



DRAFT Issues & Alternatives Document

RECREATION

Dec 16, 2007



Acknowledgements

This draft document was produced by the Project Team for the Chilliwack River Watershed Strategy as part of the Issues and Alternatives phase of the project.

The following individuals are thanked for their invaluable contributions of time and information, which was used in the development of this document:

- David Barnes, Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Doug Wilson, Fraser Valley Regional District Parks
- Gord Gadsden, Fraser Valley Regional District Parks
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This acknowledgement is solely intended to recognize the numerous individuals who contributed to the preparation of this document. These individuals are not responsible for the information or the recommendations made within the document, and the document does not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of all of these individuals. The report is a product of the CRWS Project Team, and it is the Project Team that is ultimately responsible for this document. All feedback should be directed at them and not to the individuals acknowledged above.

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Chilliwack River Watershed Strategy Issues & Alternatives:

RECREATION

1.0 General Description of the Issue

The Chilliwack River Watershed supports among the highest volume of recreational use of any watershed in the Province. Approximately 1.5 million users or more visited the Chilliwack River Valley in 2005 (e.g., from Vedder Crossing to Chilliwack Lake).¹ Outdoor enthusiasts pursue a range of activities in the watershed, including angling, kayaking, rafting, canoeing and sport boating on Chilliwack Lake, swimming, tubing, camping, hiking, mountaineering, rock climbing, paragliding, mountain biking, caving, horseback riding, wildlife viewing, dirt biking, ATVing, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing. The high level of recreational use, combined with the broad diversity of recreational and other land uses (e.g., development, forestry, etc.) that occur within the watershed, has resulted in significant recreation-related issues:

- Overnight use of public lands that are not specifically designated or managed for overnight use, which can disturb residents/visitors (e.g., noise), pollute the watershed (e.g., human waste, garbage), and damage the natural environment (e.g., tree cutting, erosion, soil compaction)
- Impacts on sensitive natural areas (e.g., alpine areas, riparian areas, wetlands) and cultural sites from a high concentration of recreational users at certain sites in the watershed, especially sites that are not actively managed for recreational use
- Disturbance of fish and wildlife by recreational users
- Dumping of waste on private and public lands (refer to the Illegal Dumping section)
- Conflicts between different recreational user groups (see also Angling Behaviour section)
- Conflicts between residents and recreational users
- Introduction and spread of invasive species (see also the Invasive Species section)
- Concerns about the potential over-consumption of certain fish and wildlife species
- Public safety concerns associated with visitor parking along Chilliwack lake Road, the use of weapons (e.g., firearms) in the valley, and fires during bans (e.g., increased risk of interface fires)

¹ Wilson, D. Fraser Valley Regional District. Pers. comm.. Note that this number does not include the months of October, November, and December. A high number of fisherpersons visit the watershed during these months.

- Theft and vandalism

These issues are a watershed concern primarily because of the negative impacts on fish and wildlife and their habitat. However, these recreational issues also have negative social and economic impacts, such as increasing conflict between different user groups and high costs incurred by public agencies and private organizations/individuals to mitigate the impacts of recreational users (e.g., cleaning up garbage and rehabilitating damaged habitat).

Due to the immense size and complexity of recreation-related issues in the watershed and the existence of ongoing processes to address these issues in the watershed, this issues and alternatives report does not fully explore this issue and all of the potential options for addressing the issue. Rather, this report will provide a brief overview of the types of uses that were noted as a concern during public consultations and project team meetings, a description of key past/current initiatives undertaken to address these concerns, and some suggestions for next steps with the primary recommendation being the continuation/expansion of existing processes to investigate and better address these issues.

2.0 Specific Examples

During project team meetings and public consultations, the following recreation-related concerns were raised (note that future research is needed to investigate the severity and relative rankings):

- Damage to riparian areas (e.g., tree cutting, erosion, soil compaction, vegetation removal, dumping of waste) along Chilliwack River and some tributaries by visitors who camp overnight in non-designated and non-managed campsites
- Pollution of Chilliwack River and its tributaries by overnight users who dump garbage and waste, including human waste, within riparian areas or directly into waterways
- Disturbance of residents by users who camp overnight in non-designated campsites between Vedder Crossing and Slesse Park
- Damage to cultural and archaeological sites located in and around recreation areas or along trails
- Confrontations and conflicts between hunters, particularly bear hunters, and other recreational users, residents, and wildlife in the Post Creek and Yukalalup area
- The potential disturbance of non-motorized recreationists (e.g., canoeists, swimmers, anglers) and fish and wildlife (e.g., particularly species of concern, such as sockeye salmon) by power boats and personal watercraft on Chilliwack Lake

- The introduction and spread of invasive aquatic plants to/within Chilliwack Lake/River by boats and people and subsequent negative impacts to native flora and fauna and recreational users (e.g., the potential for the introduction of Eurasian water milfoil to Chilliwack Lake and the subsequent impacts on sockeye salmon and swimmers)
- The introduction and spread of terrestrial invasive species by all types of recreational users (hikers, bikers, horseback riders, motorized vehicles, etc.)
- Damage to hiking trails (e.g., the Trans Canada Trail) by motorized vehicles (e.g., ATVs, dirt bikes, snowmobiles) at the end of Chilliwack Lake Road the south/east end of Chilliwack Lake, and along the trail that runs alongside Chilliwack River from Tamihi Creek to Liumchen Creek
- The disruption of wildlife by land-based motorized vehicles (e.g., ATVs, dirt bikes, snowmobiles), especially in alpine areas, along the Trans Canada Trail, and on cutblocks during times of the year in which wildlife is most vulnerable,
- The impact of land-based motorized vehicles on the vegetation in alpine areas due to its slow rate of growth (e.g., Cheam Ridge)
- The impact of land-based motorized vehicles in wetlands and riparian areas, which can affect a high number of species (including numerous aquatic species at risk) and cause erosion and sedimentation of the Chilliwack River and its tributaries
- The removal and/or over-consumption of certain resources or natural objects (e.g., rocks, plants), fish (e.g., wild coho salmon, steelhead) and wildlife species (e.g., species at risk)
- The threat to public safety from visitors parking along Chilliwack lake Road in order to access popular fishing and hiking locations
- The threat to public safety from the use of hunting weapons (e.g., firearms) in the valley
- The threat to public safety and private property (e.g., interface fires) from fires lit by both residents and visitors in the valley, particularly during dry summer months in which fire bans have been implemented.

3.0 Contributing Factors/Causes

Recreational-related issues have been a concern within the watershed since the 1980s. However, the severity of these concerns has increased over time due to a number of factors:

- Proximity of Chilliwack River Watershed to a major urban centre (Vancouver), which is home to 85-90% of the visitors to the Chilliwack River Watershed.
- Population growth throughout the Lower Mainland region
- Increased gas prices, which encourages individuals to recreate in watersheds closer to Greater Vancouver (like the Chilliwack River Watershed) as opposed to traveling (and dispersing) further into the Province
- Promotion of the Chilliwack River Watershed by the Tourism Industry
- The close proximity of some popular recreational areas to residential areas (e.g., fishing and camping spots along Chilliwack Lake Road, hunting near Post Creek)
- A growing lack of respect for the watershed and local residents by a portion of visitors
- A lack of understanding amongst visitors of the impacts of recreational activities on local residents and the natural values of the watershed
- Increased interest in certain types of recreation, such as hiking and motorized sports
- Improved access to certain parts of the watershed due to an increase in logging activity in the valley (i.e., availability of roads)

4.0 Overall Level of Community Concern

During public outreach activities, recreation-related issues were rated as some of the most concerning issues to the community. Recreational issues not only affect the natural values of the watershed; they have a significant impact on local residents as well.

5.0 Past/Current Actions or Strategies to Address the Issue

The responsibility for recreation and issues caused by recreational use in the watershed is shared amongst a variety of agencies and organizations in the watershed. BC Parks, the BC Ministry of Forests (and now the BC Ministry of Tourism, Sports and the Arts), and the Fraser Valley Regional District are involved with recreational issues that occur within their respective recreational areas (e.g., Provincial Parks, Forestry Recreation Sites, and Regional Parks/Trails). Organizations such as the Vedder-River Cleanup Coalition, the Chilliwack River Action Committee, and recreational associations have done their part to

help address issues caused by recreational use of the watershed (e.g., garbage cleanups).² In addition, numerous agencies have collaborated to address concerns that arise from recreational use on non-managed crown lands. For example, during the 1980s, the BC Ministry of Forests created the Chilliwack River Supply Block Planning Task Force, which involved representatives of all levels of government with some type of jurisdiction in the valley as well as industry (e.g., forestry) and recreation representatives (e.g., hunters, fishers, snowmobilers) (BC Ministry of Forests, 1982). The task force identified key watershed concerns, many of which were related to recreation, and made recommendations for addressing these concerns.

More recently, the Chilliwack River Valley Nuisance Use Mitigation Planning committee was formed. This multi-agency group is made up of representatives from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO), Ministry of the Environment, Conservation Officer Services (COS), Ministry of Tourism, Sport and Arts (MTSA), Ministry of Forests and Range (MFR), the Ch-ihl-kway-uhk Tribe Society, Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD), Fraser Valley Regional District Electoral District Area E, and the Integrated Land Management Bureau (ILMB). The long term objective for this group is to develop an integrated strategy for managing and mitigating the negative impacts to the land and community stemming from visitor traffic into the Chilliwack River Valley.

During 2007, the committee took interim steps to address the key issues of concern and vetted a number of long term strategies. The option considered as the most effective, comprehensive and empowering by the above agencies was the use of Section 58(1) (b) of the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA). This Order only applies to the lower five kilometers of the Chilliwack River Valley downstream of the Tamihi Bridge and will restrict camping to designated recreation sites and will allow enforcement agencies to issue tickets for non-compliance. In addition to enforcement activities, several camping sites were deactivated, new camping sites were developed, and gates, barricades and signs were installed. The MTSA is taking a lead role in this process by paying overtime to the relevant enforcement agencies and heading an Enforcement Sub-committee to examine compliance strategies/resources, while the Ch-ihl-kway-uhk Tribe Society is leading a media/communication subcommittee.

6.0 Relevant Jurisdictions and Legislation

6.1 Federal Legislation

There is relatively little federal legislation that directly pertains to recreational activities in the Chilliwack River Watershed. The federal *Fisheries Act* could potentially be used to address recreational issues that are impacting fish or fish habitat. Likewise, the federal *Migratory Bird Convention Act* and the *Species at Risk Act* may be used to address issues that impact migratory birds and their habitat or species at risk and their habitat, respectively. The *Navigable Waters Protection Act* is also relevant because it prevents a

² Refer to the Illegal Dumping and Sport Angling Behaviour Issues and Alternatives Documents for a more detailed description of past and existing initiatives to address recreational issues.

loss in navigability of Canadian waterways. See the Fish Habitat Restoration & Enhancement Section for more information.

6.2 Provincial Legislation

Most recreational issues are under the jurisdiction of the province. Several Ministries are involved in the Chilliwack River Watershed, including the BC Ministry of Tourism, Sports and the Arts, the BC Ministry of Forests, the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands (i.e., the Integrated Land Management Bureau), and the BC Ministry of Environment.

Relevant provincial legislation includes the:

- Park and Recreation Area Regulations of the *Park Act*, which regulates all activities within provincial parks and recreation areas. The regulation includes all permitted and prohibited activities with respect to camping, fires, horses, domestic pets, and all types of motorized vehicles.
- The Hunting Regulation, Hunting License Regulation, and Freshwater Fishing Regulations within the BC *Wildlife Act* regulate hunting and fishing practices in BC.
- The *BC Trespass Act*, which limits public access to private property.
- The *Forests and Range Practices Act*, which prohibits activities on Crown land that damage the environment, as well as the unauthorized construction and occupation of structures on Crown land. This Act also gives the Minister of Forests the ability to manage areas of Crown land for recreation and also to prohibit recreation in other areas (e.g., section 58). New FRPA amendments made in 2007 under Section 46 allow for forest service staff or the RCMP to impose fines as high as \$100,000 to people who cause adverse affects on ecosystems “such as driving four-wheel-drive vehicles in wetlands, or riding ATVs irresponsibly in alpine terrain or range lands”.³
- The *Environmental Management Act* prohibits discharge of waste into the environment unless authorized, littering, and the discharge of waste from recreational vehicles.
- The *Motor Vehicle (All Terrain) Act*, as well as the related Prohibition Regulations and *the Land Act* regulate the operation of all terrain vehicles, including prohibitions in specific areas of the province, and prevent littering.

6.3 Local Government

As the majority of recreation and associated impacts and concerns occur on Crown land, the Crown retains the greatest regulatory authority over this issue. However, local

³ Hamilton, 2007

governments do have bylaws and zoning that may impact some aspects of recreation or recreation development in their areas of jurisdiction. For example, the City of Chilliwack has proposed a Firearms Regulation Bylaw (Amendment Bylaw 2006, No. 3349) which would declare certain areas, including Ryder Lake, as a No-Firearm Discharge Area.

Aside from the Ryder Lake area, the majority of the Chilliwack River Watershed falls within Electoral Area E of the Fraser Valley Regional District. The FVRD Bylaw No. 0562 (2003) prevents the possession and discharge of a firearm, bow or crossbow in any Regional Park unless authorized to do so (e.g., a Peace Officer, or a person with a Park Use Permit). Additionally, FVRD Zoning and Official Community Plans outline permitted activities for specific areas of the watershed. This may be particularly relevant for recreational development that included fixed or permanent structures, such as a ski gondola or base camp, which may not be permitted under the zoning for that area. See the FVRD website (www.fvrd.bc.ca) for more information about FVRD bylaws and zoning boundaries and definitions.

7.0 Vision & Goals

7.1 VISION

The Chilliwack River Watershed is as close to natural as possible with sustainable populations of native wildlife, intact ecosystems, and clean land, air and water. All users and residents of the watershed are respectful of each other and of the watershed itself.

7.2 GOALS

1. To prevent degradation, to encourage respectful behaviour, and to promote conservation of environmental, cultural, and archaeological resources by recreational users
2. To balance the demand for recreational opportunities with the other needs and watershed uses (e.g., economic opportunities, protecting natural environment, etc.)
3. To minimize conflict between different recreationists as well as between recreation and non-recreation users

7.3 MEASURES

1. Number of conflicts between recreational users and residents reported to authorities
2. Number of recreational users
3. Total amount of area available/accessible for different types of recreation (e.g., waterways for kayaking, trails for horseback riding, areas for snowmobiling)
4. Length of trail degraded or damaged by overuse
5. Number of visitors utilizing managed vs. non-managed recreation sites
6. Wildlife population trends
7. Number of cultural sites protected vs. damaged

8.0 Options and Analysis

A large number of options for addressing recreational issues were suggested by the community and project team members during public engagement activities, tours, and project team meetings. These suggestions were first captured in several other documents (e.g., the summary document of the Chilliwack River Watershed Strategy Forum & Survey, tour summaries, and project team meeting notes) and are compiled in Appendix A. Due to the complexity of this issue, the high number of options that have been suggested, and the existence of current multi-agency initiatives focusing on recreation-related issues (e.g., the nuisance mitigation team), options for addressing recreational issues will not be analyzed in detail here. Rather, the information summarized in this document should be forwarded on to the relevant agencies and processes for more detailed analysis to prevent the duplication of efforts. Finding solutions to recreation issues requires an uncommon level of cooperation between agencies, and a collaborative effort that involves all stakeholders working together for a common goal – to restore and preserve the watershed health of the Chilliwack River Watershed.

9.0 Recommendations

The following represent the primary recommendations of the CRWS Project Team to address recreation-related issues in the watershed (see also recommendations for Illegal Dumping, Invasive Species, and Sport Angling Behaviour):

1. CRWS supports the ongoing efforts of the Chilliwack River Nuisance Mitigation team, and encourages future work done by this collaborative committee, or a future version of this committee, to consider strategic recreation planning at a watershed-scale rather than just riparian areas, and to expand its scope so as to consider all recreation-related issues that occur on non-managed crown land.
2. Promote continued discussions and studies to pursue proposed and potential regional parks as outlined in 2003 FVRD Regional Parks Plan (see Appendix B).
3. The Chilliwack River Nuisance Mitigation planning team (or future version of this committee), BC Parks, FVRD Parks, First Nations, the BC Ministry of Tourism, Sports and the Arts, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada should be encouraged to consider the options suggested by the community and the project team, as outlined in the various documents generated by the Chilliwack River Watershed Strategy. It is also recommended that Metro Vancouver (GVRD) be engaged in identifying and working towards solutions.
4. Further consultations and dialogue be conducted amongst regulatory agencies, First Nations, visitors, recreation groups, and the community regarding recreational issues in the watershed, including areas of conflict, known sources of watershed impacts, potential recreational growth sites, and potential methods or actions to manage access along Chilliwack Lake Road.

5. Reduce areas of conflict between recreation and non-recreation land use sectors by ensuring adequate buffer zones between conflicting land uses (e.g., between camping sites and working forest), and by exploring opportunities where each sector can work together towards shared goals (e.g., woodlot operator to provide cut wood for neighbouring campsite).
6. Update mapping information on recreational sites within the Chilliwack River Watershed, including access points, recreation spots, observed activities, and known environmentally sensitive sites, to aid watershed-scale management decisions.
7. Capitalize on opportunities to obtain and share information about recreational uses and values within the Chilliwack River Watershed (e.g., include questions on BC Parks surveys at Cultus and Chilliwack Lake to obtain information about observed watershed impacts, areas of interest, sources of conflict with other recreationists, suggestions for improvement, etc.).

10.0 References

BC Ministry of Forests. 1982. Chilliwack River Supply Block Planning Task Force Final Report. Chilliwack, BC.

Fraser Valley Regional District, 2003. Regional Parks Plan. Adopted March 25, 2003.

Hamilton, G., 2007. Victoria brings in hefty penalty for mud-boggers: Causing environmental damage with your ATV could cost as much as \$100,000. Vancouver Sun. March 16, 2007.

Appendix A. Summary of Suggestions for Addressing Recreational Issues

Note that these suggestions represent the full range of comments received by the public and participants of various Chilliwack River Watershed Strategy events. These suggestions are not necessarily promoted or endorsed by the project team; further analysis and discussion is needed to evaluate their merit.

Suggestions to address concerns with overnight use of non-designated campsites:

- Overnight parking ban (e.g., dusk to dawn or midnight to 5am) enforced by a local towing company
- Install signs stating that the Chilliwack River Valley is for day use only (except designated campsites)
- Increased enforcement and policing of regulations
- More visible law enforcement
- Implement fines for camping in non-designated areas
- Install barriers to block vehicle access to side trails/roads and popular camp spots
- Provide toilets and bear proof garbage bins in parking areas for kayaking, fishing areas, fish hatchery, and fishing streams
- Conduct a public awareness/education campaign using local media
- Install signs to remind visitors “if you pack it in, pack it out”
- Provide waste receptacles for campers and collect trash regularly
- Deactivate non-designated camping spots
- Patrol residential areas (e.g., Slesse Park, Bell Acres) and fine and/or remove squatters (e.g., remove tent cities)
- Develop a comprehensive recreational land use plan for the valley

Suggestions to address concerns with intensive recreational use:

- Leave Chilliwack Lake boat launch and parking area open year round to allow access to lakes and trails
- Restrict access to certain vulnerable areas
- Provide appropriate facilities for users (e.g., garbage cans, washrooms, campsites, etc.) at key locations in the valley (e.g., parking areas for kayakers, fishing areas, hatchery, popular fishing streams)

Suggestions to address concerns with motorized vehicles:

- Restrict the use of motor boats on Chilliwack Lake and/or Chilliwack River
- Place some restrictions on access to the upper Valley (e.g., upstream of Foley)
- Restrict ATV access to lower elevations to give respite to the wildlife
- Control access by non-residents (and activities such as ATVs) using a station located somewhere along Chilliwack Lake Road
- Implement user fees to support any infrastructure required
- Promote natural hiking, mountaineering, canoeing
- Increased enforcement
- Learn from Canmore
- Increased education and monitoring
- Construct gateways at trail access points and build/arrange deterrents for motorized vehicles
- Post penalty fines and pass legislation allowing for citizens to provide documentation (video) which enables prosecution
- Make more trails non-motorized only for serious hikers (not easy 1 km loops like Thompson Park)

- Develop a comprehensive recreational land use plan for the valley

Suggestions to address hunting concerns:

- Do not issue bear hunter licenses so close to Post Creek and hiking trails around Chilliwack Lake Provincial Park
- Establish a no hunting corridor (e.g., 2-10 km wide) along Chilliwack Lake Road in the vicinity of Chilliwack Lake Provincial Park, Centre Creek, and Post Creek to protect spawning areas, wildlife areas, the many hiking trails in this area, and the community of Post Creek
- Increased presence of conservation officers
- Deputize residents to maintain the rules

Suggestions to address public safety concerns:

- Patrol and control unauthorized use of firearms
- Remove campers who put the valley at risk
- Ensure that individuals who call to report a violation get a response (especially about fires, especially on weekends)
- Implement fire bans earlier in the season
- Ensure that all visitors and residents are aware of fire bans (many residents do not realize that bans also apply to fires on their property)

Appendix B. Chilliwack River Watershed-related Excerpts from FVRD Regional Parks Plan⁴

Proposed Regional Parks

These areas are under active consideration for regional park status. In some instances, further work is required regarding property negotiations with owners and government agencies.

Chilliwack River Regional Trail (see map below)

The Chilliwack River Valley has many of the most heavily used "informal outdoor recreation sites" in the Region and there has been much discussion over the years as to the most appropriate management for the Valley. The recreational value of the area is extreme and need not be documented here.

The Region should negotiate to establish a regional park trail along the south bank of the river, downstream of the Tamihi Bridge as far as the Soowahlie Indian Reservation and including the land between the river and the Vedder Logging Road. This is the area most heavily used and inadequately managed today. Negotiations with the Crown to establish the Park should include an agreement for provincial maintenance of the access road and an agreement as to the future disposition or operation of the forest service campgrounds in the area. The land base of the park might also include, with Provincial government and Regional Board approval, the transfer of the existing Chilliwack River Provincial Park on the north bank of the river to regional park status and operation.

There are several reasons why this recreation corridor along the Chilliwack River qualifies for regional park status. First, the proposed park is close to the settled areas of the Valley; in fact, it would be directly across the river from most of the residents. While this makes it accessible as a park, it also makes it sensitive from the perspective of residential amenity, and the local community would no doubt welcome improved management of the land. Secondly, the area meets the objectives of the regional parks plan and would be especially valuable to regional residents as a year-round riverside trail and fishing area. In fact, despite the obvious demand for such a trail, none is currently available along the lower reaches of the Chilliwack River.

A contrary view, if it exists, would presumably reflect the notion that the area should become a provincial park, rather than a regional park, in recognition of the number of out-of-region users who frequent the area. Indeed, there may be some validity to this argument. In reality, however, the provincial park interest in the Valley will be focused in the long term on the more remote areas farther upstream rather on those areas most accessible for year-round day use activities. This distinction would be entirely congruent with the long-standing policies of the community plan for the area which call for maintenance of public provincial jurisdiction of the land upstream of Tamihi Bridge. The provincial interest in the proposed regional park, therefore, should be recognized during the negotiations to establish the park, both in terms of an agreement for access maintenance and perhaps an endowment to operate the existing provincial recreational facilities in the area.

⁴ FVRD, 2003

Potential Regional Park Areas Requiring Further Study (areas of interest)

These areas have been identified as potential regional park sites. However, they need further study to determine whether they would make suitable regional parks such as meeting the park system objectives and the level of constraints (i.e., property values, access, development costs) associated with each site. An obvious “area of interest” which would not involve the creation of a new park, but rather the expansion of a newly established park, would be the expansion of the Sumas Mountain Regional Park not only as identified in the Concept Plan for the Park, but also to include adjacent lowland areas identified as critical wildlife habitat in the background studies for the park plan. A detailed review of this issue is not the purpose of this Plan, however, the preparation of a long term acquisition and development plan should be a priority for a joint effort between municipal and regional staff.

Mount Thurston to Mount Cheam Alpine Ridge (see map below)

One of the most visible physical features in the eastern portion of the Region is the Mount Thurston to Mount Cheam alpine ridge. Not only a scenic feature, the Thurston-Cheam ridge is a growing recreation site which attracts a large number of hikers, snowmobilers, skiers, and other visitors each year. The area already serves as a de facto park. The most viable access to the site is via the Chipmunk Creek Forest Service Road in the Chilliwack River Valley. Highest priority concerns would be protection of the alpine areas from overuse and alienation, and public safety along the precipitous slopes. The connection of the ridge trail systems to other local and regional trail systems would be a long-term goal. Additional study of recreation potential and the need for environmental protection is needed. However, of much higher priority is the need to engage the Province in a discussion regarding setting aside and protecting the alpine areas from alienation or tenures not compatible with the long-term public use and enjoyment of these areas.

FVRD Parks Plan – Southern Half

