



## What's Become of Regional Land Use Plans?

The province made a huge investment in the 1990's in regional land use plans. The need for the plans was driven by the need for greater certainty for all sectors and to end long standing land use debates. The development of the plans were costly both in time and money but they did achieve the intended results at a regional scale. The intent was to follow through with sub regional landscape plans however not many of these were completed. Government has not shown much interest in land use planning in recent years despite an increasing number of land use conflicts and questions arising.

The Okanagan Shuswap Land and Regional Resource Management Plan (LRMP) was approved by the Provincial Government in 2001. Like many LRMP's, parts of the plan provide legal guidance to decision makers and other parts provide policy guidance. The Okanagan region has some of the highest numbers of species at risk within it and has experienced some of the largest changes to the natural landscape after the Lower Mainland. <https://www.for.gov.bc.ca/tasb/slrp/plan70.html>

For the most part, successive governments have held true to the direction and intent of the LRMP's around the province even though the circumstances around the landscape (such as pine beetles impact on forestry) have changed the landscape. Most plans have had the basic zoning recommendations implemented however in the Okanagan Shuswap LRMP the same cannot be said.

The move to establish the LRMPs "Goal 2" protected areas in the south Okanagan area has been delayed for the past 15 years for a number of political and practical reasons. Goal 2 protected areas are protected area proposals identified to protect special features whether they be for ecological or recreational reasons.

The proposed South Okanagan National Park is one of the reasons decision have been delayed. The provinces consideration of this proposal was set aside about 6 years ago although it was recently reviewed in the fall of 2015 by the BC Minister of Environment. The Ministry issued an intentions paper asking a series of questions around the reconfiguration of a national park/provincial park proposal. The results have yet to be announced.

Until recently, the South Okanagan Goal 2 protected areas were respected and worked around for resource management decisions however that changed recently on an area known as Oliver Mountain. In this case the proposed protected area was to conserve rare antelope brush grasslands habitat from motorized use. A proposal has been forwarded and accepted by government to create an organized ATV recreation area over top of the proposed protected area.

The Grasslands Conservation Council recently wrote a letter to the Ministers of Forest Lands and Natural Resource Operations and Environment expressing concern about this proposal and objecting to changing the direction of the Land Use Plan. The Okanagan Shuswap Regional Land Use plan recommended this area to be protected in recognition of the sensitivity and rare qualities the area. The plan was approved by regional land use planning committee made up of local interests, supported by regional governments and approved by government.

The direction for Oliver mountain was quite specific along with general direction for this habitat type. Both were to discourage and relocate mechanized recreational activities out of the zone including the Oliver Mountain area.

The decision to turn the area in to an ATV area is essentially 180 degrees from the approved direction in the land use plan and seriously compromises the values that were to be conserved. ATV use is not conducive to protecting these values as both are vulnerable to disturbance. Governments interpretation and justification for this decision is both indefensible as the language of the plan is clear and ridiculous in thinking that the values can be restored if they find too much damage is being done in the area.

It has been suggested that there will be increased monitoring and enforcement in the area which is a surprise given that staffing for enforcement and technical positions in the resource ministries has been significantly reduced over the past ten years. In addition, the regulations respecting damaging habit are very dated and have a low success rates in the courts given how vague they are and how difficult it is to prove who did the damage and when. Enforcement officers have been reluctant to take cases to court because of a low probability of successful conviction.

Time will tell what other changes the government may unilaterally make to the provinces LRMP's. There is little interest demonstrated in dealing with local or regional land us issues. The flavour of the day is more one off adhoc decisions and decision making processes.

Changes of this nature not only betray the public trust and social license the plans were crafted under but as in this case they have consequences that erode the social economic and environmental balance the plans were intended to achieve.

In the case of the Okanagan, there is precious little grassland habitat left as a result of

land conversion. If areas that have received public and local govern support wont be protected there is little hope for the balance of the grasslands in this region. The Okanagan Region has lost over 44, 000 ha of grasslands, more than any other region in the province.

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