



**January 31, 2024**

The Honourable Nathan Cullen  
Minister of Water, Lands and Resource Stewardship  
Via: [biodiversity.ecosystemhealth@gov.bc.ca](mailto:biodiversity.ecosystemhealth@gov.bc.ca)

Dear Minister Cullen:

### **Draft Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework Consultation**

The Outdoor Recreation Council of BC (ORCBC) welcomes the BC Government's commitment to a new approach to managing forest, land and water resources and ensuring they are healthy and resilient for future generations. As an umbrella organization representing the broad spectrum of public, non-commercial outdoor recreation interests in BC, ORCBC accepts and welcomes its role in shaping a sustainable future for BC, and we are pleased to use this opportunity to provide comments and recommendations for the draft Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework.

#### **Benefits of Outdoor Recreation**

A May [2023 Ipsos poll](#) shows that seven out of every ten adult B.C. residents participated in outdoor recreation in B.C. in the past twelve months, and 2.8 million adult British Columbians enjoyed the outdoors last year. Spending time outdoors promotes physical activity, social connectedness, enhanced knowledge of the natural surroundings, enjoyment and increased quality of life.

Outdoor recreation is also an economic powerhouse and a significant economic multiplier. A [recent study](#) found outdoor recreation provides \$15 billion in economic benefits to British Columbians. It plays a crucial role in fostering community development and enhancing the prosperity of rural areas. By leveraging the appeal of their natural environments, communities can build and sustain economies that thrive on outdoor recreation, fostering diversity and resilience while attracting investments, new residents and visitors. [This document](#) outlines additional benefits of outdoor recreation to British Columbians.

#### **Overarching Considerations**

ORCBC acknowledges that quality outdoor recreation and its numerous benefits rely on the well-being of ecosystems and biodiversity.

While participation in outdoor recreation has the potential to affect the environment, it also brings about significant benefits. These advantages include societal benefits, such as public health care savings through active lifestyles, garnering political support for funding and

designating protected areas, and engaging in stewardship activities. Moreover, individuals can enjoy benefits such as enhanced health, well-being, and spiritual fulfillment through outdoor recreation. Through an integrative approach to planning and management that considers the needs of ecosystems and humans, many negative impacts in outdoor recreation management can be resolved, and both can be accommodated.

We understand that the authors of the draft framework view biodiversity and ecosystem health as the ultimate goal. Yet, to gain broader support, others must see the initiative as compatible with their interests or, ideally, as a means to their ends. Our recommendation is for the report to highlight the connection between robust ecosystems, quality of life, and the prosperity of communities.

Recognizing the importance of connection to the land and the many ways of being good outdoor stewards, we suggest that the framework, or supporting documents, highlight examples of how outdoor recreation groups and other land-based stakeholders currently engage in stewardship projects across the province as a way to celebrate existing efforts and inspire additional stewardship actions. ORCBC is willing to provide stories and visuals showcasing inspiring projects currently underway within the outdoor recreation sector.

### **Emphasizing Quality of Life**

British Columbia is desirable to us humans due to its "Super, Natural" qualities. Maintaining ecosystem health helps ensure a high quality of life, and it is indispensable for enabling and preserving British Columbia's most vital competitive advantage—its ecology and biodiversity.

We suggest that the report explicitly recognize that the province's biodiversity and ecosystems are one of the primary reasons many people choose to reside here. This fact hinges on both thriving ecosystems and the ongoing ability of residents and visitors to responsibly appreciate, access, and engage with the outdoors.

We would like to see the concept of quality of life more meaningfully recognized and acknowledged in the document. Adding a stronger link to quality of life and why upholding ecological integrity is critically important in BC will strengthen this framework and make it relevant to many stakeholders.

In the following sections, we will outline some of our specific concerns about resourcing and capacity for the Province of BC and the organized recreation community in supporting the implementation of the B.C. Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework.

### **Province of BC**

We have concerns about the Ministry of Water, Lands, and Resource Stewardship lacking the necessary resources and capacity for effective planning and policy work to implement this framework. The current state of the land use planning program is inadequate and unable to meet the demand. While the new Forest Landscape Planning framework could address certain gaps, we worry about its implementation effectiveness due to inadequate planning processes

and resources. Moreover, the lack of planning at the regional landscape level is anticipated to hinder the achievement of positive outcomes for outdoor recreation and community well-being.

Existing recreation planning is very ad hoc - it's almost entirely reactive, not proactive. There's little consideration for recreation planning at the landscape level. Outside of BC Parks, inventories of recreation values are limited to trails, sites and interpretive forests authorized by RSTBC. This does not reflect the reality as many additional recreation amenities and experiences are enjoyed but not managed or planned by the Province, as outlined below. By engaging proactively in planning, there would be an opportunity to support regional landscape planning processes that include establishing desired resource conditions (e.g. visitor use management frameworks).

There is an urgent need to resolve the recreation mandate issue. Who's responsible for looking after the public's interest in outdoor recreation? BC Parks (provincial parks and protected areas) and Recreation Sites and Trails BC (designated trails, campsites and interpretive forest) only look after a relatively small portion, with no ministry or agency mandated to look after recreation values on the rest of the landscape (dispersed recreation). There are vast recreation values outside of RSTBC and BC Parks' jurisdiction, including dispersed camping, resource roads that provide access to campsites, parks and trails, angling, historic trails, snowmobiling, backcountry skiing, and access points for canoeing and kayaking. How can we ensure these values, including associated biodiversity and wildlife values, are considered, protected, planned for and managed to maximize their benefit to British Columbia and our growing outdoor recreation economy? Through numerous conversations with Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC) - and a 2021 [special report on the management of forest recreation](#) from the Forest Practices Board - we know RSTBC is often asked to step in by the public and other ministries but doesn't have the mandate or the capacity to do so effectively.

While the Province is currently working on a new strategy for outdoor recreation, it's unknown how effectively the new plan will address planning and management outside of the jurisdiction of BC Parks and Recreation Sites and Trails BC.

Due to budget constraints and limited mandates, the Province cannot safeguard non-commercial public recreation outside specific areas. To tackle this growing issue, empowering and resource Recreation Sites and Trails BC as the provincial lead for recreation planning and management on public lands beyond provincial parks could be beneficial.

### **Recreation Stewards**

The draft framework calls for a broad "whole-of-government" approach to facilitate actions and initiatives by organizations, communities and others to conserve and manage ecosystem health and biodiversity and to advance sustainable communities and economies.

BC is home to over four hundred volunteer-powered recreation associations and groups that provide essential services to residents and visitors in BC communities. RSTBC (and, to a lesser extent, BC Parks) work with many of these groups to develop and maintain recreational

infrastructure - trails, campsites, day-use areas, trailheads, boat launches, etc. that are accessible and safe for public enjoyment. In addition to creating and maintaining recreational opportunities for the public, these organizations provide other vital contributions to the well-being of BC communities. They offer volunteer opportunities, enhance social cohesion and promote civic engagement.

Many of these organizations already engage in [various stewardship activities](#), often collaborating with other organizations, schools, local governments, First Nations, and businesses to amplify their impact.

There are tremendous opportunities to enhance and expand the ongoing stewardship efforts of these groups by offering funding, assistance, direction, and opportunities for involvement in local recreation and stewardship planning and management.

In this context, it's important to note that these groups share common challenges, including recruiting and retaining volunteers, inconsistent access to funding, and growing pressures, as revealed through conversations and surveys.

Despite providing significant public benefits, recreational groups in British Columbia receive limited support from the provincial government. They are tasked with expanding responsibilities, such as engaging with Indigenous governments, participating in planning processes, and conducting assessments to enhance public recreation opportunities. Many face difficulties obtaining the necessary resources, volunteers, and capacity support.

The evaluation and approval process for Section 57 applications to establish and maintain sites and trails, managed by the Province (FrontCounter BC), often spans several years. This prolonged timeline frequently results in key volunteers moving on before the Province reaches a decision, even though they played a crucial role in developing the vision and plans, coordinating with stakeholders, and submitting the application.

Furthermore, BC's recreation organizations are essentially dealing with land and access issues to provide meaningful, long-term recreation opportunities for the public. They are increasingly collaborating with Indigenous Nations on whose territories they operate. However, the insufficient availability of training opportunities and government support to establish sustainable relationships with Nations, coupled with the absence of clear government guidance on protocols, responsibilities, and processes, significantly hampers the effectiveness of these organizations in providing recreational opportunities for their communities.

## **Recommendations**

- The framework should explicitly acknowledge that the province's diversity and ecology are among the most significant factors attracting people to live here. This reality relies on both thriving ecosystems and the ongoing ability of residents and visitors to responsibly appreciate, access, and engage with the outdoors. Create references to the link between healthy ecosystems, quality of life and thriving communities.

- Acknowledging the link to the land and the various ways of being responsible stewards, showcase examples (either here or in supporting documents) where outdoor recreation groups - and other stakeholders - are engaging in stewardship initiatives all across the province.
- Ensure transparency and good communication practices in processes, decision-making, governance, and partnership models for implementing the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework to enable positive outcomes for public recreation.
- Align the BC Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health Framework and its implementation plan with the ongoing Outdoor Recreation Strategy led by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy.
- Work with ORCBC to build on current good efforts and practices to further instill a stewardship ethic within the organized recreation sector.
- Provide long-term funding to bolster capacity within the organized recreation sector (largely community-based and volunteer-powered), with a specific emphasis on supporting involvement in stewardship and planning initiatives, empowering citizen-driven reconciliation efforts, and nurturing relationships with Indigenous communities.

### Who We Are

The [Outdoor Recreation Council of BC](#) (ORCBC), a charitable society, supports and enhances British Columbia's organized recreation sector by advocating for its interests and strengthening its capacity. We work collaboratively with our [members](#) – provincial, regional, and local recreation associations, clubs, and local governments – to help ensure that the public has reasonable and inclusive access to public lands and waters for responsible outdoor and nature-enjoyment activities.

Our members focus on the full range of outdoor activities, including hiking, fly fishing, quad-riding, mountain biking, birdwatching, and kayaking. They organize events, deliver programs, develop and maintain trails and recreation amenities in collaboration with land managers (and, increasingly, First Nations), engage in stewardship activities, and advocate for their respective activities. Most of these groups are entirely volunteer-based.

Thank you in advance for considering ORCBC's submission to consultation for the draft BC Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health framework. We look forward to continuing to work with you as a partner in making responsible outdoor recreation a way of life in British Columbia.

Sincerely,



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