

Appendix C

The British Columbia Context

Note: This section is excerpted from a 2007 report by Professional Environmental Recreation Consultants Ltd. was commissioned by the BCRPA for the strategic planning process. This section provides a quick review of the provincial context within which the parks, recreation and culture sector exists and flourishes.

1. British Columbia's Population

With 4,113,487 residents recorded in the May 2006 census, British Columbia is Canada's third most populous province with 13.2% of the total population. The population growth rate of 4.9% over the 1996-2001 period, increased to 5.3% from 2001-2006. B.C. is also Canada's third largest area in size, making up 9.5% of Canada's total land mass.

British Columbia has a diverse and rich heritage with 26.1% of its population being foreign born. The early source of migration from Europe has since been surpassed by new residents from Asia. Of the total population growth over the last ten years, 71% has come from migration from other provinces/territories and countries, and only 29% from natural growth – the net of births over deaths. The pattern of net out-migration to other provinces from 1998-2002 has also been reversed, with recent net inter-provincial migration levels now being second only to Alberta. In 1941, 54% of the population lived in urban areas; in 2001, 85% were urban dwellers.

2. Geography

The province is dominated geographically by two mountain systems, one coastal and the other in the east. Between the two ranges are an extensive plateau system and major river systems and valleys. There is also an extension of the Great Plains in the Peace River area. The diverse habitat areas include 1.8 million hectares of freshwater surfaces and 11.4 million hectares of protected areas. The protected areas make up 12.5% of the province and consist of provincial parks, recreation areas, and special ecological preserves.

Over half of the province's land mass is considered productive forest land while only 3% is considered arable land.

3. The Economy

British Columbia has witnessed strong overall economic growth in the last few years, including 3.5 % in 2005. The B.C. government recorded a record \$3 billion surplus for the 2005-06 fiscal year, with high natural gas prices playing a significant role. This surplus allowed the government to pay down \$1.5 billion of its \$34.4 billion debt.

The province also saw its lowest unemployment rate (5.9%) in the last 30 years. One of the major shifts over the last few decades has been from a reliance on natural resources to a more diversified economy. The vast majority of the workforce (79%) is now employed in the production of services while only 21% are involved in the production of goods. Still, lumber, natural gas and coal are the three largest exports.

Tourism is also a significant economic generator. In 2005, 22.9 million overnight visitors spent \$9.7 billion. Half of these visitors were from other provinces or countries, and the other half were B.C. residents. It is highly likely that the B.C. economy will remain vibrant for at least the next decade as commodity prices remain high and tourism and other sectors continue to grow.

One potential challenge will be a labour shortage in some sectors as baby boomers retire and job opportunities remain plentiful.

4. Governments and Education

The province is governed by the Provincial Legislature consisting of the Lieutenant Governor and 79 Members of the

Legislative Assembly.

The 2006-2007 provincial budget is \$33.9 billion. Of that amount, 37.8% is dedicated to health and 27% to education. The next highest expenditures are 9% for social services and 6.8% for debt servicing. There is a growing concern that increasing health and education costs will leave even less room for other expenditure areas in the future.

The four ministries that the parks, recreation and culture sector relates to most directly are:

- Tourism, Sport and the Arts (includes recreation areas and trails)
- ActNow B.C. which has its own Minister of State
- Ministry of Health, the five Regional Health Authorities and the sixth Provincial Health Services Authority
- Ministry of Economic Development (infrastructure programs).

In terms of local governments, there are 28 regional districts and 156 incorporated municipalities. The ten largest municipalities by population in the 2006 census were:

1. City of Vancouver	578,041
2. City of Surrey	394,976
3. City of Burnaby	202,799
4. City of Richmond	174,461
5. City of Abbotsford	123,864
6. City of Coquitlam	114,565
7. District of Saanich	108,265
8. City of Kelowna	106,707
9. District of Langley	93,726
10. District of North Van	82,562

There are 59 school districts in the province, each with an elected board of trustees. British Columbia had 1,662 public schools and 355 independent ones in 2005-06. There are also 27 public post-secondary institutions including five universities, five university colleges, 11 community colleges, five provincial institutes, an open learning agency, and a growing number of private and independent schools.

5. Shifts in Governance

Particularly in the last decade, there has been a clear devolution of power from the federal government to the provincial level and down to the local government level. Local governments have emerged as a significant force and are no longer considered to be merely children of the provinces.

Through the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM), local governments are now directly involved in senior government policy decisions that affect the local level. This shift led to the development of the "New Deal for Communities" that has brought federal/provincial infrastructure funding and gas tax revenues to the local level.

The recent Canada-B.C. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Municipal Rural Infrastructure Fund was directly influenced by UBCM. The BCRPA has participated in the development of a national infrastructure renewal program and has conducted a provincial inventory of recreation and parks infrastructure. The B.C. government has also moved to a closer working relationship with provincial not-for-profit organizations in implementing provincial goals. As one example, ActNow BC has contracted the BCRPA to manage the Active Communities Initiative due to its connections to the local level.

6. The Five Great Goals

The Government of British Columbia has identified "Five Great Goals" for 2006/07 to 2015/16. They are:

1. Make B.C. the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent

2. Lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness
3. Build the best system of support in Canada for persons with a disability, those with special needs, children at risk and seniors
4. Lead the world in sustainable environmental management with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management, bar none
5. Create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada

These goals will be driving a good deal of the Province's decision-making. The parks, recreation and culture sector plays a role in all five goals, but a particularly strong role in Goals 2, 3 and 4. In terms of healthy living and physical fitness, the sector has always played a major role in the provision of programs, indoor facilities and open space systems and trails. The Active Communities Initiative is aimed at extending and expanding the sector's impact in conjunction with local partners.

Our sector has also played a strong role in Goal 3 by providing support and ensuring access for those in need, including persons with a disability and low-income families. The BCRPA is currently working on a number of projects aimed at the older adult including the Active Aging Community Consultation Project.

In relation to Goal 4, local parks, recreation and culture departments are stewards of significant natural environments and are playing a lead role in sustainable environmental management practices.

7. Increased Focus on Health Promotion

Escalating health care costs are one of the highest concerns to federal and provincial-territorial governments. In early 2005, the premier formally announced the ActNow BC program. This is the most significant health promotion initiative ever in any province. It is not necessarily aimed at reducing current health care costs, but rather at reducing or eliminating the further escalation of those costs.

The four pillars of ActNow BC are: Healthy Eating, Tobacco Use, Healthy Choices in Pregnancy, and Physical Activity. The two key physical activity strategies are Active Communities and ActionSchools! BC. ActNow BC was within the Ministry of Health, but has been separated and has its own Minister of State.

The British Columbia Healthy Living Alliance (BCHLA) was formed in 2003 to address and advocate for reducing the risk factors that contribute to preventable chronic diseases. It has nine member organizations on the Coordinating Committee as well as other forms of membership; these members include BCRPA, UBCM, and chronic disease and health-related organizations. It produced the "Winning Legacy" which sets targets and has 27 strategies for action and received a \$25.2 million grant in the spring of 2006 to begin roll-out of priority strategies.

8. 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games

The Province has identified that it wants British Columbia to be the healthiest jurisdiction ever to host a Winter Olympics and Paralympics. ActNow BC and 2010 Legacies Now were created as key elements in responding to this goal. Created in 2000, 2010 Legacies Now also wants to ensure that the benefits and legacies of hosting the Winter Games are felt throughout the province and not just in the host communities of Vancouver (and the Lower Mainland), and Whistler.

2010 Legacies Now has four component programs: Arts Now, Literacy Now, Volunteers Now, and Sports and Recreation Now. The organization has more than 90 Spirit of BC Community Committees and celebrated the first Spirit of BC Week in 2006 to mark the countdown to the Games. The parks, recreation and culture sector is a participant in most of these Spirit Committees and plays a number of other roles in highlighting and supporting the Games at the local level.