



Parks
Canada

Parcs
Canada



Proposed National Park Reserve for the **South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen**

Feasibility Assessment

Overview of Findings and Outcomes

Submitted by:
the Canada-British Columbia Steering Committee for Ministerial Approval, January, 2011





The Canada-British Columbia Steering Committee was established in 2003 as a result of the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate on assessing the feasibility of establishing a national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen, and other projects in British Columbia.

The Steering Committee is pleased to inform the Honourable Murray Coell, Minister of the Environment for British Columbia and the Honourable Peter Kent, Minister of the Environment and Minister responsible for the Parks Canada Agency, that the feasibility assessment initiated in 2004 is complete. This assessment included a comprehensive process of First Nations engagement, stakeholder and community consultations, and design, evaluation and refinement of a park concept.

The Canada-British Columbia Steering Committee recommends to Ministers that:

1. A national park reserve is feasible;
2. The proposed park reserve boundary contained herein be approved at a conceptual level;
3. The governments of Canada and British Columbia sign a Memorandum of Understanding respecting the establishment of a national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen; and
4. Parks Canada continue to work with the Okanagan Nation Alliance and affected bands to achieve shared understandings regarding the protection and future management of the park proposal area.

Recommended by:

Cairine MacDonald, Deputy Minister, Ministry of the Environment, Government of British Columbia

Ron Hallman, Director General National Parks, Parks Canada

Bill Fisher, Director General Western and Northern Canada, Parks Canada



Executive Summary

The **South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen** region is located at the southernmost extent of the Interior Dry Plateau and is characterized by a relatively dry climate. The area is one of Canada's richest areas of **natural biodiversity** and has a large number of species and habitats at risk. The proposed national park reserve presents a unique opportunity to work with First Nations and local residents to achieve conservation objectives, to restore threatened habitats and species at risk including the burrowing owl, and to collaborate with the broader ranching community to achieve stewardship of this valued landscape. This report summarizes the results of a feasibility assessment undertaken between 2004 and 2010.

In 2002, representatives of the **Okanagan Nation Alliance and community members** were the **first proponents** for protecting the area around the South Okanagan Grasslands Protected Area as a national park reserve. In 2003, the governments of Canada and British Columbia signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** to cooperate on **assessing the feasibility** of establishing a national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen region.

The Canada-British Columbia Steering Committee **recommends that a national park reserve is feasible**. The Steering Committee also recommends that the proposed boundary identified in this report be approved by ministers at a conceptual level, and that negotiations for a national park reserve establishment agreement proceed as outlined in section 4 of the 2003 Canada-British Columbia Memorandum of Understanding. Further, the Steering Committee recognizes the importance of a **timely decision** due to rapid land use change in this area, and growing requests for 'certainty' by key stakeholders, in particular the **ranching community**.

The **2010 Park Concept** is revised from an earlier 2006 proposal and includes two distinct areas, the Northern Component and the South Okanagan Grasslands Component. The **proposed boundary** of the park reserve now includes approximately **284 sq km** of provincial parks and protected areas, multi-use Crown Lands and private lands. Private lands would be secured on a willing seller and willing buyer basis.

The two components of the **2010 Park Concept** make a significant contribution towards Parks Canada's objectives to represent the Interior Dry Plateau in the national park system. The diverse landscapes provide **unique educational and visitor opportunities**. A national park reserve would complement and enhance the already well **developed tourism economy** in the South Okanagan and help local residents, and all Canadians experience this area's natural beauty and retain it unimpaired for future generations.

Executive Summary (cont'd)

The bands of the Okanagan Nation Alliance implicated in this proposal have stated an interest in sharing their vision towards protecting the ecological and cultural integrity of this area for future generations, and designing a process of collaboration to achieve this vision as part of the national park reserve establishment process. This includes a commitment from Parks Canada that legislative measures will not compromise future settlements of Aboriginal Title and Rights, and that traditional activities and the use of traditional knowledge will be included in park planning and management. Collaborative work with the Lower Similkameen and Osoyoos Indian Bands, and the Okanagan Nation Alliance is in early stages; the goal is to develop a **mutually agreeable approach** to guide a park establishment process, as well as future planning and management of a national park reserve.

Due to the cultural **importance of ranching** in this area, and community feedback about impacts to the ranching community, Parks Canada has committed to an **adaptive management framework** that supports continued livestock grazing in the park concept area in a manner consistent with ecological objectives and park values. Further development and refinement of the adaptive management framework will enable flexibility and innovation in **proactively working with the ranching sector** over the long term. Recent input from ranchers and the ranching community suggests increased support for this approach.

A socio-economic assessment completed in 2008 concluded that **there would be a significant positive economic impact** associated with the establishment of a national park reserve, if Parks Canada staff and facilities were located in smaller communities. The assessment also predicted no significant negative socio-economic impact from changes to regional land use. This assessment assumed a **multi-decade transition** to a full national park reserve and assumed that recommended mitigation measures would be applied.

A long term transition will be necessary and will require a strong commitment between Parks Canada, the Government of British Columbia and the Okanagan Nation Alliance. In summary, the proposed national park reserve presents an important **provincial and federal opportunity** to work together to protect one of Canada's treasured places and leave a living legacy that **connects people to nature, culture and history**.



In 2011, BC Parks will celebrate its 100th anniversary of the creation of the first provincial park in British Columbia. Also in 2011, Parks Canada will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of Canada's national park service, the first in the world. This could be an opportunity for both governments to recognize this significant area of biodiversity, profile the rich history of the region and jointly share a commitment to protecting the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen for all Canadians.



Why establish a national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen?

- *Enhance protection of British Columbia's temperate grassland ecosystems – landscapes that are critically endangered globally.*
- *Consolidate and connect the existing network of provincial and national protected areas – through the purchase of private lands and through partnerships with surrounding landowners and users.*
- *Build strong and meaningful relationships with the Okanagan Nation.*
- *Establish partnerships with the Okanagan Nation and local communities to collaborate on conservation, management and education – building upon traditional local ecological knowledge.*
- *Facilitate collaboration between scientific researchers, ranchers, range professionals and the Okanagan Nation to achieve ecological management objectives and protect key “at risk” habitats within the national park reserve and to improve current range conditions in surrounding grasslands and to manage wildlands in rural-urban transition areas.*
- *Make it easy for people from the Southern Interior and other Canadians to visit the park for an hour, a day or longer – by offering a wide range of first class opportunities to experience and connect with this nationally significant natural and cultural heritage area.*
- *Raise the profile of the South Okanagan and Lower Similkameen as a tourism destination by adding new visitor experience opportunities to the existing marketing mix, encouraging investment in the local tourism infrastructure and creating strategic benefits for the tourism industry.*



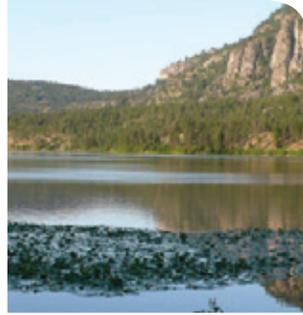
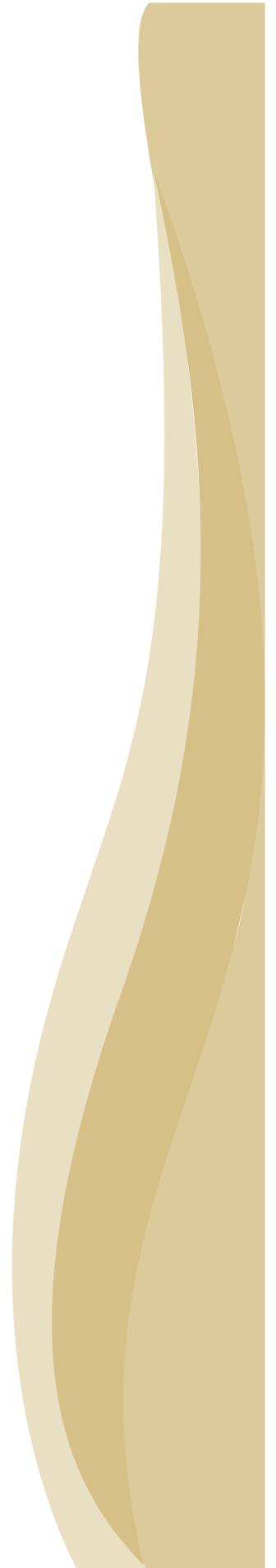


Table of Contents

Introduction.....	6
Elements of Feasibility.....	7
The Park Concept Overview.....	8
Relationship and Collaboration with First Nations.....	12
Conservation Target Analysis.....	13
Communications with Local Government Officials.....	14
Socio-Economic Assessment.....	15
Public Consultation and Outreach	19
Long Term Transition to a National Park Reserve.....	21
Recommendations.....	22
Appendices.....	23



Introduction

The South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen is part of the Interior Dry Plateau natural region of Canada, and one of 39 regions identified by Parks Canada as a distinctive component of the national landscape. This region is not yet represented in Canada's system of national parks. Located in the extreme south of the Interior Dry Plateau where the northern edge of the Great Basin reaches into British Columbia, the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen is one of Canada's richest areas of biodiversity. From both national and provincial perspectives, this is an area of high conservation value and an excellent candidate area for Parks Canada to represent the Interior Dry Plateau natural region.

In 2002, representatives of the Okanagan Nation Alliance and community members were the first proponents for protecting the area around the South Okanagan Grasslands Protected Area as a national park reserve.



In 2003, Canada and British Columbia signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate on assessing the feasibility of establishing a national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen, together with other projects in British Columbia, under the guidance of the Canada-British Columbia Steering Committee. A local Working Group was established to build and assess the proposal. The feasibility assessment was initiated in 2004, incorporating an iterative process of consultations, design, evaluation, and refinement of a park concept.

This report is a summary of the feasibility assessment results and concludes with key recommendations from the Canada-British Columbia Steering Committee that the assessment is complete and that a national park reserve is feasible. Work continues with the Okanagan Nation Alliance and affected bands to design and participate in a process of collaboration in the park establishment process.

The Working Group was established by the Canada-British Columbia Steering Committee to facilitate implementation, coordination and communication of the feasibility assessment process. The group is comprised of representatives from the Government of British Columbia (Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Forests and Ministry of Agriculture and Lands) and Parks Canada.

Elements of Feasibility Assessment

As part of the Canada-British Columbia Memorandum of Understanding, several key elements were required in the feasibility assessment. The table below outlines the elements and how they were addressed.

Memorandum of Understanding Item	How Addressed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Boundary Proposals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial Boundaries (Ecosystem Conservation Target Report) • 2006 Draft Park Concept (650 sq km) • 2010 Revised Park Concept (284 sq km)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Analysis of natural and cultural resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement of conservation targets • Cultural history overview
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Analysis of social and economic impacts – Assessment of mineral and other natural resource potential – Assessment of impact on access to land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social, Economic and Environmental Baseline Study, 2005 • Social and Economic Assessment (based on 2006 proposal) • Extensive Consultations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Analysis of environmental impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ecosystem Conservation Target Report
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mitigation for adverse economic impacts and management options to accommodate existing land uses – Identification of all land uses that must be discontinued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommended approach to transition described in Social and Economic Assessment • New approach to grazing (2010)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Report on consultations undertaken with federal and provincial agencies, affected First Nations, Local Governments and local communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase I Report on Consultations (Draft) • Phase II Report on Consultations (Draft) • 2010 Consultation Overview

The studies listed above, combined with consultations, assisted Parks Canada and the Canada-British Columbia Steering Committee with identifying opportunities, issues and concerns. They guided the development of the park concept during the assessment process.

The Park Concept Overview

Throughout the feasibility assessment, Parks Canada has sought feedback from First Nations, local communities and stakeholders in order to develop a park concept which fits within the regional context. In 2006, a draft Park Concept was introduced to the community, and feedback was gathered from open houses, forums, workshops and meetings. Further discussions assisted Parks Canada and the Working Group in better understanding where common interests from First Nations, communities, the public, and stakeholders could be combined to build a common vision.

The revised 2010 Park Concept presents a more collective vision and approach, including a smaller revised boundary and an adaptive management approach to grazing. Past discussions and renewed dialogue with local bands and the Okanagan Nation Alliance have been instrumental in revisions to the 2006 Park Concept (*see Relationship and Collaboration with First Nations section*).



THE PROPOSED PARK RESERVE BOUNDARY

The map on the following page illustrates that the new 2010 Park Concept includes two distinct areas, the Northern Component and the South Okanagan Grasslands Component. The proposed boundary of the park reserve now includes approximately 284 sq km of provincial parks and protected areas, multi-use Crown Lands and private lands (private lands would be secured on a willing seller and willing buyer basis.) Derived from the 2006 draft Park Concept which was 650 sq km, changes to reduce the size of the park concept were made in response to First Nations, key stakeholders, and some members of the public who expressed concerns that the original plan was “too much, too fast.” *See Appendix 1 for the 2006 draft Park Concept map.*

NORTHERN COMPONENT HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

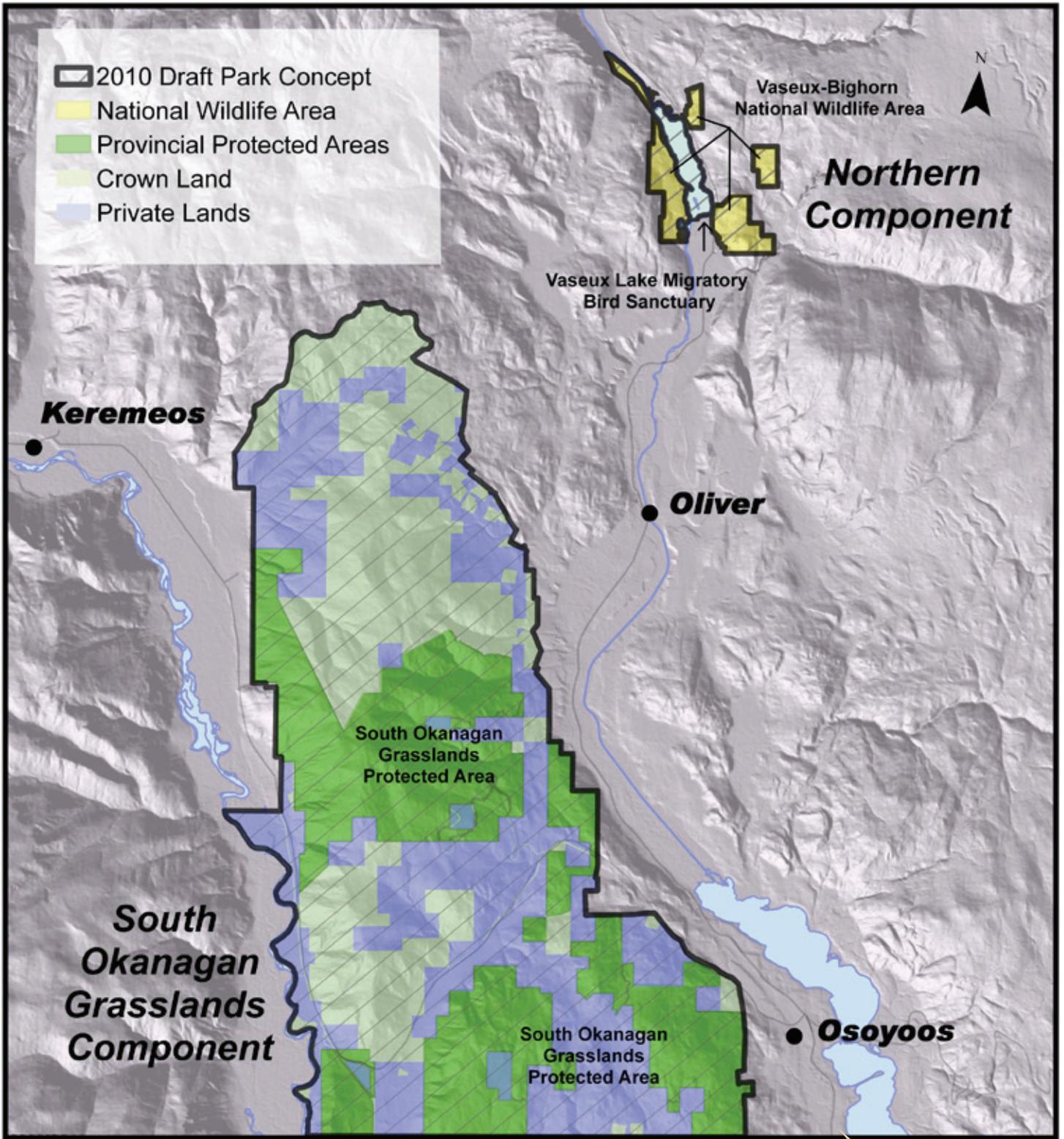
- 10 sq km of aquatic habitats, the rare ‘pocket desert’ habitat (antelope brush), species at risk, a concentration of cultural sites and a signature view
- Cooperative management with the Canadian Wildlife Service at Vaseux Lake Migratory Bird Sanctuary and Bighorn National Wildlife Area
- Partnerships in adjacent areas including White Lake and Vaseux protected areas, National Research Council lands, and other conservation lands
- Accessible nature education and interpretation values with excellent day use opportunities
- Potential interpretive theme: ‘Snakes and Lakes’

SOUTH OKANAGAN GRASSLANDS COMPONENT HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Grasslands, ponderosa pine parklands, interior Douglas fir forests and a scenic upland joining the Similkameen and Okanagan valleys
- Approximately 93 sq km of provincial protected area in 5 parcels; 83 sq km of multi-use Crown land; 98 sq km of private land
- Consolidation of fragmented protected areas; provide opportunities for road-accessible day use, trails, viewpoints, star gazing, interpretation
- Experience elevation gradient spanning five ecosystems
- Receive and orient visitors, and interpret the region at existing or new visitor centres (outside the park reserve)
- Integrate an extensive trail system within the proposed park with existing community roads and trails
- Potential interpretive theme: ‘From the Desert to the Stars’

These two components make a significant contribution towards Parks Canada’s national goals in this natural region. The grasslands and other associated ecosystems are areas rich in biodiversity, and are home to many species. The diverse landscapes provide unique educational and visitor opportunities to experience one of the driest, hottest and most threatened ecosystems in Canada.

South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen • 2010 Draft Park Concept



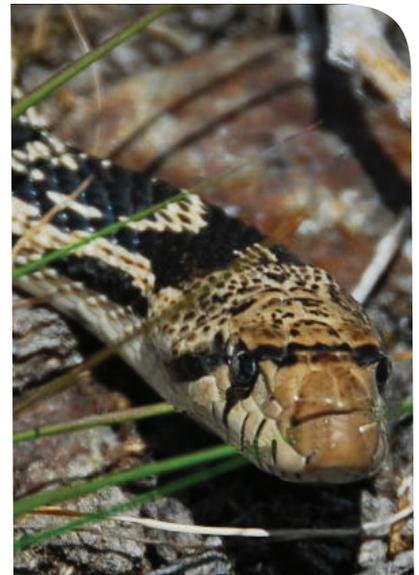
Western and Northern Service Centre
Parks Canada, Vancouver
January 7, 2011





APPROACH TO GRAZING MANAGEMENT

Due to the cultural importance of ranching in this area, and community feedback about impacts to the ranching community, Parks Canada has committed to an adaptive management framework that supports continued livestock grazing in the park concept area in a manner consistent with ecological objectives and park values. Further development and refinement of the adaptive management framework will enable flexibility and innovation in proactively working with the ranching sector over the long term. Recent input from ranchers and the ranching community suggests increased support for this approach. *(see Livestock Grazing in the Socio-Economic Assessment Section).*



Relationship and Collaboration with First Nations

Representatives of the Okanagan Nation Alliance were among the first proponents for a national park reserve in the South Okanagan and Lower Similkameen. Following some challenges part way through the feasibility assessment process, and delays in substantive discussions, the affected bands of the Okanagan Nation stated an interest in sharing their vision towards protecting the ecological and cultural integrity of this area for future generations, and designing a process of collaboration to achieve this vision as part of the national park reserve establishment process.

Foundational issues for the Okanagan Nation Alliance relate to protection of claims to title and rights. Key interests include protecting the land from further alienation; restoring healthy ecosystems; collaborative management; traditional and contemporary activities; training and employment; economic opportunities; assistance with Spotted Lake and on-reserve conservation lands; and community relationships. The Okanagan Nation Alliance requires that the park establishment process, and all that this process entails, does not erode their claims to title and rights.

Parks Canada has consistently communicated that a park establishment process cannot resolve claims to title and rights. In a letter sent to the Chiefs of the Okanagan Nation Alliance on October 6, 2010, Parks Canada stated several commitments, including a commitment that legislative measures will not compromise future settlements of title and rights claims, that traditional activities will continue, and that traditional knowledge will be used in park planning and management. Collaborative work with local bands and the Okanagan Nation Alliance will further develop the relationship and a mutually agreeable approach that will guide the establishment, planning and management of the national park reserve.

The Osoyoos Indian Band and Lower Similkameen Indian Bands have shared responsibilities regarding the current park proposal. The Okanagan Nation Alliance will provide support in specific areas. In December, 2010, the Chiefs agreed to engage in a long term work plan to gather information, address core issues, and to develop shared understandings and protocols for working together, and with Parks Canada towards establishment of a national park reserve.

Of significance, the Lower Similkameen Indian Band has stated from the beginning that it cannot support having Snowy Protected Area included in the park proposal at this time. They have also recently expressed concern about how best to protect this and other areas in the future.



“Skwrakan, St’tek, Sklkwelt, Npececk’ulawx, Tkrmius and Nasnulaxw are the area names that the Sylix use, to refer to the area, west of Similkameen River and south of Keremeos to the U.S. border. . . . This area is viewed by the Lower Similkameen people as their backyard or n’tatixwmn, and all access to this area is through reserve lands. There is an extended history of use and occupancy, including hunting, gathering, cattle grazing, logging, wood cutting, spiritual, cultural, and sites referred to in stories and oral history.”

Conservation Target Analysis

The South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen is located at the southernmost extent of the Interior Dry Plateau and is characterized by a relatively dry, warm climate. The vegetation is predominantly grassland and shrub-steppe at lower elevations with coniferous parkland at higher elevations. This area is also recognized for its nationally significant wetlands and riparian areas that provide essential habitat to birds (Important Bird Areas), amphibians and reptiles. The South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen is one of Canada's richest areas of natural biodiversity and has a large number of species and habitats at risk.

The Dry Interior Plateau of British Columbia is one of Canada's most diverse natural regions. Within its boundaries, and sometimes in a distance of only a few miles, one can travel from arid, sandy, cactus-covered bench lands up to treeless arctic-alpine mountaintops. – Richard Cannings

In 2008, Parks Canada completed an Ecosystem Conservation Target Analysis. This tool was designed to assist planning, support decision-making, and build a framework to consider options for park boundary design. It addressed three planning objectives:

- Representing the Interior Dry Plateau natural region,
- Representing the special and unique features of the South Okanagan-Similkameen, and
- Configuring a park reserve boundary to facilitate long term retention or restoration of ecological integrity, one of Parks Canada's key guiding principles.

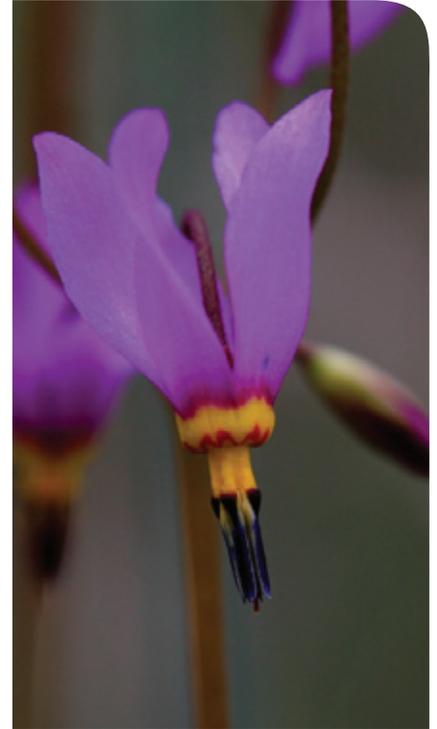
Results from the conservation target analysis suggest that the 2010 Park Concept adequately represents key biogeoclimatic zones, as well as priority habitats and special features. It represents the unique elements of biodiversity found in this region and nowhere else in Canada. In addition, there are fifty-six federally-listed species at risk known to occur in the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen and most are found within the Park Concept area.

The 2010 Park Concept focuses on protection of the lower elevation grasslands where species diversity is highest and most at risk. Several existing provincial parks and protected areas, including the White Lake Grasslands Protected Area and Snowy Protected Area, capture larger landscapes that help represent a broader diversity of ecosystems in the region.

While the park concept area is smaller, it is still larger than 13 of Parks Canada's existing 42 parks, including the recently established Gulf Islands National Park Reserve. The 2010 Park Concept presents a unique opportunity to work with First Nations to achieve conservation objectives, to restore threatened habitats and species at risk including the burrowing owl, and to collaborate with the broader ranching community to achieve stewardship of a valued landscape.



Communications with Local Government Officials



Early in the feasibility assessment process, an eight member Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Committee was formed to provide input to the assessment process. The committee is comprised of local elected officials from communities and rural areas adjoining the park proposal, including the Mayors of Penticton, Osoyoos, Keremeos, Oliver, and Regional Directors from rural Cawston, Oliver, Osoyoos and Okanagan Falls.

Formal and informal briefings with the committee and individual members occurred throughout the feasibility assessment. In November 2010, the committee was provided with a written update regarding the 2010 Park Concept.

Due to upcoming municipal elections, the committee members were unable to state a public opinion regarding their support of a national park reserve proposal at this time. They also stated that further community engagement is important.

Socio-Economic Assessment

The Socio-Economic Assessment was an independent study by resource economists to assess social and economic implications of park establishment to economy and land use, communities and lifestyle. This 2008 study identified impacts that would remain if the 2006 Park Concept was implemented and mitigation strategies were applied. Impacts were categorized as significant or not significant, evaluating the extent of the residual economic effect after mitigation. Note that the Assessment did not evaluate implications for First Nations.

The Socio-Economic Assessment determined that overall there would be a significant positive economic effect associated with the establishment of a national park reserve, if Parks Canada staff and facilities were located in smaller communities. It also predicted no significant negative socio-economic impacts from changes to regional land-use. While the Socio-Economic Assessment was based on the larger 2006 Park Concept area, the changes to the concept area appear to have reduced the number of affected tenures and the likelihood of negative residual impacts.



LAND USE IMPLICATIONS

The degree of impact was estimated by person-years of employment and income. In general terms, the Socio-Economic Assessment found that the magnitude of the loss is not expected to be large (referring to permanent loss) relative to the local industry, local economy, and local labour markets. Furthermore, the residual long-term impacts were determined to be “not significant” for all economy and land use values and activities.

“Not significant” does not mean “insignificant”. None of the values discussed and examined in the Socio-Economic Assessment are considered insignificant; their importance is highlighted by inclusion in the analysis. In the Socio-Economic Assessment, “not significant” refers only to the residual effect (after mitigation) of the project.

SUMMARY TABLE OF LAND USE AND IMPLICATIONS

After seven years of study, Parks Canada has a detailed understanding of the history and commitments associated with existing land use. Parks Canada, working with the Government of British Columbia, local communities, stakeholders and other partners has identified options for mitigating changes to land use and has developed approaches to accommodate, modified or terminated existing land uses. Table 1 summarizes the land use impacts, issues, stakeholder feedback, proposed mitigation and outstanding considerations.

Table 1: Summary of Land Uses and Implications for National Park Reserve Establishment (note: this does not include input from the Okanagan Nation Alliance)

Land Use	Issue	Scope and stakeholder feedback	Proposed Mitigation/SEA impacts	Outstanding Considerations
Ranching/ Grazing	Livestock grazing not normally permitted in national parks; existing crown range tenures are required to sustain existing ranches.	South Okanagan Grasslands component only: 5 grazing leases & 11 licenses; 12 tenure holders (2 First Nations; ranchlands on reserve); 5/12 are more likely to experience adverse impact; initial loss of existing use estimated at 25-50% (i.e. 2500-5000 animal unit months); Agricultural Land Reserve concentrated in south 1/3 of area; Impacts to grazing/agriculture of great concern to locals/ stakeholders who prefer new grazing approach to 2006 phase-out.	Purchase one or more large ranches and retire associated crown range tenures; reconfigure grazing use on remaining area and develop adaptive management strategy to retain livestock grazing over the long term consistent with management for ecological values; provide long time frames for stakeholders to adjust; Socio-Economic Assessment (SEA) found the residual effect was negative but not significant.	Develop details on approach to vegetation mgmt; collaborate with stake-holders on approach to address their interests; work with Agriculture Land Commission to determine strategy.
Mining	Mining is not permitted in national parks.	South Okanagan Grasslands component only: Mining reserve 1002003 over component; 10 tenure holders; 22 mineral claims (2 in provincial protected area), approx. 1020 ha affected by pre-reserve tenures; 14 tenure holders; 33 mineral claims; approx. 2850 ha have post-reserve status; 1 known gravel pit (land act tenure); unknown number of crown grants with subsurface rights; Moderate-high mineral capability; concerns about lost access to mineral deposits & approach to compensation; some desire for boundary modification to exclude certain claims.	Boundary modification/phased approach to park establishment reduces area of claims affected and # of tenures; acquire crown grants through willing-seller willing buyer; work with the Province of BC to develop approach to terminating other tenures; SEA found the residual effect was negative but not significant.	Confirm approach to 33 claims established since mining reserve was enacted; renew detailed discussions with the Province of BC about mineral potential in South Okanagan Grasslands Component.
Helicopters	Helicopter training is a novel use; no established tenures and history in national parks so business owners are uncertain of treatment they could expect; Parks Canada has agreed to permit use, subject to environmental impact assessment.	South Okanagan Grasslands component only: 2 local operators; at least 15 landing sites; 2 park use permits; operators are concerned about park visitor opposition and added restrictions/costs; Local politicians and residents concerned about loss of Perinton airport services. There were approximately 200 landing sites found in the 2006 park concept area and more information is needed to refine what is in the 2010 park concept.	Permit continued use by both companies, subject to environmental assessment. The 2008 SEA predicted residual negative effect although not significant; residual effect may be reduced based on new mitigation strategy; 2008 mitigation recommended continued use for Canadian Helicopters only.	Work with the Province of BC to update water license info including wells & select approach to water licenses transfer; e.g. Parks Canada tenure or province retain responsibility for water licensing as in Grasslands National Park.
Forestry/ Water	Forest harvesting is not permitted in national parks; water tenures are permitted but licenses have 5 year terms and lack provisions for priority of use.	South Okanagan Grasslands component: 252 ha affected in Osoyoos Indian Band Woodlot 1500; 3902 ha THLB; 5525 m ³ /yr Annual Allowable Cut; 0.2% of annual timber supply; 68 water licenses; some untenured water wells. Northern component: 23 water licenses; no forestry; also some untenured water wells.	Phase out forest harvest tenures with compensation where applicable; continue with fire & forest health management; Phase out water licenses not required; retain remaining water license tenures and wells required; Predicted SEA impact to forestry was negative but not significant; impact to water was indeterminate and not significant.	Work with the Province of BC to update water license info including wells & select approach to water licenses transfer; e.g. Parks Canada tenure or province retain responsibility for water licensing as in Grasslands National Park.
Hunting/ Fishing/ Guide Outfitting	Recreational hunting and guided hunting are not allowed in national parks; traditional hunting by First Nations is permitted; Recreational fishing is permitted, but normally stocking lakes only occurs where required to restore indigenous fish populations.	South Okanagan Grasslands Component: 1 guide territory and yearly permit; 34% overlap (27,600 ha); Approx yearly average use by sport hunters: 350 licenses; 2000 hunter days; 90 animals mainly deer (mule, white-tailed deer), but also black bear & cougar; small game harvest valued but magnitude unknown; 4 fishing lakes. Northern Component: sport hunting limited to one lot, mainly ducks; 1 fishing lake (Vaseux).	Phase out hunting over a time period to be defined in discussions with the Province of BC and local First Nations. Determine strategy for retirement and/or negotiate compensation for guide territory/permit. Retain recreational fishing where consistent with management for ecological integrity; seek opportunities for augmenting fish/wildlife population & fishing/hunting opportunities outside. Residual effect was negative or indeterminate but not significant.	Need to understand scope/issues for First Nations re: hunting and management of problem wildlife; participation in management of problem wildlife, if issues develop. BC Wildlife Federation remains opposed.
Other Recreation/ Tourism	There are a variety of established recreation uses / tourism activities that occur within or are affected by the proposed park concept; some are permitted in a national park (many non-motorized activities); others are not (e.g. motorized off-road uses like ATV/motorcycle).	Multiple tourism and rec. opportunities; locals and tourists are concerned about user fees, new limits to use and termination of existing uses; tourism operators interested in enhancing visitor numbers, opportunities for tenures and shared marketing; recognition that land uses shift with some gaining and others losing opportunities.	Parks Canada wishes to develop opportunities for visitor experience, recreation, learning and enjoyment, where consistent with protecting ecological integrity. The residual effect on tourism was found to be positive but not significant; negative but not significant impacts were noted for some recreation uses such as motorized recreation.	Need for enhanced understanding of recreation use to be permitted; this will occur as part of future park management planning and through negotiations with the Province of BC related to park establishment.

LIVESTOCK GRAZING

Twelve ranchers hold grazing tenures in the park concept area. Of these, five are most impacted by the proposal. Livestock grazing is not normally permitted in national parks, but will be permitted in the park concept area, under an adaptive management framework.

To achieve reductions in intensity of grazing use, Parks Canada would purchase one or more large ranches on a willing seller willing buyer basis, and work with the Government of British Columbia to reconfigure grazing use over the park concept area. This would include retiring some Crown range tenures associated with the private land acquisitions. Grazing would be excluded from some areas, where necessary to achieve park ecological and other objectives, and to provide benchmarks for scientific comparison. In other areas where grazing would continue, it would be managed in a manner consistent with ecological objectives and values. Partnerships and stewardship activities on lands outside the park concept area will contribute significantly to the park objectives and should therefore be an important component to park development and management over the longer term.



Feedback from several affected ranching families suggests an increased level of comfort with the park concept based on boundary changes (smaller area), and the new adaptive management approach, which includes grazing, and proposed mitigation. Parks Canada recognizes that further work is required to refine the adaptive management framework in collaboration with ranchers, First Nations, range professionals and scientists. Parks Canada will work towards a park management model that addresses ecological integrity, sustainable grazing, and is guided by science, active monitoring and partnerships.

COMMERCIAL HELICOPTER USE

Commercial helicopter training activities in the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen are currently permitted under provincial jurisdiction for two companies (Canadian Helicopters and Eclipse Helicopters). They use multi-use crown land, protected areas and private lands, with permission from the land owner. Although helicopter use occurs for operational purposes in some national parks across Canada, commercial helicopter training would be a new use.

Local citizens and community representatives have expressed concerns that restricted use within a national park reserve could cause adverse impacts to existing helicopter business and negatively impact revenue to the Penticton Airport Authority. The 2010 Park Concept has reduced the impact to helicopter landing sites by reducing the size of the park and the number of sites included within it. Therefore, the potential impact to helicopter training is significantly reduced. Discussions will continue with the affected companies, and operational changes to helicopter use in the park concept area are not anticipated.

TRAPPING, RECREATIONAL HUNTING & GUIDE OUTFITTING

Activities such as trapping, recreational hunting and guide-outfitting are currently allowed in both protected areas and on multi-use crown land. These activities are not allowed within a national park reserve. Hunting use in particular, has strong support by local advocates who form the core of those that oppose establishment of a national park reserve in the region.

The reduction in the size of the park has served to minimize adverse impacts on these activities as fewer guide outfitters and trappers are affected by the park proposal. In particular, the highly valued local sheep hunting and wilderness hunting opportunities in Snowy Protected Area are no longer part of the park proposal. Within the 2010 Park Concept, mitigation strategies will focus on long transition times for phasing out hunting; however, some stakeholders do not support any reductions in available opportunities. With the confirmation of the feasibility of this park reserve, Parks Canada will continue to dialogue with all interested parties regarding these matters as the establishment process proceeds.

Economy and Land Use: The Socio-Economic Assessment determined that residual impacts (after mitigation) are “not significant” for all values - forestry, minerals and mining, helicopter training, trapping, agriculture, ranching, tourism, and guide outfitting.

COMMUNITY

The potential socio-economic effects of a national park reserve on communities (namely Oliver, Osoyoos, Keremeos and the surrounding rural areas) include the economic impacts directly associated with park operation jobs, and related broader economic development impacts, primarily in the tourism sector.

Community: Significant positive economic impact of establishing a national park reserve (jobs/dollars spent), if Parks Canada concentrates its facilities in small communities. Income and employment effects are not large but they are long term and continuous.



While the income and employment effects are not large, they are long term and continuous. If Parks Canada concentrates its facilities in small local communities, they are more likely to have a significant positive impact on the economy. While the national park reserve impacts are expected to be positive for communities, the long term residual impacts are expected to be low for community growth and development combined with impacts on private land and other tenures. They are deemed by the assessment as “not significant” over the long term.

LIFESTYLE

Lifestyle was measured by four values: community well-being; rural lifestyle; park-related lifestyle and recreation. The long term residual impacts on community well-being were considered indeterminate (or neutral) and not significant. The impacts on rural lifestyle, most notably ranching, were considered negative; those for park-related lifestyle were predicted to be positive. Neither impact was considered significant.

Lifestyle: The Socio-Economic Assessment said that although both positive and negative residual impacts were noted for lifestyle, the long term residual impacts were rated not significant. For example, the assessment identified some negative effects for rural lifestyle and motorized recreation while positive effects were identified for park-related lifestyle (e.g. education, learning, environmental/aesthetic values) and non-motorized recreation.)

The impacts on public recreation are clearer. Most non-motorized user groups will gain opportunities and better recreation experiences, while Off Road Vehicle recreation users will lose opportunities due to the long term effects that these activities can have on wildlife, species at risk and sensitive habitats. Overall the net effect on public recreation is predicted to be neutral and not significant over the long term. Mitigation steps will be important to ensure all user groups are aware of allowed uses, park policies, management guidelines and transition strategies.

Public Consultation and Outreach

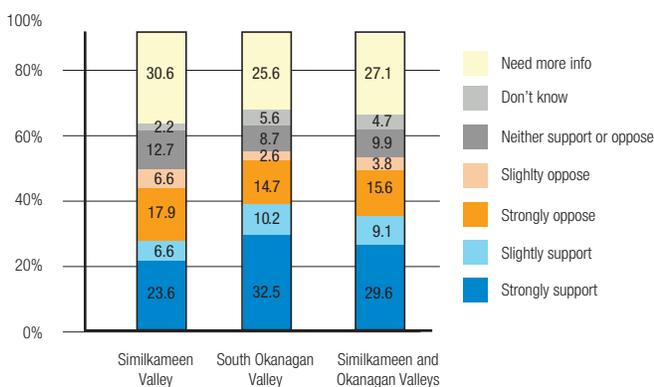
This section of the report reviews communication and consultation over a seven year period. Conducting consultations with communities and key stakeholders was instrumental in providing advice and local knowledge to the feasibility assessment and planning process. Although much of the detailed outreach, public meetings, and stakeholder meetings occurred between 2004-2008, targeted consultation has occurred since April 2010 to gather feedback from key stakeholder groups on the revised park concept (*see Appendix 2 for list of groups/stakeholders consulted*). Feedback has generally been positive, however, there continues to be some local opposition, primarily from sportsman groups, and motorized recreation users.

As the feasibility assessment concludes, there is a growing need to reconnect formally with the public and stakeholders, report on the findings of the feasibility assessment, indicate where changes and modifications have been made to the park concept, and respond to concerns and opportunities identified.

CONSULTATION AND OUTREACH – 2003-2008

There have been two phases of broad public consultation, both involving open houses. The first phase defined the scope of issues and opportunities (2004), and the second examined a park concept including mapped boundaries (2006). Over 1800 people attended the open houses, and hundreds more filled in comment forms and/or emailed the project manager. The following is a summary of concerns and opportunities, which were incorporated into the shaping of the first draft park concept, and later, the modified 2010 Park Concept.

In 2007, Parks Canada commissioned a survey of local residents in order to better understand how residents would use a national park reserve, how a national park reserve might affect desire to live in the area, and to obtain an indication of public support for national park reserve establishment. Results of this survey indicated that overall, supporters outnumber opposition by approximately 2:1.



“Do you support or oppose establishment of (the proposed) national park?”

- Based on 777 responses to a random mail survey, chart shows results of answers to questions

Overall support outnumbers opposition 2:1. Many residents are undecided or need more information.

Indication of Support from Similkameen Valley Planning Society Amenity Migration Survey, 2007

CONSULTATION AND OUTREACH – 2008-2010

Two other local surveys were completed by non government organizations in 2008 and 2010. Key results for the surveys found that:

- a) There was ‘continuing support for additional conservation efforts’, and
- b) ‘63% of respondents favoured protecting a portion of the South Okanagan Similkameen in a national park, and 26% opposed protection in a national park’.

Details from these surveys are found in Appendix 3.

Priority discussions have included First Nations as well as specific individuals, groups, organizations, community leaders and business interests. Parks Canada has renewed relationships with as many of the key stakeholders as possible. Recent stakeholder meetings have focused on listening to concerns and providing updates about recent changes to the proposed park concept, the new approach to grazing and the desire for renewed discussions with First Nations.

Targeted consultations included: ranching stakeholders (10/12 affected tenure holders; all except First Nations tenure holders); local and regional government representatives, members of the Ad Hoc Science team; Canadian Helicopters; non-government organizations (Nature Conservancy Canada, Grasslands Conservation Council of BC, Desert Centre Society), and representatives of key provincial government agencies (Ministry of Forest and Range; Agriculture Land Commission, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Lands). Anecdotally, revisions to the park concept have been well received and those involved in consultation generally express improved comfort with revised mitigation strategies and the reduced scope of impacts.

CONCERNS	OPPORTUNITIES
Loss of recreation use opportunities (e.g. hunting, fishing, motorized recreation, horseback riding, hang gliding etc.)	Ecosystem conservation and protection of unique flora and fauna
Loss of a rural lifestyle	Sustainable tourism and recreation
Loss of commercial land use opportunities, economic opportunities (grazing and agriculture), and forestry (opportunities and fire wood cutting)	Natural history and cultural interpretation, education, visitor centres
Increased government involvement	Enhanced conservation in surrounding areas
Costs to local residents (fees)	Enhanced enforcement, infrastructure and services
Holistic natural resource management (fire, wildlife)	Economic benefits and job opportunities
Desire to maintain current approach to land ownership, management, stewardship and use	Recreation and visitor opportunities
Need to mitigate impacts, adequate transition period, fair compensation	Research opportunities
Suggestions to reduce the draft Park Concept area (remove South Okanagan Grasslands Protected Area, or Snowy Protected Area)	Protection from development
	Partnerships for local participation in planning and management
	Suggestions to expand the Park Concept area (add White Lake-Vaseux, Cathedral Provincial Park, Okanagan Mountain Park)

Long Term Transition to a National Park Reserve

A long term transition program, likely over several decades, will be necessary to achieve desired land assembly and full protection under the *Canada National Parks Act*. This approach would likely include a combination of federal and provincial legislation and policies. It will also require a strong commitment between Parks Canada, the Government of British Columbia, and the Okanagan Nation Alliance to ensure success over the longer term. The benefit of this approach is that it will allow for respectful adjustments to hunting, grazing and other activities in the region, over the longterm, as the establishment of a national park reserve is implemented. The components of transition include:

FIRST NATIONS RELATIONSHIP

- Develop a collaborative working relationship with the Okanagan Nation Alliance in establishment, planning and management of the future protected area.

AGREEMENTS

- Develop an agreement between the governments of Canada and British Columbia to confirm completion of the feasibility assessment, and subsequently, a federal-provincial land transfer agreement. This agreement outlines the terms and conditions agreed to by the federal and provincial governments under which the national park reserve will be assembled and established, as well as outlining the process of land transfer.
- Craft and implement a legislative framework for interim management of lands within the park boundary; this framework would likely include a combination of federal and provincial legislation and policies.



PLANNING/IMPLEMENTATION

- Develop and implement a land assembly strategy that includes strategic acquisition of private lands within the boundary (willing seller, willing buyer). At least some acquisitions will need to occur early in the transition process before opportunities are lost and to facilitate changes to grazing management.
- Establish an interim local advisory committee to support park management, planning and implementation.
- Develop and implement interim park management guidelines with the participation of affected stakeholders, governments, land management experts and staff that takes the park through the land assembly process and toward achievement of long term objectives.
- Collaborate with ranchers, range professionals, and scientists to develop an adaptive management framework and a vegetation management plan that includes a combination of ungrazed benchmarks and areas with continued livestock grazing.
- Build a team of provincial, federal and First Nations staff to implement an effective national park reserve establishment process in collaboration with stakeholders and local communities.

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

- Inform and engage the general public about the revised 2010 Park Concept.
- Demonstrate a commitment to communities to address issues and concerns.
- Engage communities to jointly celebrate Parks Canada's 100th anniversary and British Columbia's 100th anniversary for the provincial park system, while celebrating the shared commitment to a new national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen.

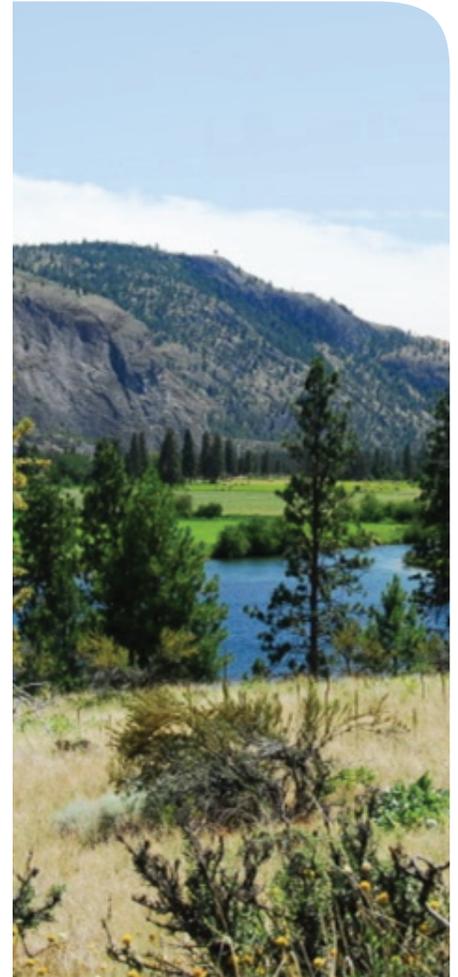
Recommendations

The 2010 Park Concept represents a significant departure from the earlier, larger draft concept. The changes to the size of the area, the adoption of an adaptive management framework, and positive steps towards re-engagement with the Okanagan Nation Alliance and local bands are an outcome of dialogue, consultation, and implementation of the feasibility assessment.

The Canada-British Columbia Steering Committee recommends that a national park reserve is feasible. The Steering Committee also recommends that the proposed park reserve boundary identified in this report be approved by ministers at a conceptual level, and that negotiations for a national park reserve establishment agreement proceed as outlined in section 4 of the 2003 Canada-British Columbia Memorandum of Understanding. Further, the Steering Committee recognizes the importance of a timely decision due to rapid land use change in this area, and growing impatience for 'certainty' by key stakeholders, in particular the ranching community.

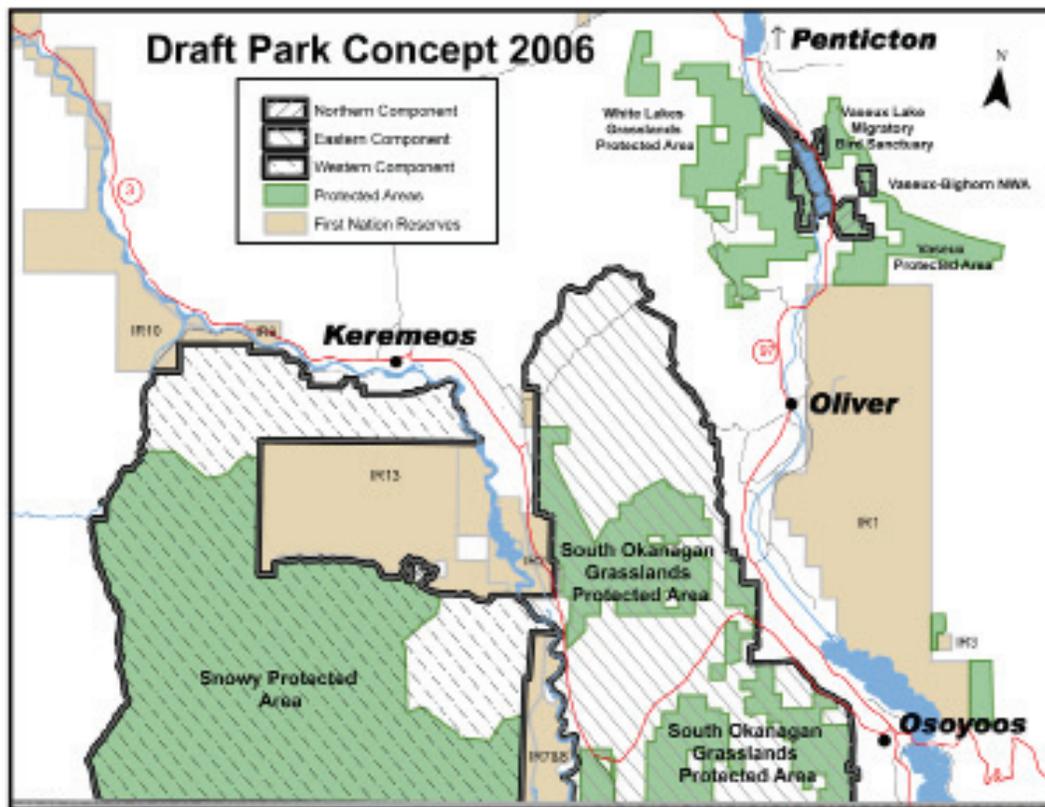
In 2011, BC Parks will celebrate its 100th anniversary of the creation of the first provincial park in British Columbia. Also in 2011, Parks Canada will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of Canada's national park service, the first in the world. This could be an opportunity for both governments to recognize this significant area of biodiversity, profile the rich history of the area, and jointly share a commitment to protecting the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen for all Canadians.

*The South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen...
Working together to protect one of Canada's
treasured places – a living legacy connecting
people to nature, culture and history.*



Appendix 1: 2006 Draft Park Concept

The 2006 draft Park Concept was 650 square kilometres and was comprised of three components (North, West, and East). The 2006 Park Concept was reduced in size to create what is now the 2010 Park Concept in response to First Nations, key stakeholders, and some members of the public who expressed concerns that the concept was "too much, too fast."



Appendix 2: Groups/Stakeholders Consulted in Feasibility Assessment

Advisory Committees:

Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS)
Land and Resource Management Plan

Provincial Ministries:

Environment
Agriculture and Lands
Forests
Tourism, Culture and Arts
Energy, Mines, Petroleum Resources
Transportation & Highways
Thompson Okanagan Management Committee
Agricultural Land Commission

Federal Agencies:

Canadian Wildlife Service
National Research Council/Dominion Radio
Astrophysical Observatory
US Dept of Fish & Wildlife

Regional/Local Government:

RDOS board
RDOS staff (planners, GIS)
IAC Regional Growth Strategy
Social, Economic, Environmental
Advisory Committees for Regional Growth Strategy
Central Okanagan Regional District
City of Penticton
Town of Princeton
Town of Osoyoos
Town of Oliver
UBCM display
Interior Health

Park Interest Groups:

Grassland Park Review Coalition
South Okanagan National Park Network

Community Economic Development:

EDO's (Oliver, Osoyoos, Penticton,
Keremeos, Princeton)
Community Futures
Similkameen Valley Planning Society
Penticton, Oliver Chamber of Commerce
Destination Osoyoos
Oliver Economic Development Society
Okanagan Partnership

Conservation Organizations:

Ad Hoc Science Group
South Okanagan Similkameen
Conservation Program
Nature Trust of BC
White Lake Ecosystem Group
Grasslands Conservation Council of BC

Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
SOS Stewardship
Nature Conservancy of Canada
Desert Centre
Earthcare
EMAN National Science Organization
Nature Canada
Okanagan Similkameen Park Society
Federation of BC Naturalists
Naturalists Clubs: North Okanagan,
Oliver/Osoyoos, South Okanagan,
Central Okanagan
Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance
Osoyoos Lake Water Quality Society
The Land Conservancy
Save our Parkland Association
Allan Brooks Nature Centre Society
Northwest Conservation Alliance (US)
Western Canada Wilderness Committee
BC Conservation Corps
Naramata Conservation Initiative

Education Institutions:

University of BC-Okanagan
University of BC
Thompson River University
Okanagan University-Salmon Arm

Tourism Organizations:

Similkameen Country
Destination Osoyoos
Osoyoos Hotel/Motel Association
Okanagan Partnership
South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen
tourism representatives (21)

Wildlife Organizations:

South Okanagan Sportsmans Association
Guideoutfitters
Guideoutfitters Association of BC
Trappers
BC Wildlife Federation
Penticton Fly Fishers
Okanagan Outfitters
Keremeos-Cawston Sportsman Association

Heritage Societies:

Fairview Townsite Society
Osoyoos Museum
Oliver & District Heritage Society
Oliver Museum
Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre

Agriculture:

BC Grapegrower's Association

Ranching:

Most ranchers within Park Concept area
Southern Interior Cattlemen's Association
BC Cattleman's Association
White Lake Stock Association
Southern Plus Feedlot

Aviation:

Canadian Helicopters
Eclipse Helicopters
Penticton Airport (Manager)

Forestry:

Lower Similkameen Community
Forest Association
Weyerhaeuser
Gorman Bros. Lumber

Mineral Exploration/ Development:

Association for
Mineral Exploration of BC
Okanagan Shuswap
Mineral Exploration Group
Mineral Tenure Holders

Recreation Users:

South Okanagan Soaring Club
South Okanagan Horsewoman's
Association
Mt. Kobau Astronomical Society
Okanagan Astronomical Society
Back Country Horseman's Association
Oliver District Riding Club
Southern Pines Riding Stable
South Okanagan Snowmobile Club
Similkameen Snowmobile Club
BC Snowmobile Federation
South Okanagan ATV Club
ATV/BC Quad Riders Association of BC
BC Off-road Motorcycle Association
South Okanagan Dirt Bike Club

Utility:

Terassen Gas
Fortis BC
TV Society (CGIV/CHBC)

Appendix 3: Petitions and Surveys

PETITIONS

In early 2005, prior to development of the draft Park Concept, a petition organized by the Grassland Park Review Coalition gathered about 6000 signatures and was presented to MLA Barisoff. This petition opposed the formation of a national park reserve, but favoured implementation and support of the Okanagan Shuswap Land and Resource Management Plan and other ongoing management initiatives. Later the same group organized a “no national park” sign campaign encouraging local landowners and residents opposed to the park to erect signs stating their opposition.

Park Supporters (Canada Wilderness Committee, local naturalist clubs, and the South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Network) formed a group to support a local national park reserve. The group responded with their own petition seeking signatures from those supporting a national park reserve. Sponsored by the South Okanagan Similkameen National Park Network, the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, a petition with over 19,000 signatures was submitted to the federal government in 2008.

SURVEYS

A 2008 public opinion survey (Species at Risk Public Opinion Survey) sponsored by the South Okanagan-Similkameen Conservation Program addressed conservation attitudes more generally and found continuing support for additional conservation efforts. The survey was based on a random telephone survey of 300 Okanagan-Similkameen residents.

Most recently, a random telephone survey was funded by the Western Canada Wilderness Committee (Local support for a national park in the Southern Okanagan-Similkameen, McAllister Opinion Research, 2010). 405 respondents in the Southern Okanagan-Similkameen region were asked, “Would you favour or oppose protecting a portion of the South Okanagan-Similkameen in a national park?” The study found that 63% of respondents favoured protecting a portion the South Okanagan-Similkameen in a national park, and 26% opposed protection in a national park.

Would you favour or oppose protecting a portion of the South Okanagan-Similkameen?	
Strongly Favour	43
Somewhat Favour	20
Total Favour	63
Depends/Neutral	4
Somewhat Oppose	8
Strongly Oppose	18
Total Oppose	26
Don't Care/ Not Applicable	7

In the last year, key discussions with the ranching community, the science community, park supporters, local/regional government and provincial government agency staff regarding the new, 2010 Park Concept have suggested that perceptions may be shifting with support increasing for development of a national park reserve in the region, based on the new 2010 Park Concept including a smaller footprint and a new approach to livestock grazing.