

Benson Creek Falls Regional Park

Management Plan Brief

Regional District of Nanaimo



ARCHADIA
landscape architecture ltd

August 1999

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Benson Creek Falls Regional Park is a 22 hectare (~55 acre) park located at the confluence of Benson Creek and Flynnfall Creek in Electoral Area D of the Regional District of Nanaimo.

Steep-sided ravines, 20 to 50 metres deep, surround Benson Creek and Flynnfall Creek through the Park. Flynnfall Falls, located at the confluence of these two creeks is approximately 10 metres high. The 15-20 metre high Ammonite Falls is located on Benson Creek near the south boundary of the Park. Several other tributaries, which are dry in summer, also flow into Benson Creek within the Park. Hoskins Creek flows eastward through the Park near the north boundary. Refer to the Site Context diagram, page 4.

The park was established August 1, 1991 through a lease with the Province of British Columbia, Lands Branch for a period of 30 years, to August 2021.

Strong enthusiasm exists in the community to continue to use the park for hiking, biking, nature appreciation and access to the creeks for swimming. Equestrians also use some of the existing trails in and around the park.

The most valuable, diverse and ecologically sensitive habitats within the Park are the deep, steep-sided ravines and associated Benson Creek and Flynnfall Creek stream beds. The greatest threats to these areas are the potential impacts of facilities aimed at increasing recreational use, and increased, unmanaged human activity in the park, including hiking, cycling and access to pool areas for swimming.

The site's steep topography and related environmental sensitivities mean that recreational improvements related to park use need to be carefully planned, executed and maintained to minimize detrimental impacts.

The Management Plan Brief provides a framework to guide future, more detailed decisions about recreational management, environmental stewardship and development priorities for the Park.

Abbreviations used in the text:

- BCBC: British Columbia Buildings Corporation
- BCFRP: Benson Creek Falls Regional Park
- DFO: Department of Fisheries and Oceans
- ESA: Environmentally Sensitive Area
- FRBC: Forest Renewal British Columbia
- MOELP: BC Ministry of Environment Lands and Parks
- MOF: BC Ministry of Forests
- Park: Benson Creek Falls Regional Park
- Plan: Benson Creek Falls Management Plan Brief
- RDN: Regional District of Nanaimo

BENSON CREEK FALLS REGIONAL PARK: Management Plan Brief

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Regional District of Nanaimo:

The following personnel have assisted in providing base data and reviewing Regional District of Nanaimo policy and directions and draft reports:

Jeff Ainge, Project Supervisor, Parks Coordinator

David Speed, Manager of Parks & Recreation

Bonnie Blue, Planner

Tom Sohier, Mapping

Jonathan Lobb, Parks Assistant

- **Benson Creek Falls Regional Park Advisory Committee:**

The following members of the Steering Committee volunteered their time for the project:

Karl Baker, Nanaimo Search and Rescue

Armand Caillet, Owner, Brannen Lake Campground

Linda Krofta, District 69 Trails Committee

Murray Martin, Rotarian, Local Resident

Jack Robinson, Local Resident

Director Ian Savage, RDN Electoral Area D Director

- **Province of British Columbia**

The following representatives from BC Provincial Ministries provided information and/or assistance in determining current land use considerations, potential impacts, lease arrangements, and potential for shared use of facilities and lease areas in the vicinity of the Park:

MOF: **Emma Neill**, Woodlot Forester, South Island Forest District

FRBC: **Marti Stewart**, Reg. Project Officer, Recreation, Pacific Forest Reg.

MOELP: **Margaret Henigman**, District Habitat Officer

- **Malaspina University-College / Crown Woodlot 0020**

David Smith, Woodlands Manager

- **Crown Woodlot 0012**

Rick Heikkila, Woodlot 0012 Licensee

- **J.C. Lee & Associates Ltd., Environmental Consultants**

Bruce Cousens, Charlene Lee, Guy Monty

- **Coastal Resource Mapping Ltd., Mapping Consultants**

John Ziemanski

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.01 The Park

Benson Creek Falls Regional Park is a 22 hectare (~55 acre) park located at the confluence of Benson Creek and Flynnfall Creek in Electoral Area D of the Regional District of Nanaimo.

Steep-sided ravines, 20 to 50 metres deep, surround Benson Creek and Flynnfall Creek through the Park. Flynnfall Falls, located at the confluence of these two creeks is approximately 10 metres high. The 15-20 metre high Ammonite Falls is located on Benson Creek near the south boundary of the Park. Several other tributaries, which are dry in summer, also flow into Benson Creek within the Park. Hoskins Creek flows eastward through the Park near the north boundary. Refer to the Site Context diagram, page 4.

The park was established August 1, 1991 through a lease with Province of British Columbia, Lands Branch for a period of 30 years, to August 2021.

Benson Creek Falls Regional Park was the first site secured as a component of the RDN Regional Parks System, and it is the larger of the two Regional Parks currently administered by the RDN.

Though the park is easily accessed from the new Nanaimo Inner Route via Biggs Road, and is relatively central to the City of Nanaimo's 70,000 plus population, it is surrounded by large tracts of relatively undeveloped resource lands, used for forestry or gravel extraction

Strong enthusiasm exists in the community to continue to use the park for hiking, biking, nature appreciation and access to the creeks for swimming and fishing. Equestrians also use some of the existing trails in and around the park.

With ongoing development in the Region, more people are looking for recreational opportunities, leading to increased use and recreational demand placed on the limited supply of open space available for public use.

The Benson Creek Falls Regional Park Management Plan brief has been prepared in the context of the **RDN Parks System Plan**, which states:

"The Regional District will establish, develop and operate a park system for the security, protection and stewardship of lands within the region which maintain livability, provide environmental and natural resource protection and accommodate outdoor recreational pursuits."

The RDN Park System Plan adopts a classification system that directs future purpose and uses applicable to each park. The Regional Park classification, which applies to Benson Creek Falls Regional Park, is intended to:

"provide for the stewardship of park land and trail systems for the protection, appreciation and enjoyment of regionally significant landscapes and natural features."

1.02 Plan Objectives

The Regional District of Nanaimo recognized the need to prepare a Management Plan Brief for Benson Creek Falls Regional Park to provide direction in developing recreational opportunities within the park, while respecting and preserving the natural features of the site.



Key issues include:

- fulfilling the RDN mandate to provide public recreational use in the park
- identifying the appropriate types of uses, facilities and associated development to be accommodated.
- addressing concerns relative to existing and potential impacts of recreational use on environmentally sensitive areas.
- identifying and prioritizing essential actions to improve recreation access opportunities within a 2 year timeframe.
- identifying a range of recreation development and environmental stewardship options for the remaining ~20 year current lease term and related longer term considerations.
- determining potential actions to achieve the above objectives, achievable within RDN funding capabilities or partnering opportunities.

1.03 Plan Development Process

In January 1998, the Regional District of Nanaimo retained ARCHADIA Landscape Architecture Ltd., to prepare a Management Plan Brief for Benson Creek Falls Regional Park.

The Plan development process aimed to create a Management Plan Brief to guide the long term planning, and development of the park that:

- builds on the findings of the research and analysis stages of the project, consolidating input from Regional District staff, the Benson Creek Falls Regional Park Advisory Committee, consultants, stakeholders and the public.
- focuses on community needs and desires.
- is consistent with applicable policies and planning documents, including the RDN Parks System Plan, and senior government policies and regulations.

Information was gathered during several visits to the Park as well as from technical references, planning documents, and meetings with Regional District personnel, Advisory Committee members, and stakeholders.

Through the early stages of the project, it became apparent to the project team that there are no “simple solutions” to sustain even historical levels of recreational activity on the site while protecting existing natural features and environmental sensitivities.

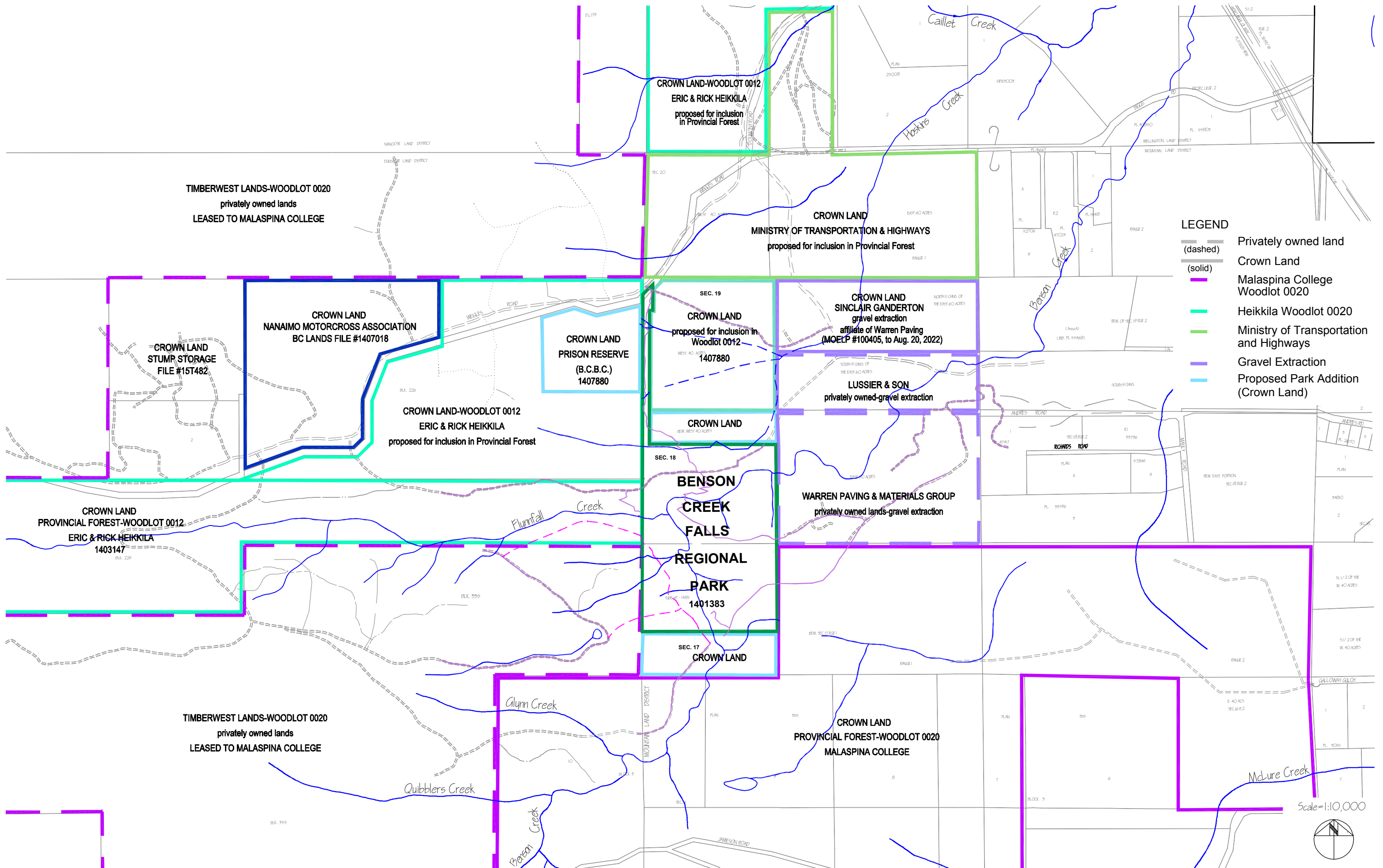
As the park and most adjacent properties are almost entirely wooded, air photo interpretation of existing features, topography and trail and stream alignments was not feasible to determine trail locations, topography or location of feature areas.

Draft recommendations prepared for the project in December 1998 outlined the need for basic field survey information within the Park to identify top of and bottom of bank location and elevations for Flynnfall Creek and Benson Creek, and locations of existing trails, to a level of accuracy adequate for planning purposes. The RDN acted on the recommendation in December 1998, and survey information was provided by Coastal Resource Mapping Ltd. in February 1999.

J.C. Lee and Associates Ltd., biological consultants, were also retained in December 1998 to conduct a preliminary environmental inventory and assessment for the Park. The environmental overview includes assessments of environmental sensitivity, enhancement requirements, constraints to development, and opportunity to support outdoor recreation uses such as trail development and nature interpretation. The results of the May 1999 report prepared by J.C. Lee and Associates Ltd. have been incorporated into the current Management Plan Brief.

The new survey and environmental information confirms that there are no ‘simple, straightforward’ solutions to providing improved recreational trail access across either Benson Creek or Flynnfall Creek within or near the Park boundaries.

The Management Plan Brief provides a framework to guide future, more detailed decisions about recreational management, environmental stewardship and development priorities for the Park.



2.0 PARK FEATURES

The following section highlights the key natural features of Benson Creek Falls Regional Park, and provides an overview of past activities in the vicinity of the Park.

The **Summary of Existing Features** diagram, (page 11) identifies general locations of features noted in the text.

Refer to the **Preliminary Environmental Overview of Benson Creek Falls Regional Park** prepared by J.C. Lee and Associates Ltd., May 26, 1999 for more detailed information about existing wildlife habitat, vegetation, geologic features, environmental sensitivities, current impacts and concerns and related recommendations.

2.01 Historical Context

In addition to current recreational activities, the resources found within and around the current Park have historically been used for purposes ranging from timber and gravel extraction, to hunting, fossil collection and salal harvest.

With the exception of the steep creek ravines, most of the surrounding area was logged in the mid-1900's.

By the early 1960's the recreational and educational attributes of the area were well known to local residents, hikers, and fossil enthusiasts. Around that time, a key event leading to the establishment of the Park occurred. A 16" diameter ammonite fossil located near the main falls on Benson Creek was destroyed by vandals. This event provided the impetus for a group of local supporters to seek protection for the remaining fossil features, dramatic creek canyons and waterfall area as Provincial Park.

For almost 40 years, the RDN has attempted to achieve protection of the area through ongoing negotiations with senior government. Refer to Appendix A for a summary of key milestones.

The current 22 ha (~55 acre) park, reduced in size from the initially proposed ~80 ha (~200 acre) area, was established as Benson Creek Falls Regional Park on August 1, 1991 through a lease with the Province of British Columbia, Lands Branch for a period of 30 years, to August 2021.

2.02 Geology and Landform

Benson Creek Falls is located within the Nanaimo Lowland, an area of low-lying terrain below the 600m elevation extending along the east coast of Vancouver Island from Sayward to Victoria, then westward to Jordan River. The Nanaimo Lowland is underlain by mostly Upper Cretaceous sedimentary rocks, which are composed of alternating shale and sandstone/conglomerate formations. Most of the shale layers, which were deposited slowly in the marine environment, contain well-preserved fossils. The sandstone/conglomerate layers, which generally lack fossils, were deposited more quickly as a result of landslides triggered by earthquakes.

These layers have been thrust, folded and tilted during subsequent earth forming processes, and further scoured and eroded by glaciers and water flows. Through such events, older geologic formations can be exposed at the earth's surface, such as the fossil-containing Haslam Formation shale found along Benson Creek within the Park. Fossils of ammonites and other Upper Cretaceous fauna are evident in the vicinity of Ammonite Falls as well as other downstream areas. Evidence of fossil hunting activities has been noted during visits to the Park.

Based on J.C. Lee and Associates' observations of eroded surface areas and banks along roads, trails and streams, soils in the Park are reported to be primarily shallow silty or sandy gravels over bedrock, or occasionally over glacial till. Such soils are highly erodible once disturbed or exposed by loss of vegetative cover.

Steep-sided ravines, 20 to 50 metres deep, surround Benson Creek and Flynnfall Creek through the Park. Flynnfall Falls, located at the confluence of these two creeks is ~10 m high. The 15-20 m high Ammonite Falls is located on Benson Creek near the south boundary of the Park. Several other tributaries, which are dry in summer, also flow into Benson Creek within the Park. Hoskins Creek flows eastward through the Park near the north boundary.

The Benson Creek and Flynnfall Creek ravines, varying from 20 to 50 metres deep dominate the Park landscape and determine the range of potential recreational opportunities. The terrain of areas beyond the ravine rims undulates, generally sloping towards the northeast.

Based on the survey information provided by Coastal Resource Mapping Ltd., the shortest distance across the NE-SW portion of Benson Creek between tops of banks within the Park is ~160 m. The shortest distance across the SE-NW portion of Benson Creek between tops of banks within the park is ~40 m. A crossing in the location of the previous 'old McGarrigle logging road' bridge, just outside the current south park boundary would also be ~40 m long.

A large, very steep bedrock slide chute has occurred in the Park just north of a sharp bend in Benson Creek just downstream from the mouth of Flynnfall Creek. It appears that the area continues to erode gradually. A rocky knoll near the Block 17/18 boundary near the east Park boundary provides an opportunity to create a viewpoint offering vistas to Brannen Lake and beyond.

The site's steep topography and related environmental sensitivities mean that recreational improvements related to park use need to be carefully planned, executed and maintained to minimize detrimental impacts.

2.03 Vegetation & Habitat

Vegetation within the park is in mid to late successional stage after being selectively logged earlier in the 1900s.

The predominant tree cover is 40 - 50 year old second growth Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Western Hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*), and Western Red Cedar (*Thuja plicata*), with the occasional second growth Grand Fir (*Abies grandis*). A few veteran trees, remnants of the original forest remain.

In north and east areas of the park, tree stands are relatively evenly aged, as a result of clear-cutting and/or fire. In other areas, past logging appears to have been somewhat more selective, as stands are more variable, of mixed age, with numerous young trees developing in the understorey.

The most significant tree resources in the park include a number of large veteran Douglas-fir trees located on the upper slopes of the Benson Creek and Flynnfall Creek ravines, within and adjacent to the Park along with several large old Western Red Cedars and Bigleaf Maples along ravine floor and lower slope areas.

Three large old Douglas-fir veteran trees, visible from several vantage points in the Park, are located ~100 metres south of Flynnfall Creek, ~250 metres west of the Park. An osprey nest, in use in 1998, remains at the top of one of the trees.

The understorey woody shrub layer is dominated by Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) Longleaf Mahonia/dull Oregon-grape (*Mahonia nervosa*) and Red huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*), with the occasional Oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*), Baldhip Rose (*Rosa gymnocarpa*) and Princes' Pine/Pipsissewa (*Chimaphila umbellata*).

The herbaceous understorey layer is dominated by Western Sword Fern (*Polystichum munitum*) with occasional large patches of Vanilla Leaf (*Achlys triphylla*) found in the tree canopy openings.

The MOELP Conservation Data Centre has no records of rare or endangered plants, plant associations, or wildlife elements, listed for the Park site in its data base as of January 1999.

No Red-listed (Endangered or Threatened) or Blue-listed (Vulnerable) plants or undisturbed plant communities were observed by J.C. Lee and Associates during site inspections, though more detailed investigation would be required in order to confirm such findings. There is a possibility that Red- or Blue-listed plant communities, (in a mature condition and undisturbed natural state prior to initial logging) may occur in ravine areas undisturbed by past logging.

2.04 Fauna

Benson Creek Falls Regional Park is used regularly by at least a small group of Coastal Black-tailed Deer, (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*) a Regionally Important species where hunting occurs. A number of other Regionally Important species suffering from habitat loss and/or other human impacts are also likely to occur here. The Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*) is known to use the area, and Cougar (*Felis concolour*) are likely to pass through at least occasionally. Frequency of use, however, is likely to decline with increasing human use in and around the Park.

Records of bird occurrence in the park and surrounding area indicate 68 species known to utilize the area between May 1998 and March 1999. Of these, 58 species are known or likely to nest in or near the park, 36 species are permanent residents, and 30 species are summer or winter migrants. Regionally Important bird species known or likely to occur in the Park include the Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Harrier, Western Screech Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, and Brown Creeper. This information indicates a high level of bird species diversity in the area, resulting from habitat and vegetation diversity found in the Park's stream/riparian areas, deep ravines and mixed-age forests.

Three large old Douglas-fir veteran trees, visible from several vantage points in the Park, are located ~100 metres south of Flynnfall Creek, ~250 metres west of the Park. An osprey nest, in use in 1998, remains at the top of one of the trees. Like bald eagles, ospreys return to their breeding territory and re-use their nest for many years, as long as the nest tree or an acceptable replacement exists and the surrounding habitat remains in suitable condition. Osprey nests are protected under Section 34 of the BC Wildlife Act.

Some of the veteran Douglas-fir trees in the Park may provide future nest sites for the Marbled Murrelet, a marine bird (Aldicae) requiring a mossy platform on upper tree branches of old growth forest or for the Bald Eagle, requiring suitable large old trees for nesting. Large old veteran trees, such as those occurring within the Park, are becoming increasingly rare along the southeast coast of Vancouver Island, due to loss of habitat to past logging and ongoing development.

Little documented information is available for fisheries resources in Benson Creek. Under the Fish Habitat category in the RDN Environmentally Sensitive Areas Atlas, Benson Creek is indicated as 'fish present' downstream of Ammonite Falls, and as 'unknown fish habitat' above Ammonite Falls. Benson Creek and Flynnfall Creek are also indicated with a 100 metre wide 'fisheries planning boundary' for fisheries and urban development management purposes, as the lower reaches of Benson Creek are known to contain salmonids and reaches further upstream may either contain fish and/or drain directly into fish-bearing habitat. Refer to J. C. Lee and Associates' report for more detailed information.

2.05 Environmentally Sensitive Areas & Related Concerns

The most valuable, diverse and ecologically sensitive habitats within the Park are the deep, steep-sided ravines and associated Benson Creek and Flynnfall Creek stream beds. The greatest threats to these areas are the potential impacts of facilities aimed at increasing recreational use, and increased, unmanaged human activity in the park, including hiking, cycling and access to pool areas for swimming.

Existing trails throughout the park, at low to moderate levels of use, show evidence of soil disturbance and erosion, with greater impacts on steeply sloping trails in the ravines and at stream crossings. Shallow soils on steep slopes are highly subject to erosion and sloughing as has already occurred in the slide chute area on Benson Creek just downstream from Flynnfall Creek.

Primary trail access-related concerns are:

- the switchback trail leading to the existing log crossing on Benson Creek, which is overly steep causing concern for public safety as well as ongoing impacts of soil disturbance and erosion on both sides of the creek.
- the very steep route down the ravine wall towards the pool below Ammonite Falls, which appears to be heavily used with the aid of ropes installed by park users, shows a particularly severe level of environmental impact including loss of vegetation and advanced erosion, exposing tree roots and creating undercut sections of bank, also causing public safety concerns.
- the very narrow, overly steep ravine trail access to Flynnfall Creek, which starts from the 'old Flynnfall Creek logging road' trail on the north side of Flynnfall Creek outside the park and leads down the bank, with the aid of ropes installed by park users, back into the park just upstream of Flynnfall Falls.
- trail crossings of small/ephemeral streams, including Hoskins Creek and at least two others that cross the main Park access trail between Weigles Road and the Park.
- increased use of trail/mountain bikes and motorized dirt bikes in the surrounding area, which further increases the risk of unauthorized use and related detrimental impacts within the Park.
- new trail development, which should be located outside steeply sloping ravine areas and sensitive wetland areas.

Primary fisheries-related concerns would be to:

- avoid disturbance of stream channels, banks and riparian (streamside) vegetation that shades the stream and moderates water temperature.
- avoid disturbance of surface soils or concentration of runoff, which could result in surface erosion and transport of silt into stream channels or initiate slope failure and deposition of sediments and debris.
- avoid developments that directly or indirectly reduce summer water flow in Benson Creek, which will have a detrimental effect on juvenile salmonid habitat and populations, as the creek is currently reported to suffer low flow in dry summers.

2.06 Existing Uses

The Park is mainly used by hikers, birders, mountain bikers, fossil hunters and equestrians, as well as swimmers destined for Benson and Flynnfall Creeks.

Since logging operations ceased leaving main roadbeds intact, development of the Park has been limited, most of which has been trail development undertaken on an ad hoc basis by volunteers.

Most Park users enter via the existing right of way access off Weigles Road. The existing trail diverges significantly from the park right-of-way onto adjacent Crown Land to the east near the north boundary of the Park, one of the areas to be considered for addition to the park.

Some users access the park from Jameson Road via an existing route through the Malaspina University-College Woodlot, though no access agreement has been established with the woodlot managers.

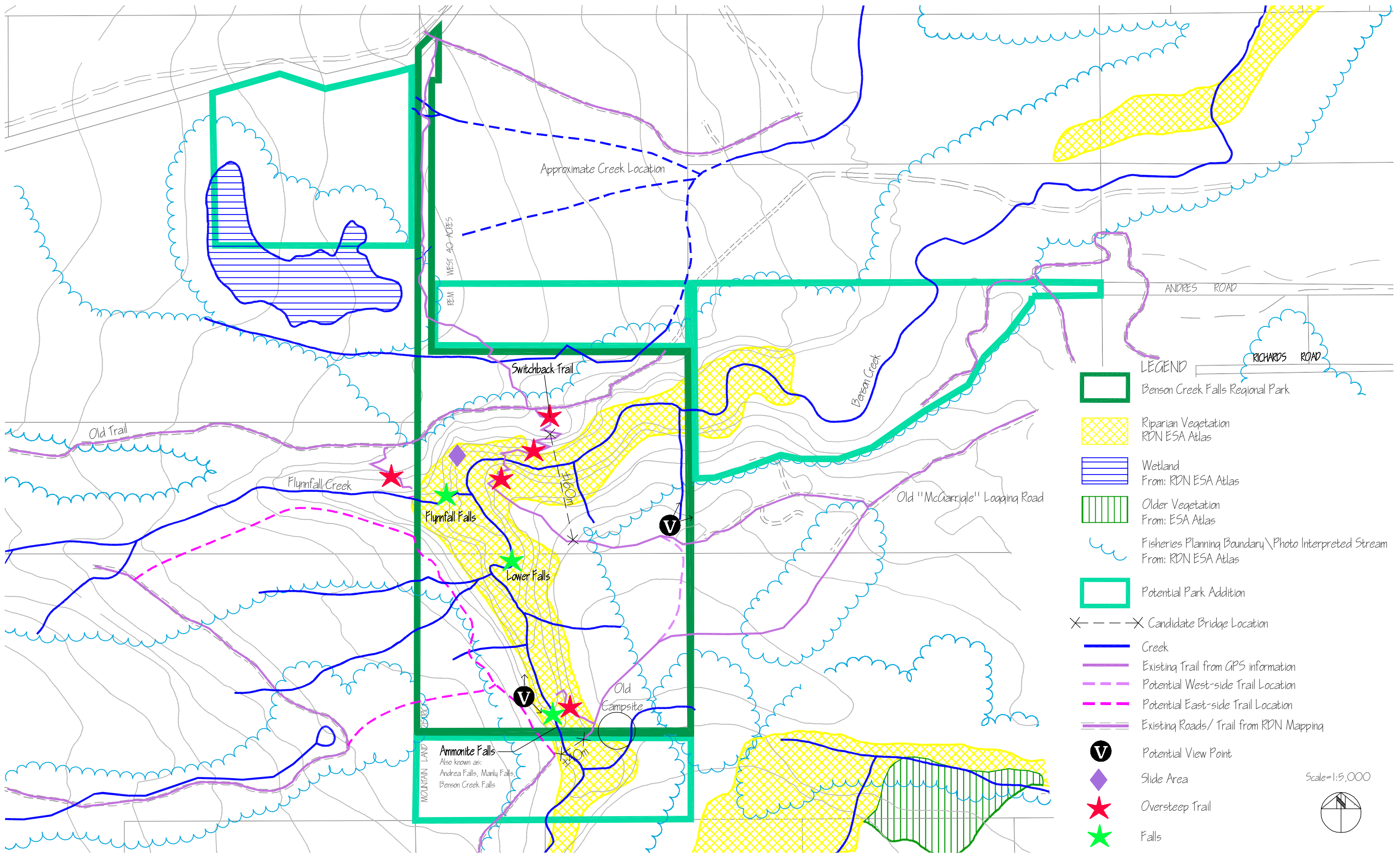
The main east-west trail which parallels the top of bank along the north side of Flynnfall Creek originated as a logging road, known locally as the 'old Flynnfall Creek logging road'.

The existing trail leading to Ammonite Falls also originated as a logging road known locally as the 'old McGarrigle logging road'. The road crossed Benson Creek via a log bridge near the south park boundary, just upstream of Ammonite Falls. The old McGarrigle logging road provided a connection between Weigles Rd. and Andres Rd. until the bridge was removed.

The path known locally as the 'switchback trail' runs southward from the old Flynnfall Creek logging road, descends steeply towards the creek. A fallen log is used to cross Benson Creek. The path then rises up the steep south bank of the creek. The path and adjacent areas are eroding and the MOELP has required that the path be closed pending upgrades to address potential erosion and sedimentation of fisheries habitat areas. Though the RDN has posted signage indicating the switchback trail is closed, some park visitors continue to use the trail.

Though the steep switchback trail is closed, and posted accordingly, park visitors continue to use the trail leading to Benson Creek. Additional strategies are needed to encourage responsible, safe recreation opportunities in the Park.

In addition to providing recreational opportunities and contributing to the environmental health of the community, parks which are predominantly undeveloped provide links with nature, spiritual renewal and a welcome retreat from urban living.



3.0 THE MANAGEMENT PLAN BRIEF

3.01 Vision for the Park

Envision Benson Creek Falls Park...

- offering nature-based recreation such as walking, hiking, bird-watching.
- providing visitors the chance to see and learn about regionally significant features, landforms, geology, plant, fish and wildlife communities.
- protecting environmentally sensitive areas.
- providing a degree of connectivity between adjacent areas with relatively high habitat value, which helps to counteract ongoing habitat loss and fragmentation in the area.
- fostering understanding and appreciation of the park environment, by providing opportunities for friends, family, visitors, school or special interest groups to participate in stewardship activities such as maintenance or nature interpretation.

To achieve the vision, the following recreation and environmental objectives need to be met:

3.02 Recreation Objectives

Recreational objectives aimed at fulfilling the RDN mandate to provide public recreation include:

1. Provide nature based recreational opportunities within the limitations of site topography and environmental sensitivity.
2. Encourage types of recreation that minimize negative environmental impacts.
3. Protect and emphasize the unique attributes of the site.
4. Enhance opportunities for learning about natural, cultural and industrial heritage of the park and its surroundings.
5. Locate trails within the Park and associated rights of way where possible. Enter into formal agreements with appropriate individuals or agencies where essential trails encroach on adjacent lands.
6. Minimize public safety hazards in keeping with relatively undeveloped nature of the park, and inform users about the level of service provided.
7. Improve infrastructure such as parking, signage, trails and creek crossings appropriate to park use, balanced with the identified level of service.
8. Balance planning and capital development costs with available resources, either through RDN funding or through partnerships with others.

3.03 Environmental Stewardship Objectives

Environmental objectives aimed at protecting the natural environment and minimizing impacts of recreational Park use include the following:

1. Identify environmentally sensitive areas and protect natural features and habitat areas from potential impacts of recreational use and development.
2. Minimize future development in ESA's and currently undisturbed areas.
3. Comply with the Crown lease covenant stating that the RDN shall not fill, build or remove vegetation within 7.5 metres of the top of the stream bank without prior written consent of MOELP.
4. Rehabilitate degraded areas to conditions consistent with undisturbed surroundings.
5. Upgrade existing trails to minimize negative impacts such as vegetation trampling, damage to tree roots, soil compaction, increased surface runoff and erosion.
6. Provide footbridges where trails cross small/ephemeral streams to reduce erosion and damage to streambeds.
7. Avoid trails in wetland areas to protect sensitive habitat and natural drainage patterns. Provide boardwalk where trail crossings are required.
8. Explore opportunities to provide low-impact pedestrian crossings of Benson Creek at key locations which would connect main trails within the Park and support links to existing recreational routes beyond park boundaries (regional Greenways initiatives).
9. Minimize environmental damage through supportive management, sensitive development, regulation, and enforcement of park use.

4.0 PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

Key considerations, essential actions and strategies to achieve the vision and objectives for Benson Creek Falls Regional Park are summarized in this section:

4.01 Recreation Management Recommendations

1. Adopt the Benson Creek Falls Management Plan Brief as a working document, designed to assist in determining management activities and improvements to be undertaken on a long term basis, balanced with current budgeting and priorities.
2. Address and mitigate public safety hazards associated with existing trails and site use areas immediately.
3. Post trails as closed until such time as public safety hazards have been addressed and degraded environmentally sensitive areas have been rehabilitated.
4. Consider adding the following Crown Lands to the Park:
 - to the north: remainder of West 40 Acres of Section 18.
 - to south: remaining portion of Section 17 not included in Woodlot 20.
 - to the west of the park access road dedication: Crown Reserve 1407880 (BCBC).
 - to the east of the park: the continuation of the Benson Creek ravine area between the current park boundary and Andres Road.
5. Obtain geotechnical engineering and structural engineering feasibility review of candidate Benson Creek crossing locations, including related estimates of capital and maintenance costs.
6. Determine a desired level of quality for park services to be provided, below which the service would be ineffective in achieving established goals and objectives. If desired quality levels cannot be afforded, either alternate funding or partnership arrangements need to be established, or the service should not be supported by the public sector.
7. Coordinate with other agencies involved in delivery and promotion of recreational services in the area, such as the City of Nanaimo and Tourism Nanaimo.
8. Maintain buffer areas around the park perimeter, minimum 15m wide, as a continuous, undisturbed area to screen adjacent land uses and to maintain an inviting park setting, considering that adjacent lands will likely be logged or developed in the future.
9. Provide site identification and orientation information at park entry areas, to welcome visitors and inform them about recreational opportunities and environmental sensitivities of the park, that is compatible with overall RDN Regional Parks System signage.
10. Develop an interpretive information system, compatible with overall RDN Regional Parks signage, to present the Park's natural attributes, sensitivities, industrial and cultural heritage.

4.02 Environmental Stewardship Recommendations

Natural habitat areas and environmentally sensitive lands such as stream corridors, wetlands and floodplains should be kept primarily in a natural state and may not necessarily include public access.

Depending on the degree of environmental sensitivity, many protected open spaces can be managed to provide a variety of passive recreation opportunities complementary to park use such as trail corridors, community links, nature appreciation and environmental awareness.

Address slope, landform and geological features, vegetation, stream channels and bank characteristics, wetlands, riparian habitat, fish and wildlife habitat areas including unique, rare or endangered species throughout the planning development and management of the Park.

1. Determine the appropriate means of protecting environmentally sensitive areas.
2. Protect important downstream trout and salmon habitat from erosion and siltation.
3. Revegetate slopes and disturbed stream bank areas to minimize erosion, loss of vegetation, sedimentation of stream areas and eliminate further deterioration of fish habitat.
4. Discourage removal or disturbance of park resources, including fossils, soils, flora and fauna.
5. Support and promote activities which enhance awareness about the importance of environmental protection and restoration.
6. Protect creek corridors and riparian area ESA's along Benson Creek, Flynnfall Creek, and Hoskins Creek, and accommodate trail access as appropriate.
7. Coordinate with MOELP/ DFO to conduct any instream and bank stabilization work during the summer, utilizing practices to ensure no silt is deposited to the streams. Submit applications to obtain MOELP approval for proposed works.
8. Support and develop environmental education programs in concert with the MOELP, MOF, Malaspina University-College, the School District and community groups.
9. Support programs to increase environmental awareness and encourage voluntary stewardship actions on adjacent private and resource lands, i.e., Naturescape B.C., Streamkeepers etc.

4.03 Pedestrian Access and Trail Connection Recommendations

Several portions of existing park access trails are excessively steep as a result of existing site topography. Associated erosion and potential environmental impacts are of concern. Trail standards, maintenance and user safety need to be ongoing priorities throughout Park planning, development and management activities.

1. Address and mitigate public safety hazards associated with existing trails and site use areas.
2. Close trails until such time as public safety hazards have been addressed and degraded environmentally sensitive areas have been rehabilitated.
3. Plan and develop trail standards in partnership with other agencies, including MOELP, MOF, City of Nanaimo, adjacent landowners, and leaseholders. Negotiate with senior governments for approvals for revegetation, trail renovation or closure in stream corridor riparian areas.

Establish trail standards, appropriate to site conditions and intended uses, to control erosion, support adequate site drainage, and protect sensitive vegetation from trampling.

Use non-toxic, permeable surfacing materials where possible to allow infiltration and reduce surface runoff.

4. Assess feasibility of utilizing existing park access trails which may be located in resource lands or ESA's, except where development and/or use endangers users or has detrimental effects on environment or resource values.
5. Focus immediate priorities for community links on acquiring or securing agreements for use of existing access corridors located outside current BCFRP boundaries, with a subsequent focus on trail development in the Park.
6. Limit trails and related disturbance within sensitive, streamside areas of the site.
7. Locate improvements such as trails, signage, interpretive information and rest or viewing areas to create complementary relationships and make efficient use of capital resources.
8. Upgrade exiting trails to established standards.
9. Decommission substandard and redundant trails.
10. Provide information about trail length and order of difficulty, i.e., easiest, moderate or most difficult.

4.04 Vehicle Access and Parking Area Recommendations

The Weigles Road trailhead is the main access for people arriving at the park in vehicles. Cars are typically parked on the widened south shoulder of Weigles Road near the park access trail.

The existing panhandle park access is widened at the Biggs Road junction to accommodate trailhead development and potential parking for a limited number of vehicles. In future, other parking options may prove more appropriate in the context of overall park development, existing site conditions, and levels of future user demand.

The following recommendations apply to vehicle access and parking considerations:

1. Prohibit use of motorized vehicles within the park, with the possible exception of emergency or maintenance vehicles to key points within the Park.
2. Consider limiting bicycle use in the park.
3. Provide safe parking, whether limited to roadway shoulder areas or accommodated in a formal parking area(s).
4. Organize vehicular access and parking to minimize impacts on recreational activities. Minimize safety and aesthetic intrusion of vehicles into the Park.
5. Address requirements (e.g. signage) for continued shoulder parking in existing locations. Coordinate with MOTH and other agencies having jurisdiction.
6. Determine potential needs for additional parking as demand increases, including:
 - identifying candidate locations for additional park access trail/shoulder parking areas and coordinate with MOTH and other agencies having jurisdiction, to address potential requirements, i.e., signage.
 - considering the feasibility of partnering with others to develop shared off-road parking in the vicinity of the park.
7. Discourage use of parking areas by non-park users.

4.05 Partnership and Management Recommendations

Effective policies for partnering with other agencies and private interests can assist in achieving more with less. RDN and City of Nanaimo residents currently enjoy several large tracts of undeveloped Crown or privately owned resource land in the vicinity of the BCFRP, where recreational use has been permitted as a secondary activity.

Ongoing support for community input and clear direction from the RDN is critical to nurturing volunteerism and utilizing limited resources as effectively as possible. Ongoing planning and development activities allow government agencies to keep pace with emerging trends, and changes in senior government administrative frameworks. Adapting and utilizing new planning and administrative tools to suit community priorities and resources can assist in achieving overall goals.

1. Balance the interests and concerns of government agencies, community groups, organizations and the public with input from Regional District representatives and Advisory Committees in the ongoing planning, design, implementation and maintenance of Benson Creek Falls Regional Park.
2. Maintain beneficial, cooperative relationships with other government agencies to coordinate planning, development, management of the Park and environs. Potential RDN partners include:
 - MOELP, to address environmental protection and stewardship while achieving recreational goals.
 - MOF, resource landowners and leaseholders, to plan and design facilities that will support recreational opportunities on resource lands and park lands.
 - City of Nanaimo, to coordinate related park, trail and greenway initiatives.
3. Establish complementary relationships with adjacent landowners/leaseholders to:
 - provide access to the park while limiting the need for additional trails within steeply sloping, sensitive, streamside areas of the Park.
 - maintain habitat and environmentally significant or sensitive areas extending outside the Park, such as habitat and watercourse areas and contiguous vegetative units.
 - coordinate interpretive information about natural, cultural and industrial heritage of the Park and environs.
4. Establish consistent construction and maintenance standards for park improvements that meet community expectations and are within RDN fiscal capabilities.
5. Research senior government programs and related opportunities to provide funding for development works within the Park such as the Environmental Youth Team or Brannen Lake Correctional Centre crews, and for grants for potential trail and interpretive improvements on adjacent Crown lands.
6. Develop and maintain an updated list of potential Park initiatives and improvements, available RDN funding, and other sources of funding or support available to facilitate partnerships for park improvements.

7. Synthesize technical information and Management Plan Brief information to develop an Implementation Plan for BCFRP, all in the context of available RDN and/or partnership funding including:
 - facility improvements required to improve recreation opportunities.
 - site rehabilitation and related stewardship measures to protect the environment.
 - partnership and management activities required to implement priority items.
 - related estimates of administrative, capital and maintenance costs.
 8. Plan capital works and site improvements to allow implementation to be staged, to respond to funding availability and priorities which will evolve over time.
 9. Prepare detailed design and related cost estimates for proposed site works and improvements.
 10. Achieve maximum benefit for costs incurred, including consideration of both initial capital development and ongoing maintenance costs.
 11. Encourage partnerships with non-government agencies, corporate citizens, interest groups and individuals to enhance opportunities for recreation and to further stewardship of the environment.
 12. Consider establishing a 'Volunteers in the Park' or related "Adopt-a-Trail" program to sustain ongoing community participation in BCFRP development, maintenance and stewardship.
- Develop and adopt a streamlined Volunteers in the Park program, including an information package for distribution to potential community partners that:
- sets standards for public input.
 - sets out a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all parties.
 - establishes assurance of performance.
 - is flexible and workable.
 - address ongoing costs for long term maintenance and upkeep requirements.
13. Continue BCFRP Advisory Committee involvement, including a range of RDN, neighbourhood and community organization representatives to advise on potential opportunities for community partnerships, volunteer input, and priorities for park improvements.
 14. Prepare a brief annual report outlining:
 - items implemented in the past year.
 - items to be addressed in the coming year.
 - Plan updates or revisions required to facilitate ongoing implementation.
 15. Update BCFRP Plan documents from time to time to reflect changing circumstances and related shifts in priorities, and the current Park's role in the overall RDN Parks System Plan. Record and append amendments to the applicable documents.

5.0 PRIORITY ACTIONS

This section summarizes the key components of the Management Plan brief as a general framework for implementation. It is expected that implementation of the recommendations outlined in the Management Plan Brief will occur over an extended period of time.

Several factors govern how far the Regional District is able to go in providing parks and open space. Since funds are limited, and taxpayers can only provide a level of service that is consistent with their ability to fund those services, priorities need to be established to progress towards overall goals in a coordinated manner.

Initiatives will be planned and carried out according to an Implementation Plan to be refined in the context of available RDN funding and /or partnership opportunities.

Some actions will have minimal impact on annual budgeting, while others will require long term planning and funding for implementation.

Action items are prioritized in the **Action Plan Summary** according to the following:

- **Immediate priorities** should be initiated in the first year, with completion over a one to five year period.
- **Longer term items**, though potentially initiated in the short term, will likely be completed beyond a five year time span.
- **Considered actions** should be evaluated as soon as possible and implemented as resources and time permit.
- **Ongoing initiatives** will be implemented over an extended period of time, some will have been initiated prior to the Plan.

Costs for immediate (up to 5 years) and longer term (over 5 years) actions are identified according to the following 'order of magnitude' budgeting categories:

- **Minimal cost** to \$ 3,000.
- **Moderate cost** \$3, 000 to \$10,000.
- **High cost** over \$10,000.

Benson Creek Falls Regional Park

Table 1: Management Plan Brief, Action Plan Summary	Priority:			Cost: \$
	Immediate to 5 yrs	Longer 5yrs+	C=Consider O=Ongoing	L=to 3,000 M=to10,000 H=10,000+
5.01 Recreation Management				
1. Adopt the Benson Creek Falls Management Plan Brief.	✓			L
2. Address and mitigate public safety hazards.	✓			H
3. Close trails until degraded environmentally sensitive areas have been rehabilitated.	✓			M
4. Consider adding the following Crown Lands to the Park:			O	
to the north: remainder of West 40 Acres of Section 18.			C	
to the south: remaining portion of Section 17 not included in Woodlot 20.			C	
to the west of the park access road dedication: Crown Reserve 1407880 (B.C. Building Corporation).			C	
to the east: continuation of the Benson Creek ravine ESA between the park and Andres Road.			C	
5. Obtain geotechnical engineering and structural engineering feasibility review of candidate Benson Creek crossings.	✓			M
6. Determine desired level of quality for park and open space services to be provided.	✓			L
7. Coordinate with other agencies re: delivery and promotion of recreational services, i.e., City of Nanaimo, Tourism Nanaimo.			O	L
8. Maintain buffer areas around the park perimeter, because adjacent lands may be logged or developed in the future.	✓		O	L
9. Provide site identification and orientation information at park entry areas.	✓			M
10. Develop an interpretive information system re: natural attributes and sensitivities, industrial and cultural heritage.		✓		M
5.02 Environmental Stewardship				
1. Determine the appropriate means of protecting environmentally sensitive areas.	✓		O	M
2. Protect important trout and salmon habitat from erosion and siltation.			O	M
3. Revegetate slopes and disturbed stream bank areas.			O	H
4. Discourage removal or disturbance of park resources, including fossils, soils, flora and fauna.				
5. Support and promote activities which enhance awareness about environmental protection and restoration.			O	M
6. Protect riparian area ESA's, and accommodate appropriate trail access re: Benson/ Flynnfall/ Hoskins Cr., streams, wetlands.	✓		O	H
7. Coordinate with MOELP/DFO re: instream/bank stabilization work. Submit applications to obtain MOELP approval.			O	L
8. Support/develop education programs w/ MOELP, MOF, Malaspina U-C, School District, community groups.			O	M
9. Support awareness/stewardship programs on adjacent lands, i.e., Naturescape B.C., Streamkeepers etc.			C	L
5.03 Pedestrian Access and Trail Connections				
1. Address and mitigate public safety hazards associated with existing trails and site use areas.	✓			H
2. Close trails until safety hazards have been addressed and degraded ESA's have been rehabilitated.	✓			H
3. Plan /develop trail standards w/ other agencies, including MOELP, MOF, City of Nanaimo, adjacent landowners/leaseholders.	✓			M
4. Assess feasibility of utilizing park access trails which may be located in resource lands or ESA's.	✓			M
5. Secure agreements for use of existing access corridors located outside current BCFRP boundaries.	✓		O	L
6. Limit trails and related disturbance within sensitive, streamside areas of the site.	✓			M
7. Locate trails, signage, info., rest/viewing areas etc. to create complementary relationships, making efficient use of capital.	✓			
8. Upgrade trails to established standards.	✓			H
9. Decommission substandard and redundant trails.	✓			M
10. Provide trail signage re: length and order of difficulty, i.e., easiest, moderate or most difficult.	✓			L
5.04 Vehicle Access and Parking				
1. Prohibit use of motorized vehicles within the park, except emergency or maintenance service to key areas.	✓			L
2. Consider limiting bicycle use in the park.			C	
3. Provide safe parking, whether on road shoulders or in a formal parking area(s).	✓			L
4. Plan vehicle access and parking to minimize impacts on recreational activities and aesthetics.	✓			
5. Address requirements re: shoulder parking in existing locations. Coordinate with MOTH /other relevant agencies.	✓			L
6. Determine potential needs for additional parking as demand increases.		✓		
7. Discourage use of parking areas by non-park users.	✓			L
5.05 Partnerships and Management				
1. Incorporate community group, public, senior gov't, RDN and Advisory Committee input into ongoing planning/implementation.	✓		O	M
2. Maintain relationships with government agencies to coordinate Park planning, development, management re:				
MOELP, to address environmental protection and stewardship while achieving recreational goals.	✓		O	L
MOF, to plan and design facilities that will support recreational opportunities on resource and park lands.	✓			L
City of Nanaimo, to coordinate related park, trail and greenway initiatives.	✓			L
3. Establish complementary relationships with adjacent landowners/leaseholders to:				
provide access to the park.	✓			
maintain habitat and ESA's extending outside Park boundaries, such as watercourses and contiguous vegetative units.	✓		O	
coordinate interpretive information about natural, cultural and industrial heritage of the Park and environs.		✓		L
4. Establish consistent construction/maintenance standards to meet community expectations and suit RDN fiscal capabilities.	✓			M
5. Research senior government programs and related opportunities to provide funding for Park development.	✓		O	
6. Develop and keep an updated list of potential initiatives/improvements to facilitate partnership activities.	✓		O	
7. Synthesize technical information and Management Plan Brief information to develop an Implementation Plan for BCFRP.	✓			
8. Plan capital works and site improvements to allow staged implementation.	✓			
9. Prepare detailed design and related cost estimates for proposed capital works and site improvements.	✓		O	H
10. Achieve maximum benefit for costs incurred, including initial capital development and ongoing maintenance costs.	✓		O	
11. Encourage partnerships with NGO's, corporate citizens, and interest groups to enhance recreation and support stewardship.			O	
12. Consider establishing a 'Volunteers in the Park' program to facilitate community participation in Park stewardship.			C	L
develop and adopt an efficient, streamlined 'Volunteers in the Park' program.			C	L
distribute information packages to potential community partners and administer the program.			C	M
14. Continue BCFRP Advisory Committee involvement.	✓		O	
15. Prepare brief BCFRP annual report.			O	
16. Update Benson Creek Falls Regional Park Plan documents from time to time as required.			O	

APPENDIX A

Chronological Outline - Benson Creek Falls Regional Park Development

The following summary is based on a review of background information and RDN file notes. It is provided as an outline for general information only.

Early 1960's	16" fossilised ammonite in the bank of Ammonite Falls shattered by vandals. Local representatives gathered photos and a box of fossils from the area and met with BC Parks Branch in Victoria to propose protection of a 201.8 acre (≈82 ha) area as Provincial Park.
Nov. 26, 1969	A BC Map Reserve (Recreation) was created on Section 17 & 18, File No. 0293664, Reference No. H-1-480. ≈ 80 acres
July 1973	A reduced area, totalling 80 acres, comprised of the West 40 acres of each of Sections 17 & 18 placed in Map Reserve Status, part of the Recreational Land Bank where certain Crown Lands are held for future recreational use. The Falls on Benson Creek has been known as Andrea Falls, Manly Falls, Benson Creek Falls, and Ammonite Falls.
July 1974	RDN applies for 201.8 acres (≈82 ha) to be acquired by RDN for Regional Wilderness Park encompassing all of Sections 17 & 18, Range 1, Mountain Land District. Planned development was limited to signage related to user safety and to prohibit the removal of gravel, plants or fossils.
April 1975	Lands Branch replies to RDN noting east 60 acres of Section 18 is privately owned but application for remaining 120 acre (≈48 ha) area is proceeding.
January 1978	RDN inquiry re: application status.
December 1979	BC Land Manager replies that application has been turned down, pending Integrated Resource Management Committee study. Resource Analysis Branch will be analysing soil and Highways will be testing for gravel resources.
June 1984	RDN receives Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing letter advising of their intention to cancel map reserve status and requesting justification to retain it.
June 1984	RDN replies recommending that map reserve status be retained, citing original reasons for its establishment including recreational and educational values.
Aug. 14, 1984	Section 12 Map Reserve #69501 (West 40 acres of Section 18 and all of Section 17, Range 1, Mountain District) cancelled.
March 1985	RDN representatives meet with BC Lands representative to discuss situation. Recommended that a proposal be submitted by RDN.
July 1985	RDN submits report proposal to BC Lands describing the need and justification for preservation of the Benson Creek area recommending either establishment of a Provincial Park or transfer of title to the RDN for park.
March 1986	BC Lands proposes a 30 year lease, subject to metes and bounds survey of the subject area, which encompassed the current Park area minus the right of way access to Weigles Road.

July 1986	RDN requests award of a short term (≈2 year) lease during which time the various requirements of the longer lease could be met (i.e. metes and bounds survey).
September 1986	BC Lands issues a 2 year License of Occupation for a portion of Sections 17 & 18 for Park purposes.
November 1986	RDN submits lease application documents, based on access from private lands to the east, referring to future completion of necessary survey (before title to the land can be conveyed to the District).
December 1986	B. Williamson, B.C.L.S. ,instructed by Ministry of Forests and Lands to survey the proposed Park area.
February 1987	A. Caillet submits trail development proposal to RDN. RDN Board recommends that staff take action to proceed with development of trails in the Park with assistance of Brannen Lake Correctional Centre crews.
April 1987	RDN authorises surveyor to commence survey. Proposed park survey plan copy sent to Highways District Office.
June 1987	Preliminary survey plan copy sent to RDN.
June 1987	Highways responds and applies 7 conditions of approval including a 20 m. public access route to be provided between the Park and Weigles Road.
October 1987	RDN submits Crown Land Lease application to Ministry of Forests and Lands for 20 m. public access between the Park and Weigles Road. Ministry of Forests and Lands replies to application for access lease requesting letter of consent from Sinclair Ganderton Contractors Ltd. who hold lease over area of access.
November 1987	RDN sends letter to Sinclair Ganderton Contractors Ltd. requesting consent.
February 1988	Ministry advises surveyor that the application will be processed under the Land Act. Park survey instructions are amended.
March 1988	Surveyor advises RDN that because the plan will be registered under the Land Act, more work must be done. RDN receives letter from Ministry explaining their point of view.
June 1988	Ministry extends deadline for completion of survey to December 15, 1988.
July 1988	RDN Board decides to direct staff to pursue acquiring title to the land or having the Province dedicate the area as Provincial Park.
February 1989	BC Lands issues a 2 yr. License of Occupation with special provisos requiring: - preparation of a development plan prior to the expiry of the License and as a prerequisite to a Crown Grant of the property. - RDN shall not fill build or remove vegetation within 7.5 metres of the top of the stream bank without prior written consent of MOELP.
March 1989	RDN Board recommends that Director Caillet be authorised to act as co-ordinator for the development of a park plan for Benson Creek Park (24.01 hectare area).

- December 1990 BC Crown Lands accepts, confirms and dates survey plan of Block A of Sections 17, 18 and 19, Range 1, Mountain District as a Park as of December 3, 1990.
- September 1991 RDN submits lease documents and park development plan to BC Lands and Parks.
- October 1991 BC Lands and Parks responds to RDN submission noting that any significant changes to the plan, and in particular any construction of buildings or parking lots not provided for in the park plan must receive BC Lands and Parks prior authorization.
- Concern was noted that portions of the trail system extend beyond Park boundaries onto Crown Land and BC Lands and Parks requires tenure under the Land Act. RDN was also advised to contact the owners of the other properties upon which its Park trail system encroaches to determine potential concerns.
- August 1991 MOELP issues Lease #103987 to RDN commencing August 1, 1991 for regional park purposes for a period of 30 years, with the special proviso that the RDN shall not fill build or remove vegetation within 7.5 metres of the top of the stream bank without prior written consent of MOELP.
- March 1992 RDN Board recommended that Director Caillet be authorised to enlist the services of Brannen Lake Correctional Centre crews to construct trails in the park.
- October 1996 RDN letter to MOELP notes that the informal route used to access the area near the bottom of Ammonite Falls is bare of vegetation and has become very slick and dangerous - a risk problem which needs to be addressed as soon as possible. RDN intends to block off the existing route and create a safer alternative trail. RDN Parks Planner and MOELP District Habitat Officer meet at BCFRP to review RDN proposal to build an improved access trail to the base of Ammonite Falls. Site visit began at Doumont Rd. access and ended at the fallen log crossing of Benson Creek. MOELP indicated that steep banks (at "switchback" trail) require revegetation project.
- MOELP letter indicated they are not in support of the new trail proposal, as follows:
- the existing trail was poorly established and is now largely deteriorated, which has resulted in sloughing and erosion of the banks.
 - existing banks along that portion of Benson Creek under discussion are too steep to design an effective route without causing further damage to the soils and rooted vegetation.
 - proposed upgrading work will only serve to legitimize the use of these trails and encourage increased access and damage to the banks.
 - no trail work should be undertaken until the existing crossing (fallen log) is improved.
 - MOELP is not in favour of "encouraging increased use by supporting short-term rehabilitation measures that will inevitably result in further deterioration of fish habitat."
 - MOELP recommends that if RDN "is determined to conduct this work, an alternate creek crossing be found that would reduce the overall impact of pedestrian traffic and not reduce the overall cross-sectional area of the channel."
- ≈October 1996 Carey Taylor Associates submits a proposal to RDN on behalf of Warren Paving and Materials Group for a private land/Crown land property exchange for the continuation of Benson Creek ravine area between the current Park boundary and Andres Road.

RDN staff and BC Environment representatives are interested in assessing proposal's feasibility, but BC Lands representatives are not supportive.

- January 1998 RDN retains Archadia Landscape Architecture Ltd. to prepare a Management Plan Brief for BCFRP Park to guide the long term planning and development of the park.
- December 1998 RDN acts on Archadia's draft recommendation to obtain additional survey and environmental inventory and assessment information.
- February 1999 Coastal Resource Mapping Ltd provides additional survey information.
- May 1999 J.C. Lee and Associates Ltd. submits environmental report to RDN.
- July 1999 Archadia L. A. Ltd. submits draft Management Plan Brief for RDN and BCFRP Advisory Committee review.
- August 1999 Management Plan Brief revised re: review comments and submitted for RDN Board consideration.