Proposal for Mt Elphinstone Park Expansion (SCRD)

Elphinstone Logging Focus (ELF) has reinitiated a campaign to expand the existing Mt. Elphinstone Park that currently is comprised of 3 small isolated and disconnected parcels totaling only 139 ha, too small to provide recreational or tourism opportunities, or protect biodiversity in our area. This area is the lower Coasts last chance to set aside a large, accessible, low elevation and natural forest for the benefit of our communities, and we currently have nothing like it. The proposed 1500 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 3 current park parcels, include the Community Forests contentious EW0002 cutblock, and contain some previously logged areas as well. At an elevation of between 200-600m, it would run from the Wilson Cr. itself in the west, to Clough Cr. above Conrad Rd in Roberts Creek in the east, would border private residential properties and the hydro lines to the south, and the former CNI lands and the Coasts 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(6000 ha), Mt Richardson(1,001 ha), and Spipiyus(2,979 ha) are wonderful resources, but they are all high elevation parks with the vast 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. Mountaintop parks have always been the easiest to secure as they have lower economic value to the forest industry, that’s why we have thus far been denied this type on the lower Coast, as logging interests have carried the most weight to the detriment of all other societal and ecological values. We’ve never had a balance here or provincially. The largest low elevation park we have below 600 meters is Smugglers Cove at 185 ha, great for an afternoon walk, but given all the natural forest the lower Coast once possessed, shouldn’t we have more than that? We shouldn’t always have to drive up to a mountaintop to enjoy the nature that used to be at our backdoors and we are quickly losing the opportunity to set aside a Sunshine Coast version of Stanley Park as the last remnants of our low elevation natural forests are being logged, fragmented and converted to tree farms. The
Sunshine Coast Forest District currently has only 3% of the land designated Class A Provincial park while the rest of the province maintains an average of 13% of the land base as such. Even 13% is not enough to ensure ecosystem protection as the numbers that came out of the Great Bear Rainforest process and Clayoquot Sound Scientific Panel put the percentage needed as 30%.

The only reason this proposed park still retains some intact areas today is that in the late 1800’s a large 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 largely left untouched, that is until recent times. It’s intended this area be logged and replanted in continuous 60-80 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 the large continuous tracts of lower intact forest are gone on the Coast.

A 2002 study commissioned by the province called 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, 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. 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, and Sechelt. The area is already widely used by the community 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, ATVing 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 within the expanded park boundaries to be carried out by the SC Community Forest, BC Timber Sales, and one more by Island Timberlands within the coming years. We hope to prevent these lest the integrity of this proposed park be further compromised. This park is our last chance to provide 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.

The proposed park is presently included in the Roberts Creek Official Community Plan in draft form, is supported by the Roberts Creek Community Assoc., Davis Bay, Wilson Cr., Selma Park Comm. Assoc., and the Sunshine Coast Conservation Assoc. Strong supporter MLA Nicholas Simons and an Elphinstone Logging Focus representative will be meeting with the BC environment minister Terry Lake sometime within a month to discuss this proposal. In the meantime, ELF is hoping to continue to educate our communities on this issue, and increase support from local and regional stakeholders. The more support we can demonstrate exists for this proposal, the stronger our argument becomes. **We are hoping you can supply us with a letter of support endorsing the proposed 1500 ha Mt Elphinstone Park addressed to the Hon. Terry Lake, BC Minister of Environment, that can be hand delivered by Mr. Simons and ELF at the upcoming meeting.** Time is growing short if we are to lobby government before more logging occurs within the park boundaries so please respond quickly if you are able. Your letter of endorsement would also be made available by ELF to the DoS, SCRD, Premier Christie Clark, BC Timber Sales, and the Ministry of Forests, and other vested and interested parties. Thanks for your consideration of this initiative.

Please email endorsements or questions to:
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