



British Columbia is internationally renowned for its amazing wilderness and diverse wildlife. From grizzly bears to killer whales, from temperate rainforests to pocket deserts, British Columbia has the most biodiversity of any province in Canada.

Today, B.C. has over 800 parks and protected areas ranging from tiny Memory Island Park to sprawling Tweedsmuir Park, B.C.'s largest protected area at 981,000 hectares.

Despite this achievement, the B.C. Liberal government has actively undermined our parks legacy through a series of initiatives that will allow an unprecedented level of industrial and corporate development in B.C. parks — threatening the very nature of our B.C. parks system for future generations.

The Cuts

In 2001, the provincial government cut the B.C. Parks budget and staff by almost 30%. This came on top of earlier cuts from previous administrations. By the time the province had finished with the cuts to parks in 2004 there was just one park ranger for every eight provincial parks. Government funded interpretive programs and other popular initiatives were disbanded.

“The B.C. Liberal government cut 15 per cent of our conservation officers and at least 21 parks assistants, and closed eight regional offices between 2001 and 2004,” said BCGEU President George Heyman. “The recent capital funding increase from Victoria doesn’t come close to addressing the operational shortfall for B.C. Parks or make up for past cuts.”

Although the provincial government restored funding for up to 25 seasonal park rangers in 2005, the number of park rangers still remains below 2001 levels. B.C.'s parks and protected areas receive just over \$2 per hectare in public funding, compared to \$14.64 per hectare in Canadian national parks..

BC Parks FOR SALE

With each passing year, B.C.'s park system faces an increasing threat. Funding cuts, logging, private development, parking meters, and massive layoffs of park rangers and field staff are eroding our parks. This summer the B.C. Liberal government announced it would allow developers to build 100-room resort hotels inside B.C. parks boundaries. Where will it end?

The Gambit

In 2003, the B.C. Liberal government introduced parking meters for the first time in provincial parks. Originally, 27 popular parks in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island had meters installed. In 2004 the government quietly expanded meters to another 14 parks in the Okanagan, bringing the total to 41 parks.

The meters proved to be deeply unpopular with the public. Within the first year of operation there were over 1,000,000 fewer visits to 14 parks with meters in the Lower Mainland alone. In addition, government documents show the meters missed revenue targets by 80 per cent.

On August 31, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee released the results of a confidential report commissioned by the B.C. government to review meters in parks. The report shows that:

- In 2003, the first year of operation, the parking meters raised just \$51,000, despite government claims to the contrary.
- Parking meters were directly responsible for over 700,000 annual lost visits to parks – 75 per cent of these due to “the imposition of day use parking fees.”
- The purchase rate of parking tickets is just 28 per cent, reflecting low compliance and poor maintenance of ticket dispensers.
- Parking commissions paid to private park operators increased from 15 to 50 per cent of gross revenues – which “result(s) in little or no revenue for the Ministry.”

The Sellout

In the fall of 2003, the B.C. Liberal government introduced the *Parks and Protected Areas Statutes Amendment Act*, which allowed development in B.C. parks to facilitate industrial uses like access roads for oil and gas development, and paved the way for commercial developments inside parks boundaries.

In early 2004, leaked government documents revealed plans for the development of commercial for-profit resorts within the boundaries of 12 provincial parks. After a series of embarrassing media stories, the government was forced to temporarily postpone a public announcement of their new park strategy.

Then, on July 27, 2006, Environment Minister Barry Penner announced the new *Fixed Roof Accommodation Policy*, which will allow up to 100-room luxury hotels to be built in 12 provincial parks in this phase.

The B.C. Parks website contains a mission statement, which states: “As a public trust, B.C. Parks’ mission is to protect representative and special natural places within the province’s Protected Areas System for world-class conservation, outdoor recreation, education and scientific study.”

British Columbians may well question how the development of luxury hotels in parks conforms to any of these stated goals. For more information on the new B.C. government policy, check out the B.C. Parks website: http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/fixe_d_roof/index.html.



On Aug. 19, BCGEU Local 2002 members joined other activists at Goldstream Park on Vancouver Island for the **BC Parks Day of Action**, to voice concerns over increasing industrial and business development plans for B.C.'s parks. BCGEU members across the province participated in events at several provincial parks on this August weekend, to protest the decision to allow hotel resorts in B.C. parks.