Reference: 393621

March 22, 2023

Keith Atkinson, Chair
Forest Practices Board
PO Box 9905 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9R1

Dear Keith Atkinson:

On behalf of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (the ministry), please accept this letter as government's response to the Forest Practices Board's (the Board) recommendations in its special report, "Management of Forest Recreation in BC" (May 2021).

Firstly, I would like to thank the Board for this report and its in-depth analysis of the challenges impacting forest recreation management in British Columbia (B.C.). British Columbians feel a deep connection with the province's outdoor spaces, and value the recreation opportunities that they provide. A strong uplift in demand and usage—buoyed by the COVID-19 pandemic—has occurred in both camping and day-use/trail-based activities in recent years. As popularity and demand for outdoor recreation opportunities continue to grow and evolve, the Province must find ways to address existing and new management challenges.

On April 1, 2022, the Province's natural resource sector underwent significant restructuring following an organizational effectiveness review. As a result of this initiative, Recreation Sites and Trails BC, the branch responsible for managing public recreation on recreation sites and trails across the province, has been moved to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy and joins BC Parks in the newly formed Conservation and Recreation Division. Since the re-organization, the ministry has initiated a larger strategic review of public recreation service delivery in B.C., one that will ultimately provide guidance on the future management and delivery of provincial outdoor recreation services. The Board's special report presents an important analysis of forest recreation management and will be actively considered by the ministry as this project moves forward.

It is my pleasure to provide this initial response to the Board's recommendations for forest recreation management in B.C. Specific actions and initiatives are detailed below.

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Recommendation 1
Improve the information available on forest recreation resources.

Government response
The ministry agrees that the availability of accurate, up-to-date information on the status and whereabouts of recreation elements and features is critical in supporting the public, industry and government to plan for recreation resources. Currently, information pertaining to recreation sites and trails legally established under the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA) is spatially represented in the B.C. Geographic Warehouse (BCGW) and on the Recreation Sites and Trails BC – Interactive Map, which may be found in the Gallery section of B.C.'s Map Hub at https://governmentofbc.maps.arcgis.com/home/index.html. On average, more than 50 new recreation sites and trails have been added per year to the BCGW database since 2007, with new sites and trails being added regularly.

As the Board is aware, in 2021 the *Forests Statutes Amendment Act* received Royal Assent. The *Forest Statutes Amendment Act* includes a wide array of changes to forest and range management practices in the province, including the addition of a new "trail-based recreation area" designation. Trail-based recreation areas will exist alongside existing recreation site, recreation trail and interpretive forest site designations. They will provide a flexible management approach to dynamic trail networks highly valued by communities across the province. Additional regulatory and policy work is required to support the implementation of this new designation. However, trail-based recreation areas will enable the ministry to spatially represent dense trail areas more accurately, clarify management intent and inform forest planning so that activities may align with recreation management objectives for these areas.

New developments as a result of the Province's *Forest and Range Planning and Practices Act* Improvement Initiative will enable greater information sharing between government and the public. The Forest Operations Map will facilitate public participation in forest planning by providing an opportunity for members of the public and other recreation stakeholders to share information pertaining to dispersed recreation resources not captured in the BCGW and other spatial databases. The Forest Operations Map is discussed in more detail under Recommendation 3.

Finally, over the past three years, BC Parks has invested in improvements to reservation systems, websites and other digital systems that have directly benefited recreation users. Following the re-organization, the ministry has identified an immediate opportunity to integrate systems development initiatives across BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC. By working together, the two agencies responsible for managing the largest portion of outdoor recreation in the province anticipate being able to provide recreation users with more seamless and comprehensive information on recreation opportunities.

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

Government response
The ministry generally supports this recommendation and agrees that objectives are a fundamental component of any recreation management framework. Objectives ensure land managers and recreation managers are basing decisions and actions on desired future states, and that those future states are known, developed with appropriate consideration and process and communicated and understood between practitioners and over time. However, as stated in the special report, the current approach of setting objectives for individual recreation sites and trails is not effective. Objectives become outdated over time, and there is no mechanism to track, inventory, monitor and update a large number of unique objectives for individual sites and trails. The ministry appreciates the Board's analysis of this issue, and is currently pursuing other processes and initiatives through which recreation management objectives may be communicated more broadly.

For example, the Province's newly introduced Forest Landscape Planning process presents a unique opportunity for recreation management objectives to be considered in forest management planning. Consultation and collaboration with First Nations communities and recreational stakeholder input are a tenet of this planning framework. Additionally, ongoing provincial land use planning initiatives, such as the Sea to Sky Visitor Use Management initiative, show great promise for guiding future land use decisions, including recreation management and monitoring, across the natural resource sector. The ministry's participation in strategic and tactical level planning processes is described in more detail under Recommendation 3.

As well, the new trail-based recreation area designation, described under Recommendation 1, will provide another opportunity to emphasize recreation objectives for large community-based trail networks. Under this designation, the management intent of high-density trail networks will be clarified through engagement with First Nations, the community, recreation partners and other stakeholders. This in turn will assist industry in designing results and strategies that align with recreation objectives set for these areas.

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

Government response
The ministry is encouraged by the Board's recommendation to incorporate recreation resource values into strategic and tactical planning processes. Objectives for managing recreation resources and values are strengthened when considered in higher level plans. The ministry is working to ensure recreation values are appropriately considered in ongoing provincial planning processes.

The Province is committed to collaborating with Indigenous governments, local communities and recreation stakeholders to modernize land use planning. Values are defined in the land use planning process by the land use planning project table, and through engagement with stakeholders. Through this process, recreation may be identified as a priority planning value by communities and stakeholders and subsequently considered as part of planning. The ministry continues to support the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship in their role as the lead ministry for this work.

In the Sea to Sky region of the province, a tool for recreation management on public lands is currently being piloted. The Visitor Use Management Framework is a planning approach that has been adopted by the Province in partnership with local First Nations to address accelerated recreation and tourism growth in the region. This approach not only supports appropriate public access to valued places and recreation opportunities, but also ensures the long-term viability of the resources and values that are unique to an area. The work to-date suggests that this process could be expanded to other locations throughout the province. Ministry staff continue to be actively engaged in this initiative. The Sea to Sky Visitor Use Management Framework has been endorsed by the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship's modernized land use planning initiative and may be found at https://landuseplanning.gov.bc.ca/.

Under government's *Forest and Range Practices Act* Improvement Initiative, several changes have been introduced that will improve transparency in forest planning. For example, under the *Forest and Range Practices Amendment Act* (2021), Forest Stewardship Plan holders will be required to make a Forest Operations Map available for public review and comment. The Forest Operations Map is an important tool for bringing greater public awareness to planned forestry activities. Until a Forest Landscape Plan is established, the Forest Operations Map will provide an opportunity for public discourse with forest stewardship plan holders early in their planning processes, where valued recreation resources may be identified and subsequently planned for from the onset.

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Forest Landscape Planning will replace the Forest Stewardship Planning regime. It is a process for establishing clear objectives and outcomes for management of forest resource values, such as recreation, for the life of a 10-year plan. To date, ministry staff from the Recreation Sites and Trails BC branch have been participating in a technical expert capacity at planning tables for the Forest Landscape Plan pilot projects. Participation in the pilot projects presents a unique opportunity to view recreation-related issues and trends in the context of other forest resource values at a local level. Through this, recreation stakeholder groups, First Nations and forest planners can develop site and trail-specific outcomes, while also managing for dispersed recreation resources.

In closing, the ministry wishes to thank the Board once again for the comprehensive special report and the recommendations included therein for improving forest recreation management in B.C. If the Board has any questions regarding this response and the ministry's actions to address the Board's recommendations, please contact Jennie Aikman, Executive Director, Recreation Sites and Trails BC at Jennie.Aikman@gov.bc.ca.

Sincerely,

Kevin Jardine
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy

cc: Shane Berg, Assistant Deputy Minister – Chief Forester, Office of the Chief Forester, Ministry of Forests
Shannon Pike, Executive Administrative Assistant, Office of the Chief Forester, Ministry of Forests

Forest Practices Board

File: 97350-20/17048

September 7, 2023

VIA Email

Kevin Jardine
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Environment and
Climate Change Strategy
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Stn Prov Govt
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DM.ENV@gov.bc.ca

Dear Kevin Jardine:

Re: Government's Response to *Management of Forest Recreation in BC*

Thank you for your letter of March 22, 2023, responding to the Forest Practices Board's special report *Management of Forest Recreation in BC* (the report).

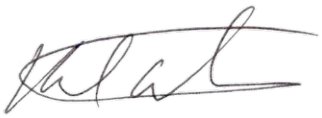
The Board recognizes government actions in disclosing spatial information about legally established recreation sites and trails under the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA). We acknowledge that initiatives like Forest Landscape Planning and the Sea to Sky Visitor Use Management may help the collaborative development of recreation objectives. The Board also commends the amendments to the *Forest and Range Practices Regulation* in June 2023 designating recreation sites and trails as resource features to be managed as a practice requirement by forest tenure holders.

As stated in the report, improved information on forest recreation resources should not only *locate* these features, but also *specify their recreational value*, such as significance, sensitivity, and usage. These attributes can guide the development of site objectives, inform conditions of use for new 'trail-based recreation area' designations, or help assess if a resource feature is rendered ineffective under FRPA's new practice requirements.

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We look forward to seeing how government delivers these numerous initiatives aimed at improving the management of recreation features in BC.

Sincerely,



Keith Atkinson
Chair

cc: Shane Berg, Assistant Deputy Minister- Chief Forester
Office of the Chief Forester, Ministry of Forests

Jim Standen, Assistant Deputy Minister- Conservation and Recreation Division
Ministry of Environment