



FRIENDS OF ECOLOGICAL RESERVES
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CANADA

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Lori Halls, Assistant Deputy Minister Lori.D.Halls@gov.bc.ca
BC Parks and Conservation Officer Service Division
5th floor – 2975 Jutland Road, Victoria
PO Box 9398 Stn Prov Govt. Victoria, BC V8W 9M9

Dear Lori Halls,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Friends of Ecological Reserves (FER) (<http://ecoreserves.bc.ca/>), a not-for-profit society that supports BC Parks in promoting the interests of the ecological reserve program in British Columbia. Ecological reserves protect provincially significant ecological values and genetic resources on small parcels of Crown land. They generate public support without alienating large areas of land from potential development.

I write to request that you endorse a series of meetings between your staff, including the Executive Director of the Parks Planning and Management Branch, Brian Bawtinheimer, and board members of the Friends of Ecological Reserves, so that together we can draft a process for designating new Ecological Reserves (ERs). We believe your Ministry will benefit by clarifying a strategic approach with specific criteria in order to vet new proposals for Crown land proposed for ERs designation. FER continues to receive ER proposals from other organizations and individuals to designate Crown land currently managed outside the BC Parks system, and that they deem worthy of ER status.

We explored with BC Government staff over the last year whether a process for assessing these areas exists. We learned that currently there is no government process and no strategically defined criteria to screen proposals for potential ERs. We believe such a process, once defined, will be more efficient and effective than a piece-meal approach where lobbyists and local public campaigns drive the addition of new ERs to the 150 already established and managed by BC Parks.

As you know, authority for the *Ecological Reserve Act* lies within your Ministry. We are aware that the authority for land use designations falls largely under the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO). We hope that you appreciate the need for an efficient yet rigorous government process for designating ERs, and the benefit of defining such a process as exists for other reserves such as wildlife habitat areas and old growth management areas. We also believe such a process would best be implemented through existing inter-ministry decision-making bodies, at both the regional and headquarters levels.

In summary:

- 1. We believe it is in the BC government's interests to clarify a process for designating ecological reserves:**

A clear process for designating ecological reserves will support BC Parks in meeting its stated mission and mandate:

“BC Parks is responsible for the designation, management and conservation of system of ecological reserves, provincial parks and recreation areas located throughout the province”; and “...our mission is to protect representative and special natural places within the Province’s Protected Areas System.”

We know larger land use decisions were made through the land use planning processes of the 1990s. However, as isolated and hitherto undocumented special ecological values continue to be found on small parcels of land, a process is needed to bring these forward for evaluation and a decision on whether they too warrant protection as ERs. A clear process will enable BC Parks to fulfill its mandate and provide the public assurance that your Ministry takes the parks and ecological reserves mandate seriously, and is willing to screen candidate areas. It is our understanding that regional government staff are also frustrated by the lack of process, given the pressures they experience from local community groups. The current ad hoc approach does not benefit local communities, your Ministry, or government in general.

2. We seek your endorsement to direct your planning staff to work with the Friends of Ecological Reserves to jointly develop a clear, efficient process for assessing whether proposed new candidate ecological reserves warrant ER status and protection.

We understand the imperative to work with First Nations and industry and FLNRO staff on this. We are committed to working with BC Parks to develop a process that demonstrates how relative risks and benefits are weighed prior to any land use designation. Likewise, we are willing to invest considerable time and effort into assessing areas with specific values where long term protection as an ecological reserve will be in the greatest public interest.

3. We hope to pilot the process on some of the candidate areas known to us once you have been fully briefed.

I trust that you will consider this request and provide the necessary direction to staff so they have your backing to work with us on this process. If approved, we hope to have this process clarified by March or April 2015, so that by next summer, specific proposals for ERs could be considered. As a mature, non-profit volunteer organization with nearly four decades partnering with BC Parks, FER hopes that our suggestions to establish an efficient and effective process to assess candidate ERs can assist you in fulfilling the BC Parks mission and mandate.

Sincerely,



Mike Fenger
President, Friends of Ecological Reserves of BC

cc. Brian Bawtinheimer, Executive Director, Parks Planning and Management Branch
Marnie Llewellyn-Thomas, ADM Executive Assistant