

Ministry of Forests Recreation Site Effectiveness Evaluation Project

Project Plan

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Prepared by: Recreation Site Effectiveness Evaluation Project Working Group

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1.0 Introduction

Forest Service recreation sites have been an integral part of outdoor recreation in B.C. since the Ministry of Forests initiated a recreation management program in 1971. The program established recreation sites and facilities to address safety and sanitation concerns that had developed in areas where public recreational use tended to concentrate (e.g., lakeshores).

Most Forest Service recreation sites are rustic, and provide only basic facilities such as toilets, fire rings and picnic tables. No electrical power or potable water is provided, and the vast majority of the sites are accessed by gravelled forestry roads. The unique recreation experience provided by Forest Service recreation sites has proven to be highly popular with both residents and non-residents.

In early 2002, the government's Core Services Review recommended that the function for managing recreation sites and trails be removed from the Ministry of Forests' mandate in order to concentrate limited staff and budget resources on core priorities such as sustainable forest management. The Core Services Review also resulted in a shift in ministry policy to maintain forest roads to wilderness standards, unless the roads are used for industrial purposes or to access residential areas. Wilderness road maintenance standards only maintain roads to the extent necessary to protect the environment – access for all types of vehicles in all types of weather is not guaranteed. Many Forest Service recreation sites and trails are accessed on roads now designated for wilderness standards.

In 2003, after considering stakeholder input, the government determined that the Ministry of Forests should continue to play a role in the management of recreation sites and trails through public-private partnership agreements with recreation groups, community organizations, First Nations and other parties. Recreation sites and trails not managed by partners continue to be open to the public, but are maintained by users.

Under the partnership strategy, the government's objective is to keep open as many recreation sites and trails as possible. To accomplish this objective, additional funds and staff have been allocated for 2004/05 to ensure that the number of recreation sites and trails managed under partnership agreements continues to increase, and that user maintained sites and trails receive a basic level of maintenance to minimize public safety and environmental issues. Beginning in 2005/06, additional funding will be provided for incremental road surface, brushing and infrastructure maintenance on non-industrial Forest Service roads leading to some recreation sites and trails.

To determine if Forest Service recreation sites are being managed in a safe, sanitary and environmentally sound manner, an evaluation of sites in different forest regions and districts is required. The results of this evaluation will be used to:

- Assess the effectiveness of current management practices;
- Identify any differences in the state of recreation sites in different forest regions and districts, and between different types of recreation sites (managed with fees, managed without fees, user maintained); and
- Adjust the ministry formula for allocating recreation funds to forest regions, if required.

This information will help the Ministry of Forests improve the overall management of Forest Service recreation sites.

An effectiveness evaluation process will be developed and applied to a representative sample of recreation sites across the province. For the purpose of this evaluation, only those recreation sites with vehicle access and overnight camping will be sampled. Recreation trails, interpretive forest sites, day-use sites, sites with enhanced facilities such as cabins, and sites that are only accessible by foot, horse, ATVs/bikes, boats or floatplanes will not be included in this evaluation. These other types of recreation sites may be evaluated in the future depending on available funding.

The results of the evaluation will be presented to ODMT, along with recommendations to consider the results in future budget allocations. The evaluation will reflect the current condition of Forest Service recreation sites, and provide valuable baseline information for immediate use. However, conducting ongoing evaluations as part of a long-term monitoring program would allow for the continued assessment of status, trends and management issues over time.

The Ministry of Forests' Service Plan for 2004/05 identifies 1189 recreation sites and 537 trails that will be managed by the ministry. The ministry has established internal targets to manage 520 sites and 220 trails under partnership agreements, and 669 sites and 317 trails as user maintained.

2.0 Project Goal and Objectives

The primary goal of this effectiveness evaluation project is to answer the following question:

“Are Forest Service recreation sites across B.C. meeting baseline standards for facilities and maintenance to provide safe, sanitary and environmentally sound recreation experiences?”

The project will have four main parts, each with specific objectives:

1. Development

- Create a standard, cost-effective, scientific method for evaluating the management of Forest Service recreation sites that can be used at both the regional and district level.
- Develop peer and stakeholder-reviewed indicators (with supporting rationales) for evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of current management practices for Forest Service recreation sites across B.C.
- Define the population and strata from which a random sample of recreation sites can be selected.
- Determine the sample size and develop data collection methods.
- Develop methods for analyzing and interpreting the data.

2. **Implementation**

- Evaluate the current state of recreation sites across the province to identify risks to public health and safety.
- Identify the type and condition of the facilities and structures present at recreation sites.
- Determine if the impacts of recreation sites on the natural environment are within acceptable levels.
- Assess the condition of forest roads providing access to recreation sites.

3. **Analysis**

- Determine if current management practices are meeting the intent of section 56 of FRPA in a sustainable manner.
- Assess the extent of public safety and environmental risks associated with recreation sites.
- Determine the extent to which recreation site facilities and structures are meeting baseline ministry standards.
- Establish baseline maintenance standards for managing different types of recreation sites (managed with fees, managed without fees, or user maintained) with regard to health and safety, environmental quality, facilities/structures, and access roads.
- Estimate the resources required to restore and maintain recreation sites to ministry baseline standards.
- Identify any regional differences in the condition of recreation sites.

4. **Management Strategy/Recommendations**

- Develop a management strategy to address issues identified during the effectiveness evaluation in order to minimize risks to public safety and the environment.
- Provide recommendations to ODMT for amending the funding allocation formula for recreation sites to meet the government objective of keeping as many recreation sites open as possible.
- Make recommendations on possible amendments to recreation site management standards and the partnership agreement strategy.

3.0 Links to the Forest and Range Practices Act (FRPA)

FRPA is intended to maintain high environmental standards and promote the innovative and cost-effective management of forest resource values. Recreation is one of the resource values identified under FRPA. The recreation site effectiveness evaluation project has been established to ensure that recreation sites are being managed to meet the intent of section 56 of FRPA. Section 56 enables the Minister to establish recreation sites and trails on Crown land, and establish objectives for sites and trails provided they are consistent with any land-use objectives set by government for the area.

4.0 Scope

4.1 In Scope

The scope of the project includes:

- Establishing the project working group.
- Devising a method for evaluating Forest Service recreation sites (defined as vehicle access sites with overnight camping).
- Identifying and prioritizing evaluation questions.
- Developing measurable indicators for Health and Safety, Environmental Quality, Facilities/Structures, and Road Access.
- Developing rationales and methodologies for data collection, analysis and interpretation for all indicators.
- Conducting the effectiveness evaluation.
- Developing and implementing a quality assurance protocol.
- Determining if current management practices are meeting the intent of FRPA.
- Estimating the resources and infrastructure required to restore and maintain recreation sites to ministry baseline standards.
- Identifying any differences in the condition of recreation sites between regions and districts.
- Analyzing results and making recommendations to the ODMT regarding:
 - amendments to the allocation formula;
 - amendments to procedures and standards for managing recreation sites;
 - maintaining access roads to recreation sites; and
 - reducing/mitigating government liability at recreation sites.
- Producing a final report.

4.2 Out of Scope

The following are out of scope for this project:

- Evaluating all types of Forest Service recreation sites (only sites with vehicle access and overnight camping will be evaluated).
- Providing recommendations on specific sites to be decommissioned.
- Determining the effectiveness of RCMP recreation site patrols.
- Determining the number of user visits.
- Determining visitor satisfaction and whether sites are socially acceptable (this may be evaluated in subsequent years, but will likely require too much time and resources to be feasible for this year).

5.0 Major Deliverables

The major deliverables for this project are:

- Questionnaire/checklist for evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of management practices for Forest Service recreation sites in B.C.
- Quality Assurance Protocol.
- Recommendations to ODMT.
- Final Report.

6.0 Team Members and Responsibilities

6.1 Team Members

Team Member	Job title / Organization	Project Title
Gary Townsend	Executive Director, Operations Division & BC Timber Sales	Project Sponsor
Bill Marshall	Forest Recreation Officer Forest Practices Branch	Project Leader
Peter Bradford	Adaptive Management Manager Forest Practices Branch	Member of Working Group
Eric Kopetski	Co-op Student Forest Practices Branch	Member of Working Group
Noelle Kekula	Resource Officer Southern Interior Forest Region	Member of Working Group
John Crooks	Engineering Officer Squamish Forest District	Project Coordinator
Gary Westfall	Recreation Officer Northern Interior Region	Member of Working Group
Paul Tataryn	Recreation Officer Coast Forest Region	Member of Working Group
Wendy Bergerud	Senior Biometrician Research Branch	Member of Working Group
Carl Johansen	Tenures Technician Kalum Forest District	Member of Working Group
Thomas,Chen	Co-op Student Forest Practices Branch	Member of Working Group

6.2 Responsibilities

Project Title	Roles and Responsibilities
Project Sponsor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion the development of partnerships between government ministries and external stakeholders. • Ensure project deliverables meet the expectations of senior management and key users. • Approve the Recreation Site Effectiveness Evaluation Project Draft Plan, and any future changes.
Project Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare project plans. • Chair the Working Group. • Act as spokesperson for the project, including liaison with senior management and the Project Sponsor. • Coordinate all aspects of the project. • Manage communication of the project to the public and other identified stakeholders. • Compile the final report. • Manage the project budget. • Present recommendations at the fall recreation workshop and to ODMT.
Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance and advice to the project leader. • Provide guidance regarding overall project design. • Review all draft planning documents. • Provide guidance for project objectives. • Assist in determining the scope of the project. • Assist in developing assessment methods. • Determine sample size and strata. • Develop a method to collect, analyze and interpret data. • Compile a specific list of evaluation questions and indicators. • Provide input for the selection of other members of the Working Group. • Identify potential links and partners. • Identify people to peer review evaluation methodologies and final report. • Participate in all Working Group meetings and conference calls, or provide alternatives. • Provide guidance to ensure the project is feasible given limited time and resources. • Develop baseline management standards for Forest Service recreation sites. • Create and implement a quality assurance protocol. • Determine who will collect data. • Assist in training those who will be implementing the evaluation methodology.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate with regional staff. • Analyze and interpret data. • Develop recommendations to be presented at the fall recreation workshop and ODMT. • Assist in preparing and approving the final report.
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7.0 Risks

Risks	Mitigation Actions
Bias and inconsistency among evaluators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design questionnaire to be objective, with specific questions, valid indicators and clear methodologies. • Develop and implement a quality assurance protocol.
Limited resources (time and funding).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure evaluation method is as efficient as possible. • Ensure project scope and objectives are feasible.
Not being able to access sample sites due to unforeseeable events such as forest fires, floods, road washouts, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a large list of randomly selected recreation sites that will allow evaluators some flexibility if they cannot get to the pre-selected sites or would like to evaluate additional sites.
Lack of buy-in from executive and/or stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly communicate the need for the project, its feasibility, and the value to be gained from the evaluation.
Lack of buy-in at the regional or district level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly communicate why the project is important to regions and districts, and how the results will be used. • Consider the time and resource constraints of regional and district staff when planning the sample size and data gathering methods. • Design the questionnaire/checklist to be as user-friendly and efficient as possible, and useful at various levels – provincial, regional and district. • Involve representatives from the regions and districts in the project planning process to increase awareness and instil a sense of ownership for the project and its results.
Being unable to sample a sufficient number of sites to represent a statistically valid “population”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an evaluation process that will minimize the time required to sample sites (e.g., utilize district staff to evaluate local sites to reduce travel time).

8.0 Stakeholders

<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>Represented by</i>
MOF Executive	Gary Townsend
Forest Practices Branch	Bill Marshall
Regional Staff	Paul Tataryn, Noelle Kekula, Gary Westfall
District Staff	John Crooks, Carl Johansen, Len Leroux
BC Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection	
BC Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management	
Tourism BC	
British Columbia Wildlife Federation	Anthony Toth
Outdoor Recreation Council of B.C.	Gordon F. Weetman
Academic Community	Wolfgang Haider, Professor, School of Resource and Environmental Management, Simon Fraser University Rob Hood, School of Tourism, University College of the Cariboo.
Okanagan Regional District	Bill Kenney
Upper Similkameen Indian Band	Brenda Gould

9.0 Linkages

Project / Organization	Description of Link
FRPA Resource Evaluation Program (FREP)	<p>Government has made a commitment to determine whether forest and range practices in BC are achieving government's objectives for the resource values identified in FRPA.</p> <p>In order to help achieve this commitment, the FRPA Resource Evaluation Program (FREP) has been established in cooperation with the stewardship monitoring initiatives being developed by the forest regions. Under FREP, evaluations will be coordinated for all 11 resource values, including recreation. FREP will provide assistance in developing evaluation and monitoring plans, protocols, quality assurance criteria, and extension of results.</p>

Resource Stewardship Monitoring Program.	Each forest region will be developing a Resource Stewardship Monitoring Program (RSMP), in cooperation with FREP. Monitoring activities under RSMPs will identify status, trends and FRPA implementation issues related to each of the resource values, allowing for analysis at the district, regional and provincial levels. Provincial and regional status, trends and issues will help define FREP evaluation priorities.
BC Parks	The Forest Service recreation program offers a recreation experience that is different, but complementary to the opportunities offered by BC Parks. As a result, there is some overlap of individuals who use BC Parks and Forest Service recreation sites. BC Parks have extensive experience in evaluation and monitoring of their sites and, as such, their experience and expertise should be utilized in the design and implementation of this project.

10.0 Milestones

<i>Milestone</i>	<i>Target Date</i>
Identify project team members	May 11
Develop draft indicators	June 10
Develop draft evaluation form	June 16
Finalize project plan	June 25
Finalize indicators	June 25
Complete draft version of evaluation	July 30
Stakeholder Workshop	August 5
Field test procedures and revisions	August 6
Training	August 6 – 20
Final version of evaluation ready for field implementation	August 13
Completion of field data collection	October 30
Compilation of field data	November 12
Complete data analysis	December 31
First draft of final report	January 31 2005
Final Report and recommendations	February 2005
Creation of ongoing monitoring plan	February 2005

11.0 Budget

\$25,000 has been allocated to complete this project.

12.0 Project Close-Out Tasks

- Communicate project results to stakeholders.
- Evaluate the success of the project.
- Identify improvements and changes to evaluation methods.
- Storage of information/data.