



Forest
Practices
Board

Management of Forest Recreation in BC

SPECIAL REPORT

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SUMMARY

Forest recreation is important in BC, both as a valued part of residents' lifestyles and for the economic benefits derived from tourism. Although there are many provincial and national parks where recreation opportunities abound, almost 80 percent of BC is public forest land outside of these parks. Forest recreation on public land outside of parks is very popular, and the recreational resources that lie on this land are one of the values managed under BC's *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA). The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development is responsible for FRPA.

Over the years, the Forest Practices Board (the Board) has received concerns and complaints about how government and licensees manage recreation under FRPA, so the Board decided to complete this special report. This report describes how the FRPA framework addresses management of forest recreation, identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the FRPA framework for forest recreation management, and describes opportunities for improvement.

Board investigators heard from forest recreation groups, government staff, forest industry staff, commercial recreation operators, and others. Investigators found several positive examples of people working together, often with government, to effectively manage recreation resources at a local or sub-regional scale. However, over much of the province, there are issues with access management, logging impacts, government staffing, and user group conflicts. These issues are most often linked to gaps in, or a lack of, planning for the recreation resource value.

FRPA's strengths in forest recreation management are that it provides a comprehensive structure for resource management and that its use of FRPA objectives with some practice requirements can allow flexibility and creativity when managing recreation resources. FRPA's main weakness is the lack of a strong planning layer within the framework. There has been little planning for recreation resources in the past 20 years, there has never been a blanket objective set for recreation resources, there are few up-to-date objectives for recreation sites and trails, and few recreation resources have been protected through the *Government Actions Regulation*. However, the Board found instances where recreation groups or government staff worked with FRPA's strengths to overcome the weaknesses, or worked outside of the FRPA framework to create positive outcomes for forest recreation.

The Board identifies three primary areas for improved recreation management: improving information available for recreation resources, increasing planning efforts including collaboration among stakeholders, and improving the use of government objectives for recreation resources.

INTRODUCTION

PARTICIPATION IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

Statistics for use of BC's forest recreation resources outside of parks are rare. Statistics available for national and provincial parks in BC show that visits between 2015 and 2019 total nearly 30 million annually, and are increasing at about 5 percent annually. The trend on BC public forest lands is likely similar.

FPB investigators were told by most interviewees that recreational use in BC's public forest lands is increasing rapidly. The COVID-19 pandemic is putting additional pressure on recreation resources and is perhaps an indicator of future trends as people pursue recreation in low density settings. The Outdoor Recreation Council reported that "last year, a record number of people went outside." For example "we saw between 40% and 140% increase in trail usage" in the Sea to Sky corridor.

Recreation in a forest or wildland setting (forest recreation) is an important, even essential, part of the lifestyle of many British Columbians and it supports a thriving tourism industry. Forest recreation occurs throughout the province. It includes many different activities across all of BC's diverse landscapes.¹ Backcountry skiing in BC's Selkirk Mountains, mountain biking on Vancouver's North Shore mountains, snowmobiling near Valemount, fly fishing on a Kamloops area lake, riding an ATV on an Okanagan wilderness road or simply savoring a pleasant forest walk almost anywhere in BC are just a few of the activities and settings that residents and tourists enjoy.

The Board has received several complaints² and concerns over the last few years about forest recreation activities and how the recreation resource values are handled under the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA). This has prompted the Board to write this special report.

This special report is focused on how forest and range activities affect the recreation resource; not how recreation affects forest and range licensees. It describes how the FRPA framework addresses management of forest recreation values. It identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the FRPA framework for forest recreation management and identifies areas for improvement.

Approach

The Board reviewed industry, academic, government and Board reports, as well as government manuals, bulletins, and strategies. The Board conducted interviews with, and received submissions from, recreation experts, government staff, forest tenure holders, universities, non-governmental organizations, and commercial tourism operators.

¹ "Forest" recreation occurs in grassland, alpine and range areas that are also part of the provincial forest. In this report "outdoor recreation" will be used synonymously with forest recreation.

² See Appendix 1 for a list of Board reports dealing with forest recreation.

Background

Who manages forest recreation and where?

British Columbia is a large province and most of the land (94 percent) is publicly owned.³ Federal or provincial parks and other protected areas protect about 15 percent of the public land. Provincial parks and protected areas are managed by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy's BC Parks, while Parks Canada manages the national parks and park reserves. In parks and other protected areas, management is generally focused on recreation, conservation, or preservation. The public lands also include a network of ecological reserves managed under the *Ecological Reserves Act*.⁴ Ecological reserves are managed for conservation and research purposes, not for recreation.

Most of the BC land base, almost 80 percent, is managed by the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD). FLNRORD is responsible for all forest resources on the land base, including timber, and commercial and non-commercial recreation. FLNRORD generally manages this land with a multiple-use approach.

Another BC government ministry, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, does not directly manage outdoor recreation, but facilitates tourism stakeholders such as members of the Adventure Tourism Coalition⁵ to secure business opportunities and promote economic growth. It uses a Crown corporation, Destination BC, to promote tourism in BC's matrix of private land, parks and other public lands outside of parks. Its promotion centers on the Super, Natural British Columbia® brand. The brand sets up an expectation for tourists and residents to experience world-class outdoor recreation. Destination BC helps communities create strategic destination plans that promote rural development and diversification. These plans often include outdoor recreation as a foundation.

Commercial outdoor recreation on public land outside of parks, such as guided adventure tourism, ski resorts, commercial campsites and lodges, is regulated through *Land Act* tenures. FLNRORD's Lands Branch administers policy, while the operational administration is the responsibility of FLNRORD district managers or directors of authorizations and the Mountain Resorts Branch. FLNRORD uses FRPA to regulate non-

³ Six percent of the province is private land and that includes private-managed forest land. FRPA only extends to public land so this report does not address recreational concerns on private-managed forest land.

⁴ Ecological reserves are numerous, but quite small in area. The 148 reserves comprise less than 0.2 percent of BC's land area.

⁵ A tourism sector association with 19 members such as Heli-Cat Canada, Backcountry Lodges of BC, and Canada West Ski Areas.

commercial recreation. Forest recreation resources are often accessed using forestry roads on lands where forest licensees decide how and where forest management activities such as harvesting, road building and road deactivation occur.

Figure 1 sets out the overall administrative framework for managing recreation resources in BC.

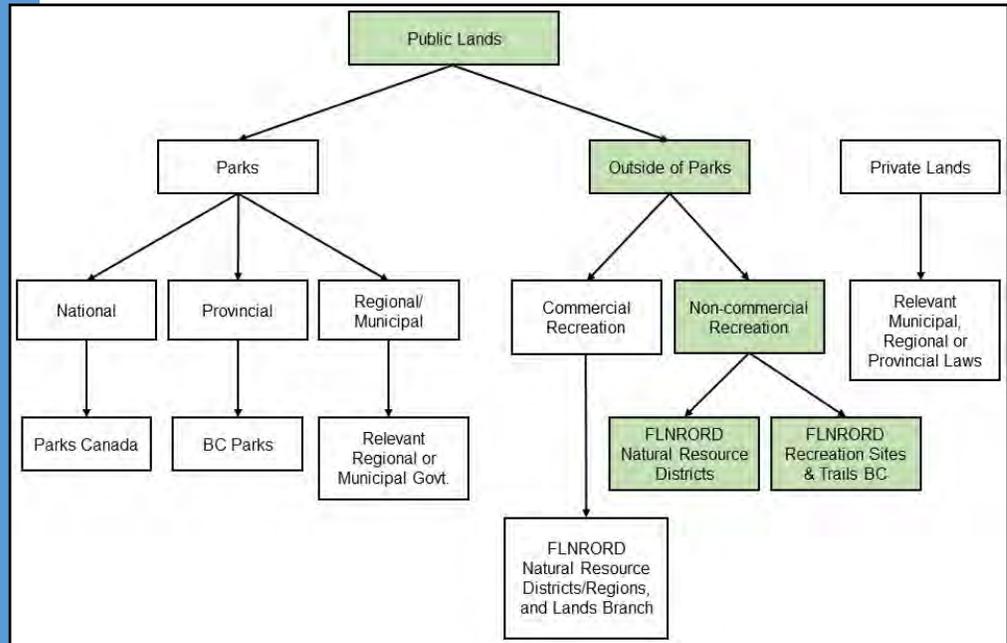
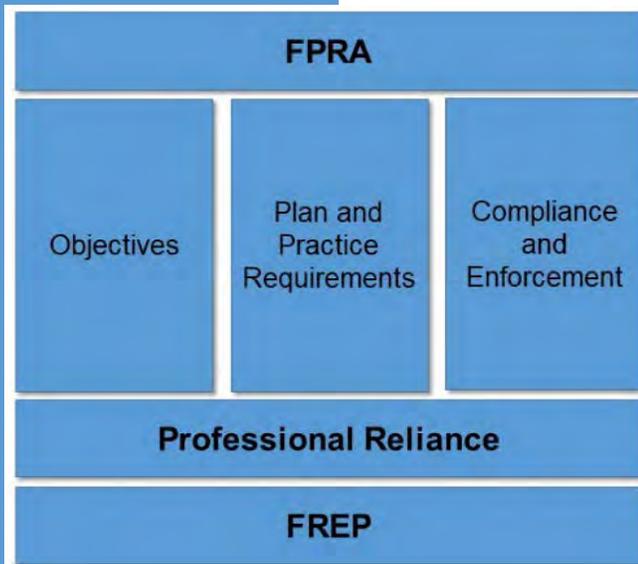


Figure 1. Regulatory framework for forest recreation in BC. The components regulated under FRPA are highlighted in green.

Planning and Practice Requirements for Forest Recreation Under FRPA



FRPA is the primary legislation governing forest and range⁶ practices on public land in BC. FRPA is largely results-based as opposed to its predecessor, the *Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act* (the Code), which was based primarily on rules. FRPA's results-based framework is supported by three pillars: government objectives, plans and practices, and compliance and enforcement (C&E) which rest on a base of professionalism and feedback from the Forest and Range Evaluation Program (Figure 2).

Figure 2. A conceptual view of the FRPA framework.

⁶FRPA deals with both forest and range management practices. The parties and people interviewed in this special report did not report issues about range impacts to recreation resources so this report focuses on forest planning and practices.

A very general overview of how FRPA works is that government sets legal objectives (FRPA objectives) for key forest values; forest licensees operating on provincial forest land prepare forest stewardship plans (FSPs) with results and strategies designed to meet the objectives; and then FLNRORD ensures compliance with these plans through the C&E program. FRPA also specifies some practice requirements⁷ to supplement and guide results and strategies.

FSPs cover large land areas. When it comes to the site level (like a road or a cutblock), licensees must have forest professionals write site plans that identify how the intended results and strategies described in the FSP apply to the site.

FSPs and site plans are required in most circumstances under FRPA. Government also may support the FRPA framework with strategic plans meant to resolve or prevent major land use conflicts. Strategic plans can establish zones where some values, like recreation, have higher priority. Government has initiated a program to modernize land use plans and has announced that it plans to introduce a tactical plan, the forest landscape plan (FLP), which may become part of the FRPA framework in the future. The FLP would be developed with First Nations and specify desired outcomes at the timber supply area level. It will focus on forestry and address more local issues than a land use plan; this could include issues that affect recreation such as access management, harvest method, and harvest scheduling. Other ad hoc planning initiatives have arisen across the province with local governments, recreation groups, and First Nations that have some provincial government support.

Government Objectives

FRPA defines 11 forest values for which government “may make regulations prescribing objectives” (see sidebar FRPA Values). Recreation resources are one of these values. These objectives create legal obligations on forest licensees and influence how forestry is practiced.

When government brought FRPA into force, it established objectives in regulations (primarily the *Forest Planning and Practices Regulation* (FPPR)) via section 149(1) of FRPA for most of the FRPA values. They apply province-wide, and are the most general type of objectives. These provincial objectives trigger a FRPA requirement for licensees to write FSP results or

LOCAL PLANNING INITIATIVES

In some parts of BC, there are very effective initiatives led by local enthusiasts. The Shuswap Trails Roundtable is one such group and consists of First Nations, local government, provincial government agencies and outdoor group representatives who help plan for outdoor recreation, build and maintain facilities, coordinate uses and liaise with all levels of government in an effort to create, maintain and improve recreation opportunities.

⁷ Practice requirements are rules set out in FRPA and the FPPR, and are described further in the Plans and Practices section of this report.

strategies for the objective. For example, the FRPA objective for biodiversity at the stand level is simply “to retain wildlife trees.” All FSPs must include results or strategies to deal with wildlife trees. To date, government has not established a provincial FRPA objective for the recreation resources value.

There are other avenues where government can set FRPA recreation objectives to direct forestry practices:

- Although rarely used for recreation resources, the *Land Act's* section 93.4 allows government to establish FRPA objectives through land use orders. These are commonly used to implement strategic land use plans. At this planning level, multiple forest values are more appropriately dealt with. For example, access management may not only address timber and recreation but also wildlife and forest protection.
- **FRPA section 56** enables government to set FRPA objectives for recreation sites and trails. Planning for these objectives is done at a more local level through referrals, local government or sometimes through non-governmental led planning processes.
- Most older recreation sites, trails or interpretive sites have FRPA objectives **grandparented from the Code**. Under the Code, government was required to establish objectives for recreation sites

and trails. Approximately half of recreation sites and trails have objectives, and most were established before FRPA came into effect.

Objectives are not directly enforceable but if a FRPA objective is established, major forest licensees must provide a result or strategy consistent with that objective in their FSP, and that result or strategy is then enforceable. To be clear, these objectives do not manage resource values themselves, but do apply to forest licensee operations that may impact the resource values.

FRPA VALUES

Under section 149(1) of FRPA, government can make regulations prescribing objectives for 11 values. The values, whether there is an objective, and the location of the objective are shown below:

FRPA Value	FRPA Objective?
Soils	Yes, FPPR s.5
Visual quality	Yes, FPPR s.9.2
Timber	Yes, FPPR s.6
Forage and associated plant communities	Not in FPPR, but in the <i>Range Planning and Practices Regulation</i> , s.7
Water	Yes, FPPR s.8, s.8.2
Fish	Yes, FPPR s.8.1
Wildlife	Yes, FPPR s.7, s.9, s.9.1
Biodiversity	Yes, FPPR s.7, s.9, s.9.1
Recreation resources	No
Resource features	No
Cultural heritage resources	Yes, FPPR s.10

If government establishes a new objective, then under section 8 of FRPA, forest licensees are required to amend their FSPs within two years. New objectives can come with policy, guidance, training or other information or tools to smooth the transition and to optimize the results.

Plans and Practices

Almost all public forest land in BC is covered by one or more FSPs. There are similar operational plans for smaller tenures such as woodlot licences.

Although woodlot licences cover a small proportion of BC, they are often near communities where forest lands are often heavily used for recreation purposes.

FRPA also specifies many practice requirements in the FPPR (e.g., sections 35 to 70). For example, a practice requirement for stand level biodiversity requires retention of standing timber in an average of 7 percent of cutblock area. However, there are few practice requirements that apply to recreation sites and trails. Two that do apply peripherally are sections 44 and 51. Both provide exemptions from normally required practices to allow clearing to create or maintain recreation sites and trails—therefore they have only a limited effect on forest recreation resources. The other practice requirement that could apply to recreation resources is section 70—a forest licensee “who carries out a primary forest activity must ensure that the primary forest activity does not damage or render ineffective a resource feature.” This practice requirement only applies if the recreation feature is identified as a resource feature in an order made under section 5 of the *Government Actions Regulation (GAR)*, and there are three orders designating recreation values as resource features.

STRATEGIC, TACTICAL, OPERATIONAL AND SITE LEVEL PLANNING FOR RECREATION IN BC

At present, there is very little planning at these levels for recreation resources in BC. Strategic level land use plans cover most of BC, and these plans are translated into FRPA objectives through the land use plan orders provided for through the *Land Use Order Regulation (LUOR)* of the *Land Act*. Although the use of this tool for recreation is not limited legally in any way, these orders are most often used for wildlife and biodiversity related functions and very rarely for management or protection of recreation resources.

Tactical planning is a link between the strategic level and the closer-to-the-ground operational and site level planning. A recent FPB report, *Tactical Forest Planning: The Missing Link Between Strategic Planning and Operational Planning in BC*, describes this level of planning and how it could be used in BC. At present, this level of planning is rarely used.

The strategic and tactical levels of planning are where the different resource values can be balanced economically, environmentally and socially.

Recreational objectives from strategic level plans and FRPA objectives from other sources, when available, feed into FSPs where results and strategies to meet the objectives are devised.

Site plans translate the results and strategies and any practice requirements that apply into site level actions.

As well, there is another somewhat complex way that recreation features may become designated resource features. The GAR section 19 grandparents resource features, as defined in the *Operational and Site Planning Regulation (OSPR)*, under FRPA. The OSPR was the Code regulation that has been superseded by FRPA regulations. Section 19 of the GAR states that a resource feature as defined in the former OSPR is a resource feature under section 5 of the GAR if the resource feature was contained in a higher level plan or made known. The term *made known* refers to a concept under the Code where the district manager made the information available prior to operational plans being submitted for approval. There are many recreation features in the province that do qualify as resource features under section 19 of GAR. There is a thorough discussion of this GAR process in a 2007 Board report.⁸

Compliance and Enforcement

One of FRPA's three pillars is C&E. Effective C&E depends on having clear legal requirements. The practice requirements within the FPPR were designed to be clear. Section 21 of FRPA requires forest licensees to achieve results and follow strategies in operational plans such as FSPs. Section 5 of FRPA requires results or strategies written in FSPs to be consistent with FRPA objectives and written so that they are clear and enforceable. However, a 2015 Board special investigation found that results and strategies were often not consistent with FRPA objectives and often not enforceable.⁹ The report made recommendations designed to improve FSPs. A 2019 follow up special report found there had been improvement for some of the values— particularly those for which training and guidance have been provided to professionals.¹⁰

RESULTS AND STRATEGIES IN FSPs

The 2015 Board report on FSPs found significant issues with results and strategies found in FSPs in that they were often not consistent with government's objectives and often not enforceable. However, when government's objectives were clear and accompanied with effective guidance, results or strategies were much more likely to be enforceable and consistent with the objective.

⁸ FPB, [Mountain Pine Beetle Harvesting in the Stake Lake Cross Country Ski Area](#), 2007.

⁹ FPB, [Forest Stewardship Plans: Are They Meeting Expectations?](#) 2015.

¹⁰ FPB, [Follow-up Report on Forest Stewardship Plans: Are They Meeting Expectations?](#) 2019.

FRPA Regulatory Framework

Figure 1 above shows the administrative framework for forest recreation by indicating agencies responsible for managing recreation on different lands in BC. Figure 3 below shows the most significant parts of FRPA and its regulations that govern forest recreation on public lands, outside of parks, in BC.

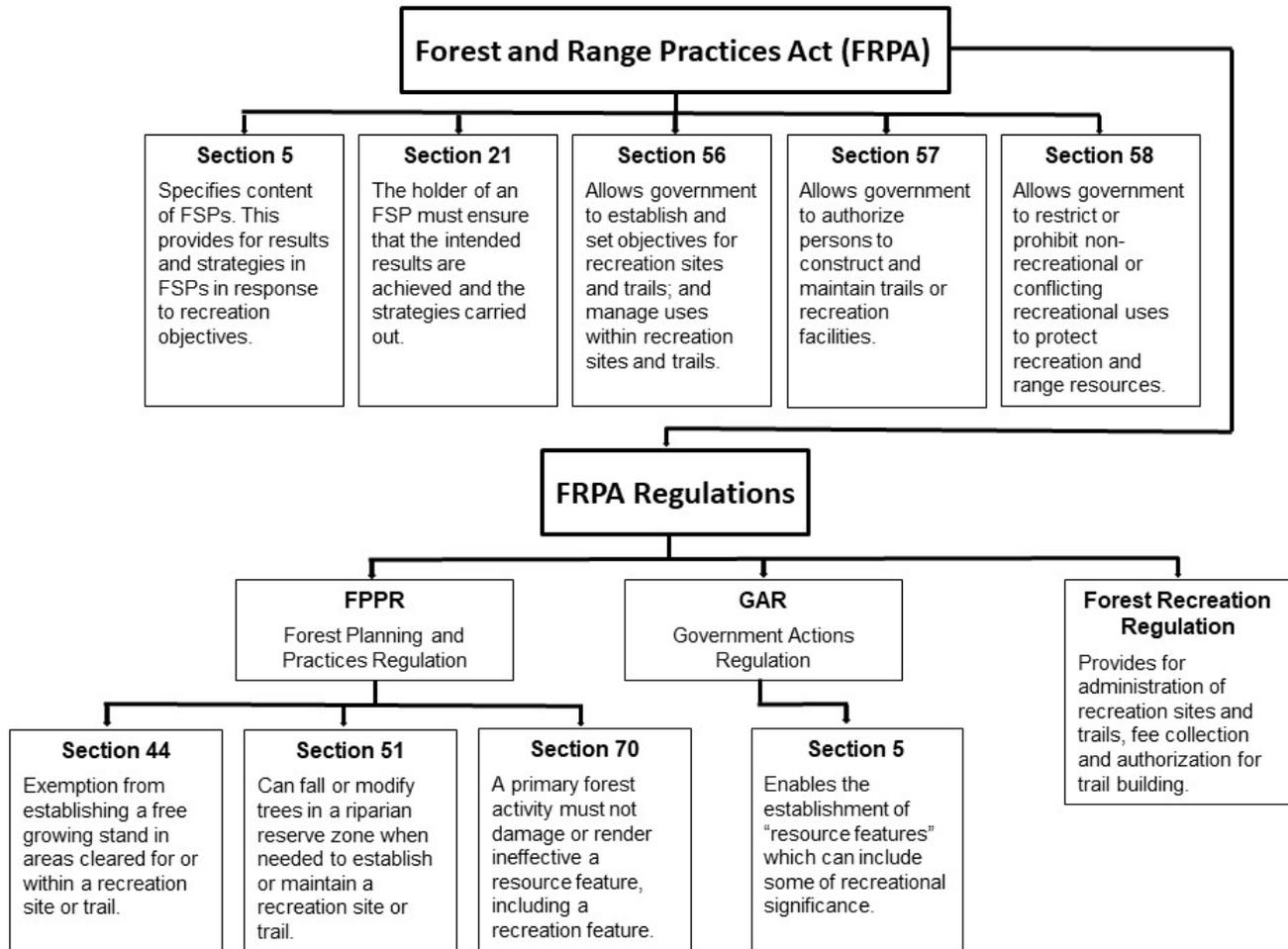


Figure 3. Primary statutes and regulations governing forest recreation on BC public lands outside of parks.

IMPORTANT RECREATION TERMS IN FRPA

These definitions are important in understanding FRPA's role in forest recreation. The term "recreation resource" is intended to encompass recreation sites and trails as recreation facilities. GAR includes recreational features.

Recreation resource means:

- a recreation feature,
- a scenic or wilderness feature or setting that has recreational significance or value, or
- a recreation facility

Recreation feature means a biological, physical, cultural or historic feature that has recreational significance or value. For example, the Squamish Chief is a recreation feature.

Recreation site or recreation trail means a recreation site or trail established under section 56 of this Act or section 6 of the *Forest Practices Code of British Columbia Act* or designated under the *Forest Act*.

The GAR defines a **resource feature** simply as a resource feature identified in a GAR order. There are several types of GAR resource features that could be considered recreationally significant:

- (a) a surface or subsurface element of a karst system;
- (f) an interpretive forest site, recreation site or recreation trail;
- (g) a trail or other recreation facility referred to in section 57 of the Act that is authorized by the minister or under another enactment;
- (h) a recreation feature that the minister considers to be of significant recreational value.

FRPA is effective at regulating the use of public lands for recreation sites, trails and other recreation facilities. Section 56 of FRPA allows government to establish or disestablish recreation sites, trails and interpretive forest sites. It also allows government to establish FRPA objectives for them. Section 57 of FRPA prohibits construction of trails and other recreational facilities, such as cabins and structures, unless government authorizes them. The *Forest Recreation Regulation* (FRR) regulates the use of sites and trails to ensure the provision of safe, sanitary, socially acceptable and environmentally sound recreation sites and trails for public use. Section 118 (2)(d) of FRPA allows government officials to enter into agreements to develop, expand, maintain, repair or close an interpretive forest site, a recreation site or a recreation trail. Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC), a branch of FLNRORD, is responsible for administering and managing these components of FRPA.

FRPA can provide for the protection of recreation resources from forestry operations, some industrial activities and conflicting recreational uses. Section 58 is particularly powerful in this regard. It enables government to restrict or prohibit non-recreational and recreational uses of public lands in order to protect a specific recreation resource.¹¹ For example, a section 58 order might restrict motorized recreational activity in an area used for non-motorized recreation.

Government may protect recreation resources where there are no FRPA objectives in place by

identifying them under section 5 of the GAR. Section 70 of the FPPR prohibits forest licensees from damaging recreation features identified under section 5 of the GAR.

¹¹ Except any non-recreational use permitted under the *Coal Act*, the *Mineral Tenure Act* or the *Oil and Gas Activities Act*.

Tenured commercial recreation operators have specific rights granted to them by the Province under their tenure agreement and forest licensees must provide them with opportunities for review of an FSP. Section 21(1)(c) of the FPPR requires providing “a person whose rights may be affected by the plan with an opportunity to review the plan in a manner that is commensurate with the nature and extent to which the person's rights may be affected.”

FINDINGS

The research and interviews conducted by the Board raised many issues. These issues tended to fall into five categories, although there were often interrelationships and “fuzzy” boundaries between them:

1. Government staffing
2. Forest harvesting
3. Access management
4. User group conflicts
5. Forest recreation planning

Of these five categories, issues in forest recreation planning were the most common and were most often linked with the other issues. For example, a lack of planning can lead to user group conflicts, harvesting issues, and access issues. As well, planning requires government resources and leadership, linking it to the government staffing category.

The analysis of findings allowed the investigators to identify strengths and weaknesses in the FRPA framework for forest recreation.

Government Staffing

Government, forest licensees and recreationists all recognized that government forest recreation staffing is lean. RSTBC, the agency within FLNRORD whose mandate is to manage recreation sites and trails, reports an unprecedented demand for services. RSTBC staff explained that when government reorganized the recreation program in 2006, it intended RSTBC only to manage sites and trails, but the demand for RSTBC’s services is not just for campsites and trails by recreationists. There is a large demand from within the provincial government that needs expert input and collaboration on issues impacting dispersed (not sites and trails) recreation resources. So, although not organizationally structured to do so, it has been working on some dispersed recreation resources issues as well.

Local governments and community organizations also seek RSTBC expertise in their efforts to enhance, develop, and create new recreation opportunities.

RSTBC has responded to this increasing workload by entering into agreements (partnering) with volunteer organizations. Some partners report frustration because of delays and complications with FRPA and *Land Act* authorizations. The workload leaves RSTBC staff with little time to engage in planning.

RSTBC staff report that they do not have a role in compliance and enforcement. C&E Branch is responsible for enforcement, but staff must balance this work with the other legislation they are tasked with enforcing.¹²

Forest Harvesting

Public recreationists and outdoor tourism operators reported that timber harvesting affects them by disturbing the forests that are important to them, disrupting trails, and adding unnatural sites, sounds and disturbances to recreational settings. Further, forestry can create unwanted access or, conversely, disrupt necessary access. Forest licensees reported that accommodating forest recreationists can lead to constraints on the operable forest land base, add costs to logging, slow logging operations and can create dangerous situations when recreationists venture close to active logging operations or use active logging roads.

Many interviewees thought that, although government and licensees recognize designated sites and trails, they often do not consider other recreation resources.

Access Management

Highways and public roads are important, but often roads built for forestry access are the final links to recreation opportunities. One resource manager said, “resource roads are the backbone of recreation in BC.” Most of these forest access roads are built by forest licensees to access their logging sites under a road permit. Other forest roads, designated as FSRs, are usually built by government. Licensees decide where and when to build the road-permit roads and when to deactivate them. In both cases, the roads are funded by government either directly (in the case of some FSRs) or through cost recognition in stumpage assessments to licensees.

Licensees use these roads to log, reforest and tend stands through their initial years of growth. Then, unless the roads are needed by the licensee for further access, they become a liability because of the ongoing maintenance required. Licensees retain responsibility for the road until they deactivate the road or until FLNRORD relieves them of responsibility.

¹² FPB, [Appropriateness of Government’s Compliance and Enforcement Framework for FRPA and the Wildfire Act](#), 2019.

When deactivating roads, a licensee must barricade the road, remove all the bridges and stream culverts, and ensure that the road prism is stable. Stabilizing the road prism sometimes entails pulling back the fill slopes.

If a licensee chooses to remain responsible for the road after their industrial use is finished, they may maintain the road to “wilderness road” standards. To meet wilderness road requirements, road maintenance need only be done to ensure that there is “no material adverse effect on a forest resource.”¹³ Where there is little risk of causing damage, licensees might leave roads unmodified, but where the risk is higher they will generally do a partial deactivation, such as creating broad cross ditches that allow use by high clearance 4WD vehicles or motorcycles. Wilderness roads generally accommodate motorized recreational use until roads become impassable by events such as wash outs or through excessive brush growth. Again, under FRPA, decisions on levels of maintenance or partial deactivation are up to the licensee.

Rather than deactivate a road, licensees can be relieved of obligations on a road-permit road if it is required for public use. Then government takes on the responsibility for maintenance and the road normally becomes an FSR. If an FSR is for industrial use such as timber harvesting, then a licensee must get a road use permit to use it. When industrial use is finished, it may be left as a wilderness road or it may be deactivated. Again, if required for public access, the obligations can be transferred back to FLNRORD and recreation is one of the considerations for funding to maintain FSRs for access. However, a recent Auditor General’s report on FSRs found issues with funding maintenance on existing roads. This likely reinforces reluctance of government to take on responsibility for more FSRs.

New roads can change the recreation experience for better or worse, depending on the recreation uses of the landscape and the recreation user’s point of view. The landscape will lose some of its wilderness character and patterns of use will probably change. For example, a new road may add a kayak-launch point to a river. A road may create access near timberline that allows public snowmobile use in previously unavailable terrain. This is a bonus for winter-motorized recreationists, but could be devastating for a backcountry ski lodge operator who has invested in a lodge and promotes skiing in pristine powder.

FOREST ROADS

A thorough review of resource road issues, including access management, is available in a previous FPB special report: [Access Management and Resource Roads: 2015 Update](#).

The Auditor General recently completed an audit of Forest Service Roads entitled [Management of Forest Service Roads](#).

¹³ Forest resources are generally the forest values in FRPA section 149 (see text box on page 5).

On the other hand, lack of maintenance, partial deactivation or deactivation can disrupt patterns of use and change the recreational experience. Forest roads are public assets, but largely managed by forest licensees. Access management plans and FRPA objectives could ensure that government and licensees consider recreation resources values when making decisions on a road's fate. For example, a licensee may wish to deactivate a road that accesses a resource feature like a hiking trail.

User Group Conflicts

A conflict in forest recreation happens when one recreational resource user perceives another user reducing the quality of their expected recreation experience. Many interviewees reported that the rapidly increasing use of finite recreation resources is leading to increases in conflicts. A conflict can happen within a single user group such as when too many people hike into a backcountry lake expecting solitude. Conflicts also occur between user groups such as when horseback riders use the same trail as downhill mountain bikers.

The most common conflicts reported were between motorized and non-motorized users and between commercial and non-commercial users.

Motorized and Non-motorized

New technology for snowmobiles and ATVs, combined with an ever-expanding road network into previously roadless areas, is allowing motorized access to areas that were previously used only by non-motorized recreationists.

Non-motorized users relish wilderness experiences that may include silence, solitude, untracked snow slopes and undisturbed wildlife. These are often incompatible with motorized use. Motorized users' experiences are not usually negatively affected by non-motorized use.

Where motorized users start using a recreation feature, they often feel that it is unfair to exclude what they perceive as an established motorized use. This type of conflict can often be prevented by tactical or strategic planning, if caught early. A key tool to ensure that recreation sites or trails continue to be used for their intended purpose is to establish objectives for the site or trail when or after they are established under section 56 of FRPA. An objective can specify the type of uses allowed on the site or trail. Objectives will support the use of other regulatory or management tools such as the requirement for a licensee to specify a result or strategy in an FSP.

Uses of trails can also be managed by ensuring that the trail is inaccessible to motorized vehicles or posted with signs that explain acceptable use. Rules can be established and signs posted in accordance with section 20(3)

of the *Forest Recreation Regulation*. Area-based closures can be set under section 58 of FRPA. Then FLNRORD can use C&E measures to protect the recreation resource.

Some regions in the province have created access management plans that essentially zone areas for various types of use. In some cases, these plans significantly reduce conflict while others are not so successful. Public consultation and planning are key.

Commercial and Non-commercial

Public expectations in BC are that people should have the right to recreate anywhere that is not private land or Crown land tied up by an intensive area-based tenure like a base camp for a guide outfitter or ski runs at a ski resort.¹⁴ The commercial recreation provider's needs, and some public recreationists' desires, can collide when, for example, snowmobilers infiltrate a backcountry ski lodge's extensive use area.

Commercial recreation tenure holders invest in infrastructure such as lodges and have operating costs to facilitate their business opportunities. They usually promote, and their customers expect, a pristine recreational opportunity.

FRPA does not distinguish between public and commercial recreation. Although developed under the *Land Act*, the *Adventure Tourism Policy (2015)* does. The *Land Act* decision maker must ensure there is diverse, responsible and sustainable growth in both adventure tourism and public recreation use on Crown land. However, commercial recreation tenure holders do not view FRPA as protecting them. Their view is that FRPA and RSTBC are good at protecting "public" recreation, but not commercial recreation values. They believe that legal protection is needed for recreation resources values, regardless of how they are used (public or commercial).

Recreation Planning

The lack of recreation planning is a common thread throughout the issues found in our interviews. Two decades ago, FLNRORD had a large forest recreation program integrated with the rest of forest operations. The program administered sites and trails, as well as set standards for them. Government maintained a recreation inventory.¹⁵ Government made

INTENSIVE AND EXTENSIVE USE

Commercial recreation operators who provide outdoor recreation activities on provincial Crown land are subject to the *Adventure Tourism Policy (2015)*.

The policy requires tenures and fees for the use of the land. The form of tenure depends on whether use is intensive or extensive. Intensive use tenures generally cover small areas for things like base camps or lodges. The tenure may allow the operator to exclude public use.

Extensive use tenures are for larger areas used for activities like backcountry skiing or hiking. The operator has non-exclusive use of the area.

¹⁴ Public access is guaranteed in ski areas subject to provisions of public safety.

¹⁵ British Columbia Ministry of Forests. Recreation Manual, Chapter 6: Recreation Inventory. Available at <https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hfp/publications/00201/chap06/chap06.htm>.

decisions based on a landscape that was inventoried and zoned for its recreational potential. Licensee operational plans were referred to local recreation staff to ensure that timber harvesting operations did not unduly impact recreational opportunities.

An important part of the forest recreation program was setting standards for, and maintaining, the forest recreation inventory. Large scale inventories of recreation features and the recreation opportunities spectrum (ROS)¹⁶ were completed throughout BC. At that

time, government was also developing strategic-level land use plans in many parts of BC.¹⁷ The inventories were done with the understanding that effective planning for recreation must be based on a knowledge of the recreational features and opportunities on the landscape. The ROS portion of the recreation inventory has recently been updated, but the recreation features portion was last updated in 1999. Features themselves do not change much, but their significance does and the associated recreational activities have changed much since the last update.

The land use planning process was extensive, expensive and took a long time. Land use plan orders were then used to implement key parts of the plans. Generally, government did not implement recreation objectives from these plans. In some cases, government completed some voluntary recreation access management plans to

facilitate maintenance of a range of recreational opportunities. Without government objectives, voluntary recreational access management plans had limited success. Today, these recreation inventories and access management plans are rarely consulted or updated.

Over the last two decades, budget and staffing cuts have reduced the scope of FLNRORD forest recreation planning to one branch, RSTBC, which was designed to only manage recreation sites, recreation trails and interpretative forest sites. RSTBC has limited staff time for planning; its staff mostly react to patterns of use. It will authorize construction, improvement, or de-establishment of recreation facilities in reaction to changes in use. RSTBC reports an unprecedented public demand for trail development that consumes most of its resources. RSTBC is designing

RECREATION INVENTORY

The BC Recreation Inventory included recreation features, feature significance, feature sensitivity, activities, management class, and recreation opportunity spectrum delineation. The Recreation Manual noted that “The recreation inventory is not a single-effort project, but an ongoing process... As new information is gathered or as conditions change, the inventory is to be updated.” It was last updated in 1999 (*except for the recreation opportunity spectrum portion which has had recent updates).

One part of the inventory is the delineation of the **ROS** polygons. ROS delineation ‘zones’ the landscape based on the relative isolation. It is based on the concept that isolation is related to wilderness character and that this affords different recreation opportunities.

¹⁶ USDA Forest Service, [ROS Primer and Field Guide](#).

¹⁷ This includes land and resource management plans, as well as regional land use plans for the Kootenay, Vancouver Island and Cariboo regions.

about 100 new sites and trails per year under section 56 of FRPA, and authorizing construction, maintenance or rehabilitation of another 100 under section 57. Despite these efforts, unauthorized trail construction continues to be an issue. Trails built without permission can lead to other resource management issues and user conflicts.

RSTBC has recently started to update its Trail Strategy for British Columbia,¹⁸ but even that is not a plan; it is a call to action to British Columbians to support and develop a network of trails.

Strategic land use plans have been completed at a regional or sub-regional scale for most areas of the Province. These guide broad level decisions on resource management. However, many of these are very old (many date from the late 1990s) and the inclusion of forest recreation as a significant part of these plans is spotty. Some of these plans, such as, the *Kamloops Land and Resource Management Plan* have led to land use plan orders with a few broad FRPA recreation objectives. Many other land use plans do not mention recreation, or if they do, FRPA objectives have not been established in resulting land use plan orders. For example, the *San Josef Land Use Plan* on northern Vancouver Island mentions recreation 11 times. The resulting land use plan order does not mention recreation. If government creates legal orders from the plans, FSPs would be required to have results and strategies that are consistent with the objectives in the orders.

Objectives can lead to more work for licensees in creating results and strategies, as well as more effort in planning operations, but they can give certainty about how timber is to be integrated with the other resources.

Although the GAR does not facilitate government objectives for recreation, resource features created through GAR orders are subject to a practice requirement. Section 70 states that designated resource features “must not be damaged or rendered ineffective.” Currently, three forest districts in BC have used this tool to protect certain recreation features. South Island and Sea to Sky natural resource districts have designated a few recreation sites and trails as resource features. Campbell River Natural Resource District has gone further and specified many features with high recreational significance, such as beaches and certain river reaches, as resource features.

UNAUTHORIZED TRAILS

The Board often receives telephone calls and e-mails from British Columbians who have run across flagging tape or painted cutblock boundaries on what they considered established trails. They are very upset that licensees could contemplate harvesting that would disturb the trails. Upon investigation, the Board often finds that these trails have never been officially established.

Before contacting the Board, trail users should contact RSTBC or their local trail group to inquire about section 56 authorization. When trails are officially established, licensees must obtain authorization from RSTBC before disturbing the trails.

Although there is no legal requirement, where licensees are planning development and find unauthorized trails, they should post notices at access points to start consultation so that the use is considered in the planning of roads and cutblocks.

¹⁸ RSTBC. 2013. [Trails Strategy for British Columbia](http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/public/pubdocs/bcdocs2013_2/531943/trail_strategy%20for_bc.pdf). Available at http://www.llbc.leg.bc.ca/public/pubdocs/bcdocs2013_2/531943/trail_strategy%20for_bc.pdf.

CLEAR OBJECTIVES FACILITATE GOOD RESULTS OR STRATEGIES

Objectives should be crafted knowing that results and strategies will be written based on them. Land use plans, as well as site and trail objectives crafted under older legislation were not devised with that thought in mind, and this shows. This recreation site objective for a small lake in the forest with a small campsite and beach illustrates the point:

To manage the recreation site for a lakeside, natural roaded recreation experience. The campsite will be maintained, the lake shoreline and natural vegetation will be conserved. Opportunities for camping, picnicking and car-top boat launching and swimming will be available at the site.

The intentions for management of this site are not clear. For example, what is a “natural roaded experience”? Should logging be plainly visible? The statement appears to be part of an ROS definition, but this is difficult to know unless you are knowledgeable in recreation inventories (most forest professionals and even many RSTBC staff are not). The statement “the lake shoreline and natural vegetation will be conserved” is vague. Should a wooded buffer be maintained around the lake? Is maintenance of riparian vegetation sufficient?

A forest professional writing an FSP would simply not have enough information to know what government's intent for management was.

A clear objective here is not difficult to write, yet it would allow an FSP to be written that would guide the crafting of a site plan that would in turn ensure that forest activities would be consistent with the intentions for the site.

In this case, the unclear objective was a major factor in a dispute that resulted in a complaint to the Board.*

* FPB. May 2018. Planned Timber Harvesting at Two Recreation Sites near Rock Creek, BC. Available at <https://www.bcfpb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/IRC213-Williamson-Thone-Rec-Sites.pdf>.

The FRPA framework depends heavily on results and strategies in FSPs being consistent with legal government objectives so the framework can support effective management of recreation resources. The framework for recreation is weakened by:

- not having an overall FRPA objective for the forest recreation resource value;
- having few FRPA legal recreation objectives arising from strategic land use plans; and
- having legal objectives for only about half of recreation sites and trails. Additionally, most of these objectives are very old and written in a manner that makes crafting of results or strategies difficult.

The on-the-ground operational plan governing forest activities, such as road building and logging, is the site plan. A primary purpose of the site plan is to indicate how licensees will achieve the FSP results and strategies

on the ground. Without results and strategies for recreation, licensees are not required to consider recreation resources values on the ground except through RSTBC's use of the FRR, which only applies to recreation sites and trails.

When forest licensees propose forest activities within a recreation site or on a recreation trail, they must receive authorization from RSTBC. This is because section 16 of the FRR says that "unless authorized by a recreation officer, a person must not use a recreation site, recreation trail or interpretive forest site for... a business or industrial activity." Without results or strategies, this becomes a rare legal point where control of forestry activities in recreation sites can be exercised by RSTBC and is also a point where some belated planning might take place but often too late for effective public consultation.

The lack of planning for recreation contributes to harvesting issues, user conflicts, poor access management and a difficulty in making a case for additional government staff. It also means that government is forced to manage issues on an ad hoc basis as issues come to the forefront.

Objectives for Recreation Sites and Trails

Few recreation sites and trails have objectives, and those objectives that do exist are often poorly understood or even disregarded. In 2018, the Board investigated a complaint about proposed logging on two recreation sites near Rock Creek. The investigation revealed that the sites had objectives, but the objectives were not understood. The recreation officer authorized the logging, but the authorization was not reasonable because, among other reasons, the planned logging would not meet the recreation objective.*

* Forest Practices Board. May 2018. Planned Timber Harvesting at Two Recreation Sites near Rock Creek, BC. Available at <https://www.bcfob.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/IRC213-Williamson-Thone-Rec-Sites.pdf>.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the FRPA Framework for Forest Recreation

The Forest and Range Practices Act was enacted in 2004 to shift from a largely rules-based system to one based on objectives. Government would set FRPA objectives and the forest industry would create results or strategies to meet these objectives. FRPA has some key strengths and several weaknesses in relation to forest recreation that have come with this transition.

Strengths

First, **FRPA has a structure in place** (the Act itself and its regulations) to manage the broad forest recreation resource together with other forest resources. This can be done through results and strategies in FSPs and other mechanisms described earlier in the report (e.g., GAR orders, FRR section 16 authorizations, FPPR section 58 restrictions, *Land Use Order Regulation*, etc.)

Second, the use of **objectives rather than rigid rules** can allow for very effective management of recreation resources and intermingled resources. For example, a rule might say 'no timber harvesting within a recreation site.' A FRPA objective could be worded such that creative and site specific results or strategies can be devised to yield better solutions. A reserve width may be varied to take into account views, windthrow potential and other site conditions.

Weaknesses

While the primary strength of FRPA is that a structure is in place that can effectively manage how forestry activities affect recreation resource values, **much of this strength is not being used**. For this strength to be unleashed, government can establish recreation features as resource features under the GAR and/or have clear FRPA objectives designed and established to foster effective management under the FRPA framework.

There are significant **gaps in the way legislation and regulations are used**. For example, FRPA governs forest resources while the *Land Act* governs many of the tenures relating to commercial recreation. The two Acts don't integrate as well as they could. *Land Act* tenure holders often make significant investments in infrastructure such as lodges, backcountry ski runs and hiking trails. They often expect adjacent forest and range management to recognize these recreation resources and respect them through variations in forest and range practices near these investments. Unless the infrastructure is recognized as a recreation feature or resource, there is no requirement for special management. Conversely, forest tenure holders can be affected by new recreation tenures in their operating area.

Collectively, government objectives are considered to be a pillar upholding the FRPA framework, but the **lack of effective FRPA objectives** weakens the structure.

Although the FPPR (sections 5 to 10) has provided general FRPA objectives for most values in FRPA (section 149(1)), government has not prescribed a general objective for recreation resources. RSTBC can establish FRPA objectives for individual recreation sites and trails under section 56 of FRPA, but has been reluctant to do so until recently. About half of the sites and trails were grandparented into FRPA with objectives but RSTBC does not consider those objectives effective for use under FRPA.

There is often a **lack of recognition of recreation resources**. This is exacerbated by **outdated inventories of forest recreation resources**. Sites, trails, interpretive sites and features are all noted on government maps but trails and campsites are usually there to provide access to a larger resource. For example, a trail may be there to provide access to a reach of a river for canoeing or fishing and that trail might be designated as an official recreation trail with objectives, but the larger resource that the trail is built to access has no designation and no objectives so may not be managed for

its recreational resource value. Also, recreation feature inventories pre-date newer, popular activities such as mountain biking and backcountry skiing.

There are **limited opportunities for input** from the public and from commercial operators into designation or management of recreation resources or setting of objectives.

For those recreation resources managed through results or strategies in FSPs, **public and other stakeholder review and comment can be difficult or ineffective**. Recreationists find FSPs hard to understand and see little in them that applies to recreation. Where GAR orders have been used to designate resource features, these features are shown on FSP maps, however this FRPA tool has rarely been used. Advertising an FSP in a newspaper solicits little response and FSPs typically provide opportunity for input at most once every five years. Recreation resource stakeholders have to identify their interests or they will not get a referral. Often these stakeholders are confused by overlapping FSPs and may not know which licensees operate in their area of interest. When it is brought into force, the *Forest and Range Practices Amendment Act* (Bill 21, 2019) will be a step in the right direction. It will require forest licensees to prepare and make publicly available a forest operations map that shows the approximate location of cutblocks and roads.

And finally, while FRPA does not prevent effective planning, it lacks a requirement for a cohesive planning layer that would ensure the consideration of the recreation resource values.

CONCLUSIONS

The framework provided by FRPA can enable effective management of the forest recreation resource. The regulatory and administrative structure is in place, but to be effective, government land managers must know about and use the available FRPA tools.

FRPA depends on three pillars: objectives, planning and practices, and compliance and enforcement. However, the recreation resources value is one of the few FRPA values without an overall objective. Only about half of recreation sites, trails or features have specific objectives and many of the existing objectives are not written to be effective under FRPA. The major FRPA plan, the FSP, depends on the presence of clear government

EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES

The government objectives specified in the FPPR are very broad, and if standing alone, are not very effective. For example, the objective for stand level biodiversity is simply “to retain wildlife trees.” For somebody writing a result or strategy in a FSP, this is not enough information. However, there is usually help. In the case of stand level biodiversity, there are practice requirements (FPPR sections 67 to 69), [FRPA Bulletins](#), and older [Forest Practices Code guidebooks](#) that will effectively guide the writer. As well, many FRPA values have ‘factors’ specified in schedule 1 of the FPPR that are designed to help guide creators of results and strategies in FSPs.

With this help, broad provincial level objectives can be effective tools for management of FRPA values.

objectives for recreation so that licensees can create results and strategies that are consistent with them. Effective compliance and enforcement largely depends on these results and strategies in FSPs or on resource features designated through GAR orders so that section 70 of the FPPR can be enforced. RSTBC does utilize section 16 of the FRR to authorize forestry activities for sites and trails, but this works only for activities within existing sites and trail boundaries. There are few recreation-related results or strategies in FSPs and few recreation resources established as resource features through GAR orders.

RSTBC is effective in managing most existing sites and trails and is providing new sites and trails as its resources allow. However, RSTBC has insufficient resources for planning or managing recreation resources outside of designated sites and trails. The strategic level plans in BC have not always encompassed forest recreation meaningfully and few of the resulting land use plan orders include FRPA objectives for the recreation resources value. There is room for improved strategic planning and new tactical planning to help guide management of recreation resources.

Opportunities for Improvement

The Board makes three recommendations to improve forest recreation management:

1. **Improve the information available on forest recreation resources.**

The traditional way of doing this is through inventories designed to gather resources information—in the case of recreation resources in BC, this is the recreation features inventory and recreation opportunities spectrum mapping. The uses and significance of recreation features are constantly changing and there have been many changes since the last update. Improving information would assist the public, industry and government to plan for recreation resources. Improvement could be achieved by updating or maintaining inventories, increasing communication and collaboration with user groups, or even creating interactive tools (e.g., crowd sourcing and use of citizen science) for users to report recreation resources or uses.

2. **Improve the use of objectives for managing the recreation resource value.**

There is a spectrum of possible objectives and ways to set them. This includes broad objectives set by government at the provincial level, site level objectives set for individual site or trails, and intermediate level objectives set by strategic and landscape level planning processes. There are presently few effective objectives for recreation, yet objectives are one of the ‘pillars’ supporting the FRPA framework and are the key to having recreation acknowledged in FSPs.

3. Incorporate recreation resources values into strategic and tactical planning processes.

There is an excellent opportunity to address some of the issues identified in this report by incorporating the recreation resource value into planning processes. This may involve collaboration between the province and outdoor recreation organizations, development of policy for how recreation resources are considered in planning, as well as creation of tools, training and guidance for those involved in strategic and tactical planning, so they can more effectively address recreation values in planning processes.

The Board hopes this report will help strengthen management of BC's forests heritage by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the FRPA framework as it relates to recreation resources, and by spurring a dialogue between the government and recreation stakeholders about constructive ways to improve the management of recreation resources.

APPENDIX 1: A Selection of Board Reports Dealing with Forest Recreation

- FPB. 2018. Planned Timber Harvesting at Two Recreation Sites near Rock Creek, BC. Available at <https://www.bcfpb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/IRC213-Williamson-Thone-Rec-Sites.pdf>.
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