

*National Park Reserve  
Feasibility Study  
South Okanagan – Lower Similkameen*

PARKS CANADA  
**UPDATE**  
NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2005/06  
*Community Voices*  
More inside...



The National Park Reserve Feasibility Study is now proceeding towards building a park concept, and Parks Canada is seeking to better understand the views of local residents, and to share these views with others who may be wondering what a park could mean. The purpose of this newsletter is to share some of the diverse community viewpoints, and to encourage readers to remain involved with the study.

Throughout the summer and fall, Parks Canada staff attended local community events to talk with people about the study and to learn more about their values and visions. To better understand what residents viewed as the potential benefits or impacts, Parks Canada invited community members to write in to share their thoughts.

Views were diverse – some felt that a national park reserve would benefit the valley; others felt that it would have negative impact. Community viewpoints will contribute to information currently being collected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the study area.

*This newsletter also highlights what research Parks Canada is conducting to advance the feasibility study process.*

**Find Out More:**  
**Info Sheets now available in your area**  
A series of 'Info Sheets' have been developed to provide more details on topics of interest to stakeholders and communities. These sheets are available at central locations in your community, including: public libraries in Penticton, Keremeos, Osoyoos, Oliver and Okanagan Falls, Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen office (Penticton), and Desert Centre (Osoyoos). Info sheets are also available on our website at [www.pc.gc.ca/sols](http://www.pc.gc.ca/sols) (under "Learn More").

Info Sheets currently available include: Draft Planning Targets, Joining a Working Landscape, User Fees, Feasibility Study, Reporting Back, Explaining National Parks and Managing Fires and Fire Risk.

*(Également disponible en français)*

## PROTECTION OF THE LANDSCAPE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

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*Due to the rapidly expanding population in the South Okanagan-Similkameen valleys, we believe a National Park Reserve is our only chance to preserve a sufficient area that will maintain and manage the natural ecosystems we all appreciate and enjoy.*

*Having taken part in the LRMP, which set up the present provincial reserves, we note that even now there is less than 8% of the Okanagan Valley set aside....*

Harry Neilsen,  
LRMP Monitoring Committee &  
Oliver/Osoyoos Naturalists

*...The national park reserve is our last, best chance to preserve wild lands large enough to sustain the valley's ecological health and thus our economic prosperity...*

*A national park will not solve everything, but it's the best means we have to provide for our future prosperity and that of the valley's unique wildlife. Let's leave an environmental and economic legacy of which we, and our descendants, can be proud.*

Eva Durance,  
Parks and Protected Areas  
Coordinator, Federation of BC  
Naturalists

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### Parks Canada's Response

The importance of balancing growth and development with conservation and protection of quality of life is a theme that continues to be expressed by local people. People live in the valley for many reasons; the primary one we heard is that residents enjoy the lifestyle and the natural environment. Local people are also well aware of the challenges in maintaining the area's natural and cultural uniqueness, as more and more people move into this beautiful part of Canada.

If people from other parts of Canada were to be asked about what a national park reserve in the South Okanagan Lower Similkameen would mean to them, they might reply that Canada was one step closer to representing the 'face of Canada' in its cherished national park system by protecting a part of the Interior Dry Plateau. They might appreciate the South Okanagan Lower Similkameen for its unique and diverse nature, and strategic location for ecosystem values and visitor opportunities, in a region where local residents value and steward their natural surroundings.

Parks Canada's goal is to have at least one national park in each of the 39 distinctive areas or 'natural regions' found across Canada. So far, 27 regions are represented in a system of 42 parks but the area including the South Okanagan and Lower Similkameen – the Interior Dry Plateau – is not yet represented.

In most cases, it's easy to recognize a 'natural region' of Canada. The Pacific Coast is rugged with large trees and abundant rainfall. The expanses of the Hudson's Bay lowlands are home to the polar bear and the perpetual deep-freeze of permafrost. Prairie dogs, pronghorns and treeless grasslands define wilderness prairie in Southern Saskatchewan. Similarly, BC's Interior Dry Plateau has a character of its own – a vast plateau between the mountains with deeply dissected valleys boasting some of the driest and sunniest weather in the country.

How well does this area represent the landscapes, vegetation and wildlife of the Interior Dry Plateau? Could its long-term ecological integrity be assured? These are questions that Parks Canada is working on answering, using the best available scientific information.

Local professionals have been asked to provide advice and expertise to Parks Canada in the review of draft planning targets\*. These targets will be used as tools to assist in the analysis of boundary options for a park concept.

\* Please refer to the info sheet called Draft Planning Targets.



photo: Laure Neish



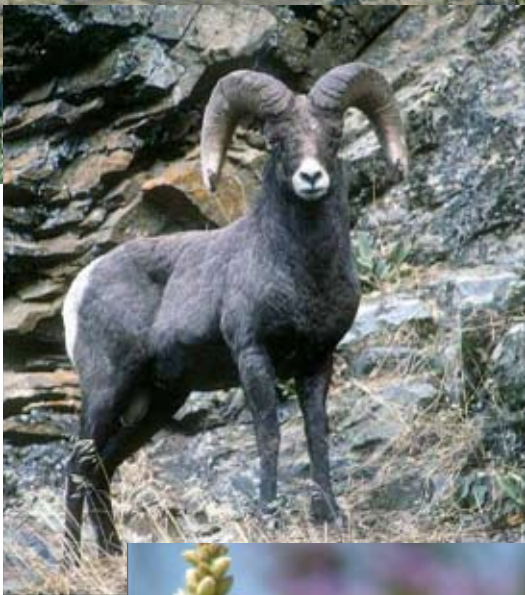
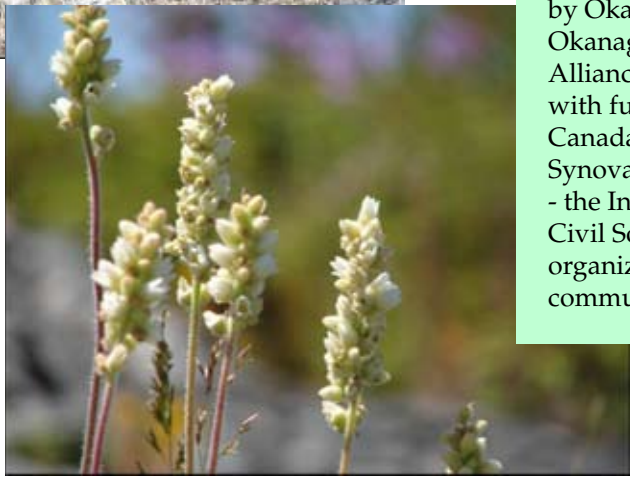


photo: Dick Cannings



**Nature first, say residents of the South Okanagan and Similkameen**

A recent community research project revealed that 93% of surveyed residents believe it is important to protect the natural ecosystems and wildlife of the South Okanagan and Similkameen, suggesting residents of the area support one of the primary objectives of a national park reserve.

Though this survey was conducted independent of the ongoing feasibility study, the results strongly suggest that a national park reserve could complement existing environmental values of area residents.

The survey was commissioned by Okanagan University College, Okanagan-Similkameen Conservation Alliance and the En’Owkin Centre with funding from Environment Canada, and was conducted by Synovate Research and IMPACS - the Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society, a Canadian non-profit organization focused on media and communications.

## THE FEASIBILITY STUDY PROCESS

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*...this process will allow everyone to voice their concerns positively or negatively. The protection of this small ecosystem and its future development and conservation practices must be instituted as soon as possible....*

Walter Despot,  
Mayor, Village of Keremeos

*Mayor and Council of the Town of Oliver support the Parks Canada feasibility study process.*

*We believe Parks Canada is conducting a slow, thorough and sensitive study. Participation by all stakeholders has been enthusiastic whether for or against a national park reserve in the South Okanagan Lower Similkameen...*

*It is important to support the process in order to make informed comments on the impacts of a National Park in our area...*

Mayor Linda Larson,  
Town of Oliver

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### Parks Canada's Response

Some people have said that the feasibility study process\* is taking too long and that they are frustrated that Parks Canada hasn't shown 'some lines on a map' which would outline a more definite area for a potential national park reserve. Other people have said that they don't trust the feasibility study process and the decision to have a national park reserve has been made already.

The final decision to proceed or not proceed with park establishment in the valley has not been made! This decision will be made following the feasibility study process.

Even though the feasibility study time frame (at least 4 years) seems long to some people, it gives Parks Canada staff the opportunity to talk with residents, stakeholders, and Aboriginal people, and to do a thorough study within the area of interest. It is expected that the study will be completed by the fall of 2007, however, Parks Canada will take the time required to ensure sufficient consultation and technical analysis has been completed. At the end of the study, a report will be completed that summarizes the research and analysis as well as the consultations. Both governments then make a decision as to whether a national park reserve is feasible.

This area has a rich legacy of resource information, thanks to programs such as the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program. Other research that Parks Canada is or will be conducting includes:

- gathering social, economic & environmental baseline information
- developing planning targets for natural region representation and ecological integrity
- developing an understanding of existing land uses, and potential implications of a national park reserve
- developing an understanding of potential opportunities for visitors and partnerships

This information will all contribute to building what Parks Canada calls a 'park concept'.

This concept will be preliminary and although it doesn't include a definitive park boundary, it will show areas that have the best potential to represent the Interior Dry Plateau while minimizing economic and social implications to existing land uses. Identification of these high priority areas will help to focus our research and consultations.

First Nations, stakeholders and community members will be asked to contribute towards building a vision, and provide their recommendations on what else should be included in the development of the park concept.

\* Please refer to the info sheet called Feasibility Study.

## ABORIGINAL PEOPLES – SHARING CULTURES

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*Although the Lower Similkameen Indian Band is undecided in its position, I feel that there may be a number of positive benefits... The establishment of a national park reserve in the South Okanagan Lower Similkameen has tremendous potential to bring native and non-native communities together to share common principles in environmental management and for aboriginal people to share invaluable aspects of our culture and history.*

Lauren Terbasket, Lower Similkameen Indian Band

*...The Nk'Mip Desert & Heritage Centre believes in promoting respect and understanding of the lands: as Okanagan First Nations people we celebrate thousands of years of habitation on these essential lands.*

Charlotte Sanders, Incoming Manager,  
Nk'Mip Desert and Heritage Centre

### Parks Canada's Response

Parks Canada staff are engaging Aboriginal peoples directly in the feasibility study through a separate but parallel consultation process. Staff have met with some, but not all, Aboriginal peoples whose interests may be affected by the proposed national park reserve.

Discussions with First Nations to date have resulted in Parks Canada staff getting a better understanding of common values, and issues that relate to the natural, cultural, economic, and social aspects of the study area.



## CHANGES TO HUNTING USE AND WILDLIFE IMPLICATIONS

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*Our major concern is for the wildlife and a National Park would take away our present management options leading to an uncontrolled population growth of large ungulates including mule deer, white-tailed deer, moose, elk and big horn sheep. Short term this may sound good, however, erratic population growth often leads to over grazing, winter starvation and disease, along with the additional impact of agricultural crop depredation and highway accidents. Large predators such as black and grizzly bear, coyote, and cougar would follow the fluctuations in their prey populations with the added dynamic of increased livestock and human confrontations, which may result in injury or death. The sportsmen of the province, lead by the BC Wildlife Federation, have contributed hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours and dollars to provide the resources to maintain sustainable wildlife populations in balance with their habitats. Site specific, we have supported higher levels of protection provided by groups such as Ducks Unlimited or Nature Trust and we do endorse our provincial parks and protected areas. We place very high value on our traditional use of the recreation lands within this feasibility study area. We stand strong in opposing what we consider to be a poorly conceived and politically driven national park.*

Doug Cowe, Region 8 B.C.W.F.  
& member of the Grasslands Coalition

### Parks Canada's Response

Loss of opportunities for sport hunting has been a concern raised by hunters. There is concern that wildlife populations would be negatively affected, in particular, populations would increase which may result in damage to agricultural lands, over grazing and winter starvation and disease.

It is difficult to predict what would happen to wildlife populations if a national park reserve were established. To better understand the issue, Parks Canada has commissioned a preliminary wildlife study that focused on deer populations within the southern portion of the study area.

This preliminary study examined baseline information on large animals including current local populations and hunter harvesting patterns. Once the park concept has identified an area of focus within the larger study area, a wildlife study will look at the potential for conflicts between wildlife and people, as an example, possible increased wildlife damage to agricultural operations. Parks Canada will continue to seek advice and work with wildlife experts to identify proactive approaches to solve wildlife management issues during the feasibility study process. Wildlife would also be a major focus for research and management should a national park reserve be established.

The economic and social implications of a potential no-hunting restriction will be also addressed in the future social, economic and environmental assessment.



## LOCAL BUSINESS, FARMING AND RANCHING

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*...Three generations live on our farm and in our community. A National Park Reserve is an economic opportunity, which would help our farming communities remain economically viable. Perhaps more important is the fact that a National Park Reserve would protect the inherent values our family has been fortunate enough to enjoy.*

Lee McFadyen,  
Mariposa Organic Farm,  
Cawston, BC

*...A national park reserve would seriously impact our ability to continue to conduct our mountain flying training operations in our traditional training areas...*

Mr. Jan Rustad,  
CFI/Manager Business, Canadian  
Helicopters

*... if a national park reserve would still allow us to use these hiking trails, and would draw more tourists to the area, it will be better for our business. But if it restricts us from using the land as we do now, then it will not be good for us.*

Kenn Oldfield,  
General Manager/Co-owner,  
Tinhorn Creek Vineyards, Ltd.

*...Because of higher land values in the South Okanagan and Lower Similkameen, a national park would likely be fragmented. A number of ranches and their range tenures would be split and a considerable amount of fence on the interface would have to be built and maintained... Extinguishing ranches to create a National Park will destabilize the remaining ranches.*

Mark Quaedvlieg,  
Rancher, Keremeos

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### Parks Canada's Response

Parks Canada has heard from many business owners, ranchers and farmers that a national park reserve could either enhance or hinder their business. Also, individuals who have provincial government land use tenures have concerns that their tenures would be cancelled.

As part of the feasibility study process, Parks Canada is conducting a study that assesses the current social, economic and environmental situation, recent trends and future predictions for the study area and its surrounding region. This information will contribute to gaining a better understanding of what a national park reserve might mean to valley residents.

Social, economic and environmental information has been gathered to establish a baseline of information (including demographics, labour force, population growth projections, commercial and non-commercial uses of Crown land). In mid-September, community and stakeholder representatives were invited to provide input to this baseline information, to help identify any data gaps and inaccuracies. They were also asked to provide recommendations on how a social, economic and environmental assessment of a future park proposal could be conducted, and to offer their expertise in shaping the next steps of the study.

The park concept will provide an initial assessment of what activities are compatible or not compatible within a national park reserve, and an initial assessment of impacts and opportunities. Over the next two years, the park concept will become more refined through additional research and consultations. At that stage, an objective, comprehensive assessment will be undertaken to fully understand the implications, positive and negative.

### **Parks and Tourism: Meeting the expectations of tomorrow's visitors**

Millions of tourists visit the Parks Canada network of heritage places every year. Many of these visitors are attracted to Canada's national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas through the efforts of private sector tourism companies and through the promotion of tourism by local, provincial and federal government bodies, such as the Canadian Tourism Commission.

Tourism studies suggest today's tourist is seeking authentic vacation and recreation opportunities that combine learning - and experience-based activities with assurances that their tourism activities are not compromising the natural qualities of the areas they visit.



photo: Doug Harcey



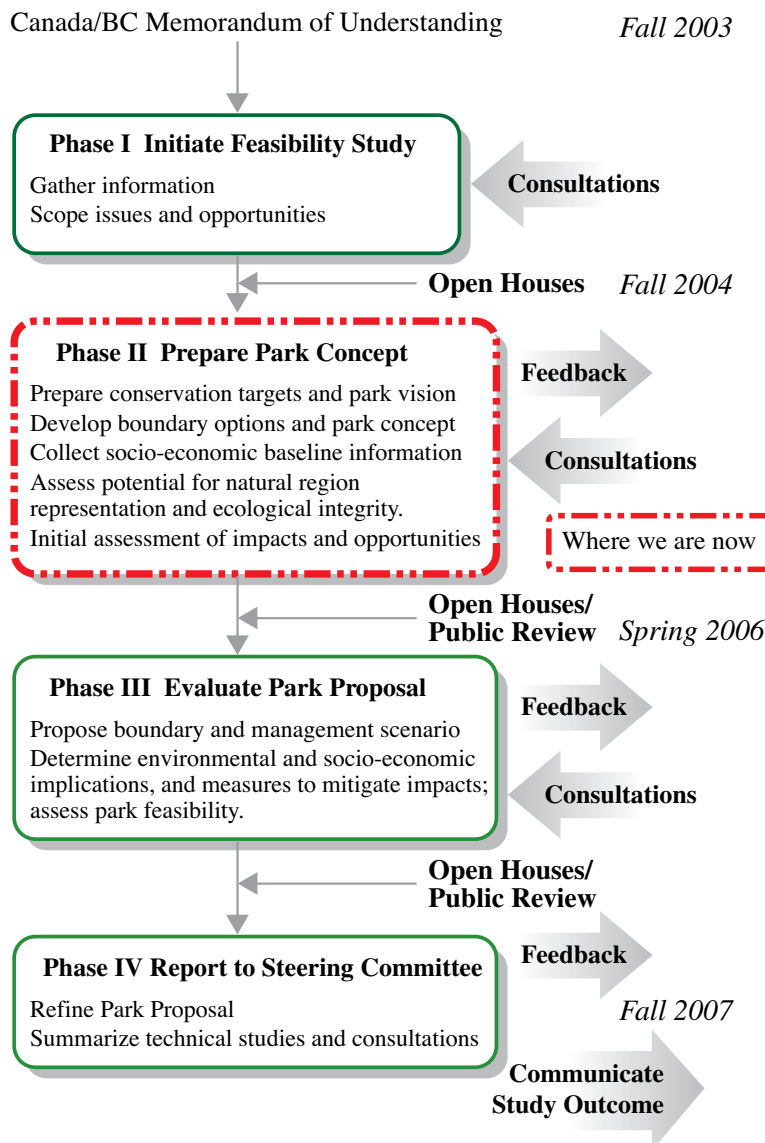
# STUDY PROCESS

A feasibility study is a series of steps leading to a decision by the Province of BC and Parks Canada regarding the feasibility of a national park reserve proposal.

If the park proposal is determined to be feasible, governments would proceed to negotiate a park agreement (setting out terms and conditions of park establishment and operations). Finally, the park would be established in legislation through amendment to the *National Parks Act*.

The time frame from the stage of a feasibility study to formal park establishment can be many years, and interim measures would be required to facilitate effective protection and management. Interim management would also consider opportunities to allow for a gradual transition of current uses to uses that are appropriate in a national park.

## Study Process



The feasibility study area includes about 2400 square kilometres in the south Okanagan and lower Similkameen areas.

This is the area, described by the Canada/BC Memorandum of Understanding, within which technical studies are being conducted to identify values for a potential park proposal. The Park Concept will help to narrow the focus to more specific areas within this larger area of interest.

## In summary...

These, and all comments are appreciated and valued, whether people support the concept of a national park reserve or not. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the newsletter. Comments will be used to help direct the research being conducted in the feasibility study. We continue to welcome your input and look forward to hearing from you throughout the feasibility study!

## Meet the Local Project Team



### Tom Hurd

Tom recently joined the team as Project Manager after transferring from the resource conservation program in Banff National Park. Tom has worked in many national parks over the last 26 years. His job has taken him from newly established remote parks in the north to the oldest and the busiest of parks in the "south". He looks forward to meeting with the communities of the South Okanagan and Lower Similkameen to work toward completing the feasibility study.

### Jana Lemes

Jana has lived in the Okanagan valley since 1991. Jana provides administrative support to the project team and manages the office. In her spare time, Jana enjoys mountain biking, hiking and kayaking. Winter activities include cross country skiing, and teaching the Grade 5 cross country ski program. Jana's love of the outdoors enhances her desire for a clean and healthy environment for current and future generations.

### Debbie Clarke

Debbie has been employed by Parks Canada on the feasibility study for the past year. For the past 25 years, she has worked in the field of recreation and conservation planning for provincial and regional governments and community organizations. A 20 year Okanagan resident, Debbie looks forward to working with communities to develop a "Made in the Okanagan" proposal.

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## Next Steps

As part of the next steps of the feasibility study process, Parks Canada has begun work to narrow the focus within the study area, and to conduct preliminary assessments. A key component of building the 'draft park concept' will be consultations with First Nations, stakeholders, and local communities. (see Feasibility Study Process for more details). Early in 2006 staff will be soliciting input from community members to help develop the concept. If you or your group would like to be involved, please contact us.

