

Cultural Values Report – CVRD’s Spike Road Park



Jesse Morin, PhD, July 31, 2025

Submitted to Mark Hart, Parks Planner, Comox Valley Regional District

Executive Summary

Based on my review of relevant ethnohistoric documents and two site visits to Spike Road Park, some of the preliminary cultural values of the park include:

- Preservation of cedar trees, mature trees and cascara trees, including avoiding impacts to their root systems;
- Preservation of existing stands of berry patches, especially salmonberry, huckleberry, thimble berry and trailing blackcap;
- Preservation of habitat for deer and potentially elk, including prohibitions on hunting within the park;
- Preservation of existing/likely mushroom harvesting areas;
- Preservation of wetlands (salmonid and beaver habitat).

Cultural Values to Enhance

- Use of KFN place names or ayajuthum language in signage, trails etc.;
- Planting of Indigenous species in recently cleared agricultural areas;
- Enhancement of wetlands, increasing salmonid and beaver habitat;
- Removal of invasive species (blackberry, Scotch broom etc.).

Overview

As part of their long-term planning for park development, the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) (Mark Hart) has requested that I (Jesse Morin) work with the K'ómoks First Nation (KFN) Guardians to compile a Cultural Values Report for Spike Road Park (**Figure 1**). The purpose of this Cultural Values Report is to ensure that KFN's values, concerns, and objectives are considered in CVRD's development planning for this park. This report is intended to be an initial investigation to identify KFN's cultural and ecological values in relation to the park development. A separate Preliminary Field Reconnaissance (PFR) report of this park was undertaken by Raini Bevilacqua for CVRD, to identify potential archaeological resources within the area (Bevilacqua 2024). Because this archaeological information is reviewed elsewhere by Bevilacqua, it is not further reviewed in this report.

To develop this cultural values report, I reviewed a range of publicly available sources for relevant ethnohistoric information, and undertook an informal survey of the Spike Road Park on May 17 2024 with Mark Hart (CVRD) and Matthew Everson (KFN Guardians). After CVRD obtained additional adjacent lots, and additional survey of those areas on July 4 2025 with Mark Hart, Ruby Vie (CVRD) Jacob Ennis (CVRD) and Cedar Frank (KFN Guardians). For the purposes of this report, these two portions of Spike Road Park are referred to as Lot A and Lot B respectively (**Figure 5**). This survey also allowed for discussion of features of interest with KFN members. The results of this research are presented below.

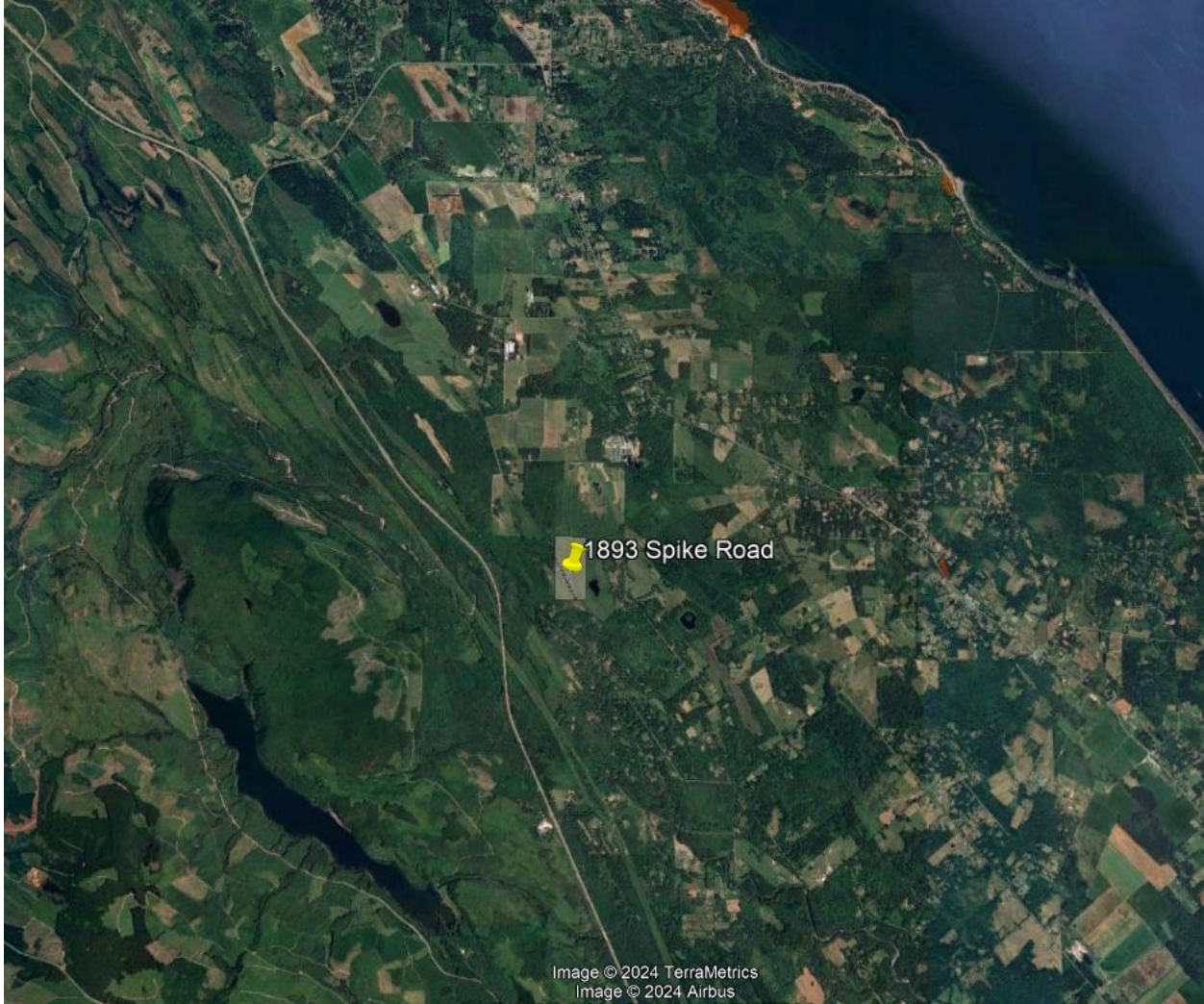


Figure 1. The location of Spike Road Park.

Background

Spike Road Park is about 76 hectares in size, extends for about 1300 m along Spike Road (running northwest-southeast), the former Comox Valley Mainline railway, and about 1000 m (east-west) along an overgrown logging road. The park is comprised of a relatively narrow strip of land adjacent to Spike Road running northwest-southeast, bounded on the west and east by wetlands (Lot A), and an even narrower strip of land running east-west also bounded by wetlands (Lot B). The central strip of land associated with Lot A has been entirely modified, first by logging, second by construction of the railway, third by the construction of relatively recent domestic and agricultural structures (e.g., house, barn, Quonset hut), and finally by the construction of garden beds. The construction of the railway bed here may have also changed the local hydrology here, perhaps expanding the extent and depth of the wetlands here. The strip of land associated with Lot B is clearly comprised of fill, and it too may have altered local hydrology.

Cultural Background

Ethnographic descriptions of Indigenous group territories at the time of First Contact (AD 1792) indicate that the Spike Road Park area was at the approximate boundary of the K'ómoks (formerly known as the sálhulhtxw or sathloot) and Pentlatch peoples (Boas 1887; Kennedy and Bouchard 1983:15, 1990:442). On the coast, the Pentlatch/K'ómoks boundary was located south of Spike Road Park, probably around Little River or Point Holmes, but inland, Pentlatch territory likely included the entirety of the Tsolum watershed¹ (Boas 1887; Carlson 2010:39-40). Because the western half of the Spike Road Park area drains into the Black Creek watershed, that portion of the park was likely the territory of the K'ómoks group known as the Eiksen/Eeqsen who occupied that area (Boas 1887; Kennedy and Bouchard 1990:441), while the western half of the park that drains into the Tsolum River was likely the territory of the Pentlatch who occupied the lower Courtenay River and Comox Harbour (Boas 1887; Kennedy and Bouchard 1990:441).

No historical, archaeological or otherwise documented traditional settlements or village sites are documented in the vicinity of Spike Road Park, but such pre-contact K'ómoks settlements were likely located about 4 to 9 km northwest around the Oyster River and Black Creek, and about 7 km southeast around Little River (Kennedy and Bouchard 1990:441). The nearest Pentlatch settlements were located about 13 km south near the junction of the Puntledge and Tsolum Rivers (Kennedy and Bouchard 1990:441). It is very likely that the inhabitants of these settlements to both the north and south of here would have regularly travelled to and through the Spike Road Park area in the course of their seasonal and even daily harvesting and other cultural activities.

Indigenous Place Names

While there are no known publicly available Indigenous place names for the Spike Road Park location, there are publicly available place names for four regional geographic features:

- First, the Indigenous name for the Tsolum River, located about 300 m west of the park, has been recorded as “Tso-lum”, “Tzoo-om”, “Tsalum”, and less commonly as “Puntledge”, and has been anglicized as Tsolum (Comox Valley 1865; Hayman 1989:112; Mackie 1995:35; Mayne 1860) (**Figure 2, Figure 3**).
- Second, the names “Avoca” or “Tsa-mai-chin” have been recorded for the anthropogenic prairie west of the Tsolum River, about 9 km south of Spike Road Park (the Dove Creek area) (Comox Valley 1865; Mackie 1995:35) (**Figure 2, Figure 3**).
- Third, the name “Pil-Choose” has been recorded for Finey Creek (Hayman 1989:113), the headwaters of which are about 5 km east of Spike Road Park.
- Fourth, the name “Chaw-wil-ocq” is indicated for the anthropogenic prairie area now known as Grantham (Comox Valley 1865; Mackie 1995:35) (**Figure 2, Figure 4**).

¹ Note that Coast Salish territories typically correspond to watersheds that belong to people who live on the lower reaches of such watersheds (Carlson 2010:39-40).



Figure 4. Detail of Map of the Comox Valley 1865, including Chaw-wil-ceq Plains² for the Grantham area (Comox District 1865).

Relevant Oral Histories

The corpus of publicly available Indigenous oral histories relevant to KFN territory were reviewed for references to the region around Spike Road Park (e.g., Arnett 2007; Barnett 1936a, 1936b, 1936c; 1955; Boas 1888, 1906, 1910; Bouchard and Kennedy 2006; Comox Valley Echo 1999a, 1999b; Curtis 1907-1930, 1913, 1915; Duff 1960a, 1960b, 1960c; Kennedy and Bouchard 1983; Kinkade 2008). The fact that Spike Road Park is not located on any distinctive landforms or associated place names makes it difficult to determine if the location is described in recorded oral histories.

The events of one Indigenous, almost certainly originally Pentlatch, oral history (several variants of it have been recorded) involving brothers taking revenge for the murder of their sister is set at a place called “Tsa’wiloq²”, a place that has been inferred to correspond to the name “Chaw-wil-ocq” for the Grantham area, located about 7 km southeast of Spike Road Park (Boas 1910: 403; Bouchard and Kennedy 2006:291-293; Comox District 1865) (**Figure 4**). In one account of this oral history, a man and woman go to a pond at a place named “Tsâ’wilax^U” to bathe and purify themselves (Boas 1910:403-404). In another version of this oral history, the husband and wife live at “Tsa’wiloq” and go for a long walk into the forest to collect pitch (Bouchard and Kennedy 2006:238, 291-293). It is worth noting that Douglas fir trees are well-known for producing copious pitch (Charlie and Turner 2021:64-66), and the wooded area around the park (but not the

² The sound “ch” does not exist in Kwakwaka’wakw, and for ayajuthem or Pentlatch (Coast Salish languages) borrowed into Kwakwaka’wakw, the “ch” is replaced with a “ts” sound (Powell 1994).

wetlands themselves) between Grantham and Spike was dominated by very large old-growth Douglas fir, making it an excellent place to collect pitch (Mackie 2000). The major theme in all versions of the oral history is that the jealous husband lures his wife there and kills her by tying ties her to a tree at, or past Chaw-wil-ocq, and her brothers then come to seek revenge for her death by killing the husband.

Ongoing and Traditional Use

KFN's Traditional Use Study (TUS) data was not reviewed as part of this research, but is reviewed in a preliminary field reconnaissance of Spike Road Park by Bevilacqua (2024). Bevilacqua (2024:5) cites that KFN TUS data indicates Spike Road Park as “a place where K'ómoks and Pentlatch people have and continue to hunt deer, elk, and grouse, gather chanterelle mushrooms, and pick berries”. It is important to note that most of this TUS data was collected over several projects spanning from around 1998 to 2019, and describes activities primarily undertaken during the second half of the 20th century and the first decades of the 21st century, after logging and forest fires had already dramatically changed the ecology of this area.

I note that there are also vague historical descriptions of a trail between Comox and Campbell River (Duff n.d.:67; Mackie 1995:234), that would likely have been located either in the Chaw-wil-ocq Plains or along the Tsolum River, either immediately west or east of Spike Road Park. While much, if not most, Indigenous travel between Comox Harbour and the Campbell River area was by canoe, this trail would have been an important route when weather was poor, and an access route to resource harvesting areas. The Spike Road Park area itself, on the other hand, would have been a difficult to traverse wetland, and would likely not have been used as a travel corridor.

Historical Background

Prior to EuroCanadian settlement of the region, in the middle of the 19th century K'ómoks people relocated from their territory around Campbell River and Quadra Island to the Comox Valley area (Galois 1994:238-240). This relocation was driven by intense warfare and raiding by the Lekwiltok people. After initial conflict with the Pentlatch people, the K'ómoks people and Pentlatch people established peaceful relations and lived side-by-side in the same settlements (Hayman 1989:123). Although this event brought new Indigenous people into the region, Indigenous populations were collapsing at the time as a result of smallpox and other diseases (Boyd 1990; Harris 1994). As recorded by Robert Brown from a Pentlatch elder in 1864:

The Great chief above became angry with the Puntledge and killed many, viz many of them by Small pox, until what with disease and war, the Puntledge became very few indeed & sought the friendship and alliance of their old Enemies the Comoucs for mutual protection & defense: & from that day they lived together. (Hayman 1989:123)

The initial EuroCanadian settlement of the Comox Valley region in the AD 1860's was focused along the Courtenay and Tsolum River prairies, brought relatively few non-Indigenous people into the region, and probably had no direct impact on the Spike Road Park area (Isenor et al. 1987; Mackie 1995). In the early 20th century, the Comox Valley Logging company expanded their logging operations into this area, when the Comox Main Line was constructed through what would become Spike Road Park, and Camp 2 established in the vicinity (Mackie 2000:114-115). Whatever standing timber remained in this area (e.g., cedars around wetlands) was likely burned during the Merville fire of AD 1938 (Mackie 2000:276).

Local Archaeological Sites

The archaeological potential of the park, and a review of local archaeological sites are summarized in Bevilacqua (2024) and are not repeated here.

Survey of Spike Road Park

A brief informal survey of Lot A of Spike Road Park was undertaken on May 17, 2024 by myself (Jesse Morin), Mark Hart (CVRD), and Matthew Everson (KFN Guardian), and a second informal survey of Lot B of Spike Road Park was undertaken on July 4, 2025 by myself, Mark Hart, Ruby Vie (CVRD) and Jacob Ennis (CVRD), and Cedar Frank (KFN Guardian).

The goal of the surveys were to observe the local lands, ecology, and species of interest to KFN. On May 17, 2024, we entered Lot A of the park from its southern boundary at 1893 Spike Road along the One Spot Trail (**Figure 5**). The central strip of land here is variably treed with alder, white pine, grand fir, cascara, and several fruit trees. The underbrush consists of Nootka rose, crab apple, sword fern, bracken fern, and Scotch broom (**Figure 6**). Of these native species, crab apple, cascara and bracken fern were all harvested in the past by Indigenous people (Turner 2000:30-31, 117-118, 143-144). It is not known if cascara (*Rhamnus purshiana*) is still harvested by KFN people, but it is a very powerful laxative that was traditionally used by Indigenous people and later harvested and sold commercially (**Figure 7, Figure 8**) (Turner 2000:143-144). These are all colonizing species that rapidly establish themselves in disturbed forests, such as after forest fires or logging. It is uncertain if these species would have been as abundant or even present prior to logging and agricultural activities here.

There are several historical disturbances to Spike Road Park that have altered the ecology from pre-contact times that deserve specific comment. First, the central road of Spike Road Park (i.e., Spike Road) appears to have been infilled with gravelly soil in construction of the Comox Mainline logging railway through the area around AD 1911-12 (**Figure 9**). This ~ 800 m long low berm likely separated what was formerly one large wetland, and altered the hydrology of the area by limited flow between eastern and western wetlands.

This central strip of land has been entirely modified, first by logging, second by construction of the railway, third by the construction of relatively recent domestic and agricultural structures

(e.g., house, barn, Quonset hut), and finally by the construction of garden beds. The construction of the railway bed here may have also changed the local hydrology here, perhaps expanding the extent and depth of the wetlands here. Because of this landscape modification, most of all the plant species currently there, save for a single old growth Douglas fir noted by Bevilacqua (2024), would not have been present in precontact times. Recent domestic and agricultural uses here have both removed colonizing native species and introduced additional non-native species, such as fruit trees (**Figure 10**, **Figure 11**).

The wetland areas to the east and west of the central road at Spike Road Park were not closely investigated. The eastern wetland is not sharply defined, but becomes increasingly swampy around a pond surrounded by willow and alder. There are many standing dead cedar trees in this area, likely remnants of the AD 1938 Merville fire.

The western wetland is surrounded by a dense stand of hardhack, and the wetland itself covered with yellow pond lily (**Figure 13**). A beaver lodge and a few ducks were observed in this western wetland. While yellow pond lily roots and seeds are reportedly edible, there is no evidence that they were harvested by Indigenous people in British Columbia (Turner 2000:143). Many standing dead cedar trees around and in this wetland suggest that local water tables have risen here.

On July 4, 2025, we entered Lot B of Spike Road from the north (via Sturgess Road), and first surveyed the northern portion of Spike Road, then the over-grown logging road area (**Figure 5**). Similar to the southern portion of Spike Road in Lot A, the vegetation adjacent of the road consisted of hardhack and Nootka rose, with the occasional salmonberry, blueberry, cascara and alder trees (**Figure 14**). The forested area to the east was comprised of a stand of ~30-40 year old Douglas fir, alder, wild cherry and occasional cedar tree (**Figure 15**, **Figure 16**).

Proceeding south to the over-grown logging road, we then surveyed about 1000 m of this route (**Figure 5**) (**Figure 17**). This road was flanked by ~10 year old alder trees with abundant bracken fern, thimble berry, red elderberry, huckleberry and trailing blackcap (**Figure 18**). Beyond this thick brushy area extending about 5 m on either side of this road, the ecology consisted of wetlands, grading into canopied wetlands, and small stands of hemlock-dominated forest (**Figure 19**, **Figure 20**). Many game trails were noted crossing this road. At one of these game trails, we observed deer signs on alders – areas where they rub their new antlers against trees (**Figure 21**). At another game trail, we noted cougar claw marks on several alder trees (**Figure 22**).

Overall, in Lot A, the local plant communities and the low density of commonly harvested species (e.g., salmon berry) there are relatively few species of particular interest to contemporary KFN peoples' harvesting activities at Spike Road Park. This inference was confirmed by Matthew Everson. One notable exception to this are the cascara trees located in the park. Lot B varies markedly from the former, where local plant communities host a range of commonly harvested species (e.g., salmon berry, huckleberry, thimble berry, trailing blackcaps) that occur in high densities. This area also evidently hosts a substantial population of deer (a species commonly hunted by KFN members).

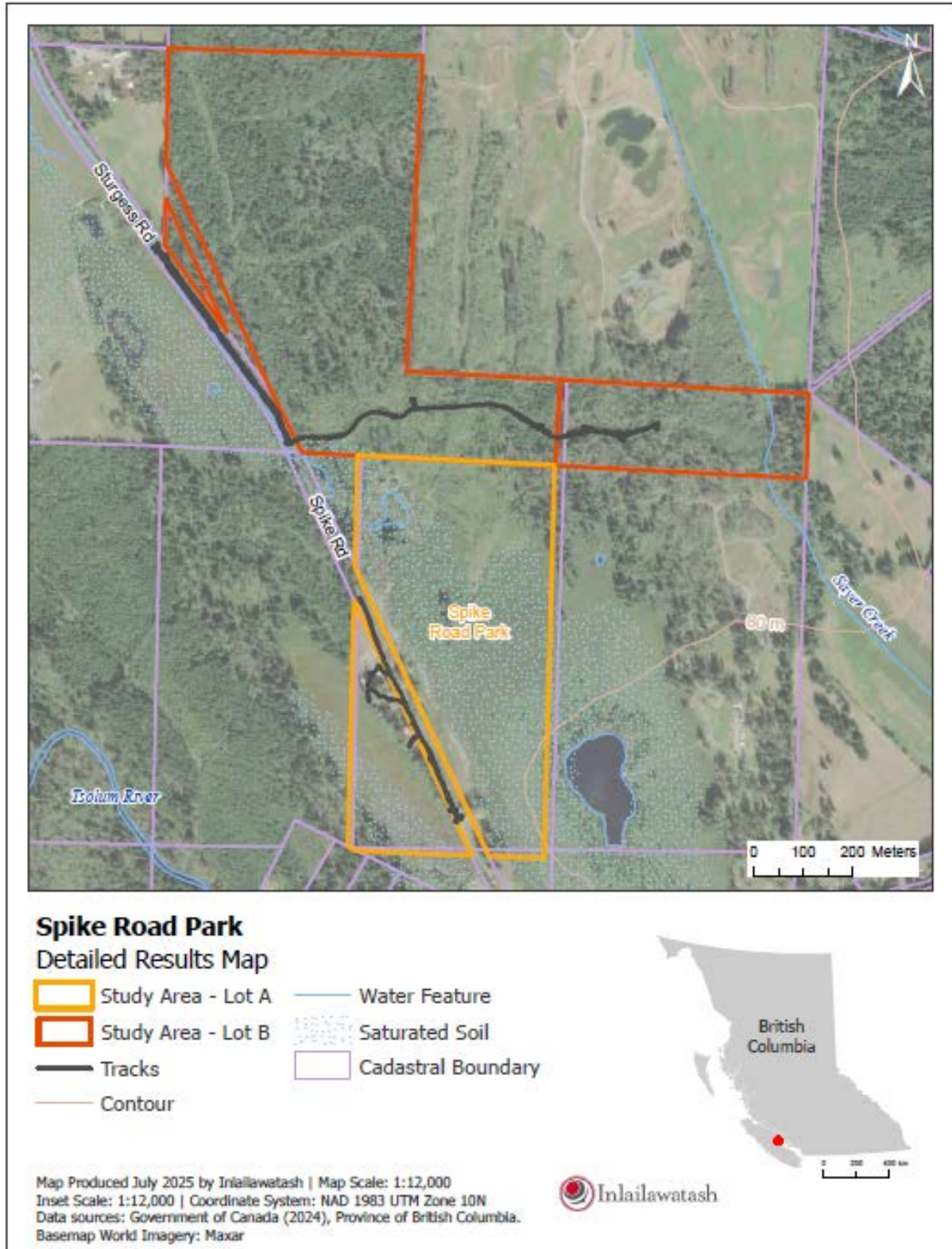


Figure 5. Survey Coverage of Spike Road Park.



Figure 6. Treed area adjacent to central road at Spike Park. Note cascara tree centre.



Figure 7. Settler Cecil Smith harvesting cascara/barbary bark (Mackie 2000:273). Note Smith is using gloves to protect himself from the powerful medicinal properties of the cascara bark.



Figure 8. Settler Cecil Smith drying cascara/barberry bark (Mackie 2000:273).



Figure 9. The central road at Spike Road Park (facing south) with Quonset hut centre.



Figure 10. House at 1893 Spike Road, Spike Road Park.



Figure 11. Recently modified agricultural areas north of the house at Spike Road Park.



Figure 12. Wetland and standing dead cedar trees to the east of the central road at Spike Park.



Figure 13. Wetland, burned cedars, and beaver lodge (centre) west of the central road at Spike Road Park.



Figure 14. Northern portion of Spike Road (facing southeast) within Lot B.



Figure 15. Example of vegetation and forest cover adjacent to Spike Road within Lot B.



Figure 16. Cedar Frank with redcedar tree in background.



Figure 17. Over-grown logging road in Lot B.



Figure 18. Red elderberry adjacent to over-grown logging road.



Figure 19. Wetland area north of over-grown logging road in Lot B.



Figure 20. Non-wetland area located south of the over-grown logging road in Lot B.



Figure 21. Deer sign on young alder tree adjacent to game trail crossing the over-grown logging road in Lot B.



Figure 22. Cougar signs (claw marks) on young alder tree adjacent to game trail crossing over-grown logging road.

Inferred Traditionally Harvested Resources in the Park and Vicinity

With knowledge of the plant and animal communities in and around Spike Road Park Nature Park, and knowledge of the range of taxa traditionally harvested by KFN ancestors, one can infer the species that likely would have been harvested there and other activities undertaken there by Indigenous people in the past.

- Cedar bark – the standing dead cedar trees in the wetland portions of the park are a clear indication that in the past cedar trees were relatively plentiful here. Cedar was used for a myriad of uses by KFN ancestors (Turner 1998:70-79), including bark for making clothes and cordage, the wood for making planks and canoes, and the branches for spiritual purposes. Given the proximity to the Tsolum River, it is very likely that in the past Indigenous people harvested cedar bark here, and perhaps other cedar products such as wooden planks.
- Berries – a range of berry species (e.g., thimble berry, salmonberry, huckleberry, trailing blackcap) that are regularly harvested by KFN members are plentiful here. Additionally, red elderberry was commonly harvested by Indigenous people in the past, and would have undoubtedly been harvested if present here in the past (Lyons et al. 2016; Turner 2000:67-68).
- Deer and elk – while deer signs were observed, elk signs were not, but the area appear to be excellent elk habitat³. In the past deer and elk were likely much more abundant in the region. Elk and deer were commonly hunted by KFN ancestors, and tons of deer hides were traded by KFN ancestors to the Hudson's Bay Company every year in the AD 1860's (Barnett 1955:92; Capes 1977; Engisch et al. 2003; Hayman 1989:112; IR Wilson 2003; Mitchell 1988). KFN TUS data indicates ongoing hunting activities in and around the Spike Road Park area (Bevilacqua 2024).
- Beaver – the presence of a beaver lodge at the park is a clear indication that the park is beaver habitat. Pre-contact Pentlatch people regularly harvested beaver (Bernick 1983; Capes 1964, 1972; IR Wilson 1998, 2003; Mitchell 1988; Monks 1987; Wright 1982), and the presence of beaver here implies that they would have been also hunted/trapped here in the past.

Attributes to Preserve or Enhance

Based on the information reviewed above, I can suggest a provisional list of attributes of Spike Road Park to preserve, and ways to enhance Indigenous cultural values there.

- Signage. The park could/should install signage describing traditional Indigenous uses of species that are present in the park, and to request that non-Indigenous people refrain from harvesting these species.

³ The elk-fence paralleling Highway 19 undoubtedly keeps elk herds west of the highway and the Spike Road Park area.

- Naming. While no Indigenous place names are known for the area of Spike Road Park, KFN could develop a name in ayajuthem that is descriptive of the park, and could be used either for the park itself, or for the trail running through it. An obvious example would be the ayajuthem name ӨiӨiyel̕ ('thi-thi-yell', 'little lake').
- Cascara. Given the importance of cascara as a traditional Indigenous medicine, the existing cascara trees here should be protected from cutting.
- Berry species. Existing stands of berry desirable species should be maintained and impacts to them avoided.
- Planting Indigenous species. The relatively recently cleared agricultural areas within the park could be rehabilitated by planting Indigenous species there. CVRD could/should work with KFN to identify suitable species for habitat restoration.
- Deer/elk habitat. KFN TUS information indicates ongoing hunting activities in and around Spike Road Park (Bevilacqua 2024), and maintenance or enhancement of deer/elk habitat at Spike Road Park could improve.
- Mushrooms. KFN TUS information indicates ongoing mushroom harvesting activities in and around Spike Road Park (Bevilacqua 2024), and planting the appropriate Indigenous trees (e.g. broadleaf maple) could increase the abundance of desired mushroom species.
- Salmon habitat. The wetlands at Spike Road Park drain into both the Tsolum River and Black Creek, and increasing these wetlands could have a positive effect on salmonid habitat.
- Removal of invasive species. A few examples of invasive species such as blackberry and broom were noted, and ongoing removal programs should be implemented.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Spike Road Park encompasses a lovely remote location including two small, rare wetland environments and regenerating forest. There are a range of species present that are currently harvested by KFN people, and there is the potential to reestablish Indigenous plants that are used by KFN people there. Further, culturally relevant information from KFN could be integrated into signage and naming to educate the public about KFN history and traditional land use.

Sincerely,

Jesse Morin, PhD



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