



National Park Reserve Feasibility Assessment

South Okanagan Lower Similkameen

Summer 2010

Since 2004, Parks Canada and the Province of British Columbia have been cooperating to assess the feasibility of establishing a national park reserve in the South Okanagan and Lower Similkameen area. Since we have not provided a public update for some time, this handout describes some work-in-progress.

What has been done

Over the past 6 years we have completed technical reports on topics ranging from conservation values to social and economic studies. We have worked with the Okanagan Nation and local bands to begin to understand their perspectives on protecting and caretaking the land.

We introduced a Draft Park Concept in 2006, and gathered local feedback from open houses, forums, workshops and meetings. We talked with stakeholders and communities to better understand where common interests and the national park concept come together.

While many people supported protection of the unique natural and cultural heritage of the area, some local residents felt that the draft proposal was too much of a change – too large, too fast, too much. We have now taken some time to carefully consider and address all input that has been received.

What we've been doing, and What's New

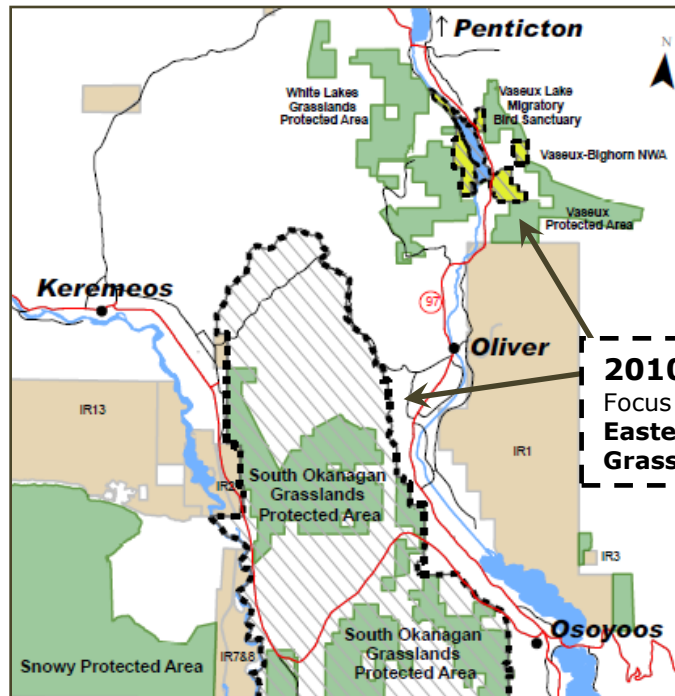
Over the past 2 years we have sought renewed involvement of the Okanagan Nation and local bands to explore common interests and a mutually agreeable approach to conclude the feasibility study.

Working with representatives of provincial agencies who currently manage Crown land, we collaborated to build new ideas and consider the merits of a new approach. There is more work to be done, but here is an update on changes to the 2006 Draft Park Concept.

1. Focus on a smaller area

The 2006 Draft Park Concept included 3 areas, totaling about 650 sq km in size:

1. **Western Component** - West of the Similkameen Valley (around Snowy Protected Area),
2. **Eastern Component** - Between the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys (around South Okanagan Grasslands Protected Area),
3. **Northern Component** - Federal lands around Vaseux Lake.



Although the western component has important natural and cultural values, it is not included in the new area of focus.

2010 Draft Park Concept
Focus on **Northern (Vaseux)** and **Eastern (South Okanagan Grasslands)** components



2. Relationships with the ranching community

The 2006 Draft Park Concept proposed a phase-out of cattle grazing in a transition leading to national park establishment. While this approach was consistent with current national park policy, it did not fully acknowledge the role of ranching in the local community and in the BC interior.

Discussions between range managers, ecosystem scientists, researchers, park managers and others have helped us to build principles of a new approach to grazing that should help to address concerns of the ranching community, and result in a national park reserve proposal that is more reflective of the way of life on Canada's Interior Dry Plateau.

In the new approach, grazing would continue, would be managed adaptively and would be guided by science to ensure achievement of park goals (including goals for ecological health, research, learning, cultural heritage and park visitor experience). This 'adaptive management' approach shifts more focus towards:

- learning and sharing knowledge about grazing and ecological health;
- the social, cultural and environmental roles of ranching and grazing in the broad ecosystem; and
- partnerships and collaboration with ranchers.

No ranches or associated tenures would be expropriated, and any land acquisition for the national park would be based on a willing-seller, willing-buyer approach.

Next steps include further discussions with affected ranchers and other stakeholders.

3. Taking time to build relationships

We are taking time to rebuild a relationship with local bands that will be strong and last into the future. To begin with, we are looking at other places where Parks

Canada is working with aboriginal peoples to meet common interests in the land, the people and the stories.

There are also many stakeholders with interest in the future of the area, including hunters, recreation users, mineral interests, water users, conservation groups and community residents. Many of these stakeholders were engaged in earlier phases of the feasibility assessment, and will continue to be involved.

4. Timely conclusion of the feasibility assessment

Never has a national park feasibility study been undertaken in a more complex place, with such a rich diversity of natural and cultural values and multi-stakeholder interests, yet under such pressure from rapid land use change. While relationships take time, the land is being affected by numerous changes, and time is of the essence to conclude the feasibility assessment.

In this area of local, provincial, national and international conservation significance, Parks Canada and the Province of British Columbia have common interests in healthy ecosystems and healthy rural communities. Next steps include engagement of local bands to conclude the feasibility assessment and design a path forward.

For further information

Please see the project website:

www.pc.gc.ca/sols

Contact: Debbie Clarke, Project Manager

Email: Debbie.Clarke@pc.gc.ca

Phone: 250-490-2238 or 1-877-490-2238

102 Industrial Way, Penticton, BC V2C 7C8

