

# Green Scene: Pinecone Burke Park Under Threat

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[photograph]

[caption: The glacially-hued waters of the Upper Pitt River (shown here in a photo taken last July) surge through a canyon.  
Submitted photo]

[Title in Tri-City News: For love of wilderness, stop Pinecone proposal]

No doubt about it, we are space hogs. Scientists estimate, of the portion of the sun's energy captured by plants and incorporated into food chains and fibre, humans now consume approximately 40%. That's a huge portion to be taken by only one of the millions of species on the planet. With our population estimated to soon reach nine billion, our share of this so-called primary productivity is likely to increase even more. The super-sized demands we put on the planet mean the few spaces we leave for other species are remarkably precious. In BC, these spaces are our wilderness parks. They are critically important places where natural ecosystems are allowed to dominate over human needs. Or at least, that's how it is supposed to be.

In the 1990s, the provincial government of the day embarked on a wise process to increase the portion of BC's parks to at least 12% of our land base. While this is considerably less than the one-fourth of land so protected in Central and South America, it was, nonetheless, an inspired and biologically-sound idea. Public input was solicited. As a result, we had two parks created in our corner of the lower mainland in 1995. Colony Farm became a regional park instead of PNE fairgrounds and, to our north, Pinecone Burke was created as a wilderness area which stretched from the higher elevations of Burke Mountain along the west side of Pitt Lake to join with Garibaldi Park in the north. Thousands of people supported its creation because they understood that wilderness functions best as an ecosystem when it comes in a large piece. Now, a private corporation is proposing to punch a hole in it.

Pinecone Burke is a Class A park, the highest level of park protection in BC. This means industrial activities, such as transmission lines, are prohibited. Such lines are not only unsightly in a wilderness setting, they can also be an impediment to the natural movements of wilderness-dependent mammals such as grizzly bears, wolves, mountain goats and wolverines. A transmission line that would delete about 70 hectares of pristine wilderness from Pinecone Burke Park has been proposed by a company seeking to develop several so-called run-of-river projects in the Upper Pitt valley. This private project would divert much of the water flow in eight tributaries of the Upper Pitt River into turbines to produce electricity. The transmission line through Pinecone Burke would take electricity to Squamish. There are dozens of similar projects planned across BC but none, apparently, that would so intrude into a Class A Park. It's hard to argue the electricity produced in the Upper Pitt would be unique or critical to our needs. Some people, including me, believe the amazing diversity of wildlife and wild salmon in the spectacular Upper Pitt River valley have a far greater value than the electricity which could be generated.

Despite the thousands of people who supported the creation of Pinecone Burke only 13 years ago, we are now being asked to allow the deletion of a critical 70 hectare slice of the Park which links the southern portion of Pinecone Burke and the Upper Coquitlam watershed to wilderness in Garibaldi Park. The proponents of the project suggest that only a little piece of the park will be lost. Well, try taking a little slice out of a bridge. The proponents of the hydro project suggest they could add a new larger piece to the park...but, of course, it's not their land to add; it's Crown land and, if it had been considered essential, it would have been protected within the park 13 years ago.

The proponents of the hydro project are even telling us there are precedents for swiping land from provincial parks. They point out, for example, land was removed from Mount Robson Provincial Park to allow for twinning of a gas pipeline last year. This is true, but the need for the second pipeline had been foreseen and planned for the park since the 1950s. Moreover, the land removed was not pristine wilderness; it was next to a national highway and railway ...and the pipeline was buried. Local naturalists believe the proposal to remove pristine, remote wilderness from Pinecone Burke is unprecedented and, if allowed, will soon lead to other deletions in other parks.

When Pinecone Burke Park was considered for protection over a decade ago, hundreds of people attended public meetings in Coquitlam and Vancouver in overwhelming support for this park. This time around, we aren't even getting meetings in these locations; instead we will have to go to the Ramada Inn in Pitt Meadows on Thursday evening, February 28 to provide input. While mankind cannot create wilderness - that is the job of a higher power - sometimes, mankind is called upon to protect wilderness. I hope people will hear that call on February 28.

In addition to Pitt Meadows, meetings will be held in Squamish (Feb 25) and Mission (March 4). Written comments can also be submitted. Additional information and a link to the proponent's website is available at: [www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/planning/bound\\_adj\\_policy.html#pinecone](http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/planning/bound_adj_policy.html#pinecone).