

“PANIC PARK”:

Environmental Protest and the Politics of Parks in British Columbia’s Skagit Valley

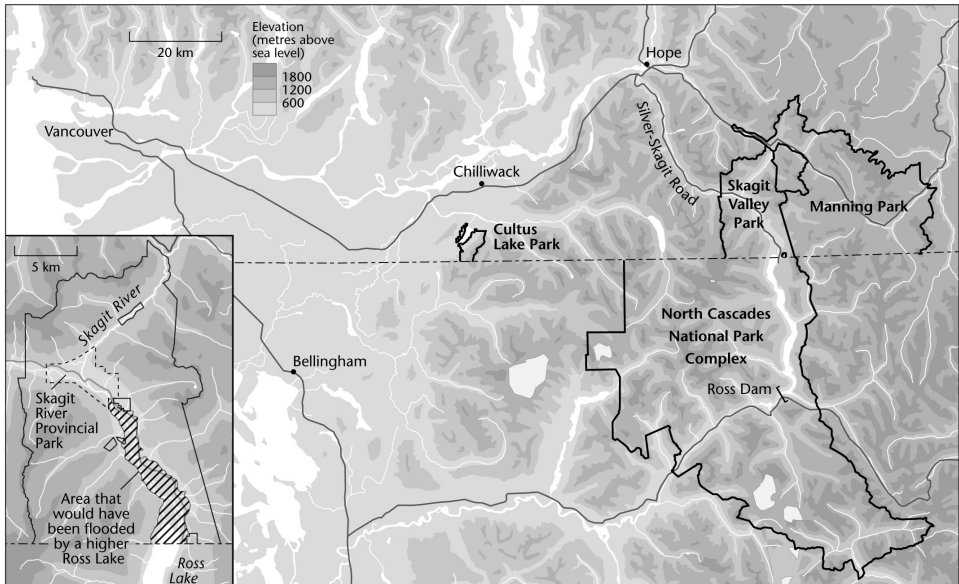
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SKAGIT VALLEY PROVINCIAL PARK is not particularly well known. Encapsulating most of the Skagit River Basin in British Columbia, the park boasts beautifully rugged mountain and river valley scenery and is close to two of the region’s largest cities – Vancouver and Seattle. Yet, despite the aesthetic appeal of the park and its proximity to nearly half the populations of British Columbia and Washington, it receives far fewer visitors than do neighbouring parks, such as Cultus Lake and Manning provincial parks in British Columbia and North Cascades National Park in Washington, into which the Skagit River flows.¹ When the park was first created in the Skagit Valley, however, it was one of the most talked about and contested places in British Columbia.

The valley’s high profile was due to a cross-border controversy over the High Ross Dam on the Skagit River. Seattle’s public utility company, Seattle City Light (SCL), had built the Ross Dam in the 1930s and then

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¹ Thirty-nine thousand, one hundred and twenty-two people visited Skagit Valley Provincial Park in the 2009–10 season, substantially fewer than the 1.2 million and 800,000 who visited E.C. Manning Provincial Park and Cultus Lake Provincial Park over the same period, and the 400,000 who visit the North Cascades National Park Complex each year. For provincial park statistics, see BC Ministry of the Environment, 2009/10 *BC Parks Year End Report* (Victoria: Ministry of Environment, 2010), app. 1. For the North Cascades National Park Complex, see <http://www.north.cascades.national-park.com/info.htm#size> (accessed 19 July 2011).



Skagit Valley Provincial Park and surrounding area. The inset shows where the Socred-created, 1970 Skagit River Provincial Park was located before it was incorporated into the 1974, NDP-created Skagit Valley Recreation Area, the borders of which were basically the same as today's Skagit Valley Park. Map by Eric Leinberger.

raised it to a height of more than 150 metres in the 1940s.² This inundated 8,000 hectares in Washington and 240 hectares in British Columbia but raised little opposition in either country. In 1942, the International Joint Commission (IJC), a Canada-US agency charged with managing shared waterways, approved a Seattle plan to raise the dam by nearly 40 metres which would flood an additional 1,200 hectares in Washington and 2,000 hectares in British Columbia, provided a compensation agreement could be reached with the province.³ This was not achieved until 1967, when British Columbia and Seattle agreed to yearly payments of \$35,000 in exchange for raising the dam.⁴ Within a couple of years, environmental

² In this article, when discussing negotiations and/or plans for the High Ross Dam, "Seattle" refers to the municipal government and "scl" refers to the public utility company.

³ International Joint Commission, "In the Matter of the Application of the City of Seattle for Authority to Raise the Water Level of the Skagit River Approximately 130 Feet at the International Boundary between the United States and Canada: Order of Approval," (Ottawa: International Joint Commission, 1942). The fact that the second stage of the Ross Dam flooded a little under 240 hectares in British Columbia was technically illegal and caused a minor quarrel between Seattle and British Columbia in 1954. Thereafter, Seattle applied for permission to flood this area each year and paid just over \$5,000 every year until the 1967 agreement. See BC Ministry of Environment, Water Management Branch, box 23, files 5-7, 90-898.

⁴ *Agreement between the Province of British Columbia and the City of Seattle with Respect to Flooding the Skagit River Basin, 10 Jan. 1967* (Victoria: Attorney General's Department, 1967).

activists and recreationists in Vancouver and Seattle were ranged in vigorous opposition to the High Ross Dam.

Skagit Valley Provincial Park emerged from this controversy. Both W.A.C. Bennett’s Social Credit Party (Socred) and Dave Barrett’s New Democratic Party (NDP) governments were criticized for their stance on the High Ross Dam. In response, both governments established parks in the Skagit Valley. Bennett’s government created Skagit River Provincial Park in 1970 to convince BC residents that the High Ross Dam’s artificial lake would improve the valley’s environment and create a popular destination for recreation. The Barrett government replaced this park with the much larger Skagit Valley Recreation Area in 1973 to indicate it would not allow SLC to flood the valley.

At first glance, these two parks seem to fit nicely with the histories of other non-urban parks, the purpose of which is seen to have shifted from use to preservation.⁵ According to these narratives, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries parks were a form of natural resource, attracting tourist dollars by developing “monumental” wild areas as retreats for the wealthy, complete with luxury hotels, spas, and golf courses. After the late 1950s, rising public interest in the environment and wilderness appreciation produced a spate of pro-environment legislation and bureaucracy, including hundreds of new parks with a mandate to preserve nature before promoting tourism.⁶ In this context, the Socred plan to use a flooded Skagit Valley to attract tourist dollars followed older trends in park creation, and the NDP plan to preserve the valley from

⁵ For this article, “parks” refers to non-urban parks. There were often different reasons for the creation of urban parks such as Stanley Park, including the desire for garden-like cities and urban health reform. For a discussion of this literature, see Sean Kheraj, “Inventing Nature’s Past: An Environmental History of Stanley Park” (PhD diss., York University, 2007), 11–15; and Robert A.J. McDonald, “‘Holy Retreat’ or ‘Practical Breathing Spot’? Class Perceptions of Vancouver’s Stanley Park,” *Canadian Historical Review* 65, 2 (1984): 127–30.

⁶ Robert Craig Brown, “The Doctrine of Usefulness: Natural Resource Policy and National Park Policy in Canada, 1887–1914,” in *Canadian Parks in Perspective*, ed. J.G. Nelson and R.C. Stace (Montreal: Harvest House, 1969), 46–62; Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979); Leslie Bella, *Parks for Profit* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1987); Gerald Killan, *Protected Places: A History of Ontario’s Provincial Parks System* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1993); Mark T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994); J. Keri Cronin, *Manufacturing National Park Nature: Photography, Ecology, and the Wilderness Industry of Jasper* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); Claire Campbell, ed., *A Century of Parks Canada, 1911–2011* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011). For general histories of the environmental movement that portray parks and other environmental legislation according to a similar trend, see Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955–1985* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

flooding reflected rising environmental sentiment and a preservationist rationale for parks.

But, as Alan MacEachern argues, the use-versus-preservation tension is a false dichotomy: all parks combine the goals of use and preservation to some degree.⁷ Many early twentieth-century parks were created for context-specific social, cultural, and political reasons that had very little to do with use or preservation. Some historians insist that turn-of-the-century parks and the early conservation movement allowed the state to regulate and even dispossess local claims (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) to “public” lands.⁸ Others argue that some parks were created to get roads built, or, more abstractly, that roads and our viewpoints from the vehicles that use them have had a profound impact on defining what parks should be.⁹

In this article, I argue that, in order to understand the development of Skagit Valley Provincial Park, we need to move beyond the use-versus-preservation arguments. The parks created in the Skagit Valley in the early 1970s were established quickly, in the face of mounting criticism of the High Ross Dam. Their purpose was to promote the image of environmentally enlightened government rather than to enhance ecological preservation or to encourage tourism.¹⁰ Both governments used park

⁷ Alan MacEachern, *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada, 1935-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). MacEachern, along with many of the authors quoted in this paragraph (and myself), rely heavily on William Cronon's insights into the false dichotomy of nature/culture and the social construction of wilderness. See William Cronon, “Introduction: In Search of Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 23-56; and William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in Cronon, *Uncommon Ground*, 69-90.

⁸ Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), chaps. 1-2; Theodore Binnema and Melanie Niemi, “Let the Line Be Drawn Now: Wilderness, Conservation, and the Exclusion of Aboriginal People from Banff National Park in Canada,” *Environmental History* 11, 4 (2006): 724-50.

⁹ Ben Bradley, “A Questionable Basis for Establishing a Major Park: Politics, Roads, and the Failure of a National Park in British Columbia's Big Bend Country,” in Campbell, *Century of Parks*, 79-102; Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); David Louter, *Windshield Wilderness: Cars, Roads, and Nature in Washington's National Parks* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

¹⁰ Similar arguments have been made for BC parks in the 1990s and 2000s. See Jeremy Wilson, *Talk and Log: Wilderness Politics in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998); and Kevin S. Hanna, Roderick W. Negrave, Brian Kutas, and Dushan Jojkic, “Conflict and Protected Areas Establishment: British Columbia's Political Parks,” in *Transforming Parks and Protected Areas: Policy and Governance in a Changing World*, ed. Kevin S. Hanna, Douglas A. Clark, and D. Scott Slocombe (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 137-53.

creation to placate environmental criticism without cancelling the 1967 agreement to raise the Ross Dam.

A LAKEFRONT PLAYGROUND: THE SOCIAL CREDIT
GOVERNMENT AND THE SKAGIT VALLEY

There were plenty of reasons to create a park in the Skagit Valley before it became the site of a Canada-US controversy. The valley's reputation as a coveted spot for trout fishing, elk and mountain goat hunting, and natural history outings increased steadily over the course of the twentieth century. Until 1946, access to the valley was possible only on foot or on horseback along rough mining or Coast Salish trails, limiting the number of people who visited. The valley was thus used only sporadically for recreation, mostly by local fishing enthusiasts from Hope and Chilliwack. The Vancouver Natural History Society led by UBC botanist John Davidson took the occasional field trip into the valley, and Shxw'ow'hamel chief Willie George and his family operated a lucrative guiding business in the Skagit Valley for wealthy American and British hunters in the 1930s and 1940s.¹¹ All of this changed when SCL built an access road from Hope to the international border to clear the future lake bed of trees. By the late 1950s, thousands of people were visiting the valley each year. According to a provincial Parks Branch study, hundreds of cars were parked at various spots along the road and at the tip of Ross Reservoir on any given weekend from late spring to early fall.¹² John Hart's provincial government agreed to SCL's proposal to turn a trail along Silver Creek into a logging road because the provincial Forest Branch recognized that it would facilitate logging in other areas

¹¹ Ralph George, interview with author, 13 July 2010; Bert Brink, oral history interview, 14 May 2003; Edward Liebow, Dorinda S. Bixler, and Sara J. Breslow, *Skagit Oral History Project Phase I* (Seattle: Environmental Health and Social Policy Center, 2003), 8-11; V.C. Brink, "Camping with the Vancouver Natural History Society," 1986, UBC Rare Books and Special Collections (hereafter UBC Special Collections), Vernon C. Brink Fonds, file 5, box 3; Thomas L. Perry, Jr., *A Citizen's Guide to the Skagit Valley* (Vancouver: Ross Committee, 1981), 9; Paula Wuorinen, *A History of the Skagit Valley Recreation Area* (Victoria: BC Parks Branch, 1975), 16-36. The Silver-Skagit Road and the logging and mass recreation that went with it effectively ended George's guiding business as wealthy hunters would not pay to be taken to a place that so many others used as well.

¹² W.M. Spriggs, Parks Officer, memorandum to R.H. Ahrens, Planning Division, 23 March 1962, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), GR-1991, Skagit Valley Park file, reel B1816, records relating to parks (hereafter Skagit Valley Park file).

of the valley.¹³ But, ironically, the Silver-Skagit Road opened up the Skagit Valley to those intent on protesting against the dam being raised.¹⁴

Construction of the Silver-Skagit Road coincided with a general change in the recreational practices of the average North American. The growing affordability of automobiles in combination with increased leisure time had an enormous impact on areas that the majority of urban dwellers had previously considered wild and inaccessible.¹⁵ This trend affected British Columbia as much as anywhere else. Vehicle ownership doubled nearly every decade in the province from the early 1940s to the 1970s, compared with a population that increased by much less.¹⁶ There was also a corresponding flurry of new road construction after the Second World War, especially by Bennett's "blacktop" government which, from 1952 to 1972, more than doubled the kilometres of paved roads in the province.¹⁷ These new roadways made motor tourism an accessible form of recreation for a large majority of BC residents.

In 1960 the provincial Parks Branch conducted a thorough survey of the Skagit Valley to determine whether it merited a provincial park. The Forest Service, which had held a forest reserve in the valley since

¹³ Geo. P. Melrose, Assistant Chief Forester, Forest Branch, BC Department of Lands, to E.H. Hoffman, 9 January 1945, Seattle Municipal Archives, Department of Lighting of the City of Seattle Collection, Superintendents' Correspondence, 1200-13, file 2, box 11; E.R. Hoffman, memorandum re: lands to be flooded in Canada, 5 October 1945, Seattle Municipal Archives, Department of Lighting of the City of Seattle Collection, Superintendent Correspondence, 1200-13, file 2, box 11.

¹⁴ W.M. Spriggs, memorandum to R.H. Ahrens, Skagit Valley Park file. It is interesting to note that the Silver-Skagit Road followed a trail that was originally surveyed for the Hope-Princeton Highway in 1910 by A.E. Cleveland. Minister of Public Works Thomas Taylor, an avid automobilist, and Premier Richard McBride committed to constructing the road using this route in 1911; however, plans were put on hold due to the First World War. The valley's history would have been quite different had the highway been built here rather than through Allison Pass, the route that Tolmie's provincial government chose when it returned to the idea in the late 1920s. See R.G. Harvey, *The Coast Connection: A History of the Building of Trails and Roads between British Columbia's Interior and Its Lower Mainland from the Cariboo Road to the Coquihalla Highway* (Lantzville: Oolichan Books, 1994), 79; and R.G. Harvey, *Carving the Western Path: By River, Rail, and Road through BC's Southern Mountains* (Surrey: Heritage House, 1998), 107-47 and app. 1.

¹⁵ Marguerite S. Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001), chaps. 3-4; Sutter, *Driven Wild*; Louter, *Windshield Wilderness*.

¹⁶ Vehicle ownership in British Columbia for this period breaks down as follows: 1941: 77,182; 1951: 153,325; 1961: 329,739; and 1971: 544,310. See Veronica Strong-Boag, "Society in the Twentieth Century," in *The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia*, ed. Hugh J.M. Johnston (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1996), 288. Population in the province grew at a slower (although still impressive) rate: 1941: 817,800; 1951: 1.1 million; 1961: 1.6 million; and 1971: 2.2 million. See <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/pop/pop/BCPop.asp> (accessed 19 July 2011).

¹⁷ Martin Robin, *Pillars of Profit: The Company Province, 1934-1972* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 89-220; David J. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983), 260.

the 1920s, had already set aside two small recreational reserves of about 40 hectares each in 1953 and 1955 "for the use, recreation, and enjoyment of the public," but these reserves were not protected by legislation and provided no amenities for recreationists, such as camping or garbage facilities.¹⁸ By the mid-1960s, the Parks Branch argued that more than a forest reserve was needed. The valley contained rare flora, including California rhododendrons and (unusually in the Cascade Mountains) ponderosa pines that should have been preserved as much from recreationists as from loggers. This was protection that only a park could provide.¹⁹

For the Socred government, however, industry came before recreation. Most recreation in the valley occurred in the 2,000 hectares that Seattle wanted to flood. The 1967 agreement that the province signed with Seattle thus severely limited options for recreation in the valley since the remainder was still important for forestry. As Forest Service director W.G. Hughes, at the behest of Minister for Lands, Forests, and Water Resources Ray Williston and Minister for Recreation and Conservation Ken Kiernan, explained to Parks Branch director H.G. McWilliams, "[the Skagit was] an area with a good potential for forest production," and "further examination" would be required to determine which areas could be logged profitably and which could be dedicated to park use.²⁰ Plans for a park were shelved, although only temporarily.

As a number of scholars have shown, environmental activism grew significantly in British Columbia in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Previously the focus of a few outdoor recreationists, wildlife conservationists, and anti-pollution activists (such as UBC biologist Vernon C. Brink and nature writer Roderick Haig-Brown), concern for the environment was popularized in the province by younger, more vocal and radical activists, including university students, counterculture activists, and American draft dodgers. Activists formed a host of new environmental groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the BC Sierra Club, the Society for Pollution and Environmental Control (SPEC), and the Don't Make a Wave Committee (which later became

¹⁸ George A. Wood, *Report on Recreational Reconnaissance of Skagit and Klesilkwa Valleys, Skagit Forest* (Victoria: BC Forest Service, 1952); R.E. Burns, Superintendent of Lands, to Parks and Recreation Division, 14 December 1953, Skagit Valley Park file; Burns to Parks and Recreation Division, 2 June 1955, Skagit Valley Park file.

¹⁹ W.M. Spriggs, Parks Officer, memorandum to R.H. Ahrens, Planning Division, 23 March 1962, Skagit Valley Park file; H.G. McWilliams to the Chief Forester, Forest Service, 6 July 1967, Skagit Valley Park file; R.H. Ahrens to W.G. Hughes, Forest Service, 3 December 1967, Skagit Valley Park file.

²⁰ W.G. Hughes to H.G. McWilliams, 29 November 1967, Skagit Valley Park file.

Greenpeace). These organizations, although initially resented by more established groups like the BC Wildlife Federation and the Vancouver Natural History Society, eventually worked in concert with older conservationists in taking issue with the Socred government's aggressive and province-wide development programs. They argued that Socreds had polluted provincial land, air, and water; depleted fish and wildlife populations; and permitted incursions into provincial parks like Strathcona and Tweedsmuir.²¹

Canadian nationalism and anti-American sentiment also contributed to rising environmentalism in British Columbia. Some researchers argue that many activists, both Canadian-born and those from the United States, were incensed with what they perceived as the United States' treating Canada as a mere storehouse of natural resources – something that activists believe made Canada complicit in the Vietnam War.²² Others investigate how BC environmentalists focused protests on nuclear weapons testing off the coast of Alaska, a proposed US oil tanker route along the coast of British Columbia, and the Columbia River Treaty, which permitted the construction of the Mica, Duncan, and Keenleyside dams in the province and the Libby Dam in Montana (flooding into southeastern British Columbia) to better produce power downstream in the United States.²³

²¹ Bruce Shelvey, "Skagit Scenes: Landscape Formation in the Pacific Northwest" (PhD Diss., Arizona State University, 1999), 373–84; Wilson, *Talk and Log*, 79–111; Frank Zelko, "Making Greenpeace: The Development of Direct Action Environmentalism in British Columbia," *BC Studies* 142/43 (2004): 197–239; Arn M. Keeling, "The Effluent Society: Water Pollution and Environmental Politics in British Columbia, 1889–1980" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2004); Arn M. Keeling and Robert McDonald, "The Profligate Province: Roderick Haig-Brown and the Modernizing of British Columbia," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36 (2001): 7–23; and Richard Rajala, "Forests and Fish: The 1972 Coast Logging Guidelines and British Columbia's First NDP Government," *BC Studies* 159 (2008): 81–120. Vernon Brink recalls that there was a brief rift between the older and younger generations of environmental activists in the province. Older conservationists saw new groups as primarily American-based: "We didn't cooperate initially and early as well as we should have ... There was a certain amount of resentment, if I might put it that way. 'Darn Americans coming up here into British Columbia.'" The High Ross Dam was one of the issues that brought the two sides together. See Brink interview in Liebow et al., *Skagit Oral History Project*, 12–13.

²² Zelko, "Making Greenpeace"; Lawrence Aronsen, *City of Love and Revolution: Vancouver in the Sixties* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2010), 135–65. These sentiments were widespread across Canada. See Stephen Clarkson, ed., *An Independent Foreign Policy for Canada?* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968); and J.L. Granatstein, *Yankee Go Home? Canadians and Anti-Americanism* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1996), chap. 7.

²³ Larratt Higgins, "The Alienation of Canadian Resources: The Case of the Columbia River Treaty," in *Close the 49th Parallel, etc.: The Americanization of Canada*, ed. Ian Lumsden (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 223–40; Terry Allan Simmons, "The Damnation of a Dam: The High Ross Dam Controversy" (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1974), 108–20; John E. Carroll, *Environmental Diplomacy: An Examination and a Prospective of Canadian-US Transboundary Environmental Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980);

For environmental activists, the High Ross Dam symbolized both Sacred disdain for wild nature and the United States' imperialistic relationship with Canada and the rest of the world. BC conservationists and environmentalists decried the 1967 agreement between British Columbia and Seattle as a "sell-out" to the United States, sacrificing a wilderness recreation area close to Vancouver for a mere \$35,000 per year. In 1969, under the leadership of former BC Hydro engineer and BC Sierra Club co-founder Ken Farquharson, and with the support of Liberal Party MLA David Brousson, environmental groups coalesced to form the Run Out Skagit Spoilers (ross) Committee to fight the High Ross Dam.²⁴

Despite the claims of many politicians and members of the Canadian media, opposition to the High Ross Dam was never simply a matter of environmental nationalism. From 1957 to 1968, Seattle-based environmentalists had fought a long battle for North Cascades National Park against logging, mining, and hunting interests, and they argued vehemently against scl's proposal to flood the Big Beaver Valley in Washington – something that went against everything for which they had worked.²⁵ Seattle activists also sympathized with anti-American attitudes in Canada, blaming their city for what they saw as an unfair plan to flood British Columbia. One North Cascades Conservation Committee (N3C) member, Joe Miller, explained that anti-American attitudes in British Columbia over the Ross Dam were not surprising since "in many respects [Americans] have treated Canada as a colony."²⁶ Support from American activists initially surprised BC environmentalists. When Farquharson met N3C president and co-founder Patrick Goldsworthy early in 1970, he exclaimed: "We thought you Yankees wanted that dam?" Goldsworthy responded: "No way. We're going to fight it tooth and nail."²⁷ Realizing

Zelko, "Making Greenpeace"; Tina Loo, "People in the Way: Modernity, Environment, and Society on the Arrow Lakes," *BC Studies* 142/43 (2004): 161-96.

²⁴ The groups that formed ross included the BC Sierra Club, the BC Wildlife Federation, SPEC, Totem Fly-Fishers, the Alpine Club, the BC Mountaineering Club, and the Vancouver Natural History Society. Notes from ross meeting, David Brousson's House, 8 January 1970, UBC Special Collections, ross Committee Fonds, file 6, box 3.

²⁵ Seattle City Light and N3C compromised over the original creation of North Cascades National Park, leaving the area around the Ross Reservoir a National Recreation Area, thereby allowing for the dam to be raised sometime in the future. N3C did this in order to make the park a reality, although it was against any form of hydroelectric development, as the controversy over the High Ross Dam would later prove. See Patrick Goldsworthy, interview with author, 16 March 2010; Simmons, "Damnation of a Dam," 121-32; David Louter, *Contested Terrain: North Cascades National Park Service Complex: An Administrative History* (Seattle: National Park Service, 1998).

²⁶ "Ross Dam, Aerospace Concern 'Convention' Delegates," *Everett Herald*, 8 April 1976, UBC Special Collections, ross Committee Fonds, file 3, box 5.

²⁷ Patrick Goldsworthy, interview in Liebow et al., *Skagit Oral History Project*, 46.



1970 protest against the High Ross Dam. It attracted more than 2,500 people to the tip of Ross Reservoir in the British Columbia Skagit Valley. *Source: Vancouver Sun*, 26 Oct. 1970. Used with permission.

that the international nature of the issue would help create a larger controversy, the Ross Committee and N3C coordinated their protest of the High Ross Dam with the public support of numerous national environmental organizations in the United States, including the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and Friends of the Earth.²⁸

Protest strategies consisted of a number of grassroots tactics that had, by the late 1960s, become common among activists seeking to attract media attention and drum up support. A 1969 petition campaign collected over thirty thousand signatures from BC residents, and these signatures were then forwarded to the Socond and Seattle governments.²⁹ Activists also organized a number of public events, including information sessions and debates in Vancouver, Mount Vernon, and Seattle. The most widely covered by the media were two protests in the BC Skagit Valley – a sit-in in 1970 and a “canoe-in” in 1974 – that featured songs, speeches, and guided tours of the river and valley. Both attracted thousands of activists, journalists, and politicians to the future reservoir site in a

²⁸ Ken Farquharson, interview with author, 3 March 2010; Ken Farquharson, letter to Patrick Goldsworthy, 19 February 1970, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 6, box 3.

²⁹ Testimony of Ross Committee to the Federal Power Commission re Project No. 553 Ross Dam, 1974, 8–12, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 8, box 2; Before the Federal Power Commission, City of Seattle, Project No. 553, direct testimony of Dr. Patrick Goldsworthy, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 8, box 4.

show of solidarity for activist efforts to stop the High Ross Dam.³⁰ In addition, activists published ads and op-ed pieces in newspapers and articles in magazines and appeared on television programs, which resulted in thousands of protest letters from residents, municipal governments, trade unions, women's groups, and environmental organizations across Canada and Washington State that were sent to politicians at all levels in both countries.³¹

A number of well-known folk singers wrote songs specifically about the Skagit Valley and the Ross Dam. The most significant of these was "Skagit Valley Forever" by prominent American folk singer and *Sesame Street* regular Malvina Reynolds (of "Little Boxes" fame). The song, which she performed across North America and included on the album *Mama Lion*, captured public sentiment against the dam:

Oh my sisters and my brothers in this shining Northern land,
 It's time to get together, to take each others' hand,
 And ring around our wilderness to keep the gangs away
 Who would ravage our sweet country for a shameful pocketful of pay.
 Skagit Valley, Skagit Valley,
 No grabber will get you for a prize,
 Skagit Valley, Skagit Valley,
 We'll let no vandal drown you,
 We'll keep you as we found you, British Columbia's forest paradise.³²

Protests by Vancouver and Seattle environmentalists were successful. By the early 1970s, the Skagit Valley had gone from relative obscurity to front-page news in British Columbia and Washington, and the High Ross Dam controversy was also covered at length by Canada's national

³⁰ *Skagit Valley Sit-In*, flyer, 25 October 1970, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 6, box 3; "2,500 Protest Scheme to Flood Skagit Valley," *Vancouver Sun*, 26 October 1970, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 8, box 2; "Canoe-In Emphasizes BC's Intentions," *Vancouver Sun*, 29 July 1974, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 6, box 13.

³¹ A large portion of these letters (and evidence of the sheer volume of them) can be found in Victoria at the BC Ministry of Environment, Water Management Branch files, box 24, 90-898; and Seattle Municipal Archives, Wes Uhlman Collection, box 140, 5287-02.

³² "Skagit Valley Forever," words and music by Malvina Reynolds, copyright 1970, Schroder Music Company, ASCAP, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 18, box 3. Other songs included Joan Reed, "Farewell to the Wilderness," which she "sang into the official record" at the 1974 Federal Power Commission hearing and played for CTV's *W5* program in the Skagit Valley. See Perry, *Citizen's Guide*, 79, 82-83; and David Schroder, "A Plea for the Skagit Valley," UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 18, box 3.

newspapers, magazines, and television and radio programs.³³ Canadian media focused primarily on the fact that the dam that would flood Canadian land was in the United States and rarely noted that there was significant opposition to it in the American Pacific Northwest. In one 1970 article in *Canadian Magazine* (reprinted in major newspapers across the country and entitled “Will Canada Let the Yanks Flood this BC Forest?”) prominent journalist Paul Grescoe explained: “The British Columbia government is trying to sell the US the right to flood a rich green BC valley to provide power for the city of Seattle. Ottawa can stop this sellout.”³⁴ To apply further pressure, a number of powerful Canadian and American politicians took advantage of the political salience of the issue to oppose raising the Ross Dam. Among them were Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau, the first federal minister of the environment Jack Davis, Washington State’s governor Dan Evans, and Seattle’s mayor Wes Uhlman.³⁵

The amount and intensity of protest against the High Ross Dam surprised the provincial government. Hardly anyone had noticed when the initial Order of Approval allowing the Ross Dam to flood into British Columbia had been issued in 1942 by the IJC. Furthermore, BC-Seattle negotiations for a settlement had gone on for over two decades, without public concern. Once the controversy erupted, Williston argued that the 1967 agreement was the best deal that could have been made in a situation that had already been decided for the province in 1942.³⁶

³³ There are hundreds of newspaper stories related to the Skagit controversy from 1969 to 1984 in the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Province*, the *Victoria Daily Times*, the *Daily Colonist*, the *Times-Colonist*, the *Seattle Times*, and the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. There are also some in the *Globe and Mail* and the *New York Times*. For an extensive collection of these, and many more from other regional newspapers and magazines, see the clippings collection in UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, files 3-6, box 13 and all of box 14.

³⁴ Paul Grescoe, “Will Canada Let the Yanks Flood This BC Forest?” *Canadian Magazine*, 16 May 1970, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 9, box 4. Grescoe has become a prolific western Canadian writer, authoring many books, including (with David Cruise) *The Money Rustlers: Self-Made Millionaires of the New West* (Makham/New York: Viking, 1985) and (with Audrey Grescoe), *Fragments of Paradise: British Columbia’s Wild and Wondrous Islands* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 1995).

³⁵ Perry, *Citizen’s Guide*, 59-67. The Canadian Department of the Environment was created in 1971. The fact that Seattle’s mayor was against the project did not mean very much since the Seattle City Council, the ultimate authority in Seattle on whether or not to raise the dam, was still in favour of the project.

³⁶ Excerpts from an address during the budget debate by the honourable Ray Williston, Minister of Lands, Forests, and Water Resources, 29th Legislative Assembly, 1st Session, 1970, p. 4, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 17, box 2. See also Eileen Williston and Betty Keller, *Forests, Power, and Policy: The Legacy of Ray Williston* (Prince George: Caitlin Press, 1997), 235-41.



A child at the 1970 High Ross Dam protest, standing in the stumps left behind each year after the drawdown of the Ross Reservoir. This image was reproduced numerous times by environmentalists and journalists alike as a potent symbol of Canadian protest against raising the dam. *Source: Vancouver Sun*, 26 Oct. 1970, p. 1. Used with permission.

Any change to the project, both Bennett and Williston claimed, could only happen at the federal level.³⁷

This defence was disingenuous. The Socred government was never under any legal obligation to negotiate a compensation agreement with Seattle, and it was Williston who had approached the city in 1961 about finally reaching an agreement.³⁸ Williston and Bennett were embarrassed

³⁷ "Ex-minister (Socred) Gives His View on Skagit," *Province*, 3 June 1974, 4, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 7, box 5; "Skagit: Bennett Won't Intervene," *Province*, n.d., UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 7, box 3.

³⁸ In 1959, the International Joint Commission ruled against a Seattle government application to force British Columbia to sign a compensation agreement, arguing that the province was not obligated to do so. Seattle was frustrated that the Socred government wanted to wait until after the Columbia River Treaty was signed before agreeing to anything concerning the Skagit. Seattle appears to have given up on the High Ross Dam after this point and, instead, began to construct the Boundary Dam on the Pend d'Oreille River. In 1961, Williston and Deputy Minister of Lands E.W. Bassett and Deputy Minister of Water A.F. Paget approached Seattle about finally negotiating an agreement over the Skagit. See, "Statement Regarding the Skagit River Application (Docket 46) Presented by Chairman of the Canadian Section International Joint Commission, Montreal, 29 June 1959," BC Ministry of Environment, Water Management Branch files, 90-898, file 5, box 23; Williston to Paul J. Raver, SCL Superintendent,

by the controversy over the 1967 agreement and tried to deflect attention onto the federal government by arguing that it had been responsible for the initial decision to flood the valley. The federal government, for its part, blamed the province for negotiating a bad deal, claiming that federal responsibility for the river had ended with the 1942 Order of Approval. This claim was also misleading. Trudeau's government could have used the 1955 International River Improvements Act (a federal law created to stop a previous Bennett plan for the Kaiser Dam on the Columbia River) to cancel the 1967 agreement, but it did not want to risk endangering other Canada-US boundary water agreements by interfering directly.³⁹ Instead, after lengthy legal consultation with the Department of External Affairs, Environment Minister Davis declared the Trudeau government was against the High Ross Dam but insisted any compromise had to come from renegotiations between Seattle and British Columbia, a position that Trudeau would later maintain with Barrett and the NDP.⁴⁰ Whereas previous controversies over rivers in the province, particularly the Columbia, had been partly based on federal-provincial struggles over jurisdiction, the High Ross Dam was a volatile issue with which neither the federal government nor the provincial government wanted anything to do.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the Bennett government tried to stress the positive impact that the High Ross Dam would have on the Skagit Valley, especially with regard to recreation. In 1969, SCL had hired a BC engineering firm, F.F. Slaney and Company, to conduct extensive surveys of the BC Skagit Valley, detailing its geography, fish and wildlife resources, and recreational use and potential. The BC government allowed Slaney to consult with officials from the Department of Lands, Forests, and Water

9 March 1961, BC Ministry of Environment, Water Management Branch files, 90-898, file 5, box 23; Williston to R.G. McKee, Deputy Minister of Forests, 7 April 1961, BC Ministry of Environment, Water Management Branch files, 90-898, file 5, box 23; Meeting – City Of Seattle re Skagit, August 1961, BC Ministry of Environment, Water Management Branch files, 90-898, file 5, box 23.

³⁹ “Skagit River: Record of Conclusions – Interdepartmental Meeting, Nov. 3, 1971,” Library and Archives Canada, Department of External Affairs, RG-25, file 25-5-2-Skagit River, pt. 3, vol. 1573L.

⁴⁰ “News Release: The Honourable Jack Davis – Minister of the Environment on the Skagit Valley, Ottawa, March 23, 1972,” UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 4, box 3.

⁴¹ For the lengthy federal-provincial struggle over control of the Columbia River, including the Kaiser project and the Columbia River Treaty, see Neil A. Swainson, *Conflict over the Columbia: The Canadian Background to an Historic Treaty* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979). For another federal-provincial tussle over the non-transboundary Stellako River, see Richard Rajala, “‘This Wasteful Use of a River’: Log Driving, Conservation, and British Columbia's Stellako River Controversy, 1965-72,” *BC Studies* 165 (2010): 31-74.

resources and the Department of Recreation and Conservation.⁴² Slaney argued that the valley was little utilized for recreation but that the new lake had the potential to attract over fifteen thousand people per day at the height of summer. With proper management, the valley would have the appearance of "a natural seashore on the Pacific Ocean when the daily tide is out" in the winter and spring, and it would be "as attractive as any inland lake" in the summer when the reservoir was full.⁴³

Early in 1970, Kiernan instructed R.H. Ahrens, then Parks Branch director, to set up a 1,500-hectare provincial park along the projected shoreline of the reservoir, extending from the confluence of the Skagit and Klesilkwa rivers to the northern reach of the future Ross reservoir. Ahrens had been adamant throughout the 1960s that a much larger park should be created along the Skagit River rather than on the Ross Dam reservoir, but the government preferred Slaney's assessment.⁴⁴ Kiernan predicted that the park "may well become as popular as Cultus Lake" and that it would "improve fish and wildlife habitat generally in adjacent areas" and "[ensure] the future protection of the area from encroachment."⁴⁵ Williston went even further, arguing that the park and the Ross reservoir would be "one of the most accessible, scenic, and delightfully usable spots to be found in the Lower Mainland."⁴⁶

The promotion of Skagit River Provincial Park was consistent with how the Socred government had, by the late 1960s, been trying to deflect environmental criticism without altering its pro-development stance. In 1967, referring to criticism of Columbia River projects, BC Hydro's executive director, E.M. Gunderson, had suggested to Premier Bennett that "the setting up of another park would do much to offset the criticism being given the government by the public."⁴⁷ In 1969, Bennett and his ministers of agriculture, municipal affairs, recreation and conservation, mines, and health set up the Environment and Land Use Committee

⁴² Press release, F.F. Slaney and Co., 25 September 1970, UBC Special Collections, ross Committee Fonds, file 14, box 3.

⁴³ F.F. Slaney and Company Ltd., *Skagit Valley and Ross Reservoir in Canada: City of Seattle Department of Lighting* (Vancouver: F.F. Slaney and Company Ltd., 1970), 41 and 46.

⁴⁴ R.H. Ahrens, memorandum to the Honourable the Minister, Ken Kiernan, 19 January 1970, Skagit Valley Park file; R.H. Ahrens to W.G. Hughes, Forest Service, 3 December 1967, Skagit Valley Park file.

⁴⁵ Press release, "A New Provincial Park in the Skagit River Valley," 5 February 1970, 1-2, Skagit Valley Park file.

⁴⁶ "Excerpts from an address during the budget debate by the honourable Ray Williston, Minister of Lands, Forests, and Water Resources," 29th Legislative Assembly, 1st Session, 1970, 4, UBC Special Collections, ross Committee Fonds, file 17, box 2.

⁴⁷ E.M. Gunderson, Executive Director of BC Hydro, to W.A.C. Bennett, Premier of British Columbia, 16 June 1967, Simon Fraser University Archives, W.A.C. Bennett Fonds, F-55-42-0-1, box 65.

(ELUC), chaired by Ray Williston. On paper, ELUC appeared to have broad regulatory powers, and it was meant to function as a de facto department of the environment. *Victoria Daily Colonist* editor Alec Merriman described its formation as “one of the most significant actions in the history of land-use in British Columbia.”⁴⁸ In practice, however, as Jeremy Wilson argues, ELUC never “used even a fraction of its potential,” serving instead as a delay-and-rubber-stamp committee for the Socred government.⁴⁹ As Williston later explained in an interview:

At the time this was a matter of critical concern by government people. Environment had become a very popular topic and people were forming environment departments all across the country ... Really, this was mostly a political approach because politicians like to impress the public that they are doing something progressive about a matter of concern.⁵⁰

Williston also plainly explained how ELUC and the Socred government approached park creation: “lots of times [critics] gave [flak] about parks, and something happened to parks, which was good politics.”⁵¹ On Cypress Mountain, for example, ELUC coordinated the creation of a park in 1971 to assuage criticism of logging operations and a ski project on the mountain face, which was visible from Vancouver.⁵² It did the same in 1972 on the Kootenay River, setting up Kikomun Creek Provincial Park, where, under the provisions of the Columbia River Treaty, Montana’s Libby Dam reservoir flooded nearly 8,000 hectares of land in British Columbia.⁵³ Like Skagit River Provincial Park, Cypress and Kikomun were both relatively small, albeit Class A parks, and were created after development had already occurred or had been approved; therefore,

⁴⁸ *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 14 January 1970.

⁴⁹ Wilson, *Talk and Log*, 108.

⁵⁰ Ray Williston, oral history interview by Derek Reimer, 9 October 1975 (transcript), BCA, Oral History Program, 1, track 1, tape 21. For a rosier depiction of Williston, the High Ross Dam controversy, and his role in the ELUC, see Eileen Williston and Betty Keller, *Forests, Power, and Policy: The Legacy of Ray Williston* (Prince George: Caitlin Press, 1997), 223–45.

⁵¹ Williston interview, BCA, Oral History Program, 10, track 1, tape 24.

⁵² Patrick L. McGeer, *Politics in Paradise* (Toronto: Peter Martin Assoc. Ltd., 1972), 135–44; James Kenneth Youds, “A Park System as an Evolving Cultural Institution: A Case Study of the British Columbia Provincial Park System, 1911–1976” (MA thesis, University of Waterloo, 1978), 97; Wilson, *Talk and Log*, 102. Wilson also describes a number of other parks that were created during this period as the result of environmentalist pressure, including Cathedral Provincial Park in the Okanagan (1968) and Pacific Rim National Park Reserve (1970) on Vancouver Island, which the provincial government allowed the federal government to create. See Wilson, *Talk and Log*, 101–5.

⁵³ Philip Van Huizen, “Building a Green Dam: Environmental Modernism and the Canadian-American Libby Dam Project,” *Pacific Historical Review* 79, 3 (2010): 445–48.

their creation conferred little protection to the regions in which they were located.⁵⁴

BC environmentalists were not fooled. In their minds the Socred government had a rather duplicitous relationship with British Columbia's provincial parks, and there was plenty of evidence to justify such a belief. Jeremy Wilson has pointed out that, despite the fact that the Socreds had separated the Parks Branch from the Forest Service and had increased the total number of provincial parks from around sixty in 1952 to over three hundred by 1972, the total area of parkland in the province over the same period had actually decreased by nearly 650,000 hectares. Moreover, the A, B, C, and Recreation Area provincial park classification system meant that park status conferred little protection because classifications could be downgraded, thereby allowing natural resource development inside the park (only Class A status conferred complete protection). Or park boundaries could simply be changed by an order-in-council.⁵⁵ By the late 1960s, the Socred government had already redrawn boundaries in several parks to advance development projects. The largest change occurred in 1961, when the massive Hamber Park in the Columbia River Valley was reduced by over 800,000 hectares to make way for the Mica Dam and its reservoir.⁵⁶ More notorious for environmentalists were the numerous cuts and changes that the Socreds made to Strathcona Park on Vancouver Island – first for a dam in the 1950s and then for mine development in the mid-1960s – despite extensive criticism on both occasions.⁵⁷

The creation of Skagit River Provincial Park was thus met with scepticism. The BC Wildlife Federation scoffed that it might better have been named "Panic Park" since "the government's hurried decision to create an instant park is merely a smoke screen to obscure what is painfully obvious – the Americans not only got the best of the horse trading, they got the ranch to boot."⁵⁸ Liberal MLA and ross supporter David Brousson expressed similar criticism in the provincial Legislature. Referring to Williston's defence of the 1967 agreement and the creation of a park in the Skagit Valley as "a trail of red herrings," he argued that

⁵⁴ Cypress Provincial Park was 3,000 hectares, Kikomun was 680 hectares. Cypress was changed to a Class A provincial park in 1975. Its original status is unclear. See Youds, "Park System," 97.

⁵⁵ Wilson, *Talk and Log*, 95-97.

⁵⁶ Bradley, "Questionable Basis."

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 95-97; Keeling and Wynn, this issue; Keeling and McDonald, "Profligate Province," 12-13; Eric Owen Davies, "The Wilderness Myth: Wilderness in British Columbia" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1972), 82-90.

⁵⁸ "What's New Outdoors?" *BC Wildlife Federation* (1970), 6, UBC Special Collections, ross Committee Fonds, file 6, box 3.

the park was a reaction to “the pressure of the publicity we have brought to bear in this matter. Thank goodness for this tiny sop thrown to the people of British Columbia by their government.”⁵⁹

A CHANGE OF GUARD, A CHANGE OF PARK: THE NDP AND THE SKAGIT VALLEY

In a voter poll taken in August 1972, 48 percent of voters expressed trust in a Socred government to take care of environmental problems and 92 percent voiced their trust in an NDP government to do so.⁶⁰ In the election that followed shortly thereafter, the NDP, led by former social worker Dave Barrett, unseated Bennett and the Socreds. The new NDP government, among other promises of change, was anxious to show that it took environmental issues seriously.⁶¹ It had been a vocal opponent of the 1967 agreement with Seattle, and Barrett had promised to prevent the flooding of the Skagit Valley if the NDP were elected. This promise was reiterated shortly after the election, and environmentalists (especially those on the Ross Committee) were optimistic.⁶²

Things were not so simple. The province could not cancel the 1967 agreement without creating an international incident. Seattle’s legal position was sound, and blocking the High Ross Dam would have forced the province to compensate the city for the electricity it would lose. Facing a dilemma, the NDP, like the Socred government before it, used the rhetoric of park creation to make a political statement about saving the Skagit Valley, while leaving the 1967 agreement intact. Barrett and Minister of Lands, Forests, and Water Resources Bob Williams were playing for time, hoping that the Canadian government would pressure the United States into forcing Seattle to cancel its plans to raise

⁵⁹ David M. Brousson, “Reply to the Budget Debate,” 18 February 1970, 5, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 15, box 3.

⁶⁰ Wilson, *Talk and Log*, III.

⁶¹ For the NDP’s short time in office, see Lorne J. Kavic and Garry Brian Nixon, *The 1200 Days: A Shattered Dream – Dave Barrett and the NDP in BC 1972–75* (Coquitlam: Kaen, 1978); Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 297–321; Dave Barrett and William Miller, *Barrett: A Passionate Political Life* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1995); and Rajala, “Forests and Fish.”

⁶² “Skagit Valley Dam Plan Killed,” *Province*, 18 November 1972; Telegram to Dave Barrett from David Brousson, 1 September 1972, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 15, box 3; Minutes, North Cascades Conservation Council Board of Directors’ Meeting, 4 November 1972, 1–2, University of Washington Archives and Special Collections, North Cascades Conservation Council Collection, Outgoing Correspondence 1972–73, box 1, 1732–00r.

the dam or that the project would be refused a licence by the Federal Power Commission.⁶³

Such inaction was not what environmentalists expected or wanted. By mid-1973, they were bombarding Barrett and Williams with letters asking why the project had not been stopped, and they demanded that the NDP follow through on its campaign promises. W.J. Otway, executive director of the BC Wildlife Federation, wrote to Barrett: "Your initial strong stand in opposition to the expansion of the Ross Dam was much appreciated by all who were and are involved in this issue, but we feel that stand must be followed up by some positive action. So far we are unaware of any such action."⁶⁴ David Brousson wrote to Williams, making it plain that environmentalists were losing patience: "I have endeavoured to keep the whole matter out of the area of partisan politics on the assumption that government action was proceeding ... Considering the lack of action taking place or intended ... I question if we can for very long maintain this attitude."⁶⁵

In creating its version of Skagit Valley Park, the NDP followed David King, who had worked for F.F. Slaney on the 1970 Skagit Valley survey. Dissenting from the report's recommendations, King called for a park that encompassed more of the valley and protected its valuable "wild nature" from flooding, logging, mining, and unregulated recreation.⁶⁶ Although the government was initially unwilling to act "until the problem of flooding or not to flood [was] resolved," the threat of a renewed activist campaign pushed it towards a fast-track approach.⁶⁷ In August 1973, a revamped ELUC, chaired by Williams, instructed the Forest Service, Lands Branch, and Department of Recreation and Conservation to work together to create a park, noting that they should take "immediate action."⁶⁸ The new minister of recreation and conservation, Jack Radford, further emphasized the need for quick action, instructing Parks Branch director Ahrens to create a park that would display "the sincerity of the

⁶³ Confidential notes of meeting between Robert Williams and Jack Davis, federal Minister for the Environment, Victoria, 8 June 1973, UBC Special Collections, Dave Barrett Fonds, file 8, box 18.

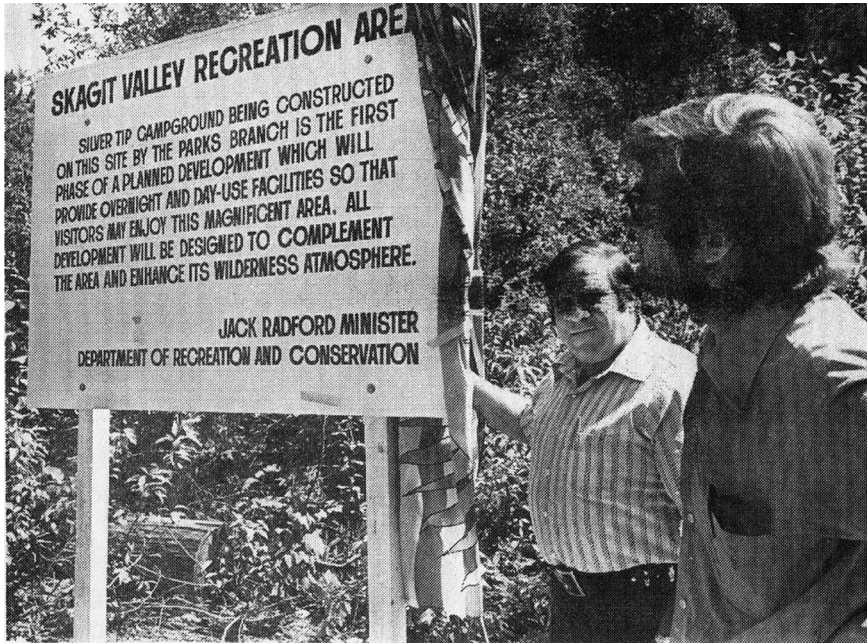
⁶⁴ W.J. Otway to David Barrett, 18 September 1973, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 6, box 3.

⁶⁵ David Brousson to Robert Williams, 31 May 1973, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 15, box 3.

⁶⁶ David G. King to R. Williams, 27 November 1972, Skagit Valley Recreation Area file.

⁶⁷ R.H. Ahrens to David G. King, 21 December 1972, Skagit Valley Recreation Area file.

⁶⁸ Environment and Land Use Committee memorandum to J.S. Stokes, Forest Service, L. Brooks, Recreation and Conservation, and W. Redal, Lands Branch, 6 August 1973, Skagit Valley Recreation Area file.



NDP ministers of recreation and conservation, Jack Radford, and of public works, Bill Hartley, unveil a sign for the Skagit Valley Recreation Area at the 1974 “canoe-in” protest against the High Ross Dam in the BC Skagit Valley. *Source: Vancouver Province*, 29 July 1974. Used with permission.

Province of British Columbia in its position relative to the Skagit.”⁶⁹ Within a month, Ahrens had submitted a proposal for a 37,000-hectare park in the Skagit Valley. This would absorb the park created by Bennett’s government and turn almost the entire valley in British Columbia over to the Parks Branch.⁷⁰ But this park was to be designated as a recreation area, the least protected type of provincial park, “because of the existence of approximately 250 mineral claims and certain merchantable stands of timber” in the valley. Only if these “other resource-use values prove[d] in time to be insignificant,” wrote Ahrens, would the “recreation area be given Class ‘A’ park status.”⁷¹ In December 1973, the NDP Cabinet carved nearly 5,000 hectares off of the proposed park (designating them a forest

⁶⁹ Jack Radford memorandum to R.H. Ahrens, 8 August 1973, Skagit Valley Recreation Area file.

⁷⁰ R.H. Ahrens, memorandum to the Honourable the Minister Jack Radford, 6 September 1973, Skagit Valley Recreation Area file.

⁷¹ R.H. Ahrens, memorandum to the Honourable the Minister Jack Radford, 19 November 1973, Skagit Valley Recreation Area file.

reserve) and created Skagit Valley Recreation Area, encompassing the entire Skagit Valley from the forty-ninth parallel to the entrance of the Silver-Skagit Road.⁷²

With this new park, explained a government spokesperson, "the northern portion of the valley will [now] be retained in its natural state, accessible only by trails with no roads or campground construction." Further south, proclaimed Williams, day-use facilities and a campground would be built in the area that the SCL proposed to flood in order to send the message: "we are going to keep the Skagit for recreation, not for power development."⁷³ To emphasize the point, three NDP cabinet ministers, including Williams and Radford, attended the Ross Committee's 1974 canoe-in protest in the Skagit Valley and took advantage of the occasion and the media presence to unveil a sign for the recreation area.⁷⁴

Activists welcomed the new park as an improvement but were still worried about the valley's future, realizing that more than a park was needed to stop the High Ross Dam. In 1974, prominent BC socialist and environmental activist Eve Smith wrote to Tom Perry: "Judging from the splurge over [the canoe-in] you'd think that [the] NDP figured we'd won! But we *never* win. The opposition almost never gives up. It has happened so many times in so many battles."⁷⁵ Tom Perry, the Ross Committee coordinator, wrote to Ahrens, congratulating the Department of Recreation and Conservation for creating the park. He pointed out, however, that there appeared to be "certain potential areas of conflict" and that "areas with high ecological interest and educational potential should ... be protected from excessive recreational pressure."⁷⁶ The Ross Committee called for a park plan that would be consistent with the rugged wildness of the area, advising that the road should be left unpaved, certain camping areas should only be accessible by hiking paths, and strict legislation should control hunting and fishing seasons in the park.⁷⁷

⁷² Executive-Order-in-Council 4037, 6 December 1973, Skagit Valley Recreation Area file.

⁷³ Press release, "Skagit Valley Recreation Area," 15 October 1973, Skagit Valley Recreation Area file.

⁷⁴ Tom Perry, "Battle of the Skagit: The End Is in Sight," *Nature Canada* volume 3, October/December (1974), 38-39.

⁷⁵ Eve Smith to Tom Perry, 6 August 1974, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 4, box 2 (emphasis in the original). For more on Smith, see Arthur Cathers, *Beloved Dissident: Eve Smith* (Blyth, ON: Drumadrawy Books, 1997).

⁷⁶ Tom Perry to R.H. Ahrens, 30 May 1974, Skagit Valley Recreation Area file.

⁷⁷ Tom Perry to Jack Radford, 8 August 1974, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 21, box 2.

The official conceptual plan for the Skagit Valley seemed to reflect the ROSS Committee's recommendations. Released in early 1975, it explained the purpose of the park:

The Skagit Valley Recreation Area is based upon the Provincial Government's decision to halt the flooding of the Skagit Valley by the City of Seattle. As such, the 5000 acres originally proposed for flooding have been included in the overall land use plan and the development proposals.⁷⁸

It also described the park as a "semi-wilderness," confirmed that the road into the park would not be paved, and indicated that some of the camping areas would be accessible only by hiking or horseback. Furthermore, at the suggestion of UBC botanist and "father of forest ecology" Vladimir Krajina, it maintained the ecological reserves established in 1971 in order to protect the rhododendrons and ponderosa pine groves in the valley and announced a proposal for one more such reserve to protect a cottonwood stand, all three of which would have been affected by the Ross Reservoir.⁷⁹ The plan also noted:

The Skagit Valley has received more publicity, more studies, and more inquiries ... than any previous Parks Branch lands. Coupled with the facts that it offers some of the most diverse environments in the province and borders a vast recreation complex in the United States, the Valley inherently affords the opportunity to be all things to all people.⁸⁰

The last phrase belied preservationist aspirations. The principle of "multiple use" and the recreational area designation of the park would allow mining and forestry to occur alongside preservation and recreation. Differences between how the NDP government and environmentalists wanted to use the valley inevitably led to conflict. In late 1972, ROSS Committee members learned that Williams had approved small logging operations in the valley. As Perry recalled later: "I couldn't believe it.

⁷⁸ BC Parks Branch, *The Concept for the Skagit Valley Recreation Area* (Victoria: Department of Recreation and Conservation, 1975), 1.

⁷⁹ BC Parks, *Concept for the Skagit Valley*, 3. The third reserve was officially established in 1978. It is unclear why the Socred government allowed ecological reserves to be created in 1971 in the area that would have been flooded by the High Ross Dam. Presumably they would have been cancelled or had their boundaries altered when the reservoir filled. See V.J. Krajina, J.B. Foster, J. Pojar, and T. Carson, *Ecological Reserves in British Columbia* (Victoria: Ministry of the Environment, 1978), 84-87, 226. For the "father of forest ecology," see Cameron Young, *The Forests of British Columbia* (North Vancouver: Whitecap Books, 1985), 18.

⁸⁰ BC Parks, *Concept for the Skagit Valley*, 2.

We were holding off SCL from flooding it, and here somebody was allowing loggers to get into the old-growth trees ... under the apparently pro-conservation [NDP] government."⁸¹ Brousson and Farquharson immediately contacted Williams over the issue, again threatening to embarrass him publicly.⁸² Williams cancelled that timber licence auction, but others went up for sale in 1975 within the boundaries of the new park. Environmentalists again protested the auction, forcing ELUC to step in and instruct the Parks Branch to treat the entire recreation area as "in all respects as a Class A park, free from further new resource exploitation."⁸³

SCL did not take the NDP-created park in the valley as anything more than a rhetorical gesture, concluding in an internal memo: "the new 'Special Recreation Area' ... [does] not really appear to be inconsistent with ... the existing Seattle-Provincial Agreement."⁸⁴ Still, both the Seattle government and SCL authorities were willing to negotiate. In 1973 and 1974, Seattle mayor Wes Uhlman, who was also publicly against the High Ross Dam, indicated to the NDP government, through official diplomatic channels between the US State Department and the Canadian Department of External Affairs, that his government was willing to try to negotiate a compromise to flooding the Skagit Valley.⁸⁵ SCL's superintendent, Gordon Vickery, also made it plain, publicly, that he would negotiate a settlement, stating in a newspaper editorial: "The point is simply this: Seattle City Light opened the door to negotiations with Canada at Canada's request. This door has been open for over a year, yet Canada has said nothing. We believe the ball is in their court and the next play is up to them."⁸⁶ Despite Prime Minister Trudeau's continued pressure for the province to enter into negotiations with Seattle, the NDP resisted. As late as 16 August 1974, John Wood,

⁸¹ Tom Perry, interview, Liebow et al., *Skagit Oral History Project*, 79.

⁸² Ken Farquharson to R. Williams, 29 December 1972, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 5, box 3; David Brousson to Bob Williams, 18 December 1972, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 5, box 3.

⁸³ T.E. Lee, Director, Parks Branch, to E.L. Young, Chief Forester, 17 October 1975, BCA, William Hartley Papers, file 4, box 13; Notice of Auction Sale of Crown Timber, Department of Lands, Forests, and Water Resources, 8 April 1974, Skagit Valley Recreation Area file.

⁸⁴ Art Lane, Assistant Corporation Counsel, memorandum to Gordon Vickery, Seattle City Light Superintendent, 16 October 1973, Seattle Municipal Archives, Seattle City Light Collection, Superintendents' Correspondence 1200-13, file 12, box 31.

⁸⁵ US Department of State Aide Memoire to Canadian Department of External Affairs, 19 April 1973, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 17, box 4; US Department of State to Canadian Department of External Affairs, 10 June 1974, UBC Special Collections, Dave Barrett Fonds, file 8, box 18.

⁸⁶ Gordon Vickery to the Editor, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 30 April 1974, Seattle Municipal Archives, Wes Uhlman Fonds, file 1, box 136, 5287-01.

Dave Barrett's executive assistant, wrote to Williams: "Dave [Barrett] does not want us to negotiate with Seattle."⁸⁷

Barrett's government was afraid that any action that altered or cancelled the 1967 agreement would require them to pay anywhere from \$10 million to \$156 million in compensation, and Trudeau had made it clear that his government would not share these costs.⁸⁸ Stuck between being forced to pay compensation on the one hand and a renewed activist campaign on the other, the NDP hoped that symbolic actions alone would stop the dam from being raised. Besides creating a park, against the federal government's advice, in mid-1974 the NDP government also submitted an application to the IJC to cancel the original 1942 Order of Approval.⁸⁹ Both the provincial and the federal governments had previously agreed that, due to the unwanted precedent it would set for other boundary water agreements, the IJC would not rescind one of its own orders; however, Barrett hoped that the province's application to the IJC would convince the US Federal Power Commission to deny Seattle's application for a domestic licence to raise the Ross Dam.⁹⁰

Barrett eventually agreed to explore the possibility of a negotiated settlement in September 1974, but only after Trudeau agreed to support the province's application to the IJC.⁹¹ Exploratory meetings between provincial and SCL and Seattle representatives finally occurred in the summer of 1975 but did not accomplish much since the NDP still hoped that it would not have to compensate Seattle. Vickery wryly described the meetings as a way to "talk about things we might want to talk about should negotiations materialize."⁹²

⁸⁷ John Wood, confidential memorandum to Robert Williams, 16 August 1974, UBC Special Collections, Dave Barrett Fonds, file 8, box 18.

⁸⁸ Confidential memorandum: renegotiation of Skagit Agreement, B.E. Marr, Deputy Minister, Water Resources, to Norman Pearson, Executive Assistant to Robert Williams, 29 January 1974, UBC Special Collections, Dave Barrett Fonds, file 8, box 18; Dave Barrett to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, 29 January 1974, UBC Special Collections, Dave Barrett Fonds, file 8, box 18; Trudeau to Barrett, 20 February 1974, UBC Special Collections, Dave Barrett Fonds, file 8, box 18.

⁸⁹ Press Release, "BC Application to IJC on Skagit," 27 June 1974, Victoria.

⁹⁰ Confidential notes of meeting between Robert Williams and Jack Davis, 8 June 1973, UBC Special Collections, Dave Barrett Fonds, file 8, box 18; Barrett to Trudeau, 25 June 1974, UBC Special Collections, Dave Barrett Fonds, file 8, box 18. The IJC did not rule on British Columbia's application as the next BC government, under Bill Bennett, missed a deadline to provide supporting documents for the application. The Federal Power Commission approved the licence for the High Ross Dam in 1976.

⁹¹ Barrett to Trudeau, 25 June 1974, UBC Special Collections, Dave Barrett Fonds, file 8, box 18; Robert Williams to Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman, 11 September 1974, UBC Special Collections, Dave Barrett Fonds, file 8, box 18.

⁹² "City Light and BC Talk on Raising Ross Dam," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 1 July 1975, UBC Special Collections, Ross Committee Fonds, file 8, box 3.

Such meetings were as close as Barrett's NDP came to stopping the High Ross Dam. When Barrett lost power at the end of 1975 to a resurgent Social Credit Party under W.A.C. Bennett's son Bill Bennett, environmentalists had already entered a long and arduous US domestic hearing and appeal process before the Federal Power Commission and the US Court of Appeals, which they eventually lost. Productive negotiations between Seattle and British Columbia finally occurred in the early 1980s, after the IJC threatened to rule on the issue, warning both the province and Seattle that there was a good chance neither would be satisfied with the result.⁹³ A deal was reached between the Socred government and Seattle late in 1983. Under the 1984 Canada-US Skagit River Treaty that followed, for the remainder of the ninety-nine-year term of the 1967 agreement, British Columbia agreed to provide scl the equivalent amount of power for the same price it would have cost had it come from the High Ross Dam. Although the Skagit Valley faded from public notice after this, environmentalists continued to lobby for the valley's preservation from industrial use, eventually convincing Glen Clark's NDP government to change the Skagit Valley Recreation Area to a Class A provincial park in 1997.

CONCLUSION

The question of whether or not to flood the Skagit Valley was a volatile political issue in British Columbia in the early 1970s. Although Socred and NDP governments came down on opposite sides of the debate, both tried to use parks to show that they were in tune with environmentalists' concerns about the future of the valley. Accusations by activists that the Bennett government "panicked" in the face of increasingly vocal environmental criticism and quickly created a park in an effort to distract the public could also have been levelled at the Barrett government that followed. In some ways, such an accusation holds even more weight when levelled against the NDP government since the latter professed a willingness to save the Skagit Valley but did little more than create a recreation area, which provided no actual protection against Seattle's flooding the valley. Environmentalists did not make such accusations against the NDP because they viewed the Barrett government as more pro-environment than its predecessor and remained hopeful it would take some kind of action to stop the High Ross Dam. As this article

⁹³ David Laroche, interview with author, 19 July 2010; Geoffrey Thornburn, interview with author, 2 June 2010. Both interviewees worked with the International Joint Commission during the Skagit River Treaty negotiations.

shows, however, the NDP's approach to environmental protest over the Skagit Valley had more in common with the Socred government's approach than many supposed.

Recognizing that parks have been created for such reasons is important. The increase in parks created in both Canada and in the United States since the 1960s is often interpreted as one of the enduringly positive legacies of the environmental movement. Some of these parks, however, had less to do with preserving nature and more to do with creating pro-environment images for governments in power. This has considerable relevance for the present not just because it is the one-hundredth anniversary of provincial parks in British Columbia but also because government desires to seem environmentally friendly are as pressing today as they were during the High Ross Dam controversy.