
NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2004SRM0025-000578
July 17, 2004

Office of the Premier
Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management

PREMIER ANNOUNCES GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE TO CREATE SPIRIT BEAR CONSERVANCY

VANCOUVER – Premier Gordon Campbell today launched a government initiative on Canada’s Parks Day to create a new sanctuary for the province’s world-famous spirit bear, also known as the Kermode bear.

George Abbott, Minister of Sustainable Resource Management, said the North Coast and Central Coast land-use planning processes have achieved a remarkable amount of agreement. The government will be able to complete consultations with First Nations affected by the recommendations that have been developed by industry, community and environmental groups.

“I want to congratulate the tables for their hard work,” said Campbell. “They took the time to learn from one another and to find solutions that make sense and are sustainable. I know everyone is looking forward to finalizing the years of effort with direct government-to-government talks that will bring certainty to the coast and will ensure First Nations and non-First Nations alike are pursuing a sustainable course of action for years to come.

“Because of the great work of those who participated, we are on the verge of being able to create a special conservancy for the spirit bear on the mid-coast. I am hopeful that through our consultations with First Nations we will find a path that will lead to the creation of a new Spirit Bear Conservancy for future generations.”

Another important recommendation of the two land-use planning tables is the adoption of ecosystem-based management – an approach to managing human activities that seeks to ensure that ecosystems and human communities are healthy and fully functioning. The Province is committed to ecosystem-based management on the North and Central Coast that will build on B.C.’s international reputation as a global leader in sustainable resource management.

The two planning tables included representatives from First Nations, government, forest companies, mining and other resource sectors, conservation groups, labour, and local government. The tables’ recommendations will be used as the basis for government-to-government discussions between the province and First Nations in the coming months. Following these discussions, final recommendations will be submitted to government for approval.

The government has introduced or extended orders-in-council that prevent commercial forestry in all of the proposed protection areas in the North and Central Coast, consistent with the recommendations from the planning tables.

“Starting from often very different positions, the sectors worked hard to find common ground,” said Abbott. “Their accomplishment reflects their commitment to the public good and to the effectiveness of the planning process in B.C. To reach agreement everyone has to compromise, and in this process everyone did.

“By taking us one step closer to certainty on the land-base, these recommendations will help ensure not only strong environmental protection, but also jobs and economic opportunities for resource sectors and coastal communities.”

When added to existing park lands, the proposed plans more than double the areas protected from commercial forestry, mining and hydro development in the two regions, while substantially increasing certainty on the land base for economic activities. Additional areas provide enhanced conservation management permitting mining and tourism as key uses, but not permitting commercial logging or major hydroelectric development. The balance of the land-base permits all resource uses.

The Central Coast planning area covers 46,000 square kilometres. There was consensus at the planning table on proposals that would set aside 21 per cent of this area for park and conservancy, including existing parks, 12 per cent for areas of enhanced conservation management that permit tourism/mining use, and the remaining two-thirds for all resource uses. The table also recommended creation of extensive grizzly bear management areas, and visual management zones where tourism, recreation and forestry are all important.

The North Coast table reached a conditional agreement for the 17,000 square-kilometre North Coast area. The conditional agreement calls for 24 per cent in protection areas, 12 per cent in enhanced conservation-tourism/mining areas and 64 per cent all uses. Only three per cent of the North Coast area is currently designated as parks and protected areas.

More than 25,000 people live in the two areas, which include the communities of Bella Coola and Prince Rupert.

Land and resource management plans apply to Crown land, which makes up 94 per cent of all land in British Columbia. The government hopes to have 85 per cent of the province covered by land use or regional plans before the end of the current fiscal year.

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

Media Mike Morton
contact: Press Secretary
 250 213-8218

Graham Currie
Public Affairs Bureau
250 387-2699

Visit the Province's website at www.gov.bc.ca for online information and services.