

APPENDIX 16.0 Public Review Summary Report

I. Introduction

The public review draft (the “draft plan”) of the Southern Rocky Mountain Management Plan (the “SRMMP”) was released to the public February 17, 2003. The draft plan was made available to the public through the SRMMP website¹, at three open houses held February 24, 25 and 26 in Cranbrook, Fernie and Elkford, respectively, and for viewing at the Cranbrook office of the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management. The public review period concluded on April 15, 2003.

A number of public consultation initiatives had been undertaken over the previous 15 months, as part of the development of the draft plan. These are summarized in the introduction and appendices to the SRMMP and elsewhere on the SRMMP website.

The Recreation Management Strategy (RMS) was run as a separate process to the SRMMP, but where the RMS project area overlaps the SRMMP area the results were incorporated as section 7.1 in the draft SRMMP. The RMS process utilized a stakeholder table, which negotiated draft access zonations for recreation. Previous opportunities had been provided to the table members to review draft RMS maps, but this was the first opportunity for the general public to comment on these maps.

In all over 300 written submissions on the draft SRMMP were received during the review period. They were submitted in a variety of forms, including:

- comment sheets completed and submitted at one of the three open houses
- comment sheets completed and mailed at a later date
- website comments link
- emails
- letters
- faxes

The submissions covered a broad spectrum of interests and opinions, and covered most of the topics in the draft SRMMP. They included input from individuals, organizations, corporations and local governments. Those who provided submissions had strong and genuine feelings about resource management and land use in the southern Rocky Mountains.

A major submission from First Nations was not treated as part of the public input and is being reviewed and considered separately. This reflects the special status of First Nations in the process.

Submissions from other government agencies were also received before and during the public review period, but they are not included in this synopsis of public comments.

¹ <http://srmwww.gov.bc.ca/kor/srmmp/srmmp.htm>

II. Handling of comments

The SRMMP project team compiled, collated and summarized all of the 300+ submissions. In summarizing the submissions, and the individual comments contained within them, there was no attempt to be statistical. Individual comments were compiled and grouped into topic areas (most of these topics show up in this synopsis as alphabetically-arranged headings). Every comment was indexed to the submission(s) in which it was contained.

All comments were given consideration for possible revisions to the draft plan. In so doing, we classified the individual comments into five categories. Some categories could not be considered for possible plan revisions. These included comments which were vague, or which provided us with an opinion but no indication of how to address the concern, along with those which were beyond the scope and/or defined limits of the planning process. These comments were all discussed by the project time, but ultimately no direct action could be taken on them, except in some cases to highlight them as issues for government. A record of the discussion was noted on many of these comments.

All other comments (i.e., those which could be considered for potential revisions) were discussed by Project Team members, and, where appropriate, a change to the wording of the draft plan was made. The rationales for our decisions with respect to the individual comments were noted throughout.

The purpose of this document is to provide a brief synopsis of all the comments we received. It does not reflect every submission, nor the actions related to the comments. Those who would like to look at the actual submissions and related information are requested to contact the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management at (250) 489-8540 or through the SRMMP website to arrange a viewing.

III. Synopsis of comments by topic (arranged alphabetically)

i. BALANCE (see also SUSTAINABILITY)

The question of how well the draft SRMMP achieved a balance was one of the more contentious areas of input. Some felt that the original priorities of the Southern Rocky Mountain Conservation Area had been subordinated to an economic development priority. Others were pleased to see a change in emphasis from conservation to balanced and sustainable development. While some felt that balance had been achieved, there were others who did not. Among those who felt a balance had not been achieved some felt the draft was biased toward economic development, while others felt that conservation was favoured.

We heard from several people that the economic value of keeping the landscape in its wild state should not be forgotten. We were also told of the importance of conducting carrying capacity studies and considering cumulative impacts. Some others pointed out that wildlife, industry and recreation co-exist successfully in the Elk valley. There was

one comment concerned that the Special Resource Management zones from the East Kootenay Land Use Plan did not appear in the SRMMP.

Some respondents from industrial sectors were concerned over the relative number of pages in the draft for various resource values, suggesting that the importance of industry was not being recognized. Conversely, some comments reflected a concern that the conservation chapter was not in a more prominent location in the draft plan.

ii. BOUNDARIES

There continued to be some concern over the fact that parts of the Elk and Bull River drainages were omitted from the plan, especially considering that the Recreation Management Strategy (RMS) for the east side of the former Cranbrook Forest District included those areas. On the other hand, some respondents preferred to wait until implementation of the final SRMMP, and an assessment of plan performance, before expanding the plan area into the remainder of these drainages.

iii. CONNECTIVITY

There was both praise and criticism of the draft SRMMP's new "matrix" approach to connectivity. Some felt that the method would not meet the stated intent. Identified weaknesses included over-emphasis on avalanche tracks and a contention that fragmentation would not be halted. Others, however, were pleased to see the demise of previous broad corridors in favour of site-specific ecosystem attributes and features.

There was a common concern expressed for restricting motorized recreation access, structures and tenures in connectivity zones. Some wanted to extend access restrictions to industrial activity as well. The importance of a corridor of "safe passage" for wildlife between the Flathead and Banff was raised by some. Therefore, research showing that some animals do not cross Highway 3 was highlighted as a serious concern needing attention, although some respondents expressed scepticism over these findings. Movement of species between Canada and the US, along the Flathead corridor, was also identified as being important.

iv. CONSERVATION (GENERAL)

There were many comments emphasizing the important need for the plan to do a good job of protecting environmental values. These included identification of the need to make conservation values the highest priority, to employ the precautionary principle and to preserve wildlife in a natural state for future generations.

There was considerable support for the conservation provisions in the draft plan, some stating the plan provided better management (than previous). However, there were some criticisms that the draft plan did not do a good enough job of protecting wildlife, and/or that additional measures were needed, sometimes in specific areas like Landscape Unit

(LU) C18 in the Flathead. Comments from the US expressed concern that the draft plan did not adequately address potential impacts to the Flathead region in Montana.

There was some doubt expressed that wildlife populations are actually threatened, and the point was made that multiple use of the backcountry has worked well.

v. FIRST NATIONS

As noted above, the submission from First Nations on the public review draft was not considered as public input and is not referred to here.

Public comments concerning First Nations issues were relatively few, but included the recommendation that steps be taken to address outstanding First Nations concerns with the planning process.

vi. FORESTRY

The need for forestry activities to address environmental values (riparian, biodiversity, core habitats, water, ungulate winter range, connectivity, etc.) was identified in many submissions.

Several perceived weaknesses were identified with the forestry provisions of the draft plan. The fact that the Issues section of Chapter B.4.0 contained only one issue was one deficiency pointed out; additional issues were identified, including problem forest types, pine beetle, overstocked types and others. Additions to the intent statements, including setting reasonable targets and maintaining Annual Allowable Cut, were also suggested. Doubt was expressed that the draft plan optimized or provided for economic development. The need to complete the socio-economic analysis (SEA) was indicated as a prerequisite to completion of the final plan.

Others felt that the impacts of forestry were not dealt with adequately in the draft plan or that development was taking precedence over sustainability.

The timber Enhanced Resource Development Zone (ERDZ) provisions received some support, but a lack of clarity in the implementation of ERDZs, along with the perception that the proposed ERDZs would be ineffectual, were pointed out. Another perceived weakness was a lack of clarity as to what constitutes a healthy forest sector.

vii. GUIDE-OUTFITTING

We received suggestions that the status of guide-outfitting be enhanced in the draft plan. For example, some respondents specified that guide-outfitting should be given the “same rights” as mining and logging (i.e., equivalent level of certainty, and recognition of the value of the industry), that mining and logging need to be required to “coexist” with guiding, and also that guide-outfitting should not be grouped as a recreational tourism activity.

Needs identified for this sector included undisturbed wilderness, healthy wildlife populations and exclusivity of tenure. Limitation on motorized access was a critical issue. Concern over issuance of other Crown land tenures which overlap territories was expressed.

We heard both opposition to, and support for, the concept of not allowing guide-outfitting to expand in LU C23. Some respondents were unhappy that guides are able to access non-motorized areas by vehicle to supply their camps.

viii. HUNTING AND FISHING

Several people took exception to the reference in the draft plan concerning the social non-acceptance of hunting. A reference to increasing competition between resident and non-resident hunters in the draft plan was also disputed.

Angling-guide pressure was raised as a potential threat to the fisheries resource and the sport itself, especially on the Elk River.

ix. IMPLEMENTATION

The importance of effective plan implementation, and the need for appropriate monitoring and enforcement, were widely recognized. However, there were concerns expressed that the draft plan did not provide clear indications as to how objectives would be implemented.

The need for the final plan to be able to incorporate and adapt to new information was also identified. A related issue, plan amendment, was also raised: the SRMMP should be revisited (e.g. every five years or at request of other ministries). A process for variances, without invoking major amendment processes, was also requested.

x. INDUSTRIAL ACCESS

While some respondents felt that an industrial access plan was needed, for environmental benefit, others were concerned about the possible implications to industry, and wanted clarification as to what such a plan would entail. There was one response in favour of maintaining or expanding access in general, and another felt that permitting processes already deal adequately with industrial access management.

Statements in the draft plan which referred to increasing or uncontrolled industrial access (as a potential impact on conservation and tourism values, for example) were strongly questioned, and identified as being biased. Improvements to riparian guidelines were suggested, because it was felt that road or crossing restrictions, as written, would not always have been the best for the environment (see also RIPARIAN).

Road reclamation and deactivation, along with access controls, were identified in several submissions as potential methods to limit road densities and impacts. Some people felt these are strictly industry responsibilities.

xi. MAPPING AND DATA

The quality (lack of resolution) of the .jpg maps on the website was criticized. Some felt the maps, in general, were too complex for the lay person, or that the material presented at the open houses was overwhelming.

The need to be collecting new data over time, so that when the plan is revisited the best information will be available, was identified.

One industrial user indicated that the maps will be incorporated into company planning.

A specific concern was raised over use of mineral potential mapping, which was described as outdated and flawed.

Several people found mapping errors and pointed them out to us.

xii. MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES RAISED:

- need for a BC-Montana cooperation agreement on the Flathead
- perceived inadequacy of the consideration given to US interests in the plan
- recognition of the importance of resource industries and integrated management
- undesirability of allowing the threat of international boycotts and funded publicity campaigns to drive the plan
- need to avoid statements that bind adjacent private landholders to the plan
- need to provide the comparative costs of tenure for various activities
- need to provide a history of the plan area

xiii. OLD AND MATURE FOREST

The need for protection of old growth forest areas was identified. Provisions of the plan were both praised and criticized. Specifically, some were confused about the process for approving access through an old-growth management area (OGMA), while another comment did not support the overlap of OGMA's with riparian areas.

One commenter felt that the basal area requirement for mature stands needs to be variable.

xiv. PARKS

A number of respondents expressed support for a National Park in the Flathead. It was suggested that only a park would provide adequate protection for the east side of the

Flathead drainage in BC. Others expressed their opposition to a National Park, and included statements like “we have enough parks” and “when does park creation stop?”

xv. PROCESS

There was a divergence of opinion on whether or not the planning process had been open, transparent and fair. Some felt that public engagement had not been adequate, while others expressed appreciation for the opportunities to participate in the process.

Advice to MSRM, in relation to the planning process, included:

- legislate the plan
- reject anecdotal information
- ensure there is broad public and community support
- don't give in to “anti-use” groups
- include potential economic impacts as well as benefits
- put draft plan out for another 60-day review (for SEA and other outstanding issues)
- provide better information about what happens after public review
- include current environmental policies and laws (as opposed to intent statements)
- state clear government position on the National Park proposal, the Trans Canada Trail and other issues
- provide a variance protocol for forest development
- identify areas outside the plan area where there are sensitive habitats and there is a need for cooperation

xvi. RANGE

There was concern expressed that this relatively small industry was being given priority over conservation in the plan area. A concern was expressed that livestock grazing in the alpine is undesirable.

Most other range-related comments dealt with the interaction of forestry and range, in particular a desire to ensure that conflicts between the two sectors are minimized. For example, it was noted that some range issues, like potential grazing expansion onto Crown land, could have impacts on the forestry sector.

One specific recommendation was received to carry out a major range enhancement program in the Bull River.

xvii. RECREATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

This was the third opportunity to review the draft Recreation Management Strategy (RMS) maps for stakeholders at our “Cranbrook east” workshop table, but the first opportunity for the general public to make comments. Nevertheless, most of the comments came from people who had participated in the process, with only 10 new

members of the general public making comments. Several trends were identified in the comments:

- The majority of comments were a restatement of concerns expressed earlier where the individual or group did not support our previous recommendations.
- The majority of the concerns were from motorized users
- There were slightly more comments related to summer use than to winter use
- Some mapping errors were noted in the comments
- Several people recommended small changes which were of low consequence to other interests
- Many continued to suggest changes that were beyond the mandate of the RMS process
- There was strong support for commercial recreation users to be treated the same as the general public

While many comments received expressed general support for the draft RMS maps and strategy, many other people were not happy with this section of the SRMMP. The largest area of dissatisfaction was in relation to limitations on motorized use, both summer and winter. However, much of this concern related to the inability of the RMS process to address the Access Management Areas legislated by the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection for wildlife management purposes. The second most contentious area was the closing of the southern passes to Alberta to motorized use; however, this is consistent with much public opinion and consistent with Alberta's access plans, with the exception of one pass being open on the Alberta side in the summer.

xviii. RIPARIAN

We received some positive comments for the riparian sections of the draft plan, in particular the road restrictions in the Flathead enhanced riparian zone. There was a question raised as to who will be responsible for reclaiming roads in the riparian, and where the money will come from. The ability to re-establish old river crossings as temporary crossings was requested. One respondent pointed out that the riparian management provisions were inconsistent with the Forest Practices Code (many S4, S5 and S6 streams in the plan area appeared to require reserve zones).

xix. SETTLEMENT

Some respondents took issue with the claim that settlements in the area are growing. The decision to not permit settlement in the Flathead drainage was lauded.

The relationship to private land was noted, specifically the fact that population pressures impact private land, whose management has implications for Crown lands. There was some concern that any Crown lands made available for future settlement must be affordable.

xx. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS (SEEA)

Some felt that the draft plan couldn't be properly reviewed in absence of a completed SEEA; this translated to a request for a second review period before the plan is approved.

We heard that the SEEA base cases need to better account for some of the positive impacts of coal mining on the economy and the environment. One respondent felt that the base cases should be part of the draft plan, and not as stand-alone documents.

xxi. SUBSURFACE RESOURCES

We received comments expressing concern that mining and oil and gas appear to take precedence over other values. It was requested that the draft plan's conservation objectives be a legal obligation and/or a requirement for exploration and development activities. Some respondents requested an outright ban on these activities in parts or all of the plan area.

On the other hand, the subsurface resource provisions were a source of cautious optimism in some cases. It was pointed out that the objectives address some of the long-standing concerns of the mining sector and imply a government commitment to sustaining the industry. The need to recognize that subsurface resource exploration often has seasonal requirements, along with a request for flexibility in other resource objectives, was pointed out by some. Maintaining access to specific coal deposits was a concern to some respondents. We received a recommendation to broaden our scope to include industrial mineral opportunities. Lastly, we were told that the bulk of the conservation objectives in the draft plan can be accommodated in a major resource company's development plans, although there was a request for more detail on assessments needed for approval.

xxii. SUSTAINABILITY (see also BALANCE)

Most comments aimed at sustainability issues tended to take a negative perspective, specifically that the draft plan did not adequately ensure sustainability of natural values. The overall goal of facilitating sustainable economic development was not considered to be appropriate by some respondents. The Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management's draft sustainability principles were criticized, because it was felt they are focused only on economic sustainability. However, one respondent felt that the final plan will serve as a good starting point for sustainable management.

xxiii. TOURISM

There was reasonable support for the tourism provisions in the draft plan. The need to emphasize quality of experience (over quantity of users) was expressed by some people. Some felt that tourism based on the natural environment will provide the long-term economic foundation in the plan area. However, motorized restrictions in the RMS were felt by some respondents to be detrimental to tourism.

On the other hand, some felt that provisions for growth in tourism are unwarranted, and/or are potentially detrimental to other activities.

xxiv. TRANS CANADA TRAIL (TCT)

The only TCT-related statement in the draft SRMMP (page 15) arguably attracted more attention than any other single provision. Most of the respondents felt the statement was inappropriate, and requested that it be changed. Some of these expressed support for the upper Elk valley route, the one currently registered with the TCT Foundation. However, there was also some support for the statement as worded in the draft.

xxv. TRAPPING

As with hunting, comments concerning negative social perceptions of trapping were described as inappropriate, as were negative statements about harvesting pressures on wildlife populations and lack of selective harvesting. On the other hand, we heard the view that any increases in trapping activity would be detrimental to the wildlife resource.

xxvi. UNGULATES AND UNGULATE WINTER RANGE (UWR)

Most of the comments on ungulates and UWR pertained to the interaction of moose and snowmobiles. In particular, the protection of moose was not considered adequate explanation for snowmobile restrictions in the RMS.

Impacts of forest harvesting activities on UWR were felt, by some, to be overstated in the draft plan, and the validity of the seasonal restrictions (best management practices) for forestry was questioned.

We were also advised to look after food sources for ungulates, and to develop a strategy to reduce highway and railway mortality.

xxvii. VISUALS

Based on two specific submissions, visual management outside of the front-country is not supported. One respondent supported the provision that approved mining activities may exceed Visual Quality Objectives.

xxviii. WATER

There was some concern expressed about the draft plan's ability to protect aquatic systems. With respect to domestic water systems there was also concern that the plan is not clear on where responsibility falls for aspects such as maintenance and contingency. Divergence of the Best Management Practices from the Higher Level Plan was noted, along with some specific concerns about statements in the draft plan which ascribed watershed damage to industrial users.

xxix. WIDE-RANGING CARNIVORES

The impact of motorized access on grizzly bears was the most common concern of our respondents. Restrictions on motorized activities were generally the favoured approach, although there was some scepticism about this approach, including a specific allegation that the annotated bibliography in Appendix 24.1 is biased against motorized users. As with connectivity, there were also suggestions to limit structures or tenures in grizzly bear habitat, or ensure that structures or camps are ecologically sensitive.

IV. CONCLUSION

If there was one common theme contained in the submissions it was a respect for the land and its resources. Differences lay in how best to achieve a sustainable future for the economy, environment and social fabric in this important area. “Balance” is never going to be easy to achieve, but the information, constructive criticism and advice provided to us in the public review phase, and indeed throughout all the stages of consultation, has helped us significantly.

The project team would like to thank all those who provided input. Your review of the draft SRMMP is much appreciated. It is important to us that all who wanted to comment on the public review draft of the SRMMP took the opportunity to do so. Feedback from a wide spectrum of interested individuals has helped us in assessing our efforts and in ultimately achieving a balanced product.