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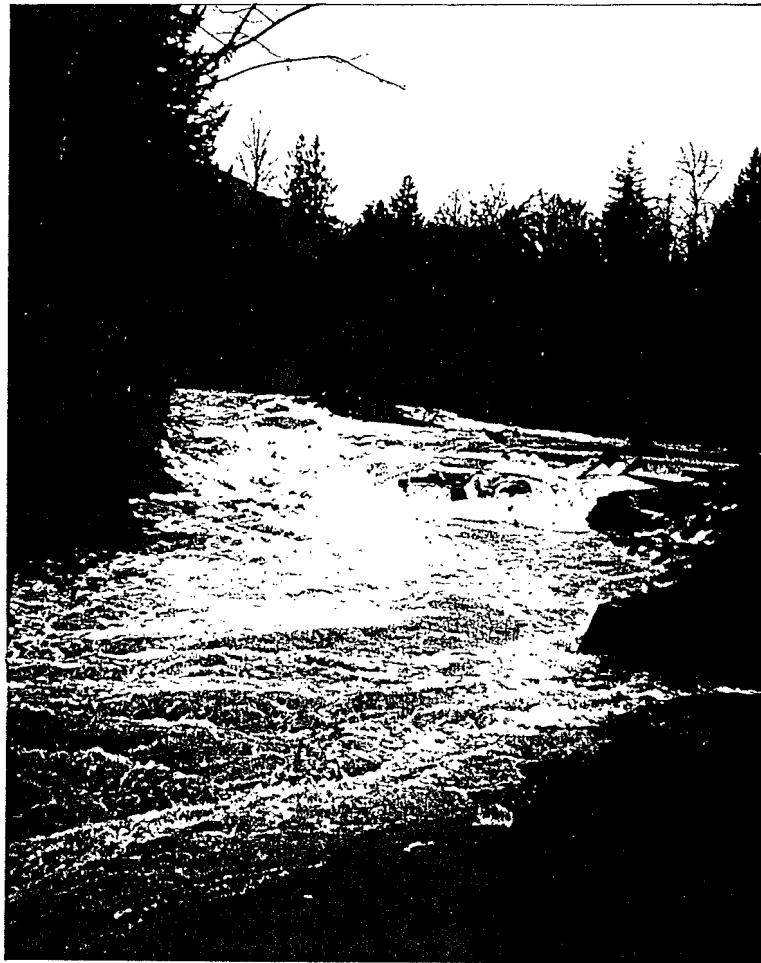
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BC PARKS  
SOUTH VANCOUVER  
ISLAND DISTRICT

# Background Document for Cowichan River Provincial Park



Prepared for:

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March 1998



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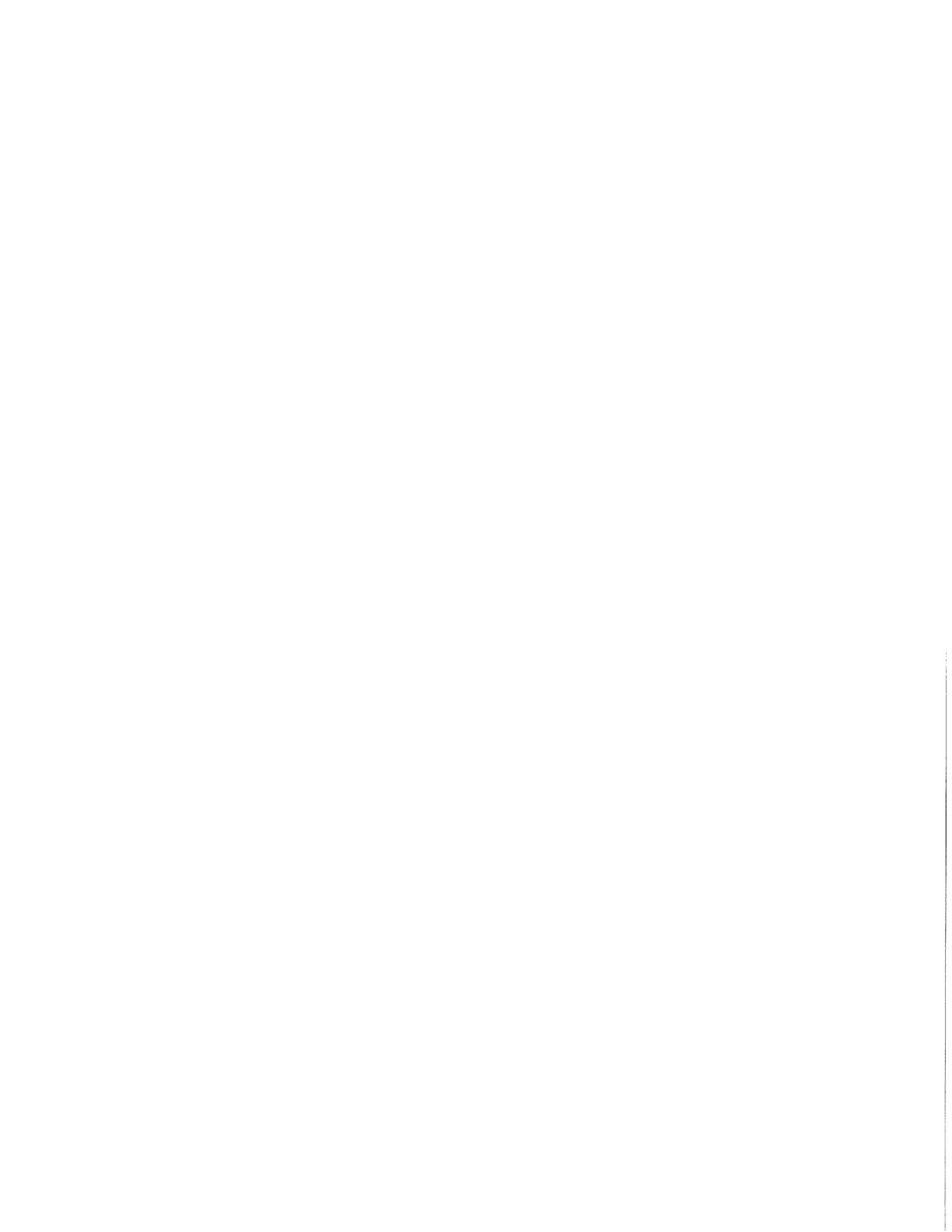


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# **INTRODUCTION**

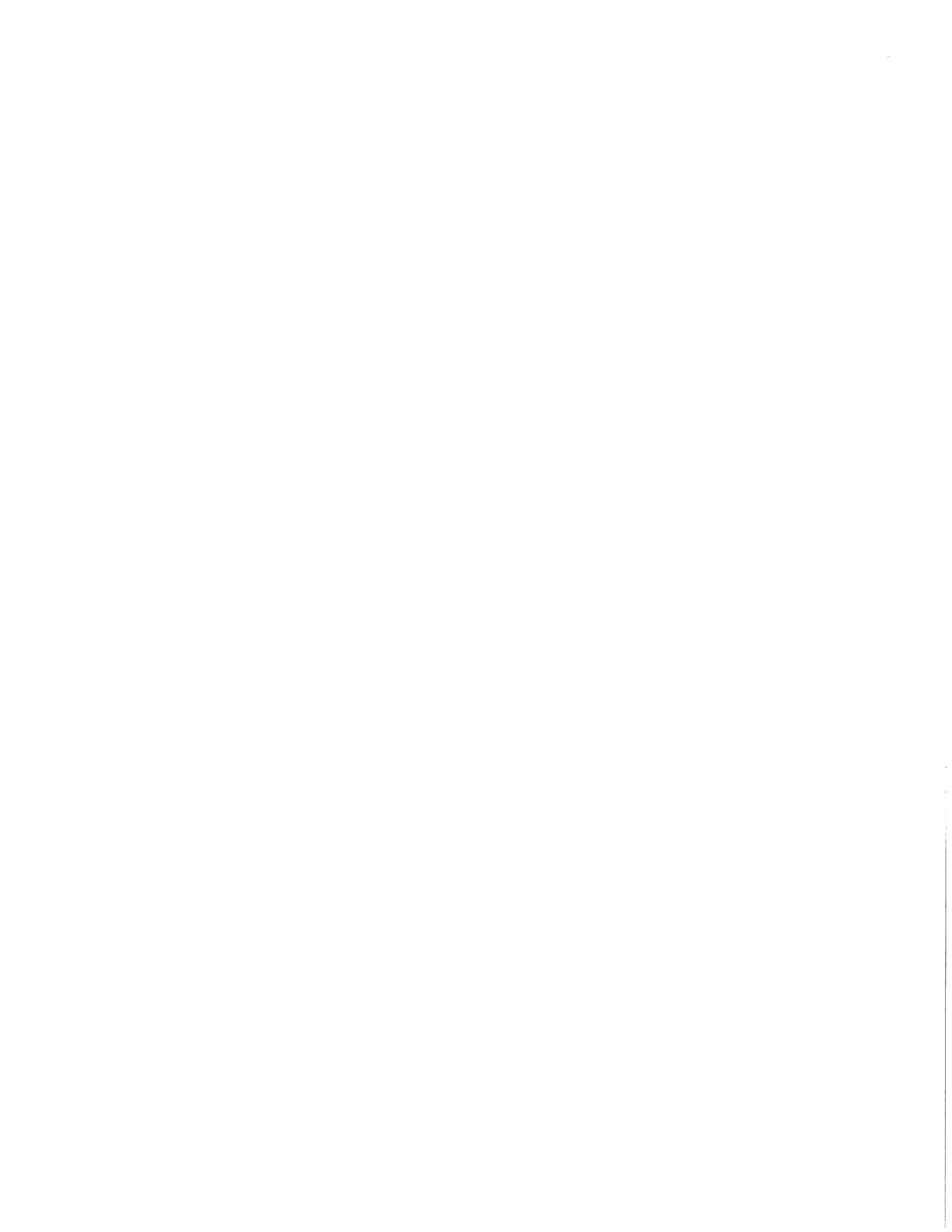
## **Purpose of Background Document**

This background document will be used as an information reference base for producing a comprehensive management plan for Cowichan River Provincial Park. The purpose of the background document is to provide a detailed overview of the natural, human heritage and recreational values of Cowichan River Park in the context of provincial goals for conservation and recreation. While not an exhaustive resource atlas, this report provides sufficient information for understanding the various issues and related considerations that will need to be addressed in a park management planning process.

## **Location and Regional Setting**

Cowichan River Park is located between the communities of Duncan and Lake Cowichan on the banks of the Cowichan River (see Figure 1). The Cowichan River originates in Lake Cowichan at an elevation of 159 metres. It flows eastward approximately 47 km before discharging into Cowichan Bay. With its main tributaries, Somenos and Quamichan creeks, the Cowichan drains an area of approximately 90,000 hectares of generally hilly and mountainous topography. The river system is the fourth largest on Vancouver Island. Over one hundred relic and side-channels (or creeks) feed into the Cowichan River System including: Robertson, Sutton, Nixon, Shaw, Cottonwood and Meade rivers. Larger nearby waterways include the Chemainus and Koksilah rivers which also flow into Cowichan Bay.

The park falls within the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) which covers an area nearly 373,000 hectares. Population in the CVRD was 70,978 in 1997 and is estimated to grow to 79,967 by 2001. While Duncan serves as the major retail service centre, much of the economy in the area is resource based. Regional land use activities include agriculture, fisheries production, pulp and paper, recreation and tourism. The region is internationally recognized for its commercial and recreational salmon fishing. Land use activities adjacent to the park include forestry, agriculture, residential and private land use, and recreational use on private land. There is little development along the river near the park. Residential development is situated primarily near Lake Cowichan and Duncan on the north side of the river. However, private cottages are found on properties adjacent to the park near Ripps Pool and upstream from Stoltz Pool.



## Park Highlights

Cowichan River Park is currently comprised of 741 hectares along the Cowichan River providing public access to the river and protecting a corridor of important riparian habitats. The park was established in July of 1995 as a Class A Provincial Park based on the recommendation of the Vancouver Island Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE). As part of the process for establishing Goal 2 areas, a Regional Protected Areas Team (RPAT) also recommended the eventual acquisition of a further 531 hectares of private land along the river to protect special features, such as fisheries values and archaeological sites, and secure recreational opportunities in the region.

The Cowichan River has been recognized as a river of provincial significance and was among the first rivers to be included in the BC Heritage Rivers System. Its inclusion was based on the river's natural, cultural and recreational values, many of which contribute to the significance of Cowichan River Park in the context of provincial protected area goals. Members of the BC Heritage Rivers Board have recommended to the Province that the Cowichan be nominated to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (CHRS). The CHRS is a national program which recognizes the most outstanding examples of natural, historic and recreational rivers in Canada.

The river and its surrounding environments have a rich First Nations history and First Nations cultures remain vibrant in the region today. During the post-contact era, the area was logged and the river was briefly used to transport logs from Lake Cowichan to the sea. Despite a long history of forest industry activity, some remnant old-growth forest remains. Although primarily second-growth, forested habitats in the park are ecologically diverse, characteristic of the Nanaimo Lowland Ecoregion. The park also protects important aquatic habitats. The Cowichan is an important salmon spawning river and supports populations of brown, cutthroat and rainbow trout as well as steelhead.

Cowichan River Park currently supports a range of recreational activities both land and water-based. Activities associated with the Cowichan River include boating, tubing, white water paddling, and swimming. The river is also widely known for its excellent fishing opportunities. Terrestrial-based activities include hiking, camping, picnicking, photography and nature appreciation including bird watching and wildlife viewing. The park includes a historic 20 kilometre hiking trail, picnic and day-use areas, and vehicle, tent and walk-in campsites. Regional parks and recreation sites, the former Canadian National Railway (CNR) right-of-way, and private property are also used extensively for recreation.



## **Park Establishment and Legislation**

The Cowichan has long been recognized as a river of special importance. As early as 1968 groups such as the BC Wildlife Federation and the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC have been promoting the Cowichan River as a park and recreational river candidate. In 1986, BC Parks, the CVRD, and a public advisory committee jointly conducted research, mapping and land status evaluations for the Cowichan River area as part of the provincial Recreation Corridor Plan. In the early 1990s, the Cowichan was identified for study in the Parks and Wilderness for the 90's campaign. Through this process the provincial government found strong support for protecting the natural environment and recreation values along the Cowichan River.

In 1991, under the Rivers and Trails Program, BC Parks became the lead agency in the development of a Cowichan River Recreation Management Plan (CRRMP). A Steering Committee was formed, made up of representatives from the CVRD, various provincial ministries, and members of the public. The intent of the CRRMP was to recommend actions to protect conservation and recreation values in the study area. Through public open houses, the Steering Committee found overwhelming support for the protection of the natural environment and recreation resources, and for the designation of a provincial park along the river and riparian zone. In their final report, the committee recommended the creation of a provincial park corridor along the Cowichan River with integrated resource management occurring outside of the park. It was proposed that 1300 hectares along the river eventually be protected.

In 1992, the recommendations of the CRRMP were presented to agencies involved in CORE and the Protected Areas Strategy. Two years later, through funding provided by the Commonwealth Nature Legacy land acquisition program, BC Parks was able to acquire undeveloped private properties (principally at Stoltz Pool) and parcels of Crown Land along the Cowichan River for park designation. Cowichan River Park was established in July of 1995 as a Class A Provincial Park. The park currently falls under the jurisdiction of the South Vancouver Island District of BC Parks.

## **Interim Measures**

Since the establishment of Cowichan River Park, BC Parks has taken measures to improve recreational opportunities and secure additional properties along the river for future inclusion in the park. These measures have been in response to the Goal 2 recommendation to acquire lands for an extended protected area corridor along the Cowichan River. In 1996, a parcel of property adjacent to Stoltz Pool was sold to the Province. This property contained a section of riparian habitat as well as a log house where BC Parks has since set up a local administration office to help manage parks in the Cowichan area. Also in 1996, the Province began an acquisition process to acquire property on the south side of the river (Block 3A). This parcel of land is approximately

119 hectares and contains over six kilometres of river front. The acquisition has been completed but the land has not been designated as yet.

BC Parks was also provided funding in 1996 and 1997 from the Forest Recreation Program of Forest Renewal BC (FRBC). These funds were to be used for facility and trail development in Cowichan River Park. A portion of this funding was used to develop a campground at Stoltz Pool and day-use facilities at Marie Canyon. Improvements were also made to trails along the Cowichan River (principally the Cowichan River Footpath) in order to bring them up to BC Parks standards. Signs have also been erected at appropriate locations providing directional and safety information.

## **Management Direction**

To date, management direction for Cowichan River Park has come primarily from the CRRMP. Priorities identified in the CRRMP include securing public access to the river, providing recreation opportunities and protecting natural and cultural resource values. Specifically, the park designation was intended to:

- protect biodiversity in the riparian zone;
- promote conservation, recreation and aesthetic values;
- protect river-based and river-side recreation opportunities;
- protect riparian fish and wildlife habitat;
- protect cultural and heritage values; and
- provide for organized and controlled recreation use, minimizing issues relating to trespass, safety and security.

Other objectives and actions of the CRRMP which may form management direction for Cowichan River Park include acquisition and designation of property on both sides of the river, establishment of a recreational trail on the abandoned CNR right-of-way, and the provision of appropriate recreational facilities within the park.

# NATURAL RESOURCES

## Climate

Due to the length and location of the Cowichan River, climate and weather patterns can vary considerably between its headwaters at Lake Cowichan and its mouth at Cowichan Bay. The Cowichan River area reflects characteristics of the Very Dry Maritime Coastal Western Hemlock (CWHxm) and Moist Maritime Coastal Douglas fir (CDFmm) biogeoclimatic zones in the Nanaimo Lowland Ecoregion, and a small area of the Leeward Island Mountain Ecoregion. The park itself lies within a transition zone between these biogeoclimatic units. In general, this region experiences a 'dry summer-wet winter' pattern.

The eastern tip of the park experiences a modified maritime climate, also referred to as a cool summer Mediterranean climate. Located in the rain shadow from the mountains of Vancouver Island and the Olympic Mountain Range in Washington state, the climate here is dry and mild. Mean annual precipitation near the river estuary is 960 mm making this region one of the driest on the coast. The frost-free period averages about 200 days a year as measured at Duncan. These favourable conditions have been a key factor in the evolution of the lush soils which support the region's agriculture and forest industries. As one travels further west to Lake Cowichan, seasonal variabilities in temperature and precipitation become more pronounced. Over 85% of the annual rainfall can occur between October and April with December being the wettest month. Snowfall averages about 56 cm per winter although some years experience little or no snow. The mean annual temperature is about 9.4° Celsius at Lake Cowichan although it is not unusual to see temperatures exceed 30° Celsius in the summer months.

Prevailing winds are from the east to southeast. Due to the protection offered by the Gulf Islands, winds are somewhat gentler than those over the open Strait of Georgia. The Cowichan Valley is generally sheltered from Pacific storms, however, occasional violent and sudden wind storms have been known to funnel up the valley in the winter.

## Geology and Physiography

Topography in the region is comprised of both mountainous uplands and flat, narrow valley bottoms. The most noticeable landscape feature is the Cowichan River Valley, formed by glacial processes during the Pleistocene period. At its climax, the last major ice sheet which covered this area was at least 5000 feet thick. During this period, the Cowichan Valley was occupied by a valley glacier (or ice tongue) which eventually

moved eastward to a point beyond Cowichan Bay. Kettle and kame topography are today found in the middle and lower reaches of the Cowichan River.

The existing lowland area extends east from Lake Cowichan along the river's path. It forms part of the westernmost extension of the Nanaimo Lowlands, a section of the Georgia Depression. The mountains on the north side of the lowlands rise gently away from the valley floor to about 800 metres. To the south, steeper slopes are encountered closer to the river rising to between 600 and 800 metres. The highest mountains in the region have been glaciated as shown by striations and fluting, and glacial erratics (large boulders plucked from the mountains by moving ice) have been found 12 - 15 km from their bedrock source.

Much of the valley floor and the low-lying areas are mantled with till resulting from the wasting of the last major ice sheet. Among the surficial materials deposited by glaciers are clays, silts and pebble-cobble gravels as well as many outwash gravels and sands. In some places clay deposits are crumbling into the river due to natural river movements causing slope instability and siltation. Rock types along the river range from resistant volcanics to clastic detrital rocks including conglomerates, shales and sandstones which are covered in places by drift deposits up to 100 feet thick. Steep banks, canyons and overhanging bluffs also characterize the topography of this river along parts of its length.

## **Soils**

The soils of the region are those classified under the Lower Nanaimo Lowlands zone. Soils representing the Podzolic, Brunisolic, Regosolic, Gleysolic and Organic orders are common. Landforms on Vancouver Island have resulted primarily from the recent glaciation which covered the entire island and ended 10,000 to 12,000 years ago. Consequently, soil parent materials are mainly of glacial origin and consist of tills and glacio-fluvial materials as well as marine deposits, fluvial Quadra sediments, and organic and recent fluvial deposits. The most prominent arable soils are the Fairbridge silt loams, which predominate on the west side of Cowichan Bay and the area to the north and west of Duncan, and the Chemainus silt loam which is visible in the deltaic environment of the Cowichan and Chemainus rivers.

## **Hydrology**

Records of discharge for the Cowichan River are available from flow-gauging stations at Lake Cowichan and Duncan. The mean annual discharge (40 year average) as measured at Lake Cowichan is about 44.5 cubic metres per second (cms). Recorded flows for stations near Duncan are generally slightly higher. A low dam at Lake Cowichan

Village regulates the flow of river water. Flooding is therefore rare, which contributes to fish productivity. Water temperatures for the river can range from 0° to 18° Celsius.

Typical of Vancouver Island waterways, the Cowichan experiences distinct seasonal hydrology and flow changes. Low flows in the area generally occur during the June to October period. During this period, runoff reaches a minimum and the base flow of the river is derived from groundwater. Precipitation in the region increases during the fall which coincides with the return of the salmon to their upstream spawning beds. Maximum flows occur during the winter months instead of during the spring freshet which is typical of other coastal systems such as the Fraser and Skeena. During the winter, discharge reaches a maximum and runoff in the mountainous upper reaches of the river basin is probably near 100 per cent. In the months of January and February, precipitation can include snow which increases the river's turbulence. Freezing conditions are sometimes experienced but the occurrence of ice on the river is rare. In the spring, snow melt and increased rain accelerate the river's flow for a short period before subsiding, allowing the flow levels to again drop.

The Cowichan River is characterized by four main changes in slope, two of which occur within the park. In the upper reaches between Lake Cowichan and Skutz Falls, the river's gradient is gentle, dropping about 1.15 metres per km. The steepest gradients are found between Skutz Falls and Holt Creek, a distance of 14.5 km. In places along this stretch, the river drops almost 8 metres per km (Skutz falls has a total drop of 5.4 metres in a run of 90 metres). Here, the Cowichan exhibits fluctuating water levels and swift currents and there are natural occurrences such as log jams and sweepers in some locations. Severe rapids exist in Marie Canyon and at Skutz Falls during all seasons.

Groundwater in the region is extensively used for municipal and agricultural purposes. The majority of groundwater extraction takes place downstream near the more urbanized areas of Duncan and Cowichan Bay. There is considerable potential for further groundwater extraction along the valley bottoms of the Cowichan River, and to a less extent in other parts of the region. The effects this may have on flow levels in the Cowichan River is unknown.

## **Vegetation**

The Cowichan River flows through two biogeoclimatic zones: the Coastal Douglas-fir (CDF) zone at the eastern end of the park, and the Coastal Western Hemlock (CWH) zone towards the west. The CDF zone occurs almost exclusively on the southeast (leeward) coast of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. The zone is characterized by low summer rainfall and a Mediterranean sub-humid climate. A number of generalized, typical forest associations are observed within this zone. The most widespread forest association, Douglas fir-salal, is comprised mainly of Douglas fir with a small amount of western hemlock. Salal dominates the shrub layer, with lesser amounts of red huckleberry

and Oregon grape. The herb layer consists mainly of twayblade, princess pine, twinflower, rattlesnake plantain and a brown saprophyte. Other species occurring within the area include trees such as western red cedar and western yew with Garry oak and arbutus (madrona) occurring in drier areas. Shrubs such as sword fern, bracken fern, and vanilla-leaf can be found along much of the river. There are also a variety of species of edible mushrooms.

The CWH zone is more common on Vancouver Island and the coastal mainland. Vegetation is typically referred to as 'temperate rainforest' and coniferous forests predominate. Western hemlock and western red cedar trees are common throughout the zone. Other tree species include amabilis fir and yellow cedar in wetter and cooler areas; and Douglas-fir, grand fir, western white pine and bigleaf maple in warmer and drier areas. Black cottonwood and sitka spruce can be found along the river and floodplain. Lodgepole pine is common in very dry areas while red alder occurs primarily on disturbed sites. Shrubs include false aralea, devil's club, oval leaf whortleberry, salal and several types of huckleberry. Herbs and wildflowers of this zone include bunchberry, queen's cup, trailing rubus, alpine marigold, foam flower and twisted stalk.

Although most of the Cowichan Valley was logged early in the century some pockets of old-growth forest and isolated species remain. However, no significant stands of old-growth occur within the park with the possible exception of a block of old-growth north of Stoltz Pool on the south side of the river. There are a few areas which contain open Douglas-fir forests, e.g., at Cabin Pool and Stoltz Pool. There are also stands of Garry oak within the park which are considered unusual for this area. A stand located between Skutz Falls and the 66 Mile Railway Trestle (at Horseshoe Bend) may be the most westerly stand of Garry Oak known in Canada. Older black cottonwood, yew and cedar trees are found outside of the park boundaries but can be observed by users of the Cowichan River Footpath. The rainforest environment provides conditions suitable for lichen and moss which are found on trees and rocks throughout the park.

A detailed survey of rare plants along the Cowichan River has not been undertaken. It is known that the greater Cowichan region contains several species of rare plants including the blue-eyed Mary (*Collinsia grandiflora*), a small blue flower with a distribution in BC limited to the Cowichan River Valley. The pink fawn lily (*Erythronium revolutum*) is protected in the nearby Honeymoon Bay Ecological Reserve, while the white fawn lily (*Erythronium oregonum*) can be found in the Skutz Falls area. The cup clover (*Trifolium cyathiferum*), a red-listed species, has also been recorded near Skutz Falls.

## Wildlife and Birds

A detailed wildlife inventory has not been completed for Cowichan River Park, however, the area is known to provide habitat for many species of birds and wildlife.

Small mammals found in the park include shrews, voles, bats and the native red squirrel. Raccoon, mink, marten and weasel are also common, and river otters and beaver are known to inhabit the river and lake. The native Vancouver Island ermine, a blue-listed species, has been recorded near the north arm of Lake Cowichan. Introduced species include the house mouse, Norway rat, black rat, muskrats, foxes, and rabbits.

Larger mammals include black bear, which can be observed in the park during salmon spawning, and cougar. Wolverine and the Vancouver Island wolf are rarely seen although their habitats may encompass the areas around the river and lake. Columbian black-tailed deer are a far more common species in the park. Roosevelt elk, a sensitive species due to its limited population in BC, historically occupied the park area. This species requires stands of mature timber in which to shelter during the winter months. As logging activities in the region reduced the amount of suitable habitat, the elk migrated away from the river. However, they are believed to be returning to the park area as second-growth forests mature and become protected.

The Cowichan Valley sustains thousands of birds of at least 200 different species. The area is known for its wintering waterfowl which can primarily be found along the banks and wetlands of the Cowichan Estuary and near Lake Cowichan. Migratory birds such as ducks and Canadian geese stop in the park on their seasonal journeys. Species resident to the park include: osprey, hawks, owls, ravens and crows. Bald eagles can be seen along the river in late fall and early winter. Many species of songbirds can also be seen, and heard, in the park.

The valley and surrounding hillslopes provide excellent habitat for many insect species including: butterflies, moths, dragon flies, beetles, grasshoppers, bees, ants, black flies, and mosquitoes.

## **Fish**

The Cowichan is a highly important river on Vancouver Island and in BC because of its variety and abundance of fish species. In addition to commercial and native fisheries, the river is internationally known for its sport fishing opportunities. The Cowichan is home to several species of salmon. The coho run usually peaks in late October depending on weather, water height, water temperature and other variables. The river also supports a fall run of chinook. Members of the Cowichan First Nation own and operate a salmon hatchery on the river which has a rearing capacity of over three million chinook smolts annually.

In BC, brown trout inhabit only the Little Qualicum and Cowichan Rivers. A European trout, the brown is not native to North America but was first introduced from Scotland in the 1930s. After the initial plantings, browns were observed spawning in the Cowichan River in 1937 and have since become firmly established throughout the entire

river system. While this species spawns naturally in the river, the population is augmented by hatchery planting and is regulated through restrictions imposed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). In addition to brown trout, the Cowichan supports populations of native resident rainbow and cutthroat trout. Hatchery stocking has also made the Cowichan one of the most popular winter steelhead streams on Vancouver Island.

# CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

## First Nations History

The Cowichan Valley has been home to First Nations people from earliest times. Prior to the 1800's, the east coast of Vancouver Island was populated by Coast Salish speaking people who resided from Campbell River in the north to Victoria in the south.<sup>1</sup> The name Cowichan is derived from the Coast Salish word 'Khowutzun' meaning land warmed by the sun. This description refers to the valley's comfortable weather conditions. Cowichan is the collective name for a number of independent villages including Comiakem, Somenos, Koksilah, Quamichan and others (see Appendix 1). Historic native settlements were concentrated in the coastal areas and few, if any, year-round settlements were established along the river as the forests were dense and travel was difficult. However, the inland area was visited by hunters in the summer and fall, and the river may have been used as a travel corridor to Lake Cowichan, an historic meeting place.

The history of the Cowichan people is centred around the region's natural resources. The Cowichan were mainly salmon and shellfish eaters. Fishing was often done from canoes using nets, hooks and spears typically at the mouth of the river near Cowichan Bay. Weirs to catch salmon migrating up the river were also used on the Cowichan. While the men fished, women dug clams in shallow bays at low tide using digging sticks made of straight ironwood or western yew. The diet of the Cowichan people was supplemented with edible roots, herbs and wild berries which could be dried and preserved for the winter. The men also hunted for small and large game that could be found in the woods surrounding the river. Among land mammals, deer and elk were the choice food of the Cowichans. Ducks and geese were also hunted using nets. Salmon and venison were preserved by cutting them into strips, smoking the pieces then drying them over fires.

Although the climate in the Cowichan Valley was relatively mild, winters were wet. Single-sloped shed structures were rain-proof and easily constructed for summer houses. Gabled cedar long houses (which could sometimes house many families) were warmer and more durable for winter. The type of house often reflected the social ranking of its inhabitants with gabled structures generally occupied by the village's higher ranking families. Cedar also supplied the Cowichan with clothing. The inner bark, shredded into fibres, was woven into skirts, capes and hats. Fur and hides were also worn as robes or constructed into winter garments. The main form of transportation other than foot, was by canoe. Canoes were constructed from cedar and were suitable for travel by river or sea.

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<sup>1</sup> Coast Salish speaking First Nations also resided on the mainland of British Columbia and Washington.

As the region became settled by Europeans in the late 1800's, the hunting-gathering-fishing lifestyle of the Cowichan tribes diminished as more of its men and women became settled farmers and labourers. Today, the Cowichan tribes make up the largest band in British Columbia and members of the band still own and reside on much of the land surrounding Duncan and along the Cowichan River.

## **First Nations Artifacts**

There has been very little archaeological work conducted along the stretch of the Cowichan River which has been designated as provincial park. This may account for the lack of archaeological evidence of historic First Nations use. To date, one archaeological site on Indian Reserve (IR) property near Skutz Falls has been identified and registered. The site contains remnants of a cedar bark canoe.

Many artifacts may have been lost due to settlement and land use in the area. However, the possibility of locating additional sites should be considered as part of a management plan for the park, particularly if further development of facilities is to take place.

## **Post-Contact and Recent History**

Prior to the first wave of settlement, the Cowichan region had been visited by few Europeans. The Cowichan River and lake areas were surrounded by thick old-growth forests which were scarcely inhabited. Those who traveled or resided here were hunters, trappers, surveyors and prospectors. A number of exploratory trips up the Cowichan were taken as early as 1857. These trips were taken by foot and by canoe. The primary purpose was to report on the mining and logging possibilities in inland areas, which were discovered to be good.

The first European settlers to the region arrived in 1862 when the HMS Hectate dropped anchor in Cowichan Bay. One hundred settlers were on board, representing the nucleus of pioneer settlement in the Cowichan-Chemainus district. In the early years, agriculture was the only successfully established economy in the valley. Practically all agricultural activity was concentrated in the more fertile regions between Duncan and Cowichan Bay. As interior areas became more heavily traveled, mining began to supersede agriculture as the primary industry. However, it was the forest industry that had the greatest influence on development and settlement in the region.

The advent of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway in 1886 had opened up the area to the lumber industry. The line was completed to Lake Cowichan in 1913, while the CNR line was not completed until 1924. Before this time, the Cowichan River was used

as a corridor for transporting logs. Tributaries to the Cowichan were used to provide a water supply for steam mills. The railway, which paralleled the river, was later used to transport logs to Cowichan Bay from saw mills located in Youbou and Honeymoon Bay. During this period, the Cowichan Valley changed quickly as more logging companies purchased timber rights and settlers cleared the land. Most of the old-growth forests of the region were logged early in the century but forestry activities have continued to this day. The rail line was discontinued in 1988 and is now used locally by recreationists. Along this historic route hikers can find footings from old water towers and four trestle bridges. Near Stoltz Pool, foundations remain from small logging camps located at what was known as Stoltz Crossing.

Since the arrival of Europeans, the Cowichan River has experienced constant change. Its banks, headwaters and tributaries have been logged, planted, settled, and influenced by municipal activities such as irrigation and sewage disposal. At its source, the river has been dammed to regulate flows, and at Cowichan Bay it has been ditched and dyked to protect farmland.

## **History of Recreational Use**

Historic use of the Cowichan River for recreation precedes the creation of the park by many decades. While recreational use of the river by First Nations and early pioneers is not known, the Cowichan has experienced a long legacy of recreational use and users dating back to the early part of the century. Before settlement became widespread, the main recreational activities were likely fishing and hunting. As the railway and later logging roads improved access into this area, the river began to receive higher numbers of recreational users. However, easier access also meant that more properties along the river were being purchased for private use.

In the 1950's, the Cowichan Fish and Game Association (CFGGA) became concerned that public access to the river was being lost. In 1960, the association began construction of a footpath along the river from their club property near Duncan to the headwaters of the Cowichan River, a distance of 19 miles. With volunteer labour from members of the CFGGA and assistance from other clubs and individuals, the project was completed in 1969. First used almost exclusively by anglers, the trail soon became a main access route to the river for other activities such as hiking, camping and day use. Today the trail is considered an important historic and community resource.

The present day demand for recreational opportunities along the Cowichan River remains high. Creation of the park, campground and day-use areas have met only a small portion of the total demand for recreational facilities and opportunities. In addition, historic use of the area will have management implications for the park related to issues such as access, appropriate activities and public involvement.

# RECREATION FEATURES, OPPORTUNITIES & FACILITIES

## Access

Vehicle access to the park on the north side of the river is provided via Highway 18 which intersects the Trans-Canada Highway just north of Duncan, or via Riverbottom Road which runs west out of Duncan and follows the path of the river. Once in the vicinity of the park there are several formal access points leading to camping and day-use areas, and numerous informal access points which have historically been developed by recreational users. In some areas, these informal access points trespass through private property.

Formal access points on the north side of the river include Stoltz Pool Campground and Day-use Area, and day-use areas at Marie Canyon and Skutz Falls. An abandoned CNR right-of-way provides a further access route into the park. The 66 Mile Trestle, which connects the right-of-way on the north side of the river to the footpath on the south, provides one of only a few opportunities to cross the river. The trestle is currently in disrepair and in need of upgrading for safety reasons.

Access to the river on the south side is provided mainly by the Cowichan River Footpath. The main section of the footpath extends from a trailhead at Glenora to a bridge just east of Skutz Falls. The trailhead is accessible via Robertson Road and a small parking area is located here.

## Recreation Features

### The River

The Cowichan River area is an outstanding freshwater environment of regional and provincial significance. The Cowichan possesses an unaltered channel, relatively natural flow and healthy fish populations which distinguish it from other rivers of its size. The river is also an excellent recreation feature with many quiet reaches connected by riffles and rapids. The seasonal variations in water flows provide a year-round dimension to the scenery and to the type and variety of river-based recreation.

### Vegetation

The area is located in the CDF and CWH biogeoclimatic zones and contains a range of vegetation types associated with these zones and their sub-zone variations. The typical forest cover consists of mixed stands of Douglas fir, Garry oak, bigleaf maple, pacific

madrona, western flowering dogwood and alder. Ground cover generally consists of small shrubs such as salal, ocean spray, Oregon grape and bracken fern. The mature forest areas usually have an open floor covered with moss. The mix of deciduous trees provide for seasonal variations and colourful autumns.

### **Geology**

The river traverses an area underlain by sedimentary rock formations and covered with gravel outwash terraces. In Marie Canyon, the river cuts through the sedimentary rock exposing an angled strata providing an outstanding feature.

### **Fish**

The Cowichan is one of the most valuable and productive salmon and trout river systems on Vancouver Island and in British Columbia. The Cowichan is probably the best known recreational fishing river for its year-round fishing potential. Fish species include: coho, chinook and chum salmon; steelhead, rainbow, brown and cutthroat trout. The river sections within the park have moderate to high capability to support coho and steelhead.

### **Wildlife**

The presence of resident and migratory species of wildlife offers opportunities for viewing and appreciation. Larger species include deer and black bear while smaller species include river otter and mink which reside in close proximity to the river. Migratory birds such as ducks and Canadian geese stop in this area on their seasonal journeys. Resident bird species such as eagles, osprey, hawks and ravens can be found throughout the park.

### **Landscape Features**

Natural features associated with the river environment include oxbow formations, erosional cliffs, canyon, river and stream deposited beaches and rapids. The combination of these features provides a very scenic natural setting.

### **Cultural Features**

The two major historic themes are First Nations history and logging. The area has not been thoroughly investigated for archaeological sites, however at least one site is known to exist. The area within the park was logged near the turn of the century with some small areas having been logged within the last 10 years. More recent cultural features include the Cowichan River Footpath, and the CNR right-of-way and associated trestle crossings.

## **Recreation Opportunities**

### **A. River-Based Recreation Opportunities**

The Cowichan River provides numerous recreational opportunities that are enjoyed by visitors of all types. However, the river and adjacent banks also exhibit characteristics which may be hazardous and visitors should use caution at all times while recreating in or near the river. In particular, Skutz Falls (white water Class 3) and Marie Canyon (Class 4) should be avoided by less experienced paddlers and tubers.

#### **Kayaking**

The Cowichan is known as one of the best kayaking rivers on Vancouver Island. The river is suitable for year-round kayaking although the best water conditions are experienced October through June.

#### **Canoeing**

The Cowichan is suitable for intermediate to expert canoeing depending on seasonal water flows. Many parts of the river are used on a regular basis by members of the Victoria Canoe Club.

#### **Tubing and private rafting**

Floating the Cowichan on inner-tubes has become a popular activity during the summer months. The warm waters, easy accessibility and variety of runs make this river one of the most suitable on Vancouver Island for tubing. The river is also suitable for non-motorized private rafting.

#### **Swimming**

There are numerous pools that offer excellent swimming opportunities throughout the length of the river and within the park. During the summer months the water is warm and clear and swimmers use every access point available.

#### **Fishing**

While the majority of fishing takes place from shore, riverboat-drifting for steelhead also occurs.

### **B. Land-based Recreation Opportunities**

#### **Fishing**

The entire length of the Cowichan provides one of Vancouver Island's best recreational fishing opportunities all year round. The same pools that accommodate swimmers are

also the main fishing areas. The Cowichan River Footpath, and numerous informal trails, provide anglers with access to all parts of the river.

### **Camping**

A main camping area has recently been developed by BC Parks at Stoltz Pool. Previously, informal camping occurred at various access points along the river which are now located in the park. Outside of the park, camping occurs on private lands. Camping is primarily a summertime activity although the campground is currently open year-round. It is used by kayakers during peak paddling months and anglers throughout the winter.

### **Hiking**

The Cowichan River Footpath is a popular hiking route used by many residents and tourists. The trail is used for day hiking and overnight hikes by individuals and organized groups. The most heavily used portion is from Skutz Falls downstream to Glenora. Other hiking trails include a loop trail at Stoltz Pool and a rustic 8 km trail along the north side of the river from Marie Canyon to Skutz Falls.

### **Day-Use**

The park offers opportunities for day-use activities such as picnicking, photography, and orienteering. These occur at formal day-use areas at Skutz Falls and Marie Canyon, and along various sections of the Cowichan River Footpath.

### **Nature Appreciation**

The park provides a setting that is very popular for naturalists in most seasons with a variety of flora and fauna present throughout the year. Several viewpoints and “overlooks” can be found along the Cowichan River Footpath.

### **Mountain Biking**

There are no developed trails or facilities to support mountain biking within the park. Mountain biking is only permitted on roads within already development areas such as at the campground.

### **Equestrian Use**

There are currently no opportunities for equestrian use within the park.

## **Existing Park Facilities**

### **Stoltz Pool Campground**

Located along the river at Stoltz Pool, the campground features 43 gravel campsites, including 4 walk-in tent sites and 2 pull-through sites. Other facilities include trails, beaches, toilets, firewood, picnic tables, garbage and recycling containers, and drinking water.

### **Stoltz Pool Day-use Area**

A day-use area is located adjacent to the campground. It includes parking, riverside trail, wheelchair-accessible picnic area, and an all-purpose playing field. The day-use area also contains a boat launch which is suitable for hand launching only. The Burma Star Memorial Cairn is located here. The cairn is a replica of the Kohima Monument in Myanmar (Burma), and was erected by the Burma Star Association to commemorate and tell the story of Major Hoey and the Allied Second World War campaign in East Asia.

### **Skutz Falls Day-use Area**

Skutz Falls Day-use Area is located at the western trailhead for the Cowichan River Footpath. The site offers parking, toilets, picnic tables, boat pull-out, and signs with current trail and park information. The site provides access to the Skutz Falls section of the river where visitors can watch spawning salmon traverse the river via a fishway.

### **Marie Canyon Day-use Area**

Marie Canyon Day-use Area is a popular site for picnicking and for viewing one of the more spectacular sections of the river. Parking and toilet facilities are found here, as well as signs with current park information and a trail which can be followed down to the canyon bottom. Upstream of the day-use area is a pull-out for tubers.

### **Tubing Pull-outs and Boat Launches**

There is a designated and signed pull-out area upstream of Marie Canyon and a pull-out at Skutz Falls. A boat launch at Stoltz Pool Day-use Area is suitable for hand launching only. There are no opportunities within the park for vehicles or trailers to launch boats.

### **Cowichan River Footpath**

The Cowichan River Footpath winds its way along the Cowichan River for approximately 20 km from Glenora to Skutz Falls. The trail offers an easy to moderate level of hiking with numerous viewpoints and an optional loop trail near the canyon section. The main trail is well signed, but several older secondary routes still exist and are not signed or maintained. Parts of the trail are through private property.

### **Stoltz Pool Loop Trail**

The Stoltz Pool Loop Trail is accessed through Stoltz Pool Day-use Area. The trail accompanies the river for much of its length, then gently climbs inland through second-growth forest. Fishing is excellent at many spots along the trail, particularly at Stoltz Pool.

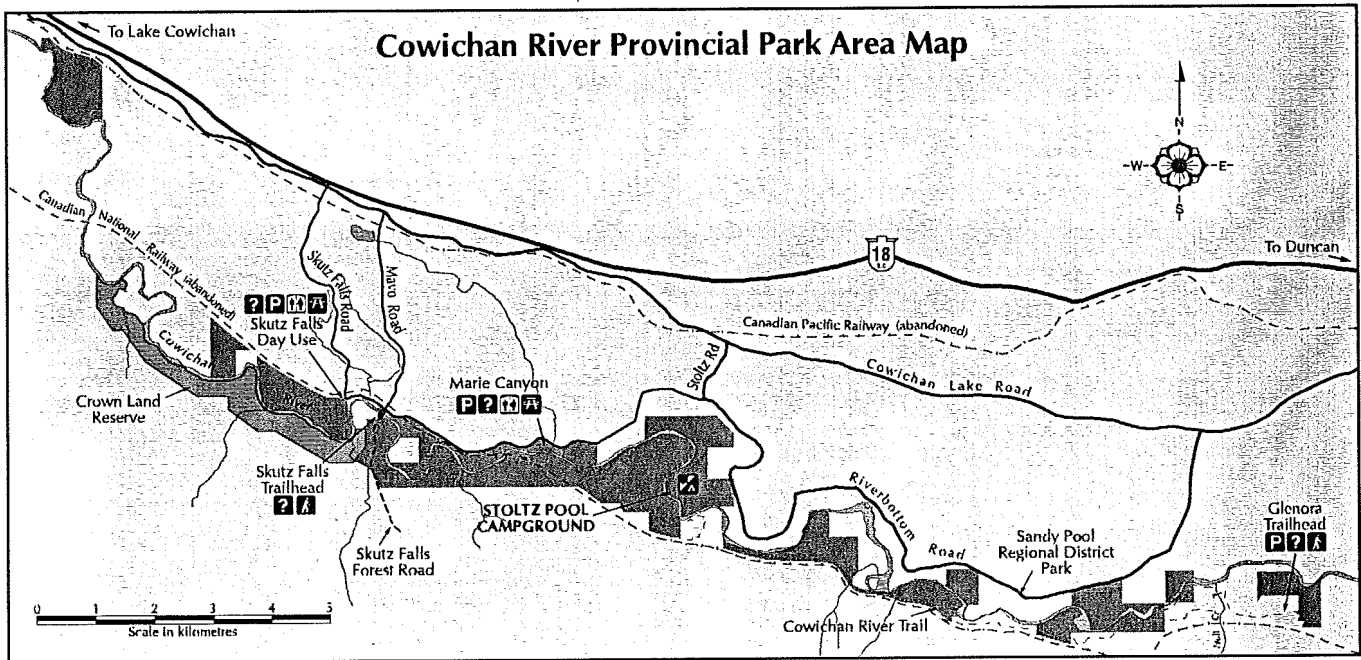


Figure 2: Existing Park Facilities



Hand launching area at Stoltz Pool



Day-use facilities at Marie Canyon

### **CNR Line**

An abandoned CNR rail line runs through sections of the park. The right-of-way is owned by the Province and administered by the Ministry of Transportation and Highways (MOTH). The right-of-way is used by hikers, mountain bikers and horse riders. While it is not part of the Cowichan River Footpath, sections of the line can be accessed from the footpath route. It has been proposed that a section of the right-of-way between Glenora and the Village of Lake Cowichan be added to the park.

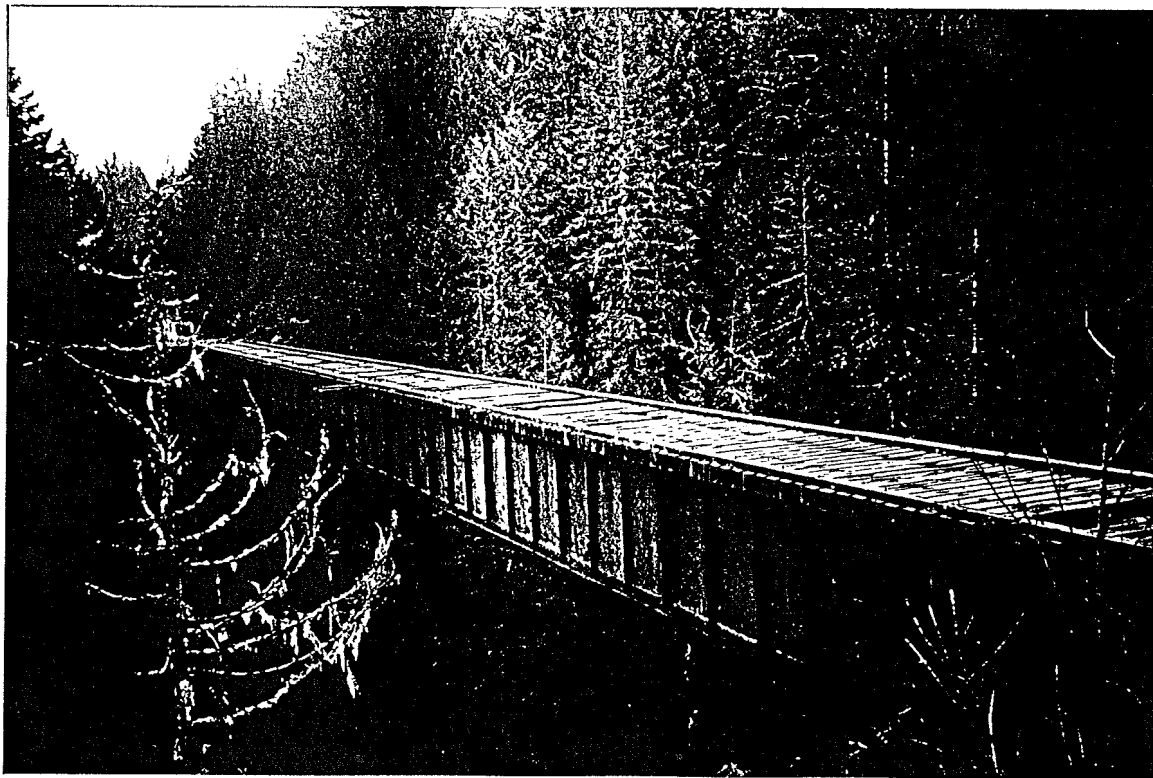
### **Trans-Canada Trail**

The CNR right-of-way and trestle are currently under consideration for inclusion as part of the Trans-Canada Trail. On Vancouver Island, the trail is expected to extend from Victoria to Nanaimo with various connecting routes being considered. The Trans-Canada Trail is intended as a multi-use trail and may be designed to accommodate mountain bikers and horse riders. Establishment of the Trans-Canada Trail through the park, and acquisition of sections of the trail as noted above, should be considered during the management planning process.

## **Commercial and Organized Recreation**

Commercially-guided fishing occurs throughout the Cowichan River region on a year-round basis. While some guides access the river through provincial park land, guiding on the river is currently regulated by the Ministry of Environment, not by BC Parks. BC Parks has informal agreements with a number of guides to allow them access to the river via the park. Some organized recreation also occurs within the park or on the river itself. These activities include kayak and canoe club events, paddling competitions, and school tours. On adjacent lands, major users include a Bible Camp (which maintains a bridge across the river) and a private lodge which operates a river-cart crossing to connect its visitors to the Cowichan River Footpath.

Abandoned CNR  
Right-of way



66 Mile rail way trestle

# RESOURCE ANALYSIS

## Protected Areas Strategy Goals

This section considers the significance of the natural, cultural and recreational resources of Cowichan River Park in relation to the goals of the Protected Areas Strategy (PAS) which are:

- to protect examples of BC's most important representative ecosystems; and
- to protect BC's special natural, cultural and recreational features.

Cowichan River Park contributes to both PAS goals by protecting representative landscapes and special features.

## Goal 1 Values

The following conservation, cultural heritage and recreational values of the Cowichan River have been identified through the Vancouver Island CORE process.

### Conservation

The Cowichan River is recognized as one of the most important fish producing rivers on Vancouver Island. The productivity of the Cowichan for fish is attributed to an extensive system of accessible, low gradient waterways in which abundant spawning gravel and rearing habitats are present and protected within the park. The park also contributes to the Very Dry Maritime Coastal Western Hemlock (CWHxm1) variant in the Nanaimo Lowland ecosystem, a critically under-represented ecosystem on Vancouver Island.

### Cultural Heritage

The entire Cowichan River region has a high potential for archaeological sites, and is a traditional native use area. The river and surrounding area also have a rich logging and farming history.

### Recreation and Tourism

The area has very high recreation values, and offers opportunities for a variety of recreational activities including: white water kayaking, river canoeing, fishing, hiking, camping, and nature appreciation. It also features spectacular scenic vistas along many points of the river.

## **Goal 2 Recommendations**

As part of the process for establishing Goal 2 areas, a Regional Protected Areas Team (RPAT) also recommended the eventual acquisition of a further 531 hectares of private land along the river to protect special features, such as fisheries values and archaeological sites, and secure recreational opportunities in the region.

The acquisition of parcels of nearby private and Crown land would complement Cowichan River Park and increase the total amount of protected area along the river corridor. Some of these areas, such as Block 3a and Block 2a, are currently under consideration by BC Parks. Appendix 2 contains a map and list of proposed additions to the park. BC Parks is currently completing a profile for all properties acquired along the Cowichan River, including an overview of the status of those properties which have been recommended for acquisition. With the assistance of BC Lands, BC Parks also intends to develop a land status map for the Cowichan region to assist with planning and land acquisition decisions. The map is expected to be completed in the next two years.

## **BC Parks Recreation Goals**

The park designation has also enhanced BC Parks Recreation Goals which are:

- to provide parks that are major outdoor recreation destinations;
- to provide outstanding backcountry recreation opportunities throughout BC;
- to provide parks along major travel corridors; and
- to provide parks for regional recreation where other agencies cannot.

Cowichan River Park contributes to all recreation goals but one - the park cannot be considered a backcountry recreation area. However, the park contributes to recreation goals by protecting a natural environment which lends itself to a variety of recreation opportunities. Cowichan River Park is considered a destination by many, particularly those interested in river-based recreational opportunities. Its accessible location on southern Vancouver Island services both local and regional visitors. The park can also be considered part of a tourism travel corridor which encompasses the central southern island from Duncan to the Carmanah Valley and the west coast. Finally, Cowichan River Park offers regional recreation opportunities that are not available in other parks, for example, white water boating and tubing.

## **Regional Significance**

The natural, cultural and recreational values of Cowichan River Park complement those of other parks in the region. Nearby provincial parks include Gordon Bay, Chemainus River and Koksilah River. These parks offer complementary day-use and overnight opportunities. The CVRD also has an extensive system of community parks as well as four regional parks including Sandy Pool Regional Park on the banks of the Cowichan. However, few parks in the region provide the same quality recreational experience for those interested in river-based activities, particularly fishing and white water boating.

# TENURES, RIGHTS, JURISDICTIONS & INTERESTS

## Tenures, Leases and Permits

There are a variety of land uses, tenures and resource interests within the park and region. These include: private residences; Indian Reserves; regional district parks; designated and undesignated Crown Land; and privately-owned forested land. Only those tenures and occupancy rights within the park will be discussed here.

- Forest Act Tenures: » 38932 F for administrative area  
» 35564 F for administrative area  
» OIC 317/86 for Vancouver Island Plantation Forest  
» Arrowsmith TSA
- Mineral Tenures: » None
- Trapline: » One - TR0105T317
- Guide outfitter: » None - BC Environment has a list of commercial fishing guides for the Cowichan River
- Rights-of-way: » Access is permitted to private properties which are land-locked by the park (e.g., IR 7)  
» Skutz Forest Service Road and crossing is located near Skutz Falls  
» MOTH administers the abandoned CNR right-of-way which passes through the park
- Inholdings: » There are four Indian Reserves adjacent to the park (one is land-locked) and several parcels of private and Crown land
- Archaeological: » One known site
- Water Tenures: » Four - One for Cowichan River; three on sources (or which have works) which cross park boundaries.  
CO27703 (within park)  
CO33954  
CO35828  
CO63948

- ALR: » No
- Boundary resolutions » Two - a portion of the Skutz Falls Forest Service Road and a private garage fall on park property. These will be removed from the park through legislation at the nearest opportunity.

## **Jurisdiction**

Cowichan River Provincial Park is a statue park, designated as Class A under the *Park Act* of British Columbia. It is managed by BC Parks, South Vancouver Island District. The *Park Act* is subject to the *Environment and Land Use Act*, *Waste Management Act*, *Forest Act*, *Heritage Conservation Act*, and *Wildlife Act*.

Aquatic species within the park are jointly managed by BC Environment (Fish and Wildlife Branch) under authority of the *Wildlife Act*, and DFO under authority of the *Federal Fisheries Act*.

## **Special Regulations**

BC Parks regulations apply with respect to garbage, wildlife, vegetation and fires. DFO has jurisdiction and enforcement authority regarding fishing for salt-water species, i.e. salmon, while provincial fisheries agencies have authority over freshwater species, i.e. trout and steelhead. Fishing regulations can vary annually and seasonally and may change frequently and without notice. BC Parks is encouraged to work with provincial and federal authorities with respect to matters related to recreational fishing and fish habitat.

## **Other Agency & Municipal Interest**

Provincial government agency interests include DFO and BC Environment concerning fish and aquatic habitat, and Ministry of Forests pertaining to logging on adjacent lands. DFO, BC Environment and BC Parks are also working cooperatively to address issues of slope stability along some sections of the Cowichan River.

Local and regional government agencies include the CVRD, the District of North Cowichan, the District of Lake Cowichan and various municipalities. The CVRD has a cooperative agreement with BC Parks to manage Cowichan River Park and Sandy Pool Regional Park. By agreement, the CVRD pays 25% toward the total cost of park operation. The CVRD, and potentially other agencies, will participate with BC Parks in the future management of Cowichan River Park.

The CVRD is currently developing a long-range plan for the Lake Cowichan district which extends from the Skutz Falls area to the Carmanah Valley and includes upper portions of the Cowichan River, Lake Cowichan and Nitinat Lake. An objective of the plan is to develop a map depicting recreation features, opportunities, public access points and recreation corridors.

## **First Nations Interest**

Cowichan River Park overlays traditional aboriginal territory of the Cowichan and Lake Cowichan Tribes. As part of the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Process, the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks signed a Joint Stewardship Agreement with the Cowichan Tribes in 1992. The Agreement pertains to the Cowichan Valley-Koksilah river area and calls for establishment of an Environmental Management Committee consisting of band members and BC Environment staff. The Committee will consider environmental issues of joint concern within the Cowichan-Koksilah area and provide a mechanism to address environmental problems which originate both on and off reserve lands.

The Cowichan Tribes were extensively consulted during the development of the CRRMP and gave their support to the park corridor concept recommended in the plan. BC Parks has a legal obligation to ensure that there is no unjustifiable infringement of aboriginal rights during the planning process, or as a result of any recommended actions of the plan. First Nations will be consulted and invited to participate in the planning process. In addition, BC Parks will undertake further discussions with First Nations to better understand their history and traditional use in the park. There are also two IR inholdings in the park which require extensive coordination between BC Parks and the Cowichan Tribes to ensure compatible management and facilities.

## **Community Interest**

Public interest in the planning process is expected to be high given historic interest in protecting the park area, and current and historic use of the river for recreation. In addition to the interest groups listed above (provincial government agencies, First Nations, and municipal interests), community interest groups should be contacted during the preparation of a park management plan. Some of the groups identified to date are listed below.

- Adjacent private land owners including industry
- Guides and operators
- Cowichan Fish and Game Association
- Cowichan Valley Naturalists
- Cowichan Watershed Council

- Cowichan Lake Community Forest Cooperative
- Cowichan Lake Educational Centre
- Cowichan and Chemainus Valleys Ecomuseum Society
- Outdoor Recreation Council
- Members of key recreation groups, e.g., canoe and kayak clubs, angling organizations

## Stakeholders

A list of stakeholders is provided in Table 1. This list is not inclusive however, and other interest groups will likely be identified as the process continues. In addition, BC Parks has proposed a Cowichan River Partnership Agreement which would include First Nations, the CVRD and other government agencies as partners.

**Table 1: Stakeholders Identified for the Cowichan River Park Process**

<p><b>Government</b>  BC Parks  BC Environment  BC Lands  Ministry of Forests  Ministry of Tourism and Culture (including Archaeological Resources Branch)  Ministry of Transportation and Highways  Department of Fisheries and Oceans  Cowichan Tribes</p> <p><b>Regional / Municipal Interests</b>  Cowichan Valley Regional District  District of Lake Cowichan  District of North Cowichan  Village of Lake Cowichan  City of Duncan  Other municipalities as appropriate</p> <p><b>Community &amp; Private Interests</b>  Adjacent private land owners (including forest industry, Sahtlam Lodge)  Guides and operators  Cowichan Fish and Game Association  Cowichan Valley Naturalists  Cowichan Watershed Council  Cowichan Lake Community Forest Cooperative  Cowichan Lake Educational Centre  Cowichan and Chemainus Valleys Ecomuseum Society  Outdoor Recreation Council of BC  Members of key recreation groups</p>
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# CURRENT LEVELS OF USE, TRENDS & FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

## Current Use Statistics

The Cowichan River has long been a popular recreation area for day-use and overnight camping by residents, visitors from Vancouver Island, and long-haul anglers. The level of recreational use in the park was not formally recorded prior to park establishment. Data for 1997 for Cowichan River Park is presented in Table 2. Day-use figures have been compiled from traffic counters located at Stoltz Pool. Numbers of campers are collected daily by the Park Facilities Operator. There is currently no data available for trail use in the park.

**Table 2: 1997 Attendance Data for Cowichan River Park  
(number of visitors to the park)**

	Camping	Day-use	Total
January	0	1362	1362
February	0	955	955
March	0	445	445
April	467	1365	1832
May	618	864	1482
June	1030	2446	3476
July	2298	15382*	17680
August	4602	1376	5978
September	1005	2163	3168
October	170	2310	2480
November	67	172	239
December	25	325	350
<b>Total</b>	<b>10282</b>	<b>29165</b>	<b>39447</b>

\* may be data error

A review of attendance figures from other parks in the region provides a measure of the demand for recreational opportunities, facilities and services. Use data for other parks in the region is provided in Appendix 3. Use at nearby Gordon Bay Park is very high during the summer months although attendance has leveled off in recent years as facilities have reached their capacity. The new campground and day-use facilities at Cowichan River Park will assist in meeting some of this excess demand.

**Table 3: Regional Recreation Opportunities**

Parks and Recreation Areas	Recreation Opportunities																	
	River kayaking	River canoeing	Boating (lakes / marine)	Tubing	Boat launch	Fishing	Swimming	SCUBA diving	Hiking	Biking	Horse back riding	Camping facilities	Informal camping	Picnicking / Day-use	Birdwatching area	Wilderness recreation	Hunting	Private cottages
<b>Provincial Parks</b>																		
Cowichan River	x	x		x	x	x	x		x			x		x				
Chemainus River						x	x		x				x	x				
Kiksillah River						x			x				x	x				
Gordon Bay			x		x	x	x		x			x		x				
Carmanah-Walbran						x			x				x			x		
Hitchie Creek									x				x			x		
Juan de Fuca <sup>1</sup>							x		x			x	x	x		x		
West Shawnigan Lake			x			x	x							x				
Nitinat River									x				x			x		
Bright Angel							x		x					x				
Eves									x			x		x				
<b>National Parks</b>																		
Pacific Rim													x			x		
									x									
<b>Regional Parks &amp; Rec. Sites</b>																		
Sandy Pool Regional Park <sup>2</sup>						x	x		x		x			x				
Mt. Tzuhalem Community Forest <sup>3</sup>									x	x								
Maple Mountain Park <sup>3</sup>									x					x				
Mt. Prevost Park <sup>3</sup>									x	x								
BC Forest Sites												x	x					
CNR right-of-way									x	x	x							
<b>Other Regional Attractions</b>																		
Cowichan Lake			x		x	x	x		x					x				x
Nitinat Lake			x			x							x			x		
Cowichan Bay			x		x	x		x							x			
Shawnigan Lake			x			x	x											x
Private and Crown land												x					x	x
Somenos Lake and marsh														x	x			

1 Includes Botanical Beach, Parkinson Creek, Sombrio Beach and China Beach

2 Cowichan Valley Regional District Park

3 District of North Cowichan Park



Cowichan River Park forms part of the recreation corridor extending from Duncan to Lake Cowichan which is recognized as a year-round recreation centre. Along this corridor, access is easy and developed recreational facilities can be found. Beyond Lake Cowichan, vehicle access becomes more difficult, and the wilderness setting of the Carmanah Valley and west coast provide a very different recreational experience.

## **Future Opportunities**

The natural setting and appeal of Cowichan River Park limit the desire to develop the area for more intensive recreational use. The potential to expand the protected area corridor for recreation (as recommended in the Provincial Government's Goal 2 announcement) is also limited by the high amount of privately-held land. Efforts to acquire additional properties along the Cowichan will continue.

Activities with the greatest potential for growth include vehicle camping, and day-use activities such as hiking, fishing and water-based recreation. In addition to the opportunities already offered in the park, activities such as mountain biking and horseback riding could potentially be accommodated on the existing CNR right-of-way particularly if this becomes part of the Trans-Canada Trail. The park also has the potential to attract visitors looking for a multi-day trip. The Stoltz Pool Campground could offer a good overnight stop for those wishing to hike the length of the Cowichan River Footpath. However, there is currently no river crossing linking the trail to the campground.

# PARK INFORMATION & PROMOTION

Minimal effort will be needed by BC Parks to promote Cowichan River Park as a recreation destination. The area is already well known locally, regionally and provincially. Fishing on the Cowichan River is internationally recognized and the river has been included in a number of fishing guides and magazines. In addition, many books have been published on the history of the Cowichan Valley. Information on Cowichan River Park is also available to the public through:

- BC Park brochures and guides
- BC Heritage Rivers System
- local and regional tourism organizations
- marketing by commercial fishing guides
- Sahtlam Lodge brochure and trail guide
- occasional newspaper articles

BC Parks may wish to communicate information to the public regarding the special values and features of Cowichan River Park and messages related to park management. The major attraction of the park is the river and its conservation and recreation values. A further attraction is the Cowichan River Footpath which allows visitors to experience the river for a considerable distance. Primary park products include recreational fishing and overnight camping, both of which receive high levels of use regionally. Other opportunities include: boating, sightseeing; wildlife viewing; nature appreciation; hiking and picnicking. Opportunities to interpret the park's natural and cultural qualities are limited at this time, but should be further explored.

# MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Below are management issues that have been identified for Cowichan River Park, many of which are inter-related. Management planning for the park will address these issues in the context of short- and long-term park management objectives.

## Park Boundary

The management plan will identify areas where boundary changes should be considered in relation to resource management and recreation use requirements. This should include the possibility of acquiring inholdings and additional properties on both sides of the river to enhance the existing protected area corridor. The existing park boundary may need fine-tuning to address inholdings and specific issues related to adjacent private properties. The management plan should also address the most effective ways of expressing the park boundary where park lands are abutted by private lands.

## Conservation

The management plan will identify the objectives and actions needed to protect the park's natural and cultural resources and repair any negative impacts from recreational use. Special inventories and monitoring programs may be required to protect important features such as archaeological sites, rare plants, wild fish stocks or Roosevelt elk. The plan should also propose strategies for vegetation management and address issues such as tree poaching and the harvesting of bark, mushrooms and wildflowers within the park.

Slope stability in the canyon area is currently being addressed by DFO, BC Environment and BC Parks. Clay deposits embedded in the canyon walls are crumbling into the river causing adverse impacts on fish and aquatic life. While the sliding is believed to be caused by natural processes, degradation of fish habitat is a concern and bioengineering solutions are being considered. The CRRMP states that steep slopes along the river banks should be maintained in their natural state in order to maintain high quality fish habitat.

## Adjacent Land Use

Forest industry activities within the Cowichan River watershed have altered the river's hydrologic regime and created forest edge effects such as windthrow. Cut blocks have been created up to the park boundary in places, resulting in biophysical and visual

effects and in some cases degradation of the Cowichan River Footpath. Increasing industrial use, agriculture and urban encroachment along the Cowichan River and its watershed may also be affecting fish productivity. Other concerns related to urbanization in the surrounding area include water quality issues, loss of habitat, and securing public access to the river.

## **First Nations**

BC Parks recognizes the significance of the area to the Cowichan Tribes and the importance of the Joint Stewardship Agreement. BC Parks has also proposed a Cowichan River Partnership Agreement which would include First Nations, the CVRD and other government agencies as partners. According to the CRRMP, consultation with the band should continue regarding: opportunities for involvement of the band in provincial park operations; park management and economic development opportunities; compatible development in the park and on adjacent Indian Reserves; and minimizing trespassing on band property.

## **Access**

The management plan should address the need to provide adequate levels of access to the river for park users, and for service and emergency vehicles. This is an issue where access is through parcels of private land, through forest industry leaseholds, or along designated rights-of-way administered by other agencies. BC Parks may wish to consider constructing a crossing at Stoltz Pool for emergency access and to provide a linkage between the campground and the Cowichan River Footpath.

## **Appropriate Activities and Facility Development**

As the population of the Cowichan Valley continues to grow, the demand for use in Cowichan River Park will likely increase. Promotion of the park, only if from park designation, coupled with increasing population will create more pressure on existing park resources. The management plan will address appropriate recreation activities and give direction for additional facilities that may be required to address visitor demand and reduce impacts to the environment. Currently, the use of mountain bikes and horses on park trails is prohibited. Providing alternate trails, such as the abandoned rail line, or alternative locations in other parks, may assist in meeting the needs of these user groups.

The management plan should also consider the need to provide interpretation and visitor information. The park offers an excellent opportunity to interpret the natural and human history of the river and surrounding area.

## **Multiple-Agency Management**

Cowichan River Park is not a contiguous landscape unit. Inholdings within the park, and privately-held lands on adjacent properties, have a direct impact on park management planning. The Cowichan River Footpath provides an example of this issue. The footpath is one of the main features of Cowichan River Park and one of historic and recreational importance. However, management of the trail is not entirely within the control of BC Parks. Portions of the route fall under the jurisdiction of forest companies or other private land holders. In some cases, these sections of the trail are not maintained to BC Parks standards. Other issues of multiple jurisdictions include public safety and liability issues on the river and along the CNR right-of-way and trestle. Both the river and the right-of-way run through the park but are managed by other agencies at this time.

The management plan should develop a strategy for addressing park management issues which transcend multiple jurisdictions. In particular, the plan should identify ways to manage the Cowichan River Footpath as a prime recreation feature, including the provision of access and river crossings, signage, trail maintenance and the enforcement of appropriate usage on all sections of the trail.

## **Public Involvement**

The management plan will provide direction for public involvement in future management decisions and activities. Public interest in the planning process and the ongoing management of Cowichan River Park is expected to be high. The management plan should determine an appropriate level of public involvement and provide options for engaging the public in discussions or actions related to management activities. Preliminary options include the establishment of a stakeholder advisory committee and the organization of volunteer groups.

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# APPENDIX 1

## Cowichan Tribes - Historic Villages

The term Cowichan encompasses the following historic villages on Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands:

Somenos  
Quamichan  
Comiakin  
Kilpaulus  
Taatka  
Clemclemluts  
Kenipsim  
Koksilah  
Theik  
Hallalt  
Kulleets  
Penelakut  
Malahat  
Siccameen  
Tateke  
Yekolaos  
Limalche

## APPENDIX 2

### Proposed Additions to Cowichan River Park

The attached map (Figure 4) from the Special Feature Protected Areas Summary Report (CORE 1996) shows the approximate locations of parcels of property recommended for inclusion in Cowichan River Park. Some of these recommendations were brought forward from the CRRMP. BC Parks is currently completing a profile for all properties acquired along the Cowichan River, including an overview of the status of those properties which have been recommended for acquisition. BC Parks also intends to develop a land status map for the Cowichan region to assist with planning and land acquisition decisions. Private properties under consideration include:

#### Ripps Pool

District Lot 55, Lake Cowichan Land District

#### Breakfast Pool

District Lot 58, Lake Cowichan Land District

District Lot 8B (Lots 1-10), Lake Cowichan Land District

#### Three Firs Pool

Block 3A (Lots 1-45), Lake Cowichan Land District

#### Stoltz Pool

Block 2A (Lots 1-4, 16, 25), Lake Cowichan Land District

#### West of Behins Pool

Range 5, Section 6, Plan 73210, Sahtlam Land District

#### Behins Pool

Range 7, Section 5, Plan 59039 (north of CNR right-of-way only), Sahtlam Land District

#### Cedar Log Pool

Range 8, Section 5, Plan 59039 (north of CNR right-of-way only), Sahtlam Land District

Range 8, Section 6, Plan 59039 (north of CNR right-of-way only), Sahtlam Land District

#### Robertson Pool

Range 9, Section 5, Plan 59039 (north of CNR right-of-way only), Sahtlam Land District

Range 9, southern half of Section 7, Plan 88671

Range 9, southern half of Section 7, Plan 39629 'A'

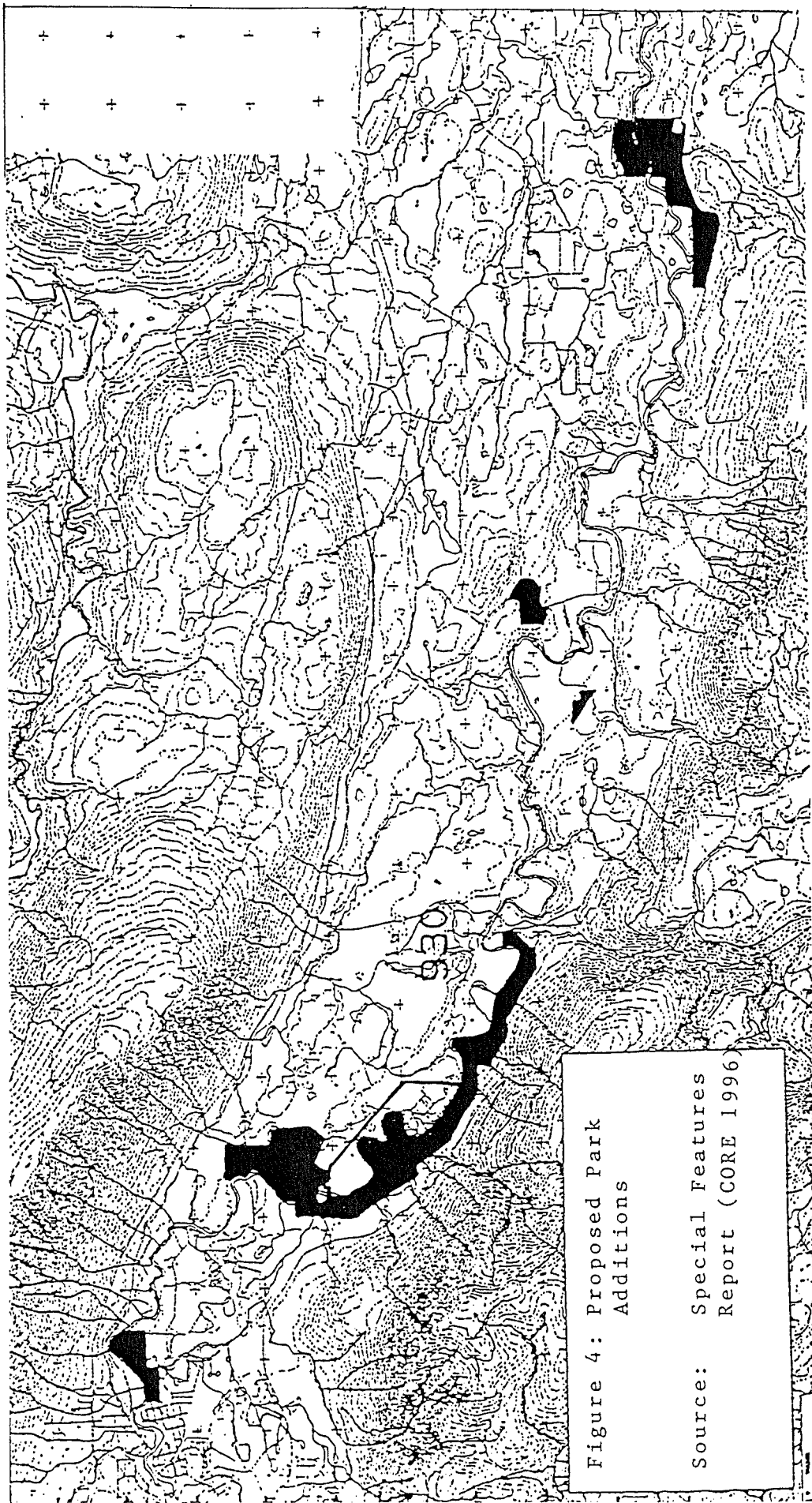


Figure 4: Proposed Park Additions  
Source: Special Features Report (CORE 1996)

## APPENDIX 3

### BC Parks Attendance Statistics for 1997

#### Cowichan River Park

	Camping	Day Use	Total
January	0	1362	1362
February	0	955	955
March	0	445	445
April	467	1365	1832
May	618	864	1482
June	1030	2446	3476
July	2298	15382*	17680
August	4602	1376	5978
September	1005	2163	3168
October	170	2310	2480
November	67	172	239
December	25	325	350
<b>Total</b>	<b>10282</b>	<b>29165</b>	<b>39447</b>

\* may be data error

#### Gordon Bay Park

	Camping	Day Use	Total
January	0	1540	1540
February	N/A	N/A	N/A
March	275	1715	2000
April	420	2979	3399
May	2864	5761	8625
June	4138	6755	10893
July	11366	17104	28470
August	13069	22778	35847
September	2186	3420	5606
October	345	2919	3264
November	125	2615	2740
December	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>34788</b>	<b>66046</b>	<b>100844</b>

**Carmanah - Walbran Park , 1997**

	Camping	Day Use	Total
January	N/A	N/A	N/A
February	N/A	N/A	N/A
March	N/A	N/A	N/A
April	N/A	N/A	N/A
May	640	1067	1707
June	246	672	918
July	333	1060	1393
August	349	889	1238
September	99	175	274
October	N/A	N/A	N/A
November	N/A	N/A	N/A
December	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>1667</b>	<b>3863</b>	<b>5530</b>

COLICHAN RIVER PARK

MOD: MISCELLANEOUS

SUB MOD: MANAGEMENT PLANS