

Green Scene: BC Parks Want to Know How You Use Pinecone-Burke Park

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Members of Coquitlam's Search and Rescue team explore the North Ridge trail on Burke Mountain - Pitt Lake can be seen in the background. *Ian McArthur photo.*

If you are a hiker or mountain-biker, you probably know what a jewel we have in northeast Coquitlam in the form of Burke Mountain. This plateau-topped mountain covered by lush green forests beckons to anyone who wishes to escape from the travails of modern life and seek out the peace and solace of nature. It is more like a diamond in the rough, however, because BC Parks has more or less ignored this park for many years. Created as Pinecone-Burke Provincial Park in 1995, this 38,000 hectare area of mostly remote wilderness stretches from Burke Mountain and the Widgeon Valley along the west shore of Pitt Lake all the way to Garibaldi Park in the north. Because of its proximity to the lower mainland, Burke Mountain is the most frequently used area within the entire park.

Due to lack of funds, BC Parks has been unable to do much, if anything, to improve amenities on Burke for the past 19 years. Now, things may change. A questionnaire was recently posted to the [BC Parks website](#)

asking members of the public to document their activities in the park and list any concerns or suggestions they have for a park management plan. Comments are due next Friday, November 14. In conjunction with this questionnaire, a stakeholders meeting, by invitation only, will also be held. When the park was created in 1995, it came with a co-management agreement between BC Parks and Katzie First Nation to work together to manage the area. Now, the two partners have agreed on a Terms of Reference and will be working to develop an appropriate management plan for the area. Public input, of course, will be an essential component of the planning process.

Ideally, all provincial parks should have a management plan to document biodiversity and provide guidance about appropriate activities within a given park. For a large park such as Pinecone Burke, management zones are typically created as not all permitted activities may be appropriate throughout the entire park. For example, with regard to Pinecone Burke, it would make sense to create a special management zone on Burke Mountain as this area receives the most use. When the Burke Mountain Naturalists were campaigning to create the park in the early 1990s, volunteers brushed out old logging roads and created a network of trails on Burke and Widgeon which allowed people to explore and enjoy the area. At one point, the Naturalists also produced trail maps. For the past two decades, Burke Mountain Naturalists' members have continued to maintain these trails and improve others – all with the knowledge and permission of BC Parks. Mountain biking enthusiasts have added to this network of trails - mostly on the lower slopes of Burke Mountain. More recently, a Burke Mountain Naturalist member, Lyle Litzenberger, has produced an excellent guide to the trails on Burke and Widgeon. This book will be available for purchase at upcoming Naturalists meetings on November 11 and December 9 (see www.bmn.bc.ca for details).

When Pinecone Burke was first established, the Burke Mountain Naturalists believed a management plan would soon be developed and BC Parks would take over trail management and provide basic facilities such as pedestrian bridges on trails to facilitate creek crossings, parking, signage and pit toilets at the two trailheads at the end of Harper Road and along Quarry Road. Sadly, this was not to be the case because core funding for BC Parks has remained at abysmal levels for many years. This has resulted in the deterioration of many provincial park facilities throughout BC and has prevented the creation of new amenities. Parks are also established to safeguard the biodiversity they sustain. Unfortunately, lack of funding creates huge challenges in terms of undertaking ecosystem studies to document the wildlife and rare plants found within parks and developing strategies to protect them.

Prior to the creation of the Park, some trails in the Widgeon area of Pinecone Burke were developed by BC Forests back in the days when this Ministry developed and managed Forest Recreation sites for public use and enjoyment. Two of the most outstanding trails in Pinecone Burke were developed in this manner. Access to the beautiful Widgeon Valley is most easily done by canoe from Grant Narrows in Pitt Meadows. At the upper end of Widgeon Creek, a trail once led people on a short hike to the lower falls. However, this trail, which had stairways and railings, has fallen into disrepair and has been closed. Hikers must now follow an old logging road which, although it bypasses scenic views of the canyon on Widgeon Creek still leads people to the spectacular lower falls. A much more arduous trail which leads to Widgeon Lake is now overgrown and presents a challenge even for experienced hikers. Hopefully, restoration of these trails will be one of the goals of the new management plan.

Regardless of current funding levels for BC Parks, the upcoming planning process presents a long-awaited opportunity for community members to come together and help develop a visionary plan for Pinecone Burke Park. I hope that all those who know the area and wish to protect its values will participate in this exercise.