



## **Strathcona Wilderness Institute – 2025 Annual Report Park Use Permit, Authorization 103312**

### **General remarks**

Even with the greater snowpack over the winter of 2024-25 and the later melt of the snow in the Meadows, we were still able to have our CSJ students open the SPWC for the last weekend of June in 2025. Even with snow higher on the Plateau the later part of June already sees many visitors to the Park, in spite of the clouds of insects that flourish in the moisture of the snowmelt. This year we had few days of extreme heat, and only a little smoke from wildfires, so the average daily numbers of visitors is noticeably higher than in previous years. We received funding (minimum wage) for 5 students through the federal Canada Summer Jobs programme and were able to fill all five positions this summer, two as Staffers at the SPWC, one as Summer Programmes Coordinator/ Research Assistant and two Naturalist Interpreter/Research Assistants, continuing the work of previous years documenting flora and fauna on the Trails, as well as helping with our summer programmes. We had a cohort of 11 volunteers to assist in the staffing of the SPWC at Paradise Meadows, but only 5 at the Buttle Hut, and a further 3 helped with special events up at the SPWC. 13 individuals (plus 3 directors and 2 students) acted as leaders or presenters in our summer program of walks, hikes, presentations and workshops. Funding from the BC Parks Foundation made possible our augmentation of the salaries of our summer students, as well as supporting our Volunteer staffers and the implementation of our various programmes.

### **General Visitor Information and Education**

#### **Strathcona Park Wilderness Centre: Paradise Meadows Trail-Head**

The SPWC is the focal point for Visitor Information and Education on the Forbidden Plateau side of the Park. It was open between June 27<sup>th</sup> and October 10<sup>th</sup> in 2025, for a **total of 75 days**: 4 days in June, 28 days in July, 29 days in August, 9 days in September, 5 days in October. The Centre was ably staffed in July and August 6 days a week by two students (Jesse Anderson-Burchill in his third year with SWI, and Sable Gilmore in her second year), while the other days over the season were covered by 8 veteran Volunteers and 3 new Volunteers.

**5530** visitors were recorded at the Centre, with a daily average of **73.5** (a significant increase from last year's daily average of **57** over **86** days). The distribution of provenance is returning to what was observed in pre-Pandemic times. The greatest number of visitors still come from Vancouver Island with the percentage similar to last year's.

**Visitor Provenance Summary for the SPWC in 2025 (2024 %s in brackets)**

56% from Vancouver Island	(56.7% Vancouver Island)
14% from mainland BC	(12.1 % mainland BC)
11% from other parts of Canada	(10 % other parts of Canada)
19% foreign visitors	(21.2 % foreign visitors)

**Wheelchair & TrailRider Use at Paradise Meadows**

At least 5 sets of visitors made use of the Wheelchairs for the Paradise Meadows & Centennial Boardwalks. The TrailRider was taken out on 6 occasions for day-trips up to Battleship Lake.

**The Buttle Hut beside Park HQ at Buttle Lake**

In the Buttle area of the Park, the Buttle Hut provides Visitor Information and Education. It was open between July 11<sup>th</sup> and October 5<sup>th</sup> for **a total of 40** days. We were unsuccessful in attracting a student specifically to work weekdays at the hut and had only five of our veteran Buttle Volunteers including artist James McBeath who covered 31 of the 40 days. A **total of 940** visitors were recorded for the 40 days, making an average of 23.5 per day (the same average per day over 38 days last year). This year again there was a greater percentage of visitors to the Buttle area coming from off the Island, by contrast with Paradise Meadows (38% of VI visitors at Buttle, 56% at PM). Over one third of the visitors were from abroad, a pattern observable pre-covid, with three quarters of that total coming from Europe.

**Visitor Provenance Summary for the Buttle in 2025 (2024 %s in brackets)**

38 % from Vancouver Island	(30 % Vancouver Island)
12 % from mainland BC	(19 % mainland BC )
14 % from other parts of Canada	(18 % other parts of Canada)
36 % foreign visitors	(33 % foreign visitors)

## **Educational Activities and Public Outreach**

### **Scheduled Interpretive Walks, Hikes, Presentations and Workshops**

We continued this summer to offer a full summer programme of weekly interpretive walks and hikes, presentations and workshops. We started the season with Back-County Safety and First Aid Workshop June 22, followed on July 12 by a related presentation by Comox Valley Search and Rescue. Within the ongoing “**Discovering our Biodiversity**” series we held **1 Workshop** (the 7th Annual Subalpine Mycology Workshop), while one on Nature Photography was postponed until Spring 2026, and **hosted 2 Presentations**: a) by researchers from the Canada Jay Project on the ongoing study of the social dynamics within the 24 Canada Jay territories in Paradise Meadows and beyond, and b) by one of the CVRD’s “Connected by Water” team on the importance of Strathcona Provincial Park for the Comox Valley’s watershed. From late June to the end of September we scheduled 8 Interpretive Walks in Paradise Meadows and 10 Hikes on the Plateau and in the Buttle area. For the most part we continued to limit registration, and so we had an average of 8 participants for each of the Interpretive Walks, Hikes, Presentations and Workshops. Our student Mateo Jaeckel, as Program Coordinator for a fourth year, oversaw the schedules and handling of registration and waivers, as well as leading two hikes. Leaders included 11 Guest Presenters, 9 Volunteers, plus 3 Directors and 3 students (Mateo Jaeckel, Paige Stuart and Zeke Gilmore).

### **Brochures**

As part of our educational mandate, we continued to distribute our Wilderness Code pamphlet setting out the general principals of *Leave No Trace*, with specific reference to Strathcona Provincial Park. Through our general SWI brochure and our website, we invited hikers to send us or post on iNaturalist their wildlife observations. To reach out to families visiting the Meadows, our students this summer created Cards for kids and youth to fill with their observations of flora and fauna in the Meadows, entitled “Exploration Bingo”, with three age brackets: 5-9, 10-14, 15+ See illustration # in the Appendix). We provided small prizes for the completed cards. We also continued to distribute BC Parks Educational Booklets for Children and Youth. Last year we produced a brochure about Volunteering with SWI, designed to encourage those who are familiar with the Park to consider using their love and knowledge of the Park to help visitors appreciate all that it has to offer.

## **SWI Data Collection Project on iNaturalist 2025**

This year we again specifically assigned 2 of our students to assist in the on-going documentation of floral and faunal diversity in the Park. The students' observations are uploaded into the *SWI Data Collection Project* on iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/swi-data-collection>) and thus made available to the public. From the work of the students this summer, as well as input from Research Director L. Maingon, the SWI's Species Count now stands at over **2390** (as of October 25th) and Strathcona Provincial Park is still the best documented Park in the overall BC Parks Project on iNaturalist. One of our students, Paige Stuart, has set up three specific "projects" in the context of her work on Buttle Lake: the Freshwater Zooplankton of Strathcona Park, the Diatoms of SP and Freshwater Molluscs of SP, joining four other projects devoted to specific organisms in the Park- Lichens, Fungi, Slime Moulds and Bryophytes. And at the end of his summer season with us, Zeke Gilmore gave a webinar on the Slime Moulds of Strathcona Provincial Park 2025, following up on the presentation he delivered last year.

## **Family-oriented Programs and School Groups**

While our scheduled Jerry's Rangers nature-oriented program for kids in the Meadows did not attract participants, throughout the summer many families picked up and returned our "Exploration Bingo" cards. We fulfilled one request (Oct. 8) for a guided hike to Battleship Lake for 18 grades 4-5 kids from Queneesh Elementary.

## **Special Events at the Strathcona Park Wilderness Centre**

**June 28<sup>th</sup>: SWI Volunteer Appreciation Tea.** To coincide with the opening of the SPWC we invited volunteers past and future for cake and refreshments at the Wilderness Centre, making it an occasion both to acknowledge the hard work of our volunteers in the 2024 Season, as well as to encourage new volunteers to learn more about what SWI does through engaging with our "veteran" volunteers and members of the Board. A group of about 20 enjoyed cake and refreshments in the Ruth Masters Nature Hall on a somewhat cool afternoon.

**July 19<sup>th</sup>- SWI's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.** We were delighted to welcome to the area outside the Wilderness Centre 5 directors from the earliest years of SWI as guests of honour at our 30<sup>th</sup>

Anniversary Celebration. A lively group of about 40 folks stopped by over the afternoon to hear about our founding directors' foresight in establishing SWI with its educational mandate, including many of the original members of FOSP. With cake and other refreshments, plus live music provided by a local folk group, it was a memorable occasion, with a special message for the younger generations to continue the work begun 30 years ago to ensure that the public would be well-informed about the importance of the Park's biodiversity and the need to protect it.

The **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Chris Carter Memorial Hike and Tea** scheduled for Sept 27<sup>th</sup> was unfortunately marred by heavy rain, so that only a few participated in an abbreviated hike in honour of one of our long-time supporters.

### **Funding Acknowledgements 2025**

SWI thanks the following sources for funding received to support its programs in 2025.

BCPF's Parks Ambassador Programme

Canada Summer Jobs Programme

BC Parks LPP Fund

Strathcona Regional District Grant in Aid.

## PHOTOS ILLUSTRATING 2025 SUMMER EVENTS/ACTIVITIES

### SPWC - July 2025

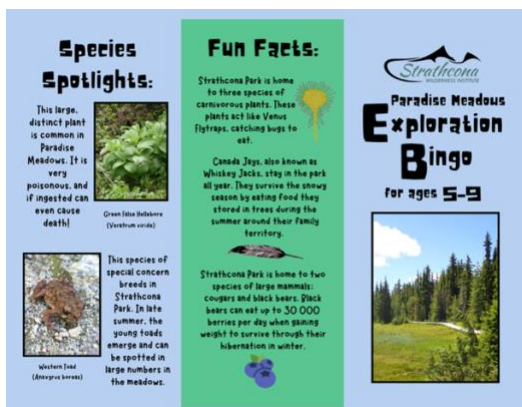


SPWC exterior

SPWC interior ( two student staffers seated)



### "Exploration Bingo" Card for ages 5-9





## **SWI EVENTS : 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

### **Guests - Founding Directors**



### **Current Director addressing group**



## **WALKS, HIKES, PRESENTATIONS & WORKSHOPS**

### **Backcountry First Aid Workshop**



### **Guided Walk – Spring in the Meadows**



### **Canada Jay Presentation**



### **Guided Hike to Croteau Lake**





## Further notes on Presentations and Mycology Workshop

### Presentations

At the beginning of August, one of the SWI presentations we hosted, under the general title **“Discovering our Biodiversity”**, was given by Andy Siemens, PhD student at SFU, on her specific research into the Sociality and Social Dominance of Canada Jays, within the larger Canada Jay Research Project in Paradise Meadows, headed by Dan Strickland. The talk was followed by a walk into the Meadows to observe the family dynamics of breeding groups in one of the nesting territories in the study. At the end of August, we teamed up with Meaghan Cursons as one of the CVRD’s “Connected by Water” group, for a presentation on the role of Strathcona Provincial Park within the watershed of the Comox Valley, followed by a guided walk around the Meadows illustrating the hydrology of the subalpine.



### Workshops

The 7th Annual Mycology Workshop took place September 20<sup>th</sup> in the Ruth Masters Nature Hall at the SPWC, with 21 participants, with a hike into Divers Lake on the 21<sup>st</sup>. We had 4 of the best Mycologists from Vancouver Island as mentors for the Lectures, ID Sessions and Forays (Andy MacKinnon, Shannon Berch, Tom O’Dell and Erin Feldman). In spite of a lack of rain in August and early September this year we had an adequate range of species in the subalpine. And on the hike to Divers Lake on the Sunday the participants were not disappointed. The feedback from our participants was again overwhelmingly positive.

