CPAWS-BC Consultation Feedback: Joffre Lakes Visitor Use Management Strategy

1. What suggestions do you have to improve the draft’s description of the natural, cultural and recreational values of Joffre Lakes Park?

These sections are all described individually with no description of the relationship between these values, and the interaction between them. This highlights the need for a modernized process of conducting and communicating management plans within BC Parks, as part of an ongoing process to modernize land use planning and decision making within the province.

The introduction acknowledges the ongoing importance of this area for Lílíwat Nation and N’Quatqua. We welcome this vast improvement from the 1989 management plan which did not make any mention of First Nations values, culture or history.

The recreational values listed give little to no description of the current levels of activities, other than hiking being the most popular. Joffre Lakes has become a popular winter snowshoeing destination, however access in recent years has limited the amount of people who can safely access the trailhead without illegal, dangerous parking.

2. What suggestions do you have for improving the clarity of management information in the draft strategy?

We are happy to see the mention of impacts to wildlife, riparian habitats, visitor safety and staff stress from the increase in visitation.

The lack of vision around carpooling or shuttle bus incentives that are brought up (for post-COVID visitor management) leaves climate-friendly transportation opportunities behind, which is a priority for many people in BC including the BC government.

3. Do you have any comments on the proposed reservation system limited the number of users per day between May and September?

We are pleased to see that this will be monitored and adapted based on trail counters and data. We would like to see increased transparency around the data that informed the 1,500 person per day limit. Additionally, we’d like to see more clarity around the environmental and visitor experience indicators that will be used to adjust the daily limit.
4. Do you have any other ideas or suggestions for improving park management at Joffre Lakes Park that were not included in the draft Visitor Use Management Strategy?

1.3: Incorrect spelling of N'Quatqua.

4.2.7: Create a park emergency response plan (which includes evacuation and closure procedures) in the event of natural disaster, wildfire, or other emergencies.

It is concerning to us that this does not yet exist, given the avalanche risk stated in the plan. Additionally, we’d like to see safety and response plans created beyond natural disasters to address the many workplace and visitor safety concerns raised by park rangers over recent years.

5.1.1: Continue to plow snow to maintain some winter season parking

This is terrific to hear, both from decreasing dangerous parking on the highway and to improve people’s health by encouraging winter recreation, however we are worried about the inclusion of “some” in winter season parking. We’d like more clarity on how whether this will refer to the larger parking lot that is available in the summer, or the small, auxiliary parking lot which was available and inadequate for Winter 2019.

5.2.1: Consider development and/or redesign of facilities and trails to support sustainable recreation, mitigate impacts of visitor use and/or disperse visitor use.

BC Parks has been working on the development of a visitor management strategy for two years. The 1989 park management plan outlines this park as contributing to BC Parks’ recreation goals by providing opportunities for the South Coast region. The park’s infrastructure has not kept pace with visitor demand, and as such needs to be updated to enable sustainable recreation. We are hoping to see a firm commitment made on this.

6.1.1: Use the BC Parks website to inform visitors about the less busy times to visit (e.g. mid-week).

The BC Parks website alone will not be able to accomplish this goals, as well as many other education goals outlined in this strategy. To achieve this worthy goal, BC Parks should implement additional strategies which include community groups and other outdoor recreation influencers helping to spread the message, as well as creative communications strategies such as contests.

6.2.2: Explore allotment of a portion of any approved day-use permits for commercial use.
BC Parks has been aiming to improve their inclusion of diverse visitors with different backgrounds and abilities. This strategy should be able to clearly define the direction of who’s access to this park will be prioritized. This is not to say commercial use should not be allowed, however organized mountaineering and alpine clubs that focus on mentorship as well as organizations that educate new park users should also be considered for day-use permits.

**7.3.1: Direct the public to the park webpage on the BC Parks’ website for timely updates and key information**

Increasing traffic to the BC Parks website must be combined with regular, timely updates to the websites. In recent seasons, the BC Parks website has included outdated and misleading information. In addition, communication efforts must be made to correct incorrect information on popular blogs and adventure websites which describe the Joffre Lakes hiking/snowshoe trail.

**8.1.1: Continue to monitor visitation through trail counters and campsite records, and commercial use reporting.**

This needs to include adaptive management actions which are informed from the monitoring efforts. The monitoring, evaluation and adjustment section outlines that a plan will be developed, reports released and changes made however there are no timelines outside of this being “ongoing.” BC Parks should set public timelines to be accountable to the public and community of park users.

**9.1.1: Ensure adequate funding to support the implementation of this Visitor Use Management Strategy – Allocate funding to support costs associated with enhanced visitor management, park maintenance, park facilities, and associated staffing at Joffre Lakes Park.**

Due to the long-term low budgets of the BC Parks system, we are happy to see that additional funding for park management will be sought. We hope this is part of a long-term, system-wide strategy to improve funding to support staffing, park and visitor management, and park facilities.