



The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services  
Government of British Columbia  
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BC Budget 2020: Submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

You have asked British Columbians to make recommendations for the 2020 Provincial Budget. As an umbrella organization representing the outdoor recreation sector in BC, we're pleased for the opportunity to provide our recommendations.

Super, Natural British Columbia. It is indeed hard to think of a place that is more awe-inspiring and that offers better opportunities for outdoor recreation and nature enjoyment. Some of BC's highlights include huge expanses of public land and thousands of kilometres of trails and access roads; mountain ranges that invite us to explore them whether through hiking, mountaineering, horseback-riding, ATVing or skiing; and a plethora of fresh lakes, long stretches of beaches and some of the world's most beautiful rivers that offer a haven for paddlers, recreational fishermen and many other outdoor enthusiasts. Our diverse landscapes are what set us apart as a province, with plenty of opportunities for seekers of thrill and seekers of solitude.

Making up 95% of the land base, parks and crown land are a crucial element for outdoor recreation activities. BC is home to five national parks, 1,033 provincial parks, recreation areas, conservancies, ecological reserves and protected areas, as well as a vast number of regional and municipal parks. Parks and protected areas that fall under provincial jurisdiction cover 14 million hectares (approximately 14% of the provincial land base). In addition, British Columbia has approximately 6,300 public trails totalling more than 28,000 kilometres<sup>1</sup>.

Outdoor recreation is a highly valued component of most British Columbians' lifestyle, and access to outdoor recreation amenities is known to help determine the choice of employment and residence for many of us. According to the 2009/10 Outdoor Recreation Study: BC Resident Participants, published by Destination BC in 2013, 91% of BC's residents participated in at least one outdoor recreation activity during the past year. Of those that had participated, nearly two-thirds participated in activities at least once a week.

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<sup>1</sup> Destination BC (2014)

Although the social, health and economic values of outdoor recreation opportunities are widely recognized<sup>2</sup>, the economic impact benefits can be difficult to quantify. However, we know that outdoor recreation stimulates economic activity locally and regionally as participants spend money on equipment, food and travel<sup>3</sup>. Outdoor recreation also plays a role in invigorating communities all across BC financially through the creation of trails and facilities as amenities that spur economic development and diversification. Through planning that integrates trails and recreation facilities with cultural activities and hospitality, there is rich potential for promoting amenity-rich communities (or a conglomerate of communities) as a tourism destination.

Additionally, studies show that participation in recreational activities is an important contributor to good mental health and quality of life<sup>4</sup>. Parks and trails that are accessible to urban and rural communities offer an excellent incentive to engage in physical activity and are shown to help reduce depression, relieve stress and improve self-esteem. Furthermore, participation in outdoor recreation and physical activity help reverse the current trend towards a sedentary lifestyle that is recognized as a major contributor towards many health and social issues.

Outdoor recreation opportunities, trails and parks are also essential for improving and maintaining healthy communities. Communities that have easy access to outdoor recreation opportunities tend to also have safer and livelier neighbourhoods, higher levels of volunteer engagement and environmental stewardship. Social bonds are strengthened when families and community members participate in outdoor recreation together and when seniors and individuals with disabilities are actively engaged in recreation activities.

Outdoor recreation can also play a critical role in supporting Indigenous reconciliation. There is tremendous value in incorporating Indigenous knowledge, history and perspectives in the planning and management of recreation and trail projects, and with each of these efforts, there is an opportunity to foster the kind of relationships with Indigenous communities that we want to build for the future<sup>5</sup>.

It is not only the residents of BC who enjoy our parks and outdoor recreation opportunities. More than 15 million tourists visit British Columbia each year, and the vast majority come here to participate in outdoor recreation activities such as hiking, skiing, paddling and whale watching.

BC's tourism industry added the largest value to the provincial economy between 2007 and 2017, relative to primary resource industries, such as oil and gas, mining, forestry and logging, and fishing. This makes BC's super, natural environment, spectacular scenery and diversity of outdoor activities some of our most valuable assets. We need to make sure the visitors get the best possible experience while protecting the experiences and natural resources we all value.

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<sup>2</sup> Elisabeth Buchwald (2018)

<sup>3</sup> Kux Stephen & Wolfgang Haider (2014)

<sup>4</sup>Rosenberger, Randall S.; White, Eric M.; Kline, Jeffrey D.; Cvitanovich, Claire (2017)

<sup>5</sup> Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (2019)

We applaud the Government of BC for releasing its 2019 vision for a thriving and sustainable tourism sector<sup>6</sup>. When managed well, recreation and adventure tourism delivers many benefits to British Columbians. When managed poorly, significant strains are placed on natural areas, volunteers organizations, government staff, and local communities.

We are very concerned that the increasing growth in tourism - in addition to a growing resident population - is putting an incredible pressure on BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails to provide and maintain trails, sites and facilities in response to the current and future demands.

Both agencies are already gravely underfunded and stretched to their maximum capacity. Decades of underinvestment in maintenance and infrastructure for both agencies is a significant risk to growth in tourism and to the enjoyment of British Columbians, and it has already created significant environmental and social externalities in terms of destruction of sensitive habitat, poaching, littering and crowding.

Elsewhere, many countries that are also eagerly pursuing tourism as a revenue-generating stream for investments, jobs and taxes, are learning the hard way that they must do a better job at preparing for the inescapable impacts of tourism in terms of crowds, overwhelmed services and environmental damage. Managing BC's valuable public natural and cultural assets and outdoor recreation facilities must be a key priority for the Province of BC to keep tourists coming and spending and to avoid travelers and residents having to pay the price for neglecting this responsibility. While it's outside of the scope of this submission to provide advice on how this can be done through destination management and planning, ORC's request focuses on the two main agencies who carries the burden of managing and accommodating people visiting crown lands; BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC.

British Columbia must act immediately to provide significant additional funding to BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails in order to address the increasing demands for public recreation opportunities within the BC Parks system and on crown land outside.

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Increased funding for BC Parks**

Almost 90% of British Columbians have used a provincial park at some time; and, about six in ten residents use a provincial park each year. Annual visitation to BC Parks has increased from 19M visits in 2014 to 24M in 2018<sup>7</sup>. BC's parks are such an integral part of our identity as British Columbians and as providers of trails, campsites and wilderness experiences; they are a critical asset to BC's booming tourism sector.

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<sup>6</sup> Government of British Columbia (2019)

<sup>7</sup> BC Parks (2019)

BC Parks manages the third largest parks and protected areas system in North America, behind the United States National Park Service and Parks Canada, covering 14.4% of the provincial land base, yet its operating budget lags behind other regional, provincial, and international parks agencies. As a comparison, the BC Parks budget was \$2.8/ha during the 2018/19 fiscal year, while Alberta Parks spent \$36/ha and Metro Vancouver Regional Parks \$3,000/ha.

According to BC Parks, every dollar invested in BC's protected areas system generates \$8.42 in visitor spending and provides a \$392-million-dollar boost to GDP and supports over 5,200 full time jobs. ORC suggests that any additional funding for BC Parks will result in similar economic benefits.

Considering how Destination BC (with a 2018/19 budget of \$51.5) makes extensive use of BC's natural assets as the backdrop for its marketing and promotional materials, a strong case needs to be made by this committee to increase BC Parks annual budget so this critical agency can fulfill its mandate of protecting and managing for the ecological integrity of parks while providing high-quality recreation opportunities valued by BC's residents, along with the desired visitor experience for tourists. It is also essential that BC Parks has the necessary capacity to engage in collaborative park planning and management with First Nations.

The BC park system is of vital importance for the BC economy and the wellbeing of the residents in this province, which is why the 2020 BC budget must take into account the long-term investment for BC Parks to ensure the long-term health of BC's environment, economic interests, and recreation assets. In a 2011 research study, it was recommended that the BC Parks' overall budget be increased by \$50M in order to provide a basic level of park management services<sup>8</sup>.

The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC recommends that the operating budget of BC Parks be significantly increased for the 2020 fiscal year so that it approaches a level which would be adequate for the responsible management and maintenance of BC's vast provincial parks system. To this end we recommend that the 2020 budget provides an increase to BC Parks of \$50M.

## **2. Increased funding for Recreation Sites and Trails BC**

Recreation Sites and Trails BC manages more than 1,372 recreation sites, 29 interpretive forests, 197 area-based trail networks and 569 trails that add up to 12,000 kilometers in all regions of the province (compared to 6,000 kilometers of trails in BC Parks)<sup>9</sup>.

We are tremendously grateful to the staff of Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC) for their dedication, knowledge and hard work towards working with communities and recreation

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<sup>8</sup> Turner, M (2011)

<sup>9</sup> Recreation Sites and Trails (2014)

organizations to develop, manage and promote a network of designated recreation sites, trails and facilities; engagement with Indigenous peoples in collaborative trail planning, and authorization of construction of recreation facilities and trails on crown land outside of BC's provincial park system.

ORC shares the privilege of co-chairing the Provincial Trails Advisory Body with RSTBC which only accentuates our appreciation for how hard this branch of the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development works to fulfill its mandate, however, it is clear that RSTBC receives entirely insufficient funding considering the scope of its mandate.

Underinvestment in the creation and maintenance of trails and facilities is problematic. Trails and recreation facilities can be important drivers of economic development and tourism in rural communities, as can be seen in places such as Penticton, Revelstoke, Cumberland, Terrace, Cranbrook and Kimberly. While many rural communities have been shrinking for years, others with strong recreational industries are often more resilient and have been growing rapidly. The growth is partly enabled by high speed internet, making it easier to work from anywhere, and as more people retire and move away from larger cities. When trail initiatives that are well planned and supported by the community are not enabled to materialize in a timely fashion, economic development and diversification opportunities are postponed or lost.

The operating budget for Recreation Sites and Trails BC was \$7.46M for the 2017 fiscal year and \$7.83M for 2018. There is an additional \$2.2M capital program allocated to RSTBC each fiscal year (for which RSTBC is required to borrow money and pay amortization) as well as varying amounts of funding for campsite expansions.

The Outdoor Recreation Council ask that the operating budget of Recreation Sites and Trails BC be increased for the 2020 fiscal year and for subsequent years until it approaches a level which is adequate for delivering its mandate. A boosted budget for RSTBC would also allow for better planning and communications with Indigenous peoples as well as with recreational user groups who are instrumental in developing and maintaining facilities and trails under partnership agreements with the agency.

We recommend that the 2020 budget allocates 10M in operational funding to Recreation Sites and Trails BC. An operational budget with this level of additional funding would enable RSTBC to hire critical staff in district operations, participate in indigenous engagement and recreation planning and would also provide an operational budget uplift to all recreation districts in the province to better serve communities.

### **About the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia:**

Founded in 1976, the Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia (ORC) is a registered non-profit charity and works on behalf of 50 provincial and regional member organizations to protect and promote responsible outdoor recreation. Our vision is for British Columbia to be a

world leader in the conservation and enjoyment of outdoor places, and for all British Columbians to have access to diverse and abundant opportunities to enjoy outdoor recreation experiences.

Specifically we work to encourage British Columbians to actively participate in outdoor recreational activities that will enhance their physical and mental well-being; advocate for and facilitate access to public lands and waters for outdoor recreation; build bridges between outdoor recreation groups; and encourage the safe and responsible use of the outdoors through education programs promoting safety and outdoor ethics.

Thank you in advance for considering the Outdoor Recreation Council of BC's submission to the 2020 BC budget consultation. We look forward to continuing to work as a partner in making responsible outdoor recreation a way of life in British Columbia.

Sincerely,



Louise Pedersen  
Executive Director

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