such buildings is to counter all negative user experiences with conventional toilet facilities. Typical facilities are smelly, dark, cramped and institutionally austere. The Phoenix composting tank assures the cubicles are odor-free and the crowned and permanently coated floor keep it easy to clean. The inside is bright with natural daylighting and is comfortably spacious with a shelf to set one's pack. A shuttered window invites the glacier cloaked mountain viewscape to uplift your meditations. The building reflects a playful craftsmanship in such elements as curved decking, decorative handrail joinery, rock cairns as post caps and entry arch. The building is finished in rough-sawn cedar siding.

It has taken us more than two decades of dedicated research to design the Phoenix compost chamber to successfully emulate an ideal garden compost pile. What particular maintenance is involved? Shavings are added regularly to keep the mass loose and well-drained. Bins located beside the toilets allow users to assist with this. The composting tank includes a pump that re-circulates liquid from a liquid treatment chamber back on top of the pile. This

(continued on page 6) ►

("Composting..." continued from page 5)

moistens the pile and continually re-inoculates the fresh material with important microorganisms. Top tines are rotated occasionally to mix, level and aerate the mass.

Typically once a year some composted material is easily removed from the bottom of the chamber. The material will be several years old and is not unpleasant in terms of odor, texture, and appearance. It can be disposed onsite.

The power needs for a small fan are provided by a solar panel mounted atop a nearby tree. The panel also supplies power to a door counter system to track usage. We've got your number!



The Phoenix composting toilet – an attractive, odorless alternative.

There remains the obvious question: "Why bother?" In backcountry settings users generally want minimal infrastructure provided. But they want good toilets! A Phoenix facility is an extremely effective means of communicating the park's environmental ethic and commitment. The park wins praise and support from the public. Conventional pit toilets raise serious concerns with contamination of surrounding water sources. A Phoenix facility safeguards these resources. When used heavily, a pit toilet will often be so unpleasant as to encourage many to use the surrounding bush with the attendant health and aesthetic compromises. Pit toilets contribute to the habituation of many animals. Digging new toilet holes has a significant impact upon a site. Such efforts,

although a hidden cost by in-house staff, are a recurring cost burden. The Phoenix does it right and does it once.

In May-June 1998, we constructed the facilities. Throughout we experi-

enced a wonderful comradeship and support with all park personnel. We were treated as an integral part of the park's family. And now the park is part of our growing Phoenix family. □

Tweedsmuir Beetle Attack

by Debbie Cichowski, Skeena District

In 1994 the Canadian Forest Service and Ministry of Forests detected a mountain pine beetle attack area on the north side of Eutsuk Lake in northern Tweedsmuir Park, four kilometers from the park boundary. The attack area was 5,000 ha in size with about 15% of the trees attacked. That fall BC Parks and the Ministry of Forests began planning for managing the beetles in the park, reviewing several management strategies. The strategy selected was to concentrate beetles into a small area using pheromone baits, then to conduct a prescribed burn in that area. The project was approved for a four year period.

In choosing a management strategy, values both within and outside of the park were considered. The Tweedsmuir-Entiako caribou population summers in northern Tweedsmuir Park and relies on old growth pine forests just east of the park for winter range. Also, that part of the park is zoned wilderness with no current adjacent access. Another park value considered was the forest itself. Fire and beetles are a natural part of the park ecosystems. Successful fire suppression over the last 40 years has resulted in a landscape of primarily older forests which are most susceptible to mountain pine beetle attack. Values outside of the park include the proposed Entiako protected area for caribou winter range, the spring migration corridor and commercial forests.

The objective of the project was to reduce the number of beetles exiting the park. The concern was that if beetles reached epidemic levels outside of the park, management outside of the park would take the form of extensive logging. This would have negative impacts on the caribou herd and the associated access would erode the wilderness quality of the park.

From 1995 – 1997 burns were conducted in September when risks associated with burning were low. In 1995, 650 ha were burned and in 1997, 260 ha. Poor weather conditions forced the cancellation of the burns in 1996. For 1998 the strategy was amended to conduct burns in August when desired fire weather conditions were more likely to occur. Strict burning conditions are required for killing mountain pine beetles. Public information sessions were conducted in March 1998 advising of the change in strategy.

Although much of the province experienced a hot dry summer in 1998, that was not the case in northern Tweedsmuir Park. Rain in early August prevented desirable burning conditions from occurring for the rest of the summer and the proposed burns were canceled.

With favourable weather conditions for mountain pine beetles over the last few years, the attack area has increased to 10,000 – 15,000 ha (of which over 50% is old attack) and beetle attack centres are establishing outside of the park, including within the proposed Entiako protected area. Due to the size of the current attack area, the strategy now is to concentrate efforts on conducting a prescribed burn for fuel management at the eastern end of the park (less restrictive burning conditions are required for a fire) and to manage beetle populations outside of the park. BC Parks is continuing to work with Forest Service and Environment staff in managing the attack areas in the park. An article in a forthcoming issue of *Visions* will report on what strategies are being undertaken to deal with the mountain pine beetle in the proposed Entiako protected area adjacent to the park. □



Steller sea lions at Race Rocks.

Below the Water Mark

by Doug Biffard

Did you know that 1998 was census year? Well, it was – if you were a Steller sea lion.

Every five years sea lions from California to Russia are counted. In early summer biologists from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and similar agencies in the USA and Russia travel to known rookeries – places where sea lions come ashore to rest, socialize and bear young – to take census. Pregnant female Steller sea lions give birth in early summer. For a few weeks after birth, newborn sea lion pups remain ashore as they have not yet learned to swim. Nursing females also spend time ashore tending their pups. Biologists find that this is the best time to count them to get the most amount of information.

There are three species of sea lion in BC. The California sea lion is the most common. It does not breed here, but both male and female adults spend time in BC feeding and socializing. Steller sea lions are less numerous, but do frequent rookeries

like the Race Rocks Ecological Reserve. Stellers breed in BC at two major nursery sites: Kerouard Islands in Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Anne Valle (Triangle Island) Ecological Reserve. The third sea lion is the Northern fur seal which is rarely seen near shore.

Adult sea lions are easily counted from the air, while pups are often hidden against their mothers. In the past, accurate pup counts were conducted by landing at the nurseries and chasing off the adult sea lions. Pups could then be directly counted, as they have not yet learned to swim. As you can imagine this caused quite a commotion. The effect on sea lion pups has been considered minimal but there are a number of good reasons to reduce the occasions when this technique is used.

Sea lions, like many seabirds, select remote, exposed islands for nurseries. Field researchers landing on these islands disturb nesting seabirds as well as the sea lions. Many of the bird species are

endangered (red listed), their populations threatened by pollution, reduced food abundance and changed nesting sites. Steller sea lions have also declined dramatically in the Aleutian Islands area. Limiting human visits to these isolated islets might help some of the more sensitive species. Fewer visits would also reduce the risk to field personnel. Sea conditions and rocky shores make boat access difficult, if not dangerous.

Last summer the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, with funding support from Gwaii Haanas and BC Parks, piloted a high-resolution photography technique to count pups at the two BC nurseries. Reliable pup counts should be possible from the high-resolution images produced by this method. Conventional 35 mm photography was also used, so the two methods can be compared. On-site beach counts were not used for the '98 census. Marine Mammal Biologist, Peter Olesiuk, says that if the two photographic methods compare well, beach counts will not normally be used.

Rik Simmons, Resource Officer for Strathcona District, says that the support and communications role that BC Parks plays in this type of research highlights the purpose of designating special biologically significant sites as Ecological Reserves. □

Answer (from page 3):
The protected area is Mount Edziza Provincial Park. A shield volcano is a geological term describing a broad, gently sloping cone of a flat dome-like shape, usually several tens or hundreds of square kilometres in extent, built chiefly of overlapping and inter-laced fingers of basaltic lava flows. Mount Edziza is an excellent example of a shield volcano.

NAME THE PROTECTED AREA.

Unsung Heros

by Michael Goodhelpsen, Strathcona District

There are people working for BC Parks who are not getting enough credit for their contributions. They are the seasonal rangers and auxiliary staff who typically start work in the spring and are gone in the fall. Since many of them work in the field all season, people in the office don't really get to know these associates and vice-versa.

In my office, the majority of the seasonal staff are backcountry rangers. A backcountry ranger works in all weather conditions, travelling on foot in remote areas with only what they can pack on their backs. They pack their accommodation, food and tools. No motels, restaurants, or tool boxes in the back of the truck. They are a hardy bunch who don't complain about the weather and they put their hearts into the job. No one who has had the opportunity of working side by side with these people looks forward to the day auxiliary staff are laid off. For the laid off employee it may mean back to school, however, for the majority of people I work with, it means trying to make ends meet before their winter job starts (or unemployment insurance kicks in). With the ever-shrinking budgets the dedicated people who come back year after year have to consider whether it's worth coming back.

I sympathize with the auxiliary employees but I can't help feeling guilty too. I came to BC Parks in July 1996 as a result of a major restructuring at the Ministry of Transportation and Highways. I was placed in the Senior Park Ranger position for the Strathcona backcountry area. I did not realize the wealth of experience that I stepped in front of to be Senior Ranger. At the time, there were nine seasonal rangers working in Strathcona Park's backcountry with a wide range of education and experience. Most seasonal rangers that I work with have hopes of landing a full-time position with BC Parks and each of them truly has a dedication to our first provincial park. Fortunately for me, the grumbling was not directed toward me but rather to the union rules and government policies.

I have also taken on the role of shop steward at our Black Creek office. It is an unenviable task and I often find that I have to be on two sides of a fence. As steward I work with the rangers to try and improve their status within the BCGEU Master and Component agreements. One success has been the change in the component agreement that will allow an auxiliary employee to apply on "In-Service" job postings after accumulating 1827 hours of work. The previous rule required auxiliary employees to accumulate 1400 hours within 15 months which is nearly impossible when their work terms are often only three months long. As a union steward I will continue to push for more recognition for these dedicated people. As a regular parks employee I encourage everyone to put themselves into the boots of an auxiliary parks employee.

Perhaps those of us who spend time at a desk are forgetting that our parks are outside. Rather than making it easier to work in an office lets try and make it easier to work outside. I use the line that I am the "Lone Ranger of Strathcona" because, for several months of the year, it is true. Strathcona Provincial Park is about 250,000 ha so my park presence is spread very thin. Are we committed to protecting our parks or not? Can we protect a park from inside our offices without ever going to see what is happening?

I would personally like to take my hat off to the rangers for whom I have so much respect. These are the people who connect our executive to the parks. They are the people who communicate with park visitors and take kudos and criticisms. They are the people who clean toilets, repair bridges and boardwalks, and tactfully enforce the rules. They bust their humps! "When the rubber hits the road" these are the people who keep our parks alive. □

Caption Contest Winners

The winner of our December 1998 issue's Caption Contest is:

What do you mean you used the non-committed funds for lunch!

Gary Glinz, Skeena District

Congratulations, Gary. A T-shirt printed with the photo and your caption will be heading your way soon!

Honourable mention goes to the following submissions:

I told you if you pulled on his tie, his head and his arms at the same time, he coughs up more money!

Gary Glinz, Skeena District

And as the rogue grizzly Koyl was captured by parks staff, Lynn sadly thought, "This one will need to be put down."

Greg Gudgeon, Victoria

Man-Beast or ADM-Furby? PMC searches for the self-destruct button.

John Furney, Victoria, HQ

BC PARKS: Always working as a team to accomplish our goals.

Dave Richmond, North Okanagan

Thanks for all your great entries!

