

Tetrahedron Park and Sunshine Coast Water Supply



BC Parks is holding an Open House at the Seaside Centre in Sechelt on May 2nd from 5-7 pm to gauge public opinion about a proposal to declassify Tetrahedron Provincial Park, or parts of it, to convert the heart of the park into a water storage reservoir and double the amount of drawdown on Chapman Lake. In its consultation process, BC Parks has not included the option of retaining the park and water protections as they are, nor has it adhered to the consultation requirements contained in its policies and procedures regarding park boundary adjustments and impact assessments. It appears a decision may have already been made, perhaps by the previous BC government.

Background

During the past 30 years the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) Infrastructure Services has **routinely ignored the community's concerns about future potable water supplies** and invariably agreed to requests for water supply for new developments, even though summer watering restrictions have been the norm for decades and were becoming ever more restrictive.

In 2016, the SCRD acquired an emergency siphon system, which was deployed on Chapman Lake in 2017 when water supply reached the critical Stage 4 drought level. The SCRD had delayed restricting outdoor water use by reasonable stages during the summer and **the emergency syphon system was used for one week before the fall rains arrived**. The cessation of all outdoor watering served to remind Sunshine Coast residents and SCRD Board members of the terrible 2015 drought. This put additional pressure on the SCRD Board, which was debating whether it wanted "a park" in the mountains **or** water for their constituents', the only options it was asked to consider by SCRD staff.

The current impasse has resulted from 30 years of deferred decision making about new sources of potable water. New source development should have been initiated when it was discovered that the Gray Creek part of the supply equation, to the extent originally assumed by SCRD consultants Dayton and Knight, was only a pipe dream. For some reason, rather than proposing to explore alternative source options, SCRD staff decided Chapman Lake could and should be tapped to make up the difference.

The SCRD is now asking BC Parks to either declassify Tetrahedron Park totally or remove the Edwards and Chapman Lake systems from the heart of the park. These two options are being proposed because converting Chapman Lake into a storage reservoir and doubling the water license is not permitted under the BC Park Act. The Chapman Water Expansion Project (CWEP) has been described as a temporary measure by the SCRD. Yet, it appears **this project is more about doubling available supply to accommodate real estate speculation pressures**, than it is about ensuring long-term diversification of the water supply for the Sunshine Coast community.

Contrary to SCRD staff's assurances that the current proposal was evaluated in the 2013 Comprehensive Water Plan, it was not. The latest plan to lower the outflow intakes from the current 3 metre depth down to 8 metres and drain the lake, could have **a devastating impact on the Chapman Lake ecosystem and put our main drinking water source at risk**. This project would negate 30 years of water quality protection resulting from the Tetrahedron Park status.

The SCRD's current preferred option has never undergone any real public scrutiny except for a reverse petition to borrow \$5,000,000 required to lower the intake by another five metres. The decision to proceed with borrowing was controversial at the SCRD board. In response, the Sunshine Coast Conservation Association, which believes Sunshine Coast residents should have both a Class A provincial park and adequate water supplies, urged citizens to sign a counter-petition for the SCRD's Alternate Approval Process Authorization Bylaw No. 704, 2016. **969 people opposed the Bylaw**.

Less than 3% of the Sunshine Coast Forest District has protected area status and the community's foresight and vision for protecting community water supply has been hijacked. Residents' hard won park has been rebranded as "lake storage" by SCRD staff and their hard-line approach is uncomfortably similar to previous resource extraction in our community watersheds.

If the BC Government is willing to remove or de-classify land from a Class A Provincial Park on the Sunshine Coast, this could set a precedent for protected areas throughout BC.

The Tetrahedron Provincial Park Management Plan's Vision Statement:

"The management plan for Tetrahedron Provincial Park will ensure a high level of water quality and quantity for the residents of the Sunshine Coast, **while** preserving the integrity of the park's natural, cultural and diverse ecosystems, maintaining its educational and spiritual values, and providing limited backcountry recreational experiences."

SCRD staff failed to account for global climate change in its supply scenarios until very recently. What was assumed 30 years ago has not been part of the equation for decades, and staff did not undertake the resource planning required to provide for community resilience. The Tetrahedron Park Management Plan being used to justify declassifying the park is also out of date in this regard.

Chapman Creek alone simply cannot supply all "future" water supply needs.

Ineffective implementation of the outdoor water use stages during the Sunshine Coast's increasing drought season appear to have been used to manufacture consent for sacrificing the park. This took a drastic turn in 2015 when Stage 4 restrictions were imposed and local gardens and trees suffered.

Ironically, SCR D staff appear to have neglected to mention water constraints when responding to development applications and referrals. Instead, some staff and politicians have resorted to using fear and division tactics, characterizing park supporters as a "selfish few" keeping water from the people, rather than accepting blame for poor planning and management.

Viable options exist that would be part of a permanent fix, and would not sacrifice one of the rare provincial parks (3%) on the Sunshine Coast. Sechelt and Elphinstone representatives on the SCR D Board are pushing for a permanent fix. They believe the \$5,000,000 price tag for the so-called temporary measure can be much better spent and would not require losing our largest local park.

- Sechelt Mayor Bruce Milne, **the new SCR D Board Chair wants to use the aforementioned funds toward building a reservoir, recognizing the current problem is storage.** There is plenty of water for 10 months of the year; but the SCR D has done very little to develop storage capacity to see residents through the drought season. Unfortunately, although SCR D Directors representing over 2/3s of Chapman supply users have voted against the proposed plan, Chair Milne has been unable to convince the majority of Directors to expedite the reservoir project.
- **Water metering** is proceeding across the Regional District and in Sechelt – which is experiencing the highest level of growth. Metering will undoubtedly result in the type of water savings experienced by other metered areas as existing leaks are repaired. The Town of **Gibsons reports 50% water savings** since installing meters in 2008.
- The SCR D Board – due, in part, to pressure applied by individuals and organizations like the SCCAⁱ and FMCBCⁱⁱ – is at last exploring ground water capacity. It has begun an aquifer exploration program and will begin test drilling this summer. A report received by the SCR D in October 2017 indicates **good potential for expanded supply from aquifers.**
- The Town of Gibsons recently committed to stop buying bulk water from the SCR D, and supply all its residents from the Gibsons aquifer. This will **free up at least 6% of the current SCR D supply by 2019** and buy time while the SCR D diversifies its water source supply, continues to implement conservation measures and builds a new reservoir.
- Other source options include **pip ing water from one of the large lakes** such as Clowhom Lake on Salmon Inlet and/or **small diversions from diverse local watersheds.**

Conclusion and Call to Action

The **SCR D chose not to consult** the community about the water currently protected and supplied by the lower Sunshine Coast's largest park. **SCR D staff ignored basic principles for sustainable use planning** in the 21st Century. As a result, the **SCR D is pursuing an outdated and shortsighted course of action** that makes ongoing "protection" of the Tetrahedron's park and the ecosystems that supply 90% of our drinking water ever more important. Founders of the Tetrahedron Provincial Park and the Sunshine Coast Conservation Association have been at the forefront of local drinking water protection for over 30 years. **We are now calling on citizens of the Sunshine Coast, water protectors and Parks defenders across BC to help us protect our Park and our water supply.**

ⁱ Sunshine Coast Conservation Association

ⁱⁱ Federation of Mountain Clubs of British Columbia