The Mt. Elphinstone Park we deserve

Elphinstone Logging Focus (ELF) has reinitiated a campaign to expand our existing Mt. Elphinstone Park.

Currently comprised of 3 small isolated and disconnected parcels totaling only 139 ha, it’s too small to provide recreation, tourism opportunities, or protect biodiversity. This area is the lower Coast’s last chance to set aside a large, accessible, low elevation and natural forest for the benefit of our communities, and we currently have nothing else like it.

The proposed 1,500 ha Mt. Elphinstone Park, a 20 year-old initiative, would incorporate some of the last mature and old growth forest bordering the communities of Wilson Creek and Roberts Creek, connect the current park parcels, and contain some previously logged areas as well. The areas gentle rolling hills fall between 200-600m. The boundaries would run from the Wilson Creek itself in the west, to Clough Creek above Conrad Road in Roberts Creek to the east, and the former CNI lands and the Coast’s largest clearcut to the north.

There are currently no sizable, low elevation forests set aside on the lower Sunshine Coast, between Egmont and Port Mellon, that address our needs.

The large parks we have, the Tetrahedron (6,000 ha), Mt. Richardson (1,001 ha), and Spipiyus (2,979 ha) are wonderful resources, but they are primarily high elevation parks with the majority of the land above 900m and therefore have limitations for year round recreational use. They also possess a very different sort of ecosystem than the lower slopes. We have no large natural forests set aside that are suitable for year-round hiking, biking, horseback riding, wilderness camping, tourism etc., or that insure biological diversity for our future. Mountain tops and steep grades have always been the easiest to secure as parkland as they have low economic value to the forest industry, and why we have thus far been denied a more usable park on the lower Coast.

The largest low elevation park we have below 600m is the 185ha Smugglers Cove, great for an afternoon walk, but the 185ha Smugglers Cove, great for an afternoon walk, but the lower slopes. We have no large natural forests set aside that are suitable for year-round hiking, biking, horseback riding, wilderness camping, tourism etc., or that insure biological diversity for our future. Mountain tops and steep grades have always been the easiest to secure as parkland as they have low economic value to the forest industry, and why we have thus far been denied a more usable park on the lower Coast.

The Sunshine Coast Forest District currently has only 3% of its land designated Class A Provincial Park while the rest of the province maintains an average of 13%. Even 13% is not enough to ensure ecosystem protection as the science that came out of the Great Bear Rainforest process and Clayoquot Sound Scientific Panel put the percentage needed at 30%. Logging interests have always carried the most weight provincially to the detriment of other societal and ecological values, we’ve never had a balance. We didn’t get down to 3% remaining old growth forest below 600m, in this and most other landscape units in our forest district because we’ve had balance.

The only reason this proposed park still retains some of its land is that in the late 1800’s a fire destroyed much of the forest in the area which has now naturally regenerated. So while most of the surrounding low and mid elevation forests were logged out, this area was left largely untouched, that is until recently. It’s intended that this area be logged and replanted in continuous 60 to 80 year cycles, but no matter what the forest industry tells us, their short rotation tree farms are not a forest, are ecologically barren compared to a naturally regenerated mature or old growth forest, and anyone who enjoys hiking or loves the outdoors knows the difference. It’s akin to comparing a turf farm with a wild meadow. Tourists don’t want to recreate amongst tree farms anymore than our children do. There is little of interest, beauty, or diversity of plants and animals within them. There are some areas within the park proposal already logged in recent years that will need to be restored and reintegrated with the remaining intact forest but that’s as good as it gets at this point in history, as large continuous tracts of intact lower forests are gone on the Coast.

According to the BC Chief Foresters office, within the Sunshine Coast Forest District, “223,000 ha are suitable for timber harvesting”. The additional 1,361 ha needed for this enlarged park would only remove 0.61% or roughly a half of one percent of our harvestable area – hardly the forestry job killer some are claiming. And there are economic benefits to leaving this area unlogged. A 2002 study commissioned by the province titled Commercial and Public Recreation for the Sunshine Coast Forest District, states that “Historically the communities were resource based with an emphasis on the forest industry. Tourism and recreation opportunities as well as retirement have begun to shift the dependence from the resource-based sectors. Tourism and recreation in the Sunshine Coast is strongly linked to land use and is directly dependent on back country, fish, wildlife and other resource values.” The study acknowledged that tourism has steadily grown here, especially on the upper Coast, and will continue to grow as Vancouver does and with increasing worldwide demand for quality outdoor recreational experiences. So while the forest industry has declined on the Coast, tourism and demand for outdoor experiences has increased and is expected to continue too.

Let’s benefit from that trend.

Write, Email or Call:
Hon. Christy Clark, Premier of BC, P.O. Box 9041, Snr Prov Govt, Victoria BC, V8W 9E1 (premier@gov.bc.ca) 250-387-1715
Hon. Terry Lake, Minister of Environment, P.O. Box 9047, Snr Prov Govt, Victoria BC, V8V 1X4 (terry.lake.mla@leg.bc.ca) 250-387-1187
Or visit www.loggingfocus.org and go to the Take Action page for a sample letter and contact information for government ministries to direct it to.
The 3 darker green patches are the pre-existing Mt. Elphinstone Park. Grey patch A87124 is the Traifest Wagon forest, the area Continental Pole Ltd. has won the logging rights to.

Grey patch EW002 is the contentious Wilson Cr. forest cutblock, currently on hold as a hydrological assessment is conducted of the damaged Wilson Cr. watershed.

Save the lower Elphinstone slopes! No clearcuts in the Trailfest-Wagon area.

Three weeks ago, Roberts Creek Director Donna Shugar requested that BC Timber Sales and the Ministry of Forests engage in a Local Resource Use Plan (LRUP) for the lower slopes of Mt. Elphinstone.

There was a land use planning process started in the midnineties but the Ministry of Forests pulled the plug on it before it was completed. If we had an LRUP it might go a long way towards ending the constant conflicts around forest lands on the Mt. Elphinstone slopes. Director Shugar is also concerned about safeguarding the water supply for her community. A third of Creekers utilize well and surface waters originating from the watersheds this park would help protect. The expanded park is presently included in the Roberts Creek Official Community Plan in draft form, and is supported by the Roberts Creek Community Assoc., Davis Bay, Wilson Cr., Selma Park Comm. Assoc., and the Sunshine Coast Conservation Assoc.

This park is your last chance for a sizable inter-urban greenbelt for habitat, tourism, year-round recreation, for present and future generations on the lower Sunshine Coast, and is crucial to maintaining our good quality of life here. Help us make it happen. Tell our local and provincial government that you support the Mt. Elphinstone Park expansion too and want to see a moratorium on logging within its boundaries.

Currently Mt. Elphinstone Park is too small and disconnected to be utilized for anything other than helping to protect fungi, but if enlarged to include the surrounding natural forest and trail system, it could be yet another high profile destination for tourists that would benefit all the communities on the lower Coast, especially Gibsons, Roberts Creek, Sechelt and our service and hospitality sectors.

The area is already widely used by the community as a de facto park for recreation in part because of its accessibility, close proximity, and its natural wild beauty, but it’s being taken away from us one cutblock at a time. The study rated current public use of the area as very high, listing nature observation, hiking, biking, equestrian, ATV’ing and other activities for the local and regional population with a draw from the lower mainland. It also listed the commercial significance in our proposed park area as high, citing the interest in the ecology of the area as the reason. If this area is logged it loses most of the attributes that attract us to it now and its potential for the future.

The Coast is growing, and development and logging will continue to eat up the last unprotected wild areas we treasure unless we set something aside for our future. There are 8 proposed cutblocks currently planned on crown land within the expanded park boundaries to be carried out by the SC Community Forest and BC Timber Sales (BCTS), and one more on Island Timberlands private land. We hope to prevent these lest the integrity of this proposed park be further compromised. The logging rights to one BCTS cutblock, the Trailfest-Wagon forest (cutblock A87124) was auctioned off Feb. 29, 2012 to Continental Pole Ltd. Let’s hope they reconsider, and choose to source their wood from a less contentious area that doesn’t have a such negative impact on the local community and the park’s future.