

BC Parks Volunteer Strategy 2012 - 2015

Province of British Columbia

Ministry of Environment

www.bcparks.ca



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Introduction

British Columbia’s parks and protected areas contain nationally and internationally significant natural and cultural features and offers incredible outdoor recreational experiences. Since the establishment of Strathcona, the first provincial park in 1911, the system has grown to over 1,008 provincial parks,

*“Volunteering with BC Parks enables me to share my skills and experience with others.”
- 2012 workshop participant*

recreation areas, conservancies, ecological reserves and protected areas covering 14% of the provincial land base, or approximately 13.7 million ha managed by BC Parks (as of July 2012). Our parks are a public trust and are essential to the quality of life and health of British Columbians.

BC Parks has always benefited from contributions made by volunteers. Much of the protected areas system we know today has not only been established, but built by individuals and groups donating time and labour. There are many activities in which volunteers are actively engaged in the BC Parks system including: campground hosts, facility restoration, interpretation, Park Watch activities, ecological reserve wardens, trespass monitoring, invasive plant control, ecological inventories, trail and campsite construction and maintenance, fundraising, educational programs, park management and planning, and many more.

*“I enjoy volunteering with BC Parks – it gives me a chance to give back to my community.”
- 2012 workshop participant*



Figure 1. BC Backcountry Horsemen

There is a clear and pressing need for improved coordination and communication about volunteering in BC Parks. Throughout 2011, volunteers and community partners contributed significantly to the success of the BC Parks 100th Anniversary celebrations. This strategy aims to build on the momentum of this success.

Improving the volunteer experience will ensure BC Parks is able to recruit and retain the talented and committed volunteers it needs now and in the future.

Public and Staff Engagement

The development of this strategy has been informed by past, current and future volunteers as well as the field staff that work with volunteers. BC Parks engaged the public and staff through community workshops and an online survey throughout February and March 2012. The purpose of these workshops was to enable the public and staff to provide constructive feedback to BC Parks about improving the volunteer experience.

*“Volunteering with BC Parks brings me a sense of accomplishment.”
- 2012 workshop participant*

The objectives of the public engagement process were:

1. To engage past, present and future volunteers in providing comments that will be incorporated into a BC Parks volunteer strategy.
2. To identify successes of past and current volunteer experiences.
3. To explore new ideas and possibilities for volunteering in BC parks and protected areas.
4. To understand challenges faced by past and current volunteers.
5. To identify solutions to overcome these challenges and enable volunteers.
6. To identify ways to improve communication about volunteering in BC parks and protected areas.

Workshops were held in the following communities: Victoria, Vancouver, Campbell River, Penticton, Kamloops, Cranbrook, Nelson, Prince George, Smithers, Williams Lake, and Haida Gwaii (Tlell). Approximately 200 people participated in the workshops and over 600 participants completed the online survey. Approximately 100 BC Parks employees participated in the staff workshops. A summary of the public input is available on the BC Parks website.¹

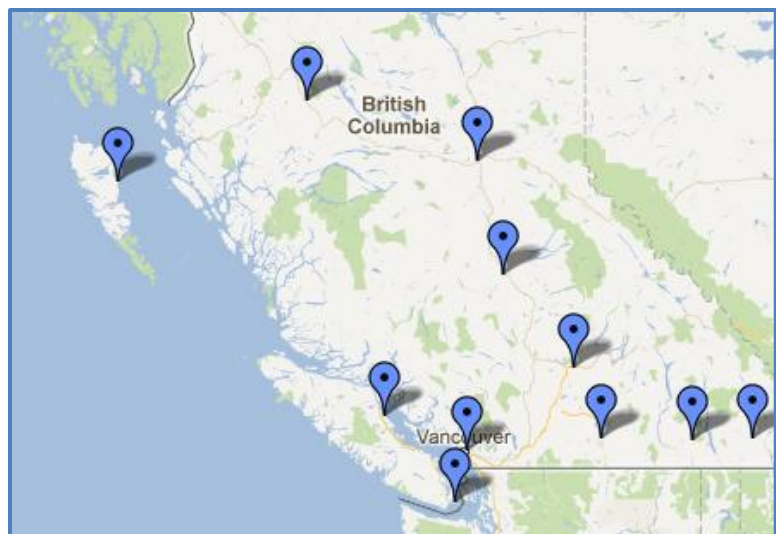


Figure 2. BC Parks Volunteer Strategy workshop locations (Feb-Mar 2012)

This strategy builds on past successes and addresses the key concerns raised during the engagement process, including: group insurance coverage, the need for consistent communication and coordination, and the importance of volunteer recognition.

¹ <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/volunteers/docs/BCParksVolunteerPublicEngagement-Report.pdf>

Goals and Objectives

The goal of the Volunteer Strategy is to strengthen capacity within the BC Parks system and to create a lasting natural legacy by improving the volunteer experience.

BC Parks aims to do this by:

- Developing a consistent and sustainable volunteer program;
- Ensuring that volunteers are actively engaged as part of BC Park’s core business; and
- Building public awareness, enthusiasm and commitment for volunteering in BC parks and protected areas.

Actions for Success

To ensure that the BC Parks Volunteer Program is robust, reliable and sustainable over the long-term, the Volunteer Strategy will be implemented in a three-phased approach, outlined below.

PHASE 1: Build the Core Program (March – October 2012)

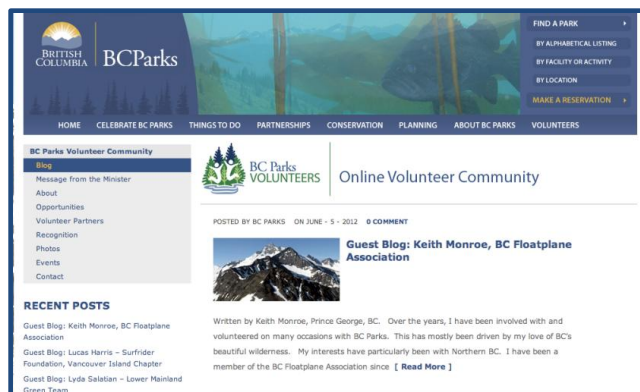
BC Parks’ volunteer program has not been updated since 2002. As such, there are some resourcing and administrative improvements required as part of the strategy to build staff capacity and ensure the success of the program.

1. Provincial Coordination

BC Parks has hired a permanent, full-time Provincial Community Engagement Specialist to lead the design, development, implementation, evaluation and coordination of the volunteer program and other provincial community engagement and outreach initiatives for BC Parks.

2. Improved Online Communication

In April 2012, BC Parks launched the first phase of a new, interactive online volunteer community within the BC Parks website. The site hosts a story-telling blog, photos and videos and also offers information about volunteer partners,



recognition and programs. A second phase of the online volunteer community will be launched once the staff toolkit and internal processes for coordinating volunteers and identifying volunteer opportunities are established. Go to: www.bcparksvolunteers.ca.

3. Building Staff Capacity

BC Parks staff capacity will be enhanced to support the Volunteer Program through a number of operational efficiencies. In addition to the newly created specialist position for community engagement, other staffing changes will allow Area Supervisors and Section Heads more time to spend on other park projects, including the Volunteer Program. BC Parks will also offer staff more training and support with respect to volunteer coordination and community engagement.

The BC Parks Volunteer Program will include an updated version of the 2002 volunteer program manual that will be developed as an online staff toolkit to ensure provincial consistency in volunteer coordination. The tools developed for the toolkit will be rolled out to staff as they are available. The staff toolkit will be completed by January 2013.

Progress is already underway. BC Parks has updated the Individual Volunteer Services Agreement and created a consistent online space where staff can easily access the updated documents when working with volunteers. A sample copy of the agreement form is also available to the public on the volunteer community website.

The toolkit will eventually include other resources for staff including updated components of the old volunteer program manual, new policies and procedures for volunteer coordination and all the supporting forms and reference material.



Figure 3. Surfrider Foundation - Vancouver Island Chapter beach cleanup

PHASE 2: Enhance the Core Program (October 2012 – March 2013)

Once a strong program foundation is established, steps will be taken to strategically enhance the program.

1. Group Liability Coverage

Many volunteer groups who contribute their time and energy to BC Parks projects are exposed to certain risks due to the nature of the wilderness areas where they work and activities that they undertake. One of the most significant concerns raised in the public engagement process was that historically BC Parks has only provided insurance to individual volunteers, leaving groups responsible to purchase their own insurance.

Working with Risk Management Branch at the Ministry of Finance, BC Parks will address this concern by developing a program to provide Commercial General Liability and Accidental Death and Dismemberment Insurance at no cost to formal volunteer groups (legal entities). Where this insurance is provided to BC Parks volunteer groups, it will only cover approved volunteer projects within provincial parks and protected areas undertaken pursuant to a formal agreement with the Province, and will exclude all other activities a group may participate in.

Eligible groups will be required to enter into an agreement with the Ministry detailing the approved volunteer projects for which the liability and accident insurance will apply. More information about the insurance program will be made available as soon as the program is developed (by January 2013).

2. Supporting Existing Volunteer Programs

The Ecological Reserve Warden and Park Host volunteer programs have been in place in BC parks and protected areas for many years. Evaluating the current state of these programs and identifying opportunities for improvement will be an important component of the revitalization of the provincial volunteer program. BC Parks acknowledges that before recruiting new volunteers and developing new volunteer programs, the existing programs must be supported.

3. Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteer opportunities will be visible. We heard from many individuals, “We’d love to volunteer; we just don’t know what types of volunteer activities are available.” BC Parks will identify a mechanism for staff to easily identify volunteer opportunities within existing business planning processes. Once this has been determined, an online tool will be developed to enable volunteers to view the opportunities and express interest in volunteering for those activities that most appeal to them in a streamlined process. The goals of this process will be to identify ways to offer opportunities to volunteers that align with BC Parks’ work priorities and capacity.

4. Recognition and Training

The BC Parks Volunteer program will provide staff with tools and resources to recognize volunteers for their valuable contributions. Volunteers will also be consistently recognized on the BC Parks website. Regional volunteer recognition events will be held to thank volunteers for their efforts and enable them to connect with staff and other volunteers. BC Parks will also support the existing volunteer programs, such the Ecological Reserve Wardens, by providing networking and training opportunities when possible.

A Volunteer Guidebook will be created to provide overall training and orientation to BC Parks volunteers. BC Parks will also identify training opportunities for volunteers to develop skills relevant to their volunteer work. Training topics to be considered include: power tool use (e.g. chainsaws), public outreach, and trail maintenance and building.



Figure 4. BC Floatplane Association

5. Promotion and Recruitment Plan

A community engagement plan will be developed as part of the Volunteer Program that will outline various ways that BC Parks can promote volunteering, facilitate networking between volunteer groups and recruit new volunteers. Components of this plan will include: regular volunteer networking events, a provincial volunteer e-newsletter, promotion outreach material (e.g. brochures), and a social media campaign.

BC Parks will also engage First Nations representatives to build greater understanding of potential partnership opportunities between BC Parks volunteers and First Nations communities.

6. Measurement and Reporting Process

The Volunteer Strategy will outline a streamlined process for measuring and reporting on volunteer activities. The goal will be to quantify volunteer contributions annually and report out publicly on these contributions in the BC Parks Annual Report.

7. Business Planning

To support volunteers, BC Parks will integrate the Volunteer Program into existing annual park management planning and business planning processes. A systematic approach will be taken to identify and support volunteer projects within existing capacity and to ensure consistent delivery of the program across the province in a sustainable manner.

PHASE 3: Expand the Core Program (April 2013 onward)

Once BC Parks has successfully implemented both Phase 1 and 2 of the Volunteer Strategy, and any additional adjustments are made, broader provincial volunteer initiatives will be considered over time, based on BC Parks' capacity and thorough cost-benefit analysis. A variety of possible programs that were identified during the public engagement workshops may be explored, including:

- 1. Park Ambassadors** – based on a previously successful BC Parks program, this program would enable recreational vehicle campers who travel outside of British Columbia to promote BC Parks to other campers. Ambassadors would be trained and provided with marketing materials for BC Parks as a way to attract new visitors.
- 2. Ecological Reserve Ride-Along** – a mentorship program to introduce new volunteers to the work that Ecological Reserve Wardens do as a way of creating a new generation of ER Wardens.
- 3. Volunteer Tourism** – modelled on programs from other jurisdictions, this program would recruit volunteers from across Canada and the world to participate in volunteer projects within BC parks and protected areas.
- 4. Youth Volunteer Program** – acknowledging that many volunteers are aging, BC Parks will identify a strategy for engaging youth in park activities and volunteer projects. BC Parks will also develop

partnerships with organizations such as the Student Conservation Association to enhance their work to engage youth in parks stewardship.

5. **School Programs** – engaging schools to connect with a park on a regular basis by providing them with stewardship activities and training linked with their school curriculum.
6. **Trail Mapping** – enabling volunteers to gather trail data in a consistent format that can be presented to the public on BC Parks’ website.

Conclusion

BC Parks believes that this Volunteer Strategy is a realistic, sustainable approach to renewing a formal provincial volunteer program and that it reflects the feedback from the community workshops. This strategy will allow BC Parks to harness the energy, passion and enthusiasm of volunteers now and in the future. The three-phased approach will create short-term successes and improvements, and will also set the course for a robust program over the long-term. BC Parks is currently developing an implementation plan to deliver efficiently on the various components in a timely manner. Our approach to developing this strategy has been through public engagement and its true measure of success will be to see the volunteers engaged in their activities on the ground across the province.



Figure 5. North Okanagan Cycling Society, Ellison Park

| Reviewed by | Initials | Date |
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