

WHAT WE HEARD

Summary of public consultations on
the proposed national park reserve in the
South Okanagan-Similkameen

Submitted to: Parks Canada

May 9, 2019

“What We Heard” from public and stakeholder consultations

This is a summary of input and feedback provided by the public and stakeholder organizations during the public consultation and engagement process on the proposed national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Similkameen. Note that First Nations are leading their own on-going community engagement regarding the proposed national park reserve, which is separate from the consultation process outlined within this document.

The Parks Canada led consultation period was held from December 10, 2018 to March 15, 2019, and involved the following components:

- **In-person and conference call presentations with stakeholder and membership organizations within the vicinity of the proposed national park reserve:** reached 627 individuals through 39 in-person and/or conference call sessions.
- **“Pin the Map” exercise:** members of the public were encouraged on the “Let’s Talk South Okanagan-Similkameen” website to pin their activities on a map of the working national park reserve boundary: 146 pins were plotted, of which 116 were inside the boundary and 30 were outside of it.
- **Public consultation surveys:** 2,848 surveys in total, of which 2,488 were directly completed online at the “Let’s Talk South Okanagan-Similkameen” website and 360 were sent in via mail and email and entered into the online engagement platform, provided by a company known as “Bang the Table”.

This document summarizes “What We Heard” from the consultations and provides recommendations on the next steps for the process for the proposed national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Similkameen. The analysis of the data from the consultations and summary of results is provided by NRG Research Group, a Vancouver BC-based market research company.

About the Stakeholder Consultations

- Parks Canada consulted with stakeholder groups through 39 meetings between January 7 and March 15, 2019 (ranching meetings were held outside of the dedicated consultation period).
- 627 participants took part in the sessions. All but two meetings were held in person (two were via WebEx).
- At each meeting, Parks Canada staff presented information about the proposed national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Similkameen and opened the floor to questions or comments from the participants.
- Stakeholders included representation from the following groups and individuals:
 - ATVBC, Princeton ATV Club, Summerland ATV Club, Valley Trail Riders ATV Club, Similkameen Valley Riders
 - BC Agriculture Council (Horticultural)
 - BC Ministry Forest, Lands, Natural Resources Operations and Rural Development - Penticton

- BC Ministry Forest, Lands, Natural Resources Operations and Rural Development - Vernon
- BC Tree Fruit Growers Association
- Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations [ENGOS] (Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Wilderness Committee, Nature Canada, BC Conservation Data Centre, The Nature Trust (BC), Nature Conservancy of Canada), South Okanagan - Similkameen Conservation Program
- First Things First Okanagan, South Okanagan Naturalist Club, The Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society, The Oliver Osoyoos Naturalists Club
- Grasslands Coalition
- Grasslands Conservation Council
- Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association of Canada
- HNZ Topflight
- Keremeos Volunteer Fire Department
- Kilpoola Estates Residents (3)
- Local Ranchers
- Lower Similkameen Indian Band - Ranchers
- Mount Kobau Astronomical Society
- National Research Council - Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory (DRAO)
- Oliver and District Heritage Society
- Oliver Riding Club
- Orchard Hill Cidery
- Osoyoos Oliver Wine Association (OOWA)
- Osoyoos Tourism Association
- Osoyoos Wildlife Federation
- Penticton and Summerland Fire Departments
- Penticton Historical Society
- Regional District of Okanagan and Similkameen
- Rotary Club - Osoyoos
- South Okanagan Chamber of Commerce
- South Okanagan Similkameen Preservation Society, Grasslands Coalition & BC Wildlife Federation
- South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park Network (SOSNPN)
- Southern Interior Stockmen's Association (SISA)
- Sun Hills Riding Center
- Sunrise - Rotary Club of Penticton
- Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
- Town of Oliver
- Town of Osoyoos
- University of British Columbia Okanagan (UBCO)
- Village of Keremeos
- Willowbrook Volunteer Fire Department

“Pin the Map”

A geocoded map featured the working boundary of the proposed national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Similkameen at the following link:

<https://letstalksouthokanagansimilkameen.ca/Okanagan/maps/boundary-map-of-the-proposed-south-okanagan-similkameen-national-park-reserve>

Respondents were given a choice of 12 ‘pins’ each representing an activity they could be engaged in within the area. Activities were:

- Sightseeing/Exploring
- Fishing/Hunting/Trapping
- Camping
- Off-Road Vehicle Use
- Biking (Non-Motorized)
- Photography/Star Gazing
- Relaxation/Reflection
- Bird Watching/Wildlife Viewing
- Hiking/Running
- Horseback Riding
- Hang-gliding/Paragliding
- Forestry/Wood Collection

The respondents were asked to select pins and drag them onto the map to indicate where they undertake their favourite activities. They also had the opportunity to comment on the location of their pin. After doing this, they were then instructed to click on a link to the online consultation survey regarding the proposed map boundary.

About the Public Consultation Survey

During the consultation period, Parks Canada obtained 3,265 subscribers to its email newsletter on the proposed national park reserve in South Okanagan-Similkameen. Parks Canada sent out four emails to this distribution list with information and web links on opportunities to provide input during this process, including stakeholder meetings, viewing the Parks Canada information video and participating in the consultation survey.

For the consultation survey, 2,488 participants registered and submitted surveys using the online platform, *Bang the Table* (an on-line engagement tool). As well, potential respondents were able to request paper copies of the survey via phone or email to fill in by hand; emailed survey submissions were also accepted. The 360 mail and emailed survey submissions were entered directly into the *Bang the Table* platform. A total of 2,848 surveys were submitted.

The survey instrument was developed by Parks Canada staff, based on previous questionnaires used for national park reserve consultations. The raw survey dataset was sent to NRG Research Group for analysis.

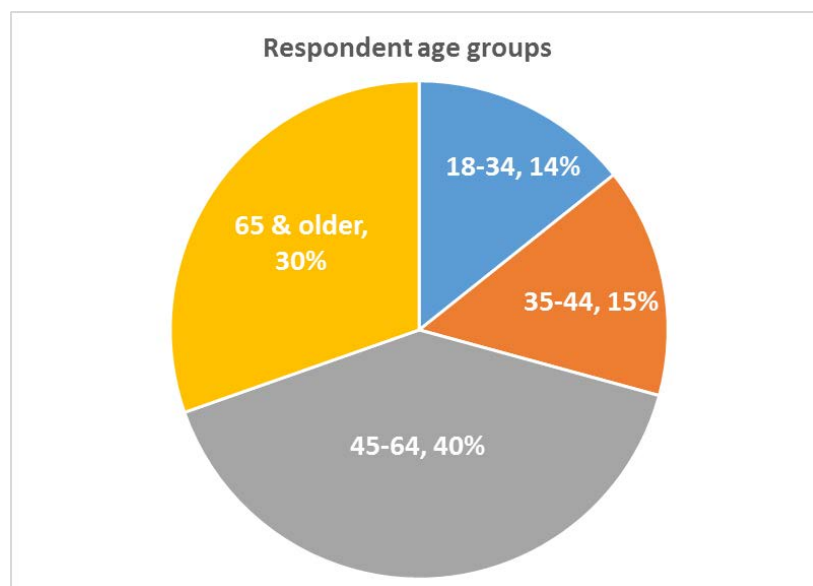
Notes for Interpretation: Unless stated otherwise, the results from the consultation survey are shown primarily as proportions of the overall total number of respondents (n=2,848). As well, we will highlight differences between residents of the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen (abbreviated as **RDOS**, which includes the communities of Summerland, Penticton, Oliver, Osoyoos, Keremeos and Princeton), residents of the Central Okanagan Regional District (abbreviated as **CORD**, including Kelowna, West Kelowna, Lake Country, Peachland) and the rest of the province of British Columbia and other areas outside of BC (abbreviated as **Other Areas**); area of residence was determined by postal codes provided by survey respondents.

As the responses to the consultation survey were voluntarily provided by respondents online via Parks Canada’s “Let’s Talk South Okanagan-Similkameen” website (plus via paper and emailed responses), it is considered a self-selection sample and not a random probability sample. Therefore, we cannot assign a margin of error to the results and any projections and interpretations to the overall population must be considered directional only and used with caution. For comparison purposes, a probability sample of a survey size of 2,848 cases would carry a margin of error of approximately +/- 1.8 percent, 19 times out of 20 for the total sample. Where more than one response is allowed for a single question (multiple response), percentages will exceed 100%. Responses for a single-response questions may also not add to 100% due to rounding.

Consultation Survey Respondent Demographics

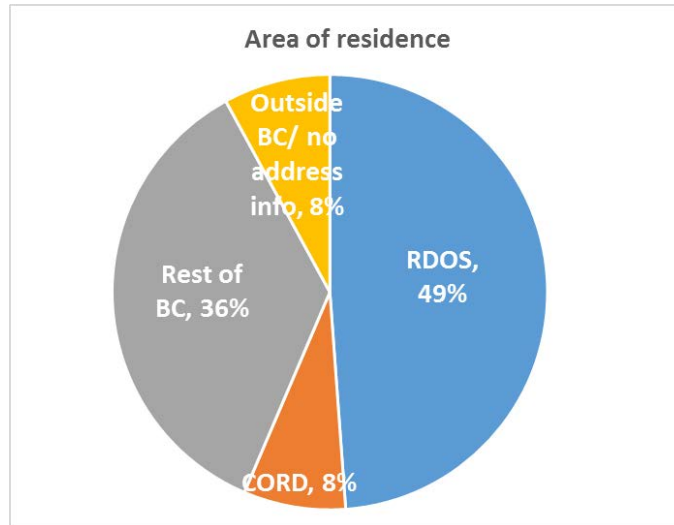
Age groups

Seven in ten (70%) are age 45 and over.



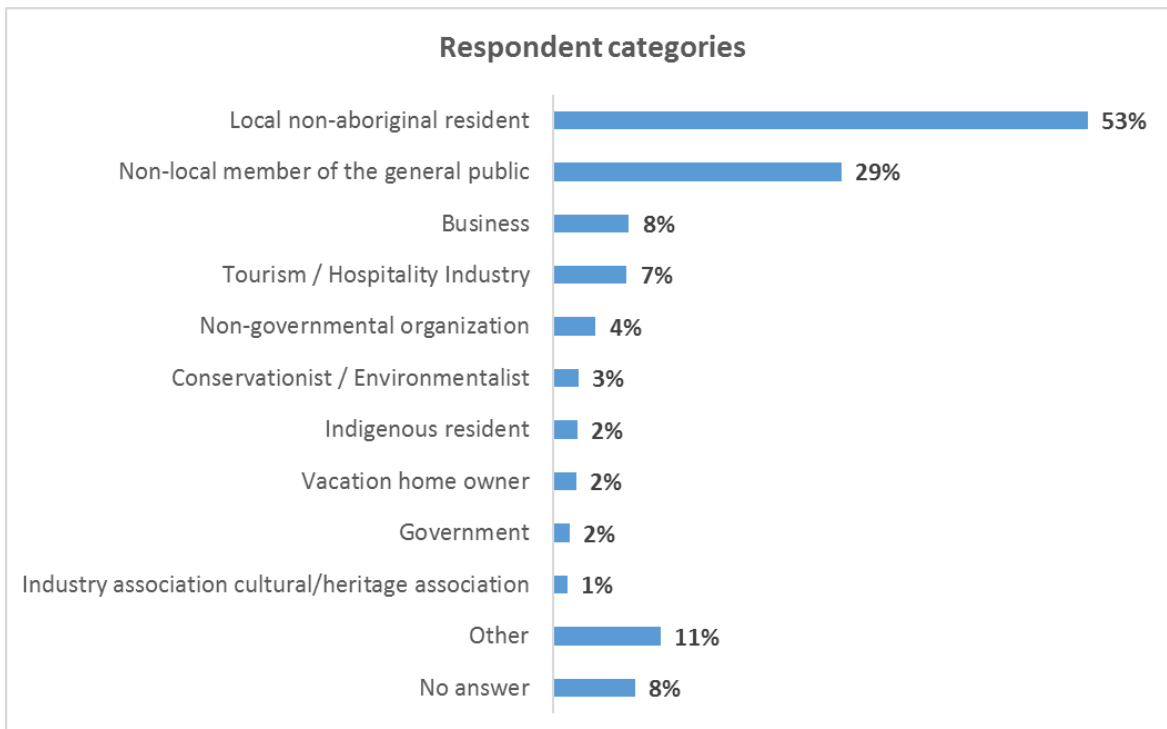
Residence

The bulk of respondents (92%) live in the province of BC, of which half (49%) reside in RDOS, 8% in CORD and over one-third (36%) in the rest of BC. The remaining 8% is spread out between Alberta (3%), Ontario (2%), the rest of Canada (2%) and the United States (1%).



Respondent Self-Categorization

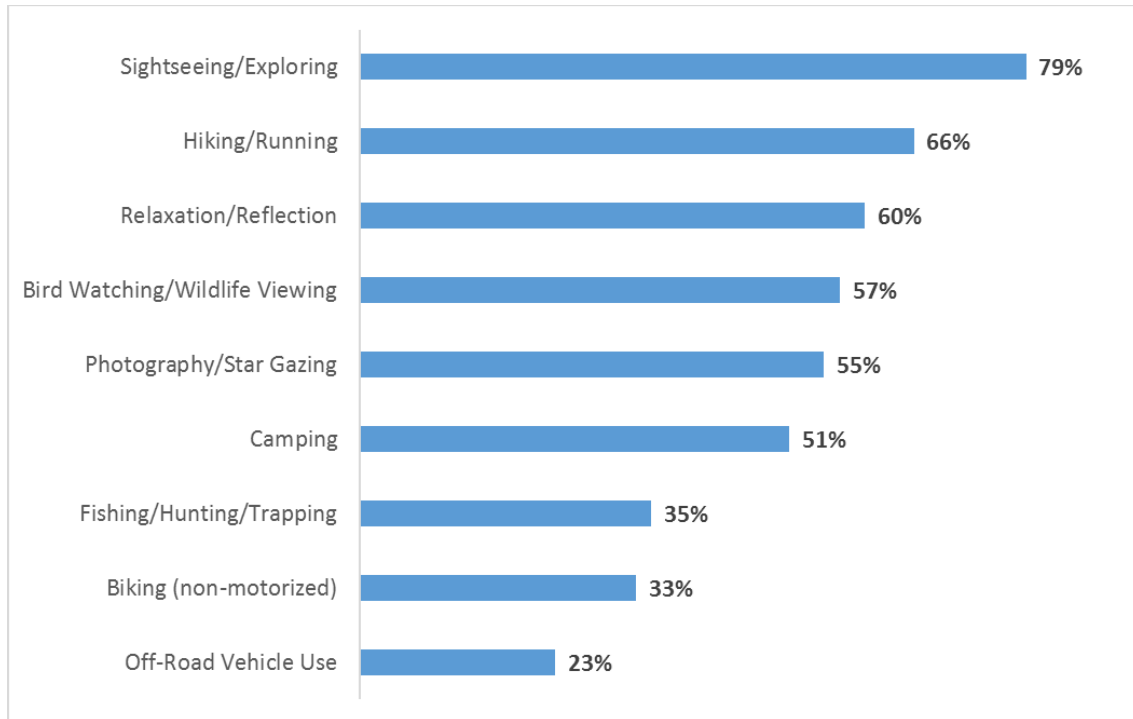
Respondents were asked to describe themselves in one or more categories from nine provided in the survey (or write in their own category). Over one-half (53%) of respondents categorize themselves as a local non-aboriginal resident, while 29% say they are a non-local member of the general public. Fifteen percent are business-oriented, identifying themselves as a business (8%) or part of the tourism/hospitality industry (7%).



Activities undertaken in the South Okanagan-Similkameen area

The South Okanagan-Similkameen area is used primarily for sightseeing, hiking and enjoying the natural assets of the region.

- The consultation survey results show that the main activities undertaken in the area are:



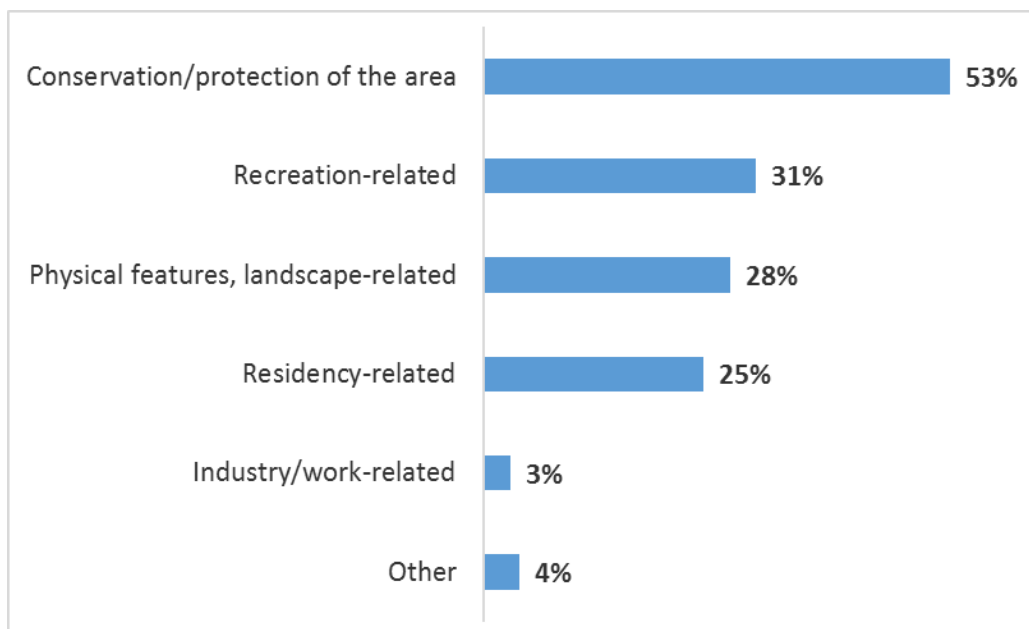
- Those who participated in the “Pin the Map” exercise also primarily selected sightseeing-related activities both within and outside of the proposed national park reserve boundary.
- Residents of the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) are more likely to engage in fishing/hunting/trapping activities and off-road vehicle use than those from other areas.

What makes the South Okanagan-Similkameen area special?

Unprompted, over half (53%) of participants in the consultation survey feel the South Okanagan-Similkameen area is special because of conservation and protection-related factors, especially non-local residents. These factors include:

- Unique/rare ecosystem not found anywhere else in Canada (24%)
- Protection required before further development removes more habitat (13%)
- Endangered species/need to protect fauna (10%)
- Other factors include important wildlife habitat, endangered grasslands/forests, biodiversity, natural/untouched/undeveloped areas.

Other categories regarding the specialness of the area include recreation-related (31%, e.g. hunting/fishing, hiking, camping), the physical features/landscape of the area (28%, e.g. “beautiful”/ “scenic,” mountains/valleys) and residency-related (25%, e.g. current residence, grew up/lived there).



Benefits and concerns: how a national park reserve might affect area use

Benefits

One-half (49%) of survey respondents (primarily non-residents) identify benefits of a national park reserve and how it might affect their use of the area--most unprompted responses again are related to conservation and protection, specifically:

- “Preserve the area/ecosystem/have less impacts” (20%)
- “Wildlife/habitat conservation” (8%)
- “I would use/enjoy it more/enhanced experience” (7%)
- “Tourism boost/helps local businesses/more jobs” (6%)
- “Allows land use for future generations” (5%)
- “Less impact from ATV/off-road vehicle use/motor vehicle restrictions” (4%)

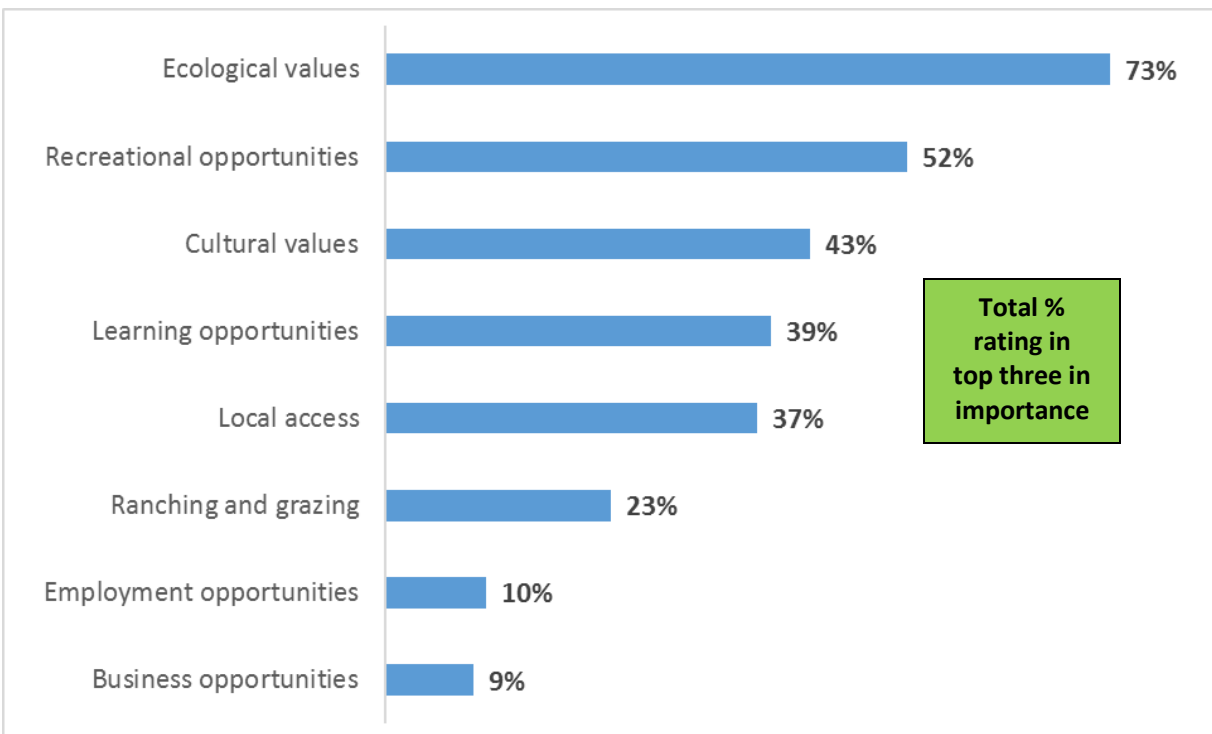
Concerns

Four in ten (41%) respondents (primarily local residents) bring up concerns of having a national park reserve and how it might affect their use of the area—unprompted, the most common ones are related to potential restrictions on activities:

- “Restricted access/limits to land use/less freedom” (14%)
- “Hunting/fishing restrictions” (8%)
- “Increased fees” (e.g. park entrance fee, day pass, etc.) (5%)
- “Negative impacts to the area/ecosystem” (5%)
- “Will cause too much tourist activity” (3%)
- “ATV/off-road vehicle user restrictions” (3%)
- “Less recreation/outdoor opportunities” (3%)

Importance of factors in establishing a national park reserve

The consultation survey provided a list of eight factors and asked respondents to put them in order of importance to consider in establishing the proposed national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Similkameen. “Ecological values” are again at the top by far, with non-residents tending more to rate this amongst their top three factors.



Respondents were also able to write in factors they felt were missing and rate them: 267 additional factors were submitted, of these, 153 wrote in “no national park,” of which 66% rated it as a top three in importance, and were provided primarily by local residents. Much fewer respondents wrote in other factors: use for all/ accessibility for all (34 write-ins), restricting public access to the area and activities (24 write-ins), ensure consultation with First Nations (23), consultation with local residents (18) and fire prevention (15).

Summary of stakeholder consultation meetings

Parks Canada held 39 stakeholder consultation meetings between January 7 and March 25, 2019, involving 627 participants. Participants included ranchers, local town councils, members of regional and provincial administrative bodies, industry and business associations, environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS), heritage societies, tourism associations and members of specialty activity clubs.

While the general sentiment about the national park reserve from the consultation survey generally centred around ecological values and conservation, most of the questions and discussions in the stakeholder meetings related to how the lands will be managed, and specifically how current and historic land uses will be impacted or altered if the proposed national park reserve is established.

Themes arising from the in-person meetings can be divided into four categories.

Governance

- **Governance/Management:** Many questions from both those opposed and in favour of the national park reserve pertained to how cooperative management within a national park reserve would work. In general, people want to know what will change, and how the national park reserve will affect existing activities within and adjacent to the boundaries.
 - There were requests to hold a referendum, however referendums are not part of the national park reserve establishment process.
- **Boundaries:** The main questions pertaining to boundaries refer to how they were established, and whether or not they can be changed in the future. For several environmental groups, the boundaries are too restrictive and should include adjacent conservation lands as a means of enhancing wildlife corridors (e.g. Vaseux Lake/White Lake area).
- **Law Enforcement:** Most of the questions pertaining to enforcement relate to visitor activities encroaching on private lands and how hunting methods carried out by First Nations will be enforced.

Private lands and tenures

- **Water rights:** Access to, and use of water is a significant concern among ranchers, agriculture growers, Indigenous peoples (ranchers) and other local residents. Specific issues include the proposed national park reserve's impact on existing water licenses and whether water infrastructure will be continued.
- **Tenures and licenses:** There was generally a good understanding that privately owned lands will remain under the title of the private owner(s). Concerns were issued around mineral tenures/interests.
- **Autonomy over private lands:** The issue of autonomy over use of private lands is a significant concern among fruit tree growers.
- **Access and Fees:** With access currently being limited in the area, there were questions pertaining to potential for new roads or trails, and how these would impact existing land uses. Ranchers in particular were concerned about how increased access would impact their cattle, and referred to cattle being placed under stress from off - road vehicles users, hikers and bikers.
- **Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR):** This was an important topic of discussion for the agriculture sector, with the main issues relating to whether or not ALRs will be lost to the federal government and if so, if they will be replaced elsewhere. ALRs are seen as an important asset to ranching.
- **Ranching and Grazing:** There are different views on ranching and grazing within the national park reserve. Some environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) see grazing as an inhibitor to

environmental sustainability, while the ranching industry states that grazing enhances the biodiversity of an ecosystem. Concerns were voiced around maintaining the ranching way of life and potential impacts to economic contributions from ranching in the region.

Visitor Activities

- **Activities:** The commentary on activities primarily related to what will change if the area is designated a national park reserve. Concerns were very specific to stakeholder groups. There are a number of current uses that are not allowed within Canada's national parks, and stakeholders want clarification on how this national park reserve might differ.
 - Restrictions on consumptive uses were raised by a number of groups. In particular, restrictions on hunting are seen as a loss of a resource to some locals; some questioned why First Nations will be able to continue hunting and gathering. They voiced the opinion that no hunting will lead to overpopulation of certain 'pest' and 'predator' species, which will impact commercial operations (mainly ranchers and growers).
 - While most of the questions and concerns relate to changes in existing uses, several groups also expressed interest in knowing what future activities would be developed, and where these would be located. Would trails be developed for hiking, horseback riding, geocaching, off-road vehicles paragliding/hang-gliding and mountain biking, and would these be in areas not currently used for these activities? Would formalized camping be developed, and if so, where, and how much? There was a request to pilot at least one Off Road Vehicle trail to retain access for those with mobility issues.
 - There was concern regarding how a potential increase in visitation to the area would impact the ecosystems and species that require protection and conservation.
- **Socio-economic benefits and impacts:** Wineries and other private property owners raised concerns about the potential for increased local taxation associated with increased property values.
 - They asked if there will be compensation for socio-economic impacts, such as loss of business or higher taxes. The contrary concern was also expressed in terms of land values declining, and the suggestion that Parks Canada should compensate land owners if this occurs.
 - Plans to increase visitation will have to be carefully addressed given the potential for additional pressure on existing municipal infrastructure, road systems, and RCMP services
 - There were also questions regarding annual budgets and operational costs associated with the establishment and on-going management of the proposed national park reserve.
- **Business Opportunities:** Participants recognize business opportunities may arise as a result of the national park reserve, especially in relation to support services for visitors. The main questions relate to who will have an opportunity to offer these services? Will First Nations alone will be given the opportunities for new business ventures, or will they have first right of refusal?

Conservation

- **Ecology, Environment and Species at Risk:** While conservation/ecological values emerged as large in importance in the public consultation survey, the views on this topic in the stakeholder meetings were highly variable. Environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) raised concerns about Parks Canada's dual mandate and some questioned how continued cattle grazing will result in any conservation gains. The ranching industry's stance is that grazing enhances biodiversity of the ecosystem and would like Parks Canada to assist with communicating this position to the general public.

- **Fire Management:** Local firefighting groups are supportive of additional firefighting resources, although had questions regarding fire assessment vs. initial response given how rapidly fire spreads in the area (Parks Canada does both at the same time) Presentations with a Parks Canada Fire Management Officer were offered to all fire departments and volunteer fire departments in the area. Three fire departments responded.
- **Cultural Heritage:** Recognition of the recent history of settlers to the area (pre and post contact cultural heritage) was raised as an important consideration by local historians, in addition to the rich Indigenous history in the area. It was suggested Parks Canada should consult with local experts to assist with telling the story of settlement history in the national park reserve.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

There is a spectrum of opinions regarding the proposed national park reserve in the South Okanagan-Similkameen.

Establishing the proposed national park reserve will require ongoing efforts to reconcile differing views on the initiative.

- The public consultation process is not intended to build consensus, but to identify challenges and opportunities associated with the proposal that require ongoing efforts to address.
- **Public consultation survey:** concern between conserving and protecting the ecosystem versus continuing specific local interests, especially activities (e.g. off-road vehicles, hunting/trapping/gathering) that would be prohibited from the area if the national park reserve is established.
- **Stakeholder meetings:** concerns about the national park reserve were expressed in a more vocal manner.










Recommendations

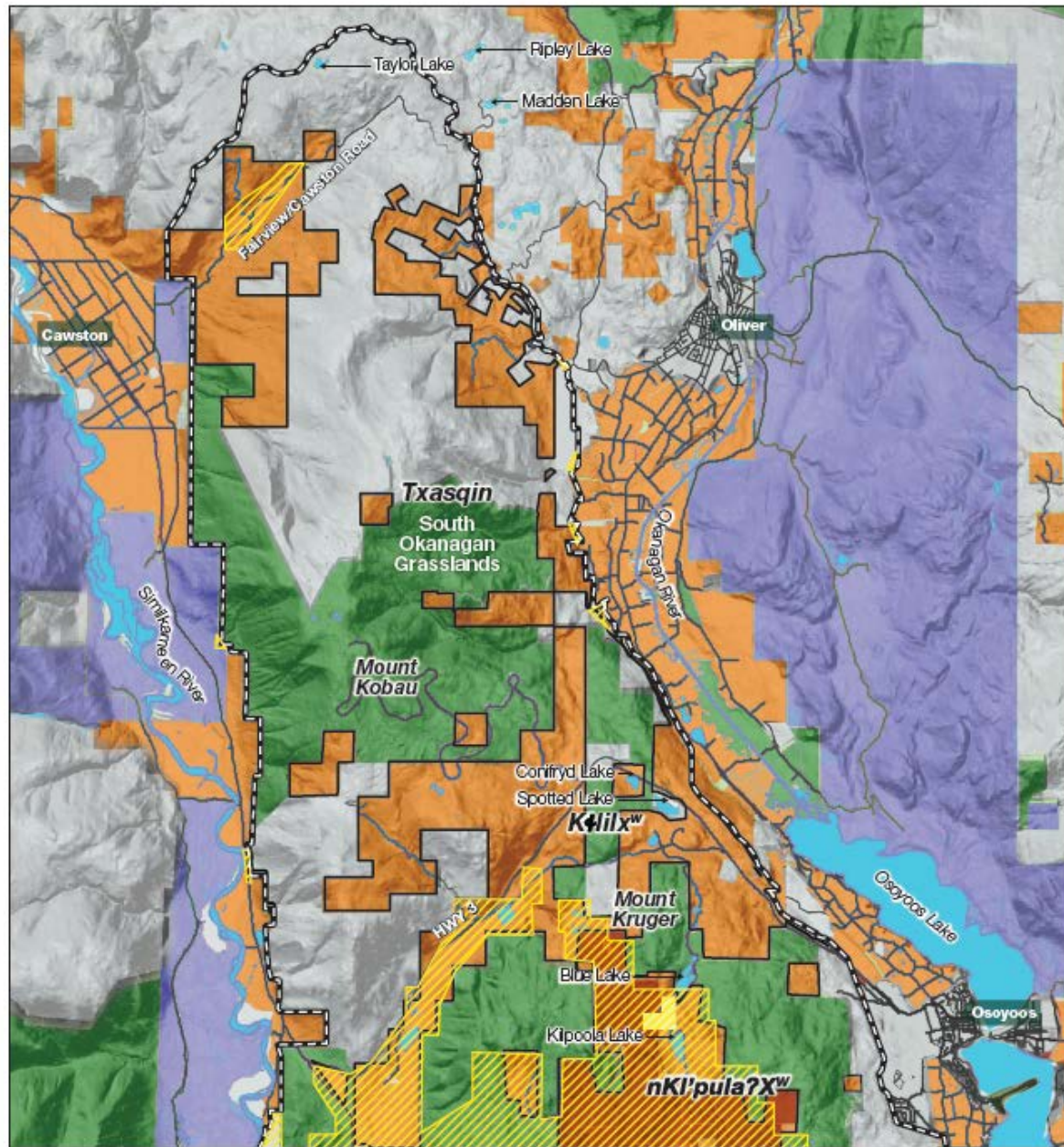
1. **Develop ways to engage the local community to provide advice on park issues as they pertain to local community matters and future next steps.**
2. **Develop and distribute regular communications materials to the public,** especially those who live in the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen (RDOS) and the Central Okanagan Regional District (CORD).
 - From the stakeholder meetings, some feel the proposed national park reserve is being forced upon them, while others see the value in establishing the national park reserve, in terms of long-term sustainability of this important ecosystem, and maintaining a stable economy going forward.
3. **Hold meetings with municipal and regional district planners on the interlinkages between the proposed national park reserve and municipal and regional management issues.**
 - **Local residents want to know how adaptable the process is and if public opinion will influence the final decision.** Establishing a national park reserve will require ongoing efforts to reconcile differing views on the initiative. If polls are conducted, ensure they are statistically valid for the area (RDOS and CORD).

- 4. Provide further communications and information to educate the community, municipalities and regional districts on First Nations rights and title.**
 - Examples may include information about allowable activities, clarifying First Nations uses and practices in a national park reserve and supporting the ecological benefits of ranching and grazing are among the items identified as needing clarification.
- 5. Consider clarifying which activities are permitted or not permitted within the national park reserve.**
- 6. Provide further clarity on maps to delineate private land outside of national park reserve jurisdiction, municipal boundary lines and make Agricultural Land Reserve areas more visible.** (see map on last page).
- 7. Provide additional information on process and timelines.**

UPDATED Working Boundary Map with Agricultural Land Reserve

South Okanagan – Similkameen Proposed National Park Reserve Working Boundary Map

-  Working Boundary
-  Crown Land
-  Private Land – Nature Conservancy of Canada
-  Indian Reserve
-  Roads
-  Private Land
-  Private Land – The Nature Trust
-  Provincial Protected Area
-  ALR/Boundary Intersection



! Privately owned lands will remain under the title of the private owner(s), and would only be considered for future inclusion on a willing-seller willing-buyer basis. No lands will be expropriated as part of a national park reserve establishment.