

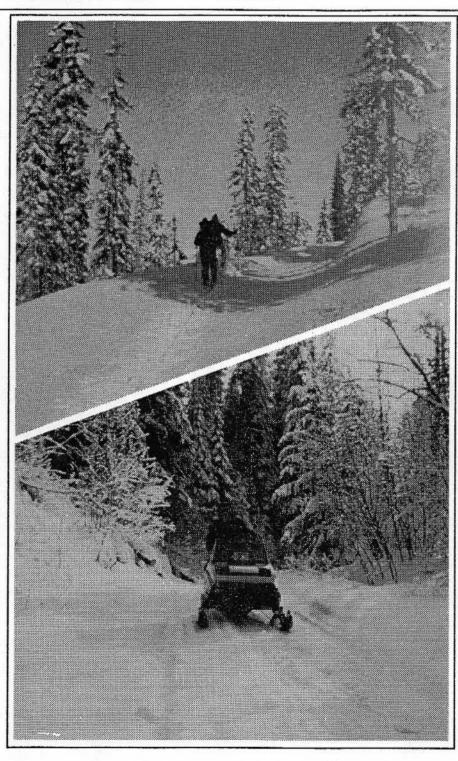
Province of British Columbia

Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing

Honourable James R. Chabot, Minister

P.F. PARKS-B.C. SILVER STAR PR. PARK ENVELOPE

Silver Star Recreation Area Master Plan



Honourable James R. Chabot Minister of Lands, Parks and Housing Parliament Buildings

Dear Mr. Minister:

It is with pleasure that the Silver Star Advisory Committee presents you with the proposed Recreation Area Master Plan.

The report has been prepared for the Committee by staff in the Thompson-Okanagan Regional Office of the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division of your Ministry. It complements our previous report on the future of Downhill Skiing. Your Committee unanimously endorses the recommendations in this document.

A. B. Campbell

W. C. Shields

a. Casperson

E. D. G. Smit

G. Podmore

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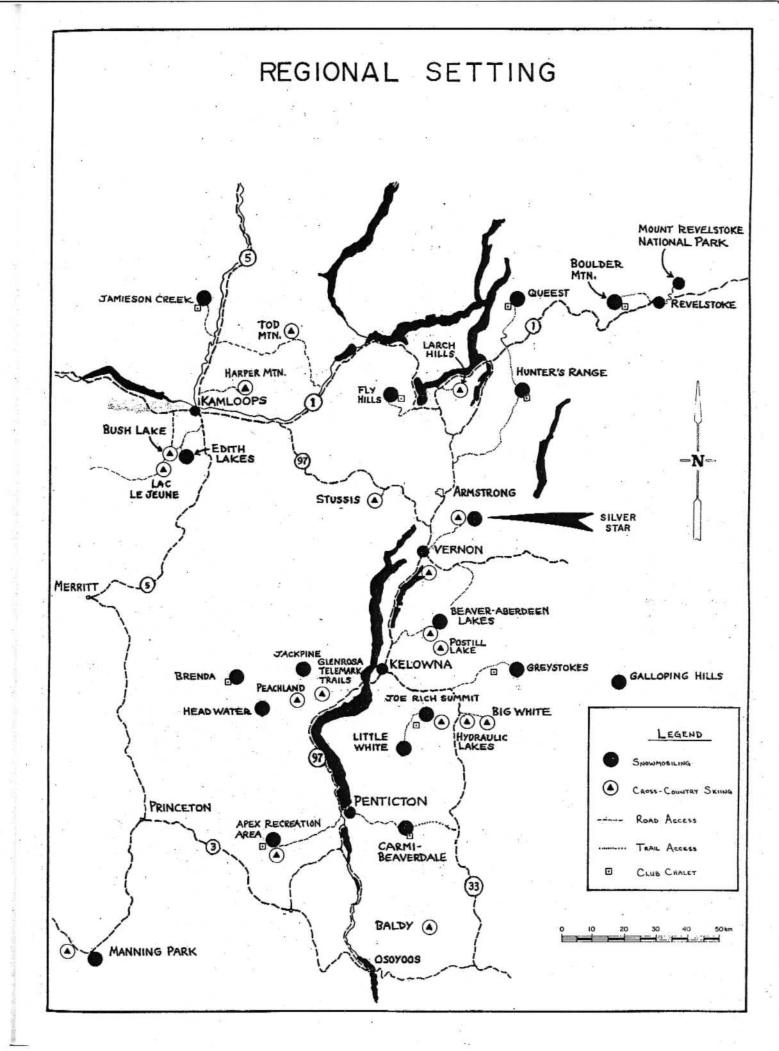
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A. INTRODUCTION

Setting

Silver Star Provincial Recreation Area is situated in the north Okanagan, 22.5 kilometres from Vernon.

Within the Recreation Area, a downhill ski resort has been developed by private interests. This facility has become one of the paramount ski areas in the interior of the province. It was around this facility that the area was established and although present use includes a wide variety of winter and summer activities the downhill skiing component of the area continues to dominate all others.

The Recreation Area also contains a variety of harvestable natural resources. In the past, only limited harvesting of certain of these has been practiced. For example, the history of mining stretches back to the early years of the 20th Century, but there has been no active work for some fifty years. Hunting has been allowed in parts of the Recreation Area in the past, but is currently prohibited.

Silver Star is one of a number of mountain tops in the Okanagan which have been developed as a downhill ski area. Both Big White and Apex are similar in character to the Silver Star ski facility, while sites such as Baldy are essentially local skiing areas. Like Apex, Silver Star offers considerable potential for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling; but it is only at Silver Star that this potential has been developed to date. Elsewhere in the Okanagan, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing occur on abandoned forest access roads, railway tracks, etc., which are not associated with major downhill ski recreation areas. Silver Star and Apex are the only areas in the valley which have the potential for a major integration of diverse summer and winter recreation activities.

2. (Historical) Perspective

The original Silver Star Provincial Park was established with a Class "A" designation in 1940. The Park contained 22,080 acres. Although the boundaries have remained virtually intact, a small area was removed in 1942 to facilitate a logging operation. The park status was changed to that of a Class "C" in July 1958.

When the original Class "A" Park was created, an Advisory Board was appointed to offer guidance in managing the Park. Upon re-designation, a Class "C" Park Board was appointed. In 1958, the Silver Star Development Association (which later became Silver Star Sports Ltd.) was formed as a public Company in order to promote and finance development and operation of the ski area in the park.

The increasing demands placed on the Park Board and the park environment led to the creation in 1972 of a Public Steering Committee to review the function of the park area and to propose plans for its future use. In 1973, this Committee submitted a brief to the Minister of Recreation and Conservation which recommended the following:

- 1. Reclassify the Park to a Recreation Area;
- 2. Place the entire road to the ski area under Highways' jurisdiction;
- That no more accommodation be developed within the park.

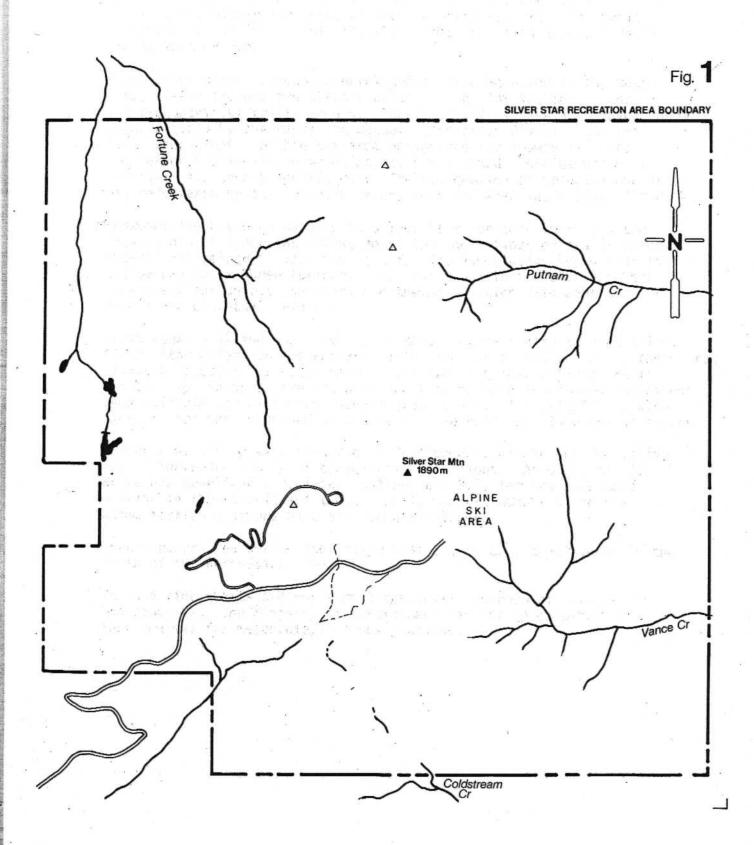
During the following two years, the Park Board was disbanded and the park was temporarily administered by the Regional District. In June, 1978, Silver Star was reclassified as a Provincial Recreation Area and an Advisory Board was named to assist the Parks Branch in its administration of the area.

In the Spring of 1980, the Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing, upon the recommendation of the Silver Star Advisory Committee, indicated that the base facilities for the downhill ski area would be removed from the Recreation Area for lease and sale of land upon completion of an approved master plan for a downhill skiing resort. This will include the development of land for overnight accommodation.

A variety of issues have formed recurrent themes for Resource Managers since 1940. The early interests of local citizens in the development of a ski area continues today. This interest is seen in both discussion of the future of the ski area and in the continuing pressure for upgrading the Recreation Area access road. At the same time, a similar level of concern has always been apparent with regard to the protection of water quantity and quality for both on-hill users and residents of surrounding communities which depend on Silver Star for their water.

Hunting has been an issue in the Recreation Area since 1950, when the Park Advisory Board requested that a Game Reserve status be established over the entire Park to prohibit hunting. In 1958, an amendment to the regulations of Class "C" Parks was made in order to allow hunting to continue within a part of the park. Finally, in 1967, because of the continuing controversy over hunting in the park, the Parks Branch recommended a reduction of the park area with the establishment of a Recreation Area to allow hunting on the periphery. Instead, the entire area was closed to hunting.

The Park Board issued the first permits for private cabin development in 1962. A number of these permits were let in the vicinity of the ski area until 1970, when the Minister of Recreation and Conservation instructed the Park Board to discontinue issuance of any permits for land occupancy.



Existing Development and Use

At present, the downhill ski area contains three chair lifts, one Poma lift, three T-Bars, a day lodge, three parking areas, a maintenance headquarters, a ski shop, a ski school, and administration headquarters. The area has a capacity for 4,325 skiers and parking capacity for 1,377 vehicles. These structures have been constructed by Silver Star Sports Ltd., within the terms of their present resource use permit, which expires in 1995. Only the ski slopes and lifts are included in the Recreation Area.

A number of other recreation developments have occurred in the Recreation Area. These include two 50-unit parking areas for snowmobile and cross-country ski trail access. These facilities have been developed cooperatively by the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division and the local user clubs. Within the area designated for snowmobile use, the Vernon Snowmobile Association has constructed a chalet which is available for general public use. The designation of separate use areas was undertaken by the two user groups when the area was a Class "C" Park.

Snowmobiling has been popular at Silver Star for some years and the area is now an important access point for the network of trails which extend well beyond Silver Star itself. The Association hopes that this system can be expanded further. Snowmobile use in the area has been consistent throughout the years and the Association maintains the trails and chalet all winter.

Cross-country skiing has recently increased dramatically in popularity. Silver Star offers consistent and early snow for skiers and will, therefore, always be popular for local users. The area has only offered trails suitable for intermediate and advanced intermediate skiers and so has not been suitable for beginners, school groups, etc. The existing parking capacity has been exceeded on a number of weekend days in previous seasons.

Resource uses have also resulted in developments within the Recreation Area. There are two major communication stations. At one site, B.C. Hydro has developed a repeater station, and B.C. Tel has developed a station in the vicinity of the ski hill, where a number of lesser communication stations have also been developed.

A hydro power line serves the Silver Star Sports Ltd. development in the south of the Recreation Area.

The old mine shafts are now almost completely overgrown; however, in the same area, the Ministry of Environment has set up a number of snow courses for meteorological observations.

4. Projected Demand

The downhill ski area, which is presently visited by some 200,000 plus skiers a year, has continued to expend since the initial development of a rope tow. Although demand for the area has recently slackened (due to competition with other facilities which also provide on-hill accommodation), this growth can be expected to continue.

Elsewhere in the Recreation Area, winter use for cross-country skiing has dramatically increased with the improvements in trail conditions continuing to heighten popularity. It is reasonable to expect demand for cross-country skiing will continue to increase for some time. Although other trail systems will be constructed outside Silver Star, this area will continue to provide adequate snow conditions at times when other areas may have less dependable snow. The area also provides easy access to trails with good parking and separation from snowmobilers. With the provision of beginner and low-intermediate trails, the popularity of the area will increase dramatically. Although snowmobiling will also be popular. Snowmobilers have far more varied opportunities available to them so Silver Star will always be just one of a number of use areas. However, if a complete network of trails evolves around Silver Star, its importance as an access point will increase.

With the development of a total alpine resort village in the downhill ski area, it is probable that activities such as cross-country skiing and snowmobiling will increase as a consequence of interest on the part of residents in the village area.

Summer use has been consistent though low over the years. With improvements in access to the mountain top, this use will continue to grow. Although applications have been received for the designation of allterrain vehicle use in the area, such use has not been approved in the past. Demand for hunting access continues, but is opposed by many users.

The demand for access to the area for commercial resource harvesting has increased. The Ministry of Forests has identified shortages in timber supply in the Okanagan Valley and is therefore extremely interested in any access to productive forest lands within the Recreation Area.

Mining concerns have recently shown renewed interest in the area.

Pressure for expansion of communication structures is consistently high because of the accessibility and availability of power in this area.

Purpose of Master Plan

In view of the many inter-connected issues involved in management of the Silver Star Recreation Area, it was determined that a Master Plan for the area was required.

The primary purposes of this plan are to identify the objectives and to present management and development guidelines for the future use of the Recreation Area.

B. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

1. Recreation Area Goal

It is the goal for the Silver Star Recreation Area to enhance the variety and amount of Recreational activities taking place in the Recreation Area and to integrate these activities with commercial recreation developments and where feasible with resource management.

Silver Star Park was originally designated to provide improved access to the Silver Star Mountain and to encourage the development of a downhill ski facility for the community of Vernon. Over the years, this has evolved into the provision of a wide range of recreation opportunities and the protection of a number of special resource values. The creation of a Provincial Recreation Area recognizes the value of this area to the population of the province and its potential management for a variety of recreational and commercial activities.

2. Recreation Area Objectives

- (a) Conservation Objectives
 A number of distinct conservation objectives can be recognized:
 - (i) To protect the quality and quantity of water supplies for the communities adjacent to the Recreation Area that are dependent for much of their water on the watershed of which Silver Star is a prominent entity;
 - (ii) To protect the natural, aesthetic qualities of the landscape for presentation to Recreation Area users (because the Recreation Area is visible from the surrounding communities), the residents of the area, and travellers on Highway 97;
 - (iii) To protect, present, and interpret a partial representation of the Shuswap-Okanagan Highlands landscape for public recreation use.

Because of the importance of the Recreation Area as a water source, the protection of the water sheds has always been a high priority even though parts of the area have been intensively developed for public recreation. Concern for protection of these values will be increasingly important as use and development in parts of the area continue to increase and as the possibility of multiple resource use is considered. As the area receives increased visitation, particularly on a year-round basis for a variety of activities, the importance of the natural values will be increased and any action which will impair any of those values should not be acceptable.

(b) Recreation Objectives

A number of recreation objectives have been recognized.

- (i) The existing downhill ski facility will continue to expand and to provide opportunities for both local and non-local use. Management of the ski hill under a Resource Use Permit will conform with the Ski Area Policy of the Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing.
- (ii) A variety of winter trails recreation opportunities will be provided and managed by the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division. This will include provision of facilities for both motorized and non-motorized trail-based recreation.
- (iii) A variety of summertime use facilities will be developed by the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division. This will include facilities for scenic viewing, picnicking, hiking, and horseback use.

The primary purpose of the Recreation Area has been the provision of a range of wintertime opportunities. These objectives recognize the potential of the Recreation Area for both summer and winter use and the potential for the continued expansion of commercial interests in the downhill ski area.

Management Philosophy

Silver Star Recreation Area will be operated to provide opportunities for the integration of recreation facilities with resource harvesting. A broadly-based set of recreation facilities will be provided by both the private sector and government agency. Development and resource harvesting will be permitted where it does not conflict with the provision of those recreation opportunities or with the retention of aesthetic and scenic values.

C. RECREATION AREA RESOURCES STATEMENT

The natural resource base of this mountainous area is the primary reason for establishing the Silver Star Recreation Area.

Natural History

(a) Climate and Vegetation

Silver Star lies within the Interior Douglas Fir and the Sub alpine Engleman Spruce and Fir Biogeoclimatic zones. Below the 1,600 metre level, the cover is predominantly pine, larch, cedar, and fir. Above this level and extending to the 3,000 metre summit of the mountain is a sub-alpine zone of spruce, fir, and some open meadows. In 1929, a fire swept over the plateau in the northern half of the Recreation Area. This blaze burnt out before reaching the alpine meadows and now a belt of mature timber effectively screensthe old burnt area from the alpine summit. The Burn has now extensively regenerated with dense stands of immature spruce and fir.

Climatically, the area lies on the edge of the Interior Wet Belt which is a critical influence on the climate in this area, contributing to consistent snow packs and related winter conditions. The 19-year minimum snow depth has been established at 65 centimetres for the first of February. It has become evident that Silver Star has one of the most reliable snow packs in British Columbia and that the hours of sunlight and related conditions are amongst the most favourable of any ski resort in the interior of the province. Summertime conditions are characterized by low levels of precipitation.

(b) Physiography

Silver Star lies on the edge of the Okanagan Highlands and is typified by a rolling plateau-like summit between 1,700 and 2,000 metres in elevation.

(c) Fish & Wildlife

The Area does contain populations of deer, bear, moose, and some upland game birds, although these are not abundant. A number of small lakes exist in the Recreation Area, but they are not known for their fishing qualities. The Fish and Wildlife Branch will be asked to provide information on the character of the area.

2. Cultural History

No cultural history appears to have been documented prior to 1900. In the early part of the Century, extensive mining exploration took place in this area and as a result a number of mineral claims were registered (Prince of Wales, Aberdeen, Silver Star, etc.). These remained active for a few years and have over the years until 1949 been periodically re-opened for investigation. Until the postwar period, the area was popular with local residents as a ski hill which could only be reached by a hike from the valley bottom. Later a scenic highway was opened which eventually became the basis for the present means of access.

D. ZONING

The zoning plan for the Recreation Area identifies two major zones: a development zone and a natural environment zone. A series of specific use sub-zones have also been designated to include a winter trails sub-zone, a summer trails sub-zone, a ski area sub-zone, and various resource management sub-zones.

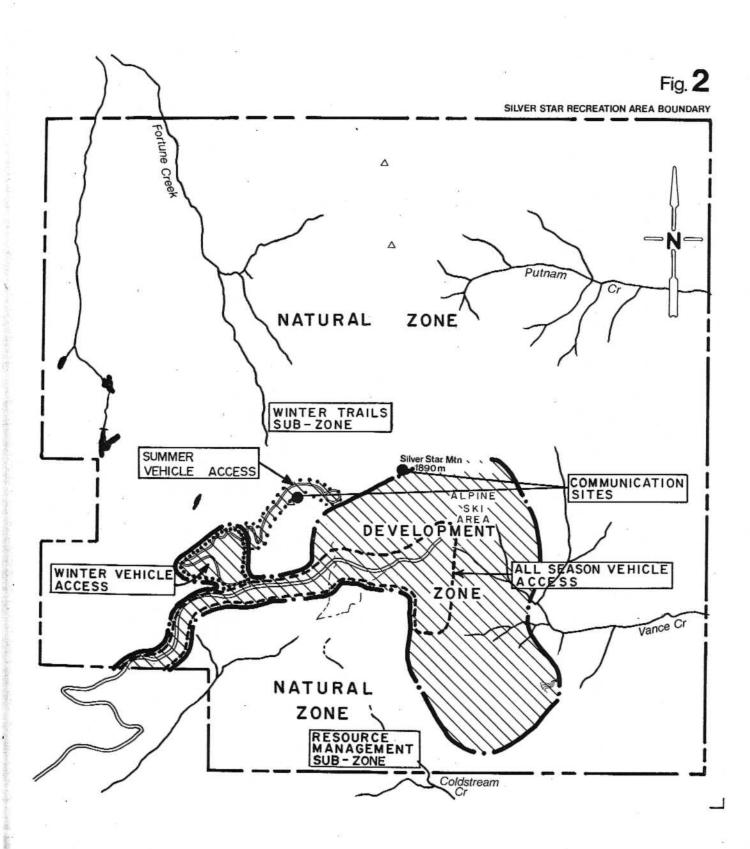
Development Zone

The objectives of this zone are to provide road access and related facilities for commercial and public recreation. Within this zone are located all winter parking facilities, downhill ski slopes, gravel pits, etc.

2. Natural Environment Zone

Within this zone are contained all other resource management areas, recreation trails, summer road access, and parking. This zone will be managed to provide for moderate levels of trail-based recreation and compatible resource harvesting.

ZONE PLAN



E. RECREATION AREA MANAGEMENT - NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ZONE

1. Resource Management

The primary objective for resource management in this zone is to integrate management of resource uses which are compatible with the conservation and recreation objectives for the whole Recreation Area. (See Figure 4)

(a) Water Management

Objective:

Management will ensure the continuation of the present water quality for the consumption of adjoining water users in harmony with the stated purpose of the Recreation Area.

Management Direction:

The requirements of the Pollution Control Act will be adhered to with regard to discharges from the development zone which enter into or affect this zone.

Regulations under the Health Act will be enforced with regard to all other discharges in the Recreation Area.

No residential structures will be developed within this zone.

Access for public recreation will be prohibited at Silver Star Lakes and the existing access road will be clearly signed.

The existing snowmobile and cross-country trails are within part of the Spalumcheen Watershed. Signs on these trails will request users to use the designated toilets and otherwise respect water quality objectives.

(b) Land Management

Objective:

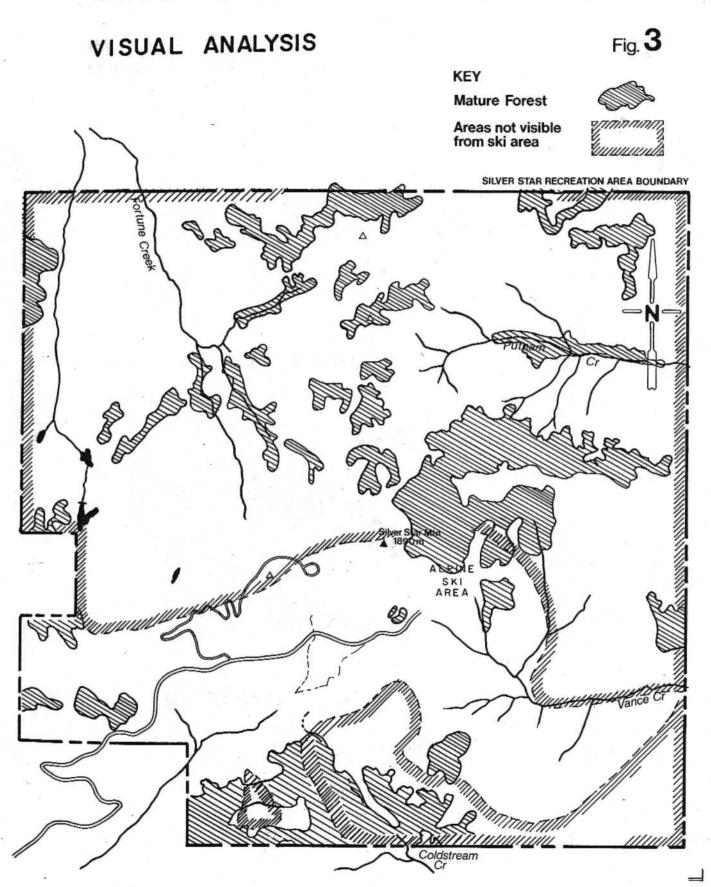
To ensure the management of an adequate land base for the provision of necessary recreation facilities.

Management Direction:

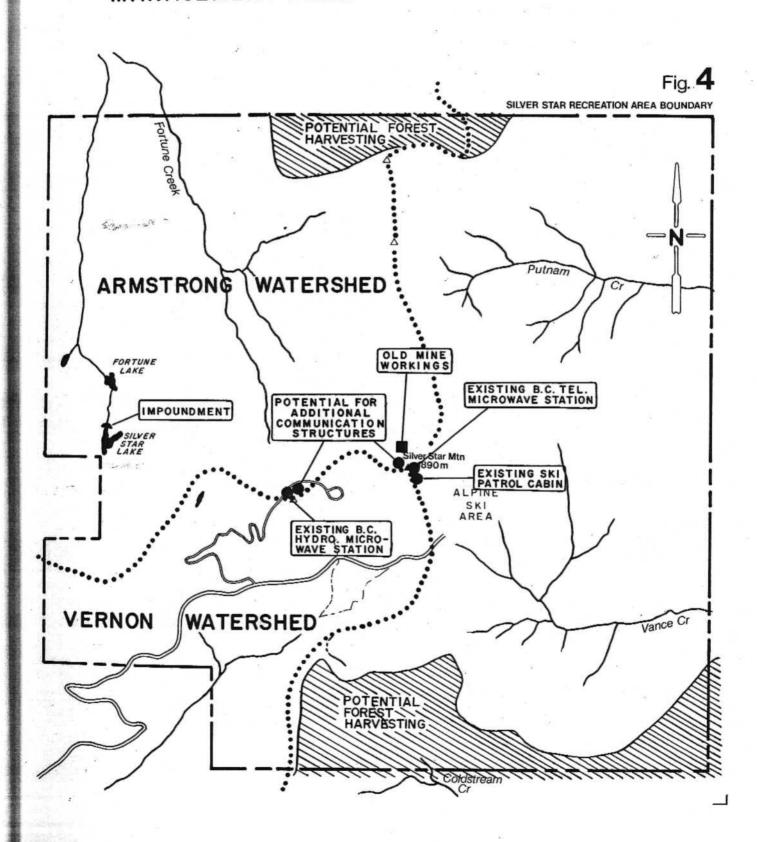
Land will be managed according to the Park Act and its regulations.

No commercial recreation facility will be built in this zone.

The Recreation Area boundaries will be reviewed with particular regard to the possibility of including additional lands to the west of the Recreation Area with a complimentary withdrawal of existing Recreation Area lands in the vicinity of the eastern boundary. This will add significant recreation opportunities for winter-based trails recreation, while releasing forest land to assist in relieving shortages.



RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN



(c) Wildlife Management

Objective:

Wildlife management will provide for the conservation and perpetuation of wildlife populations and habitats and will make provision for limited hunting in a designated section of the Recreation Area.

Management Direction:

In cooperation with the Fish & Wildlife Branch, a designated area to the south of the main road will be established where limited entry permit hunting will be permitted subject to satisfactory game management practices. The possibility of a designated area in the Putnam Creek drainage will also be investigated.

(d) Vegetation Management

Objective:

Management objectives within the Recreation Area will be directed toward providing limited amounts of commercial harvesting.

Management Direction:

It is recognized that any forest harvesting must not interfere with recreation use or impact on the aesthetics of this zone when viewed from either the development zone or the community of Vernon. It is also recognized that any harvesting must first be reviewed with representatives of the Ministry of Environment to ensure that water quality and quantity are not affected and that neither fisheries management nor wildlife management are impaired.

Personnel from the Ministry of Forests have previously identified areas where mature timber has already reached commercially viable dimensions. Preliminary visual analysis of these areas has indicated that stands exist in the vicinity of Coldstream Creek and on the southern boundary of the Recreation Area, where timber harvesting could be practiced with minimal impact on the Recreation Area. Here, both clear and selective cutting could be practiced, subject to a more detailed harvesting plan.

Elsewhere in the Recreation Area, mature timber stands are located in the extremely sensitive areas of recreation concerns. However, large areas of immature timber in less sensitive locations may be available in the next fifty years for commercial harvest.

Timber harvesting will be administered by the Ministry of Forests, subject to a pre-determined plan which will be approved by the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division.

(e) Mineral Management

Objective:

Management activities within the Recreation Area will be directed towards permitting mineral exploration which will not conflict with recreation opportunities.

Management Direction:

It is recognized that exploration and later development can have serious negative impacts on recreation use and opportunities. Such work will, therefore, only be allowed in those areas of the Recreation Area where other resource management extraction is occurring.

Mining exploration will be permitted in the area to the south of the main access road where forest harvesting practices are being considered.

Exploration work elsewhere in the Recreation Area will depend on concerns for watershed protection, recreation, and future provision of access for foresty development.

(f) Communication Structures

Objective:

Management will be directed towards providing limited opportunities for the development of communication structures.

Management Direction:

Two sites will be designated in the vicinity of the existing B.C. Hydro and B.C. Tel structures where two community antennae may be constructed for the multiple use of various commercial and service users. These will be the only approved sites for expansion of existing communication facilities. These structures will be permitted through a Resource Use Permit issued and enforced by the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division staff.

2. Visitor Management

Objective:

The primary objectives for the provision of recreation opportunities in this zone are to develop and manage a varied system of summer and winter recreation trails.

(a) Winter Recreation

Objective:

Separate trail systems will be developed and managed for snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. These will provide opportunities for all levels of experience (see Figure 5).

Management Direction:

The Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division will continue to liaise closely with the North Okanagan Cross-Country Ski Club, the Vernon Snowmobile Association, or similar organizations. Both groups will be permitted to develop facilities, subject to this plan and to prior approval of Division staff.

Vehicle access will be restricted to existing parking areas. In both the cross-country ski area and the snowmobile area, adequate trail signing, information, and warm-up or emergency shelters will be provided. All trail signing will conform to international guidelines.

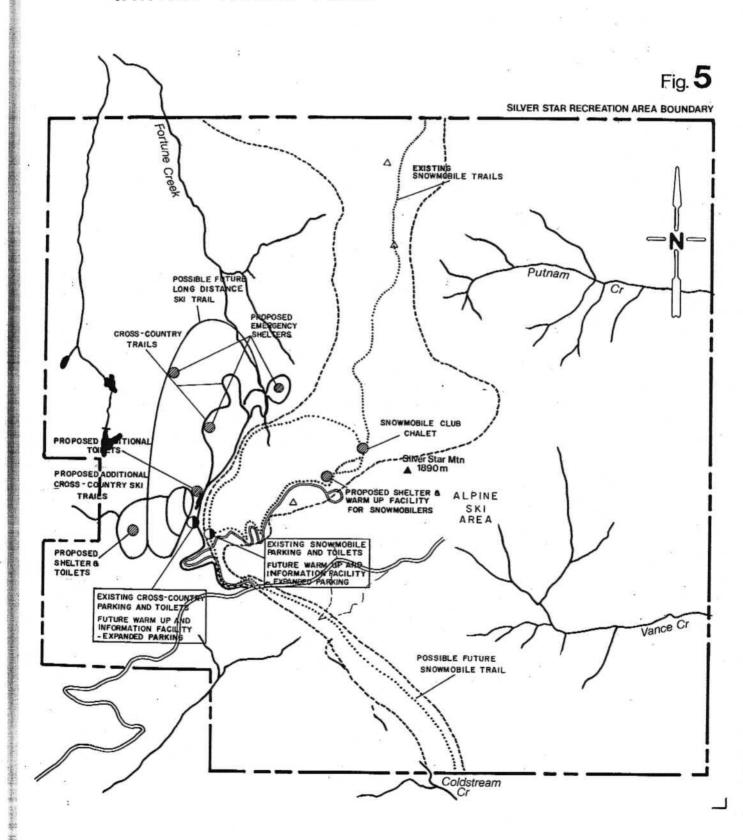
The priorities in the snowmobile area are to improve access trails and the main trail, extending north and out of the Recreation Area to permit snow grooming. A suitable warm-up facility and overlook will also be developed for snowmobilers in the vicinity of the old forest service repeater station site (on the West Ridge), which is an attractive snow play and viewing area from which both the downhill ski area and the North Okanagan valley can be seen.

In the cross-country ski area, the priority will be to provide additional short trails (ten kilometres or less), with particular emphasis on novice skiers. Trail grooming and track setting is desirable and may be part of a permit for teaching or contracted with local interests.

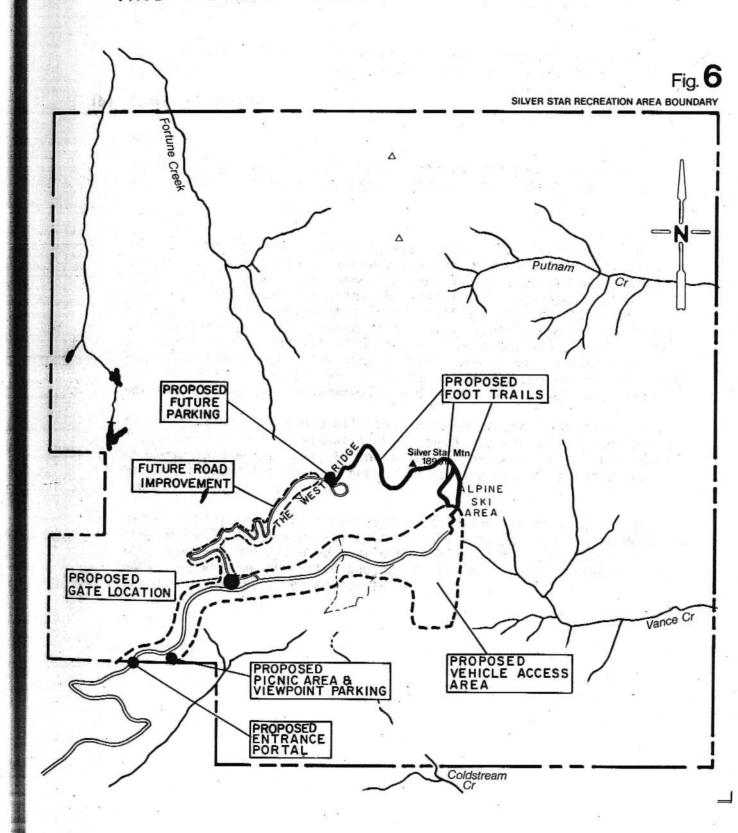
Night skiing, although possible, is not proposed at present.

Commercial use of the Recreation Area trails will be subject to a Resource Use Permit to be issued by the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division. These permits will be advertised for competition.

WINTER TRAILS PLAN



SUMMER TRAILS AND ACCESS PLAN



Any structures (including the existing snowmobile chalet) constructed by the two clubs will be approved by Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division and will be available to all winter users.

The potential for other winter trail use (hiking, snowshoeing, etc.) is recognized. Necessary facilities will be proposed as demand dictates.

The area will be opened for snowmobile and skiing use each year by the District Manager, Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division.

(b) Summer Recreation

Objective:

Management will be directed towards the provision of a variety of trail-based and viewing opportunities. (See Figure 6.)

Management Direction:

The existing repeater station access road will be improved up to a point on the West Ridge where a parking area will be constructed (this site will be in the same location as the proposed snowmobile play area, which overlooks the ski area and the Okanagan Valley). No vehicle access beyond that point oroff any part of the access road will be permitted. To prevent off-highway vehicle use in the Spring and early Winter, the existing road will be gated and closed at the junction with the ski area access road. Beyond the parking lots, the road will be closed throughout the Winter to prevent unauthorized vehicle traffic on the snowmobile and cross-country ski area trails.

No off-road motorized use will be permitted in the Recreation area. The potential for a designated off-highway vehicle area in the active resource management zone, to the south of the main access road, will be investigated but will be depend on development of forest access roads.

Summer hiking trails will be designated in the vicinity of the ski area and will originate from both the ski area parking in the development zone and the proposed overlook parking on the West Ridge. Horse use will be permitted subject to the ability to protect trails against potential adverse impacts.

F. RECREATION AREA MANAGEMENT - DEVELOPMENT ZONE

The primary objective for this zone will be to provide for developed vehicular access, parking and associated structures for summer and winter recreation and to provide for development and management of the ski hill portion of the downhill ski resort. (The rest having been removed for lease and sale.)

1. Resource Management (a) Water Management Objective:

Management will ensure the retention of existing water quality and quantity characteristics for downstream users of water from the Recreation Area.

Management Direction:

The requirements of the Health Act and Water Act will be adhered to with regard to the collection and storage of water in the Recreation Area for use in the ski area development.

(b) Land Management Objective:

The land area will be managed for the development of access roads, parking, and downhill ski runs.

Management Direction:

A Resource Use Permit will be issued in accordance with the Provincial Ski Area Policy.

The main access road to the ski hill facilities will be gazetted as a public road as will be the access road to the cross-country and snowmobile area parking lots.

Right-of-way clearing for all roads and ski hill developments will conform to the requirements of the Forest Act and will be supervised to protect water quality, slope stability, and visual aesthetics. Existing ski runs will continue to be cleaned up where necessary.

(c) <u>Vegetation Management</u> Objective:

Management activities within the development zone will be directed towards the management of vegetative cover to protect aesthetic values and slope stability.

Management Direction:

No commercial logging activities will be permitted except where additional ski area runs or road accesses are being cleared.

Clearing standards on the ski hill will be subject to existing criteria and re-vegetation of cleared areas will be mandatory. Enforcement of standards will be the responsibility of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division staff working in consultation with Ministry of Forest officials. Clean up of existing ski runs, where necessary, will be a prerequisite of permits for future clearing.

Visitor Management

Objective:

The primary objectives will be the provision of parking and associated facilities for cross-country skiing and snowmobiling and the provision of access to the downhill area parking. The latter facility is the responsibility of the ski area operator.

(a) Access and Parking

Objective:

Year-round access will be developed and maintained by the Ministry of Highways and Transportation.

Management Direction:

The main access road will be improved and re-aligned to the design and standards of the Ministries of Highways and Transportation.

Parking facilities for fifty snowmobile units and fifty cross-country skier units will be developed and the potential for expansion in both areas will be shown. In the parking areas, information stations and toilet facilities will be located. The necessity for warm-up facilities, an emergency shelter, and the possible location of a service area will all be investigated in this area.

(b) <u>Visitor Activities</u>

Objective:

Management will be directed toward the provision of facilities for intensive vehicle access.

Management Direction:

An entrance portal will be established on the western boundary of the Recreation Area.

A scenic overlook and picnic area will be established immediately adjacent to the western boundary for summertime recreation use and information about the Recreation Area.

Ski slope development will be the responsibility of the ski area operator.

The ski area operator will be requested to issue information about the Recreation Area to skiers and other visitors to the resort. This information will be provided by the Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division.

G. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division will be responsible for the implementation of this Plan. In this Division staff will be assisted by the Advisory Committee, which will meet on a scheduled basis to review and assess progress in the implementation of the Plan. Park staff will also cooperate with the staff of various other Ministries concerning resource use and management in the Recreation Area.

This plan will be completely reviewed within five years. It is recommended that at that time public participation will be included in the process.