January 2024

Maquinna Marine Park Muχšiƛa Hot Springs Area

DRAFT
Visitor Use Management Strategy

BRITISH COLUMBIA | BC Parks

MAAQUTUSIIS HAHOULTHEE STEWARDSHIP SOCIETY

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Acknowledgements

The development of this Visitor Use Management Strategy for the Muχ̣šiƛa hot springs area of Maquinna Marine Park has been jointly undertaken by BC Parks and the Ƨaḥuusʔatḥ (Ahousaht) Nation, represented by the Maaqutusiss Hahoulthee Stewardship Society (MHSS).

Special thanks to the members of the BC Parks-Ƨaḥuusʔatḥ Working Group who worked collaboratively and respectfully to advance this strategy and build stronger relations through the process.

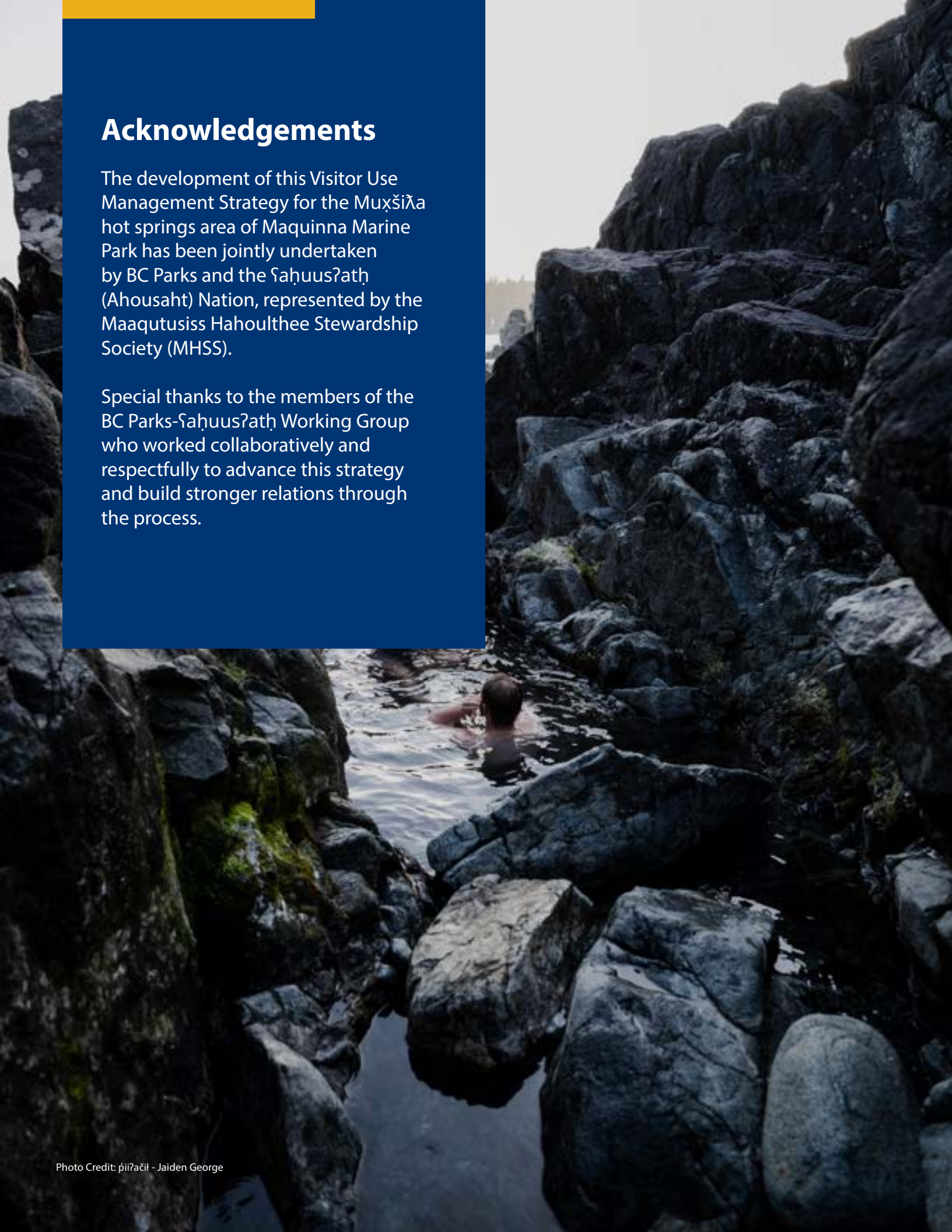


Photo Credit: ṗiiʔačił - Jaiden George

Glossary and Nisṁaakqin Place Names

ʕaḥuusʔatḥ (Ahousaht) – people with their backs to the mountains and land, facing the ocean and sea

ʕaḥuusʔatḥ haḥuułii (Ahousaht hahoulthee) – lands, waters, resources, people governed under Ahousaht traditional law in the traditional territories of the Ahousaht

ḥaẇił (Hawiilth) – Hereditary Chiefs, hereditary leadership of Ahousaht

musčim (muschim) – the Ahousaht people
nuučaaʔuł (Nuu-chah-nulth)

Muχšiƛa (muhh-shi-tla) – steaming from rock

nisṁaakqin (nis-mock-kin) – our land that we care for

ahp-cii-uk – going the right way, together

ƛayaḥuʔał waaniiš suutił hiłḥ ʕaḥuusʔatḥ ḥaḥuułi - we welcome you to Ahousaht Territory

ʔusumniš ʔuuẏałuk̓atquu ḥaḥuułi (oo-soom-nish oo-ya-thook-at-koo ha-hoo-thee) – we need to take care of the territory

hišukʔiš ċawaak (Heshookish tsawalk) - everything is one

ʔupnit - Maaʔuʔisʔaht village site

Apsuhta - translates to "where trail ends" and refers to the area on the east side of Hot Springs Cove and to the area directly opposite to it, which is part of the village of ʔupnit

Muχšiƛa - translates to "steaming from rock" and is the name of the hot springs located on the east side of Hot Springs Cove

T'imaʔa - translates to "boulders" and is the name of a rocky beach on the east shore of Hot Springs Cove and of a smaller rocky beach immediately south of Puxwpuxwah

Ayaaphi – translates to "friendly" and is the name of this distinctive rock pinnacle only visible during low tide, located off the southeast end of Sharp Point.

Kaatsis – translates to "bubbling and boiling" and is an area where tiny bubbles can be observed in the water.

ʔuuts'usiis - translates to "water goes in and out all the way" and refers to the entire length of the narrow passage between the two Mate Islands.

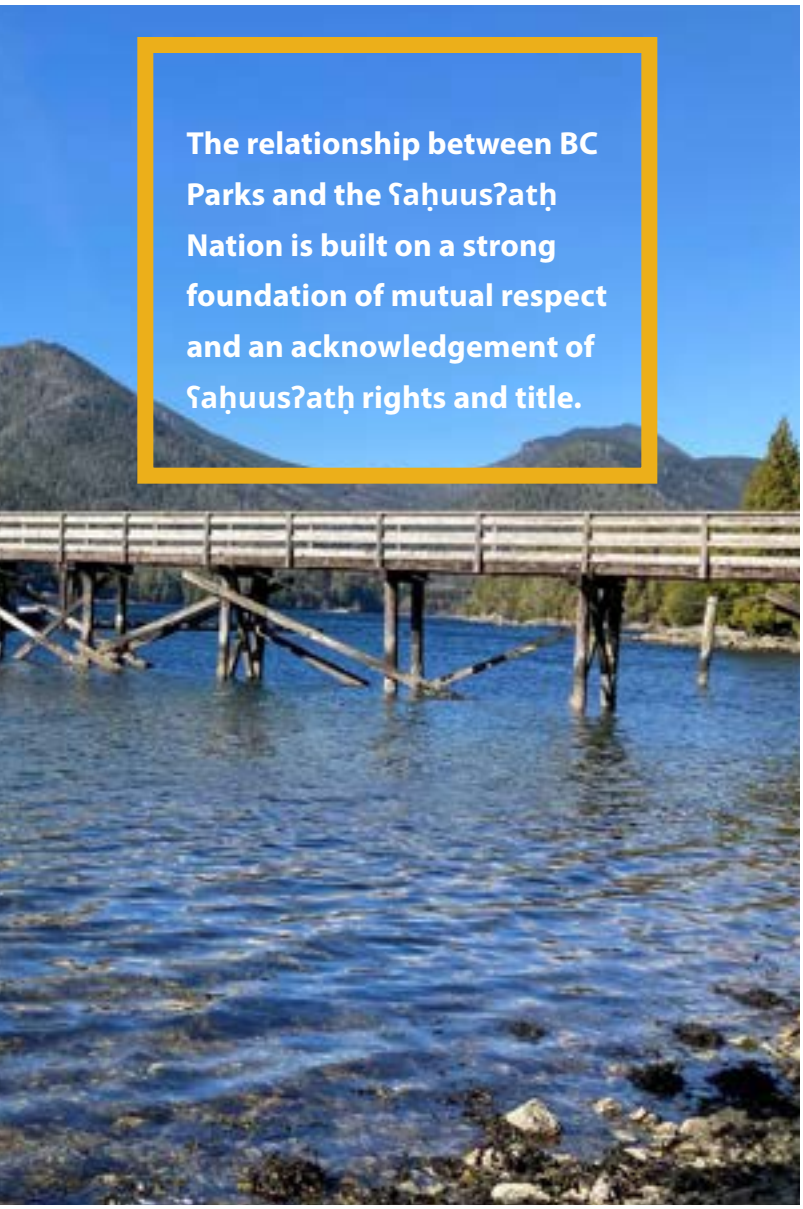
Sumaxkwuuʔis – translates to "tommy cod point" and is the name of a former Maaʔuʔisʔahth village site situated at the northeast end of Apswiis, across from the northern tip of the larger of the two Mate Islands.

Photo Credit: p̓iiʔačiɬ - Jaiden George

1. Introduction

Reconciliation

The Ahp-cii-uk Agreement which translates as "going the right way, together" is an MOU that was signed between the ʕaḥuusʔatḥ (Ahousaht) Nation and the Province of British Columbia in 2021[1]. It commits the parties to develop a way forward that recognizes ʕaḥuusʔatḥ culture, history and rights and begins to address the profound impact of colonization on ʕaḥuusʔatḥ haḥuułii (territory)[2].



The relationship between BC Parks and the ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Nation is built on a strong foundation of mutual respect and an acknowledgement of ʕaḥuusʔatḥ rights and title.

The relationship between BC Parks and the ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Nation is built on a strong foundation of mutual respect and an acknowledgement of ʕaḥuusʔatḥ rights and title. BC Parks is committed to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, strengthening government-to-government relationships, and nurturing common interests in protected areas stewardship and management[3].

BC Parks recognizes ʕaḥuusʔatḥ ancestral responsibility to steward and monitor the lands and waters of ʕaḥuusʔatḥ haḥuułii.

Background

The Maquinna Marine Park hot springs area, known as Muχšiƛa, is located in ʕaḥuusʔatḥ haḥuułii. These lands and waters have been stewarded by ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Haw'iɬ (Ahousaht Hereditary Chiefs) and ʕaḥuusʔatḥ musčim (Ahousaht people) for millennia.

Maquinna Marine Park was established as a Class A Provincial Park in 1955. It is named and described in Schedule D of the Protected Areas of British Columbia Act[4]. Maquinna Marine Park has a total area of 2,613 ha made up of both upland and coastal marine areas. The Muχšiƛa hot springs are in a small area close to ʔupnit in the southeasternmost portion of the park on the Openit Peninsula.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 30,000 people per year visited the Muχšiƛa hot springs, primarily between the months of May and September. Most visitors are transported to the park by commercial boat and float plane operators or, to a much lesser degree, paddle tour companies. Local residents, recreational boaters and paddlers also use and visit the hot springs, although these visits make up a small portion of total annual visitation.

[1] Ahp-cii-uk MOU
[2] The ʕaḥuusʔatḥ haḥuułii declaration and map can be found in Appendices A and B of the Ahp-cii-uk MOU.
[3] BC Parks Reconciliation Action Plan 2021-2024.
[4] Class A parks are lands dedicated to the preservation of their natural environments for the inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public.

Photo Credit: ƥiiʔačiɬ - Jaiden George

Maquinna Marine Park is a popular destination in Clayoquot Sound and has seen a large increase in visitation over the last decade.

When the park was closed for a two-year period during the COVID-19 pandemic, it saw no recreational use at all. The closure provided an opportunity for natural regeneration, facility improvements, and for Ꞃaḥuusʔatḥ and other Nuučaaʔuɬ (Nuu-chah-nulth) community members to utilize and reconnect with this culturally and spiritually important place.

When the park reopened in the fall of 2022, interim park use permit conditions were put in place to prevent a rapid return to the pre-pandemic visitation levels. BC Parks and the Ꞃaḥuusʔatḥ Nation had become concerned about overcrowding in the hot springs, and the impact of the large visitor numbers on ecological values, cultural uses and values, and visitor experiences in this area of the park.

At the same time as these interim conditions were introduced, the Maquinna Marine Park Muχšiƛa hot springs area Visitor Use Management Strategy was initiated to address concerns and provide management direction for the long-term.

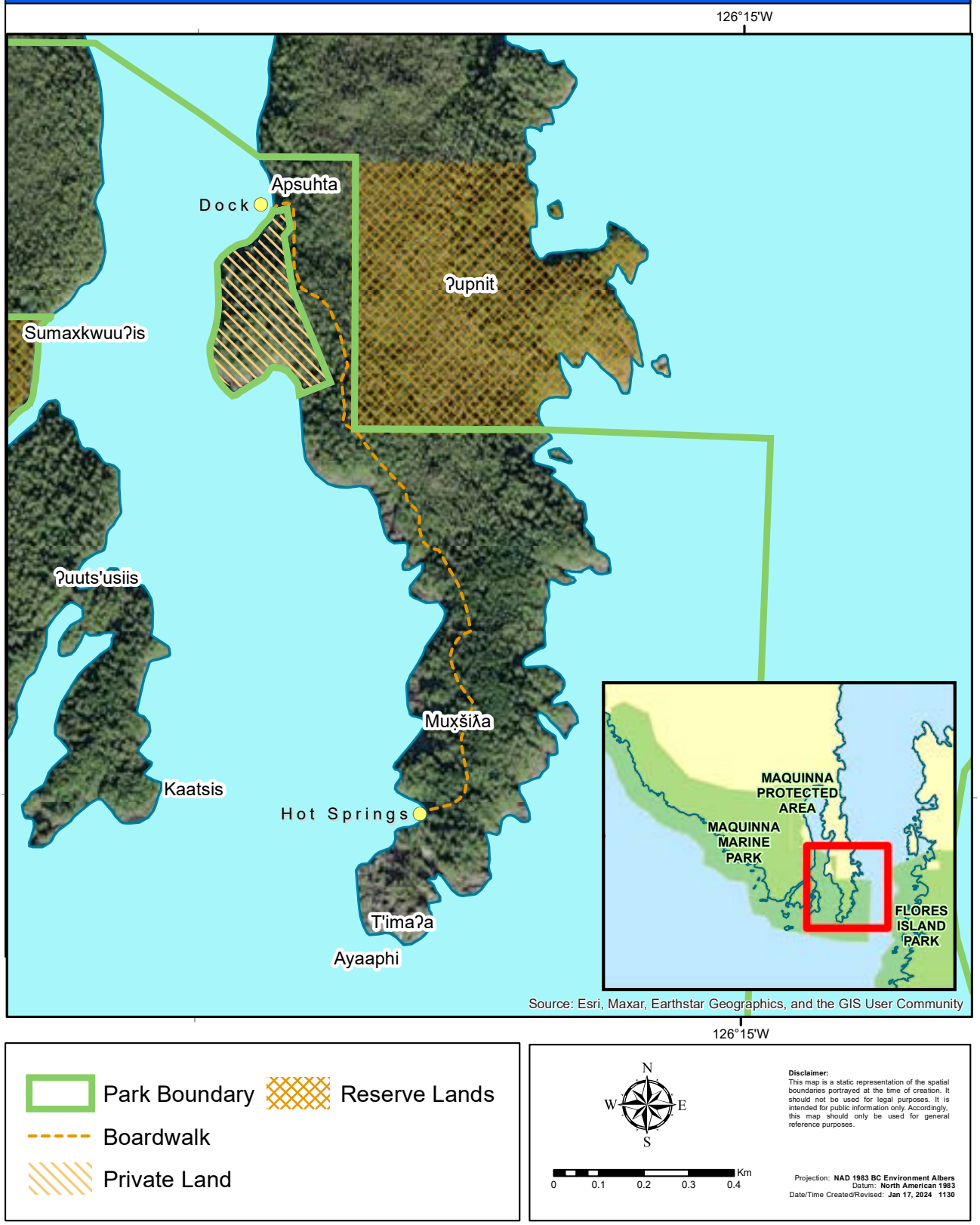
Purpose

The purpose of the Visitor Use Management Strategy is to provide long-term operational guidance for management of the Muχšiƛa hot springs area of Maquinna Marine Provincial Park, consistent with the approved management plan for the park.

Specifically, the strategy aims to:

- Articulate **a vision** for protecting natural, cultural and recreational values;
- Identify **management objectives and strategies** to achieve the desired conditions;
- Make recommendations for implementing and monitoring the **effectiveness of management actions** at achieving the vision;
- Support a **high-quality visitor experience** in the park and at the hot springs; and
- Ensure Ꞃaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuɬ **community and cultural uses and values** are protected and sustainable livelihoods are supported.

Muχšiƛa Hot Springs Area



2. Planning Process

A Collaborative Planning Approach

The development of the Visitor Use Management Strategy for the Muχšiƛa hot springs area in Maquinna Marine Park is being undertaken as a collaborative planning process between BC Parks and the ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Nation, represented by the Maaqutusiss Hahoulthee Stewardship Society (MHSS).

The Province recognizes that this collaborative planning approach is an important step towards realizing the goals of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA), and BC's commitment to lasting and meaningful reconciliation with First Nations.

In 2022, a BC Parks-ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Technical Working Group was formed to develop joint recommendations for re-opening the provincial parks and protected areas in ʕaḥuusʔatḥ haḥuuɬii that were closed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The Working Group was also tasked with developing joint recommendations regarding a longer-term Visitor Use Management Strategy for the Muχšiƛa hot springs area in Maquinna Marine Park.

External Engagement

In developing the draft Visitor Use Management Strategy for the Muχšiƛa hot springs area in Maquinna Marine Park, the project partners have engaged park use permit holders, tour and transport operators, tourism marketing and industry organizations, as well as park visitors and the public, through a variety of methods including direct correspondence, phone and video meetings, and online surveys. Hesquiaht First Nation was also invited to provide input into the strategy. A summary of What we Heard through this engagement process is available for public review. The draft Visitor Use Management Strategy is also available for public review and comment.

This collaborative planning approach is an important step towards realizing the goals of UNDRIP, DRIPA, and BC's commitment to lasting and meaningful reconciliation with First Nations

Interim Park Use Permit Conditions

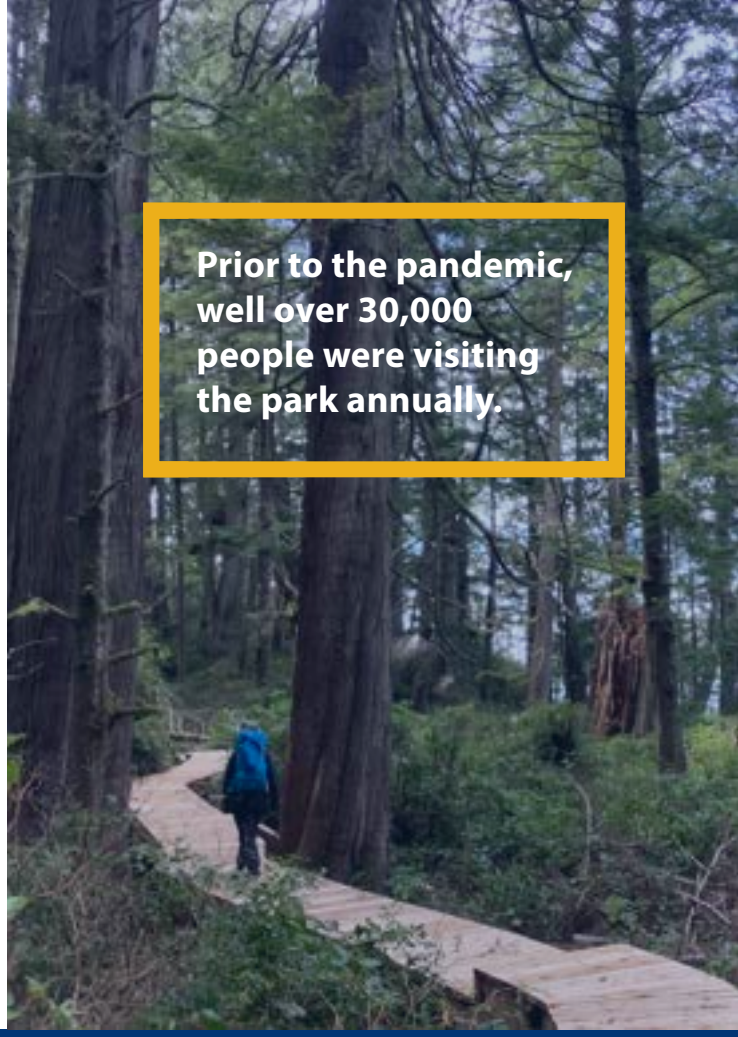
The BC Parks-ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Technical Working Group developed an interim approach for the 2022, 2023 and 2024 operating seasons, with conditions for all park use permit holders that included group size restrictions, seasonal timing windows for ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and non- ʕaḥuusʔatḥ commercial operators, and permit provisions promoting development of mutually beneficial relationships with ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Nation. These timing windows as well as scheduled monthly commercial closure days are designed to support undisturbed ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and nuučaaʔuł community use of the hot springs for social, cultural and ceremonial purposes. Permit holders are encouraged to work together to coordinate daily arrival times within timing windows to ensure there is sufficient space at the dock and a positive visitor experience while enjoying the park and hot springs. This interim approach is supported by monitoring and enforcement of permit conditions, including planned joint patrols by BC Parks Rangers and ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Guardians.

The interim approach presented an opportunity to learn about visitor experiences and observe visitor use patterns under these new operating conditions, during the development of the visitor use management strategy. In survey responses, tourism operators reported generally positive visitor feedback under the interim park use permit conditions in 2022 and 2023, relative to the pre-pandemic visitor experience. A preliminary assessment of annual, seasonal and daily visitor use patterns showed lower annual and peak daily visitation in 2023 relative to pre-2019 levels. Seasonal patterns remained similar, with most visitation occurring from mid-May to mid-September and peak use in July and August. Daily arrivals were largely distributed between the hours 11 am and 3 pm, with a midday peak and some overlap among groups of visitors around noon.

Another change observed during the interim approach was the addition of four ʕaḥuusʔatḥ tourism businesses to the list of operators holding park use permits to transport guests to the hot springs, whereas previously there were no ʕaḥuusʔatḥ businesses among these operators. These preliminary observations suggest the interim conditions have had a positive effect on visitor experience and addressing over-crowding at the hot springs. Interim park use permit conditions are also proposed for 2024-25, which will provide a further opportunity to monitor and assess this approach for another full operating season prior to implementation of the final visitor use management strategy.

3. Key Management Issues at Muχšiƛa Hot Springs Area

ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Nation and BC Parks are concerned about the impacts of the large number of annual visitors on the park's ecological, cultural, and recreational values. Prior to the pandemic, well over 30,000 people were visiting the park annually. During that time, park visitors, park use permit holders, and the park operator all reported high levels of crowding in the hot springs and surrounding area during peak season (as visitors waited to be able to access the small pools). Associated problems with overuse of the dock, boardwalk and change room facilities, noise and litter at the pools and in the forest, and other non-compliant behaviours were impacting the park and visitor experience. Potential impacts on the hot temperature ecosystem of the geothermal springs were also a concern, especially given that this ecosystem is not well understood. As well, heavy use of the park by tour groups in peak season discouraged ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuł community use of this culturally and spiritually important place.



4. Values of Muχšiƛa Hot Springs Area

Cultural Values

The Muχšiƛa hot springs area in Maquinna Marine Park is situated within the ʕaḥuusʔatḥ haḥuułii and is home to over 50 places of important cultural, historic and spiritual significance to the ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Nation. The hot springs and surrounding lands and waters have been stewarded by the ʕaḥuusʔath people, since time immemorial.

Muχšiƛa, which means "steaming from rock", is the nuučaaʔuł name of the hot springs[3]. ʕaḥuusʔatḥ knowledge and culture keepers consider the spring water in the pools to have healing properties. It was mostly women and men of lower rank who utilized the springs; whalers, specifically, were prohibited from bathing at Muχšiƛa, as doing so was thought to weaken them.

There was a path that led from Muχšiƛa to Apsuhta ("where the trail ends") at the village of ʔupnit. ʔupnit, meaning "place where it is always calm", was the primary village of the Maaʔuʔisʔahth people, who constituted one of the five local groups - the other four being ʔuts'uusʔath, ʕaḥuusʔatḥ, Kiltsmaʔath and Qwaatsuwiʔath - who came under the protection of the ʕaḥuusʔatḥ following the ʕaḥuusʔatḥ-ʔuts'uusʔath war in the 1800s and would later amalgamate to form the ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Nation as it exists today. The Openit peninsula, where the hot springs are located, is named after this village. When Chief K'ak'atlmis led the Maaʔuʔisʔahth, some people remained at ʔupnit throughout the winter. If the winter winds, which blow from the northeast, were too strong, and the seas were too heavy, the people would move up Sydney Inlet to a winter village named ʔalhmaʔa.

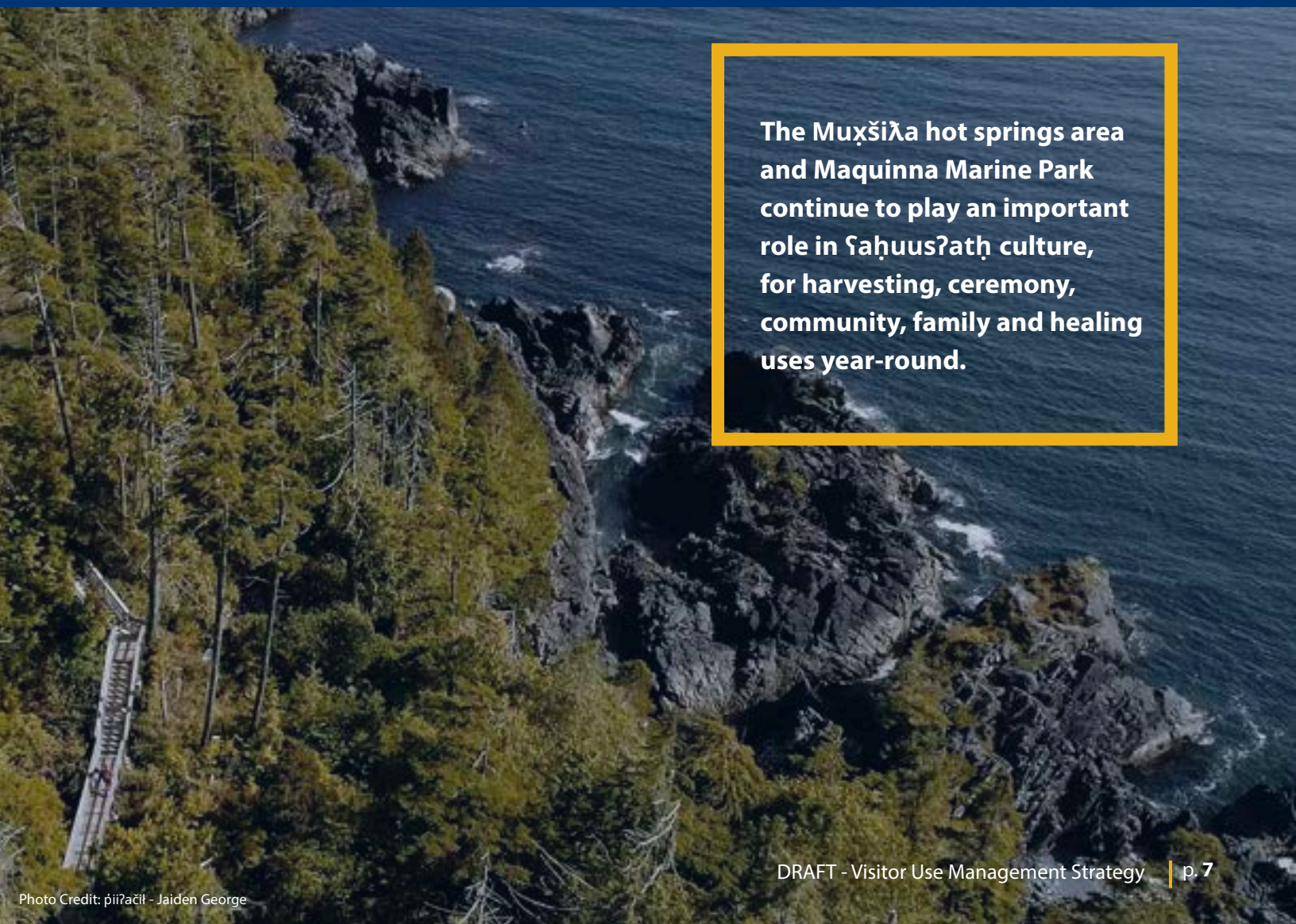
Many of the people moved from ʔupnit north to the village of Hisnit in March, although the whalers, including the head chief of the Maaʔuʔisʔahth, remained behind.The head chief would go to Hisnit in May and June to supervise the sockeye fishery, where he would stay for about a month before returning to ʔupnit for whaling.

[5] Bouchard, Randy and Dorothy Kennedy. Clayoquot Sound Indian Land Use. Victoria, B.C. Indian Language Project. 1990

Maquinna Marine Park figured centrally in regard to whaling. Yakaachisht (“something long on the water”), the traditional name of Barney Rocks, is where whale-watchmen would have kept a lookout for passing whales. While the watchmen were on the lookout, whalers in their canoes would wait nearby at Ihuʔaktlim, where they kept from drifting by holding onto kelp. Chaskwatkis (“whale’s backbone or vertebrae”), located near the westernmost channel leading into Hot Springs Cove, is where the Maaʔnuʔisʔahth people would bring whales to be butchered.

Maquinna Marine Park is also host to many harvesting grounds, where people gather čitapt (basket sedge or slough sedge), situup (blue huckleberries), ẏaʔisi (butter clams), ḥaay’ištuup (black katy) and p’aʕum (giant red chitons), ḥ’iix (purple sea urchins), t’uc’up (giant red sea urchins), c’aʔinawa (gooseneck barnacles), k’uc’um (California mussels), taaʔinwa (sea cucumbers), kʷikma (rockfish), tuškuuḥ (lingcod), tommie cod, p̓uuʔi (halibut) and suuḥa (spring), cuw’it (coho) and hink’uuʔas (chum) salmon.

The Muχšiƛa hot springs area and Maquinna Marine Park continue to play an important role in ʕaḥuusʔatḥ culture, for harvesting, ceremony, community, family and healing uses year-round. The month of November is a particularly important time of year for cultural use of Muχšiƛa. Considering both the historic and contemporary significance and uses of Maquinna Marine Park, it is important that ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuł access to the park is respected and honoured. Today, the area has been renamed by the ʕaḥuusʔatḥ as nism̓aakqin (our land that we care for) as it is inappropriate as per Nuučaaʔuł tradition to use a Haẃił (Chief) name (e.g. Haẃił Maquinna) for a place. The BC Parks-ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Joint Technical Working Group is also working on a proposal to rename Maquinna Marine Park in the Protected Areas of British Columbia Act.



The Muχšiƛa hot springs area and Maquinna Marine Park continue to play an important role in ʕaḥuusʔatḥ culture, for harvesting, ceremony, community, family and healing uses year-round.

Photo Credit: p̓iiʔačiɬ - Jaiden George

ECOLOGICAL VALUES

The hot springs at Muχšiƛa are one of the most significant ecological features of this area of the park. They are a natural geological formation, characterized by a geothermal vent, waterfall and series of hot pools that cool in temperature as they cascade into the ocean. The warm, humid, and mineral-rich environment of the hot springs may support organisms exclusively adapted to or endemic to such microclimates. More research is needed to better understand the ecology of this feature.

The old growth rainforests and rich marine environment in this area of the park provide habitat for a diversity of terrestrial and marine species. The forested upland is within the Coastal Western Hemlock biogeoclimatic zone, one of Canada's wettest climates, with a canopy dominated by western redcedar and western hemlock.

Photo Credit: p̓iiʔačiɬ - Jaiden George

Visitors to the Muχšiƛa hot springs area can observe old growth trees, bald eagles, amphibians, ferns, fungi, vibrant inter-tidal life, and many other plants and animals. The marine environment supports wildlife species at risk, including k̓uuxu (surf scoter, blue-listed), tukuukʷ (Steller Sea Lion, blue-listed), kʼʷakʷaƛ (sea otter, blue-listed) and waacʕiš (marbled murrelet, blue-listed). There is critical habitat, mossy nest platforms, for waacʕiš (marbled murrelet) in nearby old growth forest that likely extends into the park. Ḥusmin (kelp) and eelgrass beds in the marine foreshore provide important fish habitat, and a kʼʷaqmis (herring spawn) area has also been observed.

Maquinna Marine Park is situated within a wider network of protected areas in British Columbia and Canada that provide ecosystem services, support biodiversity, remove and store carbon from the atmosphere, and contribute to natural solutions to climate change.

RECREATIONAL VALUES

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Muχšiƛa hot springs at Maquinna Marine Park attracted more than 30,000 local, Canadian, and international visitors every year. Visitors continue to be drawn to the park, attracted by the opportunity to soak in the 50°C hot spring waters that flow out over a small waterfall and down through six rocky pools, gradually cooling and mixing with ocean swells as they descend. The remote coastal setting and unaltered natural condition of the pools lends to their unique recreational appeal.

Another draw for visitors is the 2-km walk to the hot springs. The scenic boardwalk and staircases give visitors the opportunity to travel easily and safely through the old growth forest. Viewing platforms, informational signage, composting toilets, a change house, and dock are other amenities valued by park visitors.

The hot springs provide commercial recreation opportunities for motorized and non-motorized tour operators. The opportunity to travel to and from the park by boat, float plane, or kayak also influences many people's decision to visit. Whether travelling independently or with a commercial operator, visitors can directly experience the rugged coastline of ʕaḥuusʔatḥ haḥuułii and Clayoquot Sound, learn more about the natural and cultural history of the area, and see wildlife such as seabirds, whales and other marine mammals.

Photo Credit: ƥiiʔačiɬ - Jaiden George

Visitors continue to be drawn to the park, attracted by the opportunity to soak in the 50°C hot spring waters that flow out over a small waterfall and down through six rocky pools.

5. Existing Management Direction

Purpose Statement and Zoning Plan

A 2003 Purpose Statement and Zoning Plan provides management direction for this park. The plan directs BC Parks to develop good working relationships with First Nations and work together to manage the impacts of recreational use on cultural sites and values. It emphasizes protection of the geothermal hot springs and associated ecosystem as a core role for this park. The plan also provides direction to consider restrictions on visitor numbers to maintain high quality experiences.

The park is divided into three zones. The Natural Environment Zone covers the developed area, including the 2 km boardwalk that leads visitors by foot from the boat dock to the hot springs and supporting facilities. The objective of this zone is to protect scenic values and to provide recreation opportunities in a largely undisturbed natural environment. The Special Features Zone covers the hot springs, warm springs, and a gas vent. The objective of this zone is to protect and present significant natural or cultural features, resources, or processes because of their special character, fragility, and heritage values. Together, these two zones cover the area subject to this strategy. The remainder of the park is a Wilderness Recreation Zone.

Photo Credit: Iain Robert Reid

6. Shared Vision for Muχšiƛa Hot Springs Area

The following statements describe a vision for the future of the Muχšiƛa hot springs area in Maquinna Marine Park. This vision reflects the ʕaḥuusʔatḥ worldview of hišukʔiš ċawaak (everything is one), and identifies priority community and cultural values, ecological values, and recreational values. Together, these priority values will guide a management approach that will allow visitors to truly enjoy the quiet of this remote coastal park, leave no trace, and come away with more knowledge of the rich cultural history of this area in ʕaḥuusʔatḥ haḥuułii.

Photo Credit: ƥiiʔačiɬ - Jaiden George

1. Visitors to Muχšiƛa are aware they are **visiting ʕaḥuusʔatḥ ḥaḥuułi** and have opportunities to learn about ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuł culture, history and use of the hot springs area.

2. ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuł people continue accessing Muχšiƛa for cultural, ceremonial, and community purposes and can carry out traditional practices at times when commercial visitors are not present.

3. The **unique geothermal hot springs** and associated hot temperature ecosystem, wildlife habitat, old growth forest and marine environment are **healthy and protected from disturbance or damage by visitors.**

4. Visitor activities and facilities in the park are **resilient to the impacts of climate change** and reflect efforts to **minimize greenhouse gas emissions**.

5. Visitors expect and seek out a multi-faceted experience while in the park, learning about and **experiencing the unique features** of the hot springs, the old growth forest and coastal environment, and ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuł culture and history.

6. Visitors enjoy their time in the park and do not feel the experience is overcrowded, noisy, rushed or degraded due to the number of visitors or size of groups at any one time in the park.

7. A variety of visitors can access and use the park, whether travelling independently or through a tour operator by boat, plane or paddle.

8. Visitors are well prepared for park conditions and **plans are in place for visitor safety.**

9. ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Nation and members have meaningful economic opportunities related to park operations, commercial activity, and interpretation/education.

10. Tourism operators bringing visitors to the park routinely hear from clients that the **park experience is positive and worthwhile**, helping them to develop resilient businesses.

7. Management Strategies

The focus of the Visitor Use Management Strategy is to identify management approaches that will help advance the shared long-term vision for the Muχšiƛa hot springs area in Maquinna Marine Park. These management strategies may be adapted over time as they are implemented and monitored, and new information is gathered.

Cultural Management Strategies

Management Objectives	Management Strategies
Enhance visitor understanding and the visitor experience through opportunities to learn about the cultural history of the area and the hot springs.	• Incorporate Nuučaaʔuł language and ʕaḥuusʔatḥ place names in park information and maps • Support the development of interpretive materials and/or programming to communicate the cultural history and use of the area and the hot springs • Support opportunities for guided cultural tourism at the hot springs
Ensure supportive conditions for regular ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuł community, cultural and spiritual use of the park and the hot springs	• Provide dedicated times and days for cultural and community use • Increase Nuučaaʔuł language resources, cultural information, and facilities in the park to create a welcoming atmosphere for ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuł people • Integrate cultural protocols into park rules and etiquette information for visitors

Ecological Management Strategies

Management Objectives	Management Strategies
Visitors stay on the boardwalk system and marked trails to travel through the park, minimizing their impact on sensitive habitats and ecosystems.	• Enhance the visitor experience on the way to the hot springs, inviting visitors to stay on the boardwalk and learn about the cultural and ecological significance of the area. • Provide information reminding visitors to stay on the boardwalk, such as through signage at the trail head and at impacted or sensitive locales • Retain and maintain the existing facilities that help to reduce impacts of visitor use (e.g., boardwalk, pit toilets, change house) • Continue to regularly maintain and clean boardwalk to ensure safe conditions and minimize step-offs
Ensure hot springs pools remain in their natural state and visitor use does not harm hot springs ecology or wildlife	• Leave hot springs pools in their natural condition (not actively modified or altered for bathing purposes) • Minimize the introduction of any possible contaminants and litter into hot spring pools and adjacent areas • Provide visitor information to enhance understanding of hot springs ecology and sensitivity, and to promote responsible and respectful behaviour • Discourage open food and feeding of wildlife to minimize habituation • Encourage and support research projects and partnerships to better understand the ecological and cultural importance of the hot springs pools • Support research and monitoring to assess wildlife disturbance and response to visitor use patterns
Park contributes to natural solutions and improves resilience to the impacts of climate change.	• Manage visitor use to minimize impacts to old growth forest, which serves a role in carbon storage (e.g., by enhancing the visitor experience along the boardwalk to minimize step-offs) • Retain and maintain the BC Parks dock as an important visitor facility that directs use away from nearby marine eelgrass and kelp beds, which serve a role in carbon storage • Incorporate a climate change vulnerability assessment into project planning for major repair or replacement of visitor facilities • Take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in park operations (e.g., on-site park operator accommodation to minimize travel needs) • Encourage tourism operators to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and explore ways to support or encourage these efforts

Recreational Management Strategies

Management Objectives	Management Strategies

Visitor numbers are managed to maintain a quality experience for visitors and to protect natural and cultural values	• Determine appropriate visitor use levels, considering the ability of the hot spring pools, dock, boardwalk, and park to accommodate visitor use
	• Manage visitor numbers to stay within appropriate use levels
	• Carefully evaluate and implement methods to manage visitor numbers, such as:
	  • Limiting the number, timing, and group size of commercial vessel/aircraft arrivals
	  • Staggering group arrivals to avoid multiple groups arriving at one time
	  • At peak times/days in the park, limiting duration of use of the hot spring pools (e.g., 1 hour max.)
	  • Limiting the total number of permitted commercial operators (e.g., through a competitive bid process)
	• Monitor and assess visitor use levels over time, and adjust management methods as necessary to protect park values, including visitor experience
	• Monitor visitor use patterns for both public and commercially transported visitors
	• Assess the current sources of visitor use data and explore any improvements that may be needed to effectively monitor visitor use levels at the hot springs.
	• If public use significantly increases, review strategies in place for managing visitor numbers. Consider limiting daily non-commercial recreational arrivals, if necessary to meet capacity limits.

Different types of visitors and groups can access the park	• Public (self-directed) and commercial access is managed within appropriate use levels • Opportunities are provided for a range of commercial access options, including non-motorized, boat and air • Local residents, recreational users, and education groups have opportunities to access the hot springs
Visitors can easily obtain needed information about park conditions and how to prepare prior to arriving	• Provide visitor information through readily accessible communication channels, such as the BC Parks website, via tour operators, on-site signage, and other. • Provide visitor information on responsible recreation and etiquette at the hot springs • Highlight important information that visitors may not anticipate (i.e., no potable water, no dogs allowed, slippery terrain at springs, high tide conditions, cultural protocols, closure days, etc.)
Public recreation and commercial demand for use of the dock can be safely and regularly accommodated	• Monitor dock use levels and, if required, take steps to coordinate usage, manage demand during peak times/days and communicate best practices

Recreational Management Strategies (continued)

Management objectives	Management strategies
Park users are aware of risks at the remote location and know how to respond in an emergency	• Create a park emergency response plan (which includes evacuation and closure procedures) in the event of natural disaster (e.g., earthquake, tsunami), wildfire, or medical emergency. • Include information on potential hazards, safety, and emergency procedures in visitor information available to park users while planning their trip and upon arrival (e.g., park web page, signage)
Maintain opportunities for tourism business to offer high quality visitor experiences consistent with protecting natural and cultural values at the hot springs, and increase ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuł involvement in these economic and commercial recreation opportunities.	• Support visitors to access the park through permitted commercial tour operators • Support ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuł commercial operators to learn about and navigate the permit application process • Ensure ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuł commercial operators have opportunities to access the park • Support opportunities for cultural tours in the park led by ʕaḥuusʔatḥ guides

Photo Credit: Iain Robert Reid

8. Implement, Monitor, Evaluate and Adjust

A collaborative approach will be taken to implement the strategies outlined in this document, including planning for any projects that are above and beyond the operational work routinely conducted by BC Parks and the Park Operator.

ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Nation and BC Parks will work together to identify and implement priority strategies, subject to available funding and staff resources.

Management strategies identified as high priorities for implementation include, but are not limited to, the following:

Cultural Management Strategies

- Incorporate Nuučaaʔuł language and ʕaḥuusʔatḥ place names in park information and maps
- Support the development of interpretive materials and/or programming to communicate the cultural history and use of the area and the hot springs
- Provide dedicated times and days for cultural and community use

Recreational Management Strategies

- Determine appropriate visitor use levels, considering the ability of the hot spring pools, dock, boardwalk, and park to accommodate visitor use (see Appendix A)
- Manage visitor numbers to stay within appropriate use levels
- Monitor and assess visitor use levels over time, and adjust management methods as necessary to protect park values, including visitor experience

Ecological Management Strategies

- Retain and maintain the existing facilities that help to reduce impacts of visitor use (e.g., boardwalk, pit toilets, change house)
- Retain and maintain the BC Parks dock as an important visitor facility that directs use away from nearby marine eelgrass and kelp beds, which serve a role in carbon storage
- Encourage and support research projects and partnerships to better understand the ecological and cultural importance of the hot springs pools

BC Parks and ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Nation will also develop a monitoring approach to determine if conditions are moving towards the vision for the Muχšiƛa hot springs area. As monitoring information is gathered and conditions change, management strategies and actions may be adjusted to better reach desired outcomes. ʕaḥuusʔatḥ Stewardship Guardians will continue to play an important role in on-site monitoring at Muχšiƛa.

Appendix A. Determining Appropriate Visitor Use Levels

As part of the implementation of this strategy, an approach being taken to set appropriate visitor use levels is to consider the limiting attributes[6] that most constrain the ability of the Muχšiƛa hot springs area to support visitor use while ensuring natural and cultural values are protected.

When considering visitor experience in the park, the most limiting attribute is the relatively small hot spring pools. Available dock space may also be a limiting attribute at times. To a lesser extent, the ability of the boardwalk to accommodate visitors walking between the dock and the hot spring pools could be considered a limiting attribute.

Surveys of tourism operators and park visitors conducted as part of the visitor use management strategy suggest the following guidelines would support an enjoyable experience at the Muχšiƛa hot springs:

- Manage for desired upper limit of 15 people in the hot spring pools at one time
- Accommodate visitors spending at least 1 hour at the hot spring pools
- Accommodate visitors spending up to 3 hours per visit to the Muχšiƛa hot springs area, including the walk on the boardwalk between the dock and pools

When considering ʕaḥuusʔatḥ and Nuučaaʔuł community, cultural and spiritual use, a limiting attribute may be the number of hours per day or days per month when quiet, undisturbed access is possible at the Muχšiƛa hot springs area. In the interim approach applied during the development of this strategy, daily timing windows (several hours/day) and scheduled, monthly closure days were applied to help create supportive conditions for community and cultural use. These dedicated access provisions form part of the overall approach to setting appropriate visitor use levels at the hot springs.

When considering ecological management objectives, the unique geothermal hot springs themselves may be considered a limiting attribute. In future, guidelines to ensure visitor use does not harm hot springs ecology may be factored into the approach for setting visitor use levels. Limiting attributes and guidelines associated with wildlife use or disturbance may also be identified, as information is gathered on the response of wildlife to visitor patterns.

This approach to determining appropriate visitor use levels, including the visitor experience guidelines and dedicated access provisions described above, may be used during the initial implementation phase of this strategy and adjusted over time as new information is gathered.

[6] IVUMC (Interagency Visitor Use Management Council). 2019. Visitor Capacity Guidebook: Managing the Amounts and Types of Visitor Use to Achieve Desired Conditions. Lakewood, CO. https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/VUM/Framework

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