

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA'S PARKS AND PROTECTED AREAS



1910 Strathcona Discovery Crown Mt Party
Courtesy: BC Ministry of Environment

BC Parks will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2011. Over the past century, the focus for managing and adding to the park system has changed from the provision of recreational opportunities to the conservation of representative ecosystems within British Columbia.

The following, excerpt from *Conservation of Species and Ecosystems at Risk: BC Parks and Protected Areas Challenges* (Stevens & Darling, 2004), provides a brief summary of the history of this change:

“In 1911, Strathcona Provincial Park was established as British Columbia’s first provincial

park. Soon after, Mount Robson Provincial Park was established as the province’s second park, and like Strathcona, was situated along railway lines. Early parks were clearly means to increase tourism, and park recreation included lodge development and alpine touring. During the 1920s and 1930s, large provincial parks such as Garibaldi, Kokanee Glacier, Tweedsmuir, and Golden Ears were created for reasons beyond tourism including multiple use and resource extraction. During this time, the amount of protected land base grew rapidly. Post-war British Columbia saw a boom in demand for car-based family recreation. Camping quickly became a popular activity as highways expanded and more of the province became accessible to the average resident. The 1950s and 1960s brought significant additions to the parks system in the form of small roadside parks with camping facilities; however, by the mid-1950s and early 1960s, large tracts of park lands had been removed from the system to facilitate hydroelectric

and forestry development. Although the system was gaining in park numbers, overall lands protected were reduced by about one million hectares between 1950 and 1965.

Until the 1960s, parks were primarily thought of as places to showcase the natural splendor of the province. In the 1960s, a new movement began evolving. People began to view protected areas as places for conserving the natural diversity of the province. In 1965, the first Park Act was passed, which explicitly mandated the Parks Branch to manage these areas for future generations.

In the 1970s and 1980s, conservation interests continued to grow along with concerns about land use. At the global level, the World Commission on Sustainability urged the protection of biodiversity by encouraging the global community to triple the amount of protected areas. At the Earth Summit in 1992, Canada signed an accord vowing to meet the challenge of establishing 12% of its land base as protected areas. In 1993, British Columbia took up this challenge and released its Protected Areas Strategy (Province of British Columbia 1993). The Strategy committed the province to double the amount of protected area land base from 6% (1993) to 12% by 2000 following a framework based on ecological representation. New areas for protection were identified through community-based land use planning that involved industry, environmental groups, First Nations, communities, and government. Land use plans were developed for more than 70% of the province, resulting in the protection of an additional five million hectares of the land base. British Columbia was the first province in Canada to achieve the 12% goal.”

Since this paper was published in 2004, the number of parks and protected areas established in the province has increased. This has resulted in approximately 14% of the province now residing within British Columbia’s parks and protected areas system.