

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT INFORMATION NOTE

Date: March 2, 2015

File:

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PREPARED FOR: Honourable Mary Polak, Minister of Environment.

ISSUE: Continuation of a dialogue with interested stakeholders and Okanagan Nation regarding land management interests in the south Okanagan

BACKGROUND:

On November 21, 2014, meetings were held between Minister Polak, MLA Larson, Ministry of Environment staff and three key groups (the Okanagan Nation Alliance (ONA); those opposed to the proposed national park reserve (NPR); and those supporting the NPR) to discuss land management interests in the south Okanagan area of British Columbia.

Coming out of these meetings, there was a commitment made to continue the dialogue in the spring of 2015, timing to be linked to a break in the spring legislative session. With the session now underway, it will be important that decisions be made and planning undertaken with respect to a follow-up meeting.

In order to inform the discussion, a preliminary analysis has been undertaken of the various land use interests expressed at the November 21 meeting and as identified through various planning documents related to land use in the South Okanagan. This analysis is presented in relation to the 2010 Draft Park Concept (Appendix 1).

DISCUSSION:

The November 2014 meetings were conducted as an open table discussion focused on the interests of each group in this area. In most, if not all cases, the interests surfaced were interests that had been raised previously through the NPR feasibility study process and other area planning processes. These interests are detailed in Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

In general, all groups expressed an interest in seeing appropriate levels of protection along with economic development focused on growing tourism opportunities. The pro-side remains convinced that the best route to protecting rare species and ecosystems while growing tourism is through the designation of the proposed NPR. The opposed side want government to implement the remaining areas of the Okanagan-Shuswap Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) that are currently suspended due to the NPR feasibility study.

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Addressing First Nations Interests:

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s.13,s.16 Under existing provincial parks legislation, most current activities could continue, while preventing further land disposition for development. Existing mineral and forestry tenures would have to be expropriated with compensation likely required.

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Through their NPR feasibility study, the Sylix have expressed their support for protecting the lands in both the Northern Component and the Southern Okanagan Grasslands Component of the 2010 Draft Park Concept; however, they also went on record that protection of the proposed lands is “insufficient in promoting the broad Sylix vision to protect cultural and ecological integrity”. s.13,s.16

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Addressing Community Interests

The general community remains divided with respect to the creation of the NPR. Those in support of the NPR proposal cite the enhanced protections for rare and endangered ecosystems, the unique tourism/marketing potential, and the anticipated operation funding that comes with a National Park Reserve. They point to the resources that flow from the federal government, citing the Gulf Islands and Gwaii Haanas national park reserves. Supporters see the NPR as a source of year-round tourism opportunities and economic boosts to smaller communities. Those in opposition raise concerns with the potential loss of commercial land use opportunities and impacts to current tenure holders and potential loss of hunting, fishing and motorized recreation opportunities. Both sides share a desire to see increased tourism.

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Pocket Desert Park concept

The southern Okanagan contains Canada's only "pocket desert," which is home to two of the most endangered ecosystems in Canada – the dry bunchgrass grasslands and open ponderosa pine forests.

This pocket desert is partially protected by the Osoyoos Desert Centre, a 67-acre nature interpretive facility where visitors learn about desert ecology, habitat restoration and conservation of endangered ecosystems in the south Okanagan. s.13,s.16

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General Planning Considerations:

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OPTIONS:

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Implications:
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Appendix 1: 2010 Draft Park Concept

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Appendix 3: Community Interests

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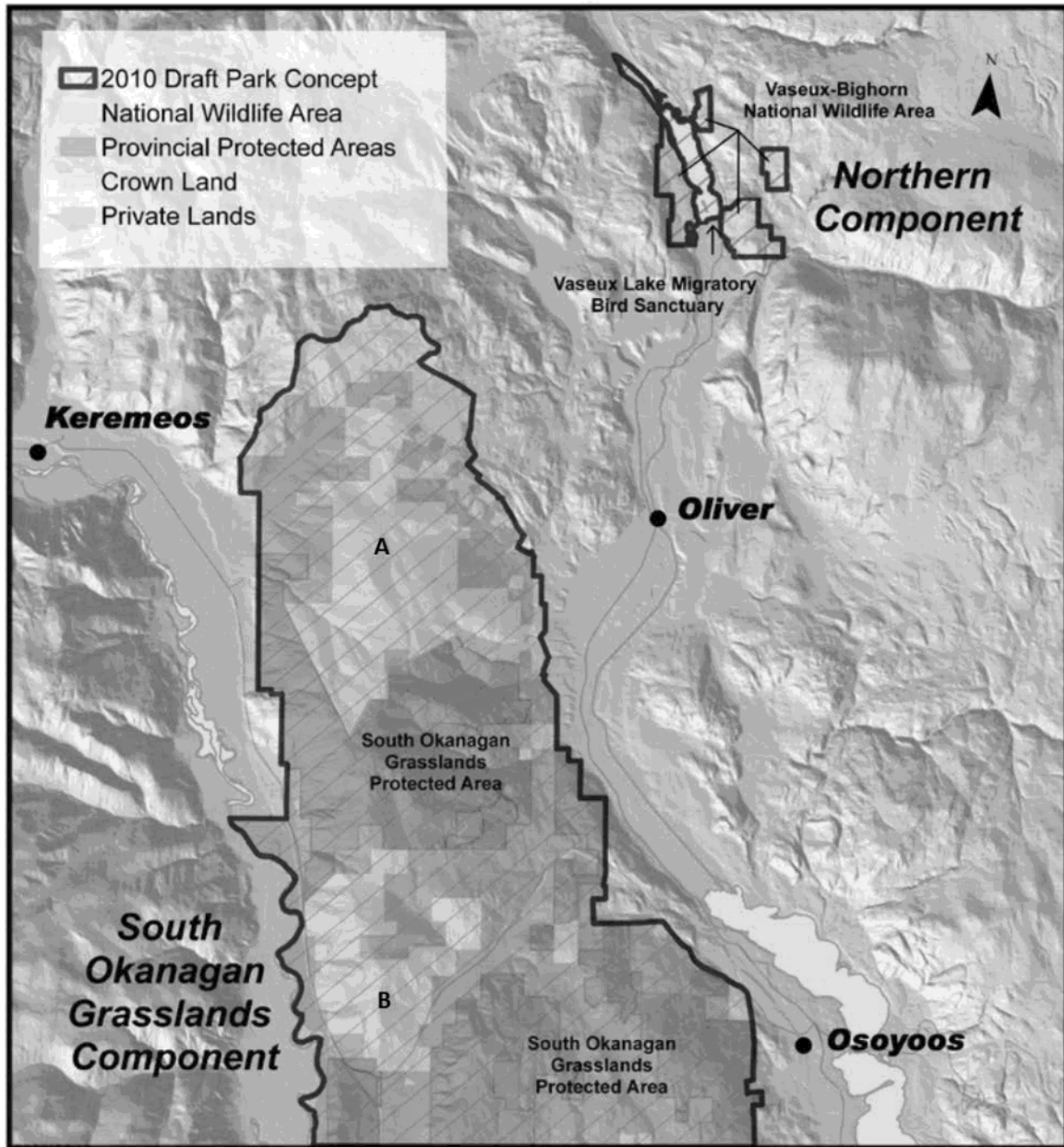
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Appendix 1: 2010 Draft Park Concept



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Appendix 3: Community Interests

From Nov 21 meeting:

Pro-NPR

- Protect rare and endangered species and grassland ecosystems, and generally increase overall environmental stewardship.
- Maintain and enhance the south Okanagan “way of life” (the reasons people chose to live there) including the outdoor recreation opportunities
- Increase opportunities for education about and general connectedness to nature
- Manage growth
- Securing government (federal) funding for the area
- Diversify and enhance tourism including full season tourism opportunities (e.g. agrotourism) – place high value on the draw that comes from National Park brand
- Apply provisions of ecological management such as burning when possible.
- Protect important cultural areas (FN and European history).
- Create more employment.
- Promote the uniqueness and specialness of the area on a larger scale

Anti-NPR

- Ensure the maintenance of businesses such as committing to continued land tenures and park use permits in order to create business certainty (e.g. ranching/helicopter training).
- Revisit and endorse the commitments from the LRMP.
- Concern over loss of fishing and hunting opportunities
- Maintain opportunities for motorized recreation
- Managing for tourism
- Promoting BC Parks

From “Parks Canada Feasibility Study Overview”

- Numerous mining claims (55 mineral claims/22 pre-reserve) in the Southern Component of proposed NPR:
 - Concerns with loss of access to mineral deposits and approach to compensation
- 2 helicopter operators with at least 15 landing sites under 2 park use permits – concern over additional costs and potential loss of revenue at Penticton airport if not continued
- Removal of 4,154 ha of operable timber or 5,525 m³/year from the timber harvesting land base
- Loss of fishing and hunting and guide outfitter opportunities currently allowed in provincial parks and on multi-use Crown land:
 - Average hunting use approximately 2,000 hunter days
 - 4 fishing lakes
 - Guide outfitter territory with 34% overlap with proposed NPR area
- Local concern over user fees, limits to use, and loss of existing opportunities.
- Tourism operators interested in new tenure opportunities, shared marketing and increased visitor numbers
- Loss of other commercial land use opportunities (grazing/agriculture)
- Current concerns with the impacts of off road vehicle use on Oliver Mountain

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