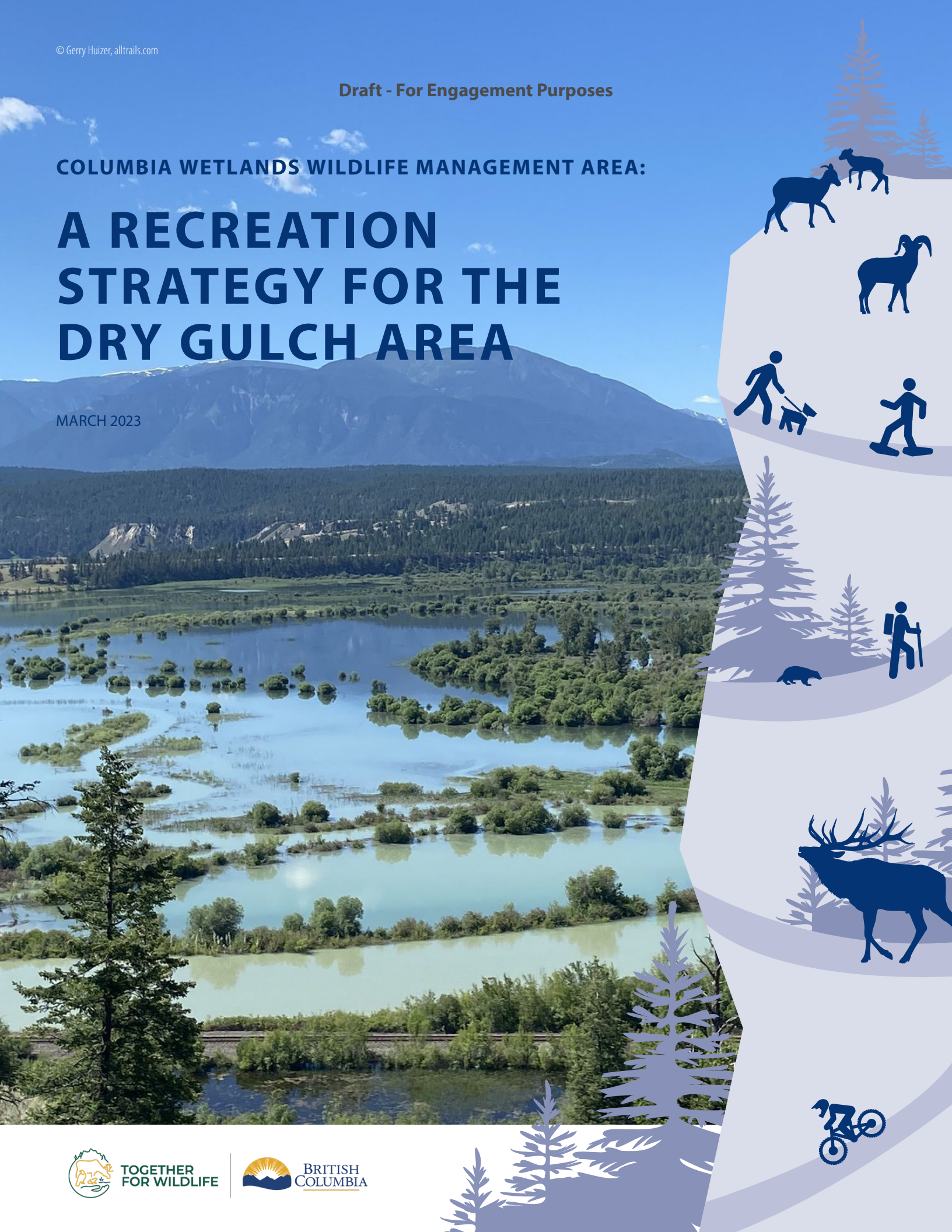


Draft - For Engagement Purposes

COLUMBIA WETLANDS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA:

A RECREATION STRATEGY FOR THE DRY GULCH AREA

MARCH 2023



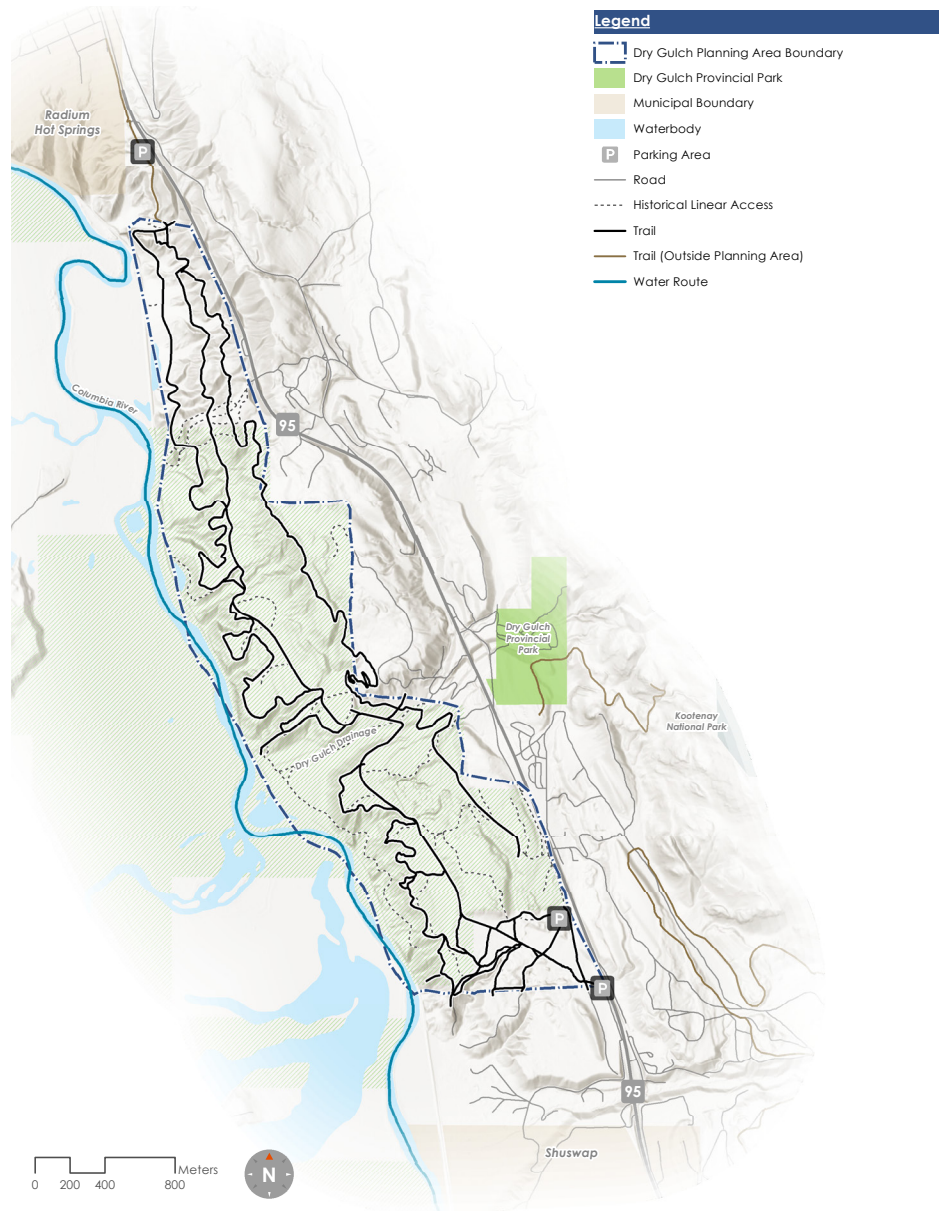
TOGETHER
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Columbia Wetlands Wildlife Management Area – Dry Gulch Area

Dry Gulch is a 398 ha benchland parcel of Crown Lands just south of Radium Hot Springs. Much of the parcel is within the Columbia Wetlands Wildlife Management Area (CWWMA). The Columbia Wetlands were designated as a Wildlife Management Area (WMA) under the *Wildlife Act* in 1996. As one of the largest contiguous systems of wetland habitats in North America, the primary mandate of the WMA is to conserve important fish and wildlife habitats, support landscape connectivity and enable the Columbia River wetlands to continue to function as a natural floodplain ecosystem.¹ More information about WMAs and their intent can be found [HERE](#). In addition to wildlife and wildlife habitat values, the WMA also holds significant cultural, spiritual, and archaeological importance to the Shuswap Band and Ktunaxa Nation.



1 <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/wildlife/wildlife-habitats/conservation-lands/wma/wmas-list/columbia-wetlands-visitor-use>

Why is a Recreation Strategy Needed?

While the primary management intent of the WMA is conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitat, the volume and diversity of recreational use of the Dry Gulch area has steadily increased over the past decade. The WMA has unintentionally become a popular year-round destination for walking, hiking, dog walking, trail running, mountain biking, fat biking, leisure cycling, and snowshoeing.

As recreation visitation has increased, so to has the potential for undesirable effects on wildlife, their habitats and cultural values. Considering the current network of formal and informal trails, approximately 97% of the WMA falls within the zone of influence of a trail. This means that just 3% of the WMA is free from the potential effects of recreational use on wildlife.

The Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (the Ministry), First Nations, and conservation partners have become increasingly concerned about the potential impacts of recreation on wildlife and habitat values, especially winter habitat for bighorn sheep, and cultural values such as archeological sites. Potential impacts such as wildlife disturbance and displacement, abandonment of desired habitat, disruption of denning sites, increased stress levels and human wildlife conflicts are significant management concerns. Recreation can also fragment and convert native grasslands and introduce and spread invasive species. It can also damage culturally important and protected archaeological sites and the traditional and spiritual use and practices of local Indigenous peoples.

Recent efforts have been taken by the Ministry to close and deactivate some informal trails and areas to recreation where these trails were built in sensitive areas and without authorization. Compliance with these closures has been limited. A more comprehensive and coordinated approach to recreation management is required to ensure the WMA can continue to protect wildlife, wildlife habitat, and cultural values into the future.

What Recreation Management Issues is the Strategy Working to Address?

The recreation strategy is focused on addressing the following management issues:

- Displacement of ungulates, especially bighorn sheep, from their winter range.
- Potential harassment and displacement of wildlife in response to the presence of domestic dogs (on and off leash) and damage to grasslands from dog urine and feces.
- Fragmentation and loss of functional wildlife habitat and landscape connectivity.
- Unsanctioned trails and unsanctioned trail building.
- Introduction and spread of invasive plant species.
- Impacts to Indigenous traditional and cultural use of the WMA and disturbance of and damage to archaeological sites.
- Trail widening, braiding and erosion resulting in the loss of native grasslands.
- Unauthorized use of deactivated industry roads for recreation.
- Visitor conflicts.

What Management Strategies and Actions are Proposed in the Draft Recreation Strategy?

To address the identified recreation management issues, the following strategies and actions are proposed as priorities that should be considered to improve the conservation of wildlife and cultural values through the improved management of recreation:

1. Establish a Sanctioned Trail System (Figure 1)

- Formally establish a trail system under legislation.
- Classify, manage and maintain each trail in accordance with a Trail Management Objective.
- Implement seasonal trail closures to protected wildlife during sensitive periods.
- Implement short-term temporary trail and access closures where necessary.
- Prohibit and discourage use of trails that are not included in the sanctioned trail system.
- In collaboration with First Nations, establish / expand partnership agreements with First Nations, local club(s) or organization(s) to steward the sanctioned trails.

2. Address Trail Sustainability Problem Sites on Sanctioned Trails

- Undertake detailed summer-based trail condition assessment.
- Re-route sanctioned trail segments with unsustainable grades and erosion risks.
- Re-establish the trail prism.

3. Actively Management Domestic Dog Walking (Figure 1)

- Establish a designated off-leash dog area in lower-value ungulate habitat.
- Permit on-leash and on-trail dog walking south of the Dry Gulch drainage.
- Prohibit dog walking (on-leash and off-leash) north of the Dry Gulch Drainage.



All proposed strategies and actions are draft and subject to change. Following the engagement process, proposed actions will undergo further review before final decision making.

4. Provide Basic Visitor Amenities & Manage the Number of Access Points

- Provide basic day use amenities at the main southern trailhead (wildlife proof waste receptacles, outhouse, picnic tables).
- Decommission and remove the northern trailhead parking lot and the informal southern parking area.
- Proactively manage direct access from adjacent private land developments.

5. Develop and Implement a Comprehensive Visitor Education Program

- Install visitor education signage at sites where undesirable visitor behaviours are persistent.
- Adopt / develop visitor education materials to educate visitors about the WMA, regulations and responsible recreation.
- Work with stewardship partners and Indigenous communities to deliver in-person visitor education / awareness sessions during peak visitation periods.
- Update the Ministry's website to provide better visitor education and trip planning information.
- Remove the WMA from any Destination Marketing promotional materials.
- Work with TrailForks, AllTrails and other crowd source applications to ensure data on the sanctioned trails and permitted uses and closures are accurately provided.

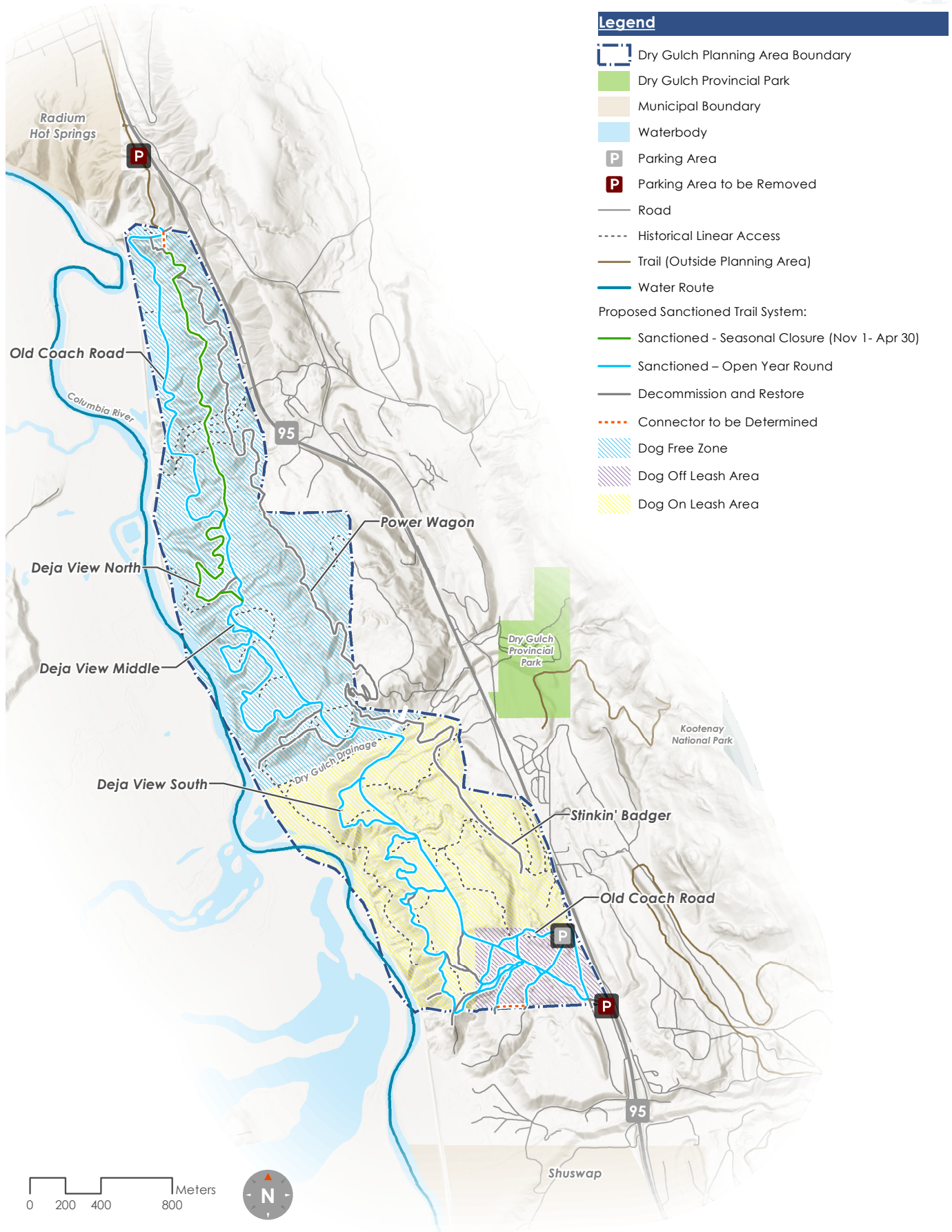


Figure 1 Proposed Sanctioned Trail System and Dog Management

6. Enhance Signage & Wayfinding

- a. Develop and implement a comprehensive and integrated signage strategy.

7. Reclaim Unsanctioned Linear Access & Recreation Caused Disturbances

- a. Work collaboratively to reclaim unsanctioned trails and linear access.

8. Increase Management Presence and Direct Engagement with Visitors

- a. Increase officer or Ministry presence, patrols and check stops during peak visitation periods.
- b. Actively investigate and enforce unauthorized trail building.
- c. Encourage visitors and the public to document and report non-compliance.
- d. Encourage and support volunteer stewardship initiatives.

9. Improve Data Collection & Monitoring

- a. Enhance data collection and monitoring of visitors and visitation.
- b. Regularly monitor the condition of trails and recreation impacts.
- c. Continue to monitor the status of priority wildlife species.
- d. Continue to monitor and effectively treat the introduction and spread of invasive species.

Please note that the above is a summary of the most significant proposed management actions. The listing of strategies and actions is not comprehensive. Please see the full draft Recreation Strategy for further details.

Where Can I Learn More About the Recreation Strategy and Opportunities to Share Input on the Draft Strategy?

To learn more about the Recreation Strategy, please visit the project webpage at <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/consultation/dry-gulch-recreation-strategy/>.

You are invited to provide your input and ideas about the draft Recreation Strategy via our online survey and interactive online web mapping tool which can be accessed on the project page above.



ONLINE SURVEY

**INTERACTIVE
WEB MAPPING
TOOL**



**SCAN TO VISIT THE
PROJECT PAGE FOR MORE
INFORMATION.**