

# *Bulkley TSA Strategic Recreation Study*

## *Executive Summary*

Starting in the fall of 1999, the Bulkley-Cassiar Forest District began a strategic review of outdoor recreation activity on crown lands in the Bulkley portion of the Forest District. The purpose of the review is to establish a long-range community vision for forest recreation in the area and to develop strategies to implement that vision.

This document presents a number of possible community vision statements for outdoor recreation in the Bulkley TSA as well as a series of possible strategies to implement this vision. Agency, licensee and public review is now needed to evaluate and revise study materials to ensure the forthcoming Strategic Recreation Plan will best meet the needs of all concerned.

An analysis was completed based on

- Existing information from previous planning processes
- A number of related technical reports
- Guidebooks
- Local knowledge
- Internet research regarding outdoor recreation and demographic trends

Public input has involved informal meetings to complete descriptions of recreation resources, and to record levels & types of existing recreation use. Community direction regarding recreation management was taken from the 1998 Bulkley Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) and the 1997 Recreation Access Management Plan (RAMP). These two plans provide numerous references to management for recreation and tourism values. These references provided a general sense of how the public would like to have recreation opportunities managed in the Bulkley Plan area.

The review considered:

- Existing recreation opportunities and use patterns
- The affect of future forest development on recreation opportunities
- The regional context of recreation features and opportunities found in the Bulkley TSA
- Issues and opportunities related to outdoor recreation
- Recreation management direction supplied in the LRMP and RAMP planning documents,
- Trends affecting outdoor recreation activities.

*Following is a brief outline of the report.*

**Section 1.0 Introduction:** A short overview of the study and the format used to present the material.

**Section 2.0 Regional context:** A review of recreation opportunities in surrounding forest districts to assist in identifying which local recreation opportunities are regionally, provincially or internationally significant.

**Section 3.0 Methodology:** A detailed description of the process used to gather and analyze the data used in this study.

**Section 4.0 Trends:** An analysis of local, provincial, national and international recreation and demographic trends. This analysis helps identify the types of recreation activities most likely to be important in the Bulkley area in the future.

**Sections 5.0 Trails, 6.0 Alpine areas, 7.0 Lakes, 8.0 Recreation Sites and 9.0 Rivers are all laid out in the following format:**

- Identification of issues, opportunities and possible community vision for recreation activities
- Background information including management direction from the LRMP and RAMP
- Resource descriptions
- Current recreation descriptions
- Related trends
- A discussion of the issues and possible management scenarios
- Possible management strategies to implement community vision statements.

### ***Regionally significant recreation opportunities***

A regional analysis determined that the following recreation opportunities were significant in the Bulkley Planning area:

- A regionally significant trail network
- Many trails close to area communities suitable for day use
- By far the best access to alpine areas of all five districts for both motorized and non-motorized users
- A cross-country ski facility in the Community Forest which is arguably the best in northern BC
- A high potential for backpacking and camping in accessible and attractive alpine areas
- Provincially significant river recreation opportunities for whitewater rafting and kayaking
- Internationally significant angling opportunities
- Recreation opportunities to use lakes and recreation sites that are locally significant rather than regionally significant.

### ***Trends Analysis***

Trends analysis was used to determine both the current level of participation and changes in levels of participation for various outdoor recreation activities of importance in the Bulkley TSA. In addition, a review of changing demographics identified trends which will be important to strategic recreation planning. The factors of most interest are an aging population, an expected increased demand for outdoor recreation opportunities, on-going growth in the eco-tourism market, and expected demand for recreation opportunities close to urban centers.

Based on the analysis the following activities are expected to have the highest participation rates: walking, day hiking, snowmobiling, canoeing/rafting, kayaking, fishing and cross-country skiing. Along with these primary activities a number of secondary activities are to be expected, these include sightseeing, wildlife viewing and bird watching. Moderate participation rates are expected for mountain biking, backpacking & camping, motor boating, picnicking, camping in forest recreation sites, ski touring and hunting.

## ***Study Highlights - Issues, opportunities, community vision and strategies***

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**Issues:** A definition of the problem or area of concern.

**Opportunities:** The factors which offer a way of resolving an issue

**Possible vision statements:** Describes the desired future condition. This study has produced a series of possible vision statements for the community to evaluate, modify and approve. It is recognized the community may wish to establish other vision statements as well. Once these modified vision statements are approved they will govern recreation management on crown lands.

### ***Trails issues, opportunities, vision***

- **Trails issue #1** Many recreation users feel a fair and equitable balance of recreation opportunities for both motorized and non-motorized recreation users has yet to be established.
- **Opportunity:** An opportunity exists to review the existing situation and address any imbalances found through new management strategies.  
**A possible community vision:** Informed choices now provide opportunities of similar quality for both motorized and non-motorized trail users.  
**Potential strategies to meet this community vision:** See Alpine issue #2
- **Issue #2:** A growing number of ATV users are actively expanding their use of the land base. In some cases ATVs are being used in fragile environments and some damage is occurring.  
**Opportunity:** The opportunity exists to develop an information and education program which will help ATV users find appropriate places to recreate and reduce the impact of ATV use on sensitive terrain  
**A possible community vision:** ATV users access information which allows them to use attractive and appropriate areas. Environmentally damaging use of ATVs has decreased.  
**Potential strategies to meet this community vision:** See section 6.5.2

- Trails Issue #3:** A number of trends point to a growing demand for additional near-urban trails which may be used for regular outdoor recreation activities such as walking, jogging, bicycling, birding, and nature study.

**Opportunity:** the opportunity exists to expand near urban trails and connections to nearby trails in provincial forests

**A possible community vision:** A network of near-urban and inter-urban trails provides a high quality of life for residents who appreciate accessible recreation opportunities near home. Agencies and user groups are working towards expanding near-urban trail opportunities and linking urban trails with nearby trails in provincial forests.

**Potential strategies to meet this community vision:** [See section 5.6.3](#)
- Trails Issue #4:** Canadian demographics indicate a large increase in the proportion of our population that are senior citizens. These active seniors will have a greater need for higher standard; gentle gradient trails and easier access to potential bird and wildlife viewing areas.

**Opportunity:** The opportunity exists to proactively plan for the trail recreation needs of a fast growing population of seniors.

**A Possible community vision:** Numerous well-maintained trails suitable for seniors are found within an hour's drive of Bulkley Valley communities. A high priority is placed on maintaining and upgrading trails suitable for seniors and new trails suitable for seniors have a higher priority than new trails un-suitable for seniors.

**Potential strategies to meet this community vision:** [See section 5.6.4](#)
- Trails issue #5:** Forest development is going to proceed in areas near existing recreation trails and has the potential to negatively impact recreation experiences.

**Opportunity:** the opportunity exists to develop strategies which will minimize development impact on the recreation experience

**A possible community vision:** Forest development and timber harvesting has either a positive or neutral affect on the recreation use of trails.

**Potential strategies to meet this community vision:** [See section 5.6.5](#)
- Trails issue #6:** The Bulkley TSA (formerly the Bulkley Forest District) has over 45 recreation trails on provincial forest land; many of these trails have had little maintenance in recent years.

**Opportunity:** The opportunity exists to safeguard this valuable resource by developing and funding a trails maintenance program.

**A possible community vision:** Well-maintained trails in the Bulkley TSA enhance opportunities for a diverse range of recreational values and uses. Funding priorities for trail inventory, maintenance and new trail development are established and ensure that all available resources are used wisely.

**Potential strategies to meet this community vision:** [See section 5.6.6](#)
- Issue #7:** Demand for new trails has the potential to utilize scarce resources required for maintenance or up-grading of highly used existing trails.

**Opportunity:** The opportunity exists for local user groups and government agencies to establish accepted priorities for trails that funding agencies would use to evaluate where to allocate limited resources.

**A possible community vision:** Proposals for new trails are evaluated against the needs for funding on-going maintenance and up grading of existing trails as well as over-all socio-economic benefits.

**Potential strategies to meet this community vision:** [See section 6.5.7](#)
- Issue #8:** Current information on trail conditions, trail head locations, trail features and trail distances is often not easily available for trail users.

**Opportunity:** The opportunity exists to continue up-dating the database prepared for this project to maintain current information.

**A Possible community vision:** Local people and area visitors can easily access current information regarding a trail they are interested in using.

**Potential strategies to meet this community vision:** See section 6.5.8

## *Alpine areas issues, opportunities, vision*

**Alpine areas issue #1 – Few high quality opportunities for alpine ski touring close to Smithers** The ski touring community feels there are few high quality, non-motorized alpine areas suitable for a day's outing from the community of Smithers. The RAMP resolved some disputes over individual areas but did not arrive at an equitable balance of opportunities across the Bulkley Planning area (former Bulkley Forest District).

**Opportunity:** As forest development occurs, new alpine areas will be accessible for winter recreation. The opportunity exists to develop agreements for equitable use of these areas and to review opportunities for use in other areas.

**Possible community vision:**

- Informed choices are made to allocate opportunities of similar quality for both motorized and non-motorized recreation in alpine areas
- All areas considered desirable to snowmobilers and ski tourers are encompassed in the accepted management solution
- Other user groups affected by designations or agreements are consulted in the development of a management solution

### **Potential scenarios**

- **Maintain the status quo where all areas not previously designated are available to all users**
- **Manage harvesting to leave natural barriers with the intent of keeping some areas non-motorized**
- **Negotiate a new sharing agreement between snowmobilers and skiers**
- **Designate further non-motorized areas**

*For a discussion of this issue please see section 6.5.2*

**Alpine areas issue #2: Opportunities for non-motorized wilderness recreation may be significantly reduced over time** (primitive and semi-primitive ROS classes)

[For definitions of primitive & semi-primitive ROS classes please see text box under table 6.4]

In the wilderness end of the recreation opportunity spectrum not only is the amount of area classed as primitive/semi-primitive being reduced but also there is no process in place to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of motorized & non-motorized opportunities on the wild lands remaining. Failure to manage this issue will lead to the loss of non-motorized wilderness recreation opportunities which will be difficult, if not impossible, to regain. There are a number of reasons why it is very important this doesn't happen (refer to section 6.5.3.1).

Some allocation of recreation opportunities has occurred across the planning area (the RAMP process). Continuing contention between skiers and snowmobilers for opportunities is a result of only partial allocation of opportunities during the RAMP process. While solutions are suggested (section 6.5.2.1) which may relieve the competition for skiing and snowmobiling opportunities these solutions do not address the underlying problem which is the lack of an overall allocation of the land base for different types of recreation/tourism opportunities.

In other words, the problem may be addressed by deciding which types of recreation are acceptable in what parts of the planning area and also which types of recreation or tourism may not be acceptable.

Contention in the future is likely to be between motorized and non-motorized users but competition for recreation resources may also occur between local residents and commercial recreation interests, between horseback riders and hikers, between mountain bikers and other trail users or between current users and users with new types of technology such as powered scooters. The most difficult opportunities to maintain will be primitive/wilderness type opportunities and semi-primitive non-motorized opportunities.

**Opportunity:** An opportunity exists to maintain a fair & equitable distribution of **primitive** and **semi-primitive** recreation opportunities across the plan area through management actions

**A possible community vision:** Both **primitive** and **semi-primitive non-motorized** recreation opportunity classes continue to exist in the planning areas and user opportunities are distributed in a fair and equitable fashion. Definitions of these opportunity classes describe the types of recreation which are appropriate in each class.

**Potential scenarios**

- **Scenario 1 – designate percentages of the land base as primitive and semi-primitive non-motorized**
- **Scenario 2 - designate particular areas as primitive and semi-primitive non-motorized**
- **Scenario 3 – designate particular areas on an interim basis**
- **Scenario 4 – continue with status quo management**

For a discussion of this issue please refer to [section 6.5.3](#)

## ***Lakes issues, opportunities, vision***

**Lakes Issue #1 - Loss of wilderness lakes:** On reviewing future development as mandated in the LRMP, it is anticipated that only sixteen lakes would be more than 200 metres from a road and four of those are in parks. Some of the best lake angling opportunities are found at remote lakes. Remote lakes provide wilderness recreation opportunities sought after by local residents and adventure tourists including hiking, wildlife viewing, scenic viewing and undisturbed natural settings. Eco-tourists are not likely to be as interested in more accessible lakes.

**Opportunity:** Many lakes in the Bulkley TSA do not have road access (see table 7.2). Decisions can be made regarding what type of access is desirable and what other management actions are required to maintain a range of recreation opportunities at these lakes.

**Possible community vision statements:**

- Permanent roads will be laid out to maintain maximum possible distance from all lakes in the **Backcountry Trail, Backcountry and Wilderness** lake classes [\(see definitions in section 7.5.2.1\)](#)
- No trail access will be up-graded to allow new motorized use to any lakes
- Roads currently providing access to lakes will not be deactivated

**Potential Strategies to meet this community vision:** Suggested strategies are detailed in section [7.5.2](#)

**Lakes issue #2 -Visual landscape management around wilderness lakes:** Undisturbed views are one of the most valued features of backcountry and wilderness lakes. At the present time there are no visual landscape management objectives for many remote lakes and much of the recreation value of these lakes will be lost if logging or mining activity disturbs the viewscape.

**Opportunity:** At the present time eighteen of the twenty lakes in the Backcountry and Wilderness Classes— all with Moderate to Very High attractiveness ratings, (See columns 3-5 in table 7.3), have little or no modification to the forest cover caused by industrial activity within their viewscape. The opportunity exists to minimize the visual impact of harvesting on the viewscapes seen from these lakes.

**Possible community vision:** Visual landscape qualities at backcountry and wilderness lakes are maintained in near natural conditions.

***Possible strategies for managing viewscapes from remote lakes:***

Suggested lakes to apply the following strategies to are: Farewell North, Little Joe, McQuarrie, Farewell, Four Lakes, Reisetser Lakes, Silvern Lakes, Mooseskin Johnny, Touhy, Netalzul, North, Mulwain, Coppermine, South, Nilkitkwa North, Un-named lakes south of Sicintine, Onerka and Hillary

- Complete visual landscape inventories on these lakes with highest priority going to lakes where visual impact could occur soonest.
- Develop Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs), which minimize the visual impact of harvesting on these lakes.
- Incorporate the approved VQO's into forest development plans.

## **Recreation sites issues, opportunities, vision**

**Recreation sites issue #1 Recreation site maintenance uses scarce funds.** There are no objective criteria in place to evaluate whether these expenditures are the “best value” that can be had. Another way of putting this - does maintaining recreation sites provide greater benefits than improving maintenance on highly used trails?

**Opportunity:** The opportunity exists to consult with recreation users to determine what priorities they would set for resource expenditures for outdoor recreation in the Bulkley TSA.

**Possible community vision:** Funds available for forest recreation maintenance and development are used in ways that provide the greatest benefit to forest recreation users.

**Potential strategies:**

- Seek community input on funding priorities

**Possible outcomes:**

- All forest recreation sites continue to be maintained to current standards
- Some recreation sites are allowed to revert to nature and the recaptured funding is spent on higher priorities

**Recreation sites issue #2 - Babine Weir area:** Anglers using the new recreation site away from the river reportedly feel the site requires improvements. This site was developed primarily to reduce potential for negative grizzly bear/human interaction in the weir area. Many people who used to camp along the river wish to stay along the river and it is more difficult to get them to move to a new site if that new site is of a lower quality.

**Opportunity:** The opportunity exists to make an easier transition to camping away from the river if the new recreation site is improved through development of a water source and more attractive camping sites.

**Possible community vision:** People enjoy the quality of camping at the new recreation site near the Babine Weir.

**Potential strategies:**

- Evaluate the new site and facilitate any improvements which are viewed necessary to encourage anglers to use it.

**Recreation sites issue #3 - There are relatively few recreation sites in the Bulkley area.**

Compared to the adjacent forest districts of Fort St. James, Morice and Lakes there are relatively few recreation sites, although the number of sites is roughly equivalent to those found in the Kispiox and Kalum district.

**Opportunity:** Opportunities exist to develop additional recreation sites on lakes in the Bulkley TSA - Hankin Lake was mentioned as a location where a new site could be developed in the 1998 LRMP document. With increasing angling use of the Bulkley River and increasing kayaking use on many area rivers, recreation sites which function as put-in, take-out points and picnic locations may become desirable (This is discussed further in **section 9.0** – River recreation management).

**Possible community vision:** Demands for additional recreation sites are evaluated through objective criteria which determines the best use of available funding.

**Potential strategies:**

- New sites will only be developed when increased demand justifies them and their cost/benefit has been objectively evaluated along side other potential development and maintenance projects

## **Rivers issues, opportunities, vision**

### **Issues and opportunities:**

The Bulkley River is seeing large increases in the numbers of users. With this increase, conflict is beginning to occur between boaters, anglers and other users. Land owners who have previously allowed public access to the river across their lands are starting to consider whether they wish to continue doing so. Also, there are currently no mechanisms in place to limit use levels (except for anglers). If use continues to grow, users may no longer be able to have the kind of recreation experience they would like to have on the river.

River recreation activities are undertaken by many different user groups including: anglers, rafters, kayakers, tubers, canoeists and others. Management of these activities is conducted by many different government agencies including: The Ministry of Forests, BC Parks, BC Fish and Wildlife, The Department of Fisheries and Oceans, BC Crown assets and Lands, The Department of Transport and likely some others. Coordinating the large number of user groups and management agencies in a way that positive action can be taken is a large task. The most significant opportunity is that existing conflicts between users are relatively low.

### **Possible community vision for river recreation:**

A Bulkley River recreation management plan minimizes conflict between users and user groups, access points are identified and secured and river users feel that use on rivers is within social carrying capacity.

### **Possible strategy:**

- Management agencies work with user groups to develop a river recreation plan when they are requested to do so
- No direct management of river recreation is put in place
- Investigation is done to find out what kinds of management strategies could be utilized to minimize future conflicts on the river and maintain future public access to the river