



BC Parks,  
Lower Mainland Regional Office,  
Squamish, BC.

24 Jan 2011

Atten. Ms. Vicki Haberl,  
Section Head, Planning.

By Email: [Vicki.Haberl@gov.bc.ca](mailto:Vicki.Haberl@gov.bc.ca)

Re: Restrictions to Accessing Callaghan Lake Provincial Park

Dear Ms. Haberl,

The Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC (FMCBC) represents the interests of about twenty outdoor recreation clubs and some 3,500 members in British Columbia, most of them in the Lower Mainland region. The FMCBC's mission is to foster and promote the hiking, mountaineering, backcountry skiing and snowshoeing activities of the membership and the general public through leadership, advocacy and education. In this capacity the FMCBC was a very active participant in the multi-year Sea-to-Sky Winter Backcountry Recreation Forum, the findings of which were ultimately incorporated into the Sea-to-Sky LRMP. We are writing this letter due to new problems that have arisen in accessing Callaghan Lake Provincial Park as a result of the Whistler Olympic Park (WOP) cross-country skiing facility.

It is important to distinguish between cross-country skiing and backcountry skiing. Cross-country skiers ski on groomed tracks in a controlled recreation area using lightweight narrow skis and light flexible boots. In contrast, backcountry skiers ski on un-groomed snow in uncontrolled areas using equipment that is similar to downhill skiers. Cross-country skiers mostly ski with little or no gear in gentle rolling terrain and tend to avoid steep ski runs. Backcountry skiers usually ski for a full day or on overnight trips in steeper terrain to climb summits and enjoy downhill ski runs. The two types of skiing are quite different from each other, and one type of skiing is usually not appropriate in the preferred terrain of the other.

For decades our members have skied freely in the backcountry of what is now Callaghan Lake Provincial Park and its surroundings, often using forestry or mining roads to facilitate access. Snowmobile use eventually drove backcountry skiers away from the area, but with the new access road to WOP and the snowmobile closure in the upper

Callaghan Valley there has been renewed interest in backcountry skiing in this area. The management plan for Callaghan Lake Provincial Park identifies backcountry skiing as one of the main activities in the park. Callaghan Lake Provincial Park, the Callaghan Conservancy, and the Upper Soo Conservancy provide some of the few places in the Sea to Sky corridor where backcountry skiers can safely go without danger from snowmobilers. Due to the ever-increasing dominance of snowmobiles in the backcountry it is critical that backcountry skiers have access to these parks in order to have a safe area to enjoy.

Backcountry access to the park has taken an unfortunate turn for the worse this year, with the Whistler Sports Legacies Society (WSL) taking over the operation of WOP and imposing new restrictive policies. WSL policies unfairly prohibit snowshoers and dog owners from using the Callaghan Lake FSR to reach Callaghan Lake Provincial Park. These activities are permitted by the park management plan, but there is no way to get there within the WSL rules. Backcountry skiers are allowed to use the cross-country ski trails, but only during “open” hours and only after purchasing a full price cross-country day pass. We feel this fee is not fair because backcountry skiers only use the cross-country trails for a small portion of their day, and because the Callaghan Lake FSR is a historic public access route for backcountry skiers going to Callaghan Lake and the surrounding area.

Parking for Callaghan Lake Provincial Park is also a problem. At our request, the Ministry of Transportation (MOT) is plowing the Alexander Falls parking lot this year on a trial basis. This lot is outside of the WOP tenure and allows overnight parking for backcountry users, as overnight parking is no longer allowed at WOP. We would like to see BC Parks formalize an agreement with MOT for the continued winter maintenance of this lot for visitors to Callaghan Lake Provincial Park.

WSL’s open hours are also overly restrictive and make it difficult for backcountry skiers and snowshoers to reach the more far-off objectives in a day. Time pressure can have a negative impact on avalanche safety practices. In the spring, skiing during the early part of the day is preferred for safety reasons, as warm weather can bring dangerous conditions as the snow softens in the afternoon. Pre-dawn starts are common for backcountry skiers this time of year. We understand WSL’s desire to lock the WOP gate after hours, but we feel that skiers should be allowed to use the trails to access the backcountry outside of normal hours, starting from the Alexander Falls parking lot.

There are several provincial parks in the region where the needs of backcountry users and private commercial operators are successfully balanced:

- Garibaldi – ~50% discount for backcountry travelers using Whistler/Blackcomb lifts and ski trails to access the park.
- Cypress – Free access trail around the cross-country area to Hollyburn Mountain backcountry.

- Cypress – Free backcountry access pass for backcountry skiers & snowshoers crossing the base of the alpine area.
- Mt. Seymour – free backcountry access trail.
- Manning (Gibson Pass) – separate parking lots for backcountry and cross-country skiers.
- Strathcona – Free backcountry access through Mt. Washington cross-country area into the park for skiers not using the cross-country ski trails.

We have tried to engage the WSL Society directly to address these issues. They insist that backcountry skiing falls outside their mandate, and our concerns have largely fallen on deaf ears. We would like to see BC Parks engage WSL and MOT to secure reasonable terms for backcountry skiers to access Callaghan Lake Provincial Park, the Callaghan Conservancy and the Upper Soo Conservancy along similar lines to other provincial parks in the region:

- Winter maintenance of the Alexander Falls parking lot for all hours and overnight parking
- All hours use of the public forest service roads (Callaghan Lake FSR and Madeley Creek FSR) to access Callaghan Lake Provincial Park for backcountry skiers, snowshoers and dog owners.
- Reasonable and fair fees for use of the above parking and access routes.
- Installation of a drop box for the payment of user fees outside of WOP's operating hours, similar to the drop box at the Diamond Head parking lot in Garibaldi Park.

We look forward to receiving your comments, and would appreciate any other suggestions that could assist us in resolving this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Wood, President,  
Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC

cc. Brian Bawtinheimer, Director, Parks Planning, Victoria .  
via Email:- Brian.Bawtinheimer@gov.bc.ca

cc. Chris Platz , Protected Area Supervisor, Squamish.  
via. Email:- chris.platz@gov.bc.ca