



INTEGRATED
LAND-USE PLANNING
AND CANADA'S NEW
NATIONAL FOREST
STRATEGY



July 2004

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editing talents were greatly appreciated.

Thank you to the **Richard Ivey Foundation** for their
generous support of this project.

Cover photo

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D: British Columbia: Muskwa-Kechika Planning Area

Overview

The Muskwa-Kechika Management Area, which extends from the Great Plains boreal forest to the Rocky mountains, is one of North America's largest wilderness areas south of the 60th parallel. It covers 6.31 million hectares, including mountains, valleys and fifty undisturbed watersheds each greater than 5,000 hectares in area. It is home to Stone's sheep, moose, caribou, deer, bison, mountain goat, grizzly bear, black bear, wolf, lynx, fox and wolverine.

The Muskwa-Kechika is an outcome of British Columbia's land-use planning initiative that began in 1990 with the Provincial Land-use Strategy. In the boreal forest portion of the province, a stakeholder-based Land and Resource Management Planning (LRMP) process, managed by government ministries, was initiated at the forest district level in 1992. Prior to this process, tenure had been awarded in the Muskwa-Kechika area to guides and outfitters, and a small number of oil and gas tenures had been awarded as well. The area was mostly unallocated, although industry was starting to express interest in the area's natural resources. In October 1997, after five years of consultation, the government of British Columbia announced its full acceptance of the Fort Nelson and Fort St. John LRMP recommendations for the designation of the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area which falls within their boundaries.

The *Muskwa-Kechika Management Area Act* received Royal Assent in June of 1998. This Act gave unprecedented authority, governance and financing to the planning team. It also established a \$2 million Trust Fund to support special projects and planning initiatives and an Advisory Board reporting to the Premier. The Act ensured that strategic local plans for wildlife, recreation, oil and gas pre-tenure, protected areas and landscape unit objectives (forestry) would be completed and co-signed prior to the granting of tenure for resource and recreation activities. Mining was exempted from the local strategic planning requirements.

In March 2001 the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area was expanded by 1.9 million hectares and the Trust Fund received an additional \$1 million annually. This was in response to the recommendations of the Mackenzie LRMP table. In April 2002, however, the *Muskwa-Kechika Management Area Act* was further amended by a new provincial government focused on cost cutting – the funding was reduced

from \$3 million (plus matching donations of up to \$400,000) per year to \$1 million (plus matching donations of up to \$1 million) per year.

The Muskwa-Kechika Management Area is comprised of 1.75 million hectares of new and existing protected areas in the Northern Rockies and 4.51 million hectares of special management areas where resource development is to be premised on environmentally-sensitive planning and management.

Assessment based on Indicators: Muskwa-Kechika planning initiative

Clear Goals and Terms of Reference	Y/N/S	Comments
Environmental, social, cultural and economic objectives are clearly stated.	Yes	The protected areas strategy was a priority. The other priority was the designation of land-uses within the five provincial categories: Enhanced Development, General Development, Special Management, Agricultural Settlement and Protected Areas. Nevertheless, Table members engaged in much discussion of whether objectives had to be achieved, rather than ways to achieve them.
The maintenance of ecosystem function, structure, composition and biodiversity is a clearly stated objective and priority of the planning process, and is premised on:	Yes	The <i>Muskwa-Kechika Management Area Act</i> preamble provides long-term goals for the management of wildlife wilderness while providing some opportunity for resource development in the special management areas. Protected areas are enshrined in legislation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> representing the full spectrum of ecosystems, across their natural range of variation, in protected areas, 	Yes	The notion of completing the protected areas system was based on representing the various natural regions. Due to competing interests and conservation biology theory that favours large protected areas over small fragmented protected areas, however, the protected areas were concentrated in the Muskwa-Kechika.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintaining viable populations of all native species in natural patterns of abundance and distribution (including commitments to wildlife corridors), and 	Yes	The Muskwa-Kechika consists of a mosaic of protected areas and special management areas to be managed on an ecosystem basis for maintaining all species.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sustaining ecological and evolutionary processes within their natural ranges of variability. 	Yes	There was a lot of focus on the intact predator-prey system in the Muskwa-Kechika and on what was required to maintain the ecosystem.
All participants have agreed to the above objective.	Yes	The objective was recognized by all parties as part of the interest-based back-grounding and discussion.
The responsible government body has set clear policy targets that include a requirement to identify and designate protected areas through the planning process	Yes	Protected area targets and support for analysis of options were essential to the consensus outcomes.

Clear Goals and Terms of Reference	Y/N/S	Comments
The terms of reference contain no restrictions on areas to be protected and no pre-authorized agreements for timber volumes, roads or other resource allocations.	No	The existing commitments in tenure and land-use were identified in the interest-based back-grounding and discussion.
There is agreement that no new major development permits (including for access roads), licenses or increases in tenure will be approved inside the planning area during the land-use planning initiative.	Somewhat	New annual work schedules for logging and oil and gas were approved. However, there was official and unofficial deferral of new initiatives in contentious and potential protected areas.
There is agreement that the planning, development and management of road access will be addressed through the planning process.	Yes	The <i>Muskwa-Kechika Management Area Act</i> requires the integration of management activities especially related to the planning, development and management of road access and the restoration of wilderness values over time.
If other regulatory reviews/processes that could impact the outcome of the planning initiative are occurring, these are coordinated with the land-use planning process.	Yes	
The roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in the planning process are clear at the outset.	Yes	The terms of reference defined the roles of the stakeholder participants and the interagency planning team. There were many instances, however, when participants had to be reminded of their role as outlined in the terms of reference.
The concerns of Aboriginal Peoples regarding land stewardship, jurisdiction and treaty and Aboriginal rights are taken into account.	No	The opportunity was provided but was not adequate to foster active participation of Aboriginal Peoples.
SCOPE		
The boundaries of the planning area are based on natural and cultural landscape features.	Yes	The planning area was based on existing forest districts, although the Fort Nelson plan was amended to keep land-use planning co-coordinated across the entire functioning northern Rockies ecosystem. Individual Resource Management Zones were based on topography and ecosystem boundaries.
The scale of the integrated-land-use planning process is large enough to encompass whole watersheds, and provide habitat for far-ranging and migratory wildlife species and predator-prey relationships.	Yes	It included 50 intact watersheds.
The process is designed to ensure that cumulative ecological impacts from industrial and recreational activities are taken into account.	Yes	To the limits of knowledge available.
The time-line for the planning process is adequate and clearly articulated.	No	The original timeline of two years was far too short, though it was clearly defined. The commitment to consensus if at all possible led, however, to an extension of the timeframe.

Scope	Y/N/S	Comments
The process is adequately resourced (funding and personnel).	Somewhat	The small regional staff of all agencies were overwhelmed by the task. The process was a clear priority, however, at the political and senior ministry levels, and specific resources and management information were allocated.
The process takes into account all activities potentially detrimental to forest ecosystems (i.e., mining, hydro, oil and gas, forestry).	Somewhat	Mining interests were invited and initially represented on the LRMP but chose to withdraw from all land-use planning.
The process is designed to result in management guidelines for both protected areas and special management areas.	Yes	

STAKEHOLDER AND ABORIGINAL PARTICIPATION

All interested parties are at the table, including relevant local, provincial, territorial and federal government authorities, Aboriginal Peoples, local communities, conservation organizations, industry, labour, hunters, trappers and outfitters.	Somewhat	Table representation included regional interests (conservation, mining, forestry, tourism, guide outfitting, trapping, local government) and national interests (namely the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society). There was a standing invitation to Aboriginal communities at each LRMP Table, but most declined participation in the process (or attended at times as observers).
The planning process is led by an independent facilitator with experience in the area and knowledge of local conditions and/or is chaired by an independent chair.	No	The chairs and co-chairs were drawn from the local government agencies due to the administrative load. When there were difficulties an independent facilitator was brought in to assist.
There are community meetings and information available inside the planning area.	Yes	At the outset, annually and upon completion.
There are other public meetings outside the planning area, in major urban centers, regarding the planning process.	Somewhat	Meetings were held initially to identify stakeholders, and after the Plan was released.
An up-to-date registry containing all minutes, presentations and technical information is available to the public.	Yes	All documents were available to the public although the volume and complexity resulted in their availability not always being timely. No registry was established, but after the fact working documents were made available in electronic archives.
Participants are adequately funded, so they can participate to their full capacity on a timely basis.	No	Participants had to be funded by their sectors.

KNOWLEDGE BASE

Adequate information is provided for the following areas:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ecoregions and degree of representation in protected areas (gap analysis) 	Yes	The government provided gap analyses.

Knowledge Base	Y/N/S	Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> natural and/or historic range of variability of key ecological processes (fire, blowdown, insect outbreaks, successional patterns, predator-prey dynamics) 	Somewhat	Information was provided to the extent possible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> comprehensive inventories and distribution maps of natural communities and easily surveyed species groups 	Somewhat	Distribution maps and natural communities information were available although sometimes inadequate. Government staff and local knowledgeable people were also available and contributed to the process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> needs, including habitat range, of individual and focal species 	Yes	Adequate for the level of planning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> areas of high conservation value (old-growth forests, intact forests, wetlands, areas of cultural significance, critical wildlife habitat, including migratory corridors) 	Somewhat	Through the Forest Inventory and other information brought to the table.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> existing forestry tenure applications 	Yes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> existing mining claims and mining activity 	Somewhat	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> locations of oil and gas deposits 	Yes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> boundaries for commercial timber 	Yes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> values for remote tourism 	Somewhat	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> existing and proposed hydro corridors 	Yes	For existing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> existing and proposed roads 	Yes	For existing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> levels of carbon stored in the forest and predicted effects on carbon storage of different management models 	No	
With permission from Aboriginal communities, the traditional knowledge of Aboriginal Peoples is incorporated into the planning process.	No	Requested but not available: a serious problem.
Aboriginal Peoples have received adequate support to develop information systems based on traditional knowledge and to map their traditional use and occupancy of the land and resources.	No	
A thorough socio-economic analysis for the planning area has been conducted.	Yes	One was conducted for each LRMP and incorporated as part of the working documents, although they came late in the process and were too general for some participants.
All relevant information is provided to participants on a timely basis.	Yes	Information was provided in stages to all participants simultaneously and was very productive to the process.
Pertinent public policies and legislation regarding land-use, land tenure, land rights and land protection are brought to the attention of participants, and access to such policies and legislation is provided.	Yes	

APPROVAL AND IMPLEMENTATION		
The plan and recommendations from the planning initiative are subject to a public review.	Somewhat	
Approval of the plan is contingent upon a collective endorsement by key parties and Aboriginal communities.	Somewhat	With the exception of some Aboriginal communities, these were consensus documents agreed to by all parties at the table. The withdrawal of the mining industry and its lack of participation was notable. The participation of Aboriginal Peoples in the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board and the incorporation of Aboriginal interests at operational-level planning indicate the ongoing effort to incorporate Aboriginal interests for both treaty and non-treaty groups.
The government is obligated to fulfill the plan, and these obligations are not weakened by discretionary wording.	Yes	The government is obligated to follow the <i>Muskwa-Kechika Management Area Act</i> . However, only some of the LRMP objectives and strategies outside the Management Area have been declared higher level plans under the Forest Practices Code. Outside the Muskwa-Kechika most protected areas have been made provincial parks and the LRMP direction has been followed. Some recent changes to the <i>Muskwa-Kechika Management Area Act</i> , such as changes to enable sub-surface oil and gas activity in provincial parks, were not vetted through the LRMP monitoring group or formally by the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board, and threaten the integrity of protected areas under the plan.
All comments, including “minority reports”, are made public	Yes	
There is a process in place to address situations where the plan contradicts existing rights, land-use, public policy.	Somewhat	The Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board deals with issues and advises the government. An LRMP monitoring and implementation group meets annually (for each LRMP) to deal with issues. The lack of legislation for the monitoring group’s role is of some concern as this function may die by attrition.
There is a transparent process for making changes to the plan.	Yes	Through the LRMP monitoring and implementation group.
An ongoing and well-supported multi-sectoral management committee is established to oversee the implementation of the plan, and to deal with amendments and to set up plan review activities.	Yes	The Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board and the LRMP monitoring and implementation group oversee implementation. Funding for the Trust Fund has been reduced, however, so the role of the Advisory Board is more limited. There is no specific funding for the LRMP monitoring and implementation group.
Adequate funding is in place for implementing the plan.	Somewhat	The Muskwa-Kechika Trust Fund was originally was set at \$2 million plus matching donations of up to \$400,000 per year. It has since been reduced to \$1million plus matching donations of up to \$1million per year.

Discussion

The Muskwa-Kechika Management Area is the outcome of a consensus-based multi-stakeholder Land and Resource Management Planning (LRMP) process. It represented a considerable improvement on earlier land-use planning initiatives in the province, and the result continues to receive strong support both locally and provincially. The success and ongoing support for this and other LRMP plans can be attributed to the transparent planning process that empowered local, provincial and national interests and was supported and facilitated, rather than controlled by, government agencies. The LRMP plans were built from the bottom up and involved a large number of local participants as well as representation from larger interests, all of which provided a strong conservation vision.

Success in meeting EBM objectives

The Muskwa-Kechika planning area includes a network of protected and special management areas. There are 1.75 million hectares of protected areas that protect core wildlife areas and wildlife movement corridors and fully represent the Northern Rocky Mountains ecosystem .

4.51 million hectares have been designated as Special Management in the *Muskwa-Kechika Management Act*. This designation reflects the agreement of the planning team that only sensitive and sustainable industrial activities, informed by conservation science and other interests in the land, are to proceed in the Special Management Areas and that industrial operations return lands to their natural state after development is completed. This agreement is legislated in the *Muskwa-Kechika Management Area Act* (Bill 37, 1998, and the 2002 Amendment Act), which details requirements for local strategic plans (i.e., oil and gas pre-tenure plan), recreation management plans, wildlife management plans and park management plans.

The Muskwa-Kechika management framework also includes a policy to reclaim roads within the special management area after use, in order to restore wilderness characteristics. Additionally, several areas have been designated wildland zones (a total of 0.92 million hectares) in which timber harvesting is not permitted.

Because the Muskwa-Kechika's development initiatives operate under an ecosystem-based management framework, it is likely that the Management Area will be able to maintain its native species over time. The wildlife management plan, which is currently being developed and is mandated by the Act, will determine how natural patterns of abundance and distribution are affected by management actions.

Those working to maintain the integrity of the Muskwa-Kechika's ecosystem must deal with the challenge of mitigating the effects of activities occurring outside of the planning area. Industrial activities, increased human access (as a result of aircraft and the Alaska Highway) and fire and wildlife management occurring outside of the planning area need to be taken into account in management strategies,

as they impact ecological functioning within the planning area, altering species' population patterns, structure and composition. For example, in accordance with wildlife management regimes over the last 60 years, animals such as moose, caribou, Stone's sheep, mountain goats, grizzly bear, wolves and elk have been variously exploited, enhanced, poisoned and protected.

To this end, the Muskwa-Kechika Wildlife Management Plan team is currently working to determine the natural range of variation for wildlife and ecosystem processes, and to develop a management plan to restore the Muskwa-Kechika ecosystem to a sustainable, functioning state within the range of historical variation. Management strategies are also being developed for appropriate industrial activity within special management areas. A major conservation area design project is close to providing functional input to assist in these efforts. This work needs to be coordinated with management efforts outside the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area.

Additionally, much effort is being directed to ensure that conservation biology principles are built into the local strategic plans. The public LRMP planning process is complemented by the ongoing Parks, Recreation, Wildlife, forestry and oil and gas local strategic area plans that each have a significant public input component. The mandate of the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board is to advise the government on the adequacy of public involvement and the substance of the plans, and to monitor outcomes.

One impact of the LRMP planning process at the broader landscape level was the fact that the Muskwa-Kechika received the lion's share of the protected areas within the greater planning area; 10 million hectares of the Fort Nelson and Fort St. John LRMP that are classified as Taiga and Boreal Plains ecosystems received less than one percent (<50,000 hectares) protection. This will likely prove inadequate for meeting ecosystem-based management objectives, such as affording habitat for wildlife (e.g., boreal caribou) as these ecosystems are subject to strong development pressures from oil and gas and forestry.

Stakeholder and Aboriginal participation

The interest-based LRMP processes and the ongoing Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board illustrate how public participation can lead to the empowerment of local community members. Local interest groups were initially charged with constructing their terms of reference. Direction and assistance to include all interests, including provincial and national interests, and respect for the legislative framework helped shape the Terms of Reference Process. The broadly supported terms of reference enabled the provincial government to approve them even though it had to relinquish some degree of control over the outcomes.

The public process was weakened by the withdrawal of Aboriginal communities and the mining industry. Aboriginal communities chose not to participate as mere stakeholders as this was inconsistent with the established legislative and admin-

istrative rights of both treaty and non-treaty groups. Consequently, the initial LRMP processes were hampered in their ability to identify and incorporate Aboriginal Peoples' interests. Since then, the negotiation of a Letter of Understanding with the Kaska Dena Council prior to the government approval of the Fort Nelson LRMP and the inclusion of both treaty and non-treaty Aboriginal communities in the Muskwa-Kechika Advisory Board have indicated progress towards rectifying this deficiency.

The mining industry was a recognized sector at all LRMP tables and participated at varying levels in each process. Late in the process, however, it withdrew from land-use planning across the province and has not been part of the consensus of any of the plans. The industry's departure has been particularly damaging for conservation objectives, as it is lobbying the current government to simplify land-use zones and exempt mining from virtually all conservation regulation. Recent trends to consider changes to park designations to allow mining and oil and gas activities in protected areas threaten many of the values safeguarded in protected areas.

Political will

Clearly the northern LRMPs and the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area illustrate that political will is crucial to the completion and success of land-use planning. The commitment of the government of the day in establishing a target for protected areas was a strong driver for this process. The level of political commitment was further demonstrated by the extension of the time frame and by the approval of consensus plans without significant political tinkering.

Another significant illustration of the government's commitment to the process was the Muskwa-Kechika's stand alone legislation and funding. There is concern, however, that funding cuts by a subsequent government signals a dwindling of this commitment. Further, ecological objectives are threatened by the approval of oil and gas tenures prior to the completion of the conservation area design, the Wildlife Management Plan and key wildlife studies, all of which are nearing completion and were intended to guide industrial development opportunities.

Success in the long-term will depend upon the government's willingness to maintain and uphold the legislation and upon the Management Board's ability to establish special management regimes for oil and gas, forestry and recreation that are in keeping with its conservation mandate.

Other insights

The northern LRMPs and the Muskwa-Kechika Management Area were the result of an opportunity to plan for the conservation and allocation of resources before the landbase was overcommitted. The willingness of the planning team members to work collaboratively was a key factor in their ability to reach consensus (every-

one gave up some future opportunity) and the government's willingness to accept the result. Like planning initiatives in the Yukon and the North West Territories, this planning process reflected a northern perspective that included some hunting and trapping in all land-use designations.

It remains to be seen whether future industrial development in the Special Management Areas will fit within the stated goal that operations return lands to their natural state after development is completed. It is to be hoped that monitoring and updating of plans, which are to be renewed every 10 years, will provide a framework for testing and improving special management techniques.