

Columbia Valley Recreation Planning Initiative

February 8, 2024

Frequently Asked Questions

CVRPI and the Forster Landscape Unit

The questions below provide additional information about the Columbia Valley Recreation Planning Initiative (CVRPI) and the draft *Recreation Use Inventory Report* and maps for the Forster Landscape Unit, available now for public comment. For more information, go to columbiavalleyrecreation.ca/engage

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What is the Columbia Valley Recreation Planning Initiative?

In early 2020, stakeholders in the Columbia Valley came together to form a community-led recreation management initiative for the Columbia Valley. Its purpose is to address recreation-related issues and impacts, identify potential management strategies, and make recommendations to government. The goal is to encourage responsible recreation use that maintains or enhances local ecological, cultural, and aesthetic values, reduces land use conflicts, and minimizes public safety issues. The Initiative has invited representatives from recreation user groups, environment and conservation organizations, First Nations, local government, provincial government, industry, ranchers, and area residents.

Why is recreation management needed for the Columbia Valley?

Over the last two decades, residents and stakeholders in the Columbia Valley have been expressing concern about the growing pressures and impacts of recreation on public lands. Recreation impacts include damage to environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife habitat; wildlife disturbance; impacts on indigenous traditional and cultural uses; impacts to range and agricultural values; unauthorized trails; squatting; littering; increased wildfire risk; public health and safety concerns; trespassing; and conflicts between recreation uses and users.

Where is the Forster Landscape Unit?

The 16,615-hectare Forster Landscape Unit corresponds to the boundary of the Forster Forestry Landscape Unit. It is located about 10 kilometres west of the Village of Radium Hot Springs and is accessed via the Forster Creek Forest Service Road to the headwaters of Forster Creek.

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Why focus on the Forster Landscape Unit?

Given the large and diverse geography of the Columbia Valley, the initiative is addressing smaller areas in sequence. The initiative began with the Steamboat Mountain Landscape Unit in 2022 and chose to focus on the Forster Landscape Unit in 2023 because of its distinct differences from Steamboat in respect of recreation uses, the seasonality and intensity of recreation uses, and the presence of environmentally sensitive alpine and sub-alpine areas.

What do we know about recreation in the Forster Landscape Unit?

The Forster Landscape Unit has two designated trails: 1) the Forster Creek Trail, a designated winter recreation trail providing access to the Forster Meadows and Catamount Glacier snowmobile and ski touring areas, managed and maintained by the Windermere Valley Snowmobile Society, and 2) the Welsh Lake Trail, a 16 km loop to the lower, middle and upper Welsh Lakes, managed and maintained by the Summit Trail Makers Society.

The Landscape Unit also has three recreational huts that have been designated as recreational sites, along with a primitive campground in the Lower Welsh Lakes Area. The 21 km Forster Forestry Service Road provides access to approximately 134 km of mostly unmaintained resource and wilderness roads within the Landscape Unit. In a given year, it is estimated that about 1000 people use the Welsh Lakes Trail and about 5000 snowmobilers access the Forster area.

The Forster Landscape Unit also has three significant recreation access closures designated under s.58 of the *Forest and Range Practices Act* for motorized use in the Forster Creek Meadows and Catamount Glacier (seasonally), and North Star Glacier (year-round).

How are Indigenous values being considered?

Indigenous values exist across the landscape, including within the Forster Landscape Unit (LU). Indigenous values include cultural, as well as archaeological values. Archeological values, both recorded and unrecorded archaeological sites, are protected under the *Heritage Conservation Act* (2019). Cultural values, which include traditional and spiritual values, reflect the living culture and history of Indigenous peoples, and are unique to each First Nation.

The Province is engaging with and will continue to engage with First Nations on the products of the Columbia Valley Recreation Planning Initiative. Cultural and archaeological values are very important considerations in this government to government process.

What do we know about critical wildlife habitat and ecological values in the Forster Landscape Unit?

The Forster Landscape Unit contains many significant wildlife and ecosystem values, including a large area of ungulate winter range (UWR) for mountain goats, and smaller UWR areas for moose, elk, bighorn sheep, and mule deer. Much of the Landscape Unit is identified as high-quality elk habitat and an elk travel corridor, and it is also recognized as a grizzly corridor. Almost all (99%) of Forster has been proposed as critical habitat for Whitebark Pine, a federally listed species at risk, with 2% already designated as such. Approximately 5% has been defined as an Old Growth Management Area and 8% has

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been identified for harvesting deferral due to the existence of old growth trees. As Forster Creek is the Village of Radium's water source, the entire Forster LU is a designated Community Watershed under the *Forest & Range Practices Act* (FRPA). To protect water for human consumption, Community Watersheds require special management to conserve the quality, quantity and timing of water flow; and to prevent adverse effects on water.

How were the potential recommendations developed?

The CVRPI has undertaken extensive information gathering to inform its understanding of recreation use and environmental values in the Forster Landscape Unit. This includes 1) *Recreation Inventory of the Invermere Timber Supply Area*, completed in 2018, which included interviews and surveys with local stakeholders, and a compilation of recreation uses based on all publicly available maps, reports, and GIS data; 2) results of information gathered through a previous recreation planning process, which culminated in early 2020 and included map-based input on recreation priorities in the Forster area; 3) spatial data on values and land uses compiled from existing government data sources, such as DataBC; 4) input from CVRPI Planning Committee (PC) and Advisory Committee (AC) members, including a field tour on July 4, 2023; and 5) engagement with local and provincial subject matter experts. All of this information was used by the PC and AC to identify a broad range of recreation management recommendations for consideration and feedback by recreation users and the public.

What happens next?

The feedback and comments received from this engagement will inform the CVRPI's recreation recommendations for the Forster Landscape Unit. These recommendations, and the *Forster Landscape Unit Recreation Use Inventory Report*, will be provided to the Province of BC and First Nations for referral. The report and recommendations are intended to support the Province's work with local recreation user groups seeking to establish appropriate trail networks, staging areas, and other recreation facilities, as well as its recreation management priorities for the Columbia Valley.

Implementation of any recommendations such as designating a trail or recreation site would first be subject to a provincial referral process involving review by provincial wildlife biologists, amongst others. The referral process is expected to include a review and consideration of available wildlife science and information, as well as consultation with First Nations, provincial government agencies, and other affected stakeholders. The CVRPI intends to continue its work in developing recreation management recommendations for the Columbia Valley.

How can I learn more, give my input, and get updates?

From February 8 to February 25, 2024, you can provide your feedback on the draft *Forster Landscape Unit Recreation Uses Inventory Report* and *recreation management recommendations*:

1. Completing the online survey surveymonkey.com/r/CVRPI-Forster
2. Submitting comments via email to info@columbiavalleyrecreation.ca

Learn more about the Initiative at ColumbiaValleyRecreation.ca. If you wish to receive occasional email updates from the CVRPI, please email info@columbiavalleyrecreation.ca with "add me to mailing list" in the subject line.