

February 4, 2021

The Honourable John Horgan, M.L.A.
Premier of British Columbia
Email: premier@gov.bc.ca

Dear Premier,

BC's provincial parks protect internationally significant ecological and cultural values and foster experiences to connect with nature through outdoor recreation. Our provincial park system is a driver of our important tourism economy, bringing in visitors from around the world.

Visitation to BC Parks increased by 24% between 2014-2018 and has continued to rise over the past few years. This steady increase in visitation has not been met with the necessary resources to maintain and upgrade park facilities. The summer of 2020 pushed visitor infrastructure to its limits, and winter recreation is already seeing a surge.

For years, visitors have struggled to find parking for day hikes, secure reservations for campground and wilderness camping, and have experienced poorly maintained and seriously eroded trail infrastructure. Despite the border closure, these challenges have continued throughout the pandemic as more British Columbians have engaged in outdoor activities.

Domestic and international tourism has the potential to play a significant role in the economic recovery of our province. It is widely believed that tourists will place increased value on outdoor experiences as the world emerges from the global pandemic.

For BC to support visitors, nature and the tourism communities that depend on BC's expansive parks system, we must act now to increase the capacity of our park system in a meaningful way. The recent mandate handed down to the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy which acknowledges the need for improved funding and calls for the creation of new campgrounds, trails and protected areas is encouraging and timely.

Increasing resources to BC Parks would allow for park system planning and expansion, maintaining critical recreation infrastructure, increasing staffing levels, necessary wildlife monitoring, ecosystem restoration, investing in partnerships with Indigenous communities, and upgrading and expanding parking lots, trails, and campgrounds. We welcome the recent \$5 million investment to tackle some of the most critical deferred maintenance items such as shoreline erosion, water treatment, and bear caches. These are good examples of the types of projects that are needed across the province at a much larger scale.

Investment in the outdoors will create jobs across BC that will support sectors hit hardest throughout the pandemic. A robust parks system supports tourism and visitor spending in rural communities and expands nature-based recreation opportunities for urban populations, particularly in southwest BC. Improved trail infrastructure will allow more people to spend time outside, with a multitude of health benefits. Stable staffing levels will support livelihoods across BC and deepen partnerships with Indigenous communities.

We advocate for a meaningful commitment to increase the annual budget for BC Parks to \$100 million for capital, land acquisition and operational investments that will spur our economic recovery, support reconciliation, and support the health of people and nature in British Columbia.

Sincerely,

Brad Harrison, Adventure Tourism Coalition and Backcountry Lodges of BC

Ingrid Jarrett, BC Hotel Association

Stephanie Smith, BC Government Employees' Union

Paul Grey, BC Marine Trails

Harry Crosby, BC Nature

Myles Armstead, BC Federation of Fly Fishers

Jesse Zeman, BC Wildlife Federation

Annita Mcphee, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, British Columbia

Colin Campbell, Elders Council for Parks in British Columbia

Barry Janyk, Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC

Tewanee Joseph, Indigenous Tourism Association of BC

Martin Littlejohn, Mountain Bike Tourism Association

Louise Pedersen, Outdoor Recreation Council of BC

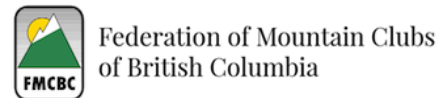
Walt Judas, Tourism Industry Association of BC

Ciel Sander, Trails BC

Joe Foy, Wilderness Committee

Scott Benton, Wilderness Tourism Association and BC River Outfitters Association

These 19 organizations represent together 1,400 organizations and businesses in BC.



cc: Minister Selina Robinson, Minister George Heyman, Parliamentary Secretary Kelly Greene, Minister of State Nathan Cullen and Minister Melanie Mark.